

R evolutional War-Related Research Problems?

These Articles May Help

by Henry B. Hoff

DO YOU SUSPECT THAT A REVOLUTIONARY WAR ancestor changed sides? Or that his family traveled during the war? If he was a patriot and received a pension, do you wonder what further records might exist? Does information in the pension not agree with your research? If you have questions about your Revolutionary War ancestor, you may want to look at articles dealing with these situations to see if the authors' sources and methods can help your own research.

In "Nathaniel Ruggles, Setauket Spy,"^[1] the author presents the evidence for one man named Nathaniel Ruggles, first a Loyalist, then a patriot. Briefly, a Nathaniel Ruggles appeared through 1780 as a Loyalist in Setauket, on the North Shore of Long Island. But in 1781 a Nathaniel Ruggles of Setauket was recruited to be part of George Washington's spy ring, operating on Long Island Sound. While this evidence, combined with two later wills for Nathaniel Ruggles, suggests there were two different men of that name, the author proves that there was only one.

During the Revolutionary War era, official passes were needed for travel by civilians, especially from one colony to another. If you have a family that appears to have moved, the head of the family (often a wife or widow) may have made an application for a pass, giving reasons for the request. "Applications for Passes, 1776–1790, Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Governments,"^[2] appears to be the only group of these records in print. Often a woman was seeking to join her soldier husband or relatives, and the applications give names, places, and relationships.

Details contained in pension-related documents at the National Archives may contain information essential for your research, as "Follow the Money: Tracking Revolutionary War Army Pension Payments"^[3] illustrates. Particularly important for genealogical research are Selected Final Payment Vouchers, 1818–1864. If the final payment was made to the soldier's widow, the names of his surviving children and their places of residence were included. Unfortunately, these vouchers have been filmed or abstracted for only some states.^[4]

Statements in pension applications may not always be true. Under an 1836 law a widow qualified for a pension, only if she had married her soldier before his term of service expired (this cutoff was later extended). In "The Fraud of Charity (Littlefield) (Niles) Niles,"^[5] the author shows that Charity posed as the first wife of her first husband, Jeremiah Niles, in order to obtain pension benefits. This deception required her to change her first name and alter her age. Not surprisingly, the fraud was detected, but there is no evidence she or her co-conspirator (her son) were punished.

These examples show the value of reading articles on families or places that are not our own, learning from the research of others, becoming aware of less familiar sources, and investigating all possibilities. ♦

Notes

¹ Willis H. White, "Nathaniel Ruggles, Setauket Spy," *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 97:2 (June 2009):131–36.

² "Applications for Passes, 1776–1790, Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Governments," *The Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine* 44:2 (Fall/Winter 2005):169–84 through 45:4 (Fall/Winter 2008):361–80. Almost all applications were made between 1776 and 1783.

³ Claire Prechtel-Klusgens, "Follow the Money: Tracking Revolutionary War Army Pension Payments," *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 40:4 (Winter 2008): 46–57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55, n. 10–11. Not mentioned was a published volume of abstracted vouchers for Virginia and West Virginia by Alycon Trubey Pierce.

⁵ Anne McKee Niles, "The Fraud of Charity (Littlefield) (Niles) Niles and Her Son Henry Littlefield Niles of Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Illinois," *The American Genealogist* 77:2 (April 2002):94–101. For an example of widespread fraud, see Linn Baiker, "John Neely and the Contested Revolutionary War Pensions of Central West Virginia," *First Landing: Newsletter of the Virginia Beach Genealogical Society* 21:2 (May 2004):18–20.

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