



All's Fair in Love and War

The Civil War Widows' Pension Files

Indexes

T288, *General Index to Pension Files, 1861–1934*

- 544 Rolls
- Available to research in the Microfilm Room at the National Archives in Washington, DC (Archives I) and online at Ancestry.com
- Arranged by surname, then first name
- Include names of widow and/or dependents

T289, *Organizational Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900*

- 765 Rolls
- Available to research at Archives 1 and online at Fold3.com
- By state, type of service, then regiment, then company, then soldier's name
- In general, it does not indicate the name of widow or the guardian of minors
- In general, more likely to indicate a date of death

Record Group 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs
Entry 12-A

The Case Files of Approved Pension Applications of Widows and Other Dependents of the Army and Navy Who Served Mainly in the Civil War and the War with Spain
("Widows' Certificate" [WC] Files")
National Archives Identifier 30020

What might I find in a WC File?

Invalid Pension Documents

- If a widows' husband had applied for an invalid pension prior to his death, his pension files will be consolidated together with the widows' claim in the WC file. This includes SO and SC files as well as corroborating evidence to the claim and Examining Surgeons Certificates.

Declaration for Widow's Pension and Widow's Certificate

- When a widow applied for a soldier's pension, her file was designated a Widow's Original, or WO number. When it was approved, it was filed under a Widow's Certificate, or WC number.
- These documents include reasons for approval or disapproval of pension and any subsequent increases.

Documents Corroborating Widow's Claim

- In order to receive a widow's pension, the widow had to provide proof of marriage to the deceased veteran, she had to show proof of her husband's death, and in the 1890s she might have been subject to a "means test" proving that she had no overly valuable property.
- May include vital records: marriage, birth, death, divorce.
- Internal correspondence from the Bureau of Pensions related to any discrepancies or conflicts that had arisen to the widow's claim.
- Affidavits taken from neighbors, friends, co-workers, employers, and others familiar with the widow's and veteran's relationship.
- In some cases, the Bureau of Pensions would send a Special Examiner to investigate widows' claims, and the WC File may include transcribed depositions.
- Sometimes, files contain correspondence and appeals written in the widow's own hand or by others writing on her behalf.