

# An Annotated Bibliography of the Roster of Prince William County Soldiers in the American Revolution

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## Introduction and Background

The goal of this project was to create a roster of Revolutionary War soldiers who hailed from or entered military service in Prince William County, Virginia. The final Roster first includes the names of the veterans and their personal connection to Prince William. Next, the Roster details the captains, commanders, or regiments that veterans recall joining, with another column for any regiments inferred by further research that might clear ambiguity on incomplete personal recollections. Further, the Roster includes veteran service terms, records of online burial records, and the geographical locations of burial sites. Finally, each veteran entry includes associated source material and notes. The project also yielded an Index of Revolutionary commanders mentioned frequently in the data, as well as a GIS map of veteran gravesites.

In order to build a complete profile of soldiers, the Roster pulls from a plethora of source material. Perhaps one of the most prominent sources of information are pension applications, which account for over 200 of the entries on the roster. Beginning in 1818, Continental Line veterans became eligible to apply for federal pensions in recognition of their military service, being awarded either monetarily or with the transfer of land. As of 1820, veterans also had to demonstrate financial need in order to successfully file, and as of 1832, veterans with militia service could also apply.<sup>1</sup> With the Act of 1836, widows could apply for pension on behalf of their deceased husbands. Pension applications provide invaluable information about each soldier, as they include personal accounts of service, genealogical and geographical details of their lives, and often birth and death dates. These resources are perhaps the most thorough of those utilized within the Roster, with their depth comparable to what we might presently refer to as an oral history. In addition to pension applications, the Roster also makes use of various recruit lists and rosters, including the Chesterfield and Noncommissioned Size Rolls, *List of Recruits*, among others. All sources were either obtained digitally or at the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center (RELIC), located at the Manassas Central Library.

## Limitations

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to this project is the physical nature of the original source material. Although many relevant archives are digitized, these are not exempt to issues of illegibility, torn or missing pages, and misspellings. In addition, we can only assume that a significant quantity of resources have been lost entirely in the 250 years since the American Revolution. Another challenge inherent to this project is a lack of specificity regarding time, location, or commanding regiment in military rosters, lists, or accounts. These ambiguities arise sometimes as issues of memory and, in other times, when the writer assumes background knowledge on the part of the reader. To provide an example of the latter, it is common for pension applications to refer to a “Captain Ewell,” when we know of a Charles Ewell, Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service. “Revolutionary War Pension Files: Tips and a Guide for the Curious (U.S. National Park Service).” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 8 Aug. 2023, [www.nps.gov/articles/000/what-might-you-find-in-the-revolutionary-war-pension-files.htm](http://www.nps.gov/articles/000/what-might-you-find-in-the-revolutionary-war-pension-files.htm).

Winder Ewell, Jesse Ewell, and so on, each with their own unique service records. Issues of memory in particular, either on the part of the veteran or the scribe, often lead to contradictory accounts across or within individual resources. At times, the researcher might be left to wonder whether there are two Revolutionary War veterans, of the same name and from the same county, who are two different people.

This Roster avoids speculation in such cases when possible, instead acknowledging inconsistencies or uncertainties wherever they appear. When there is enough preliminary information from primary source material, researchers can sometimes refer to [A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations in the American Revolution, 1774-1787](#), by E.M. Sanchez-Saavedra for clarification. The Roster makes frequent use of this resource with the column “Guide Page,” which includes the page number of Sanchez-Saavedra's book (or instructs researchers to refer to the Roster Index) from which inferences in the associated row were conducted. Even so, the Roster includes blank cells or question marks where the entries remain incomplete after crosschecking.

### **Recommended Resources**

#### **A SIZE ROLL OF NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND PRIVATES OF VIRGINIA Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris. Revised 5 April 2021.**

This transcribed, digital Size Roll is taken from a book of photocopies at the Library of Richmond. Size rolls document each soldier's height, appearance, birthplace, place of enlistment, and sometimes service term. This particular size roll lists “noncommissioned officers and privates who were processed into the Continental Line of Virginia at Chesterfield Court House, Powhatan Court House, Carter's Ferry, Albemarle Old Court House, Cumberland Old Court House, and Winchester Barracks. Most of these soldiers entered service in September or October 1780 following the capture of virtually the entire Virginia Continental Line at Charleston SC on 12 May 1780, and in March and April of 1781 after the Battle of Guilford Courthouse NC on 15 Mar 1781” (1). This resource includes hundreds of entries with varying levels of specificity. One of the limitations of this resource is that the original writers did not use a standard naming convention for various inputs, including enlistment locations and birthplaces. For example, “Prince William County” appears in variations like “P. William,” “Prince Wm,” “Prince w,” and “P Will'm.” With this in mind, the CTRL+F feature does not operate as usefully as it might with other digital resources. In order to accumulate the 22 entries from the resource in the Roster associated with Prince William County, a search was conducted using nine spelling variations of “Prince William County.” That being said, it is possible that, with the resource being over one hundred pages long, questionably labeled entries might have been missed.

#### **Bish, James. "Prince William County Virginia's Revolution: Its Political and Military Leaders." *Journal of Prince William County History*, vol. 6.**

This article, taken from the local *Journal of Prince William County History*, recounts the lives of Revolutionary War commanders involved in Prince William County including, among others, Jesse Ewell and Thomas Blackburn. This resource is incredibly helpful for researchers seeking to clarify details of veteran service, who might simply name their commander and not

their regiment. In particular, Bish's article draws distinctions between Henry Lee II and his son, Henry "Light Horse" Lee III, who both are commanders; Veterans often will only name a "Henry Lee" without being more specific. The commander profiles also provide context to the formation of various regiments, building a more complete picture of colonial life and politics at the time of mass enlistments.

**Dorman, J. F. (1973-1989). *Virginia Revolutionary Pension Applications*. (Volumes 18, 35, and 39.)**

Much like the *RevWarApps* website, Dorman's books offer the testimonies of Revolutionary veterans applying for pensions. The Roster made use of the three of Dorman's volumes that mention Prince William County: 18, 35, and 39. Luckily for the researcher, these volumes are set aside specifically and their relevant sections highlighted at RELIC at the Manassas Central Library. That being said, as with *RevWarApps*, the appearance of the term "Prince William County" does not necessarily indicate matched criterion. Still, these volumes offered four entries for the Roster, two of which also appear on *RevWarApps*.

**Heinegg, Paul. "Free African Americans in Colonial North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina." *Free African Americans in Colonial Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina*, 2020, [freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia-NC.htm](http://freeafricanamericans.com/Virginia-NC.htm).**

*Free African Americans in Colonial Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina* includes a number of genealogical lists taken from a variety of resources. The site is organized by last name, with a profile summary for each included person. For those genealogies based in Prince William County, Heinegg referred to microfilm reels from the Library of Virginia and from Ruth and Sam Sparacio's [Prince William County, Virginia Order Book Abstracts 1752-1767](#). Though this resource only includes one Prince William Revolutionary War veteran, Thomas Cole, it is still an excellent source for researchers interested in Southern genealogy. For researchers interested more specifically in Free Revolutionary War veterans, Heinegg's other work, *Free African Americans in the Revolutionary War*, might be more pertinent.

**Heinegg, Paul. "Free African Americans in the Revolutionary War." *Free African Americans in Colonial North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland and Delaware*, [freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm](http://freeafricanamericans.com/revolution.htm). Accessed 31 July 2024.**

Heinegg's *Free African Americans in the Revolutionary War* includes information taken directly from the *RevWarApps* website. Heinegg's site documents the 900 freed African Americans from North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware, with Virginia representing 420 entries. Of these, a search concluded that five of these were veterans from Prince William County (Aaron Brister, Francis Cole, Thomas Cole, Moses Grimes, and Charles Lucas), of whom three could be corroborated with other sources in the Roster. This resource, because it takes information from Revolutionary pension applications, is an excellent reference for biographical information. These profiles often include details of veteran households and family members.

**Hopkins, William Lindsay. *Virginia Revolutionary War Land Grant Claims, 1783-1850 (Rejected)*. Iberian Publishing Company, 1988.**

Hopkins' book lists claims made by Revolutionary War veterans seeking land grants following their service. Land grants, particularly in the Midwest, were a common form of pension following the Revolutionary War: the Roster concludes that at least 36 veterans died in Kentucky, likely after having received land there. Though the claims in this particular volume were all rejected, the biographical information provided by veterans is incredibly valuable to researchers. This work appears in 24 entries in the Roster. Many of these already appeared in other resources, but *Land Grant Claims* provides essential information for filling in gaps in biographical and military records.

**Jackson, Luther Porter. *Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the Revolutionary War*. Guide Quality Press, 1944.**

*Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the Revolutionary War* includes a collection of essays and roster lists of Virginia African American veterans of the Revolutionary War. This book only yielded a single entry for the Prince William County Roster, Jesse Kelly, though it includes 22 pages of recruitment lists. According to the book, Kelly “was seized by the recruiting officers to serve in the war despite the fact that as an apprentice to one Lewis Lee his term of service had not expired at the time of the war” (39). The author, Luther Porter Jackson, is known for his civil rights work in the Commonwealth. He is a founder of the Petersburg League of Negro Voters and led African American organizations throughout Virginia in opposition to Jim Crow laws.<sup>2</sup>

**Library of Virginia. "Order Book Abstracts (1778-1779)." *Northern Virginia Genealogy*, vol. 5, no. 1-4, 2000.**

The Library of Virginia publishes the Northern Virginia Genealogy magazine quarterly, and this particular issue takes from the Prince William County Court Order Book from 1778-1785. According to the Magazine, much of the Order Book disappeared from the Manassas Courthouse during the Civil War and was auctioned off years later page-by-page when the Library of Virginia located it again. With that being said, the Court Minutes are definitely not as complete as they once were. Still, this resource includes 17 soldiers who were born or enlisted in Prince William County, sometimes with mention of their regiments. In addition to the magazine itself, RELIC has a pre-prepared 2-page summary of the relevant Prince William entries from the magazine. The veteran summaries are brief; for example, they read “Brown, William took oath... first Lieutenant in Capt. Bernard Hooes company” and “Hines, Thomas a soldier in the Continental Army.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Luther Porter Jackson.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 26 July 2024, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther\\_Porter\\_Jackson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_Porter_Jackson).

**List of Recruits from the Library of Virginia, Auditor of Public Accounts (RG 48), Militia Lists 1779-1782, Prince William County, 1781.**

Transcribed by Joan Peters, this recruit list yielded 32 entries for the Roster. The original document is a “List of Money paid to Several Recruits paid in Prince William County Ap 1781.” There is a level of uncertainty with these entries, because it is only clear based on this list that recruits resided in Prince William during the War in 1781, not that they always resided there. Still, they are included in the Roster because many of these entries appear again beside other corroborating sources showing connections to Prince William County. According to this list, veterans were compensated according to their length of service, though not necessarily proportionally: Ten months of service was awarded \$4000, three years \$8000, and the entire War \$12000.

**Peters, Joan W. CG. "Prince William County in the Revolution: Identifying Revolutionary Soldiers." *Prince William Reliquary*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2008.**

In this article from the Prince William County Reliquary, Peters pulls from County court minutes to create a list of Revolutionary soldiers with ties to Prince William. This list not only often makes mention of the regiments in which the veterans served, but also offers up information about their lives post-war. Soldiers in the court minutes recount injuries sustained during the war and disputes with neighbors over land and cattle. While Revolutionary pension applications usually only recount the pension requests made by veterans, this article divulges their lives as newly-pensioned landowners: for example, the famed Colonel William Grayson “brought a complaint against Benjamin Scanland for impressing more beeves from his estate than allowed by law” (30). Given this information, researchers can continue to build a whole-life picture of the veterans of the American Revolution.

**Peters, Joan W. C.G. *The Third Virginia Regiment of Foot 1776-1778, With Flags Flying and Drums Beating. Volume One: A History*, Heritage Books, 2008.**

Peters’ book describes the history of the Third Virginia Regiment of Foot, the regiment of over 59 veterans in the Roster. The Third Regiment of Foot arose as a conglomerate of various military organizations, in response to “Lord Dunmore’s attacks in the winter months of 1775 and early 1776.” With mentions of the Regiment so prevalent throughout Prince William County Revolutionary War research, this resource is helpful to researchers seeking to verify or clarify veteran testimonies. The book is primarily history with photocopies scattered throughout of payrolls and muster rolls, and even includes the testimonies of the 23 men of the Regiment sent to assist Col Daniel Morgan’s rifle company at Saratoga. Perhaps most helpful is the book’s index at the end of the volume, to which researchers can refer to find information on specific commanders.

**Sanchez-Saavedra, E. M. *A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations in the American Revolution, 1774-1787*. Heritage Books, 2007.**

A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations is an invaluable resource to researchers interested in the Commonwealth's military activity during the Revolutionary period. Sanchez-Saavedra recognizes in their book the ambiguity inherent to interpretation of Revolutionary-era documents, writing that "confusion has often resulted in vague and inexact references to 'Weedon's Brigade,' 'Morgan's men,' and 'the Virginia Line.' The present volume attempts to present as complete and accurate an account as possible of Virginia's military participation in the Revolution" (viii). The book meticulously recounts the commanders associated with the many Virginia military organizations which, as mentioned earlier, can aid in contextualizing veterans' accounts. Sanchez-Saavedra highlights both the organizations themselves as well as the chronology of wartime events that led to their creation, adding further circumstantial framing. The book draws from a number of sources to build this volume, namely Virginia's Soldiers in the Revolution by C.A. Flagg and W.O. Waters, List of the Revolutionary Soldiers of Virginia by Hamilton J. Eckenrode, and Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution by John H. Gwathmey. A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations walks through the various iterations of the Virginia infantry, continental, and militia regiments, the Virginia State Navy, and various other special units. Within the appendices, the volume includes a *Calendar of Unit Names and Variants* and a complete *Works Cited* sections. The book's concluding index was especially useful for the creation of the Roster, as it gives researchers the ability to track every military appearance of any particular commander name.

**"Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters." *RevWarApps*, [revwarapps.org](http://revwarapps.org).**

The source of over two hundred entries in the Roster, *RevWarApps* is an essential resource for researchers interested in the soldiers of the American Revolution. *RevWarApps* is a database of transcribed Revolutionary pension applications which, as discussed in the Introduction, provide highly detailed biographical information about veterans. The website obtains its records from the National Archives, microfilm from local libraries, HeritageQuest Online, Fold3, and Ancestry.com. Like the Chesterfield and Noncommissioned Size Rolls, *RevWarApps* pensions were transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris. Harris' notes are particularly helpful to clearing up questions of specificity: in many cases, Harris has already done the difficult work of crosschecking other source material, as reflected by his annotations at the end of many of the transcribed applications. Applications typically include a testimony by the veteran (if they are filing themselves), a cross examination, and witness testimony if they choose to provide witnesses. A difficulty inherent to using *RevWarApps* is the limitations of the Search feature. In order to locate relevant applicants for the Roster, a search was conducted using the term "Prince William County." However, with the applications themselves being incredibly detailed, the appearance of the term by itself does not necessarily indicate relevance to the Roster, i.e. those who hailed from or entered service in Prince William County. It is not altogether uncommon to come across an application where a veteran was simply married in the County, had a family member or friend living there, or passed through on a tour. Still, these

applications appear within the search results, making for a slower process when one must also do the work of establishing relevance. In spite of this, given the plethora of information that Revolutionary pensions offer, this resource was the most useful when later determining gravesite information because of the included age and genealogical details.

**THE CHESTERFIELD SIZE ROLL: SOLDIERS WHO ENTERED THE  
CONTINENTAL LINE OF VIRGINIA AT CHESTERFIELD COURTHOUSE  
AFTER 1 SEPTEMBER 1780** Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris.  
**Revised 3 March 2021**

Like the Noncommissioned Size Roll, the Chesterfield Size Roll documents a list and attributes Virginia Revolutionary War soldiers. According to the transcribed document, taken from the Library of Virginia, “The size rolls transcribed here are for revolutionary soldiers who were processed into the Continental Line of Virginia at Chesterfield Courthouse during Sep 1780 and afterward... The recruits rendezvoused at Fredericksburg, the city of Richmond, Winchester, Accomack courthouse, Alexandria, or Staunton, then continued on to Chesterfield Courthouse, where they were transferred into the Continental line” (1). Like the Noncommissioned Size Roll, the Chesterfield Size Roll also has somewhat limited use because of its lack of standard naming conventions. That being said, a search of the document produced 23 entries for the Roster.

**United State Census Office. *A Census of Pensioners for Revolutionary or Military Services: With Their Names, Ages, and Places of Residence... under the Act for Taking the Sixth Census; Bound with a General Index, Prepared by the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Genealogical Publishing Company, 1973.***

The Roster pulls from just a few entries in this 1840 Census of Pensioners to locate Prince William County soldiers. John Sullivan, John Gill, and Hugh Davis all appear on this list with their respective ages, and Davis and Gill appear in other source materials as well. The Census lists pensioners from many Virginia counties and is arranged according to District.

## **Conclusion**

These fifteen sources are all incredibly valuable to the researcher trying to conceptualize a clear picture of colonial and wartime life in Prince William County. Despite this, certain questions remain of the Roster as it stands: What resources were missed in this initial investigation? How do we fill in the “gaps” that exist in the Roster? Lastly, it is important to note that certain important stories are inevitably missed by these resources. While a cursory investigation includes at least six African Americans in the Roster, there is very little information about the circumstances surrounding their enlistments. For example, Luther Jackson tells us that Jesse Kelly was an African American slave forced to serve in the War against his will, though we don’t know whether this might have also happened to other veterans on the Roster. Indeed, the Roster in and of itself does not wholly reflect the grief and sacrifice- whether voluntary or not- inherent to all American soldiers in this period. Included in Prince William soldier William Benson’s pension application is a letter he wrote during the war, reading “Poor Dear Colonel Edmonds[...] the last time I seed [sic] him was at Fauquier court house, and we drank som[e] grog together for the last time that I ever seed [sic] him in this world or ever shall again he is



gone to the other world” (revwarapps). Benson’s application includes a list of soldiers in his regiment, many of whom simply have the word “dead” next to their names. While a veteran roster might be helpful for statistical or genealogical purposes, each veteran has their own deep and personal story. Perhaps the Roster associated with this bibliography can serve as a jumping-off point for researchers, if they wish, to investigate these stories. In the meantime, researchers can begin to imagine the courage and heroism of 337 local veterans who fought for the America that we know now.