

**"IN REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES": AGING
AND IMPOVERISHED BUCKS COUNTY
CONTINENTALS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN
THE YOUNG REPUBLIC**

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Revolutionary War veteran Thomas Corbitt was engaged in a fight for survival, except this struggle did not take place on a battlefield; nor were those dependent on his services brother soldiers in the field. While years earlier he answered the call to arms in the fledgling nation's fight for its survival, the entire Corbitt family was struggling for their own economic survival after the guns fell silent. Heavily in debt, Thomas Corbitt, a veteran of the Pennsylvania Line, sought a federal pension to remain economically viable. After Thomas's death, his wife, Sarah, pursued a pension as well. Away from the fields of battle, thousands of revolutionary veterans similar to Thomas Corbitt battled against poverty in the postwar period.¹

The ragged army's winter of discontent at Valley Forge is cherished in the national lore of the American Revolution, celebrated for the patriots' perseverance in the face of despair. In the winter of their lives, former Continentals struggled to endure pressing financial difficulties, unemployment, underemployment, an

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incapacity to work, and physical infirmities—all of which compounded aging veterans' precarious postwar economic position. Revolutionary War veterans' old age was characterized by deprivation, and yet they were embraced by early American society. The Revolutionary War Pension Acts of 1818 and 1820 awarded veterans and their families distinctive treatment as aged poor. The pension legislation benevolently responded to the increasingly visible impoverishment among old patriots who midwived the birth of the republic. These veterans lacked strong ties to family, property, and occupation. Their legacy as surviving Revolutionary War servicemen, though, provided them social status in later life and elevated pension recipients to a romanticized stature. In the early years of the republic, the compensatory nature of the pension program rewarded the contributions of Continental army veterans, who were venerated as a link to the young nation's formative past. Despite having limited financial resources, owning little property, continuing wartime physical hindrances, experiencing a wide variety of age-related chronic health conditions concurrently, and exhibiting a fluid set of family arrangements, government annuities categorized veterans and their families as charges worthy of assistance, distinguishing honored pensioners from other destitute people.

Service within the Continental ranks was the basic component of veterans' citizenship when civic republicanism "assumed that the sine qua non of citizenship was the independent control of property *and* the ability to bear arms in defense of the republic."² These pensioners may not have had the independent control of property—an essential element of republican citizenship—but they had borne arms for the nation, and were accorded a position of honor and reparative payments for their past service. Lacking property, settlement, and independence, other crucial terms in the practices of citizenship were emphasized, such as the veterans' civic virtue and self-sacrificing public service to the republic. The self-seeking realities and inglorious exigencies of the Revolution—war profiteering, illicit trade, inflated prices, graft, ambivalence over the cause of liberty, the militia's inability to fully prosecute the war, and the reliance on land and cash incentives to entice regulars because of inadequate troop strength—did not live up to the standards of American republicanism. Celebrating honorable former Continentals, however, as embodiments of selfless sacrifice for the public good refocused memory of the war effort. Invoking them as the doyen of republican citizens made over aspects of the revolutionary movement, enhancing the moral strength of early national character.

Revolutionary War Pensions

Thirty-five years after the war ended, in March 1818, a Democratic Republican president, James Monroe, proposed legislation granting lifetime pensions to Revolutionary War veterans who had served at least nine months in the Continental army and who were “in need of assistance from their country for support.” In a burst of patriotic rhetoric, trumpeting, “Let us show the world that Republics are not ungrateful,” Congress approved “an act to provide for certain persons engaged in the land and naval service of the United States in the revolutionary war.” Pension advocates were responding to a public outpouring of sentimentality toward revolutionaries, which was part of a swelling national spirit following the War of 1812. The state, moreover, was trying to determine what a grateful nation owed to its aging, impoverished veterans who took up arms for the republic. Federal grants addressed directly the question of reciprocity for service rendered and privileges attached to it in the form of pensions.³

The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 established the policy of aiding those veterans in need. Rewarding Continental service for the new nation, Congress enacted the country’s first military pension program, with poor law principles—a twofold measure to salvage veterans from destitution. The bill provided \$96 a year for privates and \$240 annually for officers who served at least nine months in a Continental line and who were “in reduced circumstances.” Supplementary legislation in 1820 toughened the poverty provision with the addition of a means test that required indigent applicants to submit a certified schedule of personal property and income. Not until the twentieth-century New Deal would such a comparable social welfare program of this scale grant direct relief to the impoverished. By 1832, the federal government granted unrestricted service pensions to nonneedy veterans of any military organization. Landmark congressional acts in 1853 and 1855 expanded eligibility to all widows of veterans.⁴ Overall, the government paid an estimated \$70 million in benefits to Revolutionary War veterans and widows.⁵

The historical evidence collected in the pension files, including property schedules, depositions, and other miscellaneous documents, gather a truly remarkable treasure trove of early American source material. To be sure, there are potential problems with using the cache of service, personal, and economic data generated during the application process. The extensive body of records, though, gives an invaluable voice to ordinary soldiers and their

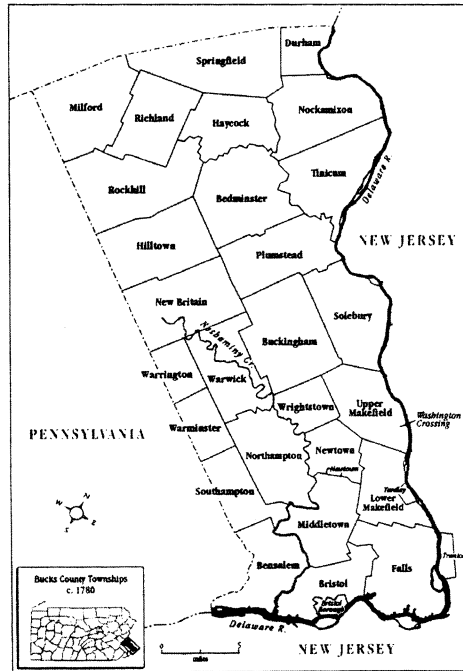
families.⁶ With the potential of this primary source and its breadth of substantive information, more and more historians are utilizing the richly detailed material in their research.⁷

Research Design

Dimensions of poverty are explored here by looking at young enlisted men of the Continental army as aging impoverished veterans. This exploration relies on the linkage between the Revolutionary War Pension Application Files and public records of thirty-seven veterans of the Continental establishment. Eighteen names were drawn, in part, from a list of 1818 pensioners compiled in the *Pennsylvania Archives*, while the remaining nineteen names of 1818 and 1820 pensioners were gathered by searching the voluminous collection of pension file abstracts.⁸ The objective of this collective biography is to understand better the postwar later lives of white laboring veterans with ties to Bucks County, Pennsylvania (see map 1 in the appendix), those either enlisting in the county or residing there when they obtained a pension. Examining a group of men who shared common historical experiences affecting their life course enables data collection relevant to the study of governmental policy, veteranhood, poverty, long-term physical disability, the health of the elderly, and family life. A cohort of Continental army veterans who enlisted in or moved to Bucks County is used here to explore the personal lives of nonelite revolutionaries. To the extent possible, the veteran cohort is compared and contrasted to nonpensioned white male heads of household of the closest available proximate age group (aged forty-five and above in the 1820 census) from Falls and Hilltown Townships, Bucks County. Both family size and wealth will be employed to measure differences between these groups.

For the purposes of this study and comparison with the cohort, it was necessary to establish this fixed age group at forty-five years of age and up because that age was employed as the 1820 federal census's last category for male heads of household. The age figure is not too low considering that at the time of the first federal census in 1790, less than 20 percent of the young nation's population lived to the age of seventy. By 1830, only four percent of the white population was sixty and older, and the proportion of the white population over seventy-years of age was less than two percent.⁹ Historically, moreover, illustrations of life stages have depicted a fifty-year-old person on

Map 1: Township Boundaries within Bucks County



Source: Reproduced, by permission of the publisher, from Owen S. Ireland, "Bucks County," in *Beyond Philadelphia: The American Revolution in the Pennsylvania Hinterland*, ed. John B. Frantz and William Pencak (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 23.

a plateau, with those younger on ascending steps and those older descending.¹⁰ Widely separated Hilltown and Falls Townships, one situated in the upper part of the county and the other an affluent, long-settled township in the lower part of the county, were selected for a county-wide cross sampling of the area's older adult male population. Information in pension files, census schedules, tax records, and probate records, revealed that members of the cohort were to be found throughout the county. In the northern parts of the county, George Crow resided in Springfield, Andrew Stoll dwelled in Nockamixon, John McKinney lived in Hilltown, both Andrew Bryson and Claudius Martin resided in Bedminster, and Adam Swager was located in Plumstead. In the middle and lower parts of the county, William Kernachan resided in Warrington, Henry Fratt was in Warwick, William Willard lived in Newtown, Andrew Stoope and John Blundin resided in Middletown, and

John Murphy dwelled in Falls. With such a county-wide distribution, the purpose of the comparison with nonpensioners is to assess the cohorts' station in relation to a contemporaneous group of men in different parts of the county.

Bucks County was situated in an active theater of operations, while internally the residents' disaffection with the rebellion's course of direction produced an anemic war effort. Military campaigns unfolded in and around the county, notably serving as the launching ground for Gen. George Washington's December 1776 attack on Trenton, located near the 1777–1778 winter quarters at Valley Forge, and, between September 1777 to June 1778, in close geographic proximity to British occupied Philadelphia. Yet, the coming of war failed to inspire a martial spirit. With the flames of rebellion rising through crisis and resistance, the inhabitants of Bucks County united in opposition when protest was confined to the boycott of British goods but ethnic-religious divisions appeared after war engulfed the colonies in a full-blown conflagration. While there may have been a popular response to controversial Parliamentary acts, once the shooting war began the lack of enthusiasm among the residents of the county was demonstrated by their indifferent response to the patriot cause. The county's farmers balked at the opportunity to provide material support to the troops in the area, and the county's inhabitants failed to recruit and field their quota of men for Continental service. Historian Owen S. Ireland calculated that Bucks County contained seven percent of the Pennsylvania's adult males but mustered only 5 of the 155, or about three percent, of the army's infantry companies raised in the state. Bucks County's contribution to the army, Ireland determined, should have been ten or eleven companies.¹¹ The men of this veteran cohort, then, were among those few willing to enlist as soldiers on behalf of the Revolution.

Over the past several decades, and especially in recent years, an impressive body of scholarship has emerged on the history of Revolutionary War soldiers and veterans. The topic has been a fruitful field of inquiry, yielding many insights into the composition of the army, motivation for enlistment, wartime service experiences, class and rank differences in the military, participants' worldviews, the legislation of social policy, and the public's sentimental lionization of veterans. This study of Revolutionary War veterans belongs to a similar line of inquiry but is specific in its focus on the condition and perspective of 1818 and 1820 pensioners as dependent elderly men. Using the cohort of 1818 and 1820 pensioners as the tool of analysis, the study builds upon the findings of historians, and considers the social and cultural meanings attached to the pension program,

but centers attention on the veterans' own perceptions in pension claims about labor force participation, family labor strategies, family role structure, age relations within the family, financial responsibility, economic dependence, the internal dynamics of family strategies, and service compensation. The aim is to ask certain questions about the family in past time and view old age and poverty in one particular setting. Studying the experiences of the cohort can provide answers to questions about the familial costs of economic deprivation occasioned by disability, age, and underemployment. The answers to such questions enable historians to reconstruct, to some extent, the basic characteristics of family life for specific impoverished families in their communities.

The collective portrait limned from the Revolutionary War Pension Application Files, state pensions, tax lists, census schedules, and wills is meant to evoke the fabric of life among economically disadvantaged early Americans, seeking to better understand the personal world of the lower orders. The data provide an opportunity to look at how Continental veterans fared after the war, considering some of the personal implications of the American Revolution and how military service affected their subsequent lives. Experiences during and after the war are examined in order to assemble a more progressive picture of the veterans' development with time and age in the decades after their reentry into civilian life. These aging men were in declining health and exhibited tenuous ties to property, occupation, settlement, and family, making their postservice period a particularly vulnerable time. Despite such an otherwise disreputable situation, their service in the Continental army and bloodshed in the Revolutionary War provided a basis for their acclaimed place as dutiful citizens of the republic.

Historiography and Profile of the Cohort in the Continental Army

The private soldier of the American Revolution, in particular the post-1776 enlistee, was typically poor and young. Historians investigating the socioeconomic origins of Continental recruits have found they were among the more marginal members of revolutionary society. The consensus has been that the Continental army was an integrated force, largely drawing its soldiery from the dispossessed, including sizeable numbers of the landless, recent immigrants, blacks, strolling poor, indentured servants, and substitutes. Class and age, especially after the rush to war faded, played significant roles in determining who served as a Continental.¹²

After the war, substantial numbers of former Continentals continued to struggle in poverty, a circumstance that often entangled them during the rest of their lives. While the Continental army's exploits on the battlefield made textbooks, a lesser-known chapter went unnoticed. Early accounts of the War for American Independence overlooked soldiers' postwar transition. The first historian of the Revolution, David Ramsay, regretted that the "unpaid army" was "unrewarded for its services" and went "without an equivalent for their labors, or even a sufficiency to enable them to gain a decent living." Still, he observed that "privates generally betook themselves to labor, and crowned the merit of being good soldiers by becoming good citizens." In a mid-nineteenth century Whig interpretation, George Bancroft wrote that returning soldiers simply "retired to their homes."¹³ Late twentieth-century works more closely studied Continentals' postservice experiences, and found that they "did not fare well economically" after the war. Recent historians have documented that soldiers returned to civilian life as poor as they had been at enlistment, and remained at the bottom of the economic order.¹⁴

These prewar and postwar characteristics appear in the Bucks County sample of men who received pensions (see table 1). The stated occupations of this group of veterans demonstrated they were members of the lower orders—those who worked with their hands. Jacob Lewis was a carpenter. Dennis Cain and Henry Fratt were fence makers. Brothers George and Jonathan Scott both explained that they were "unable to work." Andrew Stoope candidly stated that he had "no trade." These aging veterans were landless laborers, day laborers, unskilled laborers, and artisans. Even within the ranks of artisans, though, a hierarchy existed. At the bottom were coopers, weavers, and shoemakers who possessed limited and easily learned skills and needed little capital. Among the pensioners from Bucks, 19 percent were among this group of lesser craftsmen. The clear plurality of the sample, 24 percent, reported to be laborers. Milling, plastering, blacksmithing, tanning, shingling, and carpentry each represented approximately 3 percent of the sample respectively. Farmers formed only 8 percent of the sample population, reflecting that the bedrock of the sample was a large number of landless laborers. Eleven percent claimed they could not work or did not have an occupation.¹⁵ Clearly these men composed some of the lowest ranks of early national society.

While there is disagreement of interpretation over the question of recruits' motivations for long-term enlistment, historians of the American Revolution agree that the vast preponderance of common soldiers were not only poor, but

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TABLE 1: Biographical Information on Pensioners

Name	Occupation in 1820	Age of Applicant in 1776
David Alshouse	Basket Weaver	18
Stephen Ballard	Laborer	14
John Blundin	Laborer	29
Andrew Bryson	Laborer	20
Dennis Cain	Fence Maker	32
Francis Carberry	Common Laborer	23
Thomas Corbitt	Miller	24
Andrew Cramer	Cooper	32
George Crow	Making Oak Shingles	23
Lambert Dorland	Shoemaker	22
Jacob Doughty	Laborer	23
Thomas Doughty	Laborer	16
David Edgar	Tanner	25
Henry Fratt	Post Fence Maker	26
John Hawkenberry	Unknown	24
James Hogge	Black Smith	33
William Kernachan	Weaver	27
David Kinsey	"No occupation"	34
James Kirk	Farmer	23
Isaac Lewis	Unknown	26
Jacob Lewis	Carpenter	27
Claudius Martin	Unknown	38
John McKinney	Shoemaker	27
John Murphy	Laborer	26
Jeremiah Murray	Farmer	26

TABLE 1: Biographical Information on Pensioners (Continued)

Name	Occupation in 1820	Age of Applicant in 1776
John Murray	Tailor	20
John Patton	Tailor	22
George Scott	"Unable to work"	26
Jonathan Scott	"Unable to work"	28
Levi Starling	Laborer	25
James Starr	Plasterer	18
Andrew Stoll	Weaver	21
Andrew Stoope	"No trade"	22
Adam Swager	Laborer	37
Benjamin Watson	Farmer	18
John Weasey	Weaver	12
William Willard	Unknown	10

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

also young men. In a study of Pennsylvania Continentals, John Trussell found that almost three-fourths were between eighteen and thirty-two years of age when they joined the army, and well over half were only in their twenties. He determined that the average age at the time of enlistment for Pennsylvania regulars was twenty-five years and five months.¹⁶ The Bucks County cohort exhibited similar traits, with 89 percent thirty-two years of age and below and 76 percent aged sixteen to thirty. In addition, 65 percent of the sample were in their twenties in 1776, with the greatest number of veterans falling within the twenty-one to twenty-five bracket. In 1776, furthermore, more individuals were under twenty (19 percent) than were over thirty (16 percent).¹⁷ There is no pretense to any bold assertion that the trajectory of these men's postwar lives was representative of all former Continentals, but if the background of the cohort is skewed toward the majority, it is less a problem than a boon. Aspects of poorer people's lives related here were the experiences of the propertyless young men who disproportionately constituted the ranks, shouldered

the Revolutionary War's extensive military service demands, and bore the brunt of its heavy human costs.

Impact and Long-Term Costs of the Revolutionary War

The nation was violently forged by force of arms in a long, bloody conflict, and the War for Independence took a high toll in human life, shattered limbs, and physical suffering. In addition to 6824 battle deaths, another 8445 soldiers and sailors were wounded in military action.¹⁸ Approximately one out of every five revolutionary combatants, both regulars and militia in the field, were touched by the vicissitudes of warfare. The heaviest burden of fighting, furthermore, fell to the Continental rank and file, and the soldiery surely gave their lifeblood in combat. Historians James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender put forward a casualty rate as high as 30 to 40 percent for these troops, a much larger proportion compared to the 13 percent figure among Union troops during the Civil War, the country's bloodiest war for overall military casualties.¹⁹ Thus, the American Revolution was an ordeal with great physical impact on its participants. Dislocations resulting from the Revolution stretched long past the conclusion of hostilities, as many surviving Continentals were disabled during the war.

A reconsideration of the cost in lives and disabilities conveys some human dimensions of the war.²⁰ For some suffering with war injuries, certainly the long-term impact of the conflict was profound. Years after the war ended the impairments caused by the conflict could be observed in the later lives of these men. Some ex-soldiers bore physical scars that never disappeared, and, in these cases, the Revolutionary War left a legacy of maimings and broken lives, exacting a heavy price and hampering veterans' economic viability as they grew older. Specifically, the difficulty of pursuing a civilian occupation in the postwar period was a lasting, pauperizing effect of the war.

Survivors with service wounds reentered civilian life at a disadvantage, facing lifelong disabilities that adversely affected their ability to work. Veteran James Starr, for instance, stated with feeling in 1820 that he was "still suffering with wounds received in the service." Starr was "not one third of his time capable of pursuing his trade and at best not capable of doing half work" due to war injuries and other "pains." David Edgar, petitioning the state of Pennsylvania for a pension in 1813, was determined to "call upon" the government for which he "fought & bled," and, with another petitioner, was

described as “having received wounds in defense of their country.” In September 1776 John Murphy was “in the battle at Harlem where he was wounded by a musket ball in the leg.” Levi Starling reportedly “received two flesh wounds,” and was “severely wounded” while on Maj. Gen. John Sullivan’s 1779 expedition to Tioga. Starling did not describe the nature and extent of his wounds in detail, but maintained that he was “not able to pursue” labor because of “wounds received in the service.” On August 22, 1776, while setting fire to wheat stacks that had fallen into possession of the British, Isaac Lewis “was wounded . . . in an action on Long Island by a musket ball breaking his thigh.” It was with great difficulty that his comrades even rescued him. As a result of the wound inflicted “he has been a cripple ever since, entirely unable to walk but with a crutch.” Not all service related wounds were incurred from derring-do on the battlefield. David Alshouse, in 1780, was “disabled by a fall” from a rampart at West Point, New York. The injury he sustained “when in the service of the United States” prevented him “in a great degree from getting a living by labor.”²¹ The legacy of battlefield experience included persistent wartime afflictions that rippled across the remainder of their adult lives, putting war wounded veterans at an occupational disadvantage and hindering them from earning an adequate income for a self-sufficient living. Descriptions of valorous fighting in the battlefields and permanent wartime disabilities increased the credibility of their petition, and further entitled such self-sacrificing patriots to the privileges of a pension award based on military achievement.²² More important to their personal aftermath of the war were the continuing occupation-related difficulties, as their career development was retarded by residual post-combat health problems severe enough to limit their work and physical activities.

While the descriptions of these veterans convey the human cost of eighteenth-century military engagement, illustrate the permanence of injuries, and document how they faced a lifetime of recovery, their wartime ordeals became inspirational images for those seeking to rally the American cause against another generation’s fight with Great Britain. In 1814, N. B. Boileau, an officer in the Revolutionary War, urged veterans from the last war to “tell your sons . . . of the labors, the toils, the dangers, the privations you underwent to procure it [liberty]—shew them your honorable scars, and tell them it was not for yourselves alone that you spent your wealth, your strength, and your blood”²³ The wartime injuries disfigured many soldiers’ bodies and beset their postwar lives with difficulties, but dramatic references glossed over the long-lasting impact on their bodily health and

subsequent daily lives in their families and work. Battle scarred Revolutionary War veterans were evoked to enrich future generations by providing symbols of duty, honor, and country. Boileau's oration overlooked the disabling effects of military action for these men by idealizing their wounds as admirable marks of service to be prized.

Besides enemy-inflicted wounds, the military living and medical environment could also be harmful to a soldier's well-being and recovery. The army was plagued with supply shortages and had difficulty meeting the basic material needs of its soldiers. Andrew Bryson "endured hunger, poverty, and want while in the service without a murmur."²⁴ Other soldiers, however, were not so patient, as many discontented Continentals refused to accept their situation and clamored the beleaguered army for redress.²⁵ Compared to officers, lower ranking men received insufficient rations, lived in filthy and cramped quarters, and performed the drudgeries of demanding labor details.²⁶ Poor sanitary conditions among troops quickly led to outbreaks of disease, with an estimated 10,000 soldiers dying in camp.²⁷ John Patton "was discharged on account of sickness." In November 1776, John McKinney "was taken ill and sent to the hospital" during his service. He never specified an ailment, but it must have been debilitating because he "lay for some considerable time" and was "unable to do duty all winter."²⁸ To make matters worse, average soldiers received less attentive care, with unhygienic doctors and contaminated hospitals spreading disease and infection.²⁹ Illness and contagions contracted in unclean camps and the lack of adequate medical care prolonged a person's inability to follow a daily routine.

Soldiers with severe injuries or illnesses were commonly sent home because hospitals lacked the facilities to care for them, and enlisted men were financially responsible for their own medical care. During his second year in the service, David Kinsey was in a "bad state of health" and "went home sick." Due to his "indisposition" the ailing Kinsey "was released from the service and permitted to return to his relations in Bucks County." After receiving a wound in the leg, Isaac Lewis "was in several hospitals . . . for many months," until "some of his friends took him there from."³⁰ Later, one account recorded, he was "brought home by his parents."³¹ Lewis's removal suggests he was taken from an environment in which he was slowly recovering or possibly failing to recover. Both cases reveal the importance of family for receiving ill and injured returning veterans, and also allude to the lingering effects that the poor medical care had on the soldiers' post-action health.

While unsanitary conditions flourished in the camps and hospitals of the tented field, British prisons were notoriously atrocious. An estimated 8500 American prisoners perished while held in enemy captivity.³² Soldiers from Pennsylvania were recruited on a local level, and many of the veterans in the sample served in the Fifth Pennsylvania Regiment.³³ During the summer of 1776 this unit, together with the Third Pennsylvania Regiment, carried out much of the construction work at Fort Washington along the Hudson River on upper Manhattan Island. The men of the Third and Fifth Pennsylvania Regiments performed a regimen of fatiguing duty at the site from the time they arrived at New York in June 1776. Over the course of the summer and autumn the Third and Fifth Pennsylvania Regiments were stricken with fever and sickness, severely impairing the health of the troops. The British seized the fort in November 1776, capturing about 2800 weary American officers and soldiers in a mass surrender.³⁴ Alexander Graydon, a captain born in Bristol, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, was taken captive after the British assault and described what he witnessed as “abodes of human misery and despair.” Graydon saw how regular “soldiers were enclosed within walls, scantily supplied with provisions of bad quality, wretchedly clothed, and destitute of sufficient fuel, if, indeed, they had any.” The ghastly sight was so unsettling that the officer could barely stomach their harrowing plight, disclosing, “I rather chose to turn my eye from a scene I could not meliorate,” and confessed he could not bring himself to return to the soldiers’ prisons, which “soon became hospitals” marked by widespread disease.³⁵ Continental soldier Lambert Dorland was among the rank and file taken prisoner at Fort Washington, and was held captive for over a year in such appalling conditions. Dorland recounted that throughout the winter he “was kept in close confinement” and “suffered extreme hardships with cold and hunger.” N. B. Boileau, writing in support of Dorland’s application, recalled seeing Dorland “after his release from imprisonment,” remarking that “he was in a very weak and emaciated condition.” Henry Fratt was also taken prisoner at Fort Washington and held in captivity for three months. He “suffered” while held by the British and left his incarceration “in a very languishing condition.”³⁶ Captivity left soldiers haggard and gaunt, and the deponents suggested that they did not quickly recover from the long endured deplorable conditions.

Many of the protracted hardships, illnesses, and injuries that the Continental soldiers experienced during the Revolutionary War affected them physically and financially, and remained vivid in their minds. Service

experiences were such a defining moment in former soldiers' lives that they relived them through tales passed on to family members. A veteran-father's war stories could be infused with his sufferings as an enlisted man. Andrew Bryson's daughter, Mary, testified in 1851 that she had "often heard" her father "speak of that war, of the exposure, the privations, and the hardships he had endured until its termination, also of the different battles in which he had been engaged." It is not entirely clear what war veterans skirted in their version of events, but some certainly discussed bad times. Veteran-husbands retained wartime memories and detailed their accounts to spouses. Applying for a widow's pension in 1848, Sarah Stoope was able to recall her husband's military unit and recount his grueling campaigns, "as he often declared in his lifetime."³⁷ Displays of fortitude attributed to former stalwart soldiers, of course, only enhanced their admirable service, giving veterans and their families added license to public largesse.

Deserving Poor: Admired Continental Veterans in Respected Old Age

Prosperity remained elusive for these former Continentals, but their military service provided a distinguished position in the new nation. "Evidence of Continentals' or veterans' poverty," historian Charles Royster held, did "not identify them as a unique group in American society."³⁸ Conversely, veteranhood enhanced the cohort's social standing, providing former soldiers of humble means a rich status in later life. The distinction ultimately earned veterans respectability for themselves and their families. The federal pension program fostered a social differentiation, whereby aging and impoverished veterans and their families, despite exhibiting all the so-called distasteful trappings of those unable to support themselves—paupers with meager livelihoods, the disabled, transients, the unhealthy aged, and individuals without strong family ties—were set apart from other "contemptible," dependent poor.

The prestige bestowed upon Continental veterans was all the more distinctive considering the prevalence of antimilitary sentiment in early America. During the course of the war itself, there was a recognized indifference toward the army as the civilian population largely ignored the soldiers' privations. In the popular mind, the Revolution was a people's war won by true citizen-soldiers of the republic serving in the militia, a morally superior military institution. Traditional Anglo-American fears of a standing military, thought of as

paid professionals who were dangerous to the liberties of the people, inhibited the celebration of the Continental army.³⁹ Over time, the public viewed the Continental army as a special regular force that was composed of the people at large. Especially after 1815, Americans increasingly considered the Continental army as the vanguard of patriot military power with which the United States stood against the British crown. Key to this shift, historian John Resch asserted, was the image of the suffering soldier. Sympathy for the aging, frail, and impoverished army veterans, combined with the intense feeling of nationalism generated by the War of 1812, changed public memory of the war.⁴⁰ The longstanding antipension sentiment and continuing opposition to pension legislation stemmed from the fear that anything in the way of government-sponsored readjustment assistance would corrupt the idealism of the glorious cause. Concern for patriots who had sacrificed in the noble cause of liberty, however, overtook fears of creating a group dependent on the government, and Congress established pensions based on economic need. Rather than viewing pensions as symbols of privilege or the fruits of corruption, Americans began to see them as a proper and necessary way to repay those who fought and overcame trying times to create the nation.⁴¹ The 1818 act helped to remake America's memory of the Revolution and enabled indigent Continental regulars to collect public aid from the federal steward. Pensioners and their families received special consideration, with the stigma of pauperism and poor relief divorced from the government alms by the claimants' honorific service in the fight for independence.⁴²

The pension program ennobled elderly veterans, even though historian David Hackett Fischer found a trend toward the displacement of the old at the turn of the nineteenth century. This was a key period on the cusp of a transformation in the history of the elderly. Fischer traced the exaltation of the aged (1607–1820), which succumbed to a “new set of ideas” that resulted in a “revolution in age relations” (1770–1820) coinciding with American independence. American society was from this point set on a “straight and stable” course toward the ascendancy of gerontophobia (1770–1970) and a cult of youth prevalent into our own time.⁴³ In the early years of the republic, though, there was no evidence of pejorative perceptions or degradation in the young nation's treatment of these old Continentals. The status of aging veterans did not decline; rather, their previous service and accumulated wisdom were needed more than ever. In 1814, amidst a second war of independence against Great Britain, former Revolutionary War officer N. B. Boileau entreated patriot sages for direction, beseeching that “although your heads

are bleached with years, and the days of vigorous action and exertion be past, your country demands much from you; your experience and your counsel are put in requisition."⁴⁴ Age usually afforded few benefits, but revolutionary elders were accorded a position of value and honor at the very moment when American society supposedly moved inexorably toward gerontophobia. The new federal policy separated this specific population of older people from other needy groups.⁴⁵ During a period of increased hostility toward the elderly, the aging Continental veterans' ill fortune was a powerful sight that created public awareness and sympathetic sentiment, leading to charitable support for this uniquely defined class of older people in economic jeopardy. The veterans' advancing years stood in stark contrast to the youthful nation's vitality, when the average American in 1830 was sixteen-years-old.⁴⁶ Regardless of the age gap, there was no evident negative characterization of this distinctive cohort of elderly.

Veterans' status as elders was frequently noted and usually prefaced other designations; most were simply identified as an "old soldier." The emergence of derogatory names for the old, Fischer contended, illustrated their declining social status.⁴⁷ The aging pensioners were not judged contemptuously for their dependence, labeled as socially undesirable, or viewed as a threatening social concern. To the contrary, former Continentals merited assistance because of their advancing years. William Rogers wrote on behalf of James Kirk, emphasizing how the "old veteran" was "advanced in years" and "very anxious for relief." The veterans themselves acknowledged that they were simply not as fit and able-bodied, resilient and physically strong as they once were. While they were highlighting their destitution at the end of life to obtain pension funds, aging patriots exhibited a morbid acuteness of their own mortality. Thomas Doughty told the court, "as I was a stout man in '76 you must know that the grave will soon be my lot." James Kirk asked for "the small pittance" granted to "old soldiers for the few years and perhaps days" that he "may still survive."⁴⁸ Death certainly was an active presence in the lives of old and young early Americans.⁴⁹ Senescent veterans recognized that death may be around the corner and used that to full advantage and full dramatic effect when applying for a stipend.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, distrust of the poor presupposed that only their indolence and dissipation could account for their misery.⁵⁰ The deponents showed that they were not at fault for their misfortune. Little stigma was attached to poverty if it was generally due to circumstances beyond the individual's control. James Kirk maintained that his poor financial

condition resulted "from some unfortunate circumstances" whereby "he has lost his property." The pensions fostered a dichotomy between the deserving poor of Continental troops and indigent individuals who were seen as personally responsible for their status. With widespread public support, elderly revolutionary pensioners were not perceived as contested beneficiaries.⁵¹

Public dependents were considered troublesome and disreputable people who lived outside the pale of respectability, but Revolutionary War veterans in need of aid were bestowed a status as deserving individuals.⁵² John Murray, for instance, was deemed "a man of credibility and worthy of relief." Edmond Darnel's testimony underscored that Murray's service and deportment raised him to a special level "as to deserve relief." Even though Jonathan Scott was "extremely poor," Samuel Moore, whose property was adjacent to the county almshouse, regarded the veteran as "a very respectable man." In a letter to support the veteran's pension application, Moore commented that Scott's "behavior is very respectable," and noted his "superiority to the other paupers" in the almshouse. Andrew Bryson was "a man of truth and credit." James Hogge was thought "a man of great respectability." John Murphy was someone of "integrity" with "good credit, reputation, and veracity."⁵³ Even in death, these men were remembered for their virtuous conduct. Francis Carberry's obituary highlighted that he "has been a good and respectable neighbor." Noting that in his lifetime he was "a revolutionary pensioner," Levi Starling was heralded as a "worthy compatriot."⁵⁴ Respectable poor veterans became exemplars of revolutionary character. The core of republican thought was especially concerned with the moral integrity of the citizen and an individual's honesty, industry, self-control, and self-responsibility. Republican social theory recognized that the citizenry had tendencies toward self-interest, moral turpitude, and avarice.⁵⁵ The distressed situations of Bucks County pensioners were not interpreted as an indication of dissolute lives; rather, indigent veterans were viewed as models of republican respectability with sterling reputations.

Dependency and the Family Lives of Older Veterans

Despite exemplary behavior, dependence defined old age for many of these men, which was the opposite of idealized economic independence and vigorous manhood. Pauperism, after all, meant dependency. As pensioners on the dole, moreover, they relied on the bounty of the federal almoner and fell short

of the autonomy of independent living. It was during this time period, between 1810 and 1820, when the breadwinner ideal, and its denotation of a "responsible family man," entered the vernacular.⁵⁶ Regarding family duty, historian Nancy Cott observed that "Marriage was seen as a relationship in which the husband agreed to provide food, clothing, and shelter for his wife." To quintessentially "act like a man," Cott explained, "meant to support one's wife."⁵⁷ Civilian male identity, then, included seeing themselves as responsible for the financial support of their wives and children. Political scientist Mark E. Kann demonstrated how elites made manhood, which they equated with economic and political independence and dominance over women and other dependents, a prerequisite for republican citizenship. He delineated how the founders idealized the average American male as the "Family Man," as a father and husband having dependents to protect and provision, possessed responsibilities whose fulfillment necessitated the orderly behavior the founders deemed essential to republican citizenship.⁵⁸ These veterans, however, struggled to fulfill such expectations. John Weasey, age fifty-six, gave up his trade as a weaver, performing common labor when he could. The unsteady, unskilled work, though, was not enough, forcing Weasey to admit, "I cannot support my family," indicating his role in earning the family's income. At sixty-two, Benjamin Watson said he was "no longer able to support myself and family." Sixty-four-year-old John Murray echoed the same inability to support his family.⁵⁹ Age and infirmity had reduced veterans' physical activities and productive capabilities, and thus their ability to be self-supporting. The problem of dependency contradicted the basic assumptions of a man's required economic contribution to the family. Disengaged from work, they could not meet certain expectations for masculine behavior, namely providing for family. If revolutionary era manhood was predicated upon retaining the headship of a household, then poverty, diminished productivity, family dissolution, and encumbering kin undermined manly independence. In a white male-oriented society, these veterans' dependencies provide a view of men in a light other than the universal dominance of paternal authority.⁶⁰

Dependent husbands relied even more on their wives' contributions to the family's sustenance. Both men and women worked to support their households, dividing tasks in ways compatible with their perceived roles in life, but married veterans frequently characterized their spouses as sickly, thereby unable to contribute to the family's welfare. Henry Fratt's sixty-year-old wife, Rebecca, was "not able to do more than attend her household affairs." Wives carried out the day-to-day routines of maintaining a household, as the

extension of wifhood and motherhood over most of the life course continued to engage women in active familial roles into old age. Other than the tasks in and around the household, these women were looked to care for their husbands in failing health and fulfill the family's needs. William Kernachan stated that his seventy-four-year-old wife, Grissel, could "do but little towards her own support or mine." Infirm wives could not increase their amount of help to make up for their incapacitated husbands to aid in the family's subsistence.⁶¹

Compared to the sample of male heads of household over forty-five years of age, the veterans had substantially smaller household sizes. The sample of veterans averaged 4.3 persons in a household, whereas Hilltown Township households averaged 7.2 and Falls averaged 6.6. As opposed to the sample of veterans, the Hilltown sample had 2.9 more persons per house while the Falls sample averaged 2.3 more persons per household (see table 2). Continental service could be a background variable influencing family size, marital status, household formation, and fatherhood, for many veterans would have been in the army during the years when young men typically started marrying and having children. The pension records and census schedules reveal that impoverished and elderly veterans lived in a variety of household structures, ranging from simple nuclear families to more complex arrangements, such as co-residence. Although veterans' household composition varied considerably, a striking 42 percent of veterans lived alone (see tables 3 and 4). Half of the cohort either lived in nuclear or conjugal structures, but several resided with only a daughter or son. Family size, though, is more than sets of aggregate statistics, and is made up of relationships between members.⁶²

The burden of poverty fell hard upon these aging survivors of the Revolutionary War. Many of these aging veterans were dependent because they were unable to carry out for themselves the activities necessary to maintain a basic standard of everyday living. Disabilities incurred during the war and physiological age changes rendered members of the cohort physically unable to work, magnifying their plight, and poverty tended to increase dependency. The elderly veterans were simply unable to earn an income due to physical infirmities accompanying old age. Residential patterns (see tables 3, 4, and 5) and family size, then, did matter because a larger family meant that aging veterans had more people to rely on for help. The link between solitary households and little wealth indicates that poverty was especially pronounced when no family members were present.

The dependence of children rested upon their parents, and, at times, young offspring were a burden for their aging and impoverished veteran-fathers.

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TABLE 2: Comparison of 1820 Census Results for Veterans and Non-Pensioned Males Fifty-Years and Older

Sample	Household Size		
	Average	Median	Max.
Hilltown Township (N=122)	7.2	7	16
Falls Township (N=119)	6.6	6	16
Veteran Sample (N=14)	4.3	4	12

Source: Population Schedules of the Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

TABLE 3: Household Structures of Elderly Veteran Sample

Type of Household	Number	Percent
Solitary	15	42%
Conjugal	9	25%
Nuclear	9	25%
Other: Applicant living with son Daughters staying with applicant	3	8%
Total	36	100%

Note: The totals equal 36 because there were no family data in Isaac Lewis's pension file.

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

TABLE 4: Living Arrangements of the Elderly Veteran Sample

Map of Household	Number	Percent
Living with dependent children	9	25%
Living with adult unmarried daughter(s)	2	5%
Living with married son	1	3%
Living with wife only	9	25%
Living alone	15	42%
Total	36	100%

Note: The totals equal 36 because there were no family data in Isaac Lewis's pension file.

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Seventy-two-year-old John Blundin had “thirteen children living, four of whom are under ten years of age and has no means of supporting them.” John Weasey, age fifty-six, had four children all under the age of ten, and “none of them [were] able to maintain themselves” because they were still young. Henry Fratt, age seventy, stated that his twenty-year-old son Henry and twenty-one-year-old daughter Margaret were “both able to maintain themselves,” implying the children were no longer a burden for the father. Often heads of nuclear families, which comprised a quarter of the sample (see table 3), remarked that children were too young to perform any kind of labor. For the 25 percent of sample households with young dependent children (see table 4), they drained family resources if they could not contribute to the family’s maintenance.⁶³

TABLE 5: Age Structures for Each Type of Household (N=36)

Age at Application	Household Type				
	Solitary	Conjugal	Nuclear	Extended	Total
50 to 54	0	0	1	0	1
55 to 59	1	0	1	0	2
60 to 64	2	1	4	0	7
65 to 69	4	5	3	2	14
70 to 74	5	1	1	1	8
75 to 79	2	0	0	0	2
80 to 84	0	2	0	0	2

Note: The totals equal 36 because there were no family data in Isaac Lewis’s pension file.

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Households were in flux, changing in their composition over time, a pattern that was evident in the peripatetic ways of some children. James Starr’s two oldest daughters, for instance, would “hire out and make out to clothe themselves” when they could “get employment.” When they became “sick or [were] out of employ they returned home and live[d] on” their father. This particular household regularly contracted and expanded, and reveals that parenthood was not segregated to certain periods in the life course, but sometimes a lifelong role stretching over adulthood without a necessarily permanent empty nest. It also suggests that leaving home, a phenomenon typically

associated with the commencement of adulthood today, did not have such significance in the early American period. Some veterans, nevertheless, experienced the dissolution of their nuclear family unit. "I had two children" Thomas Doughty explained, but "both married and left me." Francis Carberry reported, "I have two daughters aged thirty and twenty-four-years who have for some years past been out on service on their own account." During his application for a pension, Andrew Stoll informed the court that his two oldest children were "about leaving me or will soon leave us to do for themselves."⁶⁴ The family, therefore, was dynamic, with marked changes across people's lives. When adult children moved out they reduced the amount of potential support within the house and contributed to social isolation.

As people age, they commonly experience social isolation brought on by physical disability and the death of friends or spouse. The final and surely the most difficult transition in married life accompanied the death of a spouse. The resulting bereavement and loneliness show through the depositions. John McKinney, aged seventy-one, stated that his "wife has long since been dead." The passing of a spouse could be such a traumatic event for some older men that they distinctly recalled the circumstances and chain of events leading to a wife's death. Before passing away, Thomas Doughty's wife "was taken with a complaint and lay on a bed of affliction for thirteen months." With the death of spouses, these men faced loneliness and isolation as they aged. For older poor people, families provided the primary source of social support. More than isolation, solitariness had implications for living standards, economic security, and care. Poverty was greater among the 42 percent of elderly veterans living alone (see table 6). Approximately 86 percent of veterans living alone possessed less than \$50 worth of property. Moreover, 43 percent of veterans in solitary households had no valued property at all, whereas none of the veterans living in conjugal and nuclear households fell within the zero wealth bracket. Indeed, married older households demonstrated higher wealth levels than solitary households. Living arrangements contributed to the risk of destitution, as living alone increased the chances aging veterans faced utter poverty.⁶⁵

The disabled and aged were largely cared for within a familial social support system. If old parents became dependent because of illness or poverty, they were supported by their children or other kin or were placed by the town authorities in the households of neighbors or even nonrelatives. They were placed in institutions only as a last resort. One family member—the primary caregiver—often assumed the responsibility for the care of impaired older

TABLE 6: Wealth Categories for Each Type of Household

Type of Household	Court-Assessed Wealth				
	\$0	\$1-50	\$51-100	\$101+	%\$51+
Solitary	6	6	0	2	14%
Conjugal	0	5	2	2	44%
Nuclear	2	3	2	3	50%
Other: Applicant living with son Daughters staying with applicant	1	2	0	0	0%

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

TABLE 7: Comparison of Tax Assessments for Veterans and Non-Pensioners

Sample	County Tax Assessment (\$)		
	Average	Median	Max.
Hilltown Township (N=117)	\$5.49	\$5.27	\$15.75
Falls Township (N=119)	\$7.19	\$3.30	\$43.14
Veteran Sample (N=12)	\$0.24	\$0.21	\$0.58

Source: Bucks County Tax Records, 1820.

TABLE 8: Comparison of Tax Valuation for Veterans and Non-Pensioners

Sample	Amount of Valuation (\$)		
	Average	Median	Max.
Hilltown Township (N=117)	\$3524	\$3378	\$10,096
Falls Township (N=119)	\$4214	\$1924	\$25,376
Veteran Sample (N=12)	\$139	\$116	\$320

Source: Bucks County Tax Records, 1820.

adults. Spouses and children were the main caregivers for older and disabled family members. The responsibility for care typically fell first to a spouse, and when a spouse was unavailable or unable to assume the role of primary caregiver, adult children were turned to next.⁶⁶

Whether the parent keeper continued to reside with a parent after the other siblings had left home or elderly parents were unable to maintain themselves in separate residences and moved into a child's household, one child usually

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TABLE 9: Wealth Categories for Age Structures

Age at Application	#	Court-Assessed Wealth				% \$51+
		\$0	\$1-50	\$51-100	\$101+	
50 to 54	1	0	0	1	0	100%
55 to 59	2	1	1	0	0	0%
60 to 64	7	3	3	0	1	14%
65 to 69	14	1	7	1	5	43%
70 to 74	8	3	2	2	1	38%
75 to 79	2	1	1	0	0	0%
80 to 84	2	0	2	0	0	0%

Source: Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C.

emerged into role of caregiver in order to ensure support for the parents in their old age.⁶⁷ Young adult children sometimes stayed at home longer to provide care for aging parents. Benjamin Watson, age sixty-two, claimed that declining health had diminished his capacity to support his family, and claimed he was \$220.00 in debt. Nor could his sixty-seven-year-old wife contribute much because she was reportedly disabled. As a result, Watson's two daughters, in their twenties, continued "living at home." The veteran-father explained that his daughters were "able to maintain themselves out at work." "Necessity," however, compelled the parents "to keep them with us to assist in our support." Sixty-four-year-old Andrew Bryson was in a similar predicament, in debt and "not able to pursue an occupation" with only his twenty-year-old daughter living with him. Bryson explained to the court that his daughter "could maintain herself but for the necessity of taking care of me." Although these daughters were capable of supporting themselves, their veteran-fathers showed little reluctance to depend on available children. To continue living in their own households, parents arranged that at least one adult child remain at home to perform the main caregiving duties, where spouses were not present or able to provide assistance. Age, infirmities, and poverty reinforced cultural norms prescribing that young adult children, especially females, stayed home to assume caretaking responsibilities.⁶⁸

Even after children married and were living under a separate roof aging and impoverished veteran-fathers relied on offspring. In this scenario, adult

sons could assume an active role in parent-care responsibilities, providing for ill or dependent parents. George Scott, age seventy, and his "feeble" sixty-year-old-wife, Catherine, were "wholly unable to follow any occupation," forcing them to move in with their son. The parents, though, were a financial burden on the son's household, as he was not "in a situation to afford the expense of maintaining" his parents. Caregiving severely stretched the family resources of this child, and to "aid in supporting" his parents, the son "received a small allowance" from the county almshouse. When older men needed help or did not have a spouse available, they often turned to adult children for assistance, and could be a burden on their offspring's finances. Changes in household composition occurred in the later years of life, when elderly parents and the widowed were unable to maintain themselves in separate residences. In cases of joint living under a single roof, old parents had an adult child live with them or they moved into a child's household. Lacking immediate family, poverty-stricken veterans drew on kin networks. "A short time before the Revolutionary War," veteran David Kinsey later recalled in his pension application, he "went to live at a public house." By 1820 he looked to kith and kin for financial aid, telling the court that "for the last three years [I] have chiefly been supported by the kindness of my relations and friends."⁶⁹ For those without a spouse, children, or extended family, the outlook was much bleaker.

Parents could and did rely on their offspring, but veterans intoned there were also feelings of less filial obligation and instances where elderly pensioners were abandoned by their adult children. Unable to pass on extensive inheritable land or holdings to dependent children, propertyless and aging parents could not be sure that their offspring would stay, for children may have sought better fortunes away from destitute parents. John McKinney's offspring, for example, had moved out and did not remain to help their aging widowed father. Left to fend for himself, he related, "my children have all left me."⁷⁰ In fact, McKinney's children were not that far off. The veteran-father lived in Hilltown Township, and his son, Sylvanus, settled in Solebury Township, on the other side of the county. His other son, John, and daughter, Ann McKinney Walters, were in Philadelphia County, residing in Northern Liberties and Spring Garden, respectively.⁷¹ The veteran was not completely forgotten either, for his obituary in 1833 noted that "his remains were followed by a large number of relatives and friends," but when in need he could not rely upon these people. Reduced to dependence and with his children unwilling or unable to support him, McKinney had "no other means

of subsistence” and petitioned the federal government for the assistance he did not have from family caregivers.⁷² Family certainly played an important role in aiding elderly parents, and many veterans were hobbled additionally without the benefit of a helping hand. James Hogge, one of the older pensioners at seventy-nine, explained “I have no family residing with me.” David Alshouse, age sixty-two, had no family to fall back on for support in old age, and was no longer capable of earning a living by labor, “which is his only means of support.” Fifty-eight-year-old Stephen Ballard told the court, “I am not able to support myself by labor and I have no family.”⁷³ That these veterans mentioned they had no source of support to provide for them points to a relationship between the closely-knit family unit and caretaking for the elderly, demonstrating the central role wives and children played in assisting the graying revolutionaries. With no family members to rely on, veterans living alone were put at a heightened susceptibility to poverty and had few other options to receive assistance. A last remaining possibility was the almshouse, upon which a number of mendicant veterans were forced to depend.

Economic Health

Living in penury, these aging veterans and their families were not particularly healthy, settled, or stable, leading some to rely on public assistance and seek relief from outside of the family at the almshouse. In the early nineteenth century, 22 percent of the sample received aid from the Bucks County almshouse. Six veterans and their families, comprising 16 percent of the sample, were seeking relief from the almshouse in 1817, only a year before the first federal pension legislation. David Alshouse indicated spending “some time in the poor house.” In his deposition, Jonathan Scott described himself as a “pauper.” In March 1810, Scott arrived at the county almshouse with only “an old suit of clothes,” an overseer noted, and spent “several years” there because he “could not do any kind of work.” After 1810, his name began reappearing consistently on the poorhouse register, and he sought relief as late as November 1817. Other veterans of the cohort relied upon the assistance of the almshouse prior to receiving pensions. George Scott was on the register as early as 1812 and his name frequently recurred on the rolls. John Murray looked toward public aid in April 1815. A cluster of the veterans sought local relief around the same time, a sign of the sample’s overall deteriorating economic circumstances. Andrew Stoope “and his three sons” appear on the relief

rolls for Spring 1817. In August 1817, David Alshouse and Claudius Martin received payment from the poorhouse, and one month later in September 1817 David Edgar needed public relief. "Jacob Lewis and wife" turned to the almshouse for assistance in early December 1817. That these aging men and their families appeared on the poorhouse register only about a year before federal pension legislation suggests that their health was failing precipitously and their economic situation was worsening. Henry Fratt received public aid of another sort, detailing, "I have for several years [been] allowed to live in a tenement belonging to the public almshouse of the county."⁷⁴ Truly, these older adults were reduced to a terrible financial condition late in life, and found it increasingly difficult to meet basic individual and family needs without resorting to charity.

Veterans also shared another characteristic associated with those deemed as a potential cause of social disorder, or the disreputable poor with shaky ties to property and settlement who were liable of becoming a burden or danger to the state: many of the Bucks County group were "in bad debts." Some pensioners were in debt for larger sums than their possessions were worth. The property of Levi Starling was appraised at one dollar, and he testified that he was burdened with a debt of \$64.50. Henry Fratt owed \$67.50 in debts. His property, however, was assessed at \$40. James Hogge was in debt \$25, but his property was worth only \$10. Adam Swager's property was valued at \$12, but he had borrowed \$18 to pay his rent. William Kernachan was \$415.62 in arrears, which was almost double the value of his property.⁷⁵ Veterans' divulged that they subsisted with a considerably uneven balance of finances.

Other veterans had more complicated financial situations. James Kirk was assessed at an extraordinary \$2827.57, and was initially "rejected on account of his holding too much property." Kirk maintained that he was "entirely destitute of property except the trifles," because he had to "sell all the goods" with the sheriff auctioning "him out of his land and chattels." By 1823 he only had a stove, saddle, and bridle, with "the rest having all been sold by the Sheriff for bona fide debts." Sheriff Stephen Brock wrote to corroborate the veteran's story, explaining "I sold . . . a plantation or tract of land of about 120 acres the property of James Kirk . . . for the sum of \$1513.37." The money from the sales went to creditors, and Kirk was left with his remaining debts, which amounted to a striking \$2358. Benjamin Watson's property was assessed at \$620, but he had \$240 in outstanding debts. Thomas Corbitt was unable to pay off his debts of \$336.22. Much of his property was subsequently sold under sheriff's sale in execution of debts and delivered in payment to creditors. Not all veterans owed

more than they were worth, but all were debt-burdened to some degree. George Crow's property schedule was valued at \$127.18. Yet his outstanding debts amounted to \$35, and there was little prospect he would pay them off while he was unable "to perform a days work." Since these men were too physically infirm to follow their trades and had little, if any, income it was impossible to escape from beneath the strain of debt.⁷⁶

Court-assessed wealth, furthermore, only assigned an absolute value and did not take into account other variables. Land-holding veterans repeatedly emphasized that their land was not valuable. Andrew Stoll, for instance, claimed to own twenty-four acres of "very poorly improved" and swampy pasture. Thomas Corbitt maintained that he was "unable to sell" or "raise his bread" on his "barren" land. Nor did court appraisals weigh infirmities, weaknesses, and other age-related frailties, which adversely affected economic productiveness. John Weasey was a weaver by trade, but age-related performance decrements made it difficult to complete the necessary craftwork. Functional impairments interfered with the ability to perform occupational tasks. Thus, these veterans lived under financially straitened conditions, as their fallow land or idle tools were not generating income.⁷⁷

Available tax assessment lists, furthermore, confirm that these aging veterans and their families were in poor economic health. Only fragmentary tax information was found on the veterans for the year 1820, specifically twelve certain tax returns (representing only about 32 percent of the sample). Where tax records were available for 1820, there was a great disparity between the figures for veterans and the samples of nonpensioners (see tables 7 and 8). Comparatively, the veterans demonstrated a sizeable income deficit. The cohort of veterans were assessed an average tax of \$.24, whereas the Hilltown Township sample averaged \$5.49 and the Falls Township averaged \$7.19. The valuation of taxable assets was equally telling, with veterans appraised an average amount of \$139. The sample of Hilltown Township, however, averaged \$3524 and the Falls Township sample averaged \$4214. The figures indicate that the cohort accumulated only meager taxable assets.⁷⁸

The majority of the cohort fit the colonial period's definition of poverty, where the poor were legally defined as persons not rated for local or provincial taxes. Bucks County pensioners were nonratables—persons with insufficient means to pay even the smallest tax.⁷⁹ The veterans' absence is not surprising since these were aging men located in the lowest occupational assessment category or wholly without any assets. Where it was possible to trace veterans across several years, they did not improve their position from one tax list to

the next. In 1779, while a resident in Trenton Township, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, Dennis Cain possessed only a few items that were taxed. He was taxed on one horse, one horned cattle, and as a householder. By 1800 he had crossed the Delaware River, settling in Falls Township, Bucks County. In that year, Cain was assessed a minimal ten cents, possessing only one cow. In Morrisville Borough, Bucks County in 1812, he had acquired a tiny "lot of land," about an eighth of an acre with no horses or cattle by this point, and assessed a tax of nineteen cents. Cain vanished from the tax records in 1818 when his name appears scratched off the roll for that year.⁸⁰

Veterans from the sample appeared on local tax rolls very infrequently, if at all, and it was not uncommon for a veteran to turn up one year only to disappear and never reemerge on the tax lists. David Edgar, for instance, was a propertyless taxpayer who could be located on Bristol Township's rolls only once in 1813 and paid the least possible tax for his occupational assessment. He was evidently reckoned too poor to pay and not retained on the tax lists. The veterans' absence is not surprising since these were aging men who were not working enough to be assessed a high occupational tax, and had accumulated only meager taxable assets or in some instances were wholly without any assets.⁸¹

Occupational evaluations accounted for most of the veterans' total tax assessments. Upper Makefield Township resident Francis Carberry was a landless and propertyless taxpayer in 1812. With no taxable property, he was assessed a tax of twenty-two cents for his paltry earnings potential. The year 1815 was a particularly bad year to Carberry, whose occupational assessment dropped so low that he was only charged an eight cents tax. By 1821, a couple of years after initial pension benefits, his tax rate rose to where he was assessed a thirty-six cents tax. Just four years later in 1825, though, the supposed potential of his job had slipped once again, as he was assigned an eleven cents tax. As Carberry's example highlights, tracing veterans retained on the tax rolls reveals they were assessed on a modest scale because their earning power was very weak. Lacking taxable property, furthermore, assessment on occupations often accounted for the veterans' total tax valuation. With their assessments fluctuating over the years but consistently hovering in the lowest bracket, aging veterans did not significantly improve their position from one tax list to the next. Remaining at the lower end of the economic spectrum, poverty for these older adults was a long-term prospect. With their earning power curbed it was very difficult for these destitute veterans to escape from underneath poverty. The veterans displayed a general decline in income during older adulthood, and functional limitations left little opportunity to resume working or otherwise increase one's

income. As a result, a downward trend is discernable as conditions were getting worse for this infirm, insolvent group of pensioners living in poverty. That the wealth of these workers usually did not increase as they grew older further reveals their limited opportunities.⁸²

Propertyless taxpayers accounted for the bulk of the sample and were composed almost exclusively of men who owned no taxable assets and were assessed the minimum rate on their incomes. A few were taxpayers of minimum property, consisting primarily of men who, in the judgment of assessors, fared slightly better than those at the lowest tax rate. Some veterans were levied modest occupational valuations (and therefore earning a slightly higher income), even though most of them were without taxable assets, owning a few small, inexpensive items. None of the veterans from the sample included individuals with considerable earnings or who possessed more substantial belongings, such as any parcel of land yielding rent. Within this veteran group, none of these men ranked among the top percentile of taxpayers.

Age Changes in Physical Health

Changes in physical health increase both in number and severity with age.⁸³ Many pensioners reported multiple physical disorders that restricted their activities, invariably citing their inability to work "by reason of old age and infirmities." A "very infirm" seventy-two-year-old Jonathan Scott claimed to be "unable to follow any business." George Scott was "wholly unable to follow any occupation" on account of age-related limitations in physical functioning. Andrew Cramer, a seventy-three-year-old cooper, claimed that "through age and infirmity [I] am unable to follow my business." George Crow's occupation was making oak shingles, but "old and infirm" at the age of sixty-six, he explained, "I am not able to perform a days work at that or any other manual labor." For Lambert Dorland, age-related impairments also left him "unable to earn my living" at the age of sixty-six. "Bodily infirmity" left sixty-seven-year-old Jacob Doughty "unable to get a living without assistance."⁸⁴ Reduced muscle strength, loss of bone density, diminished joint mobility, and respiratory ailments meant that range of movement was more difficult and the ability to withstand mechanical pressure became more painful and less effective, forcing some older veterans to avoid strenuous work.

Age and life experiences brought an increased likelihood of developing disabling health conditions, and many of the veterans described how physical

deterioration decreased their productive labor. "On account of my infirmities and weakness," sixty-year-old Thomas Doughty explained, "I am incapable and have not capacity sufficient" to work. He dramatically portrayed his desperate situation by further complaining, "I have suffered much with lameness which doctors cannot help me." William Kernachan, age seventy, stated that "for the last five years [I] have been unable to follow" weaving "by reason of age and weakness." Jeremiah Murray identified his business as farming, which the seventy-year-old admitted, "I am not able to follow on account of lameness and other infirmities."⁸⁵ Fatigue and a decrease in strength and energy reduced the physical work and independence of these older men.

Rheumatism among aging veterans was a frequent challenge, interfering with their motor skills. "Constant rheumatism" prevented Stephen Ballard from following his occupation as a laborer. James Starr was sixty-two and remarked that he was "greatly afflicted with rheumatic pains." Sixty-seven-year-old Thomas Corbitt was "unable to pursue" milling "in consequence of rheumatic complaints and general disability." By 1824, furthermore, Corbitt's state of health was worsening, "afflicted with a pulmonary complaint and unable to labor."⁸⁶ These older individuals were at heightened risk of developing chronic problems, such as the stiffness and pain of arthritis.

In addition to physical weakness and pathological conditions of the muscles, joints, and bones, another recurrent health problem was poor vision, with aging veterans often experiencing a reduction in visual acuity. Among other physical problems that included "some symptoms of the dropsy," the ailing sixty-year-old Thomas Doughty remarked, "I am afflicted with the gravel" (a condition marked by having minimal vision). "Being afflicted severely with the gravel and otherwise infirm," sixty-eight-year-old Henry Fratt said, "I am often unable to labor." Seventy-one-year-old carpenter Jacob Lewis described how by 1820 "a failure of my eye-sight has rendered it difficult to pursue that business." Due to "indistinctness of vision" sixty-six-year-old John Patton ceased laboring as a tailor. Visual problems had many effects on everyday life and practical implications, including increased dependence on others and interference with the ability to complete tasks of living. Given the centrality of vision to many activities, degeneration in this sensory function with age had profoundly limiting effects.⁸⁷

Deponents also provided a glimpse into the health status of family members, in particular, their wives. Married veterans such as George Crow and Dennis Cain frequently described their wives as "very infirm like myself," although the nature and degree of illness varied. Despite his own age-related

incapacities, Francis Carberry emphasized that his sixty-two-year-old wife Sarah was "still more infirm than myself." Grace Hawkenberry was fifty-eight and "lame with an ulcer on her leg." James Starr's "very sickly wife" was "continually under the attendance of a physician" for an unspecified ailment. At fifty-two, Sarah Corbitt was "very much afflicted with the rheumatism and out of health generally." She was also reportedly "lame in her arms," because she "has one of her wrists broken." The cost for medical attention could cut into a petitioner's personal estate. While trying to reduce the valuation of his property schedule, Thomas Corbitt explained that in order to pay for his wife's care he sold one of their cows for sixteen dollars "to pay for a doctor's bill." Jacob Doughty's sixty-three-year-old wife, Laetitia, was "in a dropsical state and unable to work." Sixty-seven-year-old Hannah Watson was "very infirm and has for many years been a cripple." Catherine Scott's husband, George, characterized her as "very feeble" at age sixty. John Weasey's relatively young forty-three-year-old wife was said to be "in weak health."⁸⁸ Wives in poor health themselves were limited by how much they could do for the family, especially their ailing veteran-husbands.

Elderly veterans showed changes in physical ability associated with the wear and tear of aging. Their aging process, moreover, occurred against the backdrop of a lifetime of accumulated experiences. Along with heredity, veterans' previous history of injury, disease, poor diet, inadequate health care, and unhealthful environmental conditions affected the rate of biological changes and degree of functional deterioration.⁸⁹ "If I was young and active," David Alshouse told the court in 1820, making baskets could earn him a living. At the age of sixty-two, though, he continued, "I could not now make a living [because] I am infirm and in a great measure helpless." Jonathan Scott was "too feeble for any active employment." He had once "lived by land labor until he failed in his strength." Francis Carbury frankly explained, "infirmities have rendered me unable to perform much laborious work." He also sheds light on the challenges these men faced in obtaining work. Restricted to seeking less intensive manual labor, he complained that even "such light service as I am able and willing to perform is difficult to procure." John Murray was a tailor by trade and tried to "follow that business when I can get it out," but disclosed that as of May 1820 "I have not earned three dollars for five months." Grappling with poor physical health often forced veterans to discontinue or limit their work, exacerbating their financial problems.⁹⁰

The later years for these veterans were a time of progressive loss in physiological functioning. There were a wide variety of chronic health conditions,

and older veterans and their wives experienced several of these problems concurrently. High incidences of persistent health problems translated into functional limitations, forcing aging pensioners to decrease their workload. Thomas Corbitt represented this predicament; he had "become entirely unable to follow my occupation or do any other work."⁹¹ The rate of physical declines related to the aging process was noticeably quickening. Associated with increased illness and disability is the fact that, as shown in table 9, poverty increased with age. Larger proportions of people in the seventy-five-and-over group were poorer than those who were between sixty-five and seventy-five, with no veterans of the seventy-five and up group above the \$51 range. Clearly, such factors as age and health experience in later life affected economic vitality deleteriously.

Occupational Reduction and Geographical Mobility

The veterans displayed an inverted occupational mobility; many were descending down the ladder and failing even to maintain their trade skills. Plagued by diminished strength, aging veterans expressed their need to seek less skilled and less physically taxing work. Fifty-six-year-old John Weasey detailed, "I am by trade a weaver, but it injures my health and I am obliged to desist from it." Not capable of doing this work, he stated, "I follow common labor when I can obtain it." Jacob Lewis abstained from carpentry, explaining, "I have now no dependence but common labor." With a comparatively more skilled trade than most of the sample, James Hogge declared in his deposition that "I am no longer able to follow" blacksmithing, and forced to "depend solely for my support on occasional employment at common labor." John Blundin told the court that the only way he could support his children was "by his daily labor." In 1812, Blundin was a landless resident of Middletown Township and assessed an occupational tax as a sawyer, but by the 1820s his pension application and tax assessments list him as a laborer. No longer working at their trades, these veterans struggled to get by and scrapped together any means to support themselves and their families. It also indicates that common labor was all the more pronounced among the occupational breakdown of the sample. Even though these aging men may have been skilled in a trade, they were not necessarily engaged in that occupation by the time of their depositions.⁹²

While the cohort of aging veterans did not exhibit upward economic mobility, they were geographically mobile. A common response of the

laboring poor was to leave in search of employment elsewhere, and many made multiple moves in search of a better life. The migratory pattern of Continental veterans suggests that movement was particularly strong among laborers or small landholders. Several of the enlistees from Bucks County migrated out of Pennsylvania. Thomas Corbitt moved to Steuben County, New York, and James Starr, who enlisted at Bristol, migrated to Maryland. John Murray lived in Bristol Borough, Bucks County at the time of his enlistment, but moved directly across the Delaware River to Burlington County, New Jersey. Jacob and Thomas Doughty both enlisted in Bucks County. After the war, Jacob moved to Salem County, New Jersey, while Thomas also moved to New Jersey, settling in the adjoining county of Gloucester.⁹³ Others left Bucks County but remained in southeastern Pennsylvania. Benjamin Watson lived in Warrington Township, and later resided in nearby Montgomery County.⁹⁴ Those who migrated out of Bucks County did so in a noticeable mid-Atlantic regional ring; none of the veterans from the sample moved to New England or ventured extensively west or south.

Veterans of the sample moved to Bucks County after the war, and did so even later in life. John Blundin resided in Bucks County at the time of his pension, but enlisted "a few days after" the skirmish in Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19, 1775, the proverbial first shots heard around the world, "in which Battle he fought as a minuteman." Following this opening volley of the war he served until discharged on December 13, 1776, in Bucks County, where he reenlisted. In the army three more years, Blundin was discharged by December 1779 at Philadelphia. Perhaps Blundin's settling in Bucks County was an outgrowth of his military service, during which he was exposed to that area of the country. David Kinsey enlisted at Baltimore, Maryland, surfacing in Buckingham Township, Bucks County by the 1810 census. In addition, many of those moving to Bucks County were transplanted from adjacent Burlington and Hunterdon Counties just across the Delaware River in New Jersey. Dennis Cain lived in Trenton, New Jersey at the time of his enlistment, resided in Hunterdon County, New Jersey as of 1786, and by 1800 moved to Falls Township, Bucks County and remained in what would eventually become Morrisville Borough, bordering Falls and across the river from Trenton. Francis Carberry enlisted in Mount Holly, New Jersey and was living Upper Makefield, Bucks County by 1812. In 1818 John Hawkenberry resided in Camden, New Jersey; in 1820 he was living in Bucks County. There was also internal migration from within the state. William Kernachan enlisted in York, Pennsylvania, but settled in Warrington Township, Buck County as early as 1800.⁹⁵ Finally,

veterans remained or relocated inside of Bucks County. James Hogge and James Kirk lived in the county at the time of their enlistment and pension application.⁹⁶ Before residing in Nockamixon Township for thirty years, Andrew Stoll lived “previous thereto” in neighboring Tinicum Township.⁹⁷ Impoverished veterans without permanent employment or a stable home moved their families from place to place in search of economic opportunity. This mobility strongly contradicts assumptions about their utter helplessness, for never reduced to passivity, some of these destitute veterans changed locations in an attempt to alter their immediate financial circumstances.

Standard of Living and Effects of Pensions

The question remains whether pension payments made a difference in the lives of these old soldiers. Of course, the number of years a veteran was on the pension rolls varied, depending on factors such as at what age a former Continental started receiving a stipend and how longed he lived. The Bucks County pensioner was an average sixty-eight-year-old at the time of his 1820 application. Of the twenty-eight veterans in this sample for whom it was possible to identify dates of death, the veterans lived on average to almost eighty years of age, and received pension benefits for an average of eleven years. Claudius Martin and David Kinsey were each on the pension rolls for only a year before dying in their early eighties. Stephen Ballard died at sixty-seven and John Blundin died at eighty-one; both received a pension for nine years. For eleven years Francis Carberry was granted a pension preceding his death at age seventy-eight. Eighty-four-year-old John McKinney was on the pension rolls for thirteen years at the time of his death. William Kernachan passed away at ninety, the recipient of a pension for twenty years. Andrew Stoll collected benefits for twenty-six years before dying at the advanced age of ninety-one. Petitions were granted, but the old veterans and their families still demonstrated extreme material poverty. Reviewing the contents of the property schedules included in the 1820 depositions furnished evidence on their standard of living, and showed that the veterans and their families continued to be people of little or no means residing in deprived households with few holdings of monetary value.

Pensioners were unable to accumulate even a moderate amount of property often due to generally frail health. Veterans from the sample lived in spartan material conditions, sometimes almost completely deficient of material possessions. Impoverished veteran Jonathan Scott’s walking staff was “the only

article which I can call my own." His brother George declared, "I have no property." Others were also in the same dire straits. Both David Edgar and Andrew Stoope reported, "I have no goods except my clothing." David Alshouse told the court, "I have no property of any kind." Jacob Lewis and Jeremiah Murray both admitted, "I have no property except my clothing." There were some veterans who had only a bare minimum of possessions. Stephen Ballard explained, "I have besides necessary clothing and bedding one chest." Similarly, David Kinsey stated, "The only article of property I possess . . . is one old chest." The property lists of other veterans were quite short, and most maintained a rudimentary existence, owning few household items. The houses of veterans and their families were clearly without adornment and ornamentation, plainly furnished and very occasionally included spinning wheels or a looking glass. The additional mention of a musket suggested their soldiering past. For example, Andrew Stoll possessed an "old musket," and James Kirk held on to "one musket which I was permitted to bring home with when discharged from the revolutionary war."⁹⁸ Many of these elderly lived in simple and quite bare housing units of substandard condition.

The inventories make clear that the veterans and their families did not enjoy material success. For some veterans the only possessions they owned were the tools of their trade. Andrew Cramer's sparse list of belongings included only a cooper's adze (an axlike tool used for dressing wood), one punch (a tool for circular piercing and forcing a bolt or rivet in a hole), one round shave, a drawing knife, one chisel, one file, and a small saw. Levi Starling claimed to have merely a scythe and tackling. Lambert Dorland did not have "any personal property except my clothes, a chest, and a few shoemaker's tools." Among the handful of items owned by James Starr were "a few plasterer's tools."⁹⁹ Property schedules indicated that these indigent veterans managed to obtain little property. Moreover, the levels of wealth indicated in extant probate records suggest that many merely struggled to maintain what they had.

Analysis of the inventories of personal estates, taken at death, reinforced the conclusion that these former Continentals and their families remained hard-pressed. The total amount of David Kinsey's inventory was valued at \$103.50, but he died \$114.07 in debt. In 1824 the estate of Andrew Bryson was valued at a meager \$40.15. Francis Carberry's 1831 inventory totaled a trifling \$32.04. Jacob Lewis's estate was appraised at \$25.56 in 1844. The 1826 inventory for Jacob Doughty amounted to a paltry \$5.75.¹⁰⁰ The veterans and their families remained financially strapped even with their pension benefits.

Pensions often constituted a sizeable portion of a veteran's inventory, especially for those who reported that they had no income at the time of their application. After his death, Claudius Martin's administration record assessed his wealth at \$50.17 in January 1822, but his "pension from the United States" constituted \$42.73 or 85 percent of that sum. Andrew Stoll's "U. S. pension at Philadelphia" made up 15 percent of his estate in 1846. William Kernachan's 1840 inventory was valued at \$251.29. At the time of his death he possessed \$48 worth of "pension money in hand," which was 19 percent of Kernachan's estate. The estate of Isaac Lewis was assessed at \$176.71 in 1821. Of that amount, \$38.48 was "a pension due deceased for six months," representing 22 percent of the inventory's valuation. In 1830 John Blundin's estate was valued at \$111.65, with \$40 from "about five months pension due at the time of his death." Pension payments comprised 36 percent of his total inventory appraisal. John Murphy's "9½ months pay due from the United States" was assessed at \$76. With an inventory worth \$123.36, the pension benefits amounted to 62 percent of Murphy's estate. Andrew Cramer's estate was appraised in 1828 at a mean \$48.92. His probate records noted that he had a "pension due August 26th 1828" for \$45.92. Cramer's pension stipend, then, constituted 94 percent of his estate's overall valuation.¹⁰¹ Although members of the sample stood on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder, collecting a pension succeeded in pulling veterans and their families out of a mire of despair. With the aid of benefits these men and their families did not merely trundle along their paths unaffected.

Pensions offered some solace to veterans enduring severe financial hardships, enabling them to live more self-sustaining lives. Thomas Doughty bluntly admitted, "I need my pension," telling the court he "drew two years pay which made me quite comfortable." The stipend evidently helped ameliorate his need. For others the issuance of pension payments could be a veteran's salvation from indigence. In Henry Fratt's case, he was living in a residence owned by the almshouse and barely "maintained myself until I obtained my pension." Reapplying in 1820, Adam Swager claimed he did not have "any income whatsoever, save the pension which I have hitherto drawn from the United States" under the 1818 act. Thomas Corbitt was initially scratched off the pension rolls for supposedly possessing too much property. Phineas Bradley wrote to vouch for the veteran's worsening economic situation, earnestly appealing the War Department to reinstate Corbitt on the pension list, otherwise "he will become an object of charity and a town charge."¹⁰² In a peculiar twist, the funds also contributed to the almshouse's

bottom line. The “96” dollars from “Scott’s Pension” (likely Jonathan Scott) appeared under the cash received column in the institution’s annual account statement.¹⁰³ Federal pensions provided vital assistance and eased the most pressing financial worries of old age.

Stipends stabilized and bolstered many households, as some veterans could not maintain themselves and their families without income from the pension. For these veterans of lower economic standing, life was almost as precarious with pension benefits as it had been before federal poor relief. Pensions, however, gave veterans access to supplemental income and an alternative option to petitioning the poorhouse. Ex-soldiers appeared on local poor relief rolls only a year before pension legislation in 1818. They dropped off the almshouse register after 1818, and no members of the sample were added to the local poor relief rolls after the 1818 act. The help of federal pension benefits did not make these individuals wealthy but enabled veterans to avoid the dreaded institution.

Beyond financial matters, service pensions symbolically elevated the prominence of veterans in the popular imagination of the new republic, according an esteemed recognition to those who “in the dark days of ’76 buckled on the sword of liberty.”¹⁰⁴ Americans were intensely patriotic in the early republic, and acutely aware of the passing on of this fraternity of founders. “Another Revolutionary soldier gone!” was a recurring lamentation printed in veterans’ death notices. This sense of urgency about the loss of revolutionary veterans reflected a broader feeling among Americans that a most extraordinary generation was slipping away; a realization “more sensibly felt . . . as the few survivors among us yearly become more few.”¹⁰⁵ Newspapers reminded readers that within a “few years more” former servicemen “will be mingled with the dust.”¹⁰⁶ A local newspaper obituary for George Crow, for instance, mourned that “another Revolutionary Soldier departed this life.” The death notice further memorialized that the deceased was “one of the few now remaining, who labored in the field of action, as a brave soldier to free these United States from bondage, and achieve the liberty, which we now enjoy as a republic.” Levi Starling’s obituary recognized that he was “in active service about 6 years, during the revolutionary struggle,” and sorrowfully proclaimed, “Thus has another of those who fought for our Independence, left us.” It was remembered that the deceased Francis Carberry “served in the Revolutionary War seven years.” Other Bucks County veterans were likewise commended for their role as “a soldier of the Revolution” or “a revolutionary soldier.”¹⁰⁷ Saddened Americans in the early national period paid homage to vanishing veterans such as Thomas Corbitt, “who in his day . . . rendered important services to his

country.”¹⁰⁸ Previously unheralded common soldiers, former enlisted men rose to the ranks of heroism because of their active contribution to the young republic’s independence with wartime service.

The new admiration was a change from the ingratitude veterans were accustomed to receiving.¹⁰⁹ During the war the common soldier endured hardships and fought tyranny for what often seemed to them “an ungrateful people who did not care what became of us.”¹¹⁰ The former Continental was belatedly credited with attaining American independence on the battlefield and increasingly venerated, as “*Freedom’s* wreath bedecked his grave” after a “war-worn veteran” passed away to rest in “honor’s laurel’d tomb.”¹¹¹ The press exalted veterans, hailing them as heroic men devoted to the American cause, and admonished republican scions that a revolutionary serviceman “deserved well of his country.” Newspapers decorated the memory of hoary headed soldiers by insisting that although “oblivion is too often the lot of the worthy,” their gallant actions “will be long borne in remembrance” and “should be the theme of gratitude for ages yet unborn.” While an old patriot who “girded on his armor in the defence of his country” was revered for his part in the war, a bereaving nation eulogized that for too long the veteran “witness[ed] the prosperity of a country whose independence he had so nobly assisted to achieve, and which neglected him in his old age.” The republican polity was born of a martial conflict, and a more thankful nation’s sense of responsibility to “those who perilled his life in the time that tried men’s souls, in behalf of the liberties we now enjoy” extended the praise and emolument at the end of their lives that had been lacking for so long.¹¹² Young republicans felt indebted to former servicemen, extolling their epic deeds and holding the last remaining veterans in high regard because they fought for independence.

In the early years of the republic, the government’s pension program generated salient cultural consequences, placing veterans’ in a celebrated position in early American society. But in an environment imbued with patriotism, did veterans see themselves as victims or self-sacrificing patriots? They expressed convictions about the privileges of citizenship, assuming that they were owed something for their efforts and that the state had a responsibility to fairly reward former Continentals for past military services.¹¹³ Veterans themselves spoke of the reciprocal of military service as entitlement to benefits, with former soldiers and their family members harboring a feeling of the costly sacrifices that the war exacted from them, and of the absence of any recompense. Andrew Bryson’s daughter, Mary, inquired into the possibility of receiving land “her father had

never received.” Mary and her sister Margaret asked “the government if they are not entitled to the land which she had often heard her father say he expected for his services.” Bryson’s daughter Mary remembered that her father “believed he was justly entitled” to the land.¹¹⁴ Others refused to haggle over what they believed to be due. Frustrated by the government suspending his pension until further review, a discouraged but defiant Thomas Doughty said he would rather “die as to beg from the government.” Evidently some wounds were more than skin deep, and he was quite content to “go down to the grave and ask no more.”¹¹⁵ Doughty’s fiery petition, which was approved, was an indignant expression of a soldier defending what was believed due in return for military service in time of war. The wartime experience of Continental army enlisted men—demanding back wages, food, and clothing—made ex-servicemen keenly aware of the state’s obligation to its citizens who defended the nascent nation, enabling them to claim debts owed for military service. As soldiers who bore arms during the American Revolution the veterans had fulfilled their end of the military contract, and all they expected in return was their just due owed for military labor.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Pensions commemorated veterans’ revolutionary contribution, honoring the service and sacrifice of those “who took an active part in the danger and privation” of the War for Independence. The new nation “inclined to treasure him up as a relic, to look upon him as a living monument carved and scarred with the records of battles fought and victories won in behalf of his liberty and of our country”—physical remnants “which distinguished those men who took an active part in that contest.” The program, furthermore, acknowledged that the “tented field was not the only place where the soldier of the Revolution suffered,” recognizing that when former soldiers “returned home . . . disease and poverty followed him there.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, from their often deprived and disempowered backgrounds as recruits, to the woes of camp life, wartime injuries as ragtag regulars, and piercing cold in British prisons, to postwar dependent old age, these were truly long-suffering veteran soldiers. The war cast a long shadow on the lives of these men, as performing Continental service had lasting physical and occupational consequences, effected patterns of family formation, but conferred a prominent standing. They ranked among the poorer elements of society, with the war itself leaving some veterans physically less able to pursue a living while other aging veterans in the sample cited a waning capacity to

work, limiting their earning potential. Bearing arms for the Continental establishment, their selflessness was moralized, making these veterans meritorious examples of public virtue. Serving as soldiers on behalf of the glorious cause conferred material gratitude and prestige for such veterans in the young republic.

Impoverished Continental veterans and their families occupied an uneasy place, situated between desperate poverty and a heralded spot in the gallery of Revolutionary heroes. As honored revolutionary pensioners, these Bucks County veterans were economically marginal, but not marginalized in the new nation. The representation of these disabled, elderly, and dependent citizens—as disappearing national treasures struggling to remain self-sufficient—shows how Americans in the early national period classified these hard-pressed military veterans as a specific social subgroup. Downtrodden but virtuous veterans were distinguished for their “active part” in the war and service to the embryonic nation.

The experiences of this historical cohort of 1818 and 1820 pensioners suggest the democratization of citizenship among men in terms of military service and the public’s outpouring of sentiment. Also clear was the currency of exchange between pensioners and their celebrity, where the poverty-stricken veterans demonstrated, through their own petitioning and self-presentation, their adaptability at using social and cultural trends to make claims for support and achieve a measure of security. Furthermore, these aging and impoverished veterans and their families were entwined in the fabric of early American society, and examining the effects of economic deprivation on the constitution of these older families allows for a consideration of the impact of government policies, cultural values, biological processes, market conditions, and demographic changes on the aged. Indeed, looking at the circumstances and effects of poverty on these pensioners permits an assessment of material conditions, the family life of elders, and risk factors in later years. Members of the cohort had few possessions, displayed declining skill levels, experienced a reduction in daily activities, and dealt with worsening financial strains. As fathers and husbands, in particular, veterans unable to provide for family members spoke in terms of their inability to fulfill a main responsibility they felt they could no longer meet. In addition, looking at care arrangements for the dependent elderly revealed offspring’s ability to respond to the needs of elderly parents, the impact of care responsibilities on children remaining in their parents’ household or sheltering aged parents, and the limited alternatives open to veterans living alone, who had the fewest resources. In the end, for these Revolutionary War veterans in their last years, their longevity

placed them in a position to experience another special moment on the stage of history, as celebrated pensioners in the early republic, and affords historians the chance to investigate those in the new nation living “in reduced circumstances,” a population whose personal experiences and perspectives usually remain lost to history.

NOTES

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1. The example of the veteran and his family can be found in the Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, (M804), National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RWPf), file W16227.
2. Linda K. Kerber, “The Revolutionary Generation: Ideology, Politics, and Culture in the Early Republic,” in *The New American History*, rev. and expanded ed. Critical Perspectives on the Past, edited for the American Historical Association by Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 36.
3. Quotes in William Henry Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918), 67, 66. For additional information on the 1818 act, see John P. Resch, “Federal Welfare for Revolutionary War Veterans,” *Social Service Review* 56 (June 1982): 172–73. From a British perspective, of course, Continental servicemen were part of a rebel army, and, therefore, pensioners’ claims to the benefits of citizenship were based on American nationhood. The crown also rewarded supporters of the imperial state during the revolutionary upheaval, recognizing people such as James Thompson for the “zeal and loyalty to his King and Country” (American Loyalist Claims Commission Papers, 1780–1835, Public Record Office, Great Britain, Audit Office 13/84/617) (hereafter cited as AO13) and compensating those “deserving of an allowance from government” (Thomas Hood, AO13/70A/468). In fact, the Loyalist claims in the Audit Office papers

- contain similar documentation to that found in American pension files. Petitioners requesting compensation for their losses likewise emphasized their desperate situations, including the incapability of earning a living because of disabilities, age-related health problems, and wartime hardships, whereby they were "reduced to the necessity of soliciting government for support" (Henry Ferguson, AO13/70A/293).
4. [James Barbour], *Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting Copies of the Rules by which the Department has been governed, in giving effect to the Acts of 18th of March, 1818, and 1st of May, 1820, Making Provision for Certain Persons Engaged in the Land and Naval Service of the United States, in the Revolutionary War* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1826), 5–6. The pension laws can be more readily found in William T. R. Saffell, *Records of the Revolutionary War* (Baltimore: Charles C. Saffell, 1894; reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1969), 512–15 (page citations are to the reprint edition). On the changes in the series of pension laws, see John C. Dann, *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), xv–xxii. Also see J. Todd White and Charles H. Lesser, eds., *Fighters for Independence: A Guide to Sources of Biographical Information on Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 1, 6–13. On the legislation's significance, see John P. Resch, "Politics and Public Culture: The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Summer 1988): 139–58.
 5. For expenditure statistics and the number of veterans on the pension rolls, see [John C. Calhoun], *Report of the Secretary of War, of the Number of Persons Placed on the Pension Roll* (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1822), 1; and Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 68–72, 76–77, 96.
 6. Writing about the pension files, White and Lesser, eds., *Fighters for Independence*, 12, believed that "no caution can diminish their ultimate value." A very useful introduction to the content, possibilities, and problems of the pension applications can be found in Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, xv–xxii. For more on the applications as documents illustrative of the lives of ordinary Americans, see Constance B. Schulz, "Revolutionary War Pension Applications: A Neglected Source for Social and Family History," *Prologue* 15 (Summer 1983): 103–14. For a consideration of Civil War pensions as family policy, see Megan J. McClintock, "Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families," *Journal of American History* (September 1996): 456–80.
 7. Recent works extensively using Revolutionary War pension files include, John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Emily Jane Teipe, *America's First Veterans and the Revolutionary War Pensions* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); and Gregory T. Knouff, *Soldiers' Revolution: Pennsylvanians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).
 8. "Pension List Under the Act of Congress Passed March 18, 1818," in *Pennsylvania Archives*, ed. William Henry Egle, M.D., 3d ser., vol. XXIII (Harrisburg: William Stanley Ray, 1897), 501. The list contained a roll of 1818 pensioners residing in the state and was organized by county. Virgil D. White, comp., *Genealogical Abstracts of Revolutionary War Pension Files*, 4 vols. (Waynesboro, Tenn.: National Historical Publishing Co., 1990).
 9. On statistics for the proportion of the aged population, see David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 3, 27, 272.
 10. Examples of ages-of-life prints can be found in Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 29, 112.

11. For a useful introduction to the area that focused mostly on elites and ethnic-political issues, see Owen S. Ireland, "Bucks County," in *Beyond Philadelphia: The American Revolution in the Pennsylvania Hinterland*, ed. John B. Frantz and William Pencak (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 23–45. For the figures of the county's manpower contribution, see pp. 37–38, 215 n.46.
12. On the pre-service social and economic profile of the Continental rank and file, see: Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary Private," *William and Mary Quarterly* 30 (January 1973): 117–32 (hereafter cited as WMQ); Mark E. Lender, "The Enlisted Line: The Continental Soldiers of New Jersey," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1975), iii–iv, 110–39; Mark E. Lender, "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade: The Continental Line as an American Standing Army," in Peter Karsten, ed., *The Military in America from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New York, 1980), 21–44; Charles Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," in Stanley J. Underal, ed., *Military History of the American Revolution: Proceedings of the Sixth Military History Symposium, USAF Academy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 151–56, 164–66; John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 172–73; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 136, 142, 146, 150–52; Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 373–78; Richard H. Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *American Historical Review* 86 (June 1981): 557–58; James Kirby Martin and Mark E. Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan-Davidson, 1982), 90–91, 196; and Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chap. 1. For a challenge to the view that soldiers of the ranks tended to be poor, see J. C. A. Stagg, "Soldiers in Peace and War: Comparative Perspectives on the Recruitment of the United States Army, 1802–1815," WMQ 57 (January 2000): 79–120. A forthcoming collection, John Resch and Walter Sargent, eds., *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Fronts* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, in press), promises to add further insights but was not available during this article's preparation.
13. David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: R. Aitken and Son, 1789), 325, 327; and George Bancroft, *History of the Formation of the Constitution of the United States of America*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882), 108–9.
14. Quote from Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 376. On the Continentals' postwar poverty, see Papenfuse and Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits" WMQ 30 (January 1973): 130, 132; Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," *Military History of the American Revolution*, 160–61; and Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 91, 196. John Resch, "Federal Welfare for Revolutionary War Veterans," *Social Service Review* 56 (June 1982): 187–90, composed a life course portrait of some veterans and their poverty.
15. RWPF files S40079; S40794; W7325; S41145; S41140; W2484. For a pre-war occupational breakdown of 273 Pennsylvania regulars see the figures in John B. B. Trussell, *Pennsylvania Line: Regimental Organization and Operations, 1775–1783*, 2d ed. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1993), 253–55.

16. Trussell, *The Pennsylvania Line*, 244–47. His findings were based on 1068 enlistees whose ages were known in available records. On the agreement among scholars on the youth of the majority of enlisted men, see Neimeyer, *America Goes to War*, 15–24; Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 90; and Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 373; and Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 148.
17. Age at time of enlistment for the sample is based on information in the pension files (see table 1). Some of the men's ages could be confirmed through estate records, obituary notices, and state pension applications.
18. Howard H. Peckham, ed., *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 130.
19. These figures are based on an estimated number of 175,000 total Revolutionary War participants. Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 198–99.
20. Maris A. Vinovskis raised the need to analyze the human dimensions of war, especially its impact on the postwar life course of those who participated. See "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," *Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989): 34–58. For more about studying the personal aftermath of military service, see also Josefina J. Card, *Lives after Vietnam: The Personal Impact of Military Service* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1983). Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 62–63, suggested the psychological effects of the Revolutionary War for veterans, inferring the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder.
21. RWPF file S35087; Revolutionary War Pension Accounts, ca. 1790–1883, Record Group 2, volume 13 (volume 8 on microfilm), roll 2, frame 90, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa.; RWPF files W3290; S40515; S9748; S39928.
22. On veterans centering their stories of combat experience on wounds to increase their chances of obtaining a pension, and on how their accounts affirmed the belief that because their debilitations stemmed from the war they were owed a fair recognition, see Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, 246.
23. "An Oration Delivered by N. B. Boileau on the Fourth of July, 1814," Spruance Library, Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pa., The Battle of Crooked Billet, Manuscript 39, Folio 1, 26–27.
24. RWPF file S40756.
25. Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, 98–104, outlined the ways soldiers of the Continental army reacted to the lack of material supplies and mistreatment, including formal petitions, desertion, and mutinies.
26. For more about how camp habits and army life were organized around class and rank differences, see Gregory T. Knouff, "The Common People's Revolution: Class, Race, Masculinity, and Locale in Pennsylvania, 1775–1783" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1996), chap. 2. Allen Bowman, *The Morale of the American Revolutionary Army* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943) considered various wartime conditions among the troops, such as sickness, poor diet, and discipline. Among ill-clad and undernourished soldiers, he found "deplorable health conditions." Quote on p. 23. For another portrayal of the army's chronic supply problems and the onerous duties of soldiering, see John E. Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 96, 100–1, 120. Additional analysis on the constant difficulties of meeting the soldiers' material needs throughout the war can be found in E. Wayne Carp's *To Starve an Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Wayne Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter:*

- Civilians and Soldiers in War* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), recently revisited the army's grave shortage of provisions and reconsidered George Washington's role in the crisis.
27. Peckham, *The Toll of Independence*, 130.
 28. RWPF files S40237; S41858.
 29. On camp diseases, military medical treatment, and hospital conditions, see Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), chap. 4. Other works conveying the ordeal of ill and wounded Continental troops and the inadequate military medical care include, Knouff, "The Common People's Revolution," 99–101; and Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries*, 97–98, 102–3.
 30. RWPF files S39820; S9748.
 31. W. W. H. Davis, *The History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, from the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time* (Doylestown, Pa.: Democrat Book and Job Office Print, 1876), 371.
 32. Peckham, *The Toll of Independence*, 130.
 33. On the regional recruitment and composition of the Pennsylvania Line, see Trussell, *Pennsylvania Line*, iv, 238–39; and Robert K. Wright, *The Continental Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, Government Printing Office, 1983), 259–69.
 34. For an reexamination of the events culminating in the Battle of Fort Mifflin and the role of the Third and Fifth Pennsylvania Regiments in the "worst defeat for American arms during the Revolutionary War," see William Paul Deary, "Toward Disaster at Fort Mifflin, November 1776" (Ph.D. diss., The George Washington University, 1996), vi, 90, 344, 346.
 35. Alexander Graydon, *Memoirs of a Life, Chiefly Passed in Pennsylvania, within the Last Sixty Years* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1822), 240–41.
 36. RWPF files S42171; W7325. Larry G. Bowman, *Captive Americans: Prisoners During the American Revolution* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 11–14, 18–22, 74, 125, 128, examined the large British prison system in the New York city area and the treatment of army prisoners, describing a lack of adequate bedding and clothing and "meager and not very healthful" food allotments for captives. Quote on p. 74. For more on wartime captivity and prison conditions, see Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, chap. 6; and Ferling, *A Wilderness of Miseries*, 105–8.
 37. RWPF files S40756; W2484. On veterans' memories and visions of the war, see Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, chap. 7.
 38. Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 376.
 39. On the fear of standing armies and their association with luxury, corruption, and power, see Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 6–9.
 40. On the changing perceptions of the regular army over the late-eighteenth through the early-nineteenth centuries and the shift in public opinion toward veterans of the Revolutionary War, see Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, x, chaps. 3, 4; and Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 133–36. In the "new memory of the Revolutionary War," Resch explained, the Continental Army was transformed "into a republican institution." Quote on p. 177. For more on the evolving popular memory of the Revolution paying more remembrance to previously forgotten participants, see Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Major John André and the Three Captors: Class Dynamics and Revolutionary Memory Wars in the Early Republic, 1780–1831," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Fall 1997): 391. Cray asserted that obscure and

- destitute Continental veterans benefited from a reconfiguration of the past, highlighting that through the pension program they "commanded respectful notice."
41. For more on the opposition to pensions, see Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 202–3; Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 160, 197–98; and Teipe, *America's First Veterans*, 71. See Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 113, 132–33, for a discussion of the relationship between pensions and republican principles. Even as pension eligibility prerequisites were increasingly liberalized and extended to widows, there was still reservations about granting payments: "Although the policy of our Government, as well as the manifest wishes of the people, demand that we should not entail upon the country an odious and oppressive pension system, yet there are claims upon us, and none more irresistible than the claims of soldiers, or widows of soldiers, of the Revolution." That any recompense was made at all makes the nation's gratitude all the more significant. Quote from, "Pensions to Widows of Revolutionary Soldiers," *House Report*, January 6, 1843, 29th Congress, 3d Session, no. 32, 1.
 42. Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, chap. 4, discussed how the pension act held up the selfless service of veterans, earning former soldiers "a special cultural rank that entitled them to preferment." Quote on p. 118. Furthermore, Resch argued that the more stringent 1820 means test only reinforced the popular image of veterans as heroic, virtuous, and patriotic. See chap. 7.
 43. For Fischer's periodization, see *Growing Old in America*, 40, 76–78, 101–2, 109–13, 198, 220–31.
 44. "An Oration Delivered by N. B. Boileau on the Fourth of July, 1814," Bucks County Historical Society, Spruance Library, The Battle of Crooked Billet, Manuscript 39, Folio 1, 26. On how memories of the Revolutionary War were invoked during the War of 1812, see Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 155–61.
 45. Centuries-old Anglo-American differentiations traditionally separated different sorts of poor, including "the aged" and "the wounded soldiers" as those deemed to be among deserving recipients. An example of a sixteenth-century antecedent of this practice can be found in Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 20. For more on the influence of poor relief principles and practices inherited from England, see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1971), 11, 20, 25, 31–32; and Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 14.
 46. Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790–1840* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 11.
 47. Fischer, *Growing Old*, 91–92.
 48. RWPF files S39817; S519; General Assembly, Pension Applications in House File, 1709–1903, Record Group 7, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pa., Box 7, 4–2220. While giving depositions in open court, a claimant's statements often spoke to an audience's feelings of compassionate nostalgia and played to the expectations of those gathered to hear stirring accounts that ultimately echoed and reinforced popular views of the Revolution. On the audience-awareness among pension applicants, see Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, 244, 246.
 49. Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life*, 72–85, discussed the life chances and life expectancies of Americans in the years of the early republic.
 50. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 5, discussed how the poor were thought blameworthy for their own dependence, explaining that the presence of poverty was regarded "as symptomatic of a basic flaw in the citizen" and "an indicator" of personal failings.

51. RWPF file S3441. On the distinction made between idle and honest poor in charity cases, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 32.
52. John Resch touched upon the point that federal aid assumed Continental soldiers were worthy of relief. See, “Federal Welfare for Revolutionary War Veterans,” *Social Service Review* 56 (June 1982): 191.
53. RWPF files S34441; S41140; S40756; S39699; W3290.
54. *Bucks County Intelligencer* (Doylestown, Pa.), July 11, 1831; and March 25, 1840.
55. Key studies of republicanism include Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (New York: Norton, 1969); and J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
56. Michael Kimmel referenced the term’s introduction and meaning, in *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 20.
57. Quote in Nancy F. Cott, “Eighteenth-Century Family and Social Life Revealed in Massachusetts Divorce Records,” in *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, ed. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 120.
58. On the typology of manhood in the Revolutionary and early national eras, see Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language and Patriarchal Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 30–43. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 16–17, identified other masculine types at the turn of the nineteenth century, including the emerging importance of the “Self-Made Man.” Stansell, *City of Women*, chap. 2, discussed “republican patriarchy” and the relationship between citizenship and the independent subordination of dependents. For more on men’s role as household master, see Carol Shammas, “Anglo-American Household Government in Comparative Perspective,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 52 (January 1995): 104–44; and Toby Ditz, “Shipwrecked; or Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 51–80. Ditz described how “a man who was not a master—that is not the head of a household or ‘family’ of dependents—was not a full member of the civil community of adult men.” Quote on p. 65.
59. RWPF files S40666; S41299; S34441.
60. On early American fatherhood, fathers as provider, and beliefs about maleness, see John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 27–28, 44–45, 52. For a discussion on the intimacies of domestic life and the need for male heads of households to continue making economic contributions in the family, see Lisa Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man: The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 171–75.
61. RWPF files S39803; W7325. On the role of women as economic partners in early American households, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650–1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982), and *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990).
62. Figures for household size derived from the Population Schedules of the Fourth Census of the United States, 1820, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. For more on household forms, the predominance of nuclear structures as the modal familial arrangement, and historical socio-demographic analysis of

- the early American family, see Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) 15–16, 171, 220, 224, 261–89; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62–64, 67–68, 78–79, 118, 181, 192, 194.
63. RWPF files S40003; S40666; W7325.
 64. RWPF files S35087; S519; S40806; W1660.
 65. RWPF file S41858; S519. On patterns of family and household structure of older people, see Howard Chudacoff and Tamara K. Hareven, "Family Transitions into Old Age," in *Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 217–43.
 66. On the family's responsibility to relieve the poor at home, see Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 30–39. A number of scholars have noted this caregiving pattern, the threat of dependency, and domestic location—how the elderly were positioned in relation to home and family. See Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 21–30; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 160–66; Andrew W. Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 30, 75; and Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man*, 171–72, 183–84.
 67. On generational supports, co-residence, and the expectation that family members carry the responsibility for the care of aged relatives, see Tamara K. Hareven, *Families, History, and Social Change: Life-Course and Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), 134–36, 143–47.
 68. RWPF files S41299; S40756.
 69. RWPF files S41145, S39820.
 70. RWPF file S41858.
 71. McKinney family information gathered from, Kathryn McPherson Gunning, *Selected Final Pension Payment Vouchers 1818–1864, Volume 1, Pennsylvania: Philadelphia and Pittsburgh* (Westminster, Md.: Willow Bend Books, 2003), 382.
 72. *Bucks County Intelligencer* (Doylestown, Pa.), June 17, 1833; RWPF file S41858.
 73. RWPF file S39699; S39928; S39956.
 74. RWPF file S39928; S41140; Bucks County, Pennsylvania Board of County Commissioners, List of Paupers in the Almshouse, 1810–1833; Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Board of County Commissioners, Poor House Register, 1810–1838; RWPF file W7325.
 75. RWPF files S40515; W7325; S39699; S40387; S39803.
 76. RWPF files S39817; S41299; W16227; S40862. Papenfuse and Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits," *WMQ* 30 (January 1973): 123, made the point that "even landowning was not a guarantee of escape from poverty."
 77. RWPF files W1660; W16227; S40666.
 78. These figures were compiled from Bucks County Tax Records, Hilltown Township and Falls Township, 1820.
 79. As historian Billy G. Smith noted, one of the problems with plumbing tax lists for statistical data is that many marginal men were excused or missed by tax assessors because of their poverty or geographic mobility. These veterans may have been relieved of taxes and removed from the rolls because of poverty, which helps account for their marked absence from such records. On the tax assessment

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- problem, see Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 213-15, 224.
80. New Jersey Tax Ratables, 1768-1846, Trenton Township, Hunterdon Co., 1779, New Jersey State Archives, Trenton, N.J.; Bucks County Tax Lists, Falls Township, 1800; Bucks County Tax Records, Morrisville Borough, 1812, 1818, Spruance Library, Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pa.
81. Bucks County Tax Records, Bristol Township, 1813.
82. Bucks County Tax Records, Upper Makefield Township, 1812, 1815, 1821, 1825.
83. On the major physical changes that occur in an aging population, see John C. Cavanaugh and Susan Krauss Whitbourne, eds., *Gerontology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91-112.
84. RWPF files S41140; S41145; S40866; S40862; S42171; S34332.
85. RWPF files S519; S39803; S34441.
86. RWPF files S39956; S35087; W16227.
87. RWPF files S519; W7325; S40079; S40237.
88. RWPF files S40862; S40794; S40806; S39633; S35087; W16227; S34332; S41299; S41145; S40666.
89. On experiential and environmental variables influencing the nature and magnitude of physical decline, see Lewis R. Aiken, *Aging: An Introduction to Gerontology* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1995), 33, 36, 37.
90. RWPF files S39928; S41140; S40806; S34441.
91. RWPF file W16227.
92. RWPF files S40666; S40079; S39699; S40003; Bucks County Tax Records, Middletown Township, 1812, 1825. On the practice of performing supplementary labor among landless laborers and artisans as a measure to avoid poverty, see Paul G. E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, "Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820," in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 106-43.
93. RWPF files W16227; S35087; W3290; S34332; S519. Information regarding the destination of mobile veterans was also verified through census schedules and tax lists. Smith, *The "Lower Sort,"* 151, 171-72, 175, found geographic mobility among eighteenth-century laboring Philadelphians, including veterans he tracked through the pension records, as part of their "continuous search for subsistence." Papenfuss and Stiversen, "General Smallwood's Recruits," *WMQ* 30 (January 1973): 129, traced the geographical mobility of Maryland pensioners. For another study of Maryland's migrant soldiers, see Lawrence A. Peskin, "A Restless Generation: Migration of Maryland Veterans in the Early Republic," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 91 (Fall 1996): 311-27. Peskin found that a third of his pensioners moved west into the Ohio River Valley region, while smaller migratory streams flowed into the southwestern interior or states bordering Maryland; the smallest proportion moved to New England. On pensions as a source for postwar migration studies, see the two articles by Theodore J. Crackel: "Longitudinal Migration in America, 1780-1840: A Study of Revolutionary War Pension Records," *Historical Methods* 14 (Summer 1981): 133-37; and "Revolutionary War Pension Records and Patterns of American Mobility, 1780-1830," *Prologue* 16 (1984): 155-67.
94. Gunning, *Selected Final Pension Payment Vouchers*, 585.
95. RWPF files S40003; S39820; S40794; S40806; S39633; S39803.

96. RWPF files S39699; S39817.
97. Gunning, *Selected Final Pension Payment Vouchers*, 543.
98. RWPF files S41140; S41145; S42697; W2484; S39928; S40079; S41023; S39956; S39820; W1660; S39817. John Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," 160–61, found that the veterans he studied possessed few household goods.
99. RWPF files S40866; S40515; S42171; S35087.
100. Bucks County Estate Files (Wills and Administration Records), no. 4844; no. 5348; no. 6254; no. 8022; and Pre-1901 New Jersey Wills, 1826, 3798Q. On the use of these records see Gloria L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," *WMQ* 32 (1975): 89–99.
101. Bucks County Estate Files (Wills and Administration Records), no. 4910; no. 8313; no. 7481; no. 4893; no. 6115; no. 4867; and no. 5897.
102. RWPF files S519; S40387; W7325; S40387; W16227.
103. "Statement of the Accounts of the Directors of the Poor of the County of Bucks, from the 25th day of January, 1819—to the 12th day of January, 1820," *Pennsylvania Correspondent and Farmer's Advertiser*, January 25, 1820.
104. Quote from William Summers, "Obituary Notices of Pennsylvania Soldiers of the Revolution," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 38 (1914): 449 (hereafter cited as *PMHB*). Alfred F. Young documented the honors bestowed on one aged veteran, in *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*.
105. "Pensions to Widows of Revolutionary Soldiers," *House Report*, January 6, 1843, 29th Congress, 3d Session, no. 32, 1.
106. Summers, "Obituary Notices of Pennsylvania Soldiers of the Revolution," *PMHB* 38 (1914): 447, 455.
107. *Bucks County Intelligencer* (Doylestown, Pa.), July 26, 1830; March 25, 1840; July 11, 1831. Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 150, observed the increased use of epitaphs for deceased veterans.
108. RWPF file W16227.
109. Regarding the ingratitude toward former common soldiers and the sentimental move toward apothecizing veterans, see Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 1–2, 4–5, 83–90, 148–51. On the lack of recognition for forgotten common veterans through the 1790s despite their desire to be acknowledged, see Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 113.
110. Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier*, ed. George F. Scheer (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1962), 186.
111. "The Last Veteran of the Revolution," *Pennsylvania Correspondent and Farmers' Advertiser*, 22 February 1820.
112. Summers, "Obituary Notices of Pennsylvania Soldiers of the Revolution," *PMHB* 38 (1914): 447, 451, 455, 445, 444, 447.
113. For more on how federal pensions figured in the growth of national entitlement policies, see Laura Jensen, *Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chaps. 2, 3. Pensions, Jensen argued, shaped notions of American citizenship, endowing some "with certain programmatic rights." Quote on p. 122. Another useful discussion on the connection between military service, entitlement, and the historical formulation of citizenship in the United States appeared in Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 223–25, 236–52. The relationship

- between military service and citizenship developed early in the Revolutionary War. Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 32, referenced a suggestive toast from the first anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming, "May only those Americans enjoy freedom who are ready to die for its defence." Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 200–1, addressed the crystallizing link between soldiering and definitions of citizenship in the newly independent nation, citing George Washington's view "that every Citizen who enjoys the protection of a free Government, owes not only a proportion of his property, but even his personal services to the defense of it." Women's post-war claims for aid found legitimacy only through military service. Alfred F. Young recently detailed one woman's quest for veterans' benefits based on her revolutionary service and war wounds, finding that "Deborah Gannett had a sense of entitlement that included the right of a woman no less than a man to support from a country she had served." See *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier* (New York: Knopf, 2004), chap. 8, quote on p. 237. Other women were excluded from receiving governmental support. Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 92, showed that women, especially widows, believed they were owed something for their sacrifices to the state, but found their petitions for relief "fell on unresponsive ears"; only Continentals enjoyed "any lobbying power." Jensen, *Patriots, Settlers, and the Origins of American Social Policy*, 87, highlighted that even when women were granted federal pensions, "it was only by virtue of their relationships with men" and based upon their husbands' wartime service.
114. RWPF file S40756. Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 247–49, argued that the postwar expectations of the common soldiery went unfulfilled, especially the hope of free land, regardless of the consolation of "a meager pension to hold off starvation." Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 194–202, concluded that few soldiers realized their goal of a freehold stake in the new republic. In addition, Papenfuss and Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits," *WMQ* 30 (January 1973): 132, found disillusioned expectations.
 115. RWPF file S519.
 116. On the contractual nature of soldiering in the eighteenth century, Continentals' recognition of the moral economy that existed between the soldier and the state, and their wartime perceptions about customary rights and dues, see Neimeyer, *America Goes to War*, chaps. 6, 7. Knouff, *The Soldiers' Revolution*, 98, also described the assumptions about material rights and a "military moral economy" among the Continental rank and file.
 117. "Pensions to Widows of Revolutionary Soldiers," *House Report*, January 6, 1843, 29th Congress, 3d Session, no. 32, 1, 3.