

Using Pension Files: American Revolution and Civil War

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American Revolutionary War

Step 1: Confirm your Veteran's identity.

1. Does this pension apply to your ancestor?
2. Does the name or alias match?
3. Do the residences after the war fit?
4. When did you soldier and his widow die?
5. Understand when pensions were able to be collected relating to a given war.

Step 2: Service Records for your Veteran – Muster Rolls

Step 3: Learn about the Pensions

Learn about the Pensions.

- 1776: Half pay for officers & men disabled in the service and incapable of earning a living.
- 1780: Half pay for 7 yrs. To widows and orphans of officers.
- 1806: Pensions allowed to veterans of State troops and militia for the first time.
- 1818: Pensions for life based on a period of 9 mos. or until the end of the war.
- 1820: Certified inventories of pensioner's estate and income were required.
- 1832: Pensions granted to those with service less than 6 mos.
- 1838: Widows were authorized pensions for 5 yrs. if they had married before 1794.
- 1848: Widows were authorized pensions for life if they had married before 1800.
- 1853: All widow's restrictions were eliminated.
- 1780: Half pay for 7 yrs. To widows and orphans of officers.
- 1869: Daniel F. Bakeman last pensioner dies.
- 1878: Widows authorized pensions for life if the veteran only served 2 weeks.
- 1906: Esther (Sumner) Damon the last widower to collect a pension dies in Vermont.

1. Published abstracts of Revolutionary War pensions.
2. Going beyond abstracts and dissecting pension files.
3. Searching on www.fold3.com

Civil War

Step 1: Locating your Civil War Veteran

1. U.S. Census Clues
2. National Parks – Soldiers and Sailors Database
<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>

Step 2: Locating Union Civil War Veteran Pensions

1. Variety of Union Civil War Pension types.
 - a. Invalid pension
 - b. Widow's pension
 - c. Mother or father's pension
 - d. Remarried Widow's pension
 - a. Combined pensions
2. Ordering Pensions from the National Archives.
 - Email: inquire@arch2.nara.gov; www.nara.gov – NATF-85 form.
3. Review of typical Civil Pension Documents.
4. Tips when visiting NARA in Washington, D.C.
 - Copy all application and certificate numbers carefully on your slips.
 - Turn in slips on a regular basis if you have many requests.
 - Copy the entire File and sort later.
5. Making sense of the paperwork.
 - Sort copies out in chronological order
 - Make sure front and back is together
 - Make another set of your copies and work with the original set only when needed.