

REVOLUTIONARY WAR RECORDS: WHERE TO FIND WHAT

Pension, service, and bounty land records, with a real Ohio pension file as the example. Companion to "Reading a Revolutionary War Pension File, Page by Page."

FIRST QUESTION S, W, OR R? CONTINENTAL OR MILITIA?

Revolutionary War pension files are the only war's files filmed in full, so most are online free or by subscription. Start with the pension index under every spelling, then work outward to service records, muster rolls, and the lists of pensioners.

WHERE TO FIND WHAT

RECORD	WHAT IT CAN TELL YOU	WHERE TO FIND IT
Pension and bounty land application files	The soldier's own account of service, age, birth date, residences, witnesses; a widow's marriage date, place, officiant, and children	NARA M804 (complete) and M805 (selected); Fold3, FamilySearch, Ancestry
1820 property schedules inside 1818 pension files	Land, livestock, tools, debts to named neighbors, wife and children at home with ages	In the pension file, often with a court clerk's copy
Compiled service records	Unit, rank, dates on rolls	NARA M881; Fold3
Muster rolls and payrolls	Where his name actually appears, month by month	NARA M246 (Fold3); Pennsylvania Archives, 5th series, for Pennsylvania units
Pension rolls of 1835	Pensioners by county, with service, age, and law	Published report to Congress; online free
1840 census of pensioners	Pensioners living June 1, 1840, with age and the head of household	Published 1841 list; online free
Lineage and burial rosters	Compiled service, burial place, descendants	DAR Genealogical Research System; Ohio DAR roster of Revolutionary soldiers buried in Ohio

Key rule: S = survivor (the soldier was pensioned), W = widow also applied, R = rejected, BLWt = bounty land warrant. A W file is often the richest, because the widow had to prove her marriage.

THE LAWS THAT CREATED THE RECORDS

DATE	WHAT HAPPENED
March 18, 1818	Pensions for Continental service of nine months or more, for men in need
May 1, 1820	Every 1818 pensioner had to swear to a schedule of property and income
June 7, 1832	Service pensions extended to militia and state troops
July 4, 1836	Widows who married before the soldier left the service
July 7, 1838	Five year pensions for widows married before January 1, 1794; renewed 1843 and 1844
1848 and 1853	Widows married before 1800 (1848); then any date of marriage (1853)

READING A REVOLUTIONARY WAR PENSION FILE: WORKFLOW

- 1 Search the index under every spelling (Shacklee, Shackley, Shaklee, Shakle) and note the file letter and number.
- 2 Read the soldier's own declaration word for word: enlistment, officers, battles, sickness, discharge, age.
- 3 Note who wrote what. Judges, clerks, and agents can shape a declaration; witnesses may be old comrades.
- 4 Find the 1820 property schedule if he applied under the 1818 law. It can work like a census of the farm and family.
- 5 In a widow's claim, collect the marriage date, place, officiant, and every child's name and date.
- 6 Test every family list against another record made by someone else at another time.
- 7 Follow the leads out: muster rolls, county deeds and tax lists, marriage and burial records, the 1835 and 1840 lists.

ONE FILE, MANY VOICES: THE PETER SHACKLEE FILE (W. 4799)

1. 1818

Peter's own declaration: Capt. Parker, Col. Irvine, Pennsylvania Line; sick in a Philadelphia hospital.

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2. 1822

Property schedule: 100 acres, oxen, a sow and eight pigs; wife and four children named.

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3. 1839

Widow claims under the 1838 act: married Nov. 15, 1788, Bedford Co., Pa.; 13 children.

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4. 1840

Claim suspended: no family record. Agent explains she gave every date from memory.

Peter's 1822 list of children at home (Peter 18, Betsey 14, Vermili 8, Hannah 6) matches the birth dates his widow gave in 1839. Two records made by different people, years apart, agree; that is how you test a family list when the Bible is gone. Barbara Ann's maiden name never appears; her sister was Elizabeth Devore.

COMMON RESEARCH TRAPS

Remembered dates: Old soldiers estimated years; a judge told Peter "1777 would be sufficient." Check the muster rolls.

Legal minimums: A judge certifying "nine months" may be stating what the 1818 law required, not the actual service.

Shifting ages: The widow is "nearly sixty" (1822), 66 (1839), and 79 (1843). Test each against the children's births.

Later letters: Descendants' letters and 1930s summaries in the file are someone else's reading. Go back to the originals.

Family tradition: A 1900 letter calls the soldier "of Irish birth." Nothing in the original papers says so.

Generated visuals: Illustrations help explain the process but are not evidence. Use the record images for specific claims.

WHERE TO SEARCH

Fold3 · Revolutionary War pension files and service records

[fold3.com](https://www.fold3.com)

FamilySearch · Revolutionary War pension files (M804), free

familysearch.org/search/catalog/306844

National Archives · Pension files: what they hold and how to order

archives.gov/research/military/army/pensions

DAR · Genealogical Research System

dar.org

Pennsylvania State Archives · Revolutionary War Military Abstract Card File (via POWER Library)

powerlibrary.org

MORE OHIO AND MIGRATION RESEARCH GUIDES: BRICKWALLSBUCKEYES.COM

Keep pushing past your brick walls.