

20 October 1995

RESEARCHING YOUR REVOLUTIONARY WAR ANCESTOR

by Robert S. Davis, Jr., director
Family and Regional History Program
Wallace State Community College

Two books have been published on Revolutionary War veterans in Alabama and we have both at Wallace: Louise Julich, A Roster of Revolutionary Soldiers and Patriots in Alabama (1979) and Thomas M. Owen, Revolutionary Soldiers in Alabama (1911). We also have on microfilm the records from the Alabama Archives upon which these books were based. These veterans came to Alabama long after the war. During the American Revolution, 1775-1783, Alabama was Indian lands and British West Florida.

For the whole United States, we have at Wallace the National Archives microfilm of the compiled service records of the Revolutionary War. We also have the War Department Miscellaneous Collection of Revolutionary War records on microfilm. Such records are not complete because not all of the records have survived in the Federal archives. However, rosters for soldiers from states like Virginia makes this microfilm a pretty good "people finder" for early America. Also for Virginia we have Margie G. Brown, Genealogical Abstracts Revolutionary War Veterans Scripts Act 1852 (1990) and E. G. Swem, Virginia Historical Index (1965).

Sometimes to find records of your ancestor's Revolutionary War service, you have to look in state records. Bobby Gilmer Moss, South Carolina Patriots in the American Revolution (1985) is so extensive that it is a good general way of finding your ancestor in South Carolina before the 1790 census. We are acquiring on microfilm the South Carolina Revolutionary War accounts audited and their COM index. We have the published South Carolina stub indent books for Revolutionary War service. We also have Roster of Soldiers From North Carolina in the American Revolution (1984) and many back issues of The North Carolina Genealogical Society Journal that include Revolutionary War service records. For Georgia soldiers, we have my Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution (1980); Lucian Lamar Knight, Georgia's Roster of the American Revolution (1928); and (on microfilm) Allen D. Candler, The Revolutionary Records of the State of Georgia (1911). These books are supplemented with my A Researcher's Library of Georgia (2 vols., 1987-1990).

Although the United States government had been giving some pensions as early as 1776, by the 1830s a major effort was under way in Congress to award pensions to all of the veterans and widows of veterans of the Revolution. A typical pension claim can contain the soldier's place and date of birth (sometimes even his Bible records); details of when and where he served and when he lived before and after the Revolution; the name of his wife; when and where he was married; names of friends and relatives; his place and date of death; and much more. So many claims were filed

20 October 1995

that often brothers and cousins can be found with useful information. We have Virgil White's indexed abstracts of these pensions: Genealogical Abstracts of Revolutionary War Pension Files (1990). The Birmingham and Gadsden public libraries, both within an hour of Wallace, have the claims themselves on microfilm. We subscribe to the HeritageQuest.com web site and on it can be found a few pages from each Revolutionary War pension claim. Be warned that Revolutionary War pensions ordered by mail from the National Archives are only copies of a few select pages from a pension.

Several published lists of Revolutionary War pensioners are at Wallace: The Pension Lists of 1792-1795 (1991); The Pension List of 1820 (1991); Rejected or Suspended Applications for Revolutionary War Pensions (1991); and A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Service, 1840 (1990). In our vertical file, under Revolutionary War pensions, see "When a Revolutionary War Pensioner's Claim Can't Be Found," National Genealogical Society Quarterly 77 (1989): 128-32. We have on microfilm the annual lists of Revolutionary War pensioners, a source for determining when a Revolutionary War pensioner died. Some information on Federal pensions and bounty lands can be found in Digested Summary and Alphabetical List of Private Claims (1853).

When you read "BLWT no papers," the reference is made to Revolutionary War bounty lands given by the Continental Congress. (The individual states also gave bounty lands to their respective soldiers, those records are at the respective state archives; we have some of these state records for North Carolina and Georgia). The service of the "BLWT" soldiers is given in The American State Papers. We have those books on microfilm and their index by Philip McMullen, Grassroots of America (1965).

Many other valuable record sources also came out of the struggle for American independence. For example, the Daughters of the American Revolution have extensive genealogical files compiled by their members on the descendants of Revolutionary War soldiers. We have the a two volume list of these files at Wallace called The DAR Patriot Index.

For the Loyalists or Tories, Americans who supported the King's Cause, we have Murtie June Clark, Loyalists in the Southern Campaign of the Revolutionary War (3 vols., 1981); Clifford Dwyer, Index to Series I of American Loyalist Claims (1990); and Peter Wilson Coldham, American Loyalist Claims (1980).

For persons wanting to go further into research on Revolutionary War ancestors, there is always something more. At the National Archives Southeast Branch in East Point, GA there is on microfilm the Papers of the Continental Congress. We have at Wallace, James C. Neagles' Summer Soldiers: A Survey & Index of Revolutionary War Courts Martial (1986).