

Friend or Foe: Researching Colonial Ancestors During the American Revolution

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Nearly 250 years ago, America declared its independence from the British Empire, changing the course of history. While many took up the cause and supported the revolution, others remained loyal to the British government—turning friends into foes and pitting neighbor against neighbor. The rich collections of records for soldiers and Patriots of the Revolutionary War have aided scholars for generations.

How old was your veteran?

- How old was your veteran?
- Ages not listed, no town given
- The age range of the typical soldier was 18 to 35
- Average birth year was 1735-1760
- Extremes in the early 1700s and later 1760s

Patriotic Service

- **Acts of Patriotic Service**
 - These acts cannot be self-serving
 - Service could only be rendered to the Patriots
 - This can be one act or a series of actions demonstrating loyalty to the American cause
- **Examples of Patriotic Service**
 - Signing oaths of allegiance to the new government
 - Rendering aid to wounded (nurses and doctors)
 - Furnishing supplies
 - Lending money or munitions
 - Giving patriotic sermons (ministers)
 - Paying supply taxes
 - Defenders of forts and stations
 - Members of Continental Congress, state conventions, and assemblies
 - Membership in committees during the war (ex. Committees of Correspondence, Inspection, and Safety)
 - Boston Tea Party participants

- The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) accepts the following examples of Patriotic service: <https://www.dar.org/national-society/accepted-revolutionary-war-service>
- The Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) accepts the following examples of Patriotic service: <https://www.sar.org/step-1/>

Additional Examples of Patriotic Service

- **Patriotic Sermons**
 - Religion provided a moral sanction for opposing British rule
 - Ministers of the Church of England are not eligible because they swore an oath to support the king
- **Oaths of Allegiance**
 - 18th-century oaths were seen as "sworn promises"
 - Most colonies required an oath of allegiance by free males over the minimum age (varied from over 16 to 21 years)
 - Prisoners of war and enslaved persons were exempt from taking an oath of allegiance
 - Women were not required to take an oath of allegiance unless required in other circumstances (ex. in New York to file a lawsuit)
 - Some colonies allowed Quakers to affirm allegiance (Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont)
- **Three Elements of Oath of Allegiance**
 - Renouncing allegiance to the King of England
 - Promise of allegiance to the state as an independent state
 - Commitment to reveal treasons and conspiracies against any of the states
- **Minimum Age Requirements for Oaths of Allegiance**
 - Connecticut – Office holders and freemen (over 21)
 - Delaware – White males over 21
 - Georgia – All men over 16
 - Maryland – Free males over 18
 - North Carolina – Free males over 16
 - Pennsylvania – White males over 18
 - Rhode Island – Men above 21
 - South Carolina – Free males over 16
 - Vermont – Freemen (over 21)

- Virginia – Free born males over 16 (except indentured servants)
- **Supply Taxes**
 - Congress had no authority to levy taxes (Money and supplies were requested from the states)
 - Taxes went towards raising supplies, paying troops, building ships, providing clothing, raising bounty money, providing relief for families of soldiers in service
 - The laws that were passed to levy taxes needed to state in the statute that they were addressing a request of the Continental Congress and/or to support the war or achieve independence
 - Each state had different tax assessments that were levied (Consult the DAR and SAR guides on which taxes count for Patriotic service)

Examining Previous Services in the Colonial Wars

- Determine if your ancestor fought.
- What colonial wars occurred during his lifetime?
 - King George's War: 1740–1748.
 - French and Indian War: 1754–1763.

American Revolutionary War

- Does his age fit the muster roll?
- Are there family relics or forgotten images of your veteran in the attic?
- Oral family traditions?
- Cemetery clues?

Overview of What Revolutionary War Records are available

Publication	What is it?	Where to Find Online
United States Revolutionary War Compiled Service Records, 1775–1783 NARA Microfilm publication M881	Abstracts of information about soldiers from muster rolls, pay rolls, and other documents	FamilySearch.org Fold3.com Ancestry.com
Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783 NARA Microfilm publication M246	Images of muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns, and other personnel, pay, and supply records	FamilySearch.org Fold3.com Ancestry.com
Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, 1800–1900 NARA Microfilm publication M804	Images of documents assembled during the process of applying for a pension or bounty land	FamilySearch.org Fold3.com Ancestry.com

Other Useful Resources for Researching Revolutionary War veterans

- Muster rolls
- Pension files and final payment vouchers
- Quartermaster rolls for the regiment (State Archives)
- Published genealogies and town histories
- Correspondence from officers
- Journals and diaries of your veteran or fellow veterans
- 1840 US Census listing Revolutionary War pensioners in each town
- Battle maps

1840 US Census – Listing Revolutionary War Pensioners in Each Town

- Revolutionary War pensioners and widows
- First census to give exact age
- Lists who the pensioners are residing with

Loyalist Muster Rolls

- The On-line Institute for Advanced Loyalist Studies:
<https://www.royalprovincial.com/military/musters/musters.htm>
- *Loyalists in the Maritimes — Ward Chipman Muster Master's Office, 1777–1785:*
<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/loyalists/loyalists-ward-chipman/Pages/loyalist-maritimes-ward-chipman.aspx>

- *Carleton Papers, Loyalist and British Soldiers 1772–1784*: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/loyalists/loyalists-british-soldiers-1722-1784/Pages/introduction.aspx>

Loyalist Claims

- Often include evidence and "memorials" given by witnesses about a Loyalist's claim
- List of losses of both land and personal possessions
- Associated documents relating to the claim are also provided in these collections
- Name of the person or family affected for the purpose of the claim
- Residence(s) of the individual or family
- Financial estimates of their losses
- Actual documents to support the claim
- Details of the Loyalist's life in America before, during, and after the Revolution
- Audit Office (AO-12) and Audit Office (AO-13):
<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13816>
- Ancestry.com database of *UK, American Loyalist Claims, 1776–1835*:
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3712/>

TIP: AO-12 is consolidated and easy to read; more abstracted than AO-13 which contains the original documents

Prisoners

- Fold3.com database of the *US, Continental Congress - Papers* (which contain lists of Loyalist prisoners): <https://www.fold3.com/publication/63/us-continental-congress-papers-1774-1789>

TIP: When searching use “Tory” and “Loyalist”

Study Projects

- AmericanAncestors.org database of David E. Maas' essay *Divided Hearts, Massachusetts Loyalists, 1765–1790*: <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/80/massachusetts-divided-hearts-massachusetts-loyalists-1765-1790>
- American Philosophy Society Study Project on Maryland Loyalists:
<https://www.amphilsoc.org/blog/announcing-maryland-loyalism-project>

Consider Adopting the Regiment or Crew

Consider using the steps you have learned and examine the pensions and stories of those men who served with your ancestor. The details in the diaries, letters, and pensions of his fellow veterans may add more detail to the story you know from researching his records.

Approaches for adopting a regiment or company:

- Determine your limits and set goals.
- Utilize social media to attract assistance and find other descendants.
- What is your final product of your research on this “adoption”?

Applying to Various Hereditary Societies for the Revolutionary War

- National Society Daughters of the American Revolution
<https://www.dar.org/>
- National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution
<https://www.sar.org/>
- National Society Children of the American Revolution
<https://www.nscar.org/>
- General Society Sons of the Revolution
<https://sr1776.org/>
- The Society of the Cincinnati
<https://www.societyofthecincinnati.org/>
- The Order of Founders and Patriots
<https://ofpa.org/>
- Daughters of the Cincinnati
<https://daughters1894.org/>

Websites

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

- FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/1849623>
- Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/publication/470/us-revolutionary-war-service-records-1775-1783>
- Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4282/>

Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783, may be found at:

- FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/2068326>
- Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/publication/469/us-revolutionary-war-rolls-1775-1783>
- Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4282/>

Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Files, 1800–1900, may be found at:

- FamilySearch: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/1417475>
- Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/publication/467/us-revolutionary-war-pensions-1800-1900>
- Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1995/>

Volunteer to transcribe the pension of your Revolutionary War ancestor and others via the National Archives “Citizen Archivist” online: <https://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/missions/revolutionary-war-pension-files>

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