

Revolutionary War Patriots in Alabama

A Project of the Tennessee Valley Chapter Sons of the American Revolution

Alabama wasn't even a territory much less a state when the Revolutionary War was fought. In the early 1800s, however, treaties with the Native Americans made cheap land available and brought an influx of settlers to the portion of the Mississippi territory that would become the state of Alabama. Among those were many who had fought in and supported the revolutionary cause. For some, Alabama would be their final home. For others, it became a temporary stop. This dataset is an attempt to enumerate all of those Patriots who were associated with Alabama at some point in their lives.

This project was an initiative of the Tennessee Valley Chapter Sons of the American Revolution (TVCSAR) and was one element of TVCSAR's commitment to the Alabama Veterans Museum in Athens, AL, to aid it in improving its Revolutionary War section. The dataset was designed to facilitate an improved understanding of the first veterans of the United States and other Patriots of the Revolutionary War who had a connection to the state of Alabama. Hopefully, it will prompt additional research.

The Methodology

The goal of the TVCSAR project was to identify individuals who met both the following criteria:

- **Demonstrable service to the revolutionary cause between 1775 and 1783.** It should be emphasized that the vast majority of the Patriots listed in the dataset are there because of military service in support of the American cause for independence from England. But not all! A few are deemed Patriots because of non-military patriotic service, such as furnishing material aid or services for the colonial military effort seeking independence.
- **Demonstrable connection to the state of Alabama.** The Patriot must have had at least one of several associations with Alabama. These forms of association are:
 - applied for a Revolutionary War pension in Alabama,
 - received a Revolutionary War pension in Alabama,
 - transferred a Revolutionary War pension to Alabama,
 - resided in Alabama,
 - died in Alabama,
 - is buried in Alabama, or
 - has a memorial marker in Alabama.

Any one of these seven associations with the state qualifies the Patriot for this dataset.

This large dataset was produced as a result of two time-consuming and tedious stages of research undertaken from October 2020 until June 2021. In the first stage of research, information from the two sources most often used to identify Alabama-based Revolutionary War Patriots were merged. These two sources were:

(1) Thomas Owen's *Revolutionary Soldiers in Alabama* published initially in 1911 and then updated in 1944 and

(2) a more contemporary work by Walter and Gwendolyn Dockery entitled *Alabama's American Revolutionary War Soldiers and Patriots*.

The second stage of research for this project involved taking the merged information from the Owen and Dockery efforts and comparing it with other large and widely used sources for research about Revolutionary War Patriots. These sources were:

(3) the Ancestor database of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR),

(4) the Patriot database of the National Society Sons of the American Revolution (NSSAR), and

(5) pension data found primarily at the Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters website.

Additional information on these five data sources is provided in the next section.

As a result of this two-stage process, multiple datasets were used to create a profile for each Alabama-based Patriot. However, in some instances, this process produced methodological problems. For example, on occasion, the Patriot would be identified by only a subset of the five sources. For this reason, for each Patriot the dataset identifies which of the five sources were used to create the composite picture of the Patriot.

There were other methodological problems. For some Patriots there would be missing or patently questionable information even after consulting the five sources. In other instances, the five sources would produce conflicting information about the same Patriot. When there was missing information, patently questionable information, or conflicting information, then primary research sources, such as pension applications, pension payment books, pay vouchers, muster rolls, census information, etc., were consulted. Extensive use of original pension records was especially useful. This reliance on primary sources was typically (but not always) helpful in resolving the conflicts or providing additional or more accurate information about the Patriot.

Based on this in-depth review of Patriots with an Alabama association using primary research sources, it became necessary to highlight a small percentage of Patriots who may have appeared in either Owen, Dockery, NSDAR, or NSSAR datasets. **It is highly suspect that these highlighted Patriots who are presented in *italicized* print meet both of the two essential criteria for being considered an Alabama-based Patriot.** These two criteria are: (1) a Patriot of the Revolutionary War and (2) an association with Alabama. However, these individuals were left in this dataset, because they appear in at least one of the five data sources used by

many researchers. They were highlighted rather than eliminated to assist other researchers in the future who can perhaps pursue additional sources and use other techniques of genealogical research.

Unfortunately, there are especially three issues reflected in prior sources which have created issues of reliability, if not outright errors, in labeling some persons a Revolutionary War Patriot or accurately characterizing their service. These three issues are: (1) undocumented claims of Patriot status based on family folklore generated often by relatives who lived generations after the Patriot, (2) labeling persons a Revolutionary War Patriot who had service only in the War of 1812 or during the Indian wars after 1783, or (3) "rank inflation" where a Patriot is accorded an appreciably higher military rank than what is supported by primary sources.

It must also be noted that some researchers may have errors in their databases by apparently making quick and wholehearted reliance upon two sources to justify a claim of Revolutionary War service. These two sources are the 1835 Pension Roll and the Veteran Census of 1841 derived from the 1840 Census. However, these two sources which are discussed further in the next section, also include pensioners with military service other than the Revolutionary War. Automatically assuming Revolutionary War service based on veteran or pension status claimed in these two sources can produce error.

Data Sources

As with all research projects, this effort built upon the work of others. As noted above, the five key data sources used in the TVCSAR project were:

- **Owen.** Thomas M. Owen's *Revolutionary Soldiers in Alabama* was published by the Alabama Department of Archives and History in 1911. Owen, then the director of the state archives, assembled this volume "made up from altogether reliable and authentic sources. These consist of contemporary obituaries, drawn from old newspapers files; the *Revolutionary Pension Roll*, published by the U.S. Government as Senate Document 514, 3 volumes, 23rd Congress, 1st Session, 1833-34; the *Census of Pensioners*, taken officially in 1840, and published by the U.S. Government in 1841, in one volume; inscriptions from tombstones; well authenticated data from published family histories; and the manuscript *Pension Book*, kept officially by the State Branch Bank at Mobile." In 1944 an update was published by the Department of Archives and History. An online extract of the original Owen work was available at the archives' website in 2021 (<https://archives.alabama.gov/>). The 1944 update is also available online at the website of the state archives. The Winter issue of the Alabama Historical Quarterly of 1944 also compliments the work by Owens and the state Archives.

- **Dockery.** In his role as the chairman of the Alabama Society Sons of the American Revolution (ALSSAR) Revolutionary War Graves committee, Mr. Walter Espey Dockery, with the assistance of his wife, Gwendolyn Preskitt Dockery, developed a list of Revolutionary War Patriots with ties to Alabama. The latest version of this data matrix (dated 24 Jan 2016), is available at the ALSSAR public website (<https://www.alssar.org/>). The Dockery list was an important source for particularly the gravesite and memorial information included in this TVCSAR dataset. Mr. and Mrs. Dockery also identified numerous Patriots who had not been included in the Owen document.
- **revwarapps.** This source is the Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters website (revwarapps.org). It maintains transcriptions of pertinent documents from the pension files of soldiers who participated in the southern campaign of the Revolutionary War. The vast majority of those soldiers who migrated to Alabama were veterans of the southern campaign, so these transcribed records provided key biographical and service details to enhance the TVCSAR dataset. The search engines included at the revwarapps.org website enabled us to identify more Patriots with Alabama ties, thus further expanding our dataset.
- **SAR DB.** The Patriot Research System (PRS) is maintained at the SAR public website (sar.org). PRS is a combination of the previous online NSSAR Patriot and Graves Registry, NSSAR Revolutionary War Graves Registry CD, information from the NSSAR Patriot Index CD, and additional information and updates from various State Grave Registry Databases. This database is available for the purpose of general research and assisting with the SAR membership process.
- **DAR DB.** NSDAR maintains an “Ancestor” database on its public dar.org website. **This dataset includes information on only those Patriots whose service has been proven in an accepted application for DAR membership.** This is obviously a subset of all the possible Patriots, but it is a rich resource for identifying, particularly, those Patriots whose service was not documented in pension applications. In some instances, the supporting evidence of Revolutionary War service provided with applications accepted early in the organization’s history no longer meets DAR documentation standards or conflicting information has been discovered (e.g., a single service record ascribed to two different men who have the same name). **In the spirit of full disclosure, in those instances, an “X” rather than a “●” has been placed in the DAR DB column.**

As noted above, we have referenced our utilization on those works in the following matrices by placing a “●” in the appropriate column for each Patriot. Our data sources tend to be secondary data sources, drawing their information from other primary sources. On many occasions, primary data sources like the following were consulted to provide additional information and remedy data conflicts:

- **Pension Roll of 1835.** In legislation in 1834 and 1835, U.S. Senate directed the War Department’s Commissioner of Pensions to provide a list of Revolutionary War pensioners who were or had been receiving a pension. While there had been earlier pension rolls (i.e., 1813, 1818, 1820), the 1835 was the only one to include information on veterans living in the young state of Alabama. While the intent had been to list Revolutionary War soldiers, the roll includes those who served in later conflicts. These non-Revolutionary War individuals appear primarily in the section titled “Statement Showing the Name, Rank, etc., of Invalid Pensioners residing in the State of Alabama.” In reviewing the Pension Roll of 1835 and attempting to align these names with pension applications, it has become apparent that there are “differences in spelling” of both first and last names between these two primary sources. These inconsistencies have been noted in the TVCSAR dataset.
- **Veterans Census of 1840.** As part of the enumeration process for the 1840 census, census takers were to ask whether there were any military pension recipients in the household and record the name and age of the pensioner. The title of the column is “Pensioners for Revolutionary or military service, included in the foregoing” (foregoing meaning those individuals who have been enumerated in the columns to the left of this “pensioner” column). It is obvious that this column is not limited to Revolutionary War pensioners. Pensioners from post-Revolutionary War military actions, like the War of 1812 and the Florida Indian war, were, correctly, included in this column on the census. Additionally, as with all census records, the information is “self reported;” census takers simply wrote what they were told (and spelled the names as best they could.) Ages were probably a “best guess” in many cases. For some of those listed in this column on the census, no pension has been found. These individuals are still included in our dataset because they may have very well been a veteran of the Revolutionary War but did not receive a pension. An individual census taker may have just asked if there was anyone in the household who had served during the Revolutionary War and never made the “pensioner distinction.”

In addition, the online findagrave.com site was used to provide or confirm additional information relative to burial and marker location.

The Final Product

This TVCSAR project resulted in records for more than 1200 individuals. The data are presented in the form of two large data matrices. The first matrix organizes Alabama-based Patriots alphabetically by their last name. In this list there is one entry or row for each Patriot. The second matrix organizes Alabama-based Patriots alphabetically based on the name of the county or counties with which the Patriot had a connection. In this county list the same Patriot may appear more than once, since a Patriot may have had some association with more than one county.

In the data matrices, an effort was also made to manage two other problems endemic to a database of this type. These two problems were: (1) different spellings of the same Patriot’s name and (2) name changes or boundary realignments of counties since the Patriot would have been there. This database often lists the multiple spellings of the Patriot’s last name with a preference for the spelling as the name appeared in a primary source document. Regarding county names and realignments, entries in this database use the name of the county as of 2021. Names of Alabama counties no longer used, such as Benton, Baine, Baker, Hancock, Sanford and Jones, are included only as parenthetical notes to correlate with original data sources.

As with all very large data matrices, errors, both substantive and clerical, will be discovered. It is important to be cognizant that data were generated and entered for more than 18,000 cells of information. And, as every serious researcher of history and genealogy knows, tomorrow will produce yet another nugget of reliable information that clarifies our understanding about yesterday.

Acknowledgements

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