

Civil War Research: Tracing Union & Confederate Ancestors

Class 1: Union Ancestors: Essential Resources for Tracing their Service

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Civil War History Overview

- The defining moment for our young country, changing its trajectory forever.
- Nearly 3 million Americans served, resulting in 750,000 casualties.
- Everyone living in America at that time was affected in some way by the events of 1861-1865 and its long aftermath.

How the Civil War may have affected your ancestor

- Economy
- Employment
- Divided the allegiance of their family.
- Destroyed their livelihoods, destruction on the battlefield of their farms, or troops raiding their property or occupying their homes.
- Loss of family members and friends who fought on both sides of the war.

Step # 1 – Determine if he fought for the Union

- Search the 1860 U.S. Census on Ancestry.com to determine where your ancestors were living the year before the Civil War started.
- Does your ancestor “fit the description”?
 - Male, in good health
 - Draft registration
 - How old was he in 1861?
 - Average age 18-30
 - Most soldiers born 1790 to 1850
 - Good teeth for the infantry?
 - If on the young side, did his father enlist?

- Treasures in the attic
 - Letters, diaries, and photographs
 - Military ephemera from the battlefield
 - Does this family treasure help verify oral tradition?
- Graveside Hints
 - G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) veteran flags marker or military headstone
 - Veteran plots on a national or local level
 - Search for gravestones of Civil War veterans on websites Findagrave.com and BillionGraves.com
- Search Probate and Deed Records for your Civil War soldier and his spouse.
- City Directories
 - Listing the veteran at a residence in 1860, and not present 1861-1865 may indicate service.
 - Veterans are occasionally listed in a separate appendix in the city directory.
 - Abbreviations denoting service in the Army or Navy.
 - The date of death of the veteran listed in the directory occasionally.
- Local State Sources
 - State Archives holdings
 - Published compilations of veterans
 - State Adjutant General reports
 - G.A.R. Membership list
- Federal and State Census Clues
 - U.S. Federal census
 - 1890: special schedule
 - 1910: veteran question
 - 1930: veteran question
 - State census (depends on state)
 - Three enumerated in 1865 (New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts)

Step # 2 – Learn about your ancestor’s service in the Union

- Search the National Park Service “Soldiers and Sailors Database” online:
 - <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>
 - The NPS database also allows you to search for small regimental histories of the unit, battles the regiment was involved in as well as some federal cemeteries.

- Ordering Records from the National Archives
 - To order **Compiled Military Service Records** go the NARA website:
 - <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>
- For some Union states **Compiled Military Service Records** are available online from Fold3.com
 - <https://www.fold3.com/collection/us-civil-war-union>
- **U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914** is available from Ancestry.com
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1198/>
 - These U.S. Army registers record the following details:
 - Name
 - Date of Enlistment (when, where, length)
 - Where born and age
 - Occupation
 - Physical Description
 - Regiment
 - Company
 - Number of enlistments
 - And additional remarks field
- U.S. Navy and Marines database of **United States Naval Enlistment Rendezvous 1855-1891** is available from FamilySearch.org
 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1825347>
- **U.S. Marine Corps Muster Rolls, 1798-1959** is available on Ancestry.com
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1089/>
- Other Resources to consider for obtaining details on your Union veteran
 - Town histories
 - County histories
 - College year books or alumni registers
- **Tip:** Consider other family members who served (*brothers, fathers, uncles, cousins, etc.*)

Step # 3 – Determine whether your ancestor was killed or wounded

- Sources to examine in order to determine whether your ancestor was killed or wounded
 - Published sources
 - Regimental histories
 - Roll of Honor
 - Newspapers
 - Death registers
- Search for published regimental histories on Archive.org or Hathitrust.org

- **U.S. Civil War Roll of Honor, 1861-1865** is a database of Union veterans buried in National cemeteries around the United States available Ancestry.com
 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61388/>
- Use **Newspapers** to locate death notices, an obituary, or an article reporting that your veteran was wounded during the Civil War. Examine newspaper databases that have coverage for the communities your ancestor resided in. [Example: Newspapers.com, GenealogyBank.com].
- **Death Registers**—some town, city and county clerks would record the deaths of veterans who died during the Civil War in their annual records. In Massachusetts between 1861-1865 the deaths of veterans are often found in the town and city vital records with residents who died locally.

Publications

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Stephen McManus, *Civil War Research Guide: a guide for researching your Civil War ancestor* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003).

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Richard A. Sauers, *How to do Civil War research - Revised ed.* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Pub., 2000).