

Applying to Revolutionary War Lineage Societies

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Credit: Lindsay Fulton, Chief Research Officer

Introduction

Lineage societies aim to preserve the memory of a particular historical figure or group—and lineage societies that celebrate the contributions of Revolutionary War ancestors are plentiful!

While no hereditary society is the same, each society provides an environment for members to share their common ancestry and to build a sense of community and friendship with others. Members actively participate in historic conservation and education at the local and national level. They may volunteer for community projects, sponsor academic scholarships for high school and college students, or undertake genealogical and historical research for members and other researchers. The following is a guide to get started in verifying and documenting your descent from a patriot ancestor.

Step 1- Establish Your Ancestral Line

Before choosing membership with a particular lineage society, you must establish your paternal and maternal lineages. Since most lineage societies require a direct, lineal link between the applicant and the qualifying ancestor, establishing an ancestral chart (sometimes called a pedigree chart) will help uncover any possible qualifying ancestors.

Download a printable and editable PDF of a five-generation chart, and other organizing research tools, here: <https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/research-templates>

Once you have established your lineage, choose a hereditary society that best meets your needs. Turn to the end of this document for a table of Revolutionary War lineage societies outlining eligibility requirements, their mission, website, and more. Ask yourself:

- What societies does your lineage allow for membership?
- Why do you want to join a particular society?
- Do you want to be very active in your community?
- Is a state/local chapter of the society near your home?
- How often do they meet?

Remember, you can apply for membership with more than one society and (often) a society will allow membership under more than one eligible ancestor (often using a supplemental application).

Step 2- Contact the Membership Liaison

After you have identified an appropriate society, reach out to the organization's membership liaison to understand all eligibility requirements and to begin the application process.

Depending on the lineage society you are applying to, you may need to reach out to someone at the local, state, or national level.

Local Chapter	State Society	Society
Daughters of the American Revolution	Sons of the Revolution	Boston Tea Party
National Society Sons of the American Revolution	Society of the Cincinnati	Order of Founders and Patriots

Step 3 - Organize and Document Your Ancestral Line

When organizing your information for a lineage application, we recommend creating a qualification outline. A qualification outline is an excellent way to organize information for each generation in your line of descent and confirm that you have the necessary documentation to link each generation. If you are planning to apply to more than one society, a qualification outline becomes especially helpful.

Begin with your generation (including vital information for your spouse if applicable) and state your place and date of birth (and place and date of marriage if applicable). The format for the first generation would look like this:

Generation 1

Your name, b. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year]. He/she married in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year], **name of spouse**.

Name of spouse, b. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year].

For each statement of vital information (birth, marriage, and death), you should include a scholarly citation. For the first three generations, these statements should be proven by a birth, marriage, and death certificate. You can typically locate these modern vital records with the town or city clerk in which the event occurred or the appropriate Department of Vital Statistics.

Next, on a separate sheet of paper, include your parents' generation, also known as Generation 2:

Generation 2

Name of your Father, b. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year]; d. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year]. He married in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year], **name of spouse**.

Name of your Mother, b. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year]; d. in [town/city, county, state] on [day, month, year].

Evidence for each name, place, and date is required and essential to your membership application. Be sure to cite as you write! Don't promise yourself that you will go back and complete the citation later. You may forget or misplace the record, and if so, lose countless hours trying to recreate your research. Refer to books such as *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian* (Genealogical Pub. Co., 1997) by Elizabeth Shown Mills or *Guide to Genealogical Writing*, 3rd ed. (NEHGS, 2014) by Henry B. Hoff and Penny Stratton.

Locate Vital Records:

To provide evidence for each name, place, and date, we suggest locating all possible vital records (birth, marriage, and death) for each generation. Vital records often provide specific information about an individual, such as the place and date of birth, as well as information about their parents. Be sure to search for birth, marriage, and death records for the male and the female in each generation. Also, use variant spellings when searching for your ancestors. Because spelling in the 18th and 19th centuries was not as uniform as it is today, a vital record for your ancestors may have been transcribed incorrectly or spelled differently. *See below for Vital Record Alternatives if you can't find a vital record or if one does not exist.*

The location, availability, and accessibility of vital records vary from state to state. To locate available vital records in New England, consult *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*, 6th ed. (NEHGS, 2021). For vital records outside of New England, refer to *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2004), *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. (Ancestry Publishing, 2006) or the Family Search wiki: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page

Keep in mind that each state has very specific procedures when ordering vital records. For example, some states require a copy of an applicant's photo identification, or a self-addressed stamped envelope, or a signed application. Others only accept a vital record request in writing. Additionally, some states take credit card payments, while others only accept personal checks or money orders. Whatever the condition, be sure to satisfy all the requirements before submitting an application to a lineage society.

Dealing with Discrepancies:

If there are any discrepancies on the documentation, such as a spelling variant or incorrect maiden name, you should include an explanation. This is especially true if an ancestor in your direct bloodline remarries. Even though this new spouse is not part of your bloodline, documentation of birth, marriage, and death for the second spouse will help clear up any confusion.

For example, since many modern death records provide the name of the deceased's spouse, the second spouse's name was recorded on the death certificate, it may be confusing to the lineage society genealogist. They may not be convinced that the death record refers to your ancestor. Including supporting documentation will help to quell any possible confusion.

If the discrepancy on the records is more involved than a simple spelling variant (such as multiple dates of birth), then this can be discussed on a separate sheet of paper. You should state the problem and then include original source evidence to prove that one statement is more valid than the other.

Step 4-Complete Your Application and Submit

Once you gather all proper documentation, you can fill out your application. Be sure to read ALL instructions included on the application, as well as on the society's website, before submitting your final application. Follow specifications for scholarly citations, formatting, and organization. Remember to sign your application and include proper payment.

After you have completed each of the society's requirements, submit your final application for approval.

Some Other Application Considerations:

- Determine whether you will be completing the application
 - Some states prefer their registrars to complete the application
- Do you have all the documentation the Society requires?
 - Are you following the proper citations for the Society?
 - Have you organized your documents correctly?
 - Underline/highlight
 - Labeled correctly
 - Does the application require special paper?
 - Do you need letters of recommendation?

Applications Dos and Don'ts:

DO	DON'T
Include a clear, legible photocopy of each document.	Include original records, or photocopies that cut off information.
Include the full name of your ancestor—first, middle, and last name. The name should be spelled as it most often appears on a record.	Identify an ancestor with a profession, rank, or title. Use legal names only.
Provide specific information for each vital event, including the date (day, month, and year) and the location (town, county, and state). If a town/county changed, use the town/county name from the time of the event.	Write “unknown” or “N/A” for a vital event. If a specific date is unknown, you should include a date range or estimated date. For example, use the term “bef.” or “aft.” to identify the first or last known record of your ancestor.
Use a red pen/pencil to underline or draw an arrow to a specific name or date on a record.	Use highlighter, staples, sticky notes, or glue to identify your ancestors.
Include birth, marriage, and death information for a second spouse. This can help to resolve any confusion when a second spouse is named on a death, cemetery, pension, or deed record.	Ignore discrepancies on a record. Remember: The Society will base their assessment using the documentation provided. For example, if parent’s names are incorrectly given on a death record, include a notation that the information is inaccurate.

Vital Record Alternatives:

It is uncommon for an applicant to document their line of descent using only vital records. Therefore, researchers must use alternative records or secondary sources to prove the connection between generations.

Bible records: Family bible records can be rare, but significantly helpful when available. To locate a bible record specific to your ancestors, you should contact the local historical society, archive, or genealogical society associated with the family.

Census records: Census records can provide information about an entire family, often individually listing the names of each member of the household. However, before 1850, the U.S. Federal Census did not enumerate each member of the household. The head of household was named, and the other members of the household were designated by tally marks according to their age and gender. As a result, pre-1850 U.S. Federal Census records can be less helpful (and often unacceptable). www.familysearch.org, www.fold3.com, and www.Ancestry.com have searchable collections of the U.S. Federal Census from 1790-1950. Some State Census records are also available.

Cemetery records/inscriptions: Generally, hereditary societies will accept photographs of tombstones as proof of death (and sometimes marriage). Include a clear photo of the stone, as well as a broader, landscape photograph showing surrounding stones. This will provide the society with context, and demonstrate the age of the tombstone. Societies will NOT accept modern cemetery stones that were made in memorial to an ancestor. Some national cemetery databases include: www.findagrave.com; <http://billiongraves.com/>; <http://www.interment.net/>

Church records: Baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funeral records may have been recorded with the church, and not registered on the local or state level. To locate a church record, you must first identify your ancestor's religion and/or congregation. Once a denomination is determined, you can then work to locate available records. Some records are still maintained by the original church (or church archives), while others may have been microfilmed or published. NEHGS maintains a large collection of compiled church records from across the U.S., and the Family History Library has several church records on microfilm.

Deeds: Land records sometimes identify specific relationships between the grantor (seller) and the grantee (purchaser). This can be especially common for married men who sold property, as the record often identified the first name of the grantor's wife. Most deed records for the New England states are available on microfilm at NEHGS, while other U.S. land records are available digitally at www.familysearch.org or on microfilm at the Family History Library.

DNA: Depending on the society, DNA evidence can be used to corroborate lineage; currently, DNA results cannot be used as the sole proof of lineage. Since DNA cannot specifically identify an ancestor, and only confirm that two male lineages descend from a common male ancestor, it is best used as supplemental evidence.

Local histories and well-documented genealogies: While local histories and genealogies are often unacceptable as singular proof, well documented, or properly cited resources can provide supplemental proof for lineage. If you use a published resource, always include a photocopy of the title page. Several free sites have digitized older published genealogies and local histories: <https://archive.org/index.php>; <http://books.google.com/>; <https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/>.

Military pensions: Pension records can often provide specific genealogical information about a soldier (as well as other family members), including the date/place of birth, marriage, and death of a soldier and his widow. www.familysearch.org, www.fold3.com, and www.Ancestry.com have searchable/browseable collections of Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War, Indian War, and Mexican War pension files/indexes.

Obituaries: Obituaries regularly identify the names of immediate (and sometimes extended) family members. If you are using an obituary as evidence, be sure to include a clear, clipping of the article, as well as a photocopy of the entire page. Large collections of digitized newspapers are available at subscription sites such as, www.genealogybank.com, <http://www.newspapers.com/>. There are also free sites, like <https://news.google.com/newspapers> and the Library of Congress' <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

Probate Records: Probate files, such as wills and guardianship records, can provide researchers with information about the deceased, as well as the names of their heirs (usually their spouse, children and (sometimes) grandchildren). NEHGS maintains a large collection of New England and Atlantic Canada probate on microfilm. Additionally, several U.S. town and county probate collections are available digitally at www.familysearch.org or on microfilm at the Family History Library.

Organization	Founded	Objectives	Application and Membership Process	Eligibility	Website
National Society Sons of the American Revolution	April 30, 1889	Historic research and preservation, patriotism, and education	Application approved by the Register General; membership through constituent state society.	Men 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution (civil or military service)	sar.org
Sons of the Revolution	1883	Historic preservation, patriotism, and commemoration	Application approved on national level; membership through constituent state society.	Men 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution (military or congressional service)	sr1776.org
National Society Daughters of the American Revolution	October 11, 1890	Historic preservation, patriotism, and education	Application approved on national level; membership through constituent state society.	Women 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution.	dar.org
Order of the Founders and Patriots of America	1896	To promote educational, historic and patriotic programs, to preserve the memory of the founders and patriots of America, and historic preservation.	Application approved by the Registrar General; membership through constituent state society.	Men 18 years or older who can prove descent from an ancestor who settled in the British colonies now included in the U.S. before 13 May 1657, and whose ancestor (in the same line) served in the American Revolution (between 18 April 1775 and 3 September 1783). The candidate must prove this connection through a direct male ancestor of either parent's surname who was alive on or after 16 March 1896.	ofpa.org

Organization	Founded	Objectives	Application and Membership Process	Eligibility	Website
The Society of the Cincinnati	May 13, 1783	To preserve the memory of the achievement of American Independence.	Application approved on the state level (14 constituent societies). Members often submit their application with the state in which their ancestor resided, not their current residence.	Male descendants (both collateral and direct) of commissioned officers who served in the Continental Army or Navy (or their French counterparts) and who served to the end of the war or who had resigned with honor after a minimum of three years' service as a commissioned officer. <i>**representation often limited to one current member per eligible officer.</i>	societyofthecincinnati.org
Boston Tea Party Descendants Program	March 11, 2023	Dedicated to the memory of and the legacy of America's first patriots- fostering interest in genealogical connections.	Application approved on national level	Descendants 18 years or older who can prove decent from an ancestor who actively participated in the Boston Tea Party; were affiliated with the planning and execution of the Boston Tea Party; or were present for the events of December 16, 1773, on Griffin's Wharf, Boston, Massachusetts.	bostonteapartyship.com/boston-tea-party-descendants

<p>United Empire Loyalists</p>	<p>May 27, 1914</p>	<p>The United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada is an organization dedicated to enriching the lives of Canadians through knowledge of the past, in particular the history of the United Empire Loyalists and their contribution to the development of Canada.</p>	<p>Applications approved on the Dominion level.</p>	<p>You join a branch of UELAC which gives you the benefits which that branch offers, plus those benefits which are offered by UELAC to all members. You may join additional branches if you wish. The fee to do so is lower, as a portion of your fee for your primary branch goes to Dominion Office to fund its operations.</p> <p>If you know which branch you wish to join, skip this next section.</p> <p>Choosing a Branch</p>	<p>https://uelac.ca/si_gnup/</p>
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