

Military Records for African-American Genealogy: *Suggestions for Researchers*

Claire Kluskens
National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC
www.archives.gov
<https://twelvekey.com>

ONLINE RESEARCH GUIDES

1. **Research in Military Records** at <https://www.archives.gov/research/military>
2. **Military Reference Reports** at <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/reference-reports.html>. These provide checklists of microfilmed records, many of which can now be found online on *Ancestry.com* or *FamilySearch.org*.
3. **Civil War**: Articles at <https://twelvekey.com/civil-war/>

ARCHIVES I, STATE ARCHIVES, OTHER REPOSITORIES

4. **Revolutionary War**. The most comprehensive guide to African-Americans who served in the American Revolution is Eric Grundset et al., *Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War* (Washington, DC: NSDAR, 2008), http://www.dar.org/sites/default/files/media/library/DARpublications/Forgotten_Patriots_ISB_N-978-1-892237-10-1.pdf is available free online. This go-to source will direct you to original records and publications.

Compiled Military Service Records (CSMRs) (Army): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/570910>

Compiled Military Service Records (CSMRs) (Navy): <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/572134>

Revolutionary War pensions: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300022>

ARCHIVES I (WASHINGTON, DC)

5. **War of 1812**. Nearly 400 free blacks served in the Regular Army during the War of 1812. For a list, see Eric Eugene Johnson, *Black Regulars in the War of 1812* (Heritage Books, 2015). To learn more about the records, start with Claire Kluskens and JoAnn Williamson, "U.S. Regular Army Registers of Enlistment and Enlistment Papers, 1798-1914," *NGS Magazine*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2009): 48-52, at <https://twelvekey.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ngsmagazine2009-10.pdf>

Military Records for African American Genealogy: Suggestions for Researchers (Kluskens, 2018).

6. **Civil War (Union) Compiled Military Service Records:** Large numbers of formerly enslaved and free African-Americans enlisted and fought in the Union Army and Navy. Look for military-age males (born 1850 or earlier). Online in the National Archives Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300398>, and on *Fold3.com*.
7. **Civil War (Union) and Later Pension Files:** Most pension files have **not** been digitized and must be viewed in the National Archives Building. (Files that were still active after 1930 may be at the National Archives at Saint Louis, *but start with Archives I first.*). Pension files usually contain much information and may even identify the former slave owner.

Step 1: Find Your Ancestors and Relatives in the Pension Index

“General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934” (T288) is online at *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch* <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1919699?collectionNameFilter=false>

Fold3 has a similar index online: the “Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Swerved Between 1861 and 1900” (T289).

Step 2: See the pension files at Archives I if it’s not digitized already.

(1) Online – Widows pension files numbered under approximately WC-140000 are online on *Fold3.com*.

(2) Online – As of 11 January 2018, nearly 1,200 Civil War and later pension files are digitized online in the National Archives Catalog at [https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=%22pension%20file%22%20-revolutionary%20-index&f.oldScope=\(descriptions%20or%20online\)&f.recordGroupNoCollectionId=15&SearchType=advanced](https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=%22pension%20file%22%20-revolutionary%20-index&f.oldScope=(descriptions%20or%20online)&f.recordGroupNoCollectionId=15&SearchType=advanced) (Note: This is a very specific crafted link that “weeds out” Revolutionary War pensions.)

(3) In person – come to the National Archives Building (bring a printout of those index cards to save time), submit your “pull slips” (record retrieval request forms), and see the records. Best bet: plan to spend the day. You have the option of scanning the ENTIRE pension file for FREE in the “Innovation Hub” – you get to take a copy home for free and we will put it up online in the Catalog for all to see.

8. **Civil War (Union) Carded Medical Records:** Some are in the National Archives Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=carded%20medical%20-marriage&f.oldScope=online&f.locationIds=32> (very specific crafted link) but most have not been digitized. Must be requested in the Archives I “Finding Aids Room” and viewed in the clean search room on the 2nd floor. For more information, read Claire Kluskens, “Compiled Military Service Records, Part IV: Carded Medical Records, *NGS Magazine*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2014): 37-40, at <https://twelvekey.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ngsmagazine2014-102.pdf>

9. **Civil War (Confederate):** The Confederate Government required slave owners (usually owners with multiple slaves) to provide slaves to work on Confederate army fortifications. This resulted in the creation of the Confederate Slave Payrolls. As of 11 January 2018 over 2,200 have been digitized and are online in the National Archives Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/719477>. These payrolls include names and counties of residence of slave owners and slaves, dates and places of employment, occupation, amount paid to the slave owner, and the name of the person who collected the money on behalf of the slave owner. An excellent book on this subject, which focuses on Virginia and North Carolina, is Jaime Amanda Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013; repr. 2015).
10. **Indian Wars / U.S. Army (Post Civil War) Military Service Records (“Buffalo Soldiers”):** Many African-American men served in the Regular Army in the western U.S. after the Civil War. To learn about the records, see Claire Kluskens and JoAnn Williamson, “U.S. Regular Army Registers of Enlistment and Enlistment Papers, 1798-1914,” *NGS Magazine* (2009), at <https://twelvekey.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/ngsmagazine2009-10.pdf>.
11. **Indian Wars:** Case Files of Indian Wars Pension Applications, 1892-ca. 1926. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1105236> (3 files described online). This series consists of the case files of approximately 35,000 approved and disapproved veteran and widow pension applications based on service performed during various Indian campaigns between 1817 and 1898. Index online on *FamilySearch.org* at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1979427>, *Ancestry.com*, and *Fold3.com*.
12. **Case Files of Attorneys, Agents, Pensioners, and Others Relating to the Prosecution of Pension Claims and the Investigation of Fraudulent Practices, 1886–1933** (also known as “Bureau of Pensions Law Division Case Files, 1862–1933”), at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/2538355>. These case files primarily concern persons who were attorneys, justices of the peace, and notaries public, who were investigated or had correspondence with the Bureau of Pensions. During some investigations, however, testimony by former slaves identified their slave owners. This crafted link: <https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=slave&f.ancestorNaIds=2538355> takes you to file descriptions in which the word “slave” is mentioned (but **not** all of them relate to former slave ownership).
13. **Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection Compiled Military Service Records (CSMRs).** Some records are online in the National Archives Catalog at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300400>. See Civil War (Union) and Later Pension Files” (above) regarding pensions.

ARCHIVES II (COLLEGE PARK, MD)

- 14. Unit Records of various kinds: World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, etc.** Contact Archives II reference at archives2reference@nara.gov for information. Do your homework and advance planning at home, then research onsite.

Useful links for information:

“Finding Information on Personal Participation in World War II”

<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/military/ww2/ww2-participation.pdf>

“World War II Records” <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2>

“World War II Military Unit Records” <https://historyhub.history.gov/groups/military-records/blog/2017/08/25/wwii-military-unit-records-at-the-national-archives>

“Finding Aids Related to WWII at NARA”

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/finding-aids.html>

“Master Index of Army Records” (informational web page)

<https://history.army.mil/reference/records.htm>

- 15. Still Photographs of military units and ships.** Most individuals are probably not identified. For more information, see “Guide to the Still Picture Branch Holdings” online at <https://www.archives.gov/research/guides/still-pictures-guide.html>
Search the National Archives Catalog at
Contact Still Pictures at stillpix@nara.gov

Useful links for information:

“How to Research: Photographs Relating to World War II Navy Ships” <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2017/08/10/researching-wwii-navy-ships/>

“How to Research” Photographs Relating to World War II Army Units” <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/2017/03/30/how-to-research-photographs-relating-to-world-war-ii-army-units/>

ONLINE

- 16. World War I Draft Registration Cards.** Online at *FamilySearch.org* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1968530>), and *Ancestry.com*. These cards are only registration, **not** evidence of military service, but they are very useful for providing

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dates and places of birth, place of residence in 1917 or 1918, and next of kin (parent or wife). See presentation, “The Genealogical Significance of the World War I Draft Registration Cards.” (2014 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 6.) Links to video, presentation slides, and handout at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2014/schedule-handouts.html>

17. World War II Draft Registration Cards (1st, 2nd, and 3rd Registrations). Online on *Ancestry.com* and at least some on *FamilySearch.org*.

18. World War II Draft Registration Cards (4th Registration) (“Old Men”). Go to <https://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners>, search for “World War II Draft” and follow the links of interest to either *FamilySearch.org* or *Ancestry.com*.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AT SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

19. TONS OF RECORDS FOR MILITARY SERVICE! See list (pages 8-9): “National Archives at St. Louis—Military Record Series.” Replace “XXX” with the “Catalog” number in this: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/XXX> to get to more information about the records. You will need to contact Saint Louis for copies of records at the contact information given (usually stl.archives@nara.gov).

Learn more about the records **and** how to get copies at these online presentations:

“From the Cradle to the Grave: Birth, Childhood, and Death in the National Archives at St. Louis” (2017 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 3). Links to video and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2017/schedule-handouts>

“A is for Archives, B is for Burn File” about how partially burned records from the 1973 fire are being recovered for use by researchers. This is exciting stuff. See the presentation at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibMfBFhVcGU&index=6&list=PLC641EF0E3F8AFDF9> (2017 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 4).

“The Best National Archives Records Genealogists Aren’t Using” – among other things: War Risk Insurance Court Case Files (World War I) and Veterans Home Case Files. (2016 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 2). Links to video and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2016/schedule-handouts>

“The Morning After – Changes as Reflected in Morning Reports (Army and Air Force).” These records help trace a veteran’s movements and daily unit activities, including where he went, what battles he participated in, and any changes in status he may have had on a daily basis. (2016 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 8). Links to video and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2016/schedule-handouts>

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“What’s New in in the Lou: A Look at the Latest Accessions at the National Archives at St. Louis.” Navy General Courts-Martial Records, Naval Aviation Training Jackets, Army Research and Experimental Case Files, and Vietnam War era Mortuary Files from Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang Mortuary. (2016 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 10). Links to video and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2016/schedule-handouts>

“Personnel Records of the National Archives—St. Louis.” The presentation includes official military personnel files of former military members of all branches of the U.S. military, selective service registration cards and ledgers, various courts martial records, individual deceased personnel files of former military members, and Veterans Administration deceased claim files, among many others. (2015 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 3). Links to video (starts at 2:10) and presentation slides at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2015/schedule-handouts.html>

“It’s in the Cards: Finding Family Members in National Archives—St. Louis’ Card Series.” St. Louis has two dozen records series that are in card form, and most of them are not well known. They provide valuable information for researchers who are reconstructing the service of a veteran whose personnel file was destroyed in the 1973 fire, and for those who want to learn more about their civil servant ancestors, as well. Genealogists will find they contain names and addresses; birth, death, and service dates; and many other personal details. Among the records discussed are World War I Award Cards, Air Force Award Cards (1942–1963), Arlington National Cemetery Interment Cards, Philippine POW Cards, VA Master Index Cards, WWI and WWII Pay Cards, Selective Service Cards, Civilian Service Record Cards, and more. (2015 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 4). Links to video (starts at 3:10) and presentation slides at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2015/schedule-handouts.html>

“Finding Your World War I Veteran at the National Archives at St. Louis.” It details multiple record series, including but not limited to, Official Military Personnel Files, Deceased Veteran Claim Files, World War I Burial Files, and General Courts-Martial records. It will include all records that are available to the public and an overview of the information and documents typically found in these files. (2015 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 8). Links to video (starts at 2:08:40) and presentation slides at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2015/schedule-handouts.html>

“Discovering Your Family’s Past in Military and Early Veterans Administration Personal Data Records and Selective Service Records.” (2014 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 13.) Links to video, presentation slides, and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2014/schedule-handouts.html>

“Individual Deceased Military Personnel Files (IDPFs).” (2014 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 14.) Links to video, presentation slides, and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2014/schedule-handouts.html>

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“Vets and Feds in the Family Tree: Military and Civilian Personnel Records.” (2014 Virtual Genealogy Fair Session 15.) Links to video, presentation slides, and handouts at <https://www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2014/schedule-handouts.html>

NATIONAL ARCHIVES BLOGS

You can subscribe by email to get a message whenever a new blog post is made.

Official NARA:

Links to all NARA blogs: <https://www.archives.gov/social-media/blogs>

Rediscovering Black History: <https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/>

NARAtions: <https://narations.blogs.archives.gov/>

Pieces of History: <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/>

The Text Message: <https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/>

Unwritten Record Blog: <https://unwritten-record.blogs.archives.gov/>

Other:

Research at the National Archives and Beyond (Bernice Bennett)
<http://www.blogtalkradio.com/bernicebennett>

The Twelve Key (Claire Kluskens) <https://twelvekey.com/>

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AT ST. LOUIS -- MILITARY RECORD SERIES

SERIES NAME	DATE RANGE	NATIONAL ARCHIVES CATALOG IDENTIFIER
Air Force Awards Card File	1941–1959	4530002
Applications for Headstones and Markers (for veterans' burials)	1970–1985	6016127
Arlington National Cemetery Daily Logs (of funerals and burials)	1948–2011	22475181
Arlington Disinterment Records, Gravesite Reservation Cards, Record of Interments, and Grave Cards	1864–2011	7543569
Army & Air Force Enlistment/Induction Serial Number Ledgers	1942–1960	46756391
Army Deserters Pay Cards	1943–1945	4713145
Army General Courts Martial Case Files	1918–1938	5916929
Army General Courts Martial Records of Trial	1939–1976	12459579
Army Officers Pay Cards	1940–1951	35809707
Army World War I Officers & Nurses Pay Cards	1917–1921	1488333
Army World War I Officers & Nurses Final Pay Vouchers	1917–1921	1561423
Correspondence, Reports, Telegrams, Applications, and Other Papers Relating to Burials of Service Personnel	1915–1939	595318
Card Records of Licenses Issued to Merchant Marine Officers	1910–1946	567476
Monthly Reports and Personnel Files of Chaplains	1917–1950	6016856
Chemical Warfare Service Officers Index	1941–1959	38995605
Contract Nurses Pay Cards, U.S. Army	1933–1940	4576276
Da Nang Mortuary Records	1966–1972	29033011
Deceased and War Casualty Seamans' Records	1937–1950	560620
Deceased Veterans Claim Files	1917–1945	23904754
Deceased Veterans Claim Files	1917–1949	12280123
Deceased Veterans Claim Files	1917–1955	26466267
Deceased Veterans Claim Files	1917–1955	28894631
Dependency Folders (records of dependents), U.S. Army	1918–1943	5701081
Deserters Vouchers, U.S. Army	1926–1930	4763511
Enlisted Personnel Payment Records, U.S. Army	1915–1917	5756921
Field Clerk Pay Cards, U.S. Army	1916–1921	2990428
Mexican Border Service Records	1916–1917	2462216
National Guard Officers Pay Cards	1922–1936	5573693
Naval Aviation Training Jackets	1914–1946	38983110
Navy and Marine Corps Casualty Records	1940–1989	38983131
Navy and Marine Corps Casualty Records	1898–1970	47304611
Navy General Courts Martial Records	1951–1976	38982845
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1964	646434
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1965	648038
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1966	648043
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1967	648045
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1968	648049
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1969	648051
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1972	648076

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AT ST. LOUIS -- MILITARY RECORD SERIES

SERIES NAME	DATE RANGE	NATIONAL ARCHIVES CATALOG IDENTIFIER
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1973	648079
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1974	648084
Navy Individual Deceased Personnel Files	1975	648087
Officer Orders and Files of Change, South Pacific Force	1942–1945	23889727
Officers' Reports of Change Cards (e.g., change in duty station), U.S. Army	1918	6050409
Official Military Personnel Files, U.S. Air Force *	1947–1998	30479766
Official Military Personnel Files, U.S. Army *	1912–1998	299741
Official Military Personnel Files, U.S. Coast Guard *	1898–2004	597218
Official Military Personnel Files, U.S. Marine Corps *	1905–1998	299715
Official Military Personnel Files, U.S. Navy *	1885–1998	299693
Philippine Prisoners of War Card File	1941–1946	39135972
Regular Army Officers and Field Clerks Pay Cards	1922–1936	4723773
Research and Experiment Case Files (drug effects research)	1955–1975	35302499
Reserve Officer Training Camp Rosters, U.S. Army	1917–1919	4735009
Reserve Officers Training Corps Student Pay Cards, U.S. Army	1920	3494909
Returns of Nurse Corps, U.S. Army (returns from duty stations)	1917–1921	3370993
Russian Railway Service Corps Personnel Files	1917–1920	5721174
Selective Service System Draft Records and Cards	1897–1957	varies
Student Nurse Individual Academic Records, U.S. Army	1918–1951	4851528
Tan Son Nhut Mortuary Records	1966–1972	29842556
Warrant Officer Pay Cards, U.S. Army	1917–1921	3518560
World War I Army Award Cards	1917–1940	5720378
World War I Discharge Reports, U.S. Army	1917–1920	4683632
World War I National Guard Papers, U.S. Army	1933–1940	2990429
World War I Single–name and Multiple–name Pay Vouchers, U.S. Army Enlisted	1917–1921	1436496
World War II Army Nurses Cards	1944	4693991

*** NOTE: Official Military Personnel Files have a "rolling" archival date. They become archival (open to the public) 62 years after the veteran's date of separation from military service.**

National Archives and Records Administration
 2017 Virtual Genealogy Fair - Session 3 Handout
 From the Cradle to the Grave: Birth, Childhood, and Death in the National Archives at St. Louis
 by Daria Labinsky & Cara Moore