

FAMILY HISTORY LIBRARY

PATRON CLASS HANDOUT

National Archives Pension Applications Files

The National Archives has pension applications and records of pension payments for veterans, their widows, and other heirs. They are based on service in the armed forces of the United States between 1775 and 1916, but not duty in the service of the Confederate States of America, 1861-65.

In a few cases, the Federal Government assumed responsibility for pensions based on service in state militia and other state military organizations, and records of these pensions are also in the National Archives (Anne Brunner Eales & Robert M. Kvasnicka, eds., *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives*, 3rd ed., [Washington, DC : NARA, 2000], 169).

Pensions were mainly granted for the following reasons:

- **Disability or invalid pensions** – awarded for physical disabilities incurred in line of duty
- **Service pensions** - awarded based on service for specified periods of time
- **Widow's pensions** – awarded to women and children whose husbands or fathers had served in war for a specified time period or had been killed

Pension benefits usually increased or expanded over time as the number of pensioners decreased.

The pension files are organized into and accessed through different series or categories. These are named for specific wars, such as the following series:

- Revolutionary War
- Old Wars
- War of 1812
- Indian wars
- Mexican War
- Civil War and later

The records are arranged alphabetically except for the Civil War and later series. The Civil War and later series are arranged numerically by application, certificate, or file number. All of the series have alphabetical indexes.

Pension Application Files

Veteran's application

- Name
- Rank
- Military unit
- Period of service
- Residence
- Birthplace
- Date of birth or age
- Property (when claims were made on basis of need)

Widow's application

- Most everything in veteran's application
- Her name
- Her age
- Residence
- Maiden name
- Marriage date and place
- Husband's death, date and place

Children's or heir's applications

- Everything from veteran's and widow's application
- Heirs' names
- Dates and places of their birth
- Residence
- Date of their mother's death

How to Locate a Pension File

Revolutionary War

HeritageQuestOnline.com

- *Selected Records from Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files*
- selected genealogical records – not a complete file

Footnote.com

- "Revolutionary War Pensions" Collection

Family History Library Catalog

- *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files* – first film 970001
- White, Virgil D., *Genealogical Abstracts of Revolutionary War Pension Files* 973 M28g

War of 1812 (Indexes only)

Family History Library Catalog

- White, Virgil D., *Index to War of 1812 Pension Files* FHL book 973 M22i 1992
- United States. Veterans Administration, *Index to War of 1812 Pension Application Files* FHL film 804031 (120 rolls)

Ancestry.com

- *War of 1812 Pension Application Files Index, 1812-1815*

Old Wars (Indexes only)

Family History Library Catalog

- White, Virgil D. *Index to Old Wars Pension Files, 1815-1926* FHL book 973 M22wh 1993
- United States. Veterans Administration. *Old War Index to Pension Files, 1815-1926* FHL film 821603 (7 rolls)

Indian Wars (Indexes only)

Family History Library Catalog

- White, Virgil D. *Index to Pension Applications for Indian Wars Service Between 1817 and 1898* FHL book 973 M22whv
- United States. Veterans Administration. *Pension Index Files, Indian Wars, 1892-1926* FHL film 821610 (14 rolls)

Mexican War (Indexes only)

Family History Library Catalog

- White, Virgil D, *Index to Mexican War Pension Files* FHL book 973 M22mw
- Veterans Administration. *Mexican War Index to Pension Files, 1887-1926* FHL Film 537000 (14 rolls)

Civil War and later (indexes* only)

Family History Library Catalog

- United States. Veterans Administration. *General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* FHL film 540757 (544 rolls)

Ancestry.com

- *Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* (about 1% not digitized)

Footnote.com

- *Civil War Pensions Index* (U.S. Army pension applications arranged by organization) 1861-1917

- *Civil War "Widows' Pensions"* (This is currently an extremely small collection.)

The National Archives

How to Obtain Older Military Service or Pension Records

Revolutionary War pension files are available on film in the Family History Library. Digital images of the complete files are also available at www.footnote.com.

You may go to the National Archives in Washington, DC, request the file, and copy the file yourself (\$.25 per page as of July 2008) or use a non-flashing digital camera. Cameras must be registered with the National Archives when you enter the building.

Pension records may also be ordered from the National Archives by mail or ordered online. Using the information from the index you would request the pension file by completing the National Archives form **NATF 85: National Archives Order for Copies of Federal Pension or Bounty Land Warrant Applications**. You may download the form NATF 85 from this website: <http://archives.gov/forms/pdf/natf-85.pdf>.

Please note: They will receive the order more quickly if you order online. They will also send an e-mail acknowledging the request and you will be able to track the order.

The online ordering web address is: <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>. You must register and setup an account (no charge).

Depending on which type of pension application file that you order, you will receive one of the following (fees quoted are as of 1 April 2009):

1. A complete Civil War and later pension application file (up to 100 pages), based on Federal (not State or Confederate) military service during the Civil War or later (includes the Pension Documents Packet.) \$75.00
2. A complete Federal pre-Civil War military pension application based on Federal military service before 1861 (includes the Pension Documents Packet.) \$50.00
3. A pension document packet that contains reproductions of eight documents containing genealogical information about the pension applicant, to the extent these documents are present in the file. \$25.00
4. A complete military bounty land application file based on service 1775-1855 (includes only rejected Revolutionary War applications). \$25.00

There is no prorating of the fee. For example, if you order a pension document packet (#3) and then decide you want the complete file (#1) you will need to pay the entire \$75.00. The \$25.00 cost for #3 cannot be applied for the later request of #1.

The Value of Pension Records

Pension application files contain a wealth of genealogical information. Civil War and later files are generally superior to the other pension series files. Each pension file is different and does not necessarily contain the same information. Widow's and minor's

files contain more genealogical information than just a veteran's file. Widow's and minor's files were combined into the veteran's file. There are not two or more files.

Carefully examine each document in the file. In addition to the information already noted you may find out information regarding:

- Subsequent marriages
- Prior marriage information
- Physical disabilities incurred during service
- Residences since discharge
- The affidavits will normally be from neighbors and/or family members, with family members usually indicating their relationship to the pensioner
- The cause of death will normally be given in a minor's application
- Pensioner's would occasionally be required to provide periodic updates

For Further Reading

Eales, Anne Bruner & Robert M. Kvasnicka, eds. *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*, 3rd ed. Washington, DC : NARA, 2000 p. 169-76 FHL book 973 J53e

Family History Library. *Research Outline: Military Records*. Salt Lake City : Intellectual Reserve, 2000.

Greenwood, Val D. *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, 3rd ed. Baltimore : Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2000 p. 590-94, 598-99 FHL book 973 D27g 2000

Szucs, Loretto Dennis & Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, eds. *The Source: A Guidebook to*

American Genealogy, 3rd ed. Provo, UT : Ancestry, 2006. p. 512-515 FHL book 973D27ts 2006

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