



FOR GENERATIONS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

# NGS Magazine

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Defective, Dependent, & Delinquent Classes

and The Technology for Keeping Secrets

Burlington Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1864.  
To His Excellency Abraham Lincoln, President of  
The United States,

Respected Sir,

How shall

a woman with a heart breaking  
with sorrow find words wherewith  
to address you, But I expect this  
is to you an everyday tale.

My Husband Joseph W. Clifton has  
been tried by Court-Martial for the  
crime of desertion— found guilty  
and been sentenced, Oh how can  
I write it! Sentenced— to be shot  
Oh I must make one last effort  
for his precious life; For though  
he may be erring I am his wife  
and love him still, and how can  
I endure the thought of the  
father of my five little children  
being taken out— not to fall by  
a foeman's hand, but to be cut

from his duty, and dread of  
punishment has had much to  
do with his subsequent deser-  
tions, but I will not attempt

will rest upon you to the  
of life.

Yours with deep resp

Hannah

Burlington

N. Jersey

A Lincoln.  
President U. S  
Washington.

P. S. Forgive me for adding  
one more faltering word, I of  
must suffer— let it be any or  
penalty than death, But Oh  
his life!

J. Clifton.



# NGS

National Genealogical Society  
6400 Arlington Blvd., Suite 810  
Falls Church, VA 22042-2318  
Phone 703-525-0050 or 800-473-0060  
E-mail [ngs@ngsgenealogy.org](mailto:ngs@ngsgenealogy.org)  
Website [www.ngsgenealogy.org](http://www.ngsgenealogy.org)

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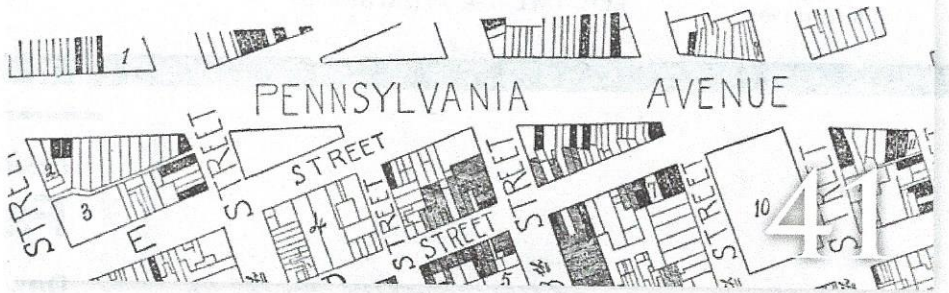
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## WITHIN SIGHT OF THE WHITE HOUSE.

ion of Washington, D. C., Known as "Hooker's Division," Which Contains 50 Saloons and Bawdy-Houses—List of 61 Places Where Liquor Is Sold With Government But Without City Licenses.



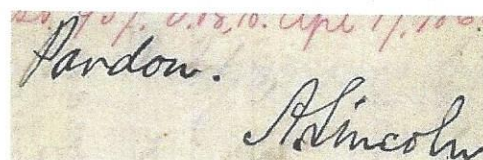
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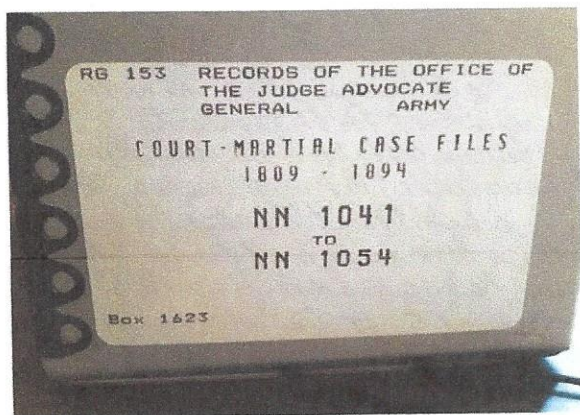
**On the cover:** Letter from Hannah Clifton of Burlington, New Jersey, to Abraham Lincoln, 12 January 1864, imploring him to spare her husband Joseph's life. Clifton's death sentence for desertion was commuted to imprisonment in Fort Jefferson, Florida, where he contracted scurvy. Lincoln signed Clifton's pardon on 13 April 1865—the day before the President was assassinated.



Clifton's court-martial file contains Hannah's letter and a petition from ninety-three citizens of Lewes, Delaware, asking for President Lincoln's clemency. In her article starting on page 11, Sydney Cruice Dixon tells the story and provides tips for researching courts-martial.

# A Family Secret: Desertion, Scurvy, and Abraham Lincoln

Sydney F. Cruice Dixon



*Court-Martial Case Files manuscript box in the National Archives, Washington, DC. Photo by Renéé Carl.*

Genealogists may miss amazing family adventures—or secrets—by not acknowledging that a family member did something unseemly or even downright disgraceful. These actions occur to some degree in most extended families, and the best stories are often about ancestors who made mistakes or poor decisions.

This family secret involves my third-great-grandfather, desertion, and scurvy; the citizens of Burlington, New Jersey, and Lewes, Delaware; and Abraham Lincoln. I had never heard the story, and neither my mother nor my grandmother knew anything about it, but it has opened a door into my family's true history.

I unearthed the story by researching the pension files and compiled military service records at the National Archives in Washington, DC. In those files, I learned that my ancestor had been court-martialed. That discovery led me to investigate his court-martial file, which contains a wealth of information.

## Clifton's enlistment and service

In 1861, Joseph W. Clifton, a mason living in Burlington, New Jersey, volunteered at age 36 to join the Union forces in the Civil War. He signed up for a three-year term.<sup>1</sup> He may have joined the military due to financial difficulties or a family history of military service.<sup>2</sup>

Clifton served in Company F of the 6th New Jersey Volunteers for over a year and saw hard fighting at the Battles of Williamsburg, Fair Oaks, and Malvern Hill.<sup>3</sup> He described the Battle of Williamsburg in a letter to his brother, reporting how they

Websites cited in this article were viewed on 30 August 2018.

1. Compiled service record, Joseph Clifton, Pvt., Co. F, 6th New Jersey Infantry; Carded Records, Volunteer Organizations, Civil War; Record Group (RG) 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780-1917; National Archives (NA), Washington, DC.

2. Three years later Clifton's wife Hannah described herself as poor. See Hannah Clifton (Burlington, New Jersey) letter to President Abraham Lincoln, 12 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042; Court-Martial Case Files, 1809-1894; Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps; RG 153: Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), 1792-2010; NA-Washington, DC. For the military service of Clifton's father, Asa Clifton, see C. S. Layton (Georgetown, Delaware), letter to Edwin M. Stanton, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042.

3. Henry F. Rodney letter to Abraham Lincoln, 24 March 1865; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, NA-Washington, DC.

**Sydney F. Cruice Dixon** is a professional genealogist and lecturer in the mid-Atlantic region. She is the president of the Greater Philadelphia Area Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists. A member of the faculty for the Researching Family in Pennsylvania Institute, she developed the curriculum and teaches the Foundations of Genealogy courses at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). Sydney also serves on HSP's Genealogy Advisory Committee. She may be reached at [sdixongenealogy@gmail.com](mailto:sdixongenealogy@gmail.com).

held off the enemy for seven and a half hours before they were relieved.<sup>4</sup> During the entire time, his company was outnumbered three to one. He also described the aftermath of the Battle of Fair Oaks, better known as the Battle of Seven Pines: “[I]t was horrible the next day to walk over the battlefield to see the dead and dying and to hear the wounded[.] I never want to see any more of fighting for I am sick of it now.”<sup>5</sup>

### Clifton’s desertion and court-martial

About a month later, in August 1862, Clifton was sent to the hospital in Chester, Pennsylvania, with a severely swollen belly and stomach pains. The doctors could not find the cause for his stomach distress. On or about 5 December, he left the hospital without leave and went home to Burlington.<sup>6</sup> He later claimed he believed he was going to be discharged shortly thereafter so he went home to wait for his discharge papers. At home, he might at least be able to help his destitute wife and children.<sup>7</sup>

In April 1863, Clifton ran into his company captain on the streets of Burlington, and the captain told him to report to his regiment immediately. Clifton did not do so, which led to his subsequent arrest and escort back to his regiment under guard in July 1863. Four days later, while following the regiment as a prisoner, he deserted again. He was re-arrested in West Philadelphia in October 1863.<sup>8</sup>

Given the conditions of war and the political environment, desertion was not uncommon during this period. Indeed, desertion rates were reportedly as high as one in ten Union soldiers.<sup>9</sup> In the North, many conservative Democrats—called Copperheads—sympathized with the South, opposed the war effort, and even encouraged Union troops to desert.<sup>10</sup>

On 10 December 1863, Clifton faced a general court-martial, was found guilty of desertion, and was

sentenced “to be shot to death with musketry.”<sup>11</sup> He was to be executed on 29 January 1864.<sup>12</sup>

### Pleas for leniency

Clifton’s family and friends were horrified. Twenty-six citizens of Burlington sent a petition to President Lincoln pleading for his life.<sup>13</sup> Other people, including some who were quite prominent, sent letters of support to officials in Washington, DC.<sup>14</sup>

It’s not definitively known why so many individuals intervened to aid Clifton. However, the Clifton family was well-connected through previous military service.

Washington Dec. 19. 1863.  
 To. His Ex. Allen, Abraham Lincoln  
 President of the United States  
 Whereas Joseph W. Clifton a Private in  
 the 1st New Jersey Regiment, Company G, has  
 been tried by a Court Martial for desertion.  
 And there is reason to apprehend that the  
 finding has been adverse: and the ex-  
 treme penalty of the Law may be cas-  
 ued out. And the wife and children, in-  
 venging to the circumstances of the case,  
 and the extreme destitution of his wife  
 and little ones, who will thus be depriv-  
 ed of all support: do most earnestly  
 desire that mercy shall be extended  
 to him: and if he cannot be entirely  
 set free, that his punishment may  
 be commuted to imprisonment for a  
 term of years.

Matthew Knight  
 Francis Roth  
 Edward H. Smith

John H. Dodge  
 G. Harry Dugdale

First page of petition from twenty-six citizens of Burlington, New Jersey, requesting mercy for Clifton

4. Joseph Clifton (Camp Near Harrison Landing) letter to Wrexham Clifton, 17 July 1862; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

5. Ibid.

6. 10 December 1863, page 2, Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

7. Hannah Clifton (Burlington, New Jersey) letter to Abraham Lincoln, 12 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

8. 10 December 1863, page 4; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

9. Mark A. Weitz, “Desertion, Cowardice and Punishment,” essay, Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech, *Essential Civil War Curriculum* (<http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/>) > Browse Topics > D > Desertion....

10. Ibid.

11. 10 December 1863, page 4; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

12. Special Order No. 14, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

13. Twenty-six citizens of Burlington, New Jersey, petition to Abraham Lincoln, 19 December 1863; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

14. Various letters; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

Burlington Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1864.  
 To His Excellency Abraham Lincoln, President of  
 The United States,  
 Respected Sir,  
 How shall  
 a woman with a heart breaking  
 with sorrow find words wherewith  
 to address you, But I expect this  
 is to you an everyday tale.  
 My Husband Joseph W. Clifton has  
 been tried by Court-Martial for the  
 crime of desertion—found guilty  
 and been sentenced, Oh how can  
 I write it! Sentenced—to be shot  
 Oh I must make one last effort  
 for his precious life; For though  
 he may be erring I am his wife  
 and love him still; and how can  
 I endure the thought of the  
 father of my five little children  
 being taken out—not to fall by  
 a foeman's hand, but to be cut

Letter from Hannah Clifton to President Abraham Lincoln,  
 12 January 1864.

Joseph Clifton's grandfather, Whittington Clifton, had close ties with Colonel David Hall (who served as the Governor of Delaware from 1802 to 1805) from their service together in the Revolutionary War.<sup>15</sup> Also in his letter Caleb S. Layton mentioned the War of 1812 service of Joseph's father, Asa Clifton, whom he had known well.<sup>16</sup> Layton, a renowned lawyer and judge, served at various times as a state

representative, state senator, and the secretary of state of Delaware.<sup>17</sup> United States senators James W. Wall and John Ten Eyck also wrote letters on Clifton's behalf.<sup>18</sup>

The reasons presented for leniency varied. Some letters documented the patriotic service of Clifton's family. Other letters portrayed the hardships his wife and five children would endure if there was no one to

Fort Jefferson Fla Feb 22 1865  
 Dear Sister In Law  
 I Received  
 your kind letter to day  
 and I was very glad to  
 hear from you all and  
 that you all was well but  
 I cannot say that I am  
 well for I have got the  
 Scurvy in one of my legs  
 and Oh how that I do  
 dread the hot season to  
 come for I know that I  
 shall be so bad that I  
 will not be able to walk  
 for the limbs gets drawed up  
 so that you cannot move  
 them and they all break  
 out with sores about as big  
 as an cent and they are

Letter from Joseph Clifton in Fort Jefferson to his sister-in-law,  
 Lydia Clifton, 22 February 1865.

15. "David Hall," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Hall\\_\(Delaware\\_governor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hall_(Delaware_governor))). "Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783," database and images, *Ancestry* (<https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=4282>) > Delaware > Delaware Regiment, 1777-1780 > image 371 of 532, entry for Whittington Clifford in Return of Captain John Pattens Company, 3 February 1790; citing microfilm publication M246, RG 93: Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records; NA-Washington, DC.

16. C. S. Layton (Georgetown, Delaware), letter to Edwin M. Stanton, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

17. "Caleb S. Layton," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caleb\\_S.\\_Layton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caleb_S._Layton)).

18. John Ten Eyck, letter to Abraham Lincoln, 20 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC. Also, James W. Wall (Burlington, New Jersey) letter to Abraham Lincoln [Washington, DC], requests pardon for Joseph W. Clinton, 26 January 1864; Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; image, *Library of Congress* (<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.2987400>).

provide for them.<sup>19</sup> One letter that particularly caught my attention was from the family physician, Henry Hollembach, MD, who stated that Clifton could not be accountable for his actions since he was “weak in mind, eccentric in character, and far below the average intellect.”<sup>20</sup> On reading these words, I hoped

that Clifton’s DNA had been sufficiently diluted by the time it reached my generation!

These efforts were successful. On 16 January 1864, Special Order No. 14 was issued at the direction of President Lincoln, suspending Clifton’s sentence until further orders.<sup>21</sup> Then on 2 May 1864, Special

19. C. S. Layton, letter to Edwin M. Stanton, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

20. Henry Hollembach, MD, letter to Abraham Lincoln, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

21. Special Order No. 14, 16 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

## Embellishment or Fact?

In Joseph Clifton’s compiled military service record, I found an article, “A Child’s Letter to Lincoln,” written by D. Turner, recounting the story of Clifton’s desertion, conviction, and pardon.<sup>1</sup> The article was published in *The Washington Post* on 4 November 1894— thirty years after these events occurred.

The article had been added to Clifton’s file on the orders of Colonel (subsequently Major General) Frederick Crayton Ainsworth, who revolutionized the record-keeping methods at the War Department and supervised the creation of compiled military service records.<sup>2</sup> It was this newspaper article that sparked my research. On investigating the article’s claims, however, I discovered that some can’t be documented.

One especially intriguing statement in the article is that Clifton’s young daughter, Virginia—my

second-great-grandmother—wrote a letter pleading for her father’s life. Hannah, Clifton’s wife, allegedly hand-delivered the letter to President Lincoln at the White House. The president was supposedly moved to tears by the letter and granted Hannah a private audience, at which he said he would commute Clifton’s sentence.

Unfortunately, despite reviewing numerous documents, including Lincoln’s appointment book and the index of Lincoln’s papers, and questioning

a Lincoln expert at the Library of Congress, I have not been able to locate such a letter. Virginia’s letter in this article sounds similar to a letter that Hannah Clifton wrote to President Lincoln on 12 January 1864.<sup>3</sup> Does Virginia’s letter exist or was it just a journalist’s flight of fancy, written

at a time when hyperbolic, romantic stories were often published to tug at the readers’ heartstrings?

**A CHILD’S LETTER TO LINCOLN.**

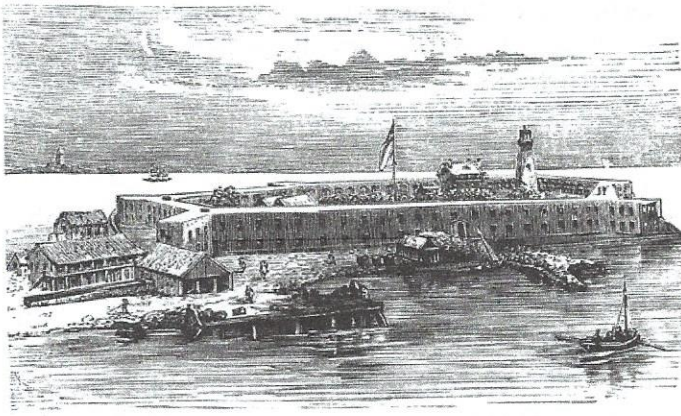
“To his excellency, the President of the United States, most honored and excellent sir: How shall a child like me attempt to write to you on such business as this, concerning my father, who is sentenced—oh, how can I write it—to be shot. Spare his poor life, I beseech you, and many thanks shall be given you. If his life is taken, my mother cannot stand that heavy blow, and will soon go also. I am the eldest of five children; I have three sisters under eight years of age. Do not leave us fatherless, I beseech you. I would freely give my life to save his.  
VIRGINIA CLIFTON.”

D. Turner, “A Child’s Letter to Lincoln,” *Washington Post*, 4 November 1894, p. 16.

1. Compiled service record, Joseph Clifton, Pvt., Co. F, 6th New Jersey Infantry; Carded Records, Volunteer Organizations, Civil War; Record Group (RG) 94: Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1780-1917; National Archives (NA), Washington, DC.

2. Memorandum, 8 November 1894, Compiled service record, Joseph Clifton, Pvt., Co. F, 6 New Jersey Infantry. For Ainsworth’s role in creating compiled service records, see Claire Prechtel-Klusgens, “Thank You, General Fred C. Ainsworth!” *NGS Magazine* 37:4 (October-December 2011), 54-57.

3. Hannah Clifton (Burlington, New Jersey) letter to President Abraham Lincoln, 12 January 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042; Court-Martial Case Files, 1809-1894; Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps; RG 153: Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), 1792-2010; NA-Washington, DC



Fort Jefferson on the island of Dry Tortugas. Image provided by ClipArtETC, Florida Center for Instructional Technology ([http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/55800/55883/55883\\_ft-jefferson.htm](http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/55800/55883/55883_ft-jefferson.htm)); citing Harper's New Monthly Magazine (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1871).

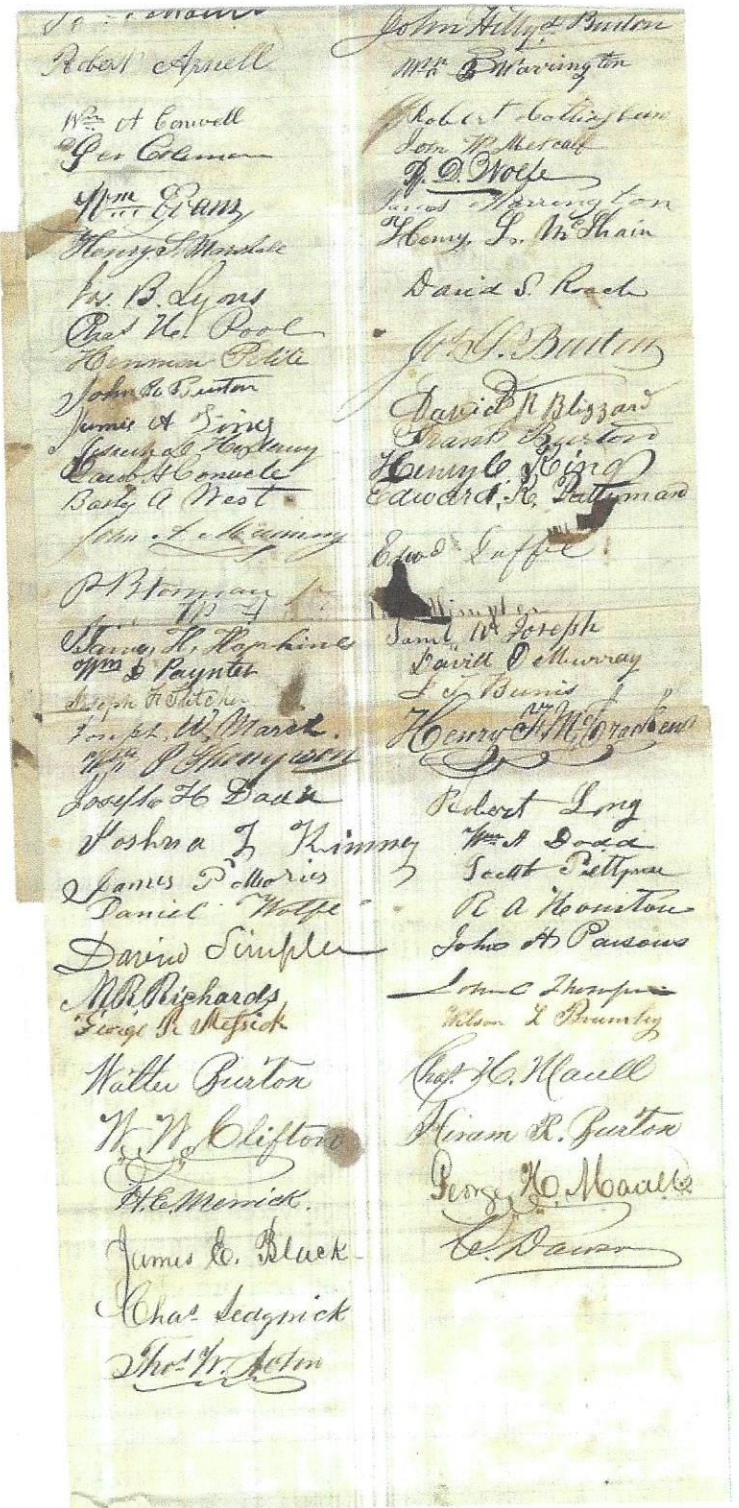
Order No. 166 mitigated his sentence to confinement for the duration of the war at Fort Jefferson in Dry Tortugas (off what is now the Florida Keys).<sup>22</sup>

Lincoln was sympathetic towards Union deserters. He expressed frustration that the only way he could curb desertion was to inflict devastating punishment on the struggling soldiers, and he could not prevent the Copperheads from openly encouraging soldiers to desert.<sup>23</sup>

### Clifton's ordeal

Clifton's wife and children in Burlington, New Jersey, and his siblings in Lewes, Delaware, rejoiced that his life had been spared.<sup>24</sup> However, his ordeal was not yet over. Clifton frequently wrote to his brother and sister-in-law regarding the hardships of life in Fort Jefferson. In one letter, he described the food he was given: "We do not get much here[,] [W]e do get a little slice of bread and about two ounces of salt beef for breakfast and that stinks so that we cannot eat it and the Bread is full of little bugs and worms and we do get a pint of something what they call coffee and we do get about the same quantity for dinner but we do not get any meat for supper..."<sup>25</sup>

On 22 February 1865, he wrote to Lydia Clifton, his sister-in-law, reporting that he had scurvy in one of his legs. "Oh how that I do dread the hot season to come for I know that I shall be so bad that I will not



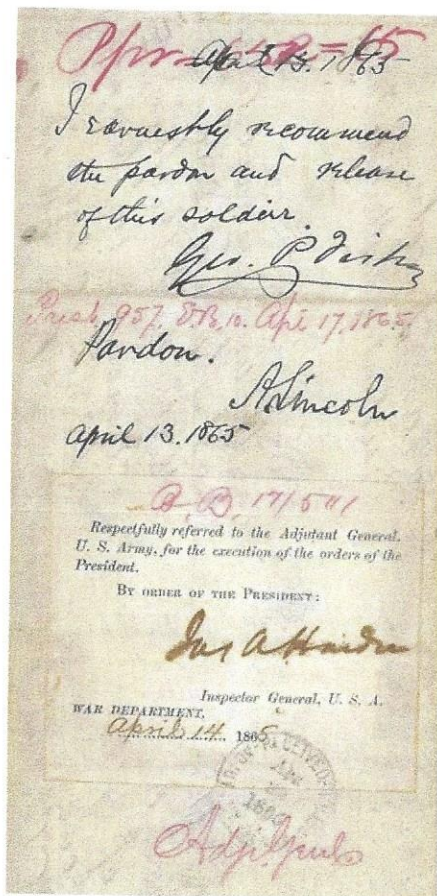
Second page of petition from ninety-three citizens of Lewes, Delaware, in support of Clifton.

22. Special Order No. 166, 2 May 1864; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

23. Weitz, "Desertion, Cowardice and Punishment."

24. James W. Wall, letter to Abraham Lincoln, requests pardon for Joseph W. Clinton, 26 January 1864; Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

25. Joseph W. Clifton, letter to Lydia Clifton, 22 February 1865; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.



Clifton's pardon on the cover of the Lewes petition, signed by Abraham Lincoln.

be able to walk for the limbs get drawn up so that you cannot move them and they all break out in sores as big as an cent..."<sup>26</sup> With this letter his family in Lewes started a petition for Clifton's release. They feared that if he stayed in prison through the summer, he would come out in a coffin.

On 22 March 1865, ninety-three citizens of Lewes signed a petition asking for executive clemency on Clifton's behalf.<sup>27</sup>

George P. Fisher, a former member of the US House of Representatives for Delaware, who had recently been appointed to the federal judiciary by President Lincoln, presented the petition to the president. On the outside cover, Judge Fisher wrote this note: "I earnestly recommend the pardon and release of this soldier. Geo. P. Fisher." The petition, preserved in Clifton's court-martial file at the National Archives,

was presented to Lincoln on the Thursday before Easter. Right below Fisher's signature reads:

"Pardon.

A. Lincoln

April 13, 1865"

That pardon came just in time, as it was signed only one day before Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford's Theater on Good Friday, 14 April 1865.<sup>28</sup>

### Aftermath

Following President Lincoln's pardon, Joseph Clifton was discharged from the service pursuant to Special Order No. 189 issued on 26 April 1865.<sup>29</sup> He lived until 1901 when he died (from heart failure brought on by Bright's disease) at age seventy-six.<sup>30</sup>

Joseph and Hannah appear to have lived together through 1880, but in 1885 they lived apart.<sup>31</sup> In the 1900 federal population census, Joseph is listed as the husband of another woman, Margaret Clifton, in Cape May County, New Jersey.<sup>32</sup> However, neither a divorce record for Hannah and Joseph, nor a marriage record for Joseph and Margaret, has been located.

After Joseph's death, Hannah applied for a widow's pension, but her application was rejected since he had been dishonorably discharged.<sup>33</sup> Oral family history reports that one of the daughters, Elizabeth, may have resorted to prostitution after she separated from her husband.<sup>34</sup> Another daughter, Ida, had a baby out of wedlock in 1879.<sup>35</sup>

Not much was ever said about the members of that side of my family. They were considered modest and seemed to keep a very low profile. My grandmother didn't even know the name of her grandmother (Virginia Clifton). Was a mantle of shame unknowingly passed down through the generations?

26. Ibid.

27. Ninety-three citizens of Lewes, Delaware, petition to Abraham Lincoln, 22 March 1865; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

28. Ibid.

29. Special Order No. 189, 26 April 1865; in Joseph Clifton Court-Martial File, NM1042, Proceedings of General Court-Martial at Head Quarters 2nd Div. 3rd Corps, RG153, NA-Washington, DC.

30. New Jersey Vital Records, Report of Death 22767 (1901), Joseph Clifton; New Jersey State Archives, Trenton.

31. 1880 US census, Burlington County, New Jersey, population schedule, Burlington City, p. 132 A, dwelling 211, family 213, Joseph and Hannah Clifton; image, *Ancestry*; citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 772. 1885 New Jersey state census, "New Jersey State Census A. D. 1885," Burlington County, p. 96, dwelling 606, family 616, Hannah Clifton; image, "New Jersey, State Census, 1885," *Ancestry*; citing New Jersey State Archives, Trenton; *State Census of New Jersey, 1885*; Film Number: 3.

32. 1900 US census, Cape May County, New Jersey, population schedule, Ocean City, p.124-B (stamped), dwelling 231, family 243, Joseph and Margaret Clifton; image, *Ancestry*; citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 961.

33. Hannah M. Clifton, Widow's Pension Application no. WO 753929 (Rejected), for service of Joseph W. Clifton (Pvt., Co. F, 6th N. J. Vol. Inf., Civil War); Case Files of Rejected Pension Applications, Civil War; RG 15: Records of Veterans Affairs; NA-Washington, DC.

34. Name of person interviewed privately held by Sydney F. Cruice Dixon, second-great-granddaughter of Elizabeth Clifton, 27 September 2018; transcript privately held by Dixon [address for private use], Berwyn, Pennsylvania, 2018.

35. Burlington County, New Jersey, "Births, 1880-1881," City of Burlington, Leander Clifton, 18 May 1880; image, "New Jersey, Births, 1670-1980," *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FCG3-CJD>); citing Burlington City, Burlington, New Jersey, United States, Division of Archives and Record Management, New Jersey Department of State, Trenton; FHL microfilm 494,188.



# Genograms and Family Patterns

As every good genealogist knows, carefully examining the documentary evidence and applying the five elements of the Genealogy Proof Standard is essential in order to arrive at a soundly reasoned conclusion. During this process, aspects of a family's history and psychology may be revealed.

Identifying patterns of behavior and traditions through documents and other resources can reveal the family's values or struggles, including divorce, elopement, volunteer military service, alcoholism or substance abuse, domestic abuse, adultery, criminal activity, a focus on education, mental illness, and so on. Analyzing these behavioral patterns can reveal clues that may lead to other documents.

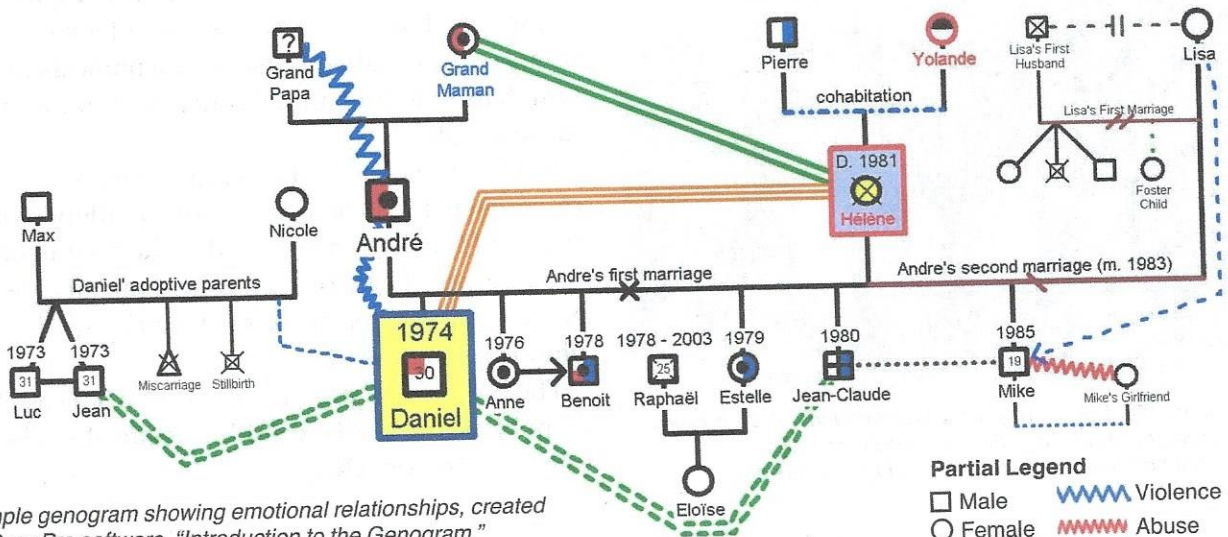
One effective way to trace patterns of behavior through generations of a family is to use a genogram, a tool often employed by psychologists in analyzing a family's behavioral history. A genogram looks similar to a family tree or a pedigree chart, but it also incorporates visual symbols to indicate behavior, relationships, medical issues, and other aspects.<sup>1</sup> Use of this tool may help researchers become better genealogists.

For example, in my family there is a pattern of elopement. My parents were about to elope until my mother's uncle discovered their plans. All four of my grandparents eloped or married without the consent and not in the presence of their families.<sup>2</sup>

Charting this marital pattern helped me find the marriage record of my great-grandparents, Joseph Fielding and Matilda Armbruster, before this record was indexed online. From census records, I knew they were married around 1895, but I could not find any record of their marriage in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where they lived.<sup>3</sup> Based on the family pattern of elopement, I looked for their marriage in the records of the nearest "Gretna Green" for Philadelphia. Indeed, I found the record for their marriage in Camden, New Jersey, on 2 August 1895.<sup>4</sup>

Although I believe I would have found the marriage record eventually, taking the possibility of elopement into consideration—given the family's marriage pattern—saved me extra time and effort.

Be careful using this strategy. It can help if used judiciously, but if not used with other evidence, it can lead in the wrong direction.



Sample genogram showing emotional relationships, created by GenoPro software. "Introduction to the Genogram," GenoPro (<https://www.genopro.com/genogram>).

1. "Genogram," Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genogram>).
2. Mathilde F. Cruice, mother of Sydney F. Cruice Dixon, interview by Sydney F. Cruice Dixon [address for private use], Berwyn, Pennsylvania, 15 May 2001; transcript privately held by Dixon, 2018. Also, Florida Department of Health, marriage certificate 9810 (1931), Edward Fielding and Kathryn Logan, Florida Department of Health, Jacksonville.
3. 1910 US census. Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, population schedule, Philadelphia, Ward 25, Enumeration District 553, p. 3 A, dwelling 38, Family 41, Joseph and Matilda Fielding; image, Ancestry, citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll T624\_1398.
4. New Jersey Marriage Records, New Jersey State Archives, marriage return (1895), Joseph Fielding and Matilda Armbruster; New Jersey State Archives, Trenton.

## Courts-Martial Records

The types of military trials and courts most often used during the Civil War period were general courts-martial, courts of inquiry, military commissions, and provost courts.

A court-martial operates under military law rather than civilian law and tries military personnel. The general court-martial is the highest level of court-martial and the tribunal where the most serious offenses are tried. Courts of inquiry conducted investigations but did not have the authority to issue punishments. Military commissions were special courts created to investigate and try civilians during times of conflict or periods of martial law.<sup>1</sup> Provost courts were under the jurisdiction of the provost marshal.<sup>2</sup> The Union forces primarily relied on military commissions—over two thousand cases were tried in Union military commissions—while the Confederates usually held provost courts.<sup>3</sup>

Always check for a court-martial file if there is any indication that the research subject may have had a court-martial. A soldier's compiled military

service record or pension application file may have a reference to a court-martial.

### NARA court-martial index

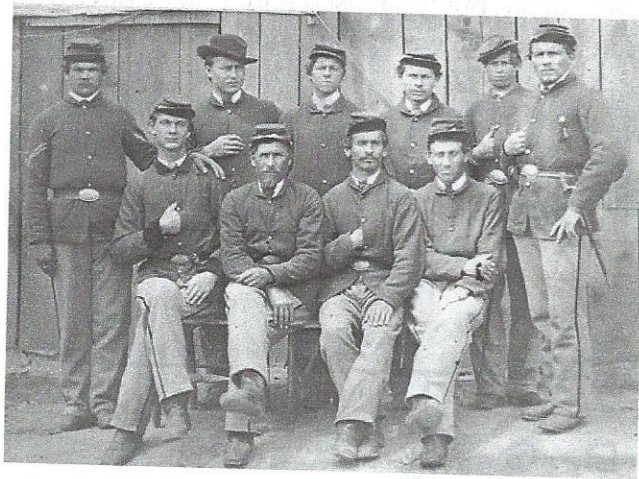
The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has made it much easier to find Army court-martial case files from 1800 to 1894. All of the 177,687 files in that period are now indexed in the online catalog under "Court Martial Case Files, 12/1800-10/1894," <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/301659>. Use the Search Within This Series button in the Details portion of the page. After clicking on this blue button, replace the \*:\* symbols in the search bar at the top with the surname of interest.

It is best to enter only the surname, since use of the soldier's full name might not retrieve an entry. For example, since Joseph Clifton is listed in this series as J W Clifton, there are no results from using Joseph Clifton or Joseph W Clifton as search terms. Only the subject of the court-martial is listed in the index. Other people involved in the court-martial, such as witnesses, are not listed.

Researchers may search for all the court-martial files of a particular military unit by using the unit as the search term, such as 6th New Jersey Infantry. Alternatively, use a state name as the search term to find all the court-martial case files for that state.

NARA will copy and send case files to researchers for a fee. Contact information to order copies of the file can be found at the bottom of the catalog entry page for each court-martial case file. NARA will communicate the fee prior to photocopying the file.

The index for later Army court-martial case files, from November 1894 to 1917, is onsite at Archives 1 in Washington, DC.<sup>4</sup>



"Court martial group, Army of the Cumberland." Mathew Brady Photographs of Civil War-Era Personalities and Scenes, National Archives; image (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/526923>).

1. Trevor K. Plante, "The Shady Side of Family History: Civil War Union Court-Martial Case Files," article text, "Prologue Magazine," *National Archives* (<https://www.archives.gov>) > Publications > Prologue > Previous Issues > 1998 Winter > The Shady Side...; citing *Prologue Magazine* 30:4 (December 1998).

2. "Union Provost Marshal," *Tennessee State Library and Archives Research and Collections* (<https://www.tnsos.net/TSLA/provost/index.php>).

3. For military commissions, see William Winthrop, *Military Law and Precedents*, 2nd ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 834; image, "Military Legal Resources," *Library of Congress* ([http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military\\_Law](http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law)) > Military Law Historical Monographs, Studies, Texts and Treatises > Military Law and Precedents. For provost courts, see William M. Robinson, Jr., *Justice in Grey: A History of the Judicial System of the Confederate States in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941), 359-360.

4. Information in this section provided by Claire Prechtel Kluskens, projects & reference archivist, National Archives and Records Administration.

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE CUMBERLAND,  
MEMPHIS, TENN., June 15, 1866.  
GENERAL ORDERS, }  
No. 2. }

I Before a General Court Martial, which convened at the United States Navy Yard, Memphis, Tennessee, pursuant to Special Orders No. 105, from Headquarters Department of Tennessee, dated at Memphis, Tenn., May 28th, 1866, and of which Capt. THOMAS J. DURNIN, 16th U. S. Infantry, was President, were arraigned and tried:  
1st—Private JOSEPH JOHNSON, Co. A, 3d Battalion, 16th U. S. Infantry.

CHARGE—*Quitting his Guard.*  
To which the accused pleaded, GUILTY.  
Findings, GUILTY.

*Sentence.*  
And the Court does therefore sentence him, Private Joseph Johnson, Co. A, 3d Battalion, 16th U. S. Infantry, to forfeit to the United States ten dollars (\$10.00) of his pay for one (1) month, and to carry a log of wood weighing twenty-five (25) pounds for three (3) days from reveille until retreat, under charge of the guard.

So much of the sentences in the cases of Privates Joseph Johnson and Peter Monahan, Co. A, 3d Battalion, 16th U. S. Infantry, as imposes the carrying of a log of wood weighing twenty-five (25) pounds, for the period of three (3) days, from reveille until retreat, and for seven (7) days in the case of Private Michael Collins, Co. H, 2d Battalion, 16th U. S. Infantry, not being recognized as a legal punishment by the 895th paragraph U. S. A. Regulations (1863), are disapproved. The remainder of the sentences in the respective cases are confirmed, and will be carried into effect by the proper officers in the detachments to which they belong.

The sentences in the cases of Privates Patrick O'Brien, Co. A, 3d Battalion, and John Lennon, Co. H, 2d Battalion, 16th U. S. Infantry, are approved and confirmed, and will be carried into execution by the proper officers. The Penitentiary at Nashville, Tenn., is designated as the place of confinement in the case of Private Lennon, whither the prisoner will be sent under suitable guard by the Commanding Officer of the Post of Memphis, Tenn.

United States Army, Department of the Cumberland, General Court Martial Orders (Louisville, KY: 1866?-), 1, 3; image, Library of Congress (<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.law/law0001.201200203998855.1>).

## NARA finding aids

- Registers of Court Martial Cases, 1800–1890, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/591699>
- Transcr of Proceedings of General Courts Martial, 1799–1867 [Navy], <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/2460083>

## Library of Congress: General Court Martial Orders

The Library of Congress has digitized several volumes of military courts-martial, 1862–1872, spanning the Civil War and Reconstruction Era. The names of the accused and the crime(s), findings, and sentences are provided. A list of links for the volumes of six Army departments is available on *In Custodia Legis*, the blog of the Law Library of Congress.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the courts-martial relate to desertion, drunken and disorderly conduct, and disobedience of orders. Other charges and findings concern spying, treason, and embezzling the US government. There are also trials of citizens for spying or aiding and abetting rebels.

The military trial volumes are viewable in PDF and page-turner versions. Name indexes are

5. Pamela Barnes Craig, "Civil War Military Trials," *In Custodia Legis*, blog of the Law Library of Congress, 13 November 2012 (<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2012/11/civil-war-military-trials>); select Army department.

included and tabbed in the PDF view, and in some of the volumes a subject index is available. OCR searches may be incomplete. One volume, for the Middle Department, is entitled *Military Trials*. The rest are called *General Court Martial Orders*, for the Departments of the Cumberland, the Gulf, the Missouri, the South, and Texas.

## Other digitized courts-martial records

- Navy Courts-Martial Records, 1799-1860, on Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/title/990/navy-courts-martial-records-1799-1867>
- Union Citizens File, on Fold3: <https://www.fold3.com/title/782/union-citizens-file>

## Resources

Eales, Anne Bruner and Robert M. Kvasnicka. *Guide to Genealogical Records in the National Archives*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Trust Fund Board, 2000.

Neagles, James C. *U. S. Military Records: A Guide to Federal and State Sources, Colonial America to the Present*. Provo, UT: Ancestry Publishing, 1994. 🌳