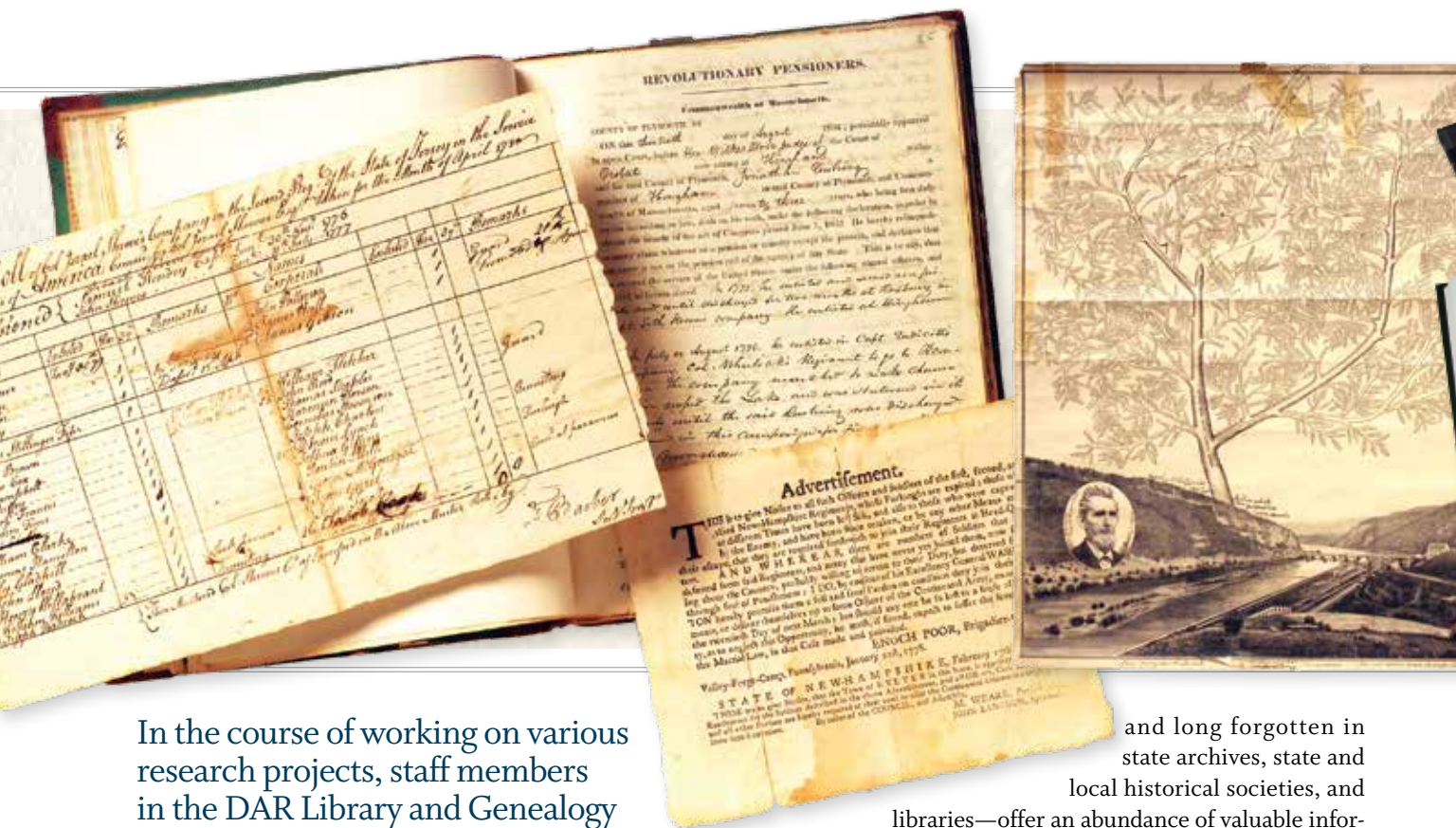


Sharing a Wealth of Data With the World

DAR Resources Simplify Genealogy Research and Expand Access to Revolutionary-era Documents

By Nancy Mann Jackson • Photography by Scott Braman



In the course of working on various research projects, staff members in the DAR Library and Genealogy departments discovered a wealth of information hidden away in historical societies, libraries and other repositories that had never been digitized or indexed.

For instance, the National Archives still has paper records of the final pension payments to Revolutionary War veterans from the early 19th century. The Virginia Archives contains bound volumes and loose papers relating to the Auditor of Public Accounts, including records of payments for Revolutionary War service and some pension payments. Such valuable primary documents—many gathering dust

and long forgotten in state archives, state and local historical societies, and libraries—offer an abundance of valuable information to genealogy researchers and historians, including many potential DAR members. But they remained largely inaccessible to the general public. The National Society's solution was to launch the Patriot Records Project.

Initiated in late 2014, the Patriot Records Project is a Society-led effort to locate valuable Revolutionary War-era documents that have not been digitized or indexed, and to make those records digitally available for researchers. Though a new initiative, it's a manifestation of an early charge by the DAR Founders to preserve the records of the Revolutionary generation.

"DAR has a long history of preserving and making available genealogical and historical records to the public," said DAR Library Director Eric Grundset. "Since the early 20th century,

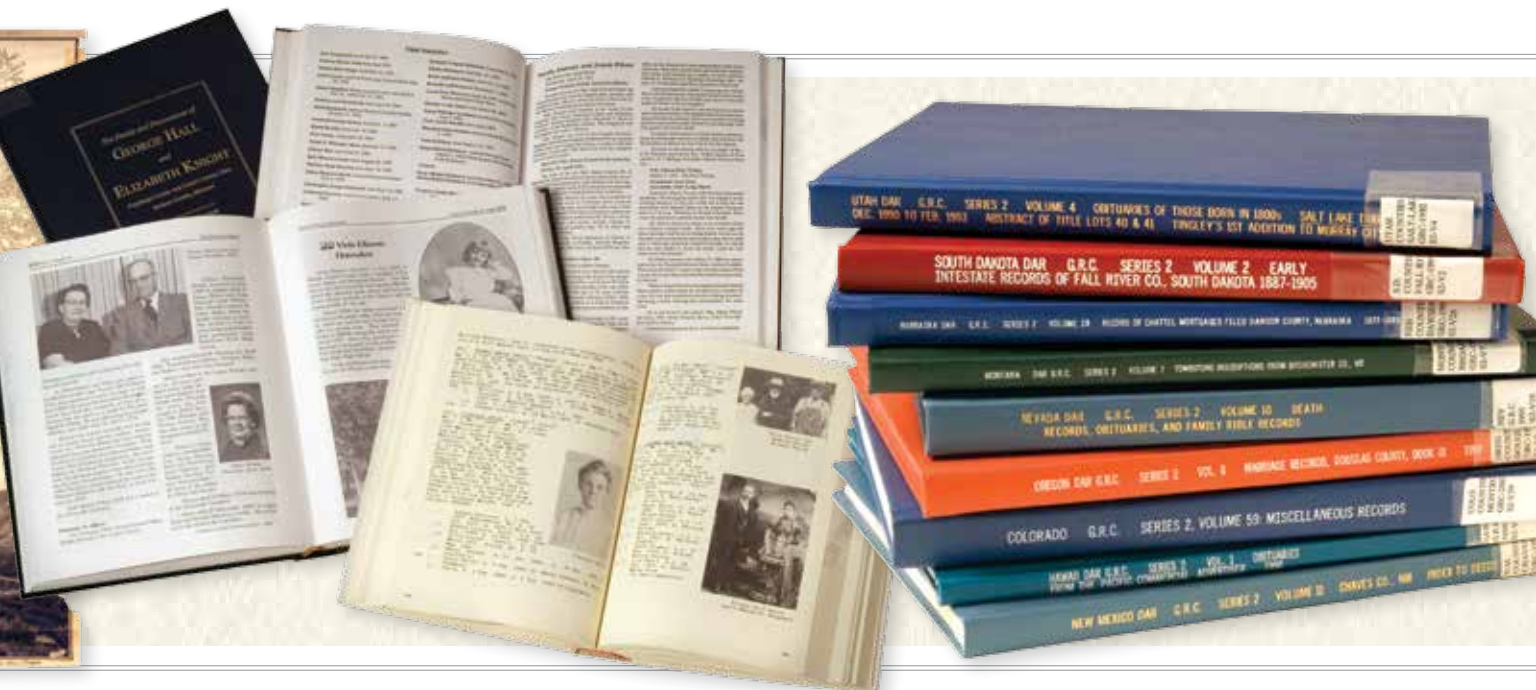
DAR has had a reputation for working with other institutions to secure the preservation of historical sources. While online database subscription providers are working on many historical records, they are not focusing heavily on Revolutionary War materials. At the same time, the decline in funding for most state archival and historical agencies in the past couple of decades leaves a void in their abilities to reformat Revolutionary War documents. This situation provides an opening for the DAR to fill this absence and make it easier to locate and identify Revolutionary War Patriots in hard-to-search collections.”

While the DAR has long specialized in genealogy research, the rise of technology has made it possible for the Society’s resources to become available for all through the click of a mouse. Today, DAR resources support evidence identify-

“These records are not improving with age and are at risk of further deterioration,” said President General Lynn Forney Young. “If DAR doesn’t take the lead, they could be lost.”

The first part of the Patriot Records Project involves digitizing and indexing DAR’s large in-house collection of rare Revolutionary War records. More than 300,000 images from these records are already digitized and waiting for member volunteers to index them. When these records are verified, they will be added to the DAR’s Genealogical Research System (GRS), a free, massive database accessible via www.dar.org/grs.

The second part of this project will involve going outside DAR’s own collection and reaching out to libraries, archives, historical societies and other repositories of Revolutionary War-era records. DAR members are urged to help locate and identify



ing 144,000 Revolutionary Patriots and provide many resources to any researcher seeking Revolutionary War-era information.

The DAR’s genealogical collections not only help tell the story of our country and the stories of members, but they also help genealogy enthusiasts and prospective members discover the stories of their families’ past. “There is so much that can be done to make research easier for people, and that’s the crux of all these projects,” said Bren Landon, DAR Public Relations Director.

Taking the Lead With Patriot Records

The DAR’s attempt to locate, digitize and index hard-to-search original and microfiche documents is crucial and time-sensitive work.

Accessing DAR Library Documents Online. DAR members and prospective members are not only able to buy record copies of previously verified DAR membership applications, but now they can also purchase available supporting documents such as birth certificates, marriage records and pension records. For more information, go to www.dar.org/library/record-copy.



these records and report their findings to the appropriate DAR staff, who will coordinate acquisition of the records. Once permission is secured, these records would also be digitized and indexed by member volunteers.

Danna Koelling, national chair of the Patriot Records Project Committee, emphasizes how easy it is for members to get involved. “All work for this project can be done within a web browser on your personal computer at home,” she said.

“This long-term project will help DAR achieve our goal of being a leading resource for Revolutionary War records,” Mrs. Young said. “This project will potentially identify many new Patriots of the American Revolution, thus giving more women an opportunity to join

DAR. Further, it should enhance awareness of DAR as a source for the stories of the people of the American Revolution.”

“We don’t think DAR has taken on such a tremendous challenge before,” Mrs. Koelling said. “The potential to make information available on Patriots who were previously so hard to locate is so exciting. What a great way to preserve our ancestors’ contributions. And it would be exciting to see our ancestor database double in size with new records by 2026, the 250th anniversary of the Revolution.”

Harnessing Technology to Lead Genealogy Forward

The newly launched Patriot Records Project is just the latest addition to the Society’s arsenal of genealogical research tools. The GRS, now a massive, searchable online database of genealogy records and documents, started out as a rudimentary card catalog, used by DAR staff.

“Long before computers, the DAR staff needed the ability to quickly locate information about members and about the holdings in the DAR Library,” said Darryn Licklitter, head genealogist at the DAR. “This became especially important early on in the Society’s history because of the rapid growth in membership; by 1913, more than 100,000 women had joined the DAR. In time, staff developed different filing systems for keeping track of the members and their ancestors.”

Eventually, the Society developed one catalog for ancestors and another for members. Information from the member cards was computerized in the 1970s, while data from the ancestor cards were computerized in the 1990s, resulting in two databases: the Member Database and the Ancestor Database.

THE DAR LIBRARY

The National Society’s Research Anchor

Founded in 1896 as a collection of genealogical and historical publications for the use of staff genealogists verifying DAR application papers, the DAR Library has become one of the country’s leading genealogical research centers. Shortly after 1900, the growing collection was opened to the public and has remained open to visitors. Though always free for members, the Library stopped charging an admission fee for nonmembers in the last year.

The Library’s book collection includes more than 225,000 volumes, and approximately 3,000 new titles are added each year. Many of those are works printed in limited quantities. The DAR Library also includes thousands of unique volumes of genealogical compilations, record abstracts and other materials, many of which have been contributed by DAR members. The collection covers all periods of American history, with an obvious focus on the period of the Colonial era, the Revolutionary and Early Republic eras, and the 19th century. Learn more at www.dar.org/library.

Library staff members regularly assist DAR members and staff with new genealogical resource projects. For instance, the DAR Library will be working with the Patriot Records Project to acquire microfilm or digital copies of rare Revolutionary War records, which will enable member volunteers to index the documents from home. ■■■



The DAR Library’s vast holdings are available free of charge to DAR members and the public.



Until the 1990s, staff could search by either the name of the ancestor or the name or national number of the member. During that decade, the capability to search ancestor records by name of a child or a child’s spouse was added. “This enabled the staff to more quickly locate alternative ancestor lines for applicants when one line could not be proved,” Licklitter said.

By the early 2000s, advanced technology made it much easier to make large databases searchable online. The existing databases for members and ancestors were integrated through an online portal known simply as the Ancestor Database, which initially was available to staff only.

In 2004, the DAR Genealogy Preservation Committee undertook the Descendants Project to index the names, dates and places from all DAR applications and add them to a searchable database. “The Descendants Project itself was possible only because the National Society already had digitized the hundreds of thousands of documents associated with members’ applications,” said Mrs. Koelling, who also serves as national advisor to the DAR Genealogy Preservation Committee. “DAR members from around the world volunteered to index the names, dates and places. Each application was indexed twice, then overlaid to correct any mismatches. This indexing was completed in seven years.”

As the digitization of the applications and the resulting data was



incorporated into the Ancestor Database, it became apparent that the portal needed to be redesigned. The reconfiguration of the Ancestor Database gave rise to the GRS, Lickliter said, which was expanded to include other resources, such as the Library's online catalog and the Genealogical Records Collection index.



“The value of the growing collections in the GRS was not lost on the staff and the Society's leadership at the time,” Lickliter said. “It was such a valuable resource, leaders decided to make the GRS available online to membership and then eventually to the public.”

Thanks to the work of member volunteers, prospective members can now use the GRS' Build-an-App feature and purchase copies of approved DAR application papers and supporting documentation online to expedite the application process. When a search of the Descendants Database locates a lineage matching that of a prospective member, Build-an-App can provide a head start on the membership application.

“The generations that are the same can be downloaded and saved, and the applicant does not have to reprove that information,” said DAR Registrar General Sharon Withers. “It also allows the user to download the Patriot's information. Older applications may require further research and additional data to meet today's genealogical standards.”

Before the records were digitized, staff from different offices would have to access applications through a variety of methods, such as microfilm, microfiche and bound volumes stored in the basement, Lickliter said. “This was a time-consuming process,” he said. “Now that the applications and supporting documentation are all digitized, both staff

and Library researchers are able to conduct their work much more efficiently.”

Perhaps most important is that the GRS provides a single interface through which members, prospective members and the public can access the DAR's online collections. This single feature of the GRS is widely accepted as one of the main reasons that DAR membership has increased so significantly in the past five to 10 years. The tool makes it much easier for chapters and DAR volunteers to locate suitable ancestral lines for prospective members.

“I often encounter this firsthand at genealogy conferences where we staff a DAR booth,” Lickliter said. “Many attendees who approach the booth are hesitant or even doubtful that they have a Patriot ancestor. When I show them the GRS on my laptop and we start putting in names, they are often both shocked and excited to learn that they do have ancestors who participated in the Revolution. It is especially thrilling to see their doubt turn into certainty.”

Remembering Family With the GRC

Included in the GRS is the Genealogical Records Collection (GRC), which includes records of unpublished genealogical source materials overseen by the Genealogical Records Committee. The efforts of local DAR members nationwide have produced almost 20,000 volumes of GRC Reports for the Library collection, constituting a unique source for family histories, cemetery record transcriptions and Bible records. These collections exist solely because DAR members from around the country have collected, recorded and shared them, greatly increasing access to materials that may otherwise have been lost.

Today, increasing numbers of those reports and documents are being digitized for online access. For instance, an index of the Bible records included in the GRC has recently been added to the GRS under a new “Bibles” tab. “The new Bible Records and Transcriptions index contains unique information that

researchers today may be unable to locate anywhere else,” Mrs. Young said. “In fact, these transcripts may be all that is left of these family Bibles.”

Already containing more than 40,000 records, the index represents one of the largest collections of documents related to family Bibles—and it's still growing.

Researchers can search the index for a name or a combination of names. The results will show the surname, the source, book title, book description and the page on which the name first appears. On-site at the DAR Library, researchers can view the Bible records and print any necessary pages. If the researcher is not at DAR Headquarters, they can use the DAR Library Search Service to acquire the records remotely. Future plans to expand the index will make the records more readily available online. 🏠

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