

FEDERAL SOURCES - REVOLUTIONARY WAR BOUNTY-LAND WARRANT APPLICATION FILES
submitted by R. Kyger

Bounty-land warrants, which entitled their holders to free land in the public domain, were given to veterans or their survivors for wartime service performed between 1775 and 3 March 1855. Bounty-land warrant application files, which provide evidence of military service, are part of Record Group 15, Records of the Veterans Administration.

Since most bounty-land warrants were transferable, an approved bounty-land warrant application is not evidence of land ownership. Bounty-land warrants surrendered for land in the public domain, usually by someone other than the veteran who applied for the warrant, document ownership of land at a given time and place. These surrendered warrants are part of Record Group 49, Records of the General Land Office.

A bounty-land warrant application is especially valuable in an instance where the veteran or his widow did not apply for a pension. Not all Revolutionary War veterans and widows met the qualifications for pensions during their lifetimes, and some who did qualify did not apply. Since there was no need requirement for bounty land, many of these veterans and widow did apply for bounty-land warrants.

In addition to his rank, military unit, and period of service, a bounty-land warrant application by a Revolutionary War veteran will give his age and place of residence at the time of the application. An application by a widow will normally give, in addition to her age and place of residence, the date and place of her marriage to him, and her maiden name. An application by a survivor may list all of the veteran's heirs at law.

BOUNTY LAND LEGISLATION

In 1776, the Continental Congress promised land to officers and soldiers who engaged in military service and served until the end of the Revolutionary War or until discharged and to the survivors of those killed in the war. The amount of land varied with rank. Privates and noncommissioned officers were to receive 100 acres, ensigns 150, lieutenants 200, captains 300, majors 400, lieutenant colonels 450, and colonels 500. In 1780 the law was extended to generals, granting brigadier generals 850 acres and major generals 1,100. This was the basic law under which bounty land was granted for Revolutionary War service until 1855.

In 1788 Congress directed the Secretary of War to begin issuing warrants to eligible veterans upon application. This law provided that the veteran could transfer his warrant to another person, and most of the warrants issued under this and succeeding acts were assigned at least once before being surrendered for land.

Actual patenting of land in exchange for bounty-land warrants did not begin until about 1800. Until 1830 the U.S. Military District of Ohio was the only place a Revolutionary War bounty-land warrant could be used. Beginning in 1830 a bounty-land warrant could be exchanged for scrip which was

receivable at any land office in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In 1842 all federal bounty-land warrants were made good at any land office.

In 1855 Congress amended the basic law governing bounty land granted for Revolutionary War service by making the minimum entitlement 160 acres regardless of rank and reducing the service requirement to fourteen days or participation in any battle during the war. A veteran or survivors who had previously received fewer than 160 acres could apply for the balance. In 1856 the benefits of the 1855 act were extended to Revolutionary War naval officers and enlisted men and their heirs. Many applications for bounty-land warrants were made under the 1855 act by persons who met the service requirement for the first time.

Claimants for bounty-land warrants based on Revolutionary War service forwarded their applications to the Secretary of War until 1841, to the Commissioner of Pensions in the War Department from 1841 to 1849, and to the Secretary of the Interior after the Pension Office was transferred to that department in 1849. Some applications were accompanied by affidavits testifying to the military service performed, marriage records, and other forms of evidence. When an application was approved, a warrant for a specified number of acres was issued to the claimant or his assignee. The holder of the warrant then selected the portion of the public domain he wished to have in exchange for the warrant and surrendered the warrant at the appropriate district land office. The papers were forwarded to Washington where the Treasury Department and, after 1849, the Interior Department issued a patent for the land.

BOUNTY-LAND WARRANT APPLICATION FILES

Bounty-land warrant applications and related papers approved before the War Department fire of November 1800 are presumed to have been lost in that fire. These lost files are represented by 10" x 14" cards that show the name of the veteran, his rank, the state or organization for which he served, the symbol "B.L.Wt." followed by the warrant number and the number of acres granted, the date the warrant was issued, and the name of a person other than the veteran to whom the warrant was delivered or assigned. This information was transcribed from surviving registers of bounty-land warrants issued before 8 November 1800.

Files for bounty-land warrants applications approved after 8 November 1800 are in envelopes that have headings consisting of the name of the veteran, his widow's name if she applied for the warrant, the state or organization for which he served, the symbol "B.L.Wt." followed by the number of the warrant, the number of acres granted, and, in the case of applications made under the act of 1855, the number "55". Records in the files may include applications, family Bible records, marriage records, affidavits testifying to the veteran's service, and other papers.

Envelopes containing rejected bounty-land warrant applications are marked "B.L.Reg." (for bounty-land register) followed by the register number assigned to the application

Bounty-land warrant applications and related papers have been consolidated with pension application files based on the service of the same veteran. Frequently a widow's approved pension application is consolidated with her approved bounty-land warrant application under the act of 1855. A veteran's pension application and bounty-land warrant application may be in the same file. Rejected pension application files may also contain approved or rejected bounty-land warrant application papers.

MICROFILM PUBLICATION

The Revolutionary War pension and bounty land warrant application files have been microfilmed on 2,670 rolls of National Archives Microfilm Publication M804. The files are arranged alphabetically by the surnames of the veterans. A pamphlet describing the contents of this publication roll by roll is available free of charge from the National Archives.

Microfilm Publication M804 is available to researchers at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. and at the eleven National Archives field branches. Individual rolls can be borrowed for you by your local library through the Census Microfilm Rental program. The publication is also available at the LDS Genealogical Department Library in Salt Lake City and through its branch libraries. Microfilm rolls can be purchased from the National Archives.

As an alternative to using the microfilmed records, a copy of a Revolutionary War bounty-land warrant application file can be ordered by mail from the National Archives using NATF Form 80, Order for Copies of Veterans Records. Check "Bounty-Land Warrant Application" on the form and provide the name of the veteran, the war in which he served, the state from which he served, and, if you have it, the bounty-land warrant application file number.

"Index to Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives," published by the National Genealogical Society gives the name of the veteran, the state from which he served, the bounty-land warrant application file number, and, in the case of a widow's application, the given name of the widow. This index is available in many libraries and can be purchased from the Society.

Information found in a bounty-land warrant application file for your Revolutionary War ancestor should be properly identified in your family records. A citation should include the following: (Descriptive title of the document), (name of the veteran), Revolutionary War Bounty-Land Warrant Application File (symbol and numbers), Records of the Veterans Administration, Record Group 15, National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, roll (number.)

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