

Revolutionary War Research: Tracing Patriot and Loyalist Ancestors

Class 1: Getting to Know your Revolutionary War Ancestor

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Events leading to the Revolution

Debts incurred by the British Crown after the Seven Years' War and the French and Indian War prompted the British to raise revenue from their colonies. In turn, the British government taxed the thirteen colonies, e.g., Revenue or Sugar Act of 1764, Stamp Act of 1765, Townshend Acts of 1767. Met with wide disapproval in the colonies, these forms of taxation helped to sow the seeds for independence. The Tea Act of 1773 was passed to subdue financial difficulties of the East India Company, which allowed the company to avoid a tax and to sell the tea at a reduced rate in the colonies. Outrage led to the Boston Tea Party. To punish Massachusetts, Coercive Acts were passed, which closed the port of Boston and revoked the Massachusetts charter. A quartering act was also included, which required colonists to provide food and housing for British troops.

The First Continental Congress met in September of 1774, where the Articles of Association were adopted, as well as the ban on the importation and consumption of British goods. Many local committees were established to enforce the Association and ban. Those found guilty of subversion were publicly slandered and renounced. The Articles of Association were seen as a catalyst in the formation of two groups: those supporting the patriot cause and those against, or Whigs versus Tories.

Patriots

There were many reasons to rebel against the British Crown. The most unifying were the ideals of Republicanism: Liberty, Equality, and Civil Rights. The colonists wanted to govern themselves and determine their own future, both politically and economically. Years of suppressive rule by the British Crown unified the colonies.

Sources for military service	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service records• Pensions• Bounty land records• Censuses and Pension Rolls• Manuscripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Town records• Published state sources• Lineage society records• Published military histories

State based sources	
<p>Connecticut</p> <p><i>Rolls and Lists of Connecticut Men in the Revolution 1775-1783</i> (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1901)</p> <p><i>Biographies of Original Members and Qualifying Officers - Society of the Cincinnati in the State of Connecticut, Edited by J. Michael Phelps. Boston: NEHGS, 2023.)</i></p> <p>Eric Grundset, <i>Connecticut in The American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians</i> (Washington, DC: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2016)</p> <p>Connecticut State Library – Revolutionary War</p>	<p>New York</p> <p>Eric Grundset, <i>New York in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, D.C: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2012)</p> <p><i>New York in the Revolution as Colony and State</i> (Albany: Press of Brandow Printing Co, 1898)</p> <p>American Revolutionary War, 1775-1783</p> <p>New York State Archives – War Service Records and Searches</p>
<p>Delaware</p> <p>William G. Whiteley, <i>The Revolutionary Soldiers of Delaware</i>, (Wilmington: James & Webb, Printers, 1875)</p> <p><i>Delaware Archives: Revolutionary War in Three Volumes</i> (Wilmington: Chas. L. Story, 1919)</p> <p>Delaware Public Archives</p>	<p>North Carolina</p> <p>Eric Grundset, <i>North Carolina in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, D.C: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2016)</p> <p>North Carolina Digital Collections – Revolutionary War Era</p>
<p>Georgia</p> <p>Eric Grundset, <i>Georgia in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, DC: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 2013)</p>	<p>Pennsylvania</p> <p>Revolutionary War Records Overview</p> <p>Pennsylvania State Library: Revolutionary War Era Genealogy Research</p>
<p>Maryland</p> <p><i>Muster Rolls and other Records of Service of Maryland Troops in the American Revolution, 1775-1783</i> (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1900)</p> <p>Revolutionary War Research</p>	<p>Rhode Island</p> <p>Eric Grundset, <i>Rhode Island in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, D.C: National Daughters of the American Revolution, 2014)</p> <p>Rhode Island Historical Society – Revolutionary War Military Records</p>

<p>Massachusetts Eric Grundset, <i>Massachusetts and Maine in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, DC: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2015)</p> <p><i>Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War. A compilation from the Archives, Volumes 1-18, (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co, 1896-)</i></p> <p>Researching Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors – Massachusetts State Archives</p>	<p>South Carolina Eric Grundset, <i>South Carolina in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, D.C: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2013)</p> <p>Sources for the American Revolution at the South Carolina Department of Archives and History</p>
<p>New Hampshire Isaac W. Hammond, <i>Rolls and Documents Relating to Soldiers in the Revolutionary War: With an Appendix, embracing some Indian and French War Rolls, (Manchester, New Hampshire: John B. Clarke, 1887)</i></p>	<p>Vermont John E. Goodrich, <i>The State Of Vermont: Rolls of The Soldiers of the Revolutionary War 1775-1783 (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle, 1904)</i></p>
<p>New Jersey <i>Official Register of the Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Revolutionary War (Trenton: Wm. T. Nicholson & Co, 1872</i></p> <p>New Jersey State Library: Researching Revolutionary and Civil War Service Records for NJ Residents</p>	<p>Virginia Eric Grundset, <i>Virginia in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogist and Historians</i> (Washington, D.C: National Society of the Daughters the American Revolution, 2015)</p> <p>Library of Virginia – Virginia Revolutionary War Service Records</p>

Miscellaneous Sources

Eric G. Grundset, Briana L. Diaz, Hollis L Gentry, *America’s Women in the Revolutionary Era: A History through Bibliography* (Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2011)

Eric Grundset, *Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War: A Guide to Service, Sources, and Studies* (Washington, D.C.: National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2008)

Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the War of the Revolution, April 1775 to December, 1783* (Washington, D.C.: Rare Book Shop Pub. Co., 1914)

Mary Beth Norton, *1774: The Long Year of Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 2020)

Walter R. Borneman, *American Spring: Lexington, Concord, and the Road to the Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2014)

Loyalists

Many colonists felt that rebelling against the British Crown was morally wrong. Others had political, economic, or familial ties that cemented their loyalty. Loyalists suffered severe consequences for their fidelity to the British Crown, including violence, property loss, and forced removal from their homes. Thousands migrated elsewhere and began again.

Loyalist Population Rankings (by numbers, not percentage)

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|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. New York | 8. Virginia |
| 2. South Carolina | 9. Georgia |
| 3. Massachusetts | 10. Maryland |
| 4. New Jersey | 11. Rhode Island |
| 5. Pennsylvania | 12. New Hampshire |
| 6. North Carolina | 13. Delaware |
| 7. Connecticut | |

Loyalist strongholds

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savannah • Boston • Charleston • Annapolis • New York City | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baltimore • Newport, Rhode Island • Philadelphia • Portsmouth, New Hampshire |
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Sources for military service	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service records • Manuscripts • Property confiscations • Property claims • Newspapers • Land grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensions • Published military sources • Lineages society records

Sources

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- Peter Wilson Coldham, *American Loyalist Claims: Abstracted from the Public Record Office, Audit Series 13*, (Washington, D.C.: National Genealogical Society, 1980)
- Timothy M. Barnes, *Loyalist Newspapers of the American Revolution: A Bibliography*, (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1974)
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- Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965)
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- Eric L. Swanick, "Wallace Brown: A Bibliography 1959-1999", *Acadiensis*, XXXII, 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 140-151.
- Claude Halstead Van Tyne, *The Loyalists in the American Revolution*, (London: The MacMillan Company, 1902)
- James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, (New York: Africana Publishing and Dalhousie University Press, 1976)