

Soldiers of the War of 1812

In his reminiscences, Captain Henry Brush described with precision what newly enlisted recruits wore during the War of 1812. Soldiers were outfitted for service in unbleached, tow-linen hunting shirts and trousers. On their heads they wore low-crown hats, on the left side of which were black cockades about two inches in diameter. A small silver eagle (about the size of a quarter) was fastened in the center of each cockade. Each soldier strapped a leather girdle around his waist, where he carried a tomahawk, a knife, a cartridge box, a bayonet, and a quart-sized tin canteen. He was armed with a musket and shouldered a linen knapsack with a blanket lashed to the top. Both were covered with oilcloth to protect them from wet weather. A soldier's arms and pack together weighed about thirty-five pounds, and troops traveled an average of twenty-five miles a day on foot. Writing home to his wife, one soldier confessed: "My limbs were so stiff and sore at the end of each day's march that I could hardly walk."

In response to complaints from militia officers about their bedraggled troops, Virginia governor James Barbour outlined new uniform requirements in January 1812. General officers, artillery, light artillery, and grenadiers stood out in cockaded hats, white cuffs, and epaulets. Cavalrymen wore distinctive black leather caps dressed on the crown with bearskin and a red and white plume. Riflemen wore purple linen hunting shirts and leather moccasins, while the main body of the militia donned blue hunting shirts festively trimmed with red fringe. Despite the governor's official proclamation, any soldiers who had provided themselves with uniforms different from those specified in the regulations could wear them for six months, and many probably went to war in the everyday clothing in which they had enlisted.

Virginia soldiers and sailors found themselves in the field as the result of international politics. Through the early decades of the nation's history, relations between the United States and Great Britain remained strained. The relationship deteriorated sharply with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1803, when Britain imposed a blockade on neutral countries, including the United States. In addition, the British seized sailors from American ships and impressed them into the British navy. In Congress, southern and western War Hawks, such as the new Speaker of the House, Henry Clay, of Kentucky, and Representative John C. Calhoun, of South Carolina, led the sentiment for war, calling for defense of American interests and honor. On 1 June 1812, President James Madison asked for a declaration of war. Shortly afterward, Congress approved the declaration (despite the opposition of every Federalist member), and the United States was fighting a war with the motto "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights."

In Virginia, the British responded by blockading the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and raiding coastal settlements. In mid-June 1813, the British attempted to capture Norfolk, but were repulsed by militia stationed on Craney Island. A week later, however, the British captured and sacked the nearby city of Hampton. Although actual encounters were few, the threat of attack kept militia in the field throughout the war, which ended when the Treaty of Ghent was signed on 24 December 1814.

Records at the Library of Virginia

Records housed at the Library of Virginia may help document War of 1812 military and public service. Proof of military service may be found in two printed volumes of payrolls and muster rolls: *Pay Rolls of the Militia Entitled to Land Bounty under the Act of Congress of Sept. 28, 1850* (published in 1851) and *Muster Rolls of the Virginia Militia in the War of 1812, Being a Supplement of the Pay Rolls* (published in 1852). The supplement includes militia companies and parts of companies omitted in the *Pay Rolls*. These volumes are also available on microfilm (miscellaneous reel 392), and in a reprint edition that includes an index (*Virginia Militia in the War of 1812: From Rolls in the Auditor's Office at Richmond*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2001). Approximately 40,000 names appear in the printed payrolls and muster rolls; they are also available in a searchable database on the Library of Virginia's Web site. A reference is provided with each name to the payrolls, muster rolls, House of Delegates documents (published in the *Journal of the House of Delegates*), or legislative petitions.

Archival records housed at the Library of Virginia concern the state's involvement in the War of 1812. Many of these manuscripts are fragile and oversized, and most are not indexed. Archival materials are served in the Archives Research Room, where special rules governing use and reproduction apply. Research in the materials described here requires patience, care, and diligence. Often records reveal a great deal about how soldiers were equipped and how supplies were obtained, but contain little information on individual soldiers. Records concerning War of 1812 soldiers are scattered and fragmentary, and proof of federal military service and benefits will be found *only* at the National Archives.

Primary among materials housed at the Library of Virginia are the records of the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA). For additional information, consult John S. Salmon and J. Christian Kolbe, comps., *Auditor of Public Accounts Inventory* (1992).

Military Records

General Militia Records, 1811–1821 (APA entry 247).

Keeping large bodies of militia in the field required an elaborate system of support based on the purchase of goods and services from civilians, in addition to the usual pay and allowances to officers and soldiers. The result was the creation of a large number of records concerning the state's disbursements to both soldiers and civilians. Many claims for payment went unsatisfied until 1821. This series consists largely of pay and muster rolls, accounts and vouchers concerning supplies, and claims for reimbursement for services rendered. The

records are arranged by army unit and by support service, and are not indexed. Also included are receipts for the care of sick and disabled soldiers.

Account and Receipt Books, 1811–1816 (APA entry 248).

Accounts with suppliers of goods and services and records of supplies received, including tents, linen, and bedding. Also included are lists of horses and wagons impressed.

List of Articles Received at the Capitol, 1813 (APA entry 249).

A list describing the types of supplies received by the superintendent of military stores, names of suppliers, and dates of receipt. Items listed include belts, saddles, anvils, chisels, compasses, and pistols. Arranged chronologically.

Memoranda of Articles Received, 1815–1816 (APA entry 252).

Lists of camp equipment, military stores, and ordnance returned by militia units at the end of the war, including musket cartridges, pistols, grape shot, saddles, bridles, great coats, and tent poles. Arranged chronologically.

Muster Rolls and Payrolls, 1812–1815 (APA entry 253).

Twenty-seven unindexed volumes containing muster rolls and payrolls of militia companies, giving names of officers and soldiers and dates for which they were paid.

Register of Furloughs, 1814 (APA entry 258).

A volume containing names of soldiers, dates and lengths of furloughs, regiment numbers, counties of residence, and reasons for furloughs. It also contains a list of soldiers discharged, including ranks, dates of discharges, regiments, counties of residence, and reasons for discharges. Arranged chronologically.

Register of Applications for Appointments in the Force to be Raised for the Defense of the Commonwealth, ca. 1812 (War 13, miscellaneous reel 985).

The Virginia militia was organized by county during the War of 1812, with each county producing one or more regiments. These regiments were in turn organized into twenty-one brigades, and the brigades were organized into four divisions. In addition to other duties, the adjutant general was responsible for organizing the militia in the event that the governor called it out. With the outbreak of war, President Madison called up the state militia, with each state satisfying a particular quota.

These records contain a list of applicants, their regiment, county, appointment solicited, and by whom recommended. The register begins with applicants in the artillery, followed by cavalry, infantry, surgical department, and rifle corps.

Bernard Peyton. Order Book, 20th Regiment, U.S. Infantry, 1812–1814 (Accession 27776).

An order book including accounts documenting the day-to-day business of the regiment, accounts of clothing

delivered to recruits, and enlistments. It describes the soldiers who enlisted at Charlottesville courthouse, including John Edwards (a black-haired, blue-eyed tailor born in Ireland) and Robert Stevenson (a farmer, born in Ireland, who died only six weeks after he enlisted). The clothing accounts list the type of items distributed (such as shoes and socks, hats and cockades, and knapsacks), and show the names or marks of roughly thirty individuals who received them. The enlistments provide a variety of information for about thirty of the regiment's members, including place of birth, age, height, complexion, hair and eye color, and profession.

Public Service

List of Certificates Issued for Militia and War of 1812 Expenses, 1807–1808, 1812–1817, miscellaneous reel 988 (APA entry 250).

A list containing names of persons to whom certificates were issued, dates, and amounts. Arranged alphabetically.

Quartermaster's Account Book, 1815 (APA entry 256).

A list of payment claims for services such as transporting supplies, as well as lists of military stores returned and sold. Arranged chronologically.

Register of Claims, 1813–1814 (APA entry 257).

Names of claimants, nature of services or supplies furnished, and accounts claimed. Arranged alphabetically by name of claimant.

List of Depositions Relating to Slaves and Other Property Plundered by the Enemy During the Late War, 1812 (Accession 36873).

A list containing the names of persons recording the deposition, the number of slaves, the property taken or plundered, the name of the slave owner, the value, and the county.

Claims of Virginia Against the U.S. for War of 1812 Debts (Office of the Second Auditor, entry 17).

Correspondence, receipts, and accounts; typed copies of acts, resolutions, and accounts; and printed acts and reports of the General Assembly concerning the cost of outfitting soldiers for the war. For example, William Coleman, a contractor for the troops stationed at Williamsburg, supplied rations, provisions, and forage. His bill amounted to \$2,511.24 and was finally paid in 1820.

Business Records

John K. Martin Papers, (Accession 12).

Martin lived in Richmond and was a pension and claims agent for military veterans. His papers consist largely of claim files, arranged in a chronological series by wars, and alphabetical files by claimant within each series. A typical file contains correspondence with the claimant, documentation concerning the nature and length of military service, proof of relationship to the individual performing the military service if deceased, and drafts

of correspondence with various federal government agencies concerning pensions and bounty lands. Files vary considerably in size. A searchable finding aid for the John K. Martin Papers is found in the Archives and Manuscripts catalog on the Library of Virginia Web site.

Organization Records

Society of the Soldiers of the War of 1812. 2nd District. Record Book, 1854–1866. (Accession 23308).

A muster roll of War of 1812 soldiers residing in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Elizabeth City County, Norfolk County, Nansemond County, and Princess Anne County. Also included are meeting minutes and accounts.

Other Records

Military service may also be mentioned in local records, particularly order books. Details of a soldier's life may be gleaned from census records, land and personal property taxes, and other local records, such as deeds, wills, and marriages.

Records at the National Archives

Virginia did not grant bounty land or pensions for military service in the War of 1812. The federal government ultimately paid many of these soldiers, and records of their service may be on file at the National Archives and Records Administration, where the *Index to Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Soldiers who Served During the War of 1812* is available on microfilm. The service records are not filmed, but are available for research in Washington, D.C.

Pension applications are also housed at the National Archives. An *Index to War of 1812 Pension Application Files* is available there on microfilm, and has been transcribed in Virgil D. White's *Index to War of 1812 Pension Files* (1989). Another useful index to these federal records is Patrick Wardell's *War of 1812: Virginia Bounty Land and Pension Applicants* (1987). Other helpful printed sources include Stuart Lee Butler's *A Guide to Virginia Militia Units in the War of 1812* (1988) and *Virginia Soldiers in the United States Army, 1800–1815* (1986), and Clarence S. Peterson's *Known Military Dead During the War of 1812* (1995).

Sources on the Web

www.lva.virginia.gov (War of 1812 payrolls and muster rolls.)

www.nara.gov (Information on War of 1812 holdings in “The Research Room” under “Genealogy and Family History” and “Veterans’ Service Records.”)

www.history.navy.mil (List of commissioned and warrant officers in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps in the War of 1812.)

<http://digisources.genealogytoolbox.com> (War of 1812, Military Bounty Land Warrants, 1815–1858, for land located in Arkansas, Illinois, and Missouri.)

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A variety of research notes and topical bibliographies are available on request from the Library of Virginia, 800 E. Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219. Visit the Library's Web site for digital collections and related archival publications.

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