



# Preserve the Pensions

## War of 1812

“O! thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,  
Between their lov’d home, and the war’s desolation...”

This little-used quote is from one of the later stanzas of what is now known as the “Star-Spangled Banner,” penned by Francis Scott Key after witnessing the bombardment and eventual triumph in defending the City of Baltimore at Fort McHenry.

The War of 1812, often called the “Second Revolution,” was a pivotal moment in our Nation’s history. Individual states struggled to become one nation after a long-fought Revolution, and the “American Experiment” was still at a precarious stage. Without the strength and courage of those patriots who fought in the War of 1812, our American Revolution may have ended up as just a footnote to British history and conquest. Instead, however, these men – farmers, merchants, seamen, fathers, sons – became soldiers to fight for what they and their fathers had believed in: their American home.

Now, two hundred years later we celebrate their success and honor their memories. We have at this time a unique opportunity. As their records become more and more fragile, we are placed at a time with technology that can preserve and showcase what the patriots of 1812 sacrificed for. **We are here to Preserve the Pensions.**

- 180,000 pension records are at the National Archives from the War of 1812. Over 3000 requests come for these pensions each year. Time, however, is taking its toll on these fragile papers.
- The Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), Ancestry.com, and fold3 are pleased to partner together in this monumental effort to digitize and index these pensions to be made available online for free to genealogists and historians across the country.
- This monumental effort plans to digitize 7.2 million records just for the War of 1812. It will cost approximately \$3.7 million dollars.
- Pat Oxley, current President of FGS, says “**Preserve the Pensions** will not only preserve the fragile original documents, but also ensure that the sacrifices and monumental achievements of our forefathers are never forgotten.”
- As we work to preserve these War of 1812 pensions allowing them to be digitized and opened to a wider public, we pave the way to future partnerships to preserve records from the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.

- Each pension page costs \$0.45 to digitize. Each dollar of contribution digitizes two pages. Every little bit helps.
- The time is now: For a limited time, Ancestry.com has agreed to match every dollar! Each dollar *you* contribute now digitizes twice the records. **Each donation is tax deductible. Contribute today or visit [www.preservethepensions.org](http://www.preservethepensions.org).**
- What value do these pensions have to genealogists and historians? The files often contain such family history gems as:
  - Veteran's name and age
  - Residence
  - Widow's name and maiden name
  - Service history and dates
  - Military rank and organization
  - If Bounty Land were granted and information on those warrants
  - Marriage information
  - Death dates for soldiers and widows
  - Additional names of neighbors and comrades
- "We should look for opportunities to promote the educational value of having information-rich historical documents available to everyone, everywhere, at no cost. Not only do the digitized War of 1812 pension documents help genealogists, historians, and academicians, now every classroom teacher in America that has an Internet connection at school (as so many do) can use these documents in teaching about the War and in demonstrating the use of primary source documents in historical research." Curt Witcher, Senior Manager of Special Collections, Allen County Public Library.
- Volunteers have carefully flattened and conserved the valuable documents. Arrangements are being made for more cameras and digital equipment. People have willingly sacrificed their time; now we need money to help catalog and digitize these records in archivally-safe and sustainable ways.
- Through the **Preserve the Pensions** Project, record images are posted online for free at <http://go.fold3.com/1812pensions/> as they become available, not held until the end of the project.
- We need you. Please contribute. Spread the word and encourage participation from your local genealogical and historical societies. Visit [www.fgs.org/1812](http://www.fgs.org/1812) and follow our progress at [www.facebook.com/1812pensions](http://www.facebook.com/1812pensions) and [www.preservethepensions.org](http://www.preservethepensions.org).

John C. Clements was one of those men hunkered down behind the battlements at Fort McHenry. Still a journeyman shoemaker, John was 30, still single and had only recently come to Baltimore from Virginia to find better work. As the shells screamed overhead, he likely wondered if he'd ever have a chance after this to find a nice girl and settle down. The men of the 5<sup>th</sup> Maryland around Private Clements shivered in the chill September night, now choked with smoke and ash from the British mortars. He did survive that night, and other battles as well. He married Elizabeth Wingate in 1815 and had at least eight children. We, with those children's children join in the refrain:

“And the star-spangled Banner in triumph shall wave,  
O'er the Land of the Free, and the Home of the Brave.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Key, Francis Scott. "Defence [sic] of Fort M'Henry", poem, now "The Star-Spangled Banner," (1814), fourth stanza.