

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES  
OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

***ARCHIVES INFORMATION CIRCULAR***

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**NORTH CAROLINA'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR PAY RECORDS**

Preserved at the North Carolina State Archives, the Revolutionary pay vouchers and certificates, as well as the Revolutionary Army accounts were records maintained by the Treasurer and Comptroller. As copies of these records are frequently requested by individuals or agencies seeking genealogical information or information for applications to patriotic societies, for grave markers, or for other reasons, this circular will cover some of the frequently asked questions. In addition, please see our ["Information by Mail"](#) sheet.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

During the Revolutionary War years, 1775-1783, there was very little hard cash (specie) in the new states. Paper money (currency) was printed both by the Continental Congress and by the individual states, but rarely, if ever, was there sufficient specie or bullion in the Continental or state treasuries to back up these issues of paper money. The saying, "Not worth a Continental," is based on the public lack of faith in the paper money which was issued between the outbreak of the Revolution in 1775 and the ratification of the United States Constitution in 1789. A depreciation in the value of paper money resulted in an inflationary situation. At one point, near the end of the war, one dollar in gold or silver was worth \$800 in paper money.

Notwithstanding their weak financial condition, however, the newly independent states were confronted with enemy troops to fight. Fighting--then as now--was an expensive operation. Soldiers had to be paid, and weapons, ammunition, clothing, food and transportation had to be provided.

**PAY VOUCHERS AND CERTIFICATES**

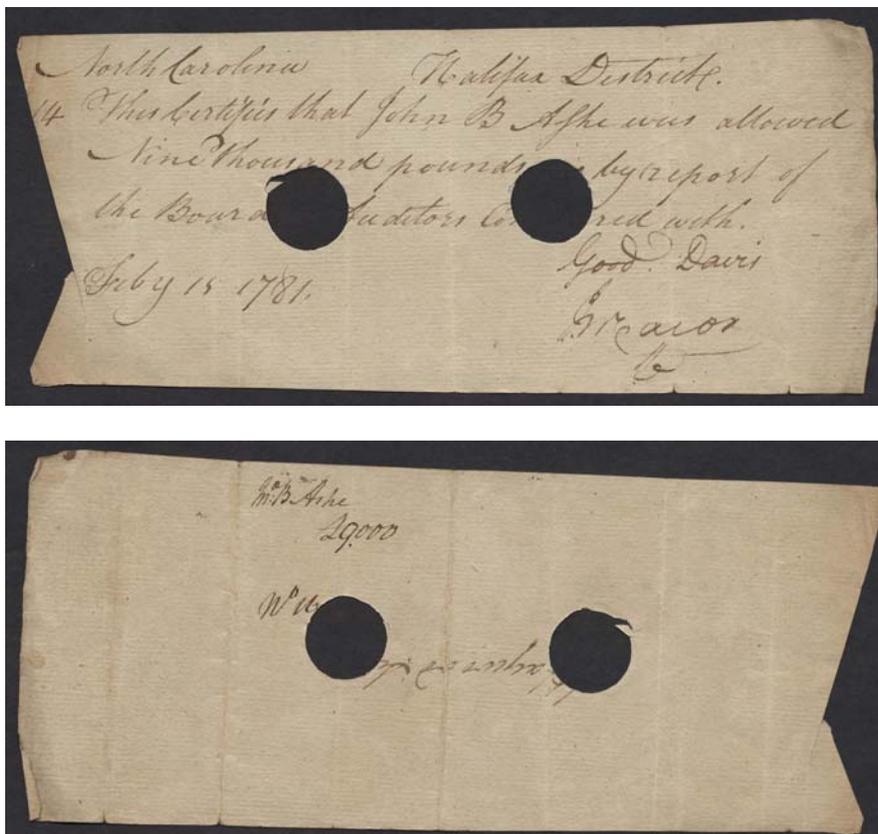
With little or no gold or silver in their treasuries, yet obliged to provide for necessary expenditures, North Carolina and the other states resorted to a complicated system of credit notes. In North Carolina this did not represent a new system, having been used during Governor William Tryon's administration (1765-1771) to defray the expenses of the War of the Regulation.

Very simply stated, the following procedure was used: In place of hard cash for military service, soldiers were issued vouchers or certificates as written promises that they would be paid a specified amount in hard cash at some time in the future. The same system was adopted to pay for goods or other services that were bought or impressed as the war progressed. (As a comparison, the situation would have been the same had the U. S. Government decided to pay its soldiers in World War II in savings bonds instead of dollars.)

Why did the state adopt the voucher-certificate system instead of issuing larger quantities of paper money? There was little public faith in paper money. As the value of paper money decreased, it became

virtually impossible to correlate the value of goods or services in terms of hard cash by means of paper money. Merchants were unwilling to trade goods which were worth \$1 in gold for \$800 in paper money if there was a chance that the following week the value of paper money would depreciate to a ratio of \$1 gold-\$1,000 paper.

There were at least two other reasons for the state's choice of the voucher-certificate system: First, the system permitted the government to defer actual payment of the costs of the war to some future time. Most certificates stated that they would not be paid for one, two, or more years, by which time (it was hoped) there would be gold and silver in the treasury. To lessen the inconvenience of such deferred payments, vouchers and certificates were designed to draw interest. A second reason for the system was that certificates and vouchers could be issued in any amount. No matter how worthless the paper currency was, it still had to be printed, and such printings had to be authorized by the legislature. On the other hand, an army passing through could issue a voucher or certificate for goods purchased or impressed simply by completing the details of name, date, amount, etc, on a printed form—or lacking a printed form, the entire certificate could be written out in longhand.

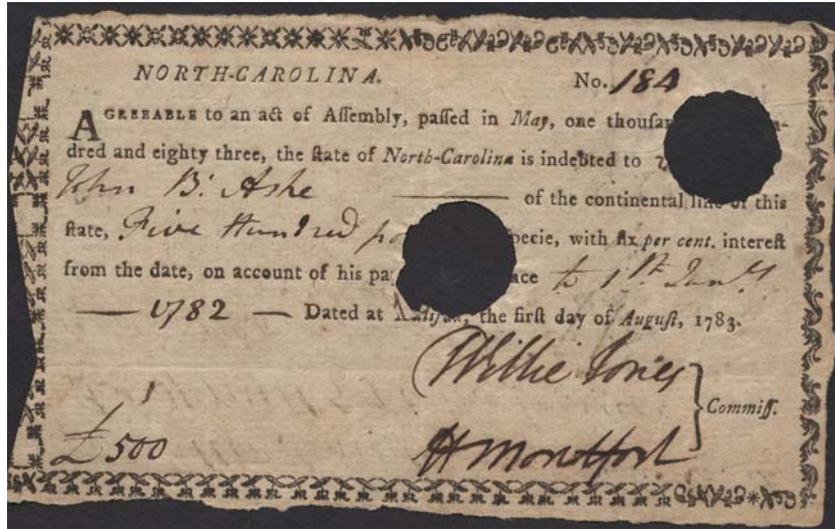


Examples of Revolutionary Vouchers-Certificates

Throughout much of the war, the system of issuing certificates was rather casual. Most state and local officials, as well as military officers, were empowered to issue these instruments in "payment" for services or goods. As often as not, at least during the early years, the issuing officers did not retain any copy or record of the certificate issued.

One can easily imagine how such informal accounting habits led to a chaotic situation. To alleviate this problem, in 1780, the General Assembly enacted legislation whereby auditors were appointed in each district

for the purpose of settling, or at least straightening out, the various accounts. These district auditors called in all specie vouchers and certificates that had been issued up to this time. When an auditor was satisfied that a certificate was legitimate, he issued a new certificate, once again to be paid in hard currency, with interest, at some future date. This time there was an important difference. A record of these new certificates was maintained, similar to a check stub copy in more recent times. Each new certificate was cut from its stub copy in a serpentine manner. This *indenting* was done as a protection against counterfeiting. The idea was that the certificates would eventually be redeemed only after they had been "proven" by being placed back in their original position next to their similarly indented stub. One must note, however, that while the Archives have the indented certificates, we know of no indented stub copies that have survived.



A typical example of an indented certificate

Before proceeding with an explanation of the Revolutionary Army account volumes, it might be well to outline the various types of information that can be gleaned from a pay voucher or certificate. Very simply stated, most of the certificates prove that certain individuals were promised certain amounts of hard money for certain services or goods on certain dates by certain issuing officers. If any of this information is missing from a particular voucher or certificate, there is no way for the absent details to be supplied, unless there happens to be an entry in one of the Revolutionary Army Account volumes which gives a further explanation. Most

vouchers and certificates give no reason for the promised payment except to satisfy an undesignated claim. In some cases, the payee's name was omitted, and instead, "the bearer" was to be paid.

Most of the vouchers and certificates are numbered. However, since numbering was apparently left to the discretion of the issuing officer, numbers were frequently duplicated or omitted. While a number may occasionally be useful in distinguishing several vouchers issued to the same individual or in comparing a voucher with an account book entry, little else can be surmised from them.

**Although vouchers and certificates frequently mention the district or place in which a payment was promised, it cannot be assumed that this was an individual's residence.** Moreover, vouchers and certificates contain no personal information, such as age, date and place of birth, parents' names, etc. Nor is there any way to distinguish between the records which relate to individuals with the same name. In the eighteenth century, some family names were proportionately as prevalent as they are now; and there may be as many as fifty or more certificates made out to individuals named John Brown or William Smith.

Few, if any, of the vouchers and certificates issued were redeemed by hard money. The laws that had permitted the system to operate had also specified that the documents could be used in payment of taxes. After the war, further legislation permitted their use in payment of land entry fees. Additionally, vouchers appear to have been used by holders to pay private debts, generally by endorsing them to someone else. It is not unusual to find a voucher payable to John Doe, endorsed to John Smith, endorsed by Smith to John Brown, and finally signed by John Brown. In this case, John Brown may have paid a tax debt or bought land, etc., by "cashing in" John Doe's voucher.

Eventually most of the vouchers and certificates found their way back to the State Treasurer, much in the way that checks are returned to the writer after they have cleared the bank. Storage of the "paid" vouchers became a great problem in the 1780s, and at one point the treasurers were permitted to destroy the records. Some vouchers and certificates were probably destroyed; but fortunately, it occurred to someone that these vouchers would be needed as a record of North Carolina's war debts when the time arrived to settle the state's accounts with the Continental Congress and the other twelve states. It was decided to cancel the stored vouchers by cutting large holes (one, two, or three in number) through the document. This was designed to protect the state in case of theft of any of the vouchers. Unfortunately, as a result of these cancellation holes, there are many vouchers for which the payee cannot be ascertained.

All of the surviving vouchers and certificates in the Archives have been filed in alphabetical order by the name of payee (except, of course, those on which the name is canceled out). There are more than 200 boxes of these records; and with an average of about 200 per box, there are probably over 40,000 legible vouchers. There is no cross index of names which appear as endorsements.

## **REVOLUTIONARY ARMY ACCOUNTS**

Revolutionary Army Accounts are books that were kept in the fashion of ledgers, between about 1780 and about 1795, for the purpose of recording various Revolutionary War military payments. A few volumes were compiled during the war by the district auditors on the occasion of their issuing or reissuing specie certificates; but most volumes were compiled between 1788 and 1793, to explain and detail North Carolina's Revolutionary War expenditures when the state's military accounts with the Federal Government were being settled. There are thirty-one volumes in this series in the Archives; however, internal and external evidence indicates that some volumes in the series have not survived intact.

To the State of North Carolina

1780 January June

To Amount Brought forward			£1261 10 4
40 To William Robins for a Shot Bag furnished	of Number 43	1 10	
41 To James Jones for a Gun, loaded &c furnished	of ditto 44	12 2	
42 To John Paulson for a Gun imprefid	of ditto 45	30	
43 To Hannah Meadows for a Musket furnished	of ditto 46	23 9	4
44 To Samuel Suit for a Gun furnished	of ditto 47	16	
45 To Joseph Shearing for ditto ditto	of ditto 48	14 13	4
46 To Thomas Reek for ditto ditto	of ditto 49	13 6	8
47 To Abner Shearing for a Shot bag furnished	of ditto 50	1	
48 To Lewis Shearing for ditto ditto	of ditto 51	1 4	
49 To Walter & Ballard for Service of himself & 10 Men ditto	52	28	
50 To Samuel Sawyer for Service of 10 Soldiers	of ditto 54	51 8	
51 To Ditto for ditto	of ditto 55	48 8	
			<u>1502 11 8</u>
52 To David Gregory for a Gun imprefid	of ditto 56	12	
53 To Richard Gregory for ditto ditto	of ditto 57	10	
54 To Thomas Nichols for a Belt furnished	of ditto 58	9 8	
55 To James Gault for a Horse furnished	of ditto 59	65	
56 To Josiah Bell for a Gun imprefid	of ditto 60	20	
57 To Thomas Lury for a Horse taken in Service	of ditto 61	3 60	
58 To Mr. A. Insulator for a Horse Bridle &c	of ditto 62	80	
59 To Miller Bright for a Gun furnished	of ditto 63	12	
60 To Joseph Jones for a Barrel Pack furnished	of ditto 64	10	
61 To John Gray for 3 Barrel Packs furnished	of ditto 65	150	
62 To Col. John Oange for a Quern furnished	of ditto 66	25	
63 To William Turner for a Gun furnished	of ditto 67	20	
64 To Thomas Ranner for Provisions furnished the 1st Regt			
Money advanced Express &c	of ditto 70	591 16	
65 To James Bagby for Horse hire	of ditto 73	19 12	
66 To Robert Smith for Provisions furnished	of ditto 74	746 14	8
67 To William Brown for a Horse lost in Service	of ditto 75	100	
			<u>3764 2 4</u>
68 To Robert Smith for a Gun furnished	of ditto 76	16	
69 To Samuel Chapman for Lundry articles lost at Bryan			
brook	of ditto 78	714	
70 To George Gordon for money expended in riding			
Express &c	of ditto 79	20	
71 To John Whitehead for a Rifle Gun furnished	of ditto 80	20	
72 To George Spearman for Lundry articles lost at Bryan			
brook	of ditto 81	23 4	
73 To Col. Mead for Lundry articles purchased	of ditto 83	225 5	
74 To James Brown for a Horse imprefid	of ditto 84	275	
75 To Ditto for a Gun imprefid	of ditto 85	10	
To Amount Carried forward			£5097 11 4

The information contained in each volume varies to some degree, but most volumes contain lists of names of individuals and the amount "paid" to each. Usually, the amount "paid" was the amount of specie certificate or voucher that had been issued to that individual, along with any interest that might have accrued.

Some of the lists include certificate or voucher numbers; occasionally, it is possible to match a particular voucher or certificate with its account entry. Such matching is normally a detailed process, however; and the Archives staff cannot undertake this research for individuals.

In some cases, the purpose and date of payment are included in an account entry, and there are instances where other information is included in the form of "remarks." Usually, these remarks are quite brief and limited to comments regarding the validity of an entry or the authenticity of a payment. Prints from microfilm of the pertinent information from the book, as well as the page including the individual name requested, are provided to those who inquire through mail or email. Similarly, the staff at the archives can help on-site patrons to find the various pages needed to compile a "complete" account book entry.

As in the case of vouchers and specie certificates, information such as date, place, and purpose of a Revolutionary Army Account entry cannot be ascertained if such information is not included in the particular entry in question.<sup>1</sup>

There is a complete index to the Revolutionary Army Account Books on microfiche available for use in the Archives Search Room. It is automatically searched for correspondence requests. A microfiche copy of the index is available for purchase, at the current price of \$30. This index is also available on-line at <http://www.ncarchives.net>

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in this narrative, for a modest charge the department can provide photocopies of the alphabetized Revolutionary Vouchers and prints from microfilm of entries in the Revolutionary Army Accounts. Individuals requesting such copies should give the **full name** of the person whose record is sought and the **military district or county of residence**. The department can only supply information which appears on vouchers or account entries; **it cannot undertake to do further research to determine personal information not included on these records**. A list of professional genealogists who have indicated a willingness to do this kind of research for a fee will be furnished on request to persons unable to do their own research in the Archives.

The compiled service records for Continental Line soldiers are available on microfilm for on-site research at the North Carolina Archives. The originals are at the National Archives; however, as it is a Federal microfilm, the North Carolina Archives staff will neither reproduce the microfilm for purchase nor search it for remote requests.

## NORTH CAROLINA'S MILITARY DISTRICTS

In 1780 the six military districts were made up of the following counties:

**Edenton District**--Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Tyrrell

**Halifax District**--Edgecombe, Franklin, Halifax, Martin, Nash, Northampton, and Warren

**Hillsborough District**--Caswell, Chatham, Granville, Orange, Randolph, and Wake

**New Bern District**--Beaufort, Carteret, Craven, Dobbs, Hyde, Johnston, Jones, Pitt, and Wayne

**Wilmington District**--Bladen, Brunswick, Cumberland, Duplin, New Hanover, and Onslow

**Salisbury District**--Anson, Burke, Guilford, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Montgomery, Richmond, Rowan, Rutherford, Sullivan, Surry, Washington, and Wilkes

In 1782, Burke, Lincoln, Rutherford, Sullivan, Washington, and Wilkes were placed in a new **Morgan District**. Although Sullivan and Washington were a part of Morgan District until 1784, they were assigned separate auditors. Finally, in 1784, **Washington District** was formed to include Davidson, Greene, Sullivan, and Washington counties (Tennessee).

## POSTSCRIPT: MILITARY LAND WARRANTS AND GRANTS

At the conclusion of the Revolution, the pay accounts of the North Carolina Continental Line veterans still remained to be settled. To complete this settlement, North Carolina laid off a section of land in her western area (now the middle of Tennessee) as a "military reservation" and issued Military Land Warrants to Continental Line veterans, in payment for past military service. These warrants entitled the holders to tracts of land in the military reservation. The size of each tract varied by rank, from 640 acres for a private to 12,000 acres in the case of at least one brigadier general. Heirs of soldiers killed in the war enjoyed the same benefits.

As many soldiers or their heirs chose not to move west, they were permitted to sell their warrants to others. Sometimes a warrant passed through several hands before being surrendered for land. A warrant holder who chose to move west--whether he was a veteran, an heir, or a purchaser of a military land warrant--first had to locate vacant land within the bounds of the reserved area. This done, he presented his warrant to a surveyor who in turn "laid off" the tract and returned the survey to the Secretary of State. When the survey had been approved, the Secretary of State issued a Military Land Grant and copies of the warrant, survey, and grant were filed in his office. See the "List of North Carolina Land Grants in Tennessee, 1778-1791" at the [National Archives](#) (Microcopies of Record No. 68) and the "Secretary of State: Land Grants in Tennessee 1778 - 1791" at the North Carolina Archives (microfilm S.108.1).

North Carolina stopped issuing military land warrants after ceding her western lands to the United States Government in 1790. However, for warrants which had been issued prior 1790, North Carolina continued to give grants up to about 1810; Tennessee honored the North Carolina warrants until considerably later.

Surviving North Carolina military land warrants, and the copies of surveys and grants for which these were exchanged, are at the North Carolina State Archives, or in the Tennessee State Archives, in Nashville, Tennessee. An informative brochure, "Land Records in the Tennessee State Library and Archives," is available on request from the [Tennessee State Archives](#).