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Inside this issue:

Back to School

Genealogy Education: A Changing Landscape

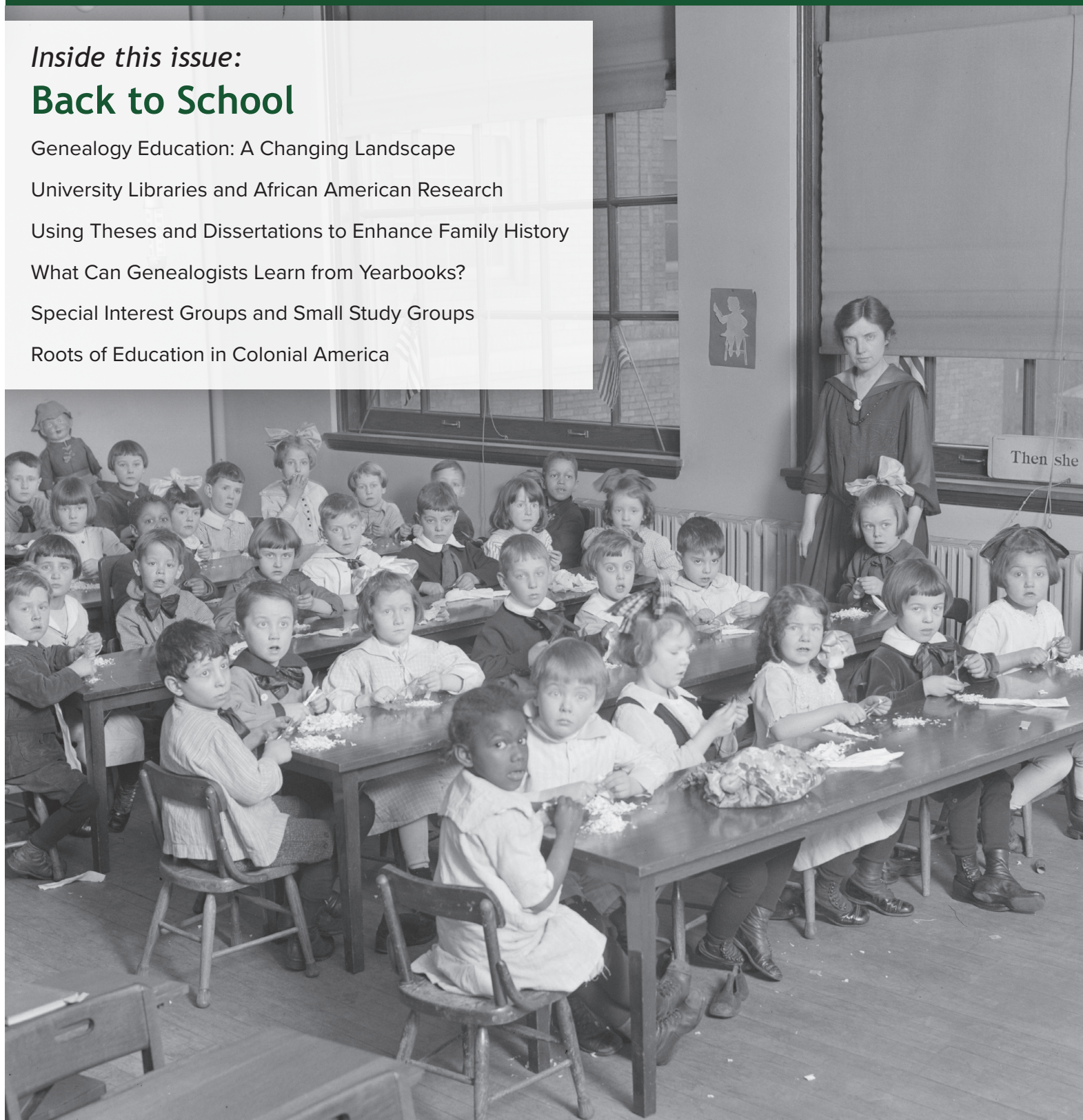
University Libraries and African American Research

Using Theses and Dissertations to Enhance Family History

What Can Genealogists Learn from Yearbooks?

Special Interest Groups and Small Study Groups

Roots of Education in Colonial America



Bounty Land Warrant Application Files

Claire Kluskens



Surrendered bounty land warrant #38587 for 120 acres, issued under the Act of 1855 (National Archives, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/116583114>)

See the article on page 5 about the new NGS/NARA effort to digitize all of the bounty land warrant application files.

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds about 360,000 approved and rejected bounty land warrant (BLW) application files that primarily relate to military service from the 1790s to 1855. These files can have excellent genealogical value since they contain applications by the veteran, his widow, and any other heirs; evidence of military service, marriage, or parentage, if needed; and correspondence and other records showing actions taken by the pension office in evaluating the BLW claim. The bounty land warrant files are like pension files but much smaller in size.¹

For example, Luther Calvin of Brown County, Ohio, guardian of Lavina Calvin, age seventeen, applied on her behalf for bounty land as the heir of James Calvin, deceased. After confusion over the name and spelling of Mr. Calvin's commander was resolved, the Treasury Department found his name on the muster rolls of Captain Zumalt's Company, Ohio Militia, having served thirty days from 22 August to 21 September 1812.

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 17 May 2023.

1. For more information about bounty land warrant applications, see Susan Goss Johnston, "An Underutilized Treasure: Bounty Land Warrant Applications," *NGS Magazine* 46:2 (April-June 2020), 18-24.

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In his declaration on 28 April 1851, Luther Calvin stated that James Calvin “died at his residence in Johnson County in the State of Indiana in the [sic] 1842 and that his widow is also dead. That Lavinah Calvin is 16 years of age and that she is the only surviving minor child” of James Calvin. In their affidavit dated 4 May 1855, Luther Calvin and John Butterson indicate that James Calvin “left a widow and minor children surviving; that the said widow died on or about the 1st day of January A.D. 1845 about three years after the death of her said husband, and that the said Lavina Calvin is the sole surviving minor heir at law of the said James Calvin deceased.”²

That he does not know whether he had a discharge or not that he does not know whether or not there is any family record that his best opinion is that there is none. That James Calvin died at his residence in Johnson County in the State of Indiana in the 1842 and that his widow is also dead. That Lavinah Calvin is 16 years of age and that she is the only surviving minor child of his the said James Calvin deceased.
Luther Calvin
mark

Luther Calvin's affidavit in bounty land warrant file for James Calvin, 1851

Bounty land warrants provided the right to free land in the public domain. They were originally authorized by the Continental Congress in 1776 as an inducement to enter and remain in military service, but later acts of Congress authorized them as a reward for past service. See the sidebar, “Selected Bounty Land Warrant Laws,” for details.

Typically, aged veterans didn’t want to start all over again on unsettled frontier lands with all the hard work that entailed: building a log cabin and barn, fencing pastures, and plowing fields in sod that had never been plowed before. Many veterans had comfortable lives, friends, and family in well-settled eastern states. Therefore, most veterans, widows, or their heirs sold the warrant instead of using it to resettle in the West. Some transferred their warrant to another family member.

Rejected bounty land warrant applications

Some BLW applications were disapproved (“rejected”) due to insufficient proof or length of service, fraud, or other reasons. Sometimes evidence of service could not be located due to the veteran’s or widow’s imperfect memory of the correct names of commanding officers or other service details.

For example, William Colvin of Adams County, Ohio, applied for bounty land on 12 October 1852, alleging that he had served as a private in a company commanded by Captain David Collier, but left the name of the regimental commander blank. On 3 April 1854, he filed another declaration, indicating Captain David Collier’s Company, Colonel Allen Trimble’s “Regiment of Ohio Mounted Volunteers.”

Colvin recalled volunteering at Hillsborough, Highland County, Ohio, about 10 September 1812 for thirty days, and thought he served about twenty-nine days until discharge at St. Mary’s, Ohio, on about 9 October 1812.

Seth Van Matre and Mashech

Downing on 3 April 1854 signed an affidavit in which they stated that they had served in the same company

Re Examinee
N 135 868
Treasury Department
Auditor's Office
Oct 24/54
The name of "William Colvin" is not
found on Capt. Paul Collier's Roll
Ohio Mil.
Rolls 30 & 31
18 Oct 1812

Note in bounty land warrant file of William Colvin (National Archives)

2. Bounty Land Application File of Private James Calvin, Captain Zumalt’s Company, 2nd Regiment (Zumalt’s) of Ohio Militia (55-120-5167) (NAID 122161788), National Archives (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/122161788>).

with him. Colvin's claim was rejected because his name was "not found on Capt Danl Collier's Rolls Ohio Mil[itia]."3

How to determine if a BLW application was filed

The Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office (GLO) Records website at <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx> provides information on land transfers from the federal government to the first private owner of land on the basis of cash sale, homestead, and military bounty land warrants. If a patent was issued *on the basis of military service*, then there should be a related BLW application. The GLO Records database is a convenient way to determine if there was an approved application, but it does not reference rejected applications since no land patent was issued.

In addition, an index created by NARA

volunteers for all BLW applications (approved and rejected) is available free to everyone on Fold3. "Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Index" currently covers surnames from A to L.4

Where to find bounty land warrant applications

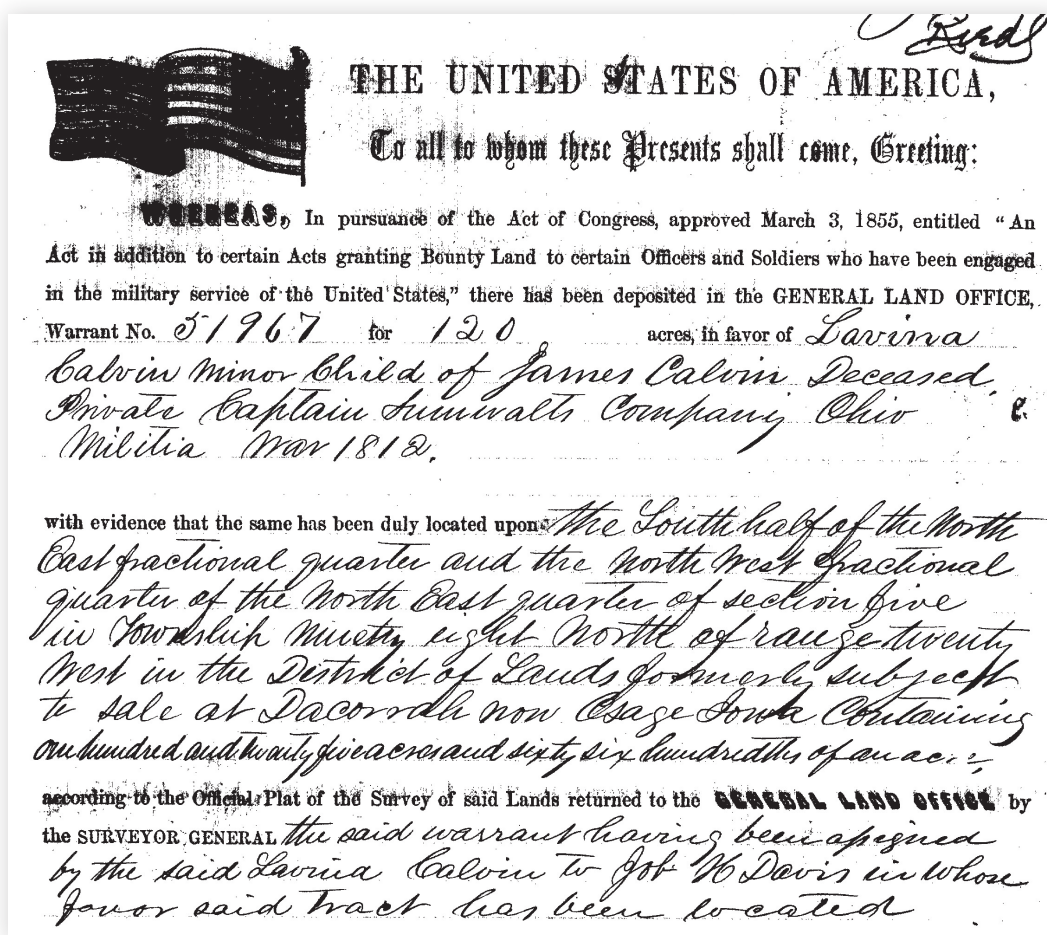
More than twenty-four hundred BLW applications have been digitized and are online in the National Archives Catalog in the record series, Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, ca. 1800–ca. 1900 (National Archives Identifier 567388), at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/567388>.

Similar files relating to Native Americans are in the record series Bounty Land Warrant Application Files of Indians Based on Service Between 1812 and 1855, ca. 1812–ca. 1900 (National Archives Identifier 160913340), at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/160913340>.

Copies of records that are not online can be requested from the National Archives (see "Obtaining Records from NARA").

How to read the numbers

The Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, ca. 1800–ca. 1900, are arranged alphabetically. They are identified and should be cited by the name of the person who performed military service; company and regimental commander's names; branch of service; and, if not rejected, specific numbers that indicate the act of Congress authorizing the claim, number of acres, and warrant number.



Patent issued to Job H. Davis, assignee of Lavina Calvin, showing warrant number for land in Iowa, 1859 (General Land Office)

3. Bounty Land Application File of Private William Colvin, Captain Collins' Company, Ohio Militia (50-Rejected-155868) (NAID 118662299), *National Archives* (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/118662299>).

4. "Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Index," *Fold3* (<https://www.fold3.com/publication/918/bounty-land-warrant-applications-index>).

Thus, for the file of James Calvin, 55-120-5167, “55” refers to the bounty land act of Congress passed in 1855, “120” represents 120 acres, and “5167” is the warrant number. The primary acts of Congress that granted bounty land were enacted in 1847, 1850, 1852, and 1855. Some applicants under the 1847 Act chose scrip (cash) in lieu of acreage. Acreage awarded was typically 40, 120, or 160 acres, with no more than 160 acres awarded for the service of one individual. An individual’s bounty land warrant file may contain applications filed under multiple acts of Congress, depending on eligibility.

How are BLW application files different from War of 1812 pension files?

Bounty land warrant application files usually exist for eligible veterans, who typically provided military service between ca. 1790 to 1855, or their widows or heirs who were alive at the time Congress enacted a law authorizing bounty land (between 1847 and 1855).

In contrast, to receive a War of 1812 pension, a soldier had to be a veteran of the War of 1812 and live to at least 1871, or his widow needed to live to at least 1878. An Act of Congress of 1871 (16 *Statutes at Large* 411) provided pensions to veterans who had been cited by Congress for specific service, so long as they had not subsequently supported the Confederate cause during the Civil War, and to widows of those veterans if the marriage had occurred before the 1815 peace treaty. An Act of Congress of 1878 (20 *Statutes at Large* 27) provided pensions to veterans who had served fourteen days or more, and to their widows regardless of what date the marriage occurred.⁵

In some cases, the Pension Office combined the prior bounty land warrant applications of veterans into their subsequent pension files, but in other cases,

Widow's brief for War of 1812 pension, 1878 (National Archives)

BLW applications remain as separate files.

Digital images of War of 1812 pension files are online free to everyone in two places:

- National Archives Catalog, War of 1812 Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, ca. 1871–ca. 1900 (National Archives Identifier 564415), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/564415>
- Fold3, “War of 1812 Pension Files” (<https://www.fold3.com/publication/761/war-of-1812-pension-files>), currently 83 percent complete

Images can be freely downloaded from both websites. There is no need to request copies from NARA. Digitization of the War of 1812 pension files series for surnames Sj to U resumed in April and is expected to be finished in 2023. NARA plans to complete digitization through Z by early 2026.

Obtaining records from NARA

Copies of bounty land warrant application files can be ordered by using NARA’s Order Online system at <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline> or by mailing a completed NATF Form 85 (available for download from <https://www.archives.gov/files/natf-85.pdf>) to the address indicated on the form. 🌲

5. Claire Kluskens, “Researching Volunteer Soldiers of the War of 1812,” *NGS Magazine* 37:1 (January–March 2011), 36–41. See also Claire Kluskens, “War of 1812 Military Service, Bounty Land, and Pension Records: A Step-by-Step Guide to Basic Federal Sources,” 19 May 2020, *The Twelve Key* (https://twelvekey.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/war_of_1812_basic_guide_2020_05_19.pdf).

Selected Bounty Land Warrant Laws

Congress passed legislation for the issuance of BLWs or scrip (cash in lieu of land) in 1776, 1788, 1803, 1806, 1811, 1812, 1814, 1816, and 1842. Altogether, these acts resulted in the issuance of 45,849 bounty land warrants. In contrast, 552,323 BLWs were issued for approved applications made under the acts of 1847, 1850, 1852, and 1855, which extended eligibility to ensure veterans of all prior wars were treated the same.⁶

Many persons applied under multiple acts of Congress, which is the reason the total number of warrants between 1847 and 1855 is much higher than the number of BLW application files (360,000). All applications relating to the same serviceman should be combined in one file.

1847

The Act of Congress of 11 February 1847 (9 *Statutes at Large* 123) was enacted to encourage enlistments during the Mexican War, resulting in the issuance of 88,274 bounty land warrants. Each non-commissioned officer, musician, or private who served twelve months, either in the regular army or regularly mustered volunteers, was entitled to 160 acres. If the soldier was killed, died of wounds or illness incurred in the service, or was discharged before the expiration of his term due to wounds or illness, he or his heirs were also eligible.

1850

The Act of Congress of 28 September 1850 (9 *Statutes at Large* 520) granted BLWs to commissioned officers in the Mexican-American War, and to commissioned and non-commissioned officers, musicians, and privates who were “regulars, volunteers, rangers, or militia” who performed military service in the War of 1812 or any Indian war since 1790, resulting in the issuance of 189,145 bounty land warrants. The amount of acreage allowed depended on the length of service: 160 acres if enlisted for twelve months or more and actually served nine months; eighty acres if enlisted for six months and actually served four months; and forty acres to those who enlisted “for any or an indefinite period” and actually served one month.

Anyone honorably discharged on account of disability would receive “the amount to which he would have been entitled if he had served the full period” for which he enlisted. Those who deserted or received a dishonorable discharge and those who received a BLW under a prior act of Congress

were disqualified from benefiting under this act. Widows whose husbands were killed in battle and had not remarried received 160 acres. The act clarified that time in captivity as a prisoner of war counted toward a soldier’s period of actual service.

1852

The Act of Congress of 22 March 1852 (10 *Statutes at Large* 4) extended eligibility for bounty land warrants to any volunteers or militia called into military service since 18 June 1812 whose services were paid by the US government, resulting in the issuance of 11,992 BLWs. It clarified that, for computing the length of time served, one day would be credited for each twenty miles the soldier’s unit marched from the place it was organized to the place of mustering in, and from the place of discharge to the place of organizing. This act also repealed a provision of the Act of 11 February 1847 (9 *Statutes at Large* 125–126) that limited bounty land warrant eligibility to those volunteers who had actually “marched to the seat of war.” While the 1847 Act specifically pertained to BLWs for service in the Mexican-American War, it is likely that the “seat of war” provision caused problems in evaluating applications related to other wars.

1855

The Act of Congress of 3 March 1855 (10 *Statutes at Large* 701–702), amended by the Act of Congress of 14 May 1856 (11 *Statutes at Large* 8), opened the doors to a claim for a bounty land warrant by nearly every man with military service, or his heirs, resulting in the issuance of 262,912 BLWs. This act granted a bounty land warrant for 160 acres to each officer, soldier, and sailor who had served at least fourteen days in any US war since 1790, or, if deceased, to the surviving widow, or, if no widow, to surviving minor children.

In addition to those who had served at least fourteen days, eligible veterans included those who served fewer than fourteen days but who had actually been “engaged in battle,” volunteers in particular battles, chaplains, wagon masters, teamsters, Indians, and Revolutionary War veterans. The claimant had to provide proof of service, of marriage (if a widow), or of parentage (if a minor child). If the veteran or his surviving claimant had previously received a BLW, the prior acreage was deducted from the new bounty land warrant.

6. Numbers of bounty land warrants from James W. Oberly, *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands Before the Civil War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), introduction, note 8. Another resource is Christine Rose, *Military Bounty Land, 1776–1855* (San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2011).