

**From Tyranny to Freedom:
Irish Contributions to the
American Revolution**

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THE BRUE FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

American Ancestors.
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Meet today's presenter



Melanie McComb
Senior Genealogist

OVERVIEW

- **Presentation (50 mins.)**
 - Historical context
 - Motivations
 - Researching service
- **Q&A (10-15 mins.)**


Historical Context

Earlier Stereotypes

- Early historical scholarship on the American Revolution painted the average soldier as the following:
 - British descent, or Anglo-Saxon
 - Yeoman farmer
 - Small-scale landowner who worked their own farms, usually with family
- The Irish were viewed by many historians as mercenaries like the Hessians.
 - Previous service in foreign armies, including the British Army and during the Napoleonic Wars

Parliament Testimony

- In 1779, Major General Robertson provided testimony in an investigation on the causes of England's defeat from the war with the colonies
- Gen. Lee [of Continental Army] told Robertson that he believed half the rebel army were from Ireland



Source: "The Irish Element in America" by Mr. R.C. O'Connor, *American Irish Historical Society*, Volume 9, 1910, p. 455

Thomas J. Fleming

- In his work, *Washington's Secret War, The Hidden History of Valley Forge*, Fleming ascertained that at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78 that the Continental Army was mostly Irish
- Fleming also emphasized that a full 2/5 of the Continental Army was Irish by May 1778

Who were the Irish?

- Irish Catholics
 - Mostly illiterate
 - Primarily indentured servants
- Scots-Irish
 - Lowland Scots who settled in the Ulster Province in modern-day Northern Ireland
 - Slightly socially and economically more elevated due to greater literacy and Protestantism


Why Fight Against England?

- Bloody campaign by Sir Humphrey Gilbert during the 16th Century
- Oliver Cromwell's conquest of Ireland in 1649
- Penal Laws (1695-1829)
 - Limited Catholic participation in owning land, serving in political office, military service, and practicing their religion
- Impressment into the Royal Navy service

Incentives to join the British Army

Recruitment

- Recruiters targeted poor Irish laborers, unemployed, and Catholics in Ireland and within the American colonies
- Areas like Limerick were heavily targeted



Recruits, Drawn by Henry William Bunbury ca. 1800 Etching, Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University

Benefits of Joining the British Army

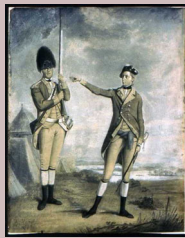
- Cash bounties
- Regular Pay
- Food
- Clothing
- Opportunities for promotion
- Education within regiments
- Eligibility for pension
- Relief from legal action for criminals and deserters
- Post-war land grants in Canada

Soldier Pay

- A private earned 8 pence/day
- Corporals or sergeants could earn a shilling/day (12 pence)
- The cost of uniform, food, shoes, medical care, etc. was deducted from the soldier's pay

62nd Regiment of Foot

- Had one of the highest percentages of Irishmen among rank-and-file soldiers and officers
- Stationed in Ireland and deployed to Canada in 1776
- Saw heavy action in the Saratoga campaign and sustained large losses in the battle of Freeman's Farm (1777)



Roman Catholic Volunteers

- Raised in Philadelphia in October 1777 under Lt. Col. Alfred Clifton
- Many were from St. Mary's Parish
- Included the appointment of officers who were Catholics in addition to the privates and non-commissioned officers

Roman Catholic Volunteers Cont'd

- In 1778 they were sent to New York.
- They did not see battle action. They were responsible for guarding the British Army's baggage trains.
- Discipline fell apart with soldiers being unruly and committing acts of violence on civilians during the retreat from Battle of Monmouth in New Jersey
- Disbanded on October 25, 1778 – 80 members were merged with the Volunteers of Ireland, and others were sent to the British Legion.

Volunteers of Ireland

- AKA 2nd American Regiment or 105th Regiment of Foot
- In 1777, raised in Philadelphia and New York under Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon
- Primarily fought in Southern Theater

Royal Gazette, 9 May 1778, Early American Newspaper Series I

ALL Gentlemen, Natives of Ireland, who are zealous for the Honour and Prosperity of their Country, are hereby informed, that a Corps, to be called the
Volunteers of Ireland,
 Is now raising by their COUNTRYMAN,
L O R D R A W D O N.
 Those who wish to Seize this favourable Opportunity of manifesting their Attachment to their Native Land, are desired to Apply to Captain BOURNE, at his Quarters, opposite to Coenties Market Place, or to Lieut. MOYER, at the Lines Kingbridge; Lieut. BINGHAM, Long-Island; Lieut. DALTON, at Poodles-Hook, or at Mr. DEANE'S, at the Sign of the Ship, near the Fly-Market, where they shall be honourably Entertained.
 Any person who shall bring an approved good Recruit, shall receive Half a Guinea for each.
 ♣ Good Men of any Country will be received.
G O D S A V E T H E K I N G.

Incentives to Enlist in the Continental Army

Benefits of Joining the Continental Army

- Cash bounties
- Regular Pay
- Food
- Clothing
- Bounty land

Soldier Pay

Rank	1775	1778
Private	\$6.67/month*	\$6.67/month
Captain	\$20/month	\$40/month
Colonel	\$50/month	\$75/month

*For Pennsylvania and Virginia riflemen

Source: "Soldier Pay in the American Revolution: How Much Money Did the Average Continental Army Soldier Earn During the Revolutionary War?" By Phillip S. Greenwalt, 1 June 2021, American Battlefield Trust website

Enlistment Bounties

- Various states offered bounties for enlistment in addition to the enticement offered by the Continental Congress
- These included land and clothing
- Officers were also offered half-pay for life to continue their service (if recommended by George Washington)

A Lack of Pay

- George Washington worked with Robert Morris, signer of the Declaration of Independence and financier, helped scrape together the money to pay the soldiers an additional six weeks until 1777
- Each soldier was paid \$10 bounty, which included money from different nations

The Promise of Bounty Land

To enlistees in the Continental Army:

That Congress make provision for **granting lands**, in the following proportions: to the officers and soldiers who shall so engage in the service, and continue therein to the close of the war, or until discharged by Congress, and to the representatives of such officers and soldiers as shall be slain by the enemy

Congressional Act of 16 September 1776

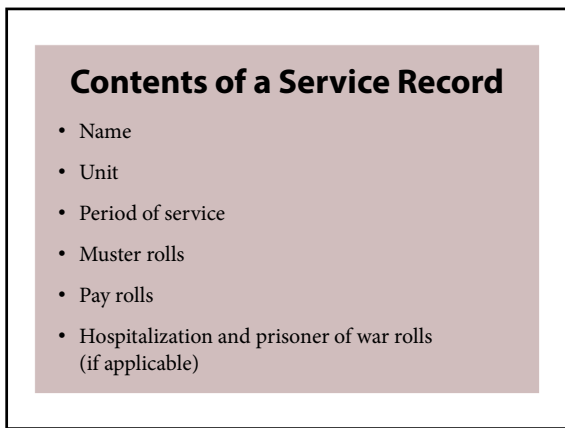
Irish Regiments

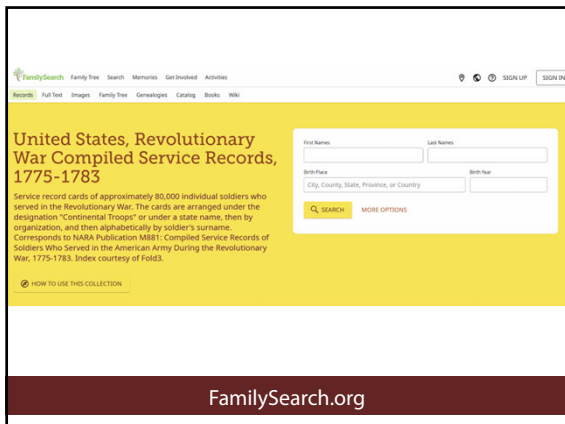
- Pennsylvania Line – otherwise known as the "Line of Ireland"
- 3rd New York Regiment – otherwise known as the Ulster Regiment
- Many of the soldiers were composed of Scots Irish men from the Province of Ulster in Ireland

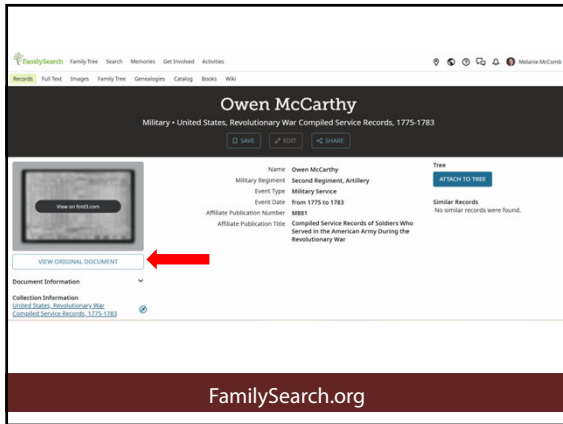
Uniform of the 3rd New York Regiment, Courtesy of the New York Historical Society











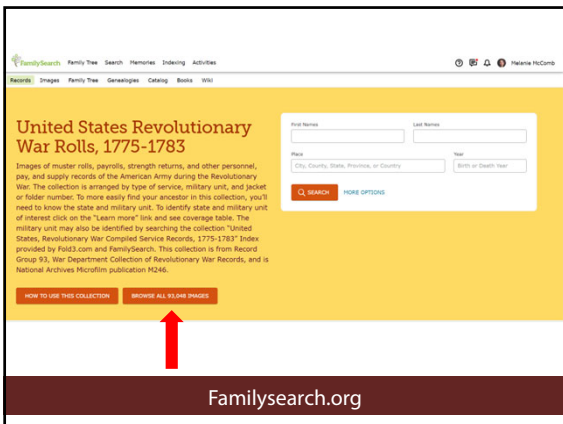






What's a Muster Roll?

- A list or return of all troops, including officers and soldiers, present or accounted for on muster day.
- Soldiers would respond at roll call when their names were read aloud.
- Muster rolls often contain the date when a soldier joined or left a military unit (including if a soldier deserted).



Types of Pensions

Survivor Pensions (Veteran)

- Indicated by an "S" on the envelope
- Could be a disability or invalid pension OR a service pension

Widow Pensions (Spouse of Veteran)

- Indicated by a "W" on the envelope

Rejected Pensions

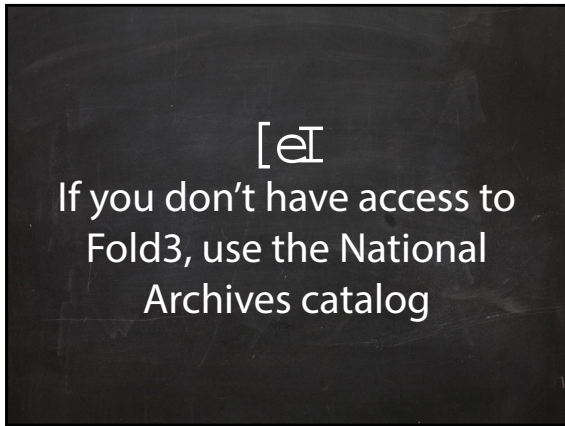
- Indicated by a "R" on the envelope

Survivor's Pension Information Collected

- Name
- Age
- Residence
- Letter from veteran soldier
- Affidavits from those that served with the soldier

Widow's Pension Information Collected

- Name (including maiden name)
- Age
- Residence
- Date and place of marriage
- Date and place of spouse's death
- Letter from widow and surviving family, including court testimony
- Affidavits from those that served with the deceased soldier







**Acts Authorizing
Bounty Land Warrants**

- Bounty Land Acts 1788, 1803, 1806, 1850, 1855.
 - These acts awarded land for service
 - 1788 allowed soldiers to sell/assign their award to someone else
 - Information about land received under these acts often combined in Revolutionary War pension files, if applicable

Eligibility

- **Unit:** Continental line
- **Rank:** Soldier or non-commissioned officer
- **Duration:** Minimum three years of service
- **Assignment Allowed:** No (changed in 1788)
- **State Application Allowed:** Yes

Amount by Rank

Rank	Amount
Colonel	500 acres
Lieutenant Colonel	450 acres
Major	400 acres
Captain	300 acres
Lieutenant	200 acres
Ensign	150 acres
Private	100 acres

Resolution: 16 September 1776
Source: NARA Pamphlet Describing M804: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files

Process Generated Paper

- Steps
- Federal Agencies
 - Secretary of War reviewed applications and issued warrants
 - Treasury Department supervised selection of land and issued patents
- State Agencies
 - Unique to state

Application

Warrant

Survey

Patent

Possession



FamilySearch.org interface showing a search result for 'British military records, "C" series, 1757-1899, located at the National Archives of Canada'. The page includes a title, a 'Format' section (Microfilm 16mm, Microfilm 35mm), a 'Language' section (English), and a 'Physical' section (564 microfilm reels, 16 and 35 mm). A 'Notes' section provides additional context about the records' location and indexing.

Note	Location	Collection/Shelf	Film	Image Group Number (GIC)	Format
A - ABEY, Richard	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683760	8329388	
ABEY, Richard - Arms	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683761	8329390	
Arms, Fire - BARD, James Smith	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683762	8329389	
BARD, John - BATTERSBY, Francis	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683782	8329391	
BATTERSBY, Francis - BENNETT, Elizabeth	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683783	8329392	
BENNETT, Ellen - Board, Medical Officers	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683784	8329393	
Board, Military - BOYCE, John	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683785	8329394	
BOYCE, Joseph - BROWN, Abaalom	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683786	8139948	
BROWN, Adam - BURKE, G.T. (or George T.)	Granite Mountain Record VAUS	United States & Canada Film	1683787	8329395	

Strategies for Identifying Irish Origins

Military Records

- Locate military records, particularly pension files for surviving soldiers – they often wrote affidavits describing when and where they were born.
 - Some may have noted the county and townland vs. Ireland.



UELAC

- The United Empire Loyalists Association of Canada is a lineage organization for descendants of Loyalists who resided in the American colonies, demonstrated loyalty to the Crown (ex. military service, oath of allegiance), and settled in Canada before 1783
- They have a directory of approved Loyalists which includes Loyalist militias



FAN Club

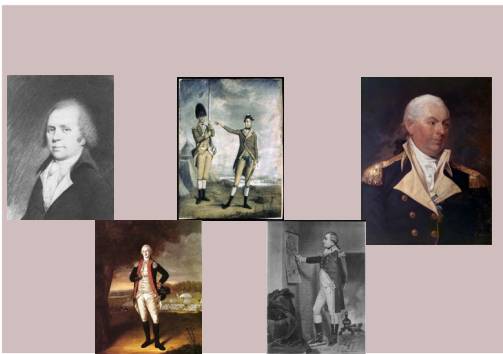
- Research the extended family, associates, and neighbors to learn about their origins
- Many brothers served together. By finding a sibling's military records, you may uncover more clues about their origins.

Cluster Research

- Research the community where they settled to identify their origins
- Many congregations of specific parishes traveled together from Ireland
- The name of the township they lived in may be a clue to the name of the parish or townland back in Ireland.

DNA Testing

- Identify a living male descendant of the soldier to take a Y-DNA test with FamilyTree DNA
- The tester may match others with the same surname where others have researched and identified their origins, including people still in Ireland.
- Many testers upload their results to a surname project



QUESTIONS?

Schedule a consultation
consultations@americanancestors.org

Hire Research Services
research@americanancestors.org



