

Preface to Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors Of the Revolutionary War (MSSRW)

The Preface below, excerpted from MSSRW Volume 1, gives some insight and background into why, how and when MSSRW was created.

PREFACE

THE General Court of 1891, by chapter 100 of its resolves, directed the Secretary of the Commonwealth to prepare and publish an indexed compilation of the records of the Massachusetts soldiers and sailors who served in the army or navy during the Revolutionary War, as shown in the archives in the office of the Secretary. The work was begun in September of 1891 by making a card record index to all names found upon the muster rolls, pay rolls and other documents which form the Revolutionary War archives. The Revolutionary collection at that time numbered sixty volumes of rolls, orders, receipts, etc., together with the continental regiment books, numbering twenty-one volumes of individual pay accounts. The work on this collection had been nearly completed when a mass of rolls and miscellaneous papers was purchased, under authority of chapter 33 of the Resolves of 1893, from Mr. Samuel A. Drake. This addition is equivalent in amount of material to two volumes and is now known as the Drake collection. Subsequent to this extension of the Revolutionary series, in 1894, a large number of company and regimental returns, descriptive lists, orderly books, account books, etc., making fourteen new volumes, were found among a miscellaneous, unclassified collection of documents which had been hidden away for years in the various storage places connected with the Secretary's office. Although much more time had been occupied in preparing the work for printing than had been originally estimated, it was deemed proper to incorporate these newly found records in the regular work, rather than to add a supplement; and this was accordingly done. It will be seen that the original Revolutionary rolls SERVICE rendered by the men of Massachusetts afloat was equally as creditable and meritorious as that rendered by the land forces. By far the greater part of such service was performed by privateers, and, these being matter of private enterprise, no official returns of officers or crews were required. Save the records of commissions granted to commanders of privateers, an occasional crew list sworn to on clearance before naval officers is all that is to be found among the state archives to furnish proof of privateer service. Such records of naval service as there are consist mainly of rolls of state armed vessels, as they were called, made up for pay due officers and men for service performed during each cruise or term of engagement. But even these records do not show continuous service of such vessels in commission and are fewer in number than might be expected. There are included among the records published some of men WHO served in various Rhode Island regiments and in the First New York Regiment, fifty rolls and lists of the former and about a dozen of the latter being comprised in the Massachusetts Revolutionary Rolls collection. It was thought best to embody them here, as it was exceedingly doubtful whether they would otherwise ever be put in print. The following summary of the legislation of the Province and Commonwealth during the Revolutionary war period is by Mr. James J. Tracy, Chief of the Archives Division of this office, who has had immediate charge of the entire work of compilation. Acknowledgment is due here of the intelligent and painstaking manner in which he has performed his duty.

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Secretary of the Commonwealth