

JOHN JACOB KRAMER:

CASE STUDY OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY AMONG REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIERS



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Disambiguation & Ancestral Identifiers

Identifying the differences between men of the same name is a challenge. We must remove the ambiguity of their currently known identity with research and by resolving conflicts. Basic identifiers that help distinguish between men of the same name are included in the list below. With these we can place each man in context and compare and contrast between them.

- Location
- Occupation (including military service)
- Social & economic status
- Handwriting & literacy
- Family & community
- Religion

Analysis & Proof

The three pillars of ancestral disambiguation are COMMUNITY, RECORDS, and METHODOLOGY.

Community	Records	Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spouse(s)• Children• Parents• Siblings• In-Laws• Church• Neighbors• Friends• Associates• Enemies• Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vital Records• Census• Probate• Newspaper• Military• Church• Taxes• Land & property• City directories• Equity/Chancery• DNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timelines• Research Logs• Maps• Tables• Analysis• Historical context• Gather signatures• Compare laws• GPS• Resolve conflicts• Writing

Research Strategy

Researching men of the same name takes more effort, for the simple reason that if you have two, three, or six men of the same name, you have that many more people to research. Be patient and pay attention to details.

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[Community](#)

Ancestors are more than names and dates, they are also identified as part of their community. Look at the records of your ancestors' family, friends, and even enemies to discover additional facts. Your ancestor's name may not be in the index, but it could be in the record created for someone else. Review more about researching with the F.A.N. Principle (Friends, Associates, and Neighbors), a concept introduced by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Bibliography, 8).

[Records](#)

Pursue a variety of records to find your ancestor. Seeking to learn about and use records that you are unfamiliar with is especially important. Look through online catalogs of the state archive, state historical society, or local historical society or other repositories for those unique records only available onsite. Find out which records may be inaccessible online and make a plan to obtain them (email, mail, phone, hire another researcher in the area, or travel).

[Methodology](#)

Use tools that give you the ability to analyze the data you are collecting from different angles. Effective use of research logs, tables, learning the context behind the laws and history surrounding your ancestors' lives can give you improved focus for your research strategy. Familiarize yourself with the points 3, 4, and 5 of the [Genealogical Proof Standard](#) (described at the [Board for Certification® website](#)). Points 3 and 4 discuss thorough analysis & correlation and the resolution of conflicting evidence. Point 5 covers one of the most underused methods and one of the most useful: writing. Start writing about your ancestor, the research, and why you think you have or have not solved a point. It does not need to be formal at first, pretend you are telling the story of your research to a friend and modify it later.

[Analysis: Tips](#)

- Compare dates & locations carefully – use tables
- Confirm all facts – believe no unsourced fact
- Recheck sources
- Read. Every. Word.
- Compare and contrast facts [in writing](#).

Revolutionary Pension Basics

Pensions were first recommended for Revolutionary War service by Congress in 1776. The Continental Congress, unable to fund any pensions however, relied on the individual states to qualify applicants and provide funds for soldiers within their borders. The federal government took over paying the pensions beginning in July 1789. The rules governing pension eligibility and benefits evolved dramatically over time and with each war. Not all pensions applied for by veterans are extant, for example, many Revolutionary War and early War of 1812 applications were destroyed by fire in 1800 and 1814.

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Pension laws evolved over time, sometimes dramatically, until the passing of the military pension General Law System in 1862. The amount of the benefit ranged depending on the soldier's rank, degree of disability, or need, and benefits also grew slowly with the standard of living of the time. Widows were required to show proof of a legal marriage with the soldier, sometimes within a set date range. Widows who remarried relinquished their right to continue to collect benefits; pensions may alternately be given to the orphan (under age 16) of the deceased soldier. Pension files are currently part of [Record Group \(RG\) 15, Records of the Veterans Administration](#), at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. (NARA). Revolutionary pension files (selected records, NARA microfilm M804) are online at [Fold3](#) and [FamilySearch](#).

[Military Pension Vocabulary](#)

Alleged	Written on pension papers when proof of service was unconfirmed.
Bounty	A cash amount paid or promised to the soldier upon enlistment as an inducement to serve. Not the same as a pension or bounty-land.
Disability	The definition of a qualifying disability changed over time. For most pensions, it involved proven injuries obtained during wartime that resulted in the soldier being unable to support his family. Later expanded to degrees of disability and then to persons disabled due to diseases contracted in service.
Indigent Service Pension	Granted to a soldier based on financial need and a set time of service in the military rather than on disability.
Invalid Pension	Granted to a soldier based on wounds, injuries, or disease contracted during service. (Invalid meaning injured rather than rejected for lack of validity; IN-valid, not in-VAL-id.)
“Old Wars”	Generally considered service in wars after the Revolution and before the American Civil War, to include Indian Wars, Barbary Wars, War of 1812, etc.
Orphan	Fatherless child of deceased soldier, usually under age 16, who may be eligible for benefits based on the father's service. Mother may still be living.
Pension	Financial benefits awarded (usually a set amount on a monthly basis) to a veteran or the veteran's widow or orphans based on military service.
Private Act	Successful petition to Congress for approval of a military pension resulting in a private bill passed to allow benefits to a named veteran or dependent.
Record Group (RG)	Sets of records transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) are divided by the name of the original organization or government agency that created the records and assigned a 'record group' (or 'RG') number within the archives system. For example, records of the Department of Veterans Affairs are in RG 15.
Service Pension	Granted in recognition of military service for a specific amount of time or for involvement in military actions; no proof of need or injury is required.
State Pension	Financial benefits to military veterans or their dependents from the state government, not federal. Some in Revolutionary and 1812 conflicts as well as Confederate southern states after the Civil War.

[Private Congressional Acts for Pensioners](#)

When a soldier's or widow's application for pension benefits was rejected, many next petitioned Congress to seek a private bill allowing their claim. If approved, a private bill would be enacted to overturn the pension office decision. A well-written [article by Charles E. Shamel](#) about private claims and legislation is recommended reading for this subject (Bibliography, 27). Another important reference

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is Bockstruck's *Revolutionary War Pensions... by Private Acts of Congress to 1905* (Bibliography, 12); many private acts are included.

[Check the Indexes](#)



Search the *Congressional Journals* and *Statutes at Large* at the Library of Congress *Century of Lawmaking*, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/>.

Use "House Journal" on the right.

Another index is available through ProQuest, usually available at your local library.

At NARA, speak with or email a [Legislative Branch archivist](#), give them the Congressional number, session number, and the committee name related to the

House Bill or proposal. Request a pull of any original records relating to that petition if you are at NARA in person or for the records to be copied and sent to you (fees for copying or digitization vary).

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