RESEARCHING REVOLUTIONARY WAR VIRGINIANS

I. Two types of federal records, service and benefits records, are used to prove patriotic military service during the American Revolutionary War.

A. “Volunteer compiled military service records" are federal records of men who participated during wartime only, whether they enlisted voluntarily or were drafted. They may include information taken from muster rolls or pay vouchers, and can confirm rank, unit, and dates of service. They are located at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Photocopies may be obtained by either ordering online or getting a NATF Form 86 from the Internet site (http://www.archives.gov/veterans/research/genealogy.html) and following the instructions regarding ordering and payments. Typically, these records have less genealogical information than pension applications. They do not include information on state militia participation.

Published sources include:
B. Federal veterans benefit records include either pension application and payment records, or bounty land warrant application records. Not all veterans have benefit records. Some did not meet the qualifications for pensions or bounty land, and not everyone who qualified bothered to apply. These records generally have more genealogical information than service records, and frequently list the names and relationships of other family members. They may include birth records, marriage or death certificates, pages from family Bibles, depositions of witnesses, etc. as supporting documents offered at the time the claim was filed by the veteran or his family.

At the time of the Revolutionary War, only soldiers who were disabled, who enlisted for the duration of the entire war, or who were killed during the war were eligible for federal bounty land or pensions. In 1818 Congress provided pensions for those who had served at least nine months and who were in need. In 1832 the need requirement was abolished. Pensions to widows of Revolutionary War veterans were not awarded until 1836. Follow the same instructions for obtaining a NATF Form 85 from the National Archives as listed above, or for online ordering, to acquire photocopies of these records by mail.

Published sources include:


II. Two types of state records, military service and public service claims, verify patriotic participation during the war.

A. State level military service records are those created by state agencies, not federal. In order to meet its quota of recruits, the Virginia legislature passed a number of acts that provided benefits based on length of service and military rank. Qualifying individuals were required to be certified by the county courts as to their eligibility, and many cases resulted in specific acts of the legislature.

Published sources include:

B. Public service claims were claims against the state for compensation for non-military services such as food, horses, supplies and personal service. They are an excellent place to locate information on women and on men who were too young or too old to provide military service. Sometimes able-bodied veterans provided such service in addition to multiple enlistments in the regular army or state militia. See the following:


III. Loyalist records, located in U.S., Canadian and British archives, and based on both military records and claims for wartime losses, are published in the following sources:


Ruch, John E. *Carleton’s Loyalist Index (Computer File): Also: The Book of Negroes.* Ottawa: United Empire Loyalists’ Association of Canada, 1996. (Microfilm of the Carleton Papers is available as M-154.1-30.)

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