

Searching Digital Documentation on HistoryKat

ARE YOU DOING research on 19th-century Illinois and Wisconsin and seek state census records? Or did someone in your family serve in the postal service (or select other government agencies) in the 1800s? Or, do your interests lay with the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, engagements with Indians, British and Mexican Troops from 1790-1848, etc? If you answered yes to any of these questions or you are a history buff, check out HistoryKat.com!

This website, www.historykat.com, contains a mix of free and subscription-only data. A one year subscription is \$24.95US and allows you access to: US Military Records, US Postal Records, State Census Records and the US Government Employees Collection (Official Registers of 1829 and 1830). Everyone can access: Selected Acts of the US Congress and Important Documents of the US. And more new data and record areas are being added.

Some documents have been transcribed and most are digital images of the original source material. To view these images, you will need the Free Adobe Flash Player (there is a link provided to acquire this).

Whether a member or not, you can browse the website to see what is available, which may entice you to buy a subscription. Access to any of the specifics of

what is included and the actual digital images is restricted to subscribers.

Much of the website is available to browse, though you will find that select collections are only searchable.

STATE CENSUSES

Currently, this collection includes: Colorado (1885), Illinois (1810, 1818, 1820-1845 — available in five year increments — 1855, 1865), Oklahoma (1890) and Wisconsin (1836, 1838, 1846, 1847).



An example of what a census looks like in the viewer, showing the various navigation and image manipulation options.

When you click on “view”, a Flash picture viewer will be revealed. The controls are on the left, top and bottom. The underlying images are very good quality. This means that when you “zoom in”, after you give the image a moment to adjust, you will continue to see very sharp images. After zooming in as much as possible, if you are still struggling to decipher some of the document, click on the “magnify tool”. A small magnifier box will pop up. Just click on the

box and you can move it anywhere on the visible portions of the document. When you are navigating around the image, you also have the option to use arrows or just “grab” the red box with your mouse and drag it to the section of the image you would like to view.

It is easy to save any image that interests you. Just click on “save image” — the new window will show the entire image, the applicable resource citation and instructions on how to save. It is that easy!

The “next record” feature is also very helpful. You can sequence through the census as you look for your “target” family. You also have options to adjust the image in terms of contrast, brightness, rotating, flipping and much more. This viewer is deceptively simple to use and yet very powerful.

There are several interesting collections besides the State Census one.

US POSTAL SERVICE

One document series is titled “Postmaster Appointments”. This collection has a useful search function available. Enter a last name, first name or Soundex code and click on “search” (note that the index currently only includes postmasters from 1789 to 1818). Typing in the name Phillips will find three individuals with that surname who were appointed postmasters between 1789 and 1818. When you click on an indi-

vidual's name, the matching record is displayed.

A collection of interest, if you are searching for postal workers from a specific area, is the Record of Appointment of Substitute Clerks in First- and Second-Class Post Offices, 1899-1905. This series is arranged alphabetically by the name of the city. The community of interest for my needs was Martinsville, Indiana. This locale was on an entry labeled: Marshalltown, Iowa; Marshfield, Wisconsin; Martins Ferry, Ohio; Martinsburg, West Virginia; Martinsville, Indiana; Marysville, California. You will then find an image that shows the substitute clerks appointed for Martinsville

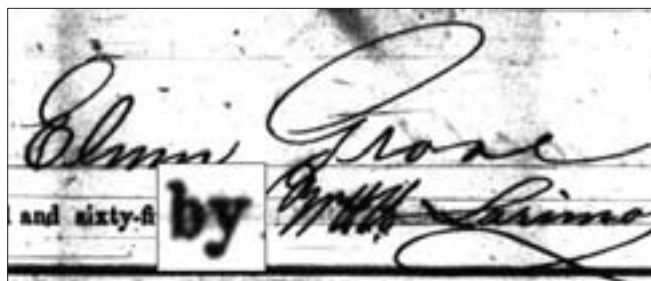
WAR OF 1812 MILITARY BOUNTY LAND WARRANTS

I also found the military collection interesting for the inclusion of lesser-known source data. In particular, the War of 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrant Search is relevant for anyone researching heirs from 1815 to 1858 who exchanged these warrants for land principally in Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas (and later, a few other states with public lands).

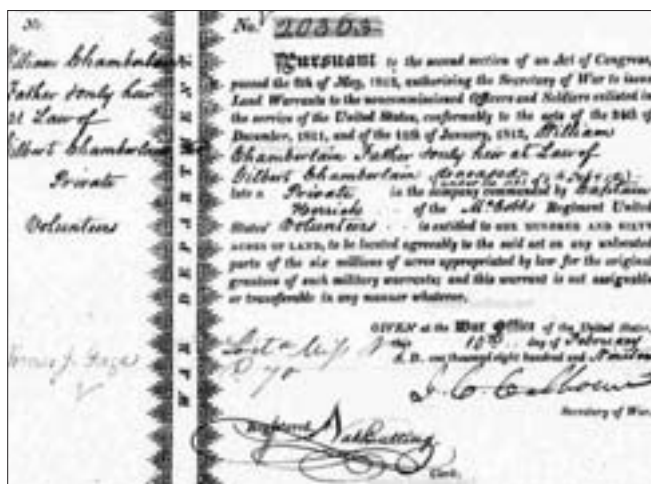
This is another collection that has a search function and has more parameters. In addition to last name, first name and Soundex, you can also search the Warrant Number, Regiment or Patent Accession Number. For example, a search for the land warrant for Gilbert Chamberlain, will find the documentation for William, his father and heir-at-law. Not only do you learn that Gilbert Chamberlain served as a private and in what company of which regiment, but you also learn his father's name.

According to the HistoryKat co-owner, Matthew Helm, in some cases, such as for these 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrants,

they "try to add value to [the] indexes beyond just indexing the names. For example, the War of 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrants contain the General Land Office (GLO) Accession Numbers for when the land was actually settled. The Accession Numbers are not listed anywhere on the Warrants — we searched through the GLO records and associated the Accession Numbers with our Warrants. That way, if someone finds a Warrant that resulted in the actual settlement



Above: Once you have zoomed in as much as possible, the magnifier feature can be used to get closer.
Below: A Military Bounty Land Warrant for Gilbert Chamberlain from the War of 1812.



on the land, the user is given the Accession Number, which they can then use on the GLO website to find the land patent (then they have two records, rather than just one)."

So, if you already have some of these details and have yet to see the actual document, you can now do that from the comfort of your home or local library.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR HISTORYKAT?

Several new additions and improvements are planned for

2007 (and may already be operable by the time you read this).

- Indexing the collections that are currently not indexed (e.g. postmaster appointments indexed from 1798-1832).
- Posting the Journal of Hugh Finlay, Surveyor of Post Roads and Post Offices, 1773-1774; and Accounts of the General Post Office in Philadelphia and of Various Deputy Postmasters — "The Ledger of Benjamin Franklin" — January 1775 to January 1780 (non-indexed).
- Posting The Record of Appointments of Postmasters, 1832 to 30 September 1971 and other official registers.
- Linking postal and military records as these datasets are indexed, to give a more complete view of a person.

So, if your 19th-century ancestors lived in Illinois, Wisconsin or a few other states, or they worked for the postal service in the 1800s or served in the military during the period starting with the Revolutionary War to the Mexican War, HistoryKat.com is the website for you. Not only does it contain unique digital images relevant to these topics, the images are high quality and are viewed through an easy-to-use, yet powerful document viewer.

And, if you run into any issues, Matthew Helm is a pleasure to deal with!



Diane L. Richard has been doing genealogy research for almost 20 years. She currently does professional research in

NC and has never lived where any of her ancestors migrated to or from! She can be found online at www.mosaicrpm.com/Genealogy.