
Revolutionary and Civil War Research—New and Overlooked Resources

Start at the Top—The National Archives, DC and Archives II, College Park, MD

Records at the National Archives— What's Online; What's Offline?

Note: As Revolutionary War records are digitized (now about 100% of pension files) they may be taken out of circulation. This is to best preserve the files for future generations, but you'll want to go see the originals before they are all digitized and filed away for good!

NARA Digitized Online Records (Bookmark This!)

An exhaustive list of all National Archives Digitization Partners, by Record Group and with links to the online databases, can be found on the National Archives' website.

Fold3.com and Ancestry.com are two of the official digitization partners for the National Archives. Even at NARA locations, they will sit you down at the computer and search the records first from these partner sites!

[www.archives.gov/digitization/ digitized-by-partners.html](http://www.archives.gov/digitization/digitized-by-partners.html)

NARA Digitization Blog—News and Surveys

- <https://narations.blogs.archives.gov/category/digitization/>

Some Fold3.com Research Tips

- Search engine is sticky—either too specific or too broad. Does not work like other search engines.
- Use the “Browse Records” function to see all available records, navigate to the “Revolutionary War” materials
- Or use the “Advanced Search” and enter who you are looking for in the “Keyword” field. (This field understand boolean, too.)

Pension File and Bounty Land Applications

There are (possibly) hundreds of thousands of recently-discovered applications that are still being indexed. If you see evidence of bounty land, contact NARA in DC.

- https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Revolutionary_War_Pension_Records_and_Bounty_Land_Warrants
- Fold3.com—browse by records and then by last name.

National Archives (NARA) Civil War Records

A wall of information about Archive records. Remember that until all records are digitized and name-indexed, it is best to navigate National Archive records by what your ancestor did—and Record Groups are inherited by individual government agencies.

- www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/resources.html

Bureau of Land Management

If your Ancestor suddenly up and moves to the West, check for Homestead land records!

- www.nps.gov/home/learn/historyculture/abouthomesteadactlaw.htm
- www.glorerecords.blm.gov

National Archives (NARA)—Confederate Pension Records (Paid by States)!

Confederate records were confiscated by Union Troops during the fall of Richmond and bought back to DC.

- www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension.html

Many scattered records are being coordinated and digitized by the University of Virginia.

- www.lva.virginia.gov/public/guides/Civil-War/Veterans-Memorials.htm

Confederate Burial Records

Confederate soldiers were left to be buried by local townspeople. Many graves were lost or soldiers unknown. The Sons of Confederate Veterans is building an online database of internments.

If your soldier is not listed, and you have a good idea where he fell, contact the local historical society.

- www.scv.org

Specialty Research

Both NARA DC and Archives II employ experts on specialty research topics, including: court-martial cases (historically small infractions as well as career-ending ones); desertions; those who fell ill or died during basic training; medical discharges; foreign internments; unit histories; and official correspondence.

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Don't Overlook State Records

County and state militias often serve as feeders for the Federal army. Some soldiers served in all three levels of forces, while others served in civilian capacities, paid a fine for religious exemption, or paid for a substitute.

In many states during the Revolutionary War, conscription for males was automatic (16–50 in New Jersey). The war lasted eight years—touching a wide swath of the populace. During the Civil War, the ages for conscription was much narrower and the war half the length in duration. But for those who fought, the pace of action could be extremely intense and all-consuming.

In the late 1800s, the Adjutant General issued a directive that all State Adjutant Generals should collect, record, and index the service, both in a military capacity as well as civilian, for their state's residents. These records survive, in varying quality and completeness, as index cards. But don't stop at the index cards!

Many of these cards are only available on microfilm. But taking the time to view them can unlock many treasures at the State and Federal Archives.

Your Libraries are Waiting!

Daughters of the American Revolution Library

Excellent research library—tens of thousands of books on American history and genealogies. Applications for all DAR members have been digitized. Many of these applications contain copies of original family records, documents, letters, and ephemera that serve as evidence for their application(s). Some of these can be found no where else or are lost. Can order application records online—but no preview (yet). Stay tuned for more online developments!

- www.dar.org
- www.dar.org/library/record-copy

The David Library of the American Revolution

Library focused on the American Revolution. Holds the largest collection of British Library microfilm outside of the UK—and much easier to access than the set in London.

- www.dlar.org

New York Public Library—Records of the US Sanitary Commission. A Whole NEW Collection of Civil War Records.

A volunteer organization founded at the start of the war—and the unofficial pre-cursor to the Red Cross. Includes tens of thousands of records for those ill, killed, or injured during the war; family travel vouchers (Marmee in *Little Women!*); thousands of USSC staff and volunteers employment, pay, and records of work; family correspondence and letters of inquiry on missing soldiers, pension, dependent relief, family emergencies requesting soldier leave; records of internment and re-internments; reports and news on strength and health of units, hospitals, towns, local populace, farm yields, and USSC equipage and supplies; news from communities isolated by war and assistance with pensions—soldiers as well as dependents.

Files are housed at the NYPL Manuscripts Division on Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street. Advance notice is required.

- www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/manuscripts-division

General Collection Overview—Information on all record groups within the collection:

- <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3101>

Army and Navy Claims Agency—The most genealogically-rich part of the collection, this group contains more than 30,000 claims for pensions, applications, and letters of correspondence:

- <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/18809>

The online finding aid PDF is name-searchable:

- http://archives.nypl.org/uploads/collection/generated_finding_aids/mss18809.pdf

Hospital Directory—Conditions of hospitals and records of inquiry for servicemen.

- <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/19877>

A New Resource for Civil War Records

The Records of the U.S. Sanitary Commission (1861–1872) at the New York Public Library

By Michelle D. Novak

It's not often that one can point to an archival record group and say "no one has used these in 100 years." If you're like me, and relish in getting hands-on with original source material, this new record group might just make your next 100 years.

Usually, by the time researchers get to records they've survived decades of clumsy handling, a conflagration or two, well-intentioned restorers, hungry bugs, and maybe even vandals. But these records are different. Boxed up in the late 1800s and donated to the New York Public Library (NYPL), these records have remained in deep storage, with limited access, at the Library ever since. In 2010, an initiative was begun to re-house and re-catalog the collection, creating a name-index and opening access to the public once a substantial part of the work was complete.

What resulted is a new, and surprisingly complete, record group that offers insight into civilian and military life during and directly after the Civil War. All just across the river in Manhattan.

WHAT WAS THE U.S. SANITARY COMMISSION?

The U.S. Sanitary Commission (U.S.S.C.) was a civilian organization founded by altruistic wealthy New Yorkers and Bostonians, to aid the humanitarian aspects of the War and supplement the government's medical operations. Like the modern-day Red Cross, this organization, funded entirely by donations, was granted first-responder access to assist in the aftermath of battle and the devastation that it brought upon the local populace.

Originally authorized to provide "sanitary" assistance (e.g., food, medical supplies) to the Union Army, the organization's role would morph and grow with the needs they faced. They operated and supplemented front line field hospitals, helped soldiers get messages home and families find missing soldiers, identified the wounded and dead and notified next of kin, provided travel vouchers for families, ran supply lines and canteens, operated Soldiers' Homes where the wounded and disabled could convalesce and recover, inspired public morale through speeches and rallies, communicated news to and from communities, reported to the Army and President of the strength, health, and condition of the forces, and helped survivors, widows, and orphans apply for benefits and pensions. [Of the many notable U.S.S.C. nurses was Louisa May Alcott, who served as a nurse in Georgetown. In her

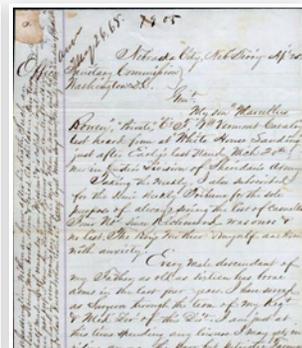
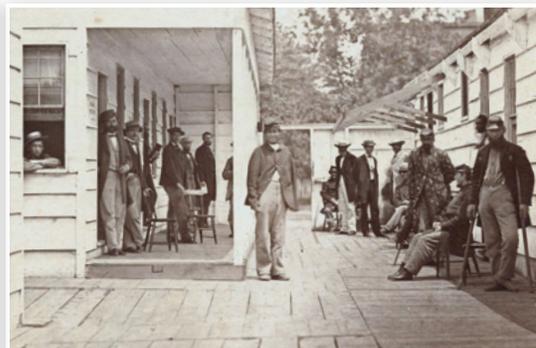
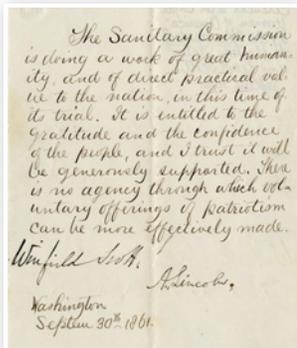
life-inspired novel, *Little Women*, Marmee travels to visit her wounded husband with a travel voucher provided by the U.S.S.C.]

It's hard to imagine today, but before the Civil War, the U.S. military had few protocols in place to keep track of their soldiers beyond muster rolls and head counts. Soldiers of the time did not wear identifying dog tags but, instead, pinned scraps of paper and a farewell letter home to the inside of their jacket — in the hope that someone might find and send it. Many letters never made it home, leaving families with no way of knowing what had happened to their loved ones. Those who tried to rescue the wounded came under fire, too, and many were left to die where they lay. Many soldiers lived off the land, foraging and eating what they could find and hoping that the enemy did not foul the well, kill-off livestock, or burn crops upon retreat. Those who were given burials were usually done so hastily, with graves marked with scrap wood or stones, and many without names. Many Union soldiers were later re-interred in official cemeteries (Confederate dead were left to be handled by the local townspeople) and in some cemeteries, the number of "Unknowns" nearly equal those named.

These needs, and many more, were filled by the U.S.S.C. Founded by a slate of notable, wealthy citizens, the U.S.S.C. tapped talent far and wide for its mission and set about their work in a highly-organized and regimented way. Noted landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, helped farmers increase crop yields and recover their fields after scarring battles. Nurse Clara Barton developed many of her revolutionary infection-control practices while working under battle-conditions at U.S.S.C. hospitals — experiences which would be later incorporated into Red Cross protocols. Mary Ann "Mother" Bickerdyke rose to the rank of Chief of Nursing, and was so well respected by the Union Army that Sherman called her "one of his best Generals."

U.S.S.C. "boots on the ground" consisted of volunteers and paid workers, men and women, black and white, from surgeons to cart-men. The U.S.S.C. eventually expanded into more than

(Continued on following page.)



All images courtesy of the Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library (<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org>), United States Sanitary Commission Records. LEFT TO RIGHT: Letter from President Lincoln, in support of the "work of great humanity and of direct practical value" of the Sanitary Commission, co-signed by Winfield Scott, 30 September 1861; John F. Claghorn, 214 Gold St., Brooklyn, LI, documenting his injuries; Union soldiers convalescing at the U.S. Sanitary Commission, Lodge 4, 389 H Street, Washington, D.C.; A letter of inquiry by A. Bowen, April 25, 1865, posted from Nebraska Territory where Bowen, a Doctor with the U.S.S.C., who was using his leave to fund-raise for the organization. The letter is an inquiry into the whereabouts and condition of his son, Marcellus Bowen, 1st Vermont Calvary, last known serving under "Custer's Division of Sheridan's Army." Bowen goes on to write "Every male descendant of my Father, as old as sixteen has borne arms in the last four years." Along the left margin, he adds, "We heard of the President's assassination within an hour after his death...Strong men broke down & cried like children."

2,500 communities, from tiny villages to cities on both sides of the Appalachians, bringing news and hope to a war-weary nation.

After the War, the U.S.S.C. continued its mission, helping scarred communities heal their physical and emotional wounds, reconnecting families with their loved ones, and helping those broken and left behind receive their due pensions. The organization officially brought its affairs to a close on 7 January 1879 with the formal transfer of its records to the Astor Library (NYPL).

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR RESEARCHERS?

This collection is a largely untapped resource for genealogists. The records contain tens of thousands of correspondence by families and soldiers; employee records and pay books for those in service to the U.S.S.C. as nurses, cart-men, orderlies, suppliers, fund-raisers, and administrators; and reports on conditions faced by units, those in hospitals, and civilians. Some of the collection is indexed by name while others are organized by location.

You can start by exploring the NYPL's website:

- **General Collection Overview** — Information on all record groups within the collection: <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3101>
- **Army and Navy Claims Agency** — The most genealogically-rich part of the collection, this group contains more than 30,000 claims for pensions, applications, and letters of correspondence: <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/18809>. The online finding aid

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- **Hospital Directory** — Conditions of hospitals and records of inquiry for servicemen. <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/19877>

ACCESS TO THE U.S.S.C. COLLECTION

Files are housed at the NYPL Manuscripts Division, Room 328, on Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. Advance notice is required. <http://www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/manuscripts-division>

This article was inspired by and details based on Terry Koch-Bostic's lecture *A Major New Research Resource: The Astonishing Records of the United States Sanitary Commission* presented at the April 2015 NERGC Conference in Providence, RI. Koch-Bostic will be lecturing on this topic at the New York State Family History Conference in Syracuse, NY, in September, 2015 (www.nysfhc.org) and publishing an accompanying article for the NYG&B later this year.

For more information about using the collection, see the Winter 2014 issue of the NYG&B *Researcher* magazine, available at the Bolger or from the NYG&B (<http://newyorkfamilyhistory.org>).

For more on the USSC and conditions during the war, watch PBS' heartbreaking documentary, *Death and the Civil War*: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/death/>.

The Federation of Genealogical Societies Annual Conference

Reported by Lauren Maehrlein, GSBC FGS Representative

The GSBC is a member of the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), an organization comprised of hundreds of Societies from across the U.S. The FGS helps Societies hone their organizations and grow their memberships, partner with other Societies on projects and initiatives, make connections, and organize to assist with the preservation of vital genealogical records — such as the preservation of the 1812 U.S. Pension Records.

This year, the FGS held their annual conference in February, instead of in the summer, and in partnership with the 2015 RootsTech Conference. Combining two major conferences and holding it in Salt Lake City, the genealogists' Mecca, proved to be a huge draw and over the next four days more than 18,000 people attended — blowing away previous attendance records.



A large chunk of the big numbers came on Saturday when the exhibition hall, which was also doubling as a lecture venue, was opened to LDS members for "Family Discovery Day." There were special exhibits and programs geared to encouraging children to get involved in genealogy and the exhibition hall was overflowing with kids, parents, and strollers.

Another draw for many was celebrity speakers. Genealogical heavy-hitters such as Scott Sorensen of Ancestry.com, and D. Joshua Taylor of Find My Past and a frequent contributor to *The Genealogy Roadshow* on PBS, were joined by Laura Bush, Jenna Bush Hager, and Donny Osmond.

The FGS portion of the conference was the usual mix of learning opportunities geared from beginners to advanced researchers. There were also multi-session programs for genealogical certification and using DNA as a research tool. I was particularly interested in the offerings of "Focus on Societies Day," which was held the Wednesday before the official start of the conference. It provided a wide range of lectures aimed at helping genealogical societies to thrive and grow. The first lecture I attended "Engaging Long-Distance Members," by Jen Baldwin, included several important and some new ideas to encourage members who aren't regularly able to attend in-house offerings. Other society-oriented lectures dealt with economical ways to stay in touch with your membership, and how to provide a "robust" website. A particularly good program discussed the role of local groups in the twenty-first century, especially as an instrument to promote and preserve local history and genealogy.

Although many of the general session lectures concerned research strategies to help those whose ancestors headed West, there was plenty for those of us with New York/New Jersey roots. Lectures on DNA; ethnic groups; searching archives; and various migrations were well represented.

For various reasons, including the change from a summer to a winter event, some FGS "regulars" were not able to participate this year, including the International Society of Family History Writers and Editors (ISFHE). This may have also been a reason why there were many more RootsTech sponsored lectures than FGS. Those who had signed up for both FGS and RootsTech may not have noticed, as the two tracts were seamlessly integrated and despite their sponsorship, the RootsTech offerings were not necessarily technology-focused.

I was particularly impressed with a presentation by my friend, Warren Bittner, *Impossible Immigrant! Exhausting Research to Find an Ancestor's Origins*. As a German expert, his examples were all gleaned from his German research, which is right up my alley.

Combining two major conferences in "genealogy central" allowed for an exhibition hall all but bursting with every sort of offering a family historian could imagine — including data sheets provided by many of the societies (including the GSBC), all the latest technologies and publications, on-site help with deciphering your DNA results, identifying old photographs, and raffles for prize baskets. A mini-arcade in the center of the floor added to the exciting, carnival-like atmosphere.

The strength of a conference is in the educational and research opportunities it affords attendees. A great added bonus is the chance to spend quality time with friends who may live on opposite coasts. No one is ever at a loss for a dinner partner, or ten or twelve, or for conversation. Dropping in at any of the nearby restaurants will almost guarantee at least a table or two of genealogists catching up on gossip, news, swapping stories and experiences, and doing a lot of laughing.

And in that is a point that we should all remember. Genealogy isn't just about records, it is about people. All genealogists should make a point of going to conferences — as often as possible. The educational opportunities are phenomenal and the chance to gather with like-minded people: to share experiences, network, have a meal, or just to hang out and enjoy each other's company is *always* worth the price of the trip.