

CIVIL WAR PENSION RECORDS: WHERE TO FIND WHAT

Union pension, service, and soldiers' home records, with three brothers' files as the example. Companion to "Reading Civil War Pension Files."

PULL EVERY BROTHER SIBLINGS' FILES CAN PROVE A PARENT

Union veterans could apply again and again, so a Civil War pension file is often more than 100 pages. Most pages are medical, but the surgeon's certificates, family circulars, and widows' proofs hold the genealogy.

WHERE TO FIND WHAT

RECORD	WHAT IT CAN TELL YOU	WHERE TO FIND IT
Pension index cards	Name, unit, application and certificate numbers, widow's name, filing state	General Index T288 (by name); Organization Index T289 (by regiment); Fold3, FamilySearch, Ancestry
Pension application files	Declarations, comrades' and neighbors' affidavits, marriages, divorces, children, residences, death	Many widows' files on Fold3; others ordered from the National Archives
Surgeon's certificates	Birthplace, age, height, weight, complexion, eyes, hair, occupation, injuries	Inside the pension file, one for each exam
Family circulars (1897, 1898, 1915)	Wife's maiden name, marriage date and officiant, earlier marriages, children with birth dates	Inside the pension file
Compiled service records	Enlistment, muster in and out, hospital stays, desertion charges	NARA; state indexes on Fold3 and FamilySearch
1890 veterans census	Veteran or widow, unit, dates, disability, address	Special schedule, surviving states; FamilySearch, Ancestry
National Home registers	Admission, birthplace, family contact, death and burial	National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers registers; Ancestry, FamilySearch

Key rule: A missing War Department record does not mean a false story. Many injuries off the battlefield were never written down. Weigh each affidavit on its own, and check every witness against the company rolls.

THE LAWS THAT CREATED THE RECORDS

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED
July 14, 1862	General law: pensions for disability from wounds or disease incurred in service; widows during widowhood
July 5, 1884	Desertion charges could be removed for men who served faithfully (cited in pension files)
June 27, 1890	90 days' service and honorable discharge: pension for any disability preventing manual labor
May 9, 1900	Widows' provisions of the 1890 act amended
1897 to 1915	Bureau circulars ask every pensioner for marriages and children
April 19, 1908	Widows' rate raised to \$12 a month

READING CIVIL WAR PENSION FILES: WORKFLOW

- 1 Search the index for the soldier and every brother, under every spelling (Murray, Morrow).
- 2 Order or download the full file, not a "selected" set.
- 3 List every surgeon's certificate; compare birthplace, age, and description across them.
- 4 Read the family circulars, then test them against the widow's claim.
- 5 In a widow's claim, collect proof of every earlier marriage: deaths, divorces, and the witnesses who swore to them.
- 6 Write down every affiant's name, age, and relationship. Siblings often swear for each other.
- 7 Line up places and dates across all the brothers' files and the father's records. Look for agreement.

THREE BROTHERS, ONE FAMILY: THE MURRAY FILES

JAMES

Co. A, 3rd Iowa Cav. Born
Columbiana Co., Ohio.
Divorced in Jay Co., Ind., 1855.

→

BENJAMIN P.

Co. B, 193rd Ohio Inf. Gallia
Co. wagon maker. Saw his
father die in Jay Co., 1853.

→

CHARLES H.

18th and 53rd Ohio Inf. Born
Columbiana Co. Swore James
was "my own Brother."

→

RACHEL

Mrs. Mankin of Middleport.
Swore James was her brother.

None of these files names the father. But the siblings name each other, and their places (Columbiana County, Jay County, Indiana, and southeast Ohio) match their father William Morrow's War of 1812 file. Agreement across independent records is how children's files build the case for a parent.

COMMON RESEARCH TRAPS

Only your direct line: The brother's file may hold the birthplace or the family affidavit yours lacks.

One state only: Brothers served from Ohio and Iowa. Search every state the family lived in.

Circular answers: One brother told the Bureau he was never married before; his widow's file names two earlier wives.

Shifting stories: Injury place, date, and details changed across 37 years of declarations. Compare them all.

Desertion charges: A "deserter" may later be cleared and discharged. Read to the end of the service record.

Generated visuals: Illustrations explain; they are not evidence. Use the record images for specific claims.

WHERE TO SEARCH

National Archives · Civil War pension index T288 and ordering

archives.gov/research/military/pension-genealogy

Fold3 · Civil War widows' pension files and Organization Index

fold3.com

FamilySearch · General Index to Pension Files, 1861 to 1934

familysearch.org

National Park Service · Soldiers and Sailors Database

nps.gov/civilwar

MORE OHIO AND MIGRATION RESEARCH GUIDES: BRICKWALLSBUCKEYES.COM

Keep pushing past your brick walls.