

# CIVIL WAR PENSIONS: A CLOSER LOOK

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The Civil War ran from April 12, 1861 to April 9, 1865. The greatest number of Union and Confederate veterans were 18-25 years old, although some served as young as 16 or as old as 55. Any man who was born (broadly) between 1806 and 1849, and who was residing in the United States at any point during the war, whether a citizen or not, should be considered a potential veteran.

## Pension Laws

The **General Law of 1862** created the Pension Bureau and specified who was eligible for a Civil War-related pension. Union veterans who survived the war needed to prove they were disabled as a result of their service and be examined regularly by appointed physicians. Other eligible pensioners included widows, minor children under the age of 16, dependent mothers and dependent sisters of Union veterans.

Whether or not someone was eligible for a pension depended on the current pension law, which was constantly being changed. Every change required a pensioner to resubmit paperwork, so you will likely find lots of “duplicates” in any particular pension file. If a veteran waited 40 years to apply for a pension, it was probably because the laws became more liberal regarding eligibility. For a summary of available Civil War pension records and an overview of the changing Pension Laws, please visit the following websites:

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Civil\\_War\\_1861\\_to\\_1865,\\_Part\\_2](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Civil_War_1861_to_1865,_Part_2)

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/confederate/pension>

<http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/civil-war-pensions.html>

<http://genealogy-quest.com/military-pensions/pension-acts/>

If you have a pension that was granted by a **Special Act of Congress**, you can research the Congressional Record at:

<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwss.html>

## Closely Examining Pension Papers

As you go through a pension, be sure to note all names, dates and places, so you can build a timeline for each person mentioned.

Don't take documents at face value or make assumptions about what you are reading. Don't dismiss documents that seem to be duplicates. Always look for other sources to verify what you find and be sure to put each document in its proper context, referencing the current pension laws.

Don't cite the pension file as a whole; instead, cite a particular document within the file and understand what is and isn't a primary source. For example, a *Widow's Declaration for a Pension* will list the date of her marriage to the veteran, as well as details on her former husband's service. Neither of these statements should be accepted or cited as facts. The only proof of the veteran's service is the report supplied by the Army's Adjutant General or the Navy's Bureau of Navigation, for example.

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