Public Service Claims

During the Revolution the Virginia General Assembly authorized the procurement of supplies from its citizenry for the use of the militia, state, and Continental troops. Commissioners were appointed in each county to impress such supplies and services as were thought necessary to the war effort. Officials provided certificates or receipts for the requisitioned items so that the owners could seek reimbursement from the state government. Microfilm copies of these certificates are available at the Library.

Record-keeping proved difficult and in 1782 an act was passed providing for claims to be submitted to the county courts for adjudication. These claims, known as court booklets and lists, exist for almost all Virginia counties. A typical entry includes the name of the claimant and the nature and value of the supplies or services furnished. The booklets and lists are microfilmed and also transcribed by Janice L. Abercrombie and Richard L. Slatten in Virginia Revolutionary Public Claims (Athen: Iberian Publishing Co. 1992, 3 vols). Also available on microfilm is Commissioner’s Books. A card file in the West Reading Room indexes all public service claims by name of claimant and is available on the Library’s Web site.

Other Records

A number of other records concerning the prosecution of the war effort by the Virginia government are also available at the Library. These include a searchable database and images of Letters Received by the Governor, 1776–1784, Journals of the Council of State, and records of various organizations and officials charged with management of the war and supply of the army. The Library holds microfilm and an index of both the Continental Congress Papers and the Draper Manuscripts, which contain material related to the service of Virginians. The Library’s online Archives and Manuscripts catalog also contains references to personal papers and military records of Virginians during the Revolution.


Compiled by Minor T. Weisiger
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Virginia awarded bounty land to soldiers who served for at least three years in the Continental Line, the State Line and the State Navy, died in service, or enlisted for the war. Heirs could apply if the soldier had died.

Bounty Land

Benefits in the form of bounty land and pensions were offered by Virginia to induce men to enlist in the Continental or State Line. These benefits could be valuable to researchers as they may contain personal and service information about the veteran and identify his heirs.

Benefits Records

Federal pensions were granted by Congress under a number of acts beginning in 1789 and continuing until 1878. The earliest pensions were granted to Revolutionary War veterans beginning in 1832. Papers relating to pension applications prior to 1818 were destroyed, but many exist for later years.

Federal Pensions

Federal pensions were granted by the Secretary of State’s Land Office Division, Room T40 Capitol Annex, Frankfort, KY 40601(http://sos.ky.gov/land/military) and the Ohio Historical Society, 1982 Velma Ave., Columbus, OH 43211(http://sos.ky.gov/land/military). Bounty warrants and rejected claims (rejected for insufficient service or other reasons) are available on the Library’s Web site and on microfilm. Land office military certificates are available on microfilm and there is an online index. A card index to these records is located in the West Reading Room. The American Library also awarded bounty land and all records pertaining to it are held by the National Archives and the state(s) where the land was located.


Virginia Pensions

Beginning in 1779 the Virginia General Assembly passed several laws to increase military enlistment. These laws provided for pensions for maimed and disabled soldiers or their widows. Surviving state pensions usually include proof of service, the nature of the disability, records of payment and receipt of the pension, and statements of disability from the local court. In most cases the General Assembly was petitioned to pass an act granting a pension. Search the legislative petitions database on the Library’s Web site for references to these pensions. The Virginia pensions are available on microfilm at the Library.

Federal Pensions

Federal pensions were granted by the Secretary of State under a number of acts beginning in 1789 and continuing until 1878. The earliest acts applied mainly to disabled Continental soldiers or their widows. Beginning in 1818 pensions were granted for service only, and soldiers who served in the militia were eligible beginning in 1832. Papers relating to pension applications prior to 1818 were destroyed, but many exist for later years.

Federal pension records can provide much information about the soldier’s service and life, and the files often contain statements made by the veteran, his widow, relatives, or neighbors. The data can include his military unit, rank and period of service, place and date of birth, residence before and after the war, names and ages of family members, bible records, and list of possessions. The widow’s application usually contains place of marriage and maiden name. The Library of Virginia holds copies of these records on microfilm. Photocopies must be obtained from the National Archives.