

Researching American Revolutionary War Patriots

Class 1: Getting to Know Your Revolutionary War Veteran Ancestor

Jonathan Hill, Researcher, jonathan.hill@nehgs.org

The Revolution by the Numbers

- About 231,000 soldiers served in the Continental Army
- About 145,000 soldiers served in the Colonial Militia
- Over 22,000 British soldiers were dispatched to North America for use in the British War Effort
- About 25,000 Loyalists Soldiers served in the conflict
- Roughly 12,000 French soldiers and sailors fought alongside the colonial army
- Nearly 30,000 Hessian soldiers fought alongside the British Army

Determine if your Ancestor Fought

Perhaps you have a family story that an ancestor fought in the Revolutionary War. How do you know this is true? First, consider the age of your ancestor. If he was born between 1735 and 1760 and living in 1775–1776, he may have served. Typically, a Revolutionary War soldier was between the ages of 18 to 35, although a few were younger and a few were older.

If you have an ancestor of the right age living during the Revolutionary War, note his colony of residence, and, if he survived the war, which state he lived in after the war. Then take the next step and consult the records.

In addition to oral traditions or family relics you may have, local cemeteries can be a great place to find clues that might indicate Revolutionary War Service. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a gravestone for your ancestor?
- Is there a flag marker?
- Is there an SAR. marker on the right grave? The first SAR grave marker was placed in 1923. Since then, the Sons of the American Revolution have been placing markers on the graves of known veterans of the American Revolution.

TIP: Markers and flags can be moved by mistake! Verify any clues with records and other documentation.

Researching Your Veterans

A surprising number of options exist for researching your Revolutionary War ancestor. You may find information in published compilations and accounts, as well as original records. Some resources you may start with:

- Compiled Genealogies
- Town Histories
- Newspapers
- Scholarly journals
- Diaries
- Online databases
- Gravestones online
- Newspapers
- Compiled Service Records
- Muster Rolls

A helpful resource to get started with locating your Revolutionary War ancestor is [Locating your Revolutionary War Ancestor: A Guide to the Military Records](#) by James C. Neagles and Lila L. Neagles, online at FamilySearch.org. This guide opens with descriptions of the War's military organizations, the Militia, the Continental Line, the Navy, and the Marines. It then lists the battles of the war and moves into a detailed discussion of key military records.

You might also start your research with a volume from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Lineage Books (check your local library; see below under **Resources**) or by searching the DAR [Genealogical Research System](#) (GRS) for your ancestor's name. The Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) maintains the online [Patriot Research System](#) (PRS).

Or you may use a published compilation such as *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolution* or *Record of service of Connecticut Men* (see below under **Resources**). These volumes list rolls of soldiers.

WPA Graves Registration Project

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed millions of jobseekers to carry out public works projects, including the construction of public buildings and roads. One such initiative was the Graves Registration Project which was carried out in some places to record historical grave markers. This includes the registration of veteran's graves which may no longer exist today or are illegible. Many of these records are available on FamilySearch.org. Search the FamilySearch Catalog (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>) for the town or county where your Revolutionary War Veteran was buried to see if the cemetery inscriptions are available.

Compiled Genealogies and Town Histories

Although rarely cited, published genealogies and town histories, popular during the 19th century, can provide clues to the service and stories of your veteran ancestors. Many are now out of copyright and available digitally at several sites, including:

- <https://www.hathitrust.org/>
- <https://books.google.com/>
- <https://archive.org/index.php>
- <https://books.familysearch.org>
- <http://library.si.edu/digital-library>

Muster Rolls

During the American Revolution, muster rolls were prepared by the commanding officer of each company of a regiment for the express purpose of paying the officers and soldiers. These records give great insight into the dates a soldier served and the experiences they might have had. Many have been digitized and are available on FamilySearch.org.

Compiled Service Records

Compiled Service Records record information about a soldier extracted by clerks in the War Department from muster rolls, regimental returns, hospital rolls, and other records. These are extracted from the original records and can give a great overview of a soldier's service during the American Revolution. They can provide:

- Name of soldier
- Rank, regiment, and commanding officer
- State from which served
- Date of commission or enlistment
- Term of enlistment, e.g., 3 months, 1 year
- Pay records

“United States Revolutionary War Compiled Service Records, 1775–1783” may be found at:

- [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)
- [Fold3.com](https://www.fold3.com)
- [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)

Resources

Websites Discussed

Findagrave: <https://www.findagrave.com/>

FamilySearch.org

- Muster Rolls of the Revolutionary War, 1767-1833 (Massachusetts):
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/746935?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- Muster/payrolls, and various papers (1763-1808) of the Revolutionary War (Mass. and R.I.):
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/729681?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- New Hampshire Revolutionary War Records:
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1880940>
- FamilySearch Wiki: <https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en>
- Family Search has made available digitalized copies of published state rosters under the title
“[United States Rosters of Revolutionary War Soldiers and Sailors, 1775–1783.](#)”

Genealogybank Newspapers: <https://www.GenealogyBank.com>

Ancestry.com

- Massachusetts, U.S. Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War:
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7726/>

Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com>

AmericanAncestors:

Digital Library & Archives: <https://digital.americanancestors.org/>

ArchiveGrid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

Hereditary Societies

- National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) <https://www.dar.org/>
- National Society Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) <https://www.sar.org/>
- National Society Children of the American Revolution (CAR) <https://www.nscar.org/>
- General Society of the Sons of the Revolution (SR) <https://sr1776.org/>
- Society of the Cincinnati <https://www.societyofthecincinnati.org/>
- Daughters of the Cincinnati <https://daughters1894.org/>

Watch an archived webinar: Applying to Revolutionary War Lineage Societies

<https://www.americanancestors.org/video-library/applying-revolutionary-war-lineage-societies>

Suggested Books

Grundset, Eric G., *Connecticut in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., et al. *Forgotten Patriots – African American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War: A Guide to Service, Sources, and Studies* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.). Currently out of print, but available as a free download here:

https://www.dar.org/sites/default/files/media/library/DARpublications/Forgotten_Patriots_ISBN-978-1-892237-10-1.pdf

Supplement:

https://www.dar.org/sites/default/files/media/library/DARpublications/Forgotten_Patriots_Supplement_2008-2001_ISBN-978-1-892237-13-2.pdf

Grundset, Eric G., *Georgia in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *New York in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *North Carolina in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *Pennsylvania in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *Rhode Island in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *South Carolina in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *Virginia in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

Grundset, Eric G., *America's Women in the Revolutionary Era 1760-1790: A History Through Bibliography* (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution: Washington, D.C.).

More info about the above at: <https://www.dar.org/library/research-guides/dar-publications>