



RESEARCHING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MILITARY RECORDS

February 22, 2021

Hosted by Giles County Public Library & Wolf Gap

First things first:

- Bookmark these sites and make a FREE account to make your search easier:
 - **FamilySearch** (www.familysearch.org) for assorted records including military, Freedmen's Bureau, and other genealogical
 - **Fold3** (www.fold3.com) for military records
 - **Discover Freedmen** (www.discoverfreedmen.org) gives easy access to FamilySearch's Freedmen's Bureau records

Step by Step:

1. Are they a veteran?
2. What was their military unit?
3. Find Enlistment/Service Records
4. Do they or their spouse/child(ren) have a Pension record?
5. What else can I find out about them?

1. Are they a veteran?

Veterans' Census of 1890

- This will show veterans of Civil War, Spanish-American War, and some Indian Wars.
- Search the veteran's name. Include any other information you may know in the search form (such as their state of residence in 1890).
- Also try searching their spouse/children's names.
- <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1877095>

Veterans' Administration Master Index, 1917-1940

- This will show veterans of World War I.
- Search the veteran's name
- <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2968245>

1. Are they a veteran?

Do you know which war you're looking for?

Civil War (1861-1865)

- If they were born in 1820s-1840s
- Search the National Park Service's Civil War Soldiers & Sailors Database (<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/index.htm>)

Spanish-American War (

Indian Wars (1892-1926)

- Indian Wars Pension Files Index
 - <https://www.fold3.com/title/1007/index-to-indian-wars-pension-files-1892-1926>

World War I (1917-1921)

2. What was their military unit?

- You probably found this information when you found them listed as a veteran in Step 1. Sometimes they ended up in two different units at different times! Take notes of what you find.
- If not, check again at:
 - Civil War Sailors & Soldiers Database <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/index.htm>
 - VA Master Index 1917-1940 <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2968245>
 - Veterans' Census of 1890 <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1877095>
- *TIP: Most African-American Civil War veterans from Giles County were in the U.S. Army in the [12th](#), [13th](#), [110th](#), or [111th](#) U.S. Colored Infantry (also called U.S. Colored Troops). Some members of the [110th](#) and [111th](#) were captured at Sulphur Branch Trestle and held as prisoners of war. Unit histories are linked.*
- It can be helpful to research their unit's history (where they were stationed/deployed/captured/engaged in battles). You can generally do this with a Google search of "110th USCT Unit History" for example.
- Sometimes it is helpful to see the unit's roster, as there may be other veterans with the same last name who served with them and could be family or previously enslaved by the same people.

3. Find their Enlistment & Service Records

4. Do they have a Pension record?

In order to get a military pension, the veteran had to prove that they were unable to support themselves by their own labor, and that they were suffering as a result of injuries, illnesses, or hardships experienced during their military service. Widows and orphaned children also applied when they could not support themselves after the loss of the veteran. Many people applied for pensions and were denied.

FIRST: Find them in the Pension indexes.

If they applied for a pension, there will be an index card with their name, unit, and pension application #, and pension certificate # (if their application was accepted).

- U.S. Civil War & Later Pension Index (1861-1917)
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1471019>
- Civil War Pension Index <https://www.fold3.com/title/57/civil-war-pensions-index>
- Indian Wars Pension File Index
<https://www.fold3.com/title/1007/index-to-indian-wars-pension-files-1892-1926>

NAME OF SOLDIER:					<i>Griggsby, Colman</i>				
NAME OF DEPENDENT:					<i>Widow, Griggsby, Candace</i> <i>Minor,</i>				
SERVICE:					<i>Co. 12 96 S Co Inf</i>				
DATE OF FILING.	CLASS.	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	STATE FROM WHICH FILED.					
<i>1911 Mar 4</i>	<i>Invalid,</i> <i>Widow,</i> <i>Minor,</i>	<i>509,989</i>	<i>433,359</i>	<i>Tenn.</i>					
ATTORNEY:									
REMARKS:					<i>4/13</i>				

4. Do they have a Pension record?

IF THEY HAVE A PENSION INDEX CARD: Find their Pension application(s).

Their index card will tell you whether it was the veteran or the widow who made the application, as well as the year of application and their application/certificate #. This information is important for finding their pension application.

Civil War Widows' Pensions are currently the only pensions that are available online. Fortunately this does include records from some companies of the 110th and 111th USCT! <https://www.fold3.com/title/24/civil-war-widows-pensions>

If your veteran is one of the many whose application has not been digitized yet, you can access it in person for free by visiting the National Archives, or you can hire a researcher to find and scan it for you.

What if you think they were part of the Confederate Army in the Civil War?

It's possible that they filed for a pension because of their service to the Confederate Army. It was not too uncommon for enslaved men to go with their owners when their owners joined the Confederate Army. Sometimes enslaved men were impressed (forced) into service to the Army as well. These enslaved men served important roles but the Confederacy DID NOT have Black soldiers.

If you think they did spend time with the Confederacy, look here:

- Tennessee had its own Confederate Pension system. You can see an index of these applications at <https://sos.tn.gov/products/tsla/tennessee-confederate-pension-applications-soldiers-widows>. A letter "C" at the beginning of the pension # indicates the applicant was Black.
- You can search Tennessee Confederate Pension Applications at FamilySearch at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1874474>.

5. What else can I find out about them?

- Go to the Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers (through the Library of Congress at <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) to search the *Pulaski Citizen*, the *Nashville Globe*, and other local newspapers for your veteran's name.
- Visit the Giles County Historical Society (located inside the Giles County Public Library) to research local records available on microfilm or in family files. (931-363-2720)
- Visit the Giles County Archives (located on the 2nd floor of the courthouse) to research local records with the help of County Archivist Barbara Nicolson. (931-363-8434)