

Research

Proving Revolutionary War Service

Diane L. Richard shows you how to find proof in unusual places

PROVING REVOLUTIONARY WAR era patriotic service for an ancestor, can sometimes be as simple as finding them listed in a Militia Record or learning that they have a pension record. Or, for North Carolina, finding entries in the North Carolina Revolutionary Army Accounts.

Sometimes though, your ancestor can't be found in any of these records or you may need to document a higher level of service. For example, for the Society of Colonial Wars, the requirements are more stringent. Given the time period involved, this can be a great challenge for southerners in states where few served as military officers before April 1775. Often, the only option is to prove

services as a justice, judge or justice of the peace. Even to qualify for Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), <http://www.dar.org/natsociety/content.cfm?ID=145> or Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), <http://www.sar.org/membership/whojoin.html>, you sometimes have to look further afield than the obvious records to document your ancestor's qualifying service.

Let's look at two examples of these more obscure records and how they helped qualify descendant's ancestors for membership.

SIGNING A PETITION

William Hobbs was a landowner (though missing deed and court documents make proving this

challenging) and a fairly visible member of the Orange County, North Carolina, community at the start of the Revolutionary War. Why could we not find a record of his service?

He was not listed on militia lists or as having provided goods to the cause or any of the other "usual" types of documents. The former was hard to do as militia service encompassed "an armed force of able-bodied men within certain age ranges who were subject to go into action when the colony and state needed to defend itself." Throughout the colonial period, men from 16 to 60 were liable for militia duty. So, though most North Carolinian able-bodied men did serve in the

PARTIAL LIST OF DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ACCEPTABLE SERVICE

<http://www.dar.org/natsociety/content.cfm?ID=145>

The National Society reserves the right to determine the acceptability of all service and proof thereof. The National Society accepts service, with some exceptions, for the period between 19 April 1775 (Battle of Lexington) and 26 November 1783 (withdrawal of British troops from New York) as follows:

- Signers of the Declaration of Independence
- Military service, such as participation in: Army and Navy of the Continental Establishment, State Navy, State and Local Militia, privateers and military or naval service performed by French nationals in the American theater of war
- Civil service, under authority of provisional or new state governments: state officials, county and town officials (town clerk, selectman, juror, town treasurer, judge, sheriff, constable, jailer, surveyor of highways, justice of the peace, etc.)
- Patriotic service, which includes: members of the Continental Congress; state conventions and assemblies; membership in committees made necessary by the War, including service on committees which furthered the cause of the Colonies

from April 1774, such as Committees of Correspondence, Inspection and Safety, committees to care for soldier's families, etc.

- Signer of Oath of Fidelity and Support, Oath of Allegiance, etc.
- Members of the Boston Tea Party
- Defenders of forts and frontiers, and signers of petitions addressed to and recognizing the authority of the provisional and new state governments
- Doctors, nurses and others rendering aid to the wounded (other than their immediate families)
- Ministers who gave patriotic sermons and encouraged patriotic activity
- Furnishing a substitute for military service
- Prisoners of war or refugees from occupying forces
- Prisoners on the British ship *Old Jersey* or other prison ships
- Those who rendered material aid, such as furnishing supplies with or without remuneration, lending money to the Colonies, munitions makers, gunsmiths, etc.

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militia, the bigger issue is that many of these records have not survived.

Once it was determined that we weren't going to be able to document William Hobbs and his service directly, the next step was to research his Revolutionary War era and earlier life. Through this, we might be able to document his involvement in some activity that would qualify as patriotic service.

After much searching, we learned that William Hob(b)s, as a freeholder (a freeholder had to be a property owner), signed a petition on 13 November 1776, calling for a new election to elect Orange County delegates to attend the Fourth Provincial Congress, thereby recognizing the authority of the provincial government. As a result, on 28 November 1776, the Provincial Congress passed a resolution calling for a new election in Orange County and this was held 10 December 1776. We could now prove that William "was a signer of a petition recognizing the authority of the provisional government", a service recognized by DAR.

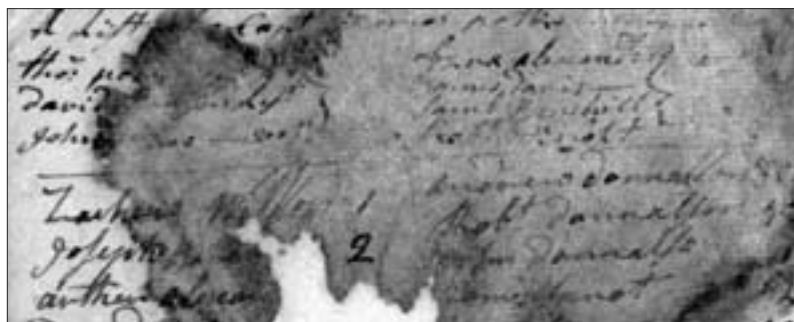
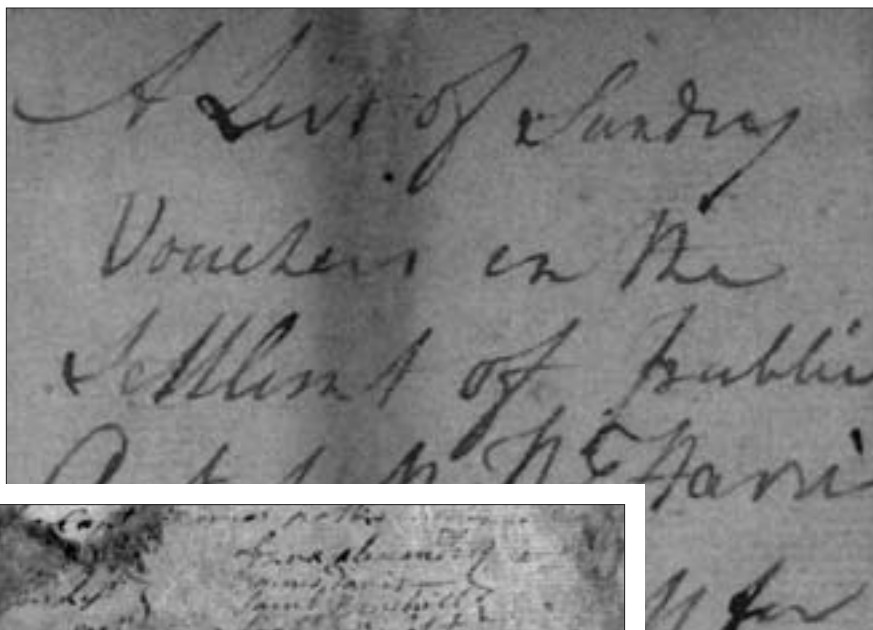
SERVING AS JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

Though ancestors may have earned some renown, such as the case of Zacheus Wilson, <http://www.cmstory.org/meckdec/bios.asp?id=283248177>, this does not always mean that one can easily document service early enough. For instance, Zacheus signed the Mecklenburg Declaration on 20 May 1775, less than a month after the battle of Lexington, and was subsequently a delegate at various congresses and conventions. However, all of these documented activities were too late.

We struggled to find any indication of "colonial service" pre-May 1775, even though he was a landowner and a fairly prominent citizen. He was not found on any militia list that we could date. He was found on one militia list that was undated and that a North Carolina archivist tentatively

dated as 1771-75. However, with no proof of date, it was insufficient for our purposes. He was not found in a list of those who served the Revolution by providing goods, except for a note of a "miscellaneous" payment. However, there was no information on what this payment was for.

County. The date of his commission was 29 November 1768, well in advance of the date before which service needed to be proved. This document was in the very last collection of possibly relevant documents (time period and document type) that we were going to examine.



Above: 1774 payment to Zacheus Wilson for a sundry expense.
Left: Undated militia service entry for Zacheus Wilson.

We explored whether Zacheus served as a government appointed surveyor, since we know that he did serve as a surveyor throughout his life. However, no record was found.

We knew that Zacheus had lived in what was Anson County and which became Mecklenburg County in 1762. Was it possible that he had served in a recognized official capacity in his youth? In searching the records of Anson County, we came across a reference to some tax files which were maintained by the North Carolina governor's office and are now part of the North Carolina archives collection.

We did not find Zacheus in Anson County, but a Zacheus Wilson was listed as a justice of the peace for Mecklenburg

CONCLUSION

Hopefully these two examples have inspired you to make sure that you exhaust the records when seeking to document Revolutionary War Era service (or attempt to meet the membership eligibility requirements for any lineage society). Sometimes, our ancestors contributed to society in ways that are a little off the beaten path or are a bit harder to document. Until, and unless, you have exhausted all the records where such documentation may be found, you may be premature in assuming that your ancestor did not serve.

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