

Ask "Why?"

Genealogy Tips by Jeannette Holland Austin



1886 buggyride

Genealogy research is a rolling vehicle searching for facts.

Because it is items such as birth, death and marriage dates which drive the integrity of the search. Another essential element to the vehicle is a clear understanding of how wars and other events were affected communities and everyday family life. Here is a good example. During the Revolutionary

War, soldiers only signed up for three month periods.

Now, let us ask "why?" Well, here we go. The British soldiers had landed in the port cities and were engaging at every opportunity. Frequently, it was the militia companies which assembled on a moment's notice to engage the British. The Continental Army consisted of those who enlisted for three month terms so that they could return home during planting and harvesting. Sometimes, they sent a servant or friend in their place for the three months, themselves enlisting later. These short terms added up and by 1780, most rebels had served at least one year.

The longer the term, the more acreage was involved in the land grant. Applications for pensions were replete with stories of their adventures, including the names of officers and battles. Many histories are available online of the officers who served in the Revolutionary War.

That information also provides a historical accounting of battles in which our ancestors participated.

Likewise, one can read the pensions of Civil War Soldiers which are usually found in the State and County of enlistment. The names of officers may seem like minor details, however, they go a long way in describing the struggles of the war.

A perusal of the civil war pensions for the Confederate States reveal the sad results of devastation of crops, burning of homes, and a distinct poverty within the conquered South which was still in play in 1903 when most pensions were issued.

Thus, pension records are one source to learn "why." And understand.