So, now you are the graves committee chairman or maybe interested in marking an ancestor's grave. In any event, this is one of the most rewarding ventures that you can participate in as a member of the Sons of the American Revolution. It also provides one of the few programs that can include all chapter members – a great team building opportunity.

The basic job description is simple – Find them and fix them! So, how do we get started? Locating the grave can be a real challenge. A name or list can get you on your way. Next, develop a list of resources that can aid in the project. Use known references, such as the DAR Patriot Index, State Archives, State Sources for Family Histories, County Histories, Historical Societies, published Family Histories, Church Histories, to name a few.

Resources

Some areas, such as Georgia, Indiana, Wisconsin and Texas have published books or a listing (necrology) of graves in their areas. Not all locations of graves are listed, but there are ways to develop this. The main rule is to keep asking questions until you get the answer.

Georgia has a unique reference, *Georgia Revolutionary Soldiers & Sailors, Patriots & Pioneers* that contains the names of over 4500 Patriots. This publication, in two volumes, lists a considerable number of Patriots, as Georgia was the only state to have a land lottery following the American Revolution. Revolutionary War Veterans received land for their service and many took advantage of this opportunity that began in 1818. This publication may be ordered for $54 paperback, $75, hardback, plus $4 Shipping & Handling from:

New Papyrus Co., Inc
548 Cedar Creek Drive
Athens, Georgia 30605-3408

Another helpful source is the CD, SAR Revolutionary War Graves Register 2000 Edition. This aid provides the names of all SAR & DAR reports of graves and those whose location have been identified countrywide. The CD may be ordered from Progeny Software, Inc via www.progenysoftware.com
or 1-800-565-0018. The cost is $29.95, plus $5 shipping and handling.

In Vermont, refer to Fisher and Fisher's publication for a listing of all Soldiers, Sailors and Patriots buried there.

The National Society Microfilm records located at Headquarters is another great place for your research. These National Society projects were developed under the leadership of Graves Chairman, Bob Galer.

Other resources that can be used are County Cemetery publications, County Cemetery Maps and County Cemetery Commissions. Department of Transportation maps are especially helpful as they identify the location on the ground by small dotted rectangles with a cross inside.

Providing notices in local newspapers or Historical Societies newsletters can bring surprising results. It seems that everyone who has knowledge of Patriot graves is willing to provide information if they are aware of your search.

One recommendation using new technology is to record locations by using the Global Positioning System (GPS). This will aid future generations.

Validation of a Revolutionary Soldier's Service

Sometimes the issue of how to validate Revolutionary War Service arises. Revolutionary War Service records are an excellent validation of a Patriots' service. However, these records were "compiled" after the Civil War and are fragmentary. Many records were lost in a fire that occurred on November 10, 1800 in the offices that the Secretary of War occupied. Other records were lost or destroyed in 1814 when government buildings in the capital were sacked by the British. So... the absence of a service record does not mean that he didn't serve.

Also, we can assume that we could also mark the grave of a patriot who did not serve, such as the famous Nancy Hart and daughter Sukey Hart in Wilkes County, Georgia or Molly Pitcher at the Battle of Monmouth who would qualify for a supplemental. There would be no record of their "service."

The best source for validation is from Revolutionary War Pension Records that will provide a broader base of the participation of the Patriot. These and the Service Records indexes are published and are available at most genealogy-based libraries. They will provide a file number that can be used to obtain a record from the microfilm record at the National Archives.

Requests for service records and pension records must be requested by using one of the forms listed below. When completed, order from:

National Archives and Records Administration
Textual Reference Branch (NWDT1)
700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20408

The NARA web site is www.nara.gov .

The cost for Form 85 Bounty Land Records is $17.25; Form 85 Pension Records is $37 (full) or $14.75 (packet); Form 86 Military Service Record is $17.

Forms may be ordered from web site inquire@nara.gov . Use of a charge card will bring good results. If no record is found, there is no charge.

Sources, such as the DAR/SAR Patriot Index, County Histories, publications by County Historical Societies, Church Histories, Necrology records and, depending on the information provided, publications by historians, such as Bobby Gilmer Moss who catalogued all known Patriots who fought at Cowpens, Kings Mountain, South Carolina and Moores Creek Bridge, North Carolina.

The bottom line is that there are a number of sources to validate a Revolutionary War Patriot service (or supporter of the war for Independence). Use them all.

Ordering a Government Grave Marker

If there is no existing grave marker, a free marker may be ordered from the National Cemetery Administration office located on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee. This office processes the applications for grave stone/bronze markers for Revolutionary War Patriots. (Note that the Patriot must have served in the military, not “aided” in the Revolution). Form VA40-1330 may be completed by visiting web site:
www.cem.va.gov

When completed, print a copy and fax it with a letter of transmittal and a one-page documentation of the service to 1-800-455-7143. This will cut down considerably on the time it takes to get a free government marker. This is a direct fax line to the using section and will place you ahead of about 19,000 other VA requests for grave markers! If you have questions of this source, call 1-888-367-1330 and ask for “The Old Boys” section.

If there is an error on a bronze maker, the Memorial Programs Service will pick it up and replace it free, even if the mistake is ours. However, errors on stones will not be replaced. Applications and documents are scanned in a computer system and the Memorial Programs Service office does not desire to have a lot of attachments. Also, note that the marker may be delivered to another site if the proper information is completed on the form. For instance, this allows for an SAR member in Arizona to order a marker and have it delivered to someone in New Jersey for installation. Additional information is available on this new web site.

The National Society Graves Committee encourages the addition of the SAR marker added to the government marker. However, the SAR considers a grave marked if only a government marker is installed.

Planning a Grave Marking Service

Visit the SAR web site for helpful information about planning and conducting a grave marking service. However, remember that grave markers are now ordered as outlined above as some of the information is in the process of being updated. A sample invitation, program, media releases, service layout and graves registry form are provided. A planning guide is available to cover all the bases for a grave marking service.

Use of bagpipes, if available, adds a unique feature to these programs as a considerable number of Patriots were of Scottish descent. If live music cannot be obtained, recorded music

works well. This could be played about 20 minutes prior to the beginning of the service and 10 minutes following the service. A tape (Sousa-type marches) is sometimes available from a local Armed Service Band if one is available in your area. Inclusion of “Taps” adds dignity to the program. This is an excellent substitute for live music. Drum & Fife music is obviously desirable if available. One of the Drum & Fife tunes is *Farewell to Lochaber*, which is a traditional lament used at military funerals when approaching a gravesite. Hot Punch, used to depart a gravesite, follows this. This can be used when the colors are being posted, at the unveiling, wreath laying and when the colors are retired.

Use of media releases with photographs are extremely valuable in these programs and are universally acceptable to newsprint sources. Extensive publicity can be obtained from this and other media, such as Television at no cost to the SAR. One item that will aid in informing the community of your grave marking service is to obtain a Proclamation for the Honored Patriot from the local Mayor and publicize this in area newspapers.

Marking a Grave for SAR Ancestors in Another Area or State

The SAR web site provides several helpful items to assist members who cannot be present at a grave marking across country but would still like to see the grave marked.

Finally, the grave marking needs to be reported to the National Society on the form included in the SAR web site. These reports are microfilmed and added to our reference at Headquarters.

When you complete your grave marking service, be sure to include a report to Editor Win Williams for inclusion in the SAR Magazine. As these services are very colorful and provide a variety of attendees, be sure to include photos for Win.

As you can see, there is quite a lot of work to conducting a meaningful grave marking. However, select from this material what works for you and you will be most pleased when your ancestor is honored with such dignity! When you complete a grave marking service, you will walk a bit taller for having accomplished such a noble deed for the Sons of the American Revolution.