By Marie Varrelman Melchiori, CG, CGL, and Claire Prechtel-Kluskens
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Did your Union Army Civil War ancestor apply for a pension?

In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the thirteenth in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, DC, that are useful in researching the war and its participants.

Did your Union Army Civil War veteran ancestor, his widow, minor children, dependent father, mother, or sister, apply for a pension from the federal government? Four different indexes can provide the answer to that question.

T288, the alphabetical index

The index most frequently used by researchers is National Archives Microfilm Publication T288, *General Index to Pension Files, 1861–1934* (544 rolls), which is commonly but inaccurately known as the Civil War Pension Index since it also includes veterans of the Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, and Regular Army service between the wars, as well as certain civilians. (T288 is available online at Ancestry .com and FamilySearch.org.) This index contains cards arranged alphabetically by the veteran's name, then by the state from which he served. Each card includes any aliases he used; the

names of his widow and the guardian of his minor children, if applicable; the companies and regiments in which he served (if Army); the names of vessels on which he served (if Navy); the dates of filing of the invalid, widow, minor, and any other pension applications; and various pension file numbers. The pension attorney's name and the state from which an application was filed may be noted. As used here, the word "invalid" is for "suffering from disease or disability" not "false or incorrect."

No matter how many file numbers are listed on one index card, there is only one file per veteran, which contains all the papers filed by him, his widow, his minor children, or by anybody else. Thus, a pension file is *usually* filed under the *last number assigned to the file*. While it may seem absurd that a file about one veteran had numerous file numbers over its active life, the system was efficient and made sense to the pension office staff.

Even if a veteran has two or more index cards in T288, there is only one pension file. For example, John P. Waste, assistant surgeon of the 193rd Ohio Infantry, has one index card that lists his application and certificate numbers. He has a second index card that lists his widow's name

and her application and certificate numbers. However there is only one pension file that contains all papers about both of them, filed under her widow's certificate number, WC 627,791.

T288 includes Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection veterans who are designated by the letter "S" written after the word "Invalid." You have to look closely to notice. Index cards for Navy veterans were often blue colored cards that did not reproduce well on microfilm and may be omitted from online versions. T288 also includes Civil War-era nurses whose index cards were filed under their own names. For example, Lucy J. Blanchard's index card lists her service as "Nurse, Med. Dept., U.S. Inf." and provides her invalid application and certificate numbers.

T288 also includes cards for some federal civilian employees who retired before 1928. These typewritten cards include the person's name, address, and file number, such as "Maude A. Dubant, Bellevue Hotel, Washington, D.C., R-29531." "R file" records are not in the National Archives; requests for copies should be addressed to Office of Personnel Management, Retirement Operations Center, P.O. Box 45, Boyers, PA 16017.

Understanding pension file numbers

It is important to understand the pension file numbering scheme.

T288 index card for John Becker, Co. H, 9th Wisconsin Infantry. Claims were filed for his minor children as well as for a dependent mother and sister.

SO and SC. The invalid application number, normally referred to as SO for survivor's original, was the number assigned to the file when the soldier first (originally) applied. The invalid certificate number, normally referred to as SC for survivor's certificate, was his pension certificate number and the new number given to his file when his pension was approved.

WO and WC. When the veteran's widow applied for a pension, the file was given a new number—WO for widow's original—and when her application was granted, her pension certificate number—WC for widow's certificate—became the file's new number.

Other Dependents. If there were claims made on behalf of minor children, or dependent mothers, fathers, or sisters, their application and certificate numbers will be noted. As a practical matter, pension files for dependent claims are interfiled with WO and WC files. The name given on the minor's line, followed by the abbreviation "Gdn.," was the minor children's guardian, who could have been the remarried widow, her new husband, a kinsman of the soldier, or some responsible community member.

C and XC. If the veteran or his widow lived into the 1920s, the file was given a new number, either a C or XC number noted at the bottom of the card. Often, these cards have the letter "A" and a date written in the space for certificate number. That is the date when the pension became an age-based pension instead of a disability-based pension.

T289, the organization index

The second most commonly used index is National Archives Microfilm Publication T289, *Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900* (765 rolls), the title of which is inaccurate because it includes veterans who served as late as World War I. (T289 is available online at Fold3.com with images of the index cards, and on FamilySearch .org without images of the index cards.) T289 is arranged by branch of service, then by regiment, company, and finally in alphabetical order by

T289 index card for William H. Harvey, Co. A, 1st Ohio Infantry, who also had service in the Veteran Reserve Corps.

A1158 card for 276298, showing the four files connected with that number.

name of soldier. There are both similarities and differences in the information given by T289 versus T288.

Like T288, T289 provides the man's name, military unit, the dates on which original pension applications were filed, all pertinent SO, SC, WO, and WC numbers, and additional service the man had in another military unit.

Unlike T288, T289 *does not* include Navy veterans, the names of the widow or guardian of minor children, or the state from which the application was filed. It is less likely to provide needed C or XC numbers. It *often gives* the dates of enlistment and discharge, the law or section of the law under which a pension was granted, and the veteran's date and place of death. "War with Spain" is marked on those who served in either the Spanish-American War or Philippine Insurrection.

Why would a researcher use T289 instead of T288? There are several reasons. First, if the man cannot be located in T288 because his name is spelled differently than expected, then T289 provides an alternative place to look if his military unit is known. Second, if T288 contains an erroneous pension file number, or a number that is hard to read, then T289 provides a way to double-check those numbers. In fact, researchers may wish to routinely check *both* indexes to ensure accurate file numbers have been obtained. Third, researchers studying a particular military unit, such as a company or regiment, can more

easily determine relevant pension file numbers for men in that unit. Finally, rolls 627 to 765 of T289 include Spanish-American War (including Philippine Insurrection) veterans, some World War I veterans, Indian Scouts, Philippine Scouts, miscellaneous early twentieth-century Regular Army personnel, hospital corps, quartermaster corps, medical department (including nurses), and other units.

A1158, a numerical index

The third index is National Archives Microfilm Publication A1158, *Numerical Index to Pensions, 1860–1934* (359 rolls), which provides a way to connect a file number to a specific veteran. (Part of A1158 is available online at Fold3. com.) A1158 is arranged by number from 1 to 1,737,997. Most cards identify up to four veterans who are connected with that number. For example, the number 276,298 is (1) the SO number for William C. Riddle, Company A, 1st West Virginia Cavalry, whose SC number was 293,660; (2) the SC number for John M. Myer, 1st Company, Michigan Sharp Shooters; (3) the WO number for the widow of Samuel J. Berrier, Company F, 57th Ohio Infantry, whose WC number was 344,663; and (4) the WC number for the widow of Isaac Stevenson, Company H, 132nd Ohio Infantry. "WO" and "WC" numbers relating to fathers, mothers, minors, and sisters are marked with F, M, M, or S, respectively. The lowest-numbered cards identify up to thirty-four

M1785 card for remarried widow Margret Isham.

veterans associated with a file number because the cards include several different wars—Old War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Indian War, and Navy as well as Civil War army soldiers. (Old War refers to service in the Regular Army between the 1780s and the Civil War.) This index can be useful if a published source connects a person with a common name to a pension file number without any military unit or other helpful identifying information.

M1785, remarried widows' index
The fourth index is National Archives Microfilm Publication M1785, *Index to Pension Application Files of Remarried Widows Based on Service in the Civil War and Later Wars and in the Regular Army After the Civil War* (7 rolls). (M1785 is available online at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.) Arranged alphabetically by the widow's remarried name, the index cards give her deceased former husband's name, the military unit in which he served, her widow's original (WO) number, the date of her application, and remarks, which may indicate the law under which she applied. For example, the card for Margret Isham indicates she was the former widow of William H. Harvey who served in Company A, 1st Ohio Infantry. She filed her pension application based on the Act of 1 May 1920, and her WO number was 321,637. This index can be useful if a widow was known to have a previous spouse who was a veteran but the name is unknown. However, this index *does not* include all remarried widows of which there were many thousands.

Get the full pension file next
You've checked an index and found an ancestor. Now what? To get a copy of the pension file, you have several options:

(1) You can view the file from any computer if it is one of the WC pension files that have been digitized and placed online at Fold3.com. Digitization of all pension files will take many years.

(2) You can travel to the National Archives in Washington, DC, to examine and copy the file yourself if it has not been digitized. Basic facility information is online at http://www.archives .gov/dc-metro/washington/researcher-info.html. Or you can hire a professional researcher to make copies for you if it has not been digitized.

(3) You can have the National Archives make copies for you by making a request through the Order Online system at https://eservices.archives .gov/orderonline/ or by mailing a completed NATF Form 85, "National Archives Order for Copies of Federal Pension or Bounty Land Warrant Applications," to the National Archives. NATF Form 85 can be obtained online at http:// www.archives.gov/forms/pdf/natf-85.pdf. As of May 2014, the cost of a full Civil War Pension Application File is $80 for the first one hundred pages and 70 cents for each additional page. For a Pension Documents Packet (a small portion of the file), the cost is $30.

Most of the pension files held by NARA had become inactive by about 1928. Most C or XC files—those with a living veteran, widow, or other dependent circa 1928—remain in the custody of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Researchers seeking a Civil War pension file should always inquire first with the National Archives, and, if we don't have the file, we will provide the information needed to contact the VA.

For more information
The substantive contents of pension files are discussed in "Anatomy of a Union Civil War Pension File," *NGS NewsMagazine* 34 (July–

September 2008): 42–47, available online in the members-only section of the NGS website.

The pension office's handling of pension claims is discussed in "A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude: Civil War Pension Application Processing, 1861–1885," *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records 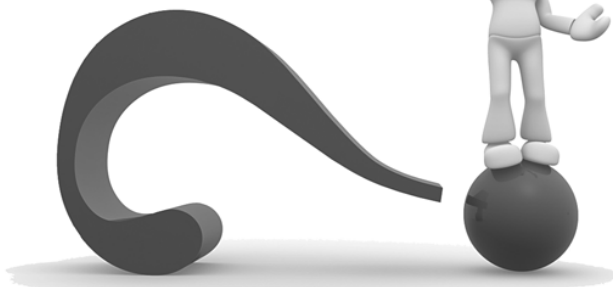Administration* 42 (Spring 2010): 26–35, online at http://www .archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/spring/ civilwarpension.html.

It is interesting to note that the pension indexes reproduced in T288, T289, A1158, M1785, and other National Archives microfilm publications, were created in 1911 by the Bureau of Pensions to replace less convenient indexing systems that had been used in previous decades. More details about them, as well as numerous other cards used by the Bureau in its day-to-day work, can be found in *Card Records in Use in the Bureau of Pensions, 1916* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), online at the Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org) and on Google Books (http://www.google.com).

Many of the card records described in that book were temporary records.

National Archives microfilm publications are available for viewing on microfilm at selected NARA facilities; for details, consult the microfilm catalog in the Order Online system at https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/. (You do not need to register or purchase anything to use the catalog.) 🌳

Marie Varrelman Melchiori, CG, CGL, *a full-time professional researcher since 1979, specializes in Union and Confederate records at the National Archives, Washington, DC. She can be reached at MVMcgrs@ aol.com.* *Claire Prechtel-Kluskens*, *a projects archivist at NARA, served as NGS registrar (1996– 1998) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at ckluskens@verizon.net.*