America at 250! - Revolutionary War Genealogy Overview

A presentation by Scott Norrick to the RCGS membership, 13 January, 2026

Scott presented on Revolutionary War genealogy, discussing the background of the war, its key events, and the composition of the American population at the time. He emphasized the importance of working backwards in time when researching Revolutionary War ancestors and highlighted that no single source contains all the information needed. Scott also covered the various groups involved in the Revolution, including patriots, loyalists, and often overlooked groups like women, blacks, slaves, Native Americans, and foreigners. He concluded by reviewing the timeline of events leading up to and during the war, noting that the population of the 13 colonies at the time was approximately 2.7 million, with a majority being of European descent.

Revolutionary War Ancestor Research Tips

Scott Norrick discussed the various ways ancestors could have shown patriotic service during the American Revolution, beyond just military service. He explained the distinction between Continental Army soldiers and local militia soldiers, and mentioned that many Loyalists, women, African Americans, Native Americans, and foreigners also participated in the war. Scott recommended starting genealogical research on Revolutionary War ancestors with well-known websites like Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and Fold3.com, as they contain extensive records related to the war. He also noted that most records from the National Archives have now been digitized and are available on these websites.

Revolutionary War Military Records Overview

The National Archives in Washington, D.C. holds military records for Continental Army soldiers, including payroll and supply records, though some were destroyed in the War of 1812. The Archives maintains digitized records of Revolutionary War Compiled Service Records, Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, and Founding Fathers documents. For ancestors who served in state or local militias, researchers should consult state archives, libraries, or historical societies, with Virginia having the most extensive record sets. Pension files from the 1800s contain detailed personal information about Revolutionary War veterans, while compiled military service records provide information about Continental Army service.

Revolutionary War Genealogy Research Overview

Scott presented a detailed overview of resources for researching Revolutionary War ancestors, including state records, genealogical societies like DAR and SAR, and online databases. He shared specific examples from his own research and recommended books, websites, and historical records to explore. The group discussed bounty land grants, with Scott explaining that while initial rules prohibited selling the land, many soldiers eventually did so or passed it to relatives. Ruth requested the handout with links be updated and shared with the library, and Scott agreed to resend it. The session concluded with Ruth announcing the next meeting would focus on Native American research.

A program outline with many other useful links can be found at: Scotts Presentation Page (https://www.rcgswi.org/america-at-250---researching-your-revolutuonary-war-ancestors.html)