Researching Colonial and Revolutionary War Soldiers

David Allen Lambert, Chief Genealogist

Meet today’s presenter

David Allen Lambert
Chief Genealogist

OVERVIEW

- Presentation (60 mins.)
  - Review of early conflicts
  - What records exist and how to access them
  - Using Revolutionary War pensions

- Q&A (30 mins.)
  Click to expand your user panel

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Determining the Military Service of your Ancestor before the Revolution

- Age at enlistment
- Wars during his lifetime
- Documents & Artifacts
- Pensions
- Genealogies and local histories
How old was your Veteran?
- Drummer Boy
- Student Soldier
- Married with Children
- Seasoned Veteran
- Senior Soldier

What colonial wars occurred during his lifetime?
- Pequot War: 1636-1638
  - Expansion into Connecticut
  - New England settlers and Pequot Indians
  - Major battle: Fort Mystic May 26, 1637
King Philip’s War: 1675-1676

- First full scale New England war in the 17th c.
- Metacomet (aka) King Philip and the Wampanoag Indians
- Plymouth Colony, Rhode Island, Western Mass., and beyond

Massachusetts Archives Collection

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To the Honored Governor.

Your poor subject being, a stranger in the country, and having no friends to speak for your interests in this new world of strangers, he is compelled to petition your honor for protection from this cruel usage of what he, who has been conducted by nature to such a degree of industry, so much time and labor, and the fruits of the work. All having been so much labored and punished in the service in this new country, that he has scarce been able to use the country service, which is what he deems the greatest good.

Your obedient servant,

John Bragdon
King William’s War: 1689-1697

- Glorious Revolution of 1688; England declares war on France 1689
- Areas of New York, Maine, and New Hampshire
- Sir William Phips led attack on Port Royal, Acadia
- Failed attempt to capture Quebec

Sir William Phips’ Expedition
October 1690
Queen Anne’s War: 1702-1713

- England at war with France
- Raids by French and allied Indians from Canada into Northern New England communities
- Attack on Deerfield, 1704
King George's War: 1740-1748

- Key battle: Fortress Louisburg on Cape Breton in modern day Nova Scotia, 1745
- 1748, return of fortress to French control

French and Indian War

- "Seven years war" over boundary disputes between English colonists and French
- Recapture of Fortress Louisbourg in 1759
- Many British soldiers would later fight against the crown in Revolution
Tip

Look at family heirlooms for clues.
Family Heirlooms for Clues

• What might be in the attic?
• Ask relatives
• Museums and archives
• Ebay or Auction catalogs

What was lost – now is found

Military Commissions
Tip
Examine probate inventories.

Inventories & Family heirlooms?

QUESTIONS?
Research and Resources

- Don’t re-invent the wheel
- What has been published?
- State by State Lists
- Local Histories
- Internet resources when available

AmericanAncestors.org
Massachusetts 1620-1775

- Officers & Soldiers in the Seventeenth-Century Conflicts
- Officers & Soldiers, 1702-1722: Queen Anne’s to Dummer’s War
- Soldiers in the French and Indian Wars 1744-1755
- Officers in the French and Indian Wars 1748-1763
- Officers & Soldiers 1725-1743: Dummer’s War to the War of Jenkins’ Ear
- Officers and Soldiers in the French and Indian Wars, 1756-1758

Tip
Adopt your ancestor’s regiment.

Adopt your ancestor’s regiment
- Research each individual
- Look for additional MSS
- Who were the officers?
- Did they fight together again?
Mass. Archives Collection
- List of Men Who served in British Military Organizations, 1710-1774. Name, enlistment date, time in service, and amount of pay due; available on Massachusetts Archives Reels 91-99. They are arranged chronologically.
- Government Responses to petitions and claims for Payment of individual military service, or for losses as a result of hostile actions against or by Indians (17th century). Reels 67-80.
- www.state.ma.us/sec/arc/arcidx.htm

Connecticut State Archives: Records of the General Assembly
- Militia 1678-1820
- Rev. War: 1756-1820
- Colonial War: 1675-1806
Maine Historical Society  
(Portland, ME)
- Zebulon Harmon 18th Century Military MSS
- MSS on King Williams and King George's War including Muster Rolls

New Hampshire State Archives  
(Concord, NH)
- Index to Indian Wars and French and Indian Wars documents at Archives
- Court Martial papers, 1694-1959
- Rolls of Military Personnel, 1690-1775

Rhode Island State Archives  
(Providence, RI)
- Muster Rolls, accounts and Correspondence files pre-1775
- Misc. documents relating to the French & Indian War
- A list of men in the Canadian Expedition and Crown Point Expedition.
Published Sources

Published Resources:
Muster Rolls and military histories
• Compilations of Colonial soldiers
• Published histories of battles and wars
• Hereditary Society publications

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Step # 3
Applying to Hereditary Societies

1638: Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company
1927: National Society Women Descendants of A. & H. A. C.
1893: General Society of Colonial Wars
1932: National Society Daughters of Colonial Wars
1896: National Soc. of Colonial Daughters of the 17th Century
1896: Order of Founders and Patriots of America
1898: National Society Daughters and Patriots of America
1987: Continental Society Sons of Indian Wars
1988: Continental Society Daughters of Indian Wars

QUESTIONS?
Revolutionary War

Step #1
Determine if he fought

Too young or Too Old?
- Ages not listed, no town given
- Age range of typical soldier, 18-35
- Average birth year 1735-1760
- Extremes early 1700s & late 1760s
Family Relics in the Attic

- Letters
- Diaries
- Paintings
- Guns & Swords
- Discharge Papers

Oral Family Traditions

- 1775 to 2017
- Lost in translation
- Preserving stories
- Confirming stories with primary sources
- Hero or Deserter?
- Proving or disproving Grandma

Cemetery Clues and Pitfalls

- Is there a gravestone for your vet?
- Cemetery and burial records
- Transcribed gravestones
- Where is his spouse buried?
- Is there a flag marker?
  - S.A.R. marker on the right grave?
Forgotten Images

- Do you have an image of your soldier?
- Did your veteran live into the 1830s?

Step #2 Research

Useful Resources

- Muster rolls
- Quartermaster rolls
- Published genealogies
- Correspondence from officers
- Town histories

- Pension files
- Journals and diaries
- 1840 Census
- Maps
- TIP: Adopt the regiment!
Tip

Locate the primary source of the Muster Rolls.

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Mass. Soldiers & Sailors

The following is his Revolutionary War sketch from Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the Revolutionary War (12:591).

Poor, Jonathan, Newbury. Captain of a company of militia, Col. Samuel Gerrish (2d Essex Co.) Regt., which marched on the alarm of April 19, 1775; service, 6 days; also, Captain; return of militia officers who joined Col. Jedediah Huntington's Regt., dated Roxbury Camp, Dec. 22, 1775; ordered in Council Feb. 3, 1776, that said officers be commissioned; also, Captain; list of officers of companies under command of Col. Huntington which reinforced the army; commissioned Feb. 3, 1776; also, copy of a return of said Poor's co. [year not given]; copy of a receipt dated Newbury, March 18, 1777, signed by mun belonging to said Poor's co.; for wages for 6 weeks service, appears on reverse of return; also, Captain, 1st co., Col. Daniel Spafford's (7th Essex Co.) regt. of Mass. militia; list of officers to be commissioned in said regiment; ordered in Council June 26, 1777, that said officers be commissioned; reported commissioned June 26, 1777.

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Muster Roll Index Microfilm

- Massachusetts Muster Rolls (index file cards) of the Revolutionary War, 1767-1833
- 259 Microfilms

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Capt. Jonathan Poor

Step #3
Learn about the Pensions

Pension Timeline
• 1776: Half pay for officers and men disabled in the service and were incapable of earning a living.
• 1780: Half pay for 7 yrs. To widows and orphans of officers.
• 1806: Pensions allowed to veterans of State troops and militia for the first time.
• 1818: Pensions for life based on a period of 9 mos. or until the end of the war.
Pension Timeline

• 1820: Certified inventories of pensioner’s estate and income were required.
• 1832: Pensions granted to those with service less than 6 mos.
• 1838: Widows were authorized pensions for 5 yrs. if they had married the veteran before 1794.
• 1848: Widows were authorized pensions for life if they had married the veteran before 1800.

Pension Timeline

• 1853: All widows restrictions were eliminated.
• 1869: Daniel F. Bakeman last pensioner dies.
• 1878: Widows authorized pensions for life if the veteran only served 2 weeks.
• 1906: Esther (Sumner) Damon the last widow to collect a pension dies in Vermont.
Joshua Whitney Abstract

Going beyond Abstracts and Dissecting Pension Files

www.fold3.com
Final Payment Voucher Index

Pension payment records are not typically found in pension application files. These cards were created as an index for the final payments made to either the veteran or his widow. They provide additional details on where a family may have moved in the early- to mid-19th century, death dates of veterans, widows, or dependent children, and sometimes the maiden name of a widow.

1840 Census of Pensioners

- Revolutionary War pensioners and widows
- First census to give exact age
- Lists who veteran is residing with
Tip
Look for diaries of fellow veterans

Journals and Diaries
- Published journals
- Transcribed accounts
- Local historical societies
- Search:
  - library.nehgs.org
  - ArchiveGrid.org

Step #4
Applying to Hereditary Societies
- National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)
- National Society Sons of the American Revolution
- National Society Children of the American Revolution
- General Society of the Sons of the Revolution
- Society of the Cincinnati
- Daughters of the Cincinnati
Remember them all

THANK YOU!
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