

Dig deeper into less well known Revolutionary War records

Researchers seeking evidence of an ancestor's support of the American Revolution have many readily accessible records to search. The compiled military service records¹ (CMSR) and the pension files² of the Revolutionary War are both well known. There are numerous published muster rolls and other lists based on records in state archives, town records, or other sources.³

There are also other less well-known records in the National Archives (NARA) that may help establish proof of service or support for the American Revolution.

War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records (Record Group 93)

The War Department lost all of its early records to fire in 1800, and then suffered more losses in 1814 when the British burned Washington during the War of 1812. In 1873 and 1914–15, the War Department purchased or copied Revolutionary War records from various sources. From 1894 to 1913, the Departments of State, Interior, and Treasury also transferred Revolutionary War military records to the War Department. Thus, Record Group (RG) 93, the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, is unique as an artificially created collection. The War Department abstracted information from muster rolls, payrolls, and personnel reports and assembled them into the CMSRs.

Records such as letters, pay receipts, enlistment papers, supply returns, commissions, and orders were not included in the CMSRs. Instead, the War Department kept these items separately in 199 numbered, bound volumes, and in a file of about

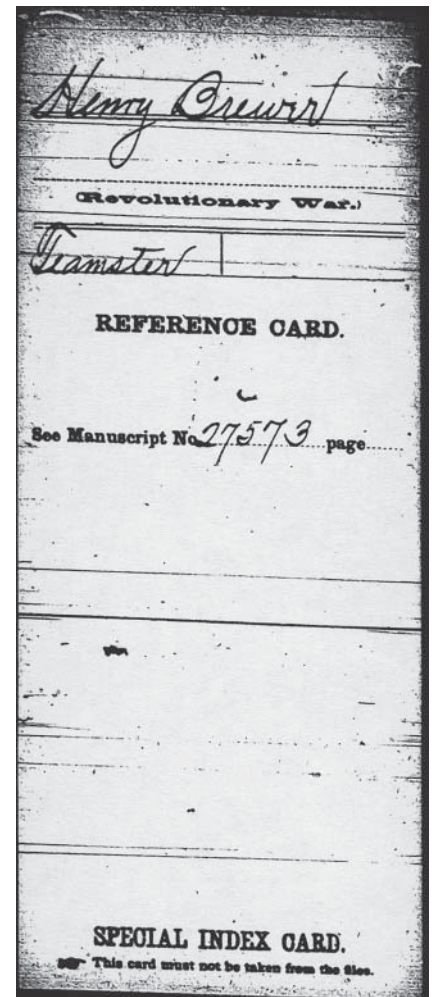
35,500 numbered, unbound items. Fortunately, locating information about individuals in these voluminous records is straightforward.

Begin with NARA microfilm publication M847, *Special Index to Numbered Records in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1775–1783* (39

rolls), an alphabetical card index to names that appear in the numbered records. Many of the index cards indicate the person's state, rank, or reason for mention in the original record. For example, the card for Jonathan Bridges indicates "March 10, 1782, paid for cattle." Other people were noted to have supplied hides or candles. There are cards for teamsters Henry Brewer and Isaac Brewer, citizen Caleb Brokaw, and all ranks of military men. Women are also included, such as Ann Brooks, of New York, "cook for wheelwright;" Martha Brewster, of New York, and Mary Brewster, also of New York.

The "numbered books"

If the M847 index cites a "book" number, consult NARA microfilm publication M853, *Numbered*



Books Concerning Military Operations and Service, Pay, and Settlement of Accounts, and Supplies in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records (41 rolls). As the title suggests, the records consist of bound volumes or “books” of records, including orderly books (orders); oaths of allegiance and fidelity and oaths of office; commissions and resignations; lists of troops and letters; pay and settlement of accounts; receipts; and accounting for supplies.

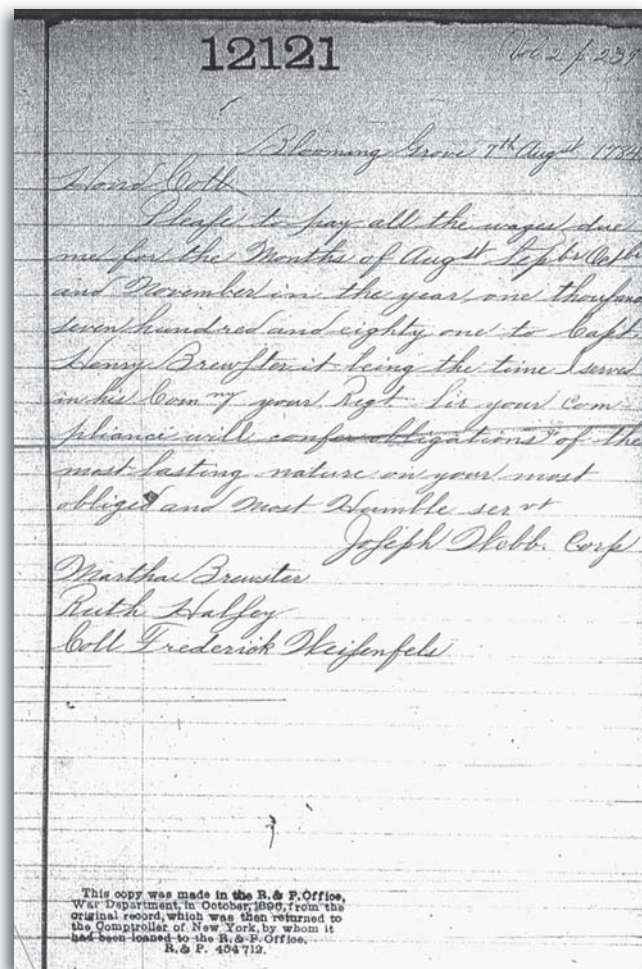
One example of what can be found is the example of “citizen” Caleb Brokaw. He merited attention from the Revolutionary military authorities because a formal complaint was submitted to the Commander in Chief, General Washington, while the army was headquartered at Middle Brook, New Jersey, on 11 February 1779, “against Col. Craig for beating and otherwise ill treating Caleb Brokaw an Inhabitant of this Place.” A court of inquiry “to examine in to the circumstances of the affair” subsequently reported back that “they are of opinion that if the Inhabitants of the Country take the Liberty of dealing with the Soldiers in an improper manner and to the prejudice of good order & military discipline, they do it at their own risque and if they should receive any correction which they think is a breach of the civil Law ... they should have recourse for Redress to the Courts of civil Law.” General Washington was “sorry to find that the Court [of Inquiry] seem to have mistaken his intention.” He knew that citizens had right to seek redress from civil courts “but he wished to have the opinion of the Court explicitly on the particular merits of the complaint against Col. Craig in order to determine how far the Complainant might be entitled to redress from military justice.” (M853, roll 4, book 28, pp. 17–18, 30–32).

The “manuscript file”

If the M847 index cites a “manuscript number,” consult NARA microfilm publication M859, *Miscellaneous Numbered Records (the Manuscript File) in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1775–1790s* (125 rolls). The manuscripts—which include a wide variety of materials—are in numerical order identified by the large mechanically stamped number at the top

of the first page of each record. Records related to pay and supplies predominate, but there are also records of oaths of allegiance, correspondence, enlistment papers, resignations, and other matters.

Martha Brewster’s name appears on manuscript 12121 because she, Ruth Halsey, and Colonel Frederick Weisenfels witnessed the signature of Corporal Joseph Webb on a letter dated 7 August 1784 to Colonel Hand, in which Webb requested that his pay for August to November 1781 be paid to Captain Henry Brewster. (M859, roll 38, manuscript 12121).



Jonathan Bridges, the supplier of cattle mentioned previously, was paid £144 on 10 March 1782 by Ebenezer Foote, inspector of cattle. More than twenty other suppliers were also paid on various dates. (M859, roll 124, manuscript 35489).

The two teamsters, Henry and Isaac Brewer, are on “A Return of Wheelwrights, Blacksmiths, Masons, Teamsters, Bateamen, Fatiguemen,

| <i>Rebaurmens Names</i> | <i>How they have been and now are imployed with their Engagements</i> |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Richard Prince Foreman</i> | <i>Two Boats Crews Transporting Provisions and stores from West Point & Fishkill to this place & From this place to Kingsing Carrying Horses to Salisbury Island and bringing them from there when Recruited hawling up and corking Boats Transporting Bagage & Stones of all kinds to and from Kings Ferry — These are all Entitled until the first of January 1781 —</i> |
| <i>Thomas Stilwell</i> | |
| <i>Edward Finakin</i> | |
| <i>James Grant</i> | |
| <i>Peter Brewer</i> | |
| <i>John Timson</i> | |
| <i>William Sheldon</i> | |
| <i>Robert Murchie</i> | |
| <i>William Hobby</i> | |
| <i>Charles More</i> | |
| <i>Cornelius Pantasol</i> | |
| <i>Wm. Brewerbrook</i> | |
| <i>Wm. Pantasol & Co</i> | |

Expresses, and others who Draw provisions at Continental Village under the Inspection of John Campbell, AQMG, September 11th, 1780." The job of Silvanus Hugins, wagon master, and fourteen teamsters under his command was described as follows:

"Driveing Teams bringing Provisions from the Village Landing to the Issuing store, Carying Provisions to the Troops on the Lines, Drawing Timber for the Wheelwrights Bagage to and From diferent places, Carting Timber for Fort arnold, bring Salt Hay from Ver Planks point, and for some Time have had two of them on said Point. To take care of a Number of Horses, their recruiting, and whenever I have had no other imploy for them they have been Collecting Hay, Publick Horses Broke Down, Wagons & Carts in all which bisness I have now every posible care Taken to get my Teams in good order knowing by Experience that the Fall [illegible word] of Transporting provisions and Forrage will be more than [illegible words] can posibly do." (M859, roll 94, manuscript 27573).

Papers of the Continental Congress

The Papers of the Continental Congress (PCC) are part of RG 360, Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention. In anticipation of the nation's bicentennial, NARA undertook a multi-year effort

to comprehensively index these records, which culminated in the five-volume set compiled by John P. Butler, *Index: Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789* (National Archives, 1978), which is available in libraries nationwide. The *Index* directs the researcher to the exact microfilm publication number, roll number, and item number of interest in the related NARA microfilm publications M247, *Papers of the Continental Congress* (204 rolls) and M332, *Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress* (10 rolls). Butler's index is still the best and most comprehensive index to the PCC, but researchers without ready access to it may find the PCC online at Footnote.com to be useful.

Although the PCC has a lot of correspondence between high-ranking persons coordinating the war, there are also many useful references to regular citizenry. Several search strategies are possible.

Search by personal name for a quick focus on particular persons of interest. Tole Kennedy is on a list of recruits from Westmoreland, Connecticut, 6 March 1776. James Kelly and James Kelly Jr. are among those on a list of inhabitants of the west side of the Laurel Hill Mountains, Pennsylvania, January 1783. E. W. Keirs is named on a return of horses, 19 July 1778.

Search by geographic location to learn more about specific places affected by the war, even if an ancestor's name is not mentioned. Laurel Hill Mountains, Pennsylvania, are mentioned in five different records, and there are several lists of,

and petitions from, inhabitants of the Kaskaskia, Illinois, area, to name just two locations.

Search by military unit name, or by regimental or company commanders' names for records that give insight into the activities of a command to which an ancestor was attached.

Search by subject if interested in logistical issues or special subjects, such as gunpowder, horses, wagon masters, or particular forts.

Related records online

As mentioned above, the War Department lost all of its pre-1801 records to fire. George Mason University's Center for History and New Media has posted online the results of an exciting project to reconstitute those records, as best as can be done, with copies of records from repositories in the United States, Canada, England, France, and Scotland. The *Papers of the War Department, 1784 to 1800* <<http://wardepartmentpapers.org>> include materials from 1781 to 1803, some of which relate to Revolutionary War claims and activities. It includes selected images from RG 93 records series described above.

There are indexes online for "The Papers of George Washington" <<http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/>>; a 48-hour free trial of the full digital version is also available. The "George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741–1799" <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>> has indexes and digital images online.

For more information

"War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records" <<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/093.html>> and "Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention" <<http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/360.html>>, from the *Guide to Federal Records in the Archives of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: NARA, 1995).

Descriptive pamphlets (DPs) for NARA microfilm publications can be freely downloaded through NARA's "Order Online" system <<https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>>. It is not necessary to register or purchase anything. Click on the "Microfilm" tab to begin. Detailed DPs for

M847, M853, M859, M247, and M332, will provide much more information about these records than could be written here. 🌳

Notes

1. NARA microfilm publications M860, *General Index to Compiled Military Service Records of Revolutionary War Soldiers* (58 rolls); M879, *Index to Compiled Service Records of American Naval Personnel Who Served During the Revolutionary War* (1 roll); M880, *Compiled Service Records of American Naval Personnel and Members of the Departments of the Quartermaster General and the Commissary General of Military Stores Who Served During the Revolutionary War* (4 rolls); M881, *Compiled Service Records of Soldiers Who Served in the American Army During the Revolutionary War* (1,096 rolls); and M246, *Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783* (138 rolls).

2. NARA microfilm publication M804, *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files* (2,670 rolls). For a discussion, see Claire Prechtel-Kluskens, "Revolutionary War Pension Files—An Introduction," *NGS NewsMagazine* 32 (April/May/June 2006): 34–37.

3. See Table 6, "Selected Genealogical Research Aids: Revolutionary War," in the *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: NARA, 2000): 129–31.

Claire Prechtel-Kluskens, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, Washington, D.C., served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at <cklusken@yahoo.com>. Opinions expressed are her own and do not necessarily reflect the policies of NARA.