

Using Virginia Civil War Records

The ordinance of secession adopted by the Virginia State Convention in Richmond on 17 April 1861 was the result of the failure of all political efforts to avert civil war. Virginia joined an increasing list of southern states dissatisfied with further participation in the Union. The seceding states chose, rather, to form a confederation of states in order to maintain the southern political and social order. The great debates over popular sovereignty and states' rights ended. These issues were settled by a clash of arms.

The convention realized the consequences of secession and so instructed Governor John Letcher to make preparations to defend the state from probable attack. The total armed militia force throughout the state by 21 April 1861 numbered 12,050 troops. By January 1864, the most reliable statistics available reveal that more than 153,000 Virginians had served in the state's military forces. The Old Dominion, however, was far from fully prepared for war. Virginia became the battleground for dozens of major engagements and hundreds of minor clashes. Ultimately, more men fought and died in Virginia than in any other state. The legacy of a soldier's service remains within the surviving written record. Researchers using Virginia Civil War records should examine a variety of materials in order to chronicle a soldier's military experience.

Service Records

At the end of the Civil War in 1865, the Union armies confiscated most of the surviving Confederate War Department records. Records pertaining to service in Virginia's Confederate as well as Union military units were later abstracted by the United States War Department. Researchers should first consult these Compiled Military Service Records (CMSR). Each volunteer soldier has one CMSR for each regiment in which he served. This record contains basic information about the soldier's military career, including when a soldier was present or absent, dates of enlistment and discharge, wounds received or hospitalization for illness, and dates of capture and release as a prisoner of war. Records relating to Confederate soldiers are typically less complete than those relating to Union soldiers because many Confederate records were destroyed. The CMSR rarely indicates the battles in which a soldier fought, nor will it contain any genealogical information. It may, however, provide a soldier's physical description at the time of his enlistment. There are no CMSRs for either Union or Confederate naval personnel.

The National Archives in Washington, D.C., preserves the original service records created for Union and Confederate soldiers from each state. The Library of Virginia has microfilm copies of the following service records for reference use:

- *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia*
- *Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers and Non-Regimental Enlisted Men*
- *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations Raised Directly by the Confederate Government*
- *Compiled Records Showing Service of Virginia Military Units in Confederate Organizations*
- *Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia*

Requests for copies should be directed to the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. 20408.

The following publications serve as a convenient index to records found in the Compiled Service Records:

- *The Roster of Confederate Soldiers, 1861–1865* (16 vols.), an alphabetical list of every Confederate soldier with a CMSR at the National Archives.
- *The Roster of Union Soldiers, 1861–1865* (31 vols.), an alphabetical list of every Union soldier with a CMSR at the National Archives. Volume twenty-three of this series contains a listing of those Union soldiers who served from both Virginia and West Virginia.

The National Park Service hosts a Web site for searching very basic facts about Civil War soldier records in the National Archives. This database, however, does not duplicate the detailed information found within the CMSR (www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/index.html).

Confederate Rosters

Interest in memorializing Confederate veterans prompted the General Assembly to pass an act on 13 March 1884 directing the adjutant general to compile a roster of all those who served from Virginia in the Confederate armed forces. The project did not begin, however, until 1904, following an act passed by Congress in 1903 providing for the assembling of muster rolls for all the former Confederate states. Virginia created the Office of the Secretary of Virginia Military Records to begin this task. The Department of Confederate Military Records was formed by an act of the General Assembly on 12 March 1912 that abolished the Office of the Secretary of Virginia Military Records. The new department continued the work of assembling muster rolls and other documents related to Virginians in the Civil War.

Twenty volumes contain an unofficial roster of soldiers from Virginia who served in the Confederate military forces. These rosters represent the accumulated work of the Department of Confederate Military Records and its predecessor between 1904 and 1918. The rosters are organized by regiment and the soldiers are listed alphabetically according to rank. The rosters provide the soldier's name, rank, and date of enlistment

or commission, and sometimes include additional remarks. Individual entries give minimal (if any) personal or military service information. The rosters are indexed and available on microfilm. A searchable database is also available on the Library's Web site. A researcher should consult the Compiled Military Service Records for more detailed information on military service.

The papers of Virginia's Department of Confederate Military Records, which collected and compiled unit rosters and other lists of Virginia soldiers under the direction of Colonel Joseph V. Bidgood, are assembled in the Department of Military Affairs (Accession 27684). This extensive collection of manuscript materials was created to replace lost information resulting from the destruction of original unit rolls. It consists of wartime documents, muster rolls, payrolls, and published regimental histories produced early in the twentieth century in response to pleas for information. Unit records represent the largest segment, which are arranged first by branch of service and then by regiment.

Confederate Pensions

Financial assistance for Confederate veterans and their families was provided when the General Assembly passed Confederate pension acts in 1888, 1900, and 1902, followed by a series of supplementary acts through 1934. The initial act provided pensions to Confederate soldiers, sailors, and marines disabled in action and to the widows of those killed in action. Subsequent acts broadened the coverage to include all veterans, their widows, and their unmarried or widowed daughters and sisters. The acts required that applicants be residents of Virginia. Later legislation also included veterans or their survivors residing in the District of Columbia.

This collection of Virginia Confederate pensions consists of approved pension applications and amended applications filed by resident Confederate veterans and their widows under the acts of 1888, 1900, and 1902. The applications contain statements pertaining to the service record of the applicants and may include medical evaluations, information about the income and property of the veterans or their widows, and, in the case of widows, the date and place of marriages. The collection also includes claims submitted by more than five hundred African Americans who had worked as cooks, herdsman, laborers, servants, or teamsters in the Confederate army.

The applications are indexed and available on microfilm. The microfilm is arranged first by pension act, then alphabetically by the applicant's county or city of residence, and thereunder by name of applicant. A searchable database linked to digital images is also available on the Virginia Memory section of the Library's Web site (<http://www.lva.virginia.gov>).

The General Assembly passed an act on 10 March 1914 providing additional money for the relief of needy Confederate women who were not already on the pension rolls. Applications were made to the Relief Committee of the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which certified the applications, ascertained the payment amount, and then forwarded the applications to the pension clerk at the Department of Accounts.

A warrant was then issued to the Treasury for payment to the beneficiary. Applications for relief include the name, address, and condition or need of each beneficiary, along with her relationship to and the service of a Confederate soldier husband or relative. Microfilm copies of these pension applications for needy Confederate women (1915–1967) are found on miscellaneous reels 2178–2205. There is a two-volume index to these records in the Archives manuscript room.

In the Virginia Department of Accounts, the Confederate Pension Records (Accession 44105) consist of 118 boxes and 35 volumes and are arranged in eight series. Series have been designated for Applications, Card Files, Certificates, Confederate Memorial Association, Correspondence, Funeral Expenses, Miscellaneous, and Volumes. This collection documents pension payments to Confederate veterans, widows, daughters, and servants. These records should not be confused with the Library of Virginia's Confederate Pension Rolls, which should be searched before any examination of the Confederate Pension Records. The Confederate Pension Records differ from the Confederate Pension Rolls in that they serve as the administrative and financial documentation for the pension rolls. Even though there are pension applications for daughters of Confederate veterans within the Confederate Pension Records, the Confederate Pension Rolls are the best source for these types of records. These applications provide the most extensive information on the Confederate pensioners. The strength of the Confederate Pension Records is that they provide information on maiden daughters or widowed daughters of Confederate veterans who received a pension from the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Confederate Pension Rolls do not provide information on Confederate daughters who received pensions. In addition, the Confederate Pension Records document pension payments forty years beyond the documentation in the Confederate Pension Rolls.

Confederate Disability Applications

The General Assembly enacted legislation, effective in 1867 and ending in 1894, to provide artificial limbs and other disability benefits to Virginia's Civil War veterans. To coordinate the program, and oversee the distribution of aid, the General Assembly established the Board of Commissioners on Artificial Limbs. Injured soldiers submitted certificates from their county court stating that they were Virginia citizens, that they had lost a limb or had been otherwise disabled in the war, and describing the nature of assistance needed. The veterans listed the unit in which they served; included information on when, where, and how they were wounded; and provided details about their medical history. The disability benefit provided by the state was a one-time commutation payment of sixty dollars.

The applications are indexed and available on microfilm. The microfilm is arranged by date of the act, and then alphabetically by name of applicant. An online database to the disability applications is also provided on the Library's Web site, which is searchable by both the Confederate veteran's name and place of residence (city or county). In addition, each entry contains links to digital images of the disability application, including supporting affidavits and receipts for payments issued.

Letters to the Governor

In-depth research into Virginia's Civil War history should include an examination of the executive papers of the state's three wartime governors, John Letcher, William Smith, and Francis H. Pierpont. Two opposing state governments existed during the war years. Letcher (1860–1863) and Smith (1864–1865) led the government under the Confederate States of America in Richmond, while Pierpont (1861–1865) helped to form and lead the Restored government of Virginia based first at Wheeling and later at Alexandria. Searchable databases are available for these collections in the archives catalog on the Library of Virginia's Web site. These extensive records contain important incoming correspondence regarding the preparation and prosecution of the war, political and military appointments, and reflect the burden of leadership in the war-torn state.

Other Records

The Robert E. Lee Camp Soldiers' Home was established on 18 April 1883 as a benevolent society to aid hundreds of needy Confederate veterans. The home opened on 1 January 1885. It was located at the corner of Grove Avenue and the Boulevard in Richmond. Eventually plagued by financial difficulties, the home sought money from the state in exchange for the deed to the property. Under the direction of the Department of Public Welfare it remained open until the death of the last resident in 1941. R. E. Lee Camp Soldiers' Home applications for admission are on microfilm and arranged alphabetically by the name of the applicant (Accession 24736). A searchable database is also available on the Library's Web site along with digital images of the registers.

The Home for Needy Confederate Women was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1898 and opened in Richmond in 1900 to assist needy widows, sisters, and daughters of Confederate veterans. The home operated in the city at several locations until it closed in 1991. These records include applications for admission, lists of residents, financial records, correspondence, and Board of Trustees reports (Accession 34092).

Researchers should also consult the Archives and Manuscripts online catalog to investigate our holdings of Civil War–era Personal Papers. The Library's extensive map resources are also accessible in the Books and Journals online catalog. Through a cooperative project with the Library of Congress, free digital images of nearly two hundred Civil War maps can be viewed on the new Virginia Memory Web site (<http://digitool1.lva.lib.va.us:8881/R/>).

United States Government Records and Resources

- *Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau), 1865–1870*. Microfilm containing the *Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia, 1865–1869* (Accession 30080), miscellaneous reels 3840–3906, and the *Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Virginia, 1865–1870* (Accession 32073), miscellaneous reels 3907–3926. This federal agency was created in March 1865 to assist African Americans in their transition from slavery to freedom.

- *Office of the Adjutant General, Case Files of Applications for Presidential Pardons from Former Virginia Confederates, 1865–1867* (Accession 31057), miscellaneous reels 3927–3942. These records consist of pardon applications submitted to President Andrew Johnson by former Virginia Confederates excluded from his amnesty proclamation of 29 May 1865. The applications are alphabetically arranged on microfilm.
- *United States, District Court (Virginia, Eastern District), Case Papers of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia Relating to the Confiscation of Property, 1863–1865* (Accession 32076), miscellaneous reel 977. This court, seated at Alexandria during the Civil War, prosecuted cases to confiscate the property of those citizens in Alexandria, Fairfax, and Loudoun Counties who supported the Confederacy.

Published Resources

Beers, Henry P. *The Confederacy: A Guide to the Archives of the Confederate States of America*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1986.

Hewett, Janet B., ed. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. 51 volumes. Wilmington, N.C.: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1994–1997.

Munden, Kenneth W., and Henry P. Beers. *The Union: A Guide to Federal Archives Relating to the Civil War*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1986.

U.S. War Department. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. 128 volumes. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880–1900. Reprint, Gettysburg, Pa.: National Historical Society, 1971–1972.

U.S. Naval War Records Office. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*. 30 volumes. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1874–1922. Reprint, Gettysburg, Pa.: National Historical Society, 1971.

Wallace, Lee A., Jr. *A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations, 1861–1865*. Revised 2d ed. Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1986.

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