

Kinship Information in Bounty Land Records

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OVERVIEW

Bounty lands were awarded by the federal government from 1788 to 1855 to encourage and reward service in the military. Nine individual states (Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Virginia) also awarded land as part of Revolutionary War compensation. Eligibility for military bounty lands varied by the criteria in the authorizing legislative act. In addition to the reward for service, federal and state governments were motivated to populate the western lands. The award of bounty lands did, in fact, motivate some veterans to move west. The effect was considerably diluted because many individuals sold or assigned their bounty land warrants. Often these warrants were purchased by land speculators. Nevertheless, many people moved west because of the promise of free land.

GENEALOGICAL VALUE

Bounty land records can contain a wealth of information on soldiers and their families. Nearly 600,000 warrants were issued and 60 million acres of the public domain transferred to individuals. Many times, the transfer of property created records of heirs and associates. Early records contain less information than later records. Location of individuals, ownership of land, spouses, children, migration activities, and social status are just some of the information that may be found. The specific information contained is a function of the applicable law. Oberly's *Sixty Million Acres, American Veterans and the Public Lands before the Civil War* (# 10 in the bibliography) provides both a historical and sociological view of bounty lands in America. Christine Rose's book *Military Bounty Land, 1776–1855* (#13) provides comprehensive treatment of these records.

COLONIAL ERA

Bockstruck's *Bounty and Donation Land Grants in British Colonial America* (#1) provides both sources and names of individuals seeking bounty lands in the Colonial era. This source may allow the researcher to locate the land.

STATE BOUNTY LANDS

The basic guide for state bounty lands is *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants: Awarded by State Governments*, (online at *Ancestry and #2*). The master index that includes the states of Connecticut, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Virginia-Indiana (land for the Illinois Regiment of Colonel George Rogers Clark).

THE FEDERAL RECORDS



The easiest guide to get started with federal bounty lands is *Researching in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office*, by Kenneth Hawkins (online at NARA & #9).

There are two major NARA record series that involve military bounty land. The first is found in Record Group (RG) 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and consists of bounty land application files. The second series is found in RG 49, Records of the Bureau of Land Management, and consists of land entry files (surrendered bounty land warrant files). Bounty lands awarded for the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812 were to be taken up in designated bounty land districts. As the bounty land districts filled up, Congress modified these restrictions and allowed bounty land warrants to be taken up on any available public land.

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Acts of 1776 (v5 Journals of the Continental Congress), 1788 (v34 Journals of the Continental Congress), 1803 (2 Stat. 236), 1806 (2 stat. 378), 1855 (10 Stat. 701). Eligibility: all ranks, acres varied by rank, assignable, restricted to Ohio, until scrip acts.

Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, M804 (RG 15) online at *Fold3* and *Ancestry*. These files are indexed by *U.S. Revolutionary War, Bounty Land Warrants used in the U.S. Military District of Ohio and Related Papers (Acts of 1788, 1803, and 1806)*, M829 (RG 49) (online at *Ancestry*). The rejected bounty land applications will be found in the unindexed series described above.

WAR OF 1812

Acts of 1811 (2 Stat. 669), 1812 (2 Stat. 671), 1812 (2 Stat. 728), 1814 (3 Stat. 147), 1816 (3 Stat. 256), 1842 (5 Stat. 497), 1850 (9 Stat. 521), 1852 (10 Stat. 3), 1855 (10 Stat. 701).

Eligibility: enlisted only, 160 or 320 acres, warrants were not assignable, and must be taken up in the designated districts in Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas.

Indexed by *Index to War of 1812 Pension Application Files*, M313 (RG 15)

War of 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrants, 1815–1858, M848 (online at *Ancestry*).

Congress intended to fix the abuses created by the ability to assign or sell the warrants awarded for Revolutionary War service. They did this by not allowing the assignment of War of 1812 warrants. The result was that some veterans became absentee owners, often reselling later.

If you locate a veteran in the General Land Office website, who received a patent in one of War of 1812 bounty land districts, follow the land history to determine if he actually took up the land.

MEXICAN WAR

Act of 11 Feb 1847 (9 Stat. 125).

Eligibility: enlisted only, 40 or 160 acres or scrip, assignable, locate on any public land

Indexed by *Index to Mexican War Pension Files*, T317 (RG 15). This index is online at *FamilySearch*.

LAND ENTRY FILES (RG 49)

These files contain evidence of first title. To access these files pertaining to bounty lands, you must have the warrant number, the number of acres, and the year of the act awarding the benefit. For example:

12345-160-1855 or 12345-320-55. These files may contain surrendered warrants, legal description of the land, court papers, and records of transfer from warrantee to assignee. Since nearly all of the bounty land patents are online now, the vast majority of the land entry files related to military bounty lands are in effect indexed by the BLM website. What is not indexed are the rejected claims.

SCRIP

Scrip acts were passed in 1830 (4 Stat. 422), 1832 (4 Stat. 578), 1833 (4 Stat. 665), 1835 (4 Stat. 770), 1852 (10 Stat. 143), to compensate for diminishing land availability in the designated bounty land areas. Warrants were surrendered for scrip of \$100 or \$25 to be used to buy public land. These records are original textual records in RG 49 and must be requested from NARA. However, Margie Brown has abstracted the records of the Act of 1852 in her book *Genealogical Abstracts, Revolutionary War Veterans, Scrip Act 1852* (#4).

THE ACTS OF 1850, 1852, AND 1855

These acts were passed to extend eligibility to more veterans and to ensure all individuals were treated the same regardless of the war of participation. Over all there were 16,720 warrants awarded for the Revolutionary War; 29,186 for the War of 1812; 88,274 for the Mexican War; and 464,419 under the Acts of 1852, 1852, and 1855 combined.

ONLINE RESOURCES—FEDERAL BOUNTY LAND APPLICATION FILES

Many records relating to federal bounty lands are online. Specially, the bounty land applications for the Revolutionary War are interfiled with the pension files. These files are online at the National Archives (also *Fold3*) and the names are searchable through the National Archives Catalog (NAC). The bounty land applications for the War of 1812, Mexican War, and other wars are found in the NARA Series "Case Files of Bounty-Land Warrant Applications Based on Service Between 1812 and 1855 and Disapproved Applications Based on Revolutionary War Service."

Ordering NARA textual records. Land Entry Papers and Bounty Land Applications are requested frequently. Consequently, NARA has established standard order forms and fees for these records. See the discussion on NARA's website at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records>.

If a War of 1812 veteran lived long enough to receive a pension for disability or service his bounty land application file was probably interfiled with the pension file. This database is online at *Fold3* under the title "War of 1812 Pension Applications," <https://go.fold3.com/1812pensions>. Pensions for service were authorized under the Act of 14 February 1871 (16 Stat. 411). The database is complete up through the letter "P" in the alphabet.

SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Read Hawkin's guide thoroughly – understand the process.
- Understand the applicable law.
- Recognize that multiple search strategies may be required. Use the BLM web site as an index to find land entry papers.
- Treat bounty land records like pension records—many times they are filed with the pension.
- Always order the unindexed bounty land file from NARA.

- Even if your person of interest did not serve he may be involved in a bounty land transaction as most warrants were assigned or sold.
- Locate the land the veteran or assignee took up.

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