

MILITARY MINUTES

U.S. Draft Registrations

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Military records can lead genealogists to many new sources of information. One of the first records that you may come across (for our United States ancestors) that could provide unknown information are found in draft registrations. The records are civilian in scope, but can provide clues of prior military service or proof of current war conditions.

The National Archives hold custody overall for the bulk of the draft registrations from the Civil War to the post war years after World War II. The Archives organizes their records by grouping numbers. The Civil War draft registrations are found in two record groups; these include RG59, and RG110. The later Draft registrations are found in RG147. In all cases, finding aids are available to locate and obtain copies.

CIVIL WAR

Draft records date back to the days of the Civil War, with the first national draft being signed by Abraham Lincoln on March 3, 1863. It was called the Enrollment Act of 1863 and replaced the former Militia Act of 1862. This draft only applied to men residing in states under Union Control.

The draft includes several lists detailing information about men eligible to be drafted to fight for the Federal Army. This included consolidated lists for men between the ages of 20-45, which are grouped and divided into two classes of records. This list contains the name, residence, age, race, marital status, place of birth, any former military service, occupation, and remarks for each registrant. Some examples of remarks could include ineligibility based on religious reasons or former service in the Confederate Army.

Other registrations included medical exams, statements of substitutes, and case files of persons who were draft aliens. Aliens were ineligible for military service and therefore contain files that document their nativity. All of these are all available at the National Archives. The last group of records includes the descriptive rolls that contain the name, age, physical descriptions, where born, occupation, when and where drafted and remarks. The descriptive books are located at the regional branches of the National Archives and can be accessed by researchers as these have not been filmed or scanned.

The records are divided into two separate record groups at the National Archives. For RG59 (Department of State) covered those men who were aliens. The other is RG110

(Provost Marshal) that recorded all the other lists of men being drafted. The only Civil War draft registration records available online are the consolidated lists; [click here](#) to search them at Ancestry.com (subscription required).

On the Confederate side during the Civil War, there are a limited number of draft records available (some at the National Archive) and these will be discussed in a future episode along with those Confederate draft records in the custody of the individual state archives.

Fast forward 65 years where for a number of years there are no draft registrations. This brings us to the years preceding World War I.

WORLD WAR I

Called the “war to end all war,” it was fought between 1914 and 1918 and ended in the misery of countless lives lost. The United States entered the war in Europe on April 6, 1917, totally unprepared for overseas campaigning. This conflict forced our government to consider other means to recruit the tens of thousands of men it would take to wage this war.

The Selective Service Act of 1917 authorized the President of the United States to increase the military establishment being passed by Congress on May 18, 1917. The Act directed the Provost Marshal General Office (P.M.G.O.) to select men eligible for military service.

The draft is separated into three registrations. All men were required to register, regardless of whether they were native born or aliens. Each registration had a specific number of questions required on the forms to be filled out by the registrants and then processed by the P.M.G.O.

- The 1st draft registration was dated June 5, 1917 for men aged 21 to 31 and consisted of 12 questions.
- The 2nd draft registration was dated June 5, 1918 for men who had turned 21 since the previous registration and included a supplemental registration on August 24, 1918 for men turning 21 after June 5, 1918. Each consisted of 10 questions.
- The 3rd draft registration was dated September 12, 1918 and was intended for all men aged 18 to 45 years. It consisted of 20 questions.

Each registrant was required to provide their name, age, birthdate, and birthplace (in 2 of the 3 registrations), occupation or employer, nearest family, and a summarized physical description.

By the end of World War I, nearly 24 million men had registered for the draft. This number excluded individuals who were registered enemy aliens, or already in the United States military.

The original cards are available at the National Archives branch in Morrow, Georgia. World War I Draft registrations are available online at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, Findmypast.com and fold3. (FamilySearch is the only one with free access (a personal subscription or library access is required for the others).

WORLD WAR II

The eve of World War II saw the passage of another conscription act. This act was the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, and was the first peace time conscription in United States History. This act officially established the Selective Service System. The draft during World War II consisted of seven registrations. The “Old Man’s Draft,” or 4th registration, was for men born between 1877 and 1897, with the other six registrations intended for the younger adult men born after 1897:

- 1st: October 16, 1940, included all men 21-31.
- 2nd: July 1, 1941, for those men who reached age 21 since the first registration.
- 3rd: February 16, 1942, for men ages 20-21 and ages 35-44.
- 4th: April 27, 1942, for all men between the ages of 45 and 64. The registrants were not eligible for military service (this is the “Old Man’s Draft”).
- 5th: June 30, 1942, for all men between the ages of 18 and 20.
- 6th: December 10 - 31, 1942, for all men who had reached the age of 18 since the previous registration.
- 7th: November 16 - December 31, 1943, for American men living abroad between the ages of 18 and 44.

Registrants were required to provide their name, address, birthdate, birthplace, and employer’s information, along with a contact individual who would always know the registrants information or address. The form also asked for the telephone number of the registrant in addition to a more complete physical description.

Several of the states that recorded the “Old Man’s Draft” were lost. The National Archives no longer has these records available. These states include; AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, and TN.

Not all of the World War II Draft registrations are available online. Less the states above, view 4th registration online at Ancestry.com (here’s a [second Ancestry.com database](http://second.Ancestry.com)), Familysearch.org (index and [browse-only images](http://browse-only-images)) and fold3. The fold3 database includes 25 states and territories that include; AL, AK, AR, AR, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HA, ID, LA, MD, NV, NM, NC, OK, PA, UT, VA, WV, WY, and the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. (On Ancestry.com, the number of states is limited to AR, GA, LA, and NC.) Other states are in the process of being added, however the remaining states are only available directly from the National Archives in St. Louis, MO. It is not uncommon to find men registered for both World War I and World War II which would depend on their ages.

Some of the other registrations are also available online for a selected grouping of states.

POST-WORLD WAR II

The draft and registrations didn't cease with the conclusion of World War II. Again activated in 1948 until 1973 when President Richard M. Nixon officially signed legislation that ended the draft. This was later suspended in 1975, and five years later in 1980 President James E. Carter again brought back into activity the Selective Service System. This came in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. To present the Selective Service System still remains active requiring all men to register within 30 days of their reaching the age of 18 years.

To gain access those records not online from World War II and for the later registration cards for men for the Korean and Vietnam conflicts and for other years, researchers will need to contact the National Archives in St. Louis, MO.

The original records are available in person or through the mail:

National Archives-St. Louis

ATTEN: RL-SL

P.O. Box 38757

St. Louis, MO 63138-0757

This office handles the original cards for all men born between April 28, 1877 and March 28, 1957. The National Archives fee schedule is in place to request the records by mail. The Draft Registration Card (SSS Form 1) costs \$7.00 and to follow through with the Draft Classification History (SSS Form 102) which costs \$27.00. The latter fee includes the Draft Registration Card in the price. The National Archives on their website provides researcher with online access to information, fees, and a .PDSF request form (to mail to their office) for all the draft cards.

[Click here](#) for a direct link to the form. The very top of the form states clearly this is intended for all men born prior to 1960. (Note above that the ending date is 1957. For men born between March 29, 1957 and December 31, 1959, the law never required these men to register.)

The National Archives doesn't hold copies of records for men born after January 1, 1960. To gain access to draft registration for all other years researcher was directly contact the Selective Service System to request record copies. [Click here](#) for all the details.

