



# 23. Finding Your Patriot! Revolutionary War Research

by: Jean Halls Muetzel, MLS

Could your Ancestor have served in the American Revolution? What to consider?

1. Was your ancestor born between 1690-1765? They could be a man or woman but few women had military service.
2. Did they live in the 13 colonies? Maine was part of Massachusetts. Settlers in modern-day Vermont, Louisiana and frontier regions also served. Or could they have been French, or Spanish Patriots with service outside of the colonies? Patriots could have been German, Jewish, Native American and African American.
3. Did they have service between April 1775 with the Battle of Lexington and ending in 1783. Some individuals served on committees made necessary by the approaching war in late 1774 and early 1775.

## TYPES OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR SERVICE:

### SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

### MILITARY SERVICE

**Military service in the Revolution began with the Battle of Lexington, 19 April 1775 and ended on 26 Nov 1783, the date that the British evacuated New York City.**

1. Continental Line or Continental Army- In June 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the establishment of military units. National Army, full-time, younger men.  
Location of enlistment might offer clue to residence.
2. State Lines- some state assemblies created regiments of regular troops, separate from both Continental Line units and the militia, that were dedicated for local defense
3. Militia- Militiamen were expected to drill at various points throughout the year, and were subject to emergency or expeditionary service at the discretion of the Governor of the colony. Active duty service may have been for a few hours, several days, or perhaps a few months.  
The county and/or town organized militia service. Local Defense.  
\*\*Served in communities where lived. Wider age range of those who served.

4. Continental Navy- The Continental Navy reached its maximum strength in 1776 but never had more than thirty ships at one time. Its purpose was to support land troops, protect the coasts and capture enemy supply ships.
5. State Navies- In July 1775, the Continental Congress authorized each colony, at its own expense, to provide armed vessels to protect its harbors and navigate its seacoasts. New Jersey, Delaware and Vermont did not maintain a state navy.
6. Privateers- Privateers were privately owned, armed trading vessels, commissioned or issued letters of marque from either the Continental Congress or from the individual provisional government (sometimes by both) to capture enemy ships and goods

## CIVIL SERVICE

Civil service began when the royal governor was removed from power and a form of statewide American government was established. It was the law in all states during the Revolution that office holders be vested in the government they served.

\*\*As you search for your ancestor, remember older men may have served in positions of authority that needed education or background, like judges or other important jobs. Younger, less-educated men might have had jobs that did not require reading.

- Could your ancestors have served as a:
  - Judge or Juror      Sheriff
  - Selectman          Jailor
  - Moderator          Overseer of the Roads
  - Hog Reeve!        Justice of the Peace
  - Constable          Overseer of the Poor
  - Town Clerk        Fence Viewer
  - Town Treasurer    Tax Assessor
  - Surveyor

In New England, the business of ordinary government was conducted by the towns. The principal officers were selectmen and moderators. Additional officers were added to suit the needs of the particular town. Outside New England, business was conducted at the county level and the types of offices held varied with the needs of the counties. Some states, notably New York, used both town and county forms of government.

## PATRIOTIC SERVICE- most diverse category of service

Could be men or women. Very few single women have been proven.  
Proof of patriotic service may be found in town, county, state, and/or federal records.

Members of the Provincial Congresses – met in each colony in 1774 and continued until new state governments were established.

Members of the Continental Congress, State Conventions, and Assemblies

Membership in committees made necessary by the War, including service on committees which furthered the cause of the Colonies from April 1774, such as Committees of Correspondence, Inspection, and Safety, committees to care for soldier's families, etc.

Signer of Oath of Fidelity and Support, Oath of Allegiance, etc. (ONLY MEN SIGNED)

Members of the Boston Tea Party

Signers of Petitions- especially petitions that included requests for political separation from Great Britain. In addition, the content and wording of the petition must clearly demonstrate loyalty to the cause of American independence. Petitions regarding religious issues do not qualify.

Defenders of Forts and Stations: Individuals who lived on the frontier, from the Great Northern Lakes to Georgia, who are documented as having actively defended the western frontiers against British forces and their allies, the Indians.

Doctors, nurses, and others rendering aid to the wounded (other than their immediate families). Not include those who gave aid to wounded family members.

Ministers who gave patriotic sermons and encouraged patriotic activity

Furnishing a substitute for military service.

Prisoners of war or refugees from occupying forces> Those who suffered deprecation may also be eligible.

Prisoners on the British ship Old Jersey or other prison ships

Service in the Spanish Troops under Galvez or the Louisiana Militia after 24 December 1776

Service performed by French nationals within the colonies or in Europe in support of the American cause

Those who rendered material aid, in Spanish America, by supplying cattle for Galvez's forces after 24 December 1776

Those who applied in Virginia for Certificates of Rights to land for settlement and those who were entitled to and were granted preemption rights

Those who took the Oath of Fidelity to the Commonwealth of Virginia from October 1779 to 26 November 1783

Furnishing supplies – clothing, blankets, animals, crops

Those who rendered material aid and supported the cause of American Independence by furnishing supplies, with or without remuneration, loaning money and/or providing munitions.

Some states enacted special tax laws to raise money for supplies, etc. to provide to the military and naval forces.

SUPPLY TAX LISTS- are available for seven states

States with supply tax lists that cover most of the states are: VA, PA, NJ and MD

NY has lists that cover a portion of the state

MA & NH- have lists of some towns. No SC or GA tax lists.

## SERVICE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES:

### **From France:**

French support of the Americans began in early 1778 with the signing of the Treaty of Alliance. Between 1778 and 1782, the French provided arms, ammunition, supplies, and most importantly, troops, naval support, and monetary loans.

French forces took part in the siege of Savannah, Georgia; established a naval base at Newport, Rhode Island; and participated in the campaigns at Yorktown and Williamsburg, Virginia.

### **From Canada:**

In 1776, the Canadian governor commissioned a list of those who aided the Americans, resulting in a journal naming hundreds of Quebec residents. French Canadians served in the 1st and 2nd Canadian Regiments. In 1778, almost 200 men residing near Post Vincennes (now Indiana) took the oath of allegiance to the state of Virginia.

### **From Spain:**

Patriots were residents of either Spanish Louisiana or Nueva España. Nueva España included portions of the present day states of Texas, California, New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona, as well as Mexico. Spanish forces also served in Cuba and other parts of the Caribbean.

1. **Donativos** In 1780, Carlos III, King of Spain, issued a Royal Decree that all subjects in Nueva España, or New Spain, make a voluntary contribution, in the form of a donation, to help fund the American Revolutionary War. Every citizen of Spanish America was asked to donate one or two pesos to the cause.

2. **The Gálvez Expedition** Many Spanish patriots served under General Bernardo de Galvez in his Gulf Coast campaigns, including the Battles of Pensacola and Mobile. They were also stationed at militia posts throughout Spanish Louisiana. Some Spanish patriots were at the Battle of Fort San Carlos, in present day Saint Louis, and others were recruited from the Canary Islands to the Louisiana Infantry Regiment.
3. **Texas Longhorn Cattle** Texas cattlemen who supplied approximately 10,000 head of Texas longhorn cattle in response to a request by Gálvez in 1779.

## NON-ACCEPTABLE SERVICE:

1. Signers of Oath of Loyalty to the King of Great Britain
2. Serving with Loyalist troops and militia
3. Convicted of Treason, Desertion or court-martialed
4. Confiscated Estates- property confiscated by local patriotic government
5. Residence in areas occupied by British forces for some or all of the Revolutionary War.  
The British forces would occupy the area around the mouth of the Hudson River until 1783. British forces would also seize control of other cities, including Philadelphia (1777), Savannah (1778–83) and Charleston (1780–82),
6. Donating or seeking reimbursement from Loyalist forces
7. On fines list for non-participation in militia activities

## RESIDENCE DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR:

LOCATION of Service must match Patriot's proven residence at the time of the event.

IF a person can be proven to have resided in a given locality during the war, then acceptable documentation can be few years prior to or few years after the Revolution. Show Patriot consistently resided there during that time -

SUCH AS: 1772 tax list or 1786 court record (showing in same locality)

**Be cautious if you find multiple men of the same name living in same area-**

NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT SERVICE BELONGED TO WHAT MAN.

(pay attention to suffixes and prefixes in names, occupations)

Use primary records, contemporary to time of event-

1. Tax Lists & Ratables
2. Militia Lists (older men rarely served)
3. Deeds, Leases & Mortgages
4. Legal documents- witnessing a deed, neighbor in a deed, appearance in court
5. Church Records- serving as baptism sponsor, children baptized during the war.  
membership lists, pew lists, church minutes
6. Town meeting minutes- most in New England
7. Store accounts and ledgers – may show living in a given locality
8. Newspaper notices
9. Depositions found in pensions, bounty land applications, court records and proceedings

**\*\*PENSIONS** may provide residence

IF Patriot remained in same locality for most of his or her life- tax records can be helpful.

IF Patriot moved during the war – may need additional documents to establish identity and migration.

IF Patriot under 21- generally assumed living in their parents' household.

If orphaned- may be living in residence of guardian or ward

**\*\*Persons under 21 will not be found owning land or making legal transactions.**

**WOMEN** did not own land or property unless she was a widow. If woman credited with service while married, residence assumed to be husband's residence.

If widow, residence generally assumed to be residence of late husband.

Most common female patriots were widows who either paid a supply tax or furnished supplies,

IN NY, NJ & PA- residence can often be proven to specific town, precinct or township

IN MD & DE- residence can be proven to specific district

IN VA, NC, SC & GA- more agrarian, counties usually preferred method of residence.

Some place in VA, NC & SC- can have specific district or parish name through tithable lists or vestry records.

## TYPES OF MILITARY RECORDS:

1. **Service Records** – Rosters, Muster rolls, payrolls, etc. Many were destroyed during the War of 1812 but surviving records were transcribed into compiled military service records.
2. **Pension Records** – could exist for those soldiers or their widows who lived long enough to see pension laws enacted. **\*\*Contain more personal details than service records and may name heirs.** **Pension rolls** – list names of those receiving payments in particular year. **Final payment vouchers** – usually indicate who receive monies after a veteran's death.
3. **Bounty Land records** – created when soldiers or widows applied for land warrants based on military service. U.S. Government compensated veterans with public land in frontier areas, like Ohio

[Revolutionary War Pension Records and Bounty Land Warrants • FamilySearch](#)

## GREAT RESOURCES FOR REVOLUTIONARY WAR RESEARCH:

1. The **1840 US federal census** was the **first to ask the status and age of Revolutionary War veterans**. \*\*Look at the second page of the record.
2. **National Archives** [The American Revolution | National Archives](#)
3. **FOLD3.COM**- \$fee site or may be available through your local public library research databases. Many of the records from the National Archives can be found at this site. Check out digitalized and indexed Pension Files
4. Debbie Duay's super site [Sources of Revolutionary War Service \(learnwebskills.com\)](#)  
She outlines references available by Colony
5. **Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)** [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)  
Go to Genealogy and click on the GRS (Genealogical Research System)- can search by Ancestors and Descendants. Approved applications and supporting documentation can be purchased. One of the best genealogical libraries in the country.
6. **Sons of the American Revolution (SAR)** [www.sar.org](http://www.sar.org)  
Fantastic library at Louisville, KY headquarters. Can order applications. Ancestry.com has membership applications from 1889-1970  
Great resources on taxes- [Revolutionary-War-Tax-Law-Records-Multiple-States.pdf \(sar.org\)](#)
7. **FamilySearch.org** – click on search, type in ‘Revolutionary War’ in collection space
8. **Ancestry.com** \$ fee site. May also be accessed for free at some public libraries
9. **The National Society of the Daughters of the Revolution of 1776**  
The society disbanded in 1983, and all of the records of the national society were donated to the Suffolk County Historical Society, in Riverhead, New York.  
<https://www.germangenealogygroup.com/records-search/daughters-of-the-revolution.php>  
This database consists of an index of all of the applications submitted by prospective members. Copies of the applications are available for a fee.
10. **Southern Revolutionary War Institute**  
"The institute is the only center exclusively dedicated to the study of the Revolution in the Southern states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Tennessee. Although the general scope of the Institute is the entire Southern Campaign, it has a particular focus on the Revolutionary War in the Carolina backcountry."  
<https://chmuseums.org/southern-rev-war-institute-mc/>
11. **The Valley Force Muster Roll, a project of the Valley Force Park Alliance**  
<https://valleyforgemusterroll.org/search-the-muster-roll>  
is dedicated to those who were at winter quarters from December 19, 1777 to June 19, 1778. The Continental Army used monthly muster rolls to track the army's strength. Each roll contains names, ranks, dates of enlistment, and other notes on soldiers' assignments, activities, or conditions.
12. **State Archives, County Resources, Local Historical and Genealogical Societies**

## LINEAGE SOCIETIES

1. **National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)** [www.dar.org](http://www.dar.org)
2. **National Society Sons of the American Revolution (SAR)** [www.sar.org](http://www.sar.org)
3. **General Society Sons of the Revolution (SR)** [www.sr1776.org](http://www.sr1776.org)
4. **The Society of the Descendants of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence**  
[www.dssi1776.com](http://www.dssi1776.com)
5. **The Society of Cincinnati** [www.societyofthecincinnati.org](http://www.societyofthecincinnati.org) is the nation's oldest patriotic organization, founded in 1783 by officers of the Continental Army and their French counterparts who served together in the American Revolution
6. **Daughters of the Cincinnati** [www.daughters1894.org](http://www.daughters1894.org)
7. **The Order of the Founders and Patriots of America** [www.founderspatriots.org](http://www.founderspatriots.org)  
Founded in 1896, the Order is made up of "Associates" who trace their ancestry back to those first colonists and who have forefathers in the same male ancestral line who served in the American Revolution.
8. **National Society of Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America (DFPA)**  
one must possess a Founder ancestor who arrived in one of the colonies between May 13, 1607, and May 13, 1686, and a Patriot ancestor who rendered military service, civil service, or aid in establishing American Independence in the period 1775 to 1784.  
[www.nationalsocietydfpa.com](http://www.nationalsocietydfpa.com)
9. **Hereditary Order Descendants Loyalists & Patriots of the American Revolution**  
<http://loyalistsandpatriots.org>  
Membership is available to those persons who can prove lineal or collateral descent from an ancestor who, during the American Revolution from 1775 to 1783, was loyal to the Crown of Great Britain and who are currently a member of an organization requiring proof of descent from a Patriot of the American Revolution
10. **DESCENDANTS OF WASHINGTON'S ARMY AT VALLEY FORGE**  
<http://www.valleyforgesociety.com>  
is a historical & genealogical organization where one must prove descent from a person that spent time at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania with the Continental Army between December 19, 1777 and June 19, 1778. Also, can join Friends of DVF, if not eligible to join with an ancestor.