



Hessian Soldiers

Their History and How to Find Them in America and Germany

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OBJECTIVES

You will be able to:

- Describe who the Hessian Soldiers were.
- Identify resources containing research on individual Hessian Soldiers.
- Locate and use resources to help identify a soldier's regiment and hometown.

Usefulness

Several thousand Germans who came to America during the Revolutionary War as soldiers or otherwise associated with the troops ended up settling in Canada and the United States after the war. These were not traditional immigrants. Learning about the Hessian Soldiers and associated resources can help in determining their town of origin and being able to continue research in their native country.

A BRIEF HISTORY

At the commencement of the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), King George III of Great Britain needed additional troops to increase his fighting power. Former allies were contacted for help, and, following a common practice at the time, auxiliary troops from foreign countries were hired. The following six principalities within the Holy Roman Empire signed treaties with Great Britain to provide troops for the war.

Principality	Number of troops sent
Hesse-Cassel	16,992
Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel	5,723
Hesse-Hanau	2,422
Ansbach-Bayreuth	2,353
Waldeck	1,225
Anhalt-Zerbst	1,152
Total	29,876

These hired troops have often been incorrectly referred to as mercenaries. The term *mercenaries* refers to individuals who are not members of a military unit and who participate in a conflict for personal gain. The troops contracted by Great Britain were auxiliary troops. The term *auxiliary troops* refers to units of soldiers hired out by their government. They served side by side with foreign armies while maintaining their usual unit structure, officers and wearing their own uniforms.

Over the course of the war, about 30,000 troops, representing about a third of the British forces, came to America. More than half of these came from Hesse-Cassel, which led to all auxiliary troops hired by Great Britain being referred to as Hessians, regardless of their true state of origin.

It is estimated that of the roughly 30,000 Hessians who came to America, about 6,000 either deserted or were discharged and remained in the United States and Canada after the war. About 2,500 settled in Canada, the majority in Quebec and some also in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and present-day Ontario. In the United States, they settled anywhere from the Canadian border south to Florida. Many settled in German-speaking areas in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, and the Carolinas.

Has your research identified the name of a possible Hessian soldier? Did your ancestor appear in American records after 1776? Was he born in Germany between 1736 and 1760? Consider the possibility that your ancestor served with one of the German Auxiliary troops. Several resources are available to help you learn more about them, including identifying their hometown in Germany.

See Bibliography at end for general information about Hessian Soldiers.

Part 1: SOLDIER BIOGRAPHIES

Much research has already been conducted on several Hessian Soldiers. Review the following available resources to see if your ancestor has already been researched.

Associations and lists of researched soldiers

1. Johannes Schwalm Historical Association (JSHA) Registry
<http://jsha.org/jsharegis.htm>

One of the pages on the JSHA website is this JSHA Registry page which includes links to four different lists of German Auxiliary soldiers: 1) registry of researched soldiers, 2) registry of partially researched soldiers, 3) list of men in the very early stage of study, and 4) names of men who have been positively identified as Hessian ancestors by researchers.

JSHA is willing to assist with some research; and becoming a member will increase the available research assistance. Biographies and stories of individual soldiers, as well as information on anything related to Hessian Soldiers can be found in their annually published journal. The association's accumulated documents and research materials are held as a special collection at the Martin Library of the Sciences of Franklin and Marshal College. <https://archives.fandm.edu/repositories/2/resources/68>

2. AMREV-HESSIAN Mailing List Website
<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/o/ourhessians.htm>

One of the several links included at this website includes a list of soldiers who have been researched. This website also provides links to several helpful and informative resources on topics such as name lists, historical background, prison camps, transport ships, journals and diaries, parish registers, etc.

Hessian Soldiers who settled in Canada

Regiments from Brunswick, Hesse-Hanau, and Anhalt-Zerbst primarily served in Canada, and many soldiers from these regiments stayed in Canada. Johannes (John) Helmut Merz identified several soldiers who settled in Canada. Following are a few of his publications.

1. *PDF (Personal Data File) on Hessians.*

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/pdf-index.htm>

A selection of information about 46 individual soldiers in Canada compiled by John Merz. The sources abbreviations appearing in these PDFs appear to be the same included in the book listed next.

2. *Register of German military men who remained in Canada after the American Revolution* by Johannes Helmut Merz (FamilySearch Books, ID 661862).

<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/132009-register-of-german-military-men-who-remained-in-canada-after-the-american-revolution>

This publication includes an alphabetical list of names of soldiers. The information for each soldier varies, but can include some of the following: possible surname variants, regiment, occupation, vital events and place, place of origin, land grant, last place known at, etc. Each listing can have up to three source references which pulls from a list of 330 sources (e.g., diaries, compiled name lists, books, etc.) and 51 microfilms held by the Library and Archives Canada and the Archives of Ontario. The list of sources begins on image 15.

Additional information about most of the individual regiments listed at the front of this book (image 2) can be found at AMREV-HESSIAN – *The Hessians of Quebec: German Auxiliary Troops in Canada 1776-1783.*

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/gatnc.htm>

3. *The Hessians of Upper Canada* by Johannes Helmut Merz. (FHL 971.3 D3m).

This book includes biographies of 190 Hessian Soldiers.

4. *The Hessians of Nova Scotia* by Johannes Helmut Merz. (FHL 971.6 D3mj).

This publication includes personal data files of 235 Hessian Soldiers.

5. *The settlement of former German auxiliary troops in Canada after the American Revolution* by Virginia Easley DeMarce. (FHL microfiche 6,101,456).

This book contains about 1,300 brief biographies. They may include each soldier's former regiment, age at enlistment or discharge, place of settlement in Canada, wife's name, and date and place of marriage.

6. *An annotated list of 317 former German soldiers who chose to remain in Canada after the American Revolution* by Virginia Easley DeMarce. (FHL microfiche 6,101,457).

The names in this list were taken from Lower Canada land petitions.

Part 2: IDENTIFYING PRINCIPALITY, REGIMENT AND HOMETOWN

Determining which principality and regiment your ancestor served in will help you know where to look for records. Following are some sources that can help identify a regiment or unit. The first two are quick-reference sources that can point you to other resources with more details. Following these are resources listed by principality.

1. *U.S. and Canada, Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500s-1900s* (Ancestry.com).
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7486/>

This index includes all immigrants coming to America, including Hessian Soldiers who remained in America. This database can help to quickly identify with which principality a Hessian Soldier was associated. It was compiled from various record types, such as original passenger lists and diaries, or as in the case of Hessian Soldiers, compiled lists

of soldiers who stayed in America. Information provided includes the name, year and place of arrival, annotation, and source of record. An estimated age and birth year may also be included.

2. *Cumulative surname index and soundex to monographs 1 through 12 of the German-American genealogical research series* by Clifford Neal Smith. (FHL 973 W2smn no. 13).

This publication only includes the name and associated monograph number. The referenced monograph can then be consulted for additional information about the individual's rank and unit. It might also include birthplace, age, occupation, promotion, residence or where recruited, and place wounded, killed, missing, captured, or deserted.

3. **Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau, and Waldeck**

- a. *HETRINA** (Hessische Truppen in Amerika / Hessian Troops in America)
<https://www.lagis-hessen.de/en/subjects/index/sn/hetrina>

This database includes soldiers who served in regiments from Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau and Waldeck. Some of the information provided includes the soldier's name, town, approximate year of birth, rank, regiment, and date/type of event. Sources for this database are held at the Hessian State Archive in Marburg.

*HETRINA is one of several databases found at the Hessian Regional History Information System of the Hessian Regional Authorities for Historical Regional Studies. (Landesgeschichtliches Informationssystem Hessen des Hessischen Landesamt für geschichtliche Landeskunde.)

- b. *British and German Deserters, Dischargees, and POW's Who May Have Remained in Canada and the USA, 1774-1783. Part One and Two*
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/49094/>

This collection can be digitally searched (e.g., by name, or keyword "Hesse*") or by browsing the images of the associated monographs by Clifford Neal Smith as seen below:

- i. *British and German deserters, dischargees, and prisoners of war who may have remained in Canada and the United States, 1774-1783.* (FHL 973 W2sco no. 9 – Pt 1&2). This monograph refers readers to HETRINA for deserters from Hesse and Waldeck and to other monographs for deserters from other principalities.

- ii. *Deserters and disbanded soldiers from British, German and Loyalist military units in the South, 1782* by Clifford Neal Smith. (FHL 973 W2scd no. 10). This monograph includes 80 Hessians found in HETRINA. The list includes names and destinations. The original documents from which the list was transcribed can be found on FHL film 0017787 (starting at image 10). Digital images can be viewed at a family history center or the Family History Library.

- c. *Notes on Hessian soldiers who remained in Canada and the United States after the American Revolution, 1775-1784* by Clifford Neal Smith. (FHL 973 W2smn no. 28 pt1-3, 4A-4E).

This subseries of monographs provides lists of information from HETRINA presented by different criteria: Lists of deserters by 1) place of origin, 2) regiment and company, and 3) date of defection. An alphabetical index is also included.

- d. *Mercenaries from Hesse-Hanau who remained in Canada and the United States after the American Revolution* by Clifford Neal Smith. (FHL 973 W2smn no.5).

This publication focuses only on soldiers from Hesse-Hanau. Information was pulled from sources held at the Hessian State Archive in Marburg, Germany, including dismissal lists of deserters and missing soldiers from individual units, prisoner of war lists, lists of those present at recapitulation, those captured, and of those remaining in Virginia after prisoner exchange.

4. **Brunswick**

- a. *Brunswick Deserter-Immigrants of the American Revolution* by Clifford Neal Smith, 1973. (FHL 973 W2smn no.1).

This monograph provides a list of 1,700 names originally published by Hans Helmut Rimpau in *Archiv für Sippenforschung*. The list includes name, birthplace, age, and details about the soldier's departure from service – how, where, and when. The means of departure include deserted, in the service of the enemy, discharged, prisoner of war, and transfer to civil service. The list does not include soldiers who were presumed to be dead. It should be noted, that due to financial advantages some deserters may have been listed as dead.

- b. *Brunswick troops in North America, 1776-1783: index of all soldiers who remained in North America* by Claus Reuter, 1999. (FHL 970 M22r).

This publication includes a soldier's name, place and year of birth, unit and company, and his status.

5. **Ansbach-Bayreuth**

- a. AMREV-HESSIAN (American Revolution Hessian Soldier) - *Ansbach Regiment - the company commanded first by Colonel von Eyb after May 1778 by Colonel von Voit*. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/ans/ans.htm>

These lists are transcriptions of fourteen semi-annual muster rolls between 25 March 1777 and 24 Jun 1783 written in French. Each list includes up to about 130 names and include rank and occasional status and notes (e.g., illness, date of death, desertion, transfer, return to Europe, prisoner). They are not alphabetized. Names can be searched using Ctrl+F (or Cmd+F) in the open window of a selected list.

- b. AMREV-HESSIAN - *Complete list of those soldiers from the Ansbach-Bayreuth regiments who deserted or stayed in North America after the war*. <http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/ans/ansbach-bayreuth.htm>

This list, alphabetized by surname, includes name, rank, regiment or company, status (e.g., deserted, absent, released), date of event, and for some, their hometown.

- c. A similar listing, by soundex, is found in *Mercenaries from Ansbach and Bayreuth, Germany, who remained in America after the Revolution* by Clifford Neal Smith. (FHL 973 W2smn no.2, 1974 and 1979). The 1979 listing includes a surname index.

Smith's list includes additional information, such as enlistment with the American troops. Both lists (3.a and 3.b) were taken from Erhard Städtler's dissertation *Die Ansbach-Bayreuther Truppen im Amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg, 1777-1783*, which included a transcription of muster rolls in the Public Records Office in London.

6. **Anhalt-Zerbst**

- a. *Mercenary troops from Anhalt-Zerbst, Germany, who served with the British forces during the American Revolution* by Virginia Easley DeMarce. (FHL 973 W2smn no. 19).

This monograph lists names taken from some of the muster rolls of regiments from Anhalt-Zerbst. The lists are incomplete. They include name, age, length of service and place of origin.

7. Additional lists of names

- a. *Muster rolls and prisoner-of-war lists in American archival collections pertaining to the German mercenary troops who served with the British forces during the American Revolution* by Clifford Neal Smith, 1973. (FHL 973 W2smn no.3).

This monograph provides transcribed muster rolls and prisoner-of-war lists of the various regiments in chronological order. Lists from all principalities except Ansbach-Bayreuth are included. These lists were accumulated from several different archives and collections. Each list will indicate its source, what language it was written in (English, German, French), location and date created. Since various lists were created for different purposes, the information contained therein will differ. Information can include name, rank, unit or regiment, occupation, trade, employer (POWs could hire out to locals). A few names of women and children are also included.

- b. *Names of Persons Who Took the Oath of Allegiance to the State of Pennsylvania Between the Years 1777 and 1789.*

This publication includes two books listing locals as well as foreigners, including some former Hessian Soldiers. Besides a name, additional information may include year or time frame and place of desertion, identification of which army he served with (American, British, Anspach [Ansbach], Brunswick, Hessian), if served with American army after desertion from foreign army, occupation, marital status, current place of residence, and character reference.

This resource can be accessed in various forms:

- i. Ancestry.com

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48371/>

Available to search by Name or keywords, or by browsing book images.

- ii. AMREV-HESSIAN

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/oath.htm>

Extracted list by book and page number. Scroll or use Ctrl+F to search for names.

- iii. Internet Archive

<https://archive.org/details/namesofpersonsw00west>

View digital version of book, browse images to search for individuals.

Part 3: CHURCH RECORDS

With a known hometown, research can continue in church records, the main record type used in German research before 1874.

1. Archion.de – Protestant Church Records Online

Many records of the protestant parishes within the six principalities from which the Hessian Soldiers originated can be found at <http://www.archion.de>. Areas of these principalities are covered by the following archives:

Anhalt: Archiv der Evang. Landeskirche

Bayern: Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evang.-Luth. Kirche

(e.g., Dekanat Ansbach, Dek. Bayreuth)

Braunschweig: Landeskirchliches Archiv der Evang.-Luth. Landeskirche

The Braunschweig (Brunswick) archive includes military parish registers for the Riedesel, Prince Friedrich, and Dragoon regiments which record baptisms, marriages and deaths during their service time in America.

Hannover: Landeskirchliches Archiv Hannover

Hessen-Nassau: Zentralarchiv der Evang. Kirche

Kurhessen-Waldeck: Landeskirchliches Archiv Kassel.

Archion represents the collaborative effort of most protestant church archives in Germany to provide access to digital parish records. It requires a subscription to be able to view the records. The How To Guide [Using Archion for German Research](#) can help you register with Archion and navigate the website.

A gazetteer, like Meyer's Gazetteer, can help you find the correct parish. The How To Guide [Meyer's Gazetteer Online](#) is available to help learn how to use this resource.

2. *Annotated Hessian chaplaincy record of the American Revolution, 1776-1783; christenings, marriages, deaths* by Clifford Neal Smith, 1994. (FHL 973 W2smn no.30).

This monograph compares entries taken from the diary of Chaplain Henrich Kümmel with service records of individual soldiers in HETRINA. Chaplain Kümmel served in the Regiment von Huyn from Treysa, Hesse-Cassel.

Part 4: ONLINE IMAGES AND ARCHIVES

The information in the compiled name lists and resources mentioned above came from numerous different sources and archives, especially muster rolls. A few of these documents can be viewed online. However, the majority need to be accessed at or retrieved from the archives directly.

1. *German Auxiliaries Muster Rolls, 1776-1786 (bulk 1781-1783)*.
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/g/germanaux/>

This collection at the Clements Library at the University of Michigan includes digital images of 17 muster rolls from Anhalt-Zerbst, Brunswick, Hesse-Cassel, Hesse-Hanau, and Waldeck regiments, and 15 other documents and letters related to the German auxiliary troop.

2. *List of Hessian Officers (Of the Convention) who signed Paroles at Cambridge 13 December 1777*.
https://www.loc.gov/resource/mgw4.046_0222_0235/?sp=6

This list (images 6-8) is part of a collection of George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress. The list includes names (mostly surnames only) and rank. These soldiers were part of the Convention Army, an army of British and allied troops captured at the Battles of Saratoga in 1777.

3. **COMING SOON:** Hessian Unit Muster Lists held at the Hessian State Archives in Marburg.

The Johannes Schwalm Historical Association's (JSHA) purpose is to research the German auxiliary troops who remained in America after the Revolutionary War. The

Association contracted with the Hessian State Archives in Marburg to photo the muster rolls of the Hessian units. The PDF files will be viewable via a web page interface through Kutztown University in Pennsylvania at a future date. These muster rolls are different than the ones included in the German Auxiliaries Muster Rolls mentioned above.

4. **COMING SOON:** JSHA's Military and Naval Collection

This microfilm collection has been converted to PDF files which will be viewable via a web page interface through Kutztown University in Pennsylvania in the future. (The project was halted due to the current pandemic.)

5. Hessisches Landesarchiv (Hessian State Archive)

<https://landesarchiv.hessen.de/hessian-state-archives>

Original source documents for HETRINA are held at the state archives in Marburg. Source call numbers of specific sources of information presented for individual soldiers in HETRINA are linked to the listing in Arcinsys (<https://arcinsys.hessen.de>), the Archival Information System of the Hessen state archives. Use the call numbers to help identify documents of interest. Where permitted, digital photos can be made during an on-site visit. If a personal visit is not possible, a request to scan documents of interest can also be submitted to the archive. Inquiries can be sent to marburg@hla.hessen.de.

6. Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv (Lower Saxony State Archive) - Wolfenbüttel

<https://nla.niedersachsen.de/startseite/>

7. Landesarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt (Saxony-Anhalt State Archive) - Magdeburg

<https://landesarchiv.sachsen-anhalt.de/startseite/>

8. Library and Archives Canada

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/german.aspx>

Records of German Troops are found in the collection about German Immigration.

A few things to keep in mind while researching

- When searching for an ancestor's name in a list, be mindful of variant forms (e.g., names appearing in English, French and German records can appear in different versions: John, Jean, Johannes. Also, surnames may have changed due to translation: Schwarz-Black, or spelling difference based on sound: König-Koenig-Konig-Keaning-Keenig-Koenig. The following letter pairs were often interchanged: B/P, W/V, K/C, and Sch/Sh.
- The Hessians were not the only Germans who participated in the Revolutionary War. Germans were also recruited to serve in British regiments, wearing British uniforms. The French also recruited Germans for their army. Additionally, Germans who emigrated to America prior to the war also fought in the war. This class and handout focus only on the auxiliary troops from the six principalities listed above hired by Great Britain.
- Not all members of the auxiliary troops were natives of the associated six states. For example, birth places of soldiers from Brunswick included Hesse-Homburg, Bavaria, Moravia, Saxony, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Poland, Berlin, etc.

Part 5: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Some additional resources as you move forward in conducting research in Germany:

"Germany Genealogy" (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy) provides an introduction and overview of conducting research in Germany. Be sure to check out links to additional articles in the right-hand column, including the following:

Germany Research Tips and Strategies

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Research_Tips_and_Strategies

Germany Church Records

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Church_Records

Germany Archives and Libraries

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Archives_and_Libraries

German Genealogical Word List

https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/German_Genealogical_Word_List

German Script tutorials

<https://www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/german-paleography-seminar-introduction> (10 lessons)

<https://www.familysearch.org/help/helpcenter/lessons/old-german-script-part-1> (3 parts)