

Video Transcript

Jon Deiss: So the record that I found was in the records of the Senate. It was in the Legislative Archives, and it was a diary written by a soldier who participated in the Revolutionary War in the Continental Line from New Hampshire. His name was Samuel Leavitt and his diary details his trip from Stratham, New Hampshire to West Point during a three month term of service in the Continental Line. He enlisted in, according to the notes I have – he even states it directly in the diary, which I have made a transcription recently, soon after discovering – he enlisted in, like on the 5 July 1780. It doesn't get much more patriotic than that. And then was discharged in October 1780.

The actual diary was found in the legislative files here and it's been pulled and put in the vault because of its rarity and fragility. But it was found in the files of a woman [who] petitioned Congress for a pension stating that her grandfather, a guy named Broadstreet Wiggins – that's one of those great colonial names – served in the same unit as Samuel Leavitt. So she had a copy of the diary and provided it as evidence to show that they actually went out on service. Now, she doesn't seem to be related to Leavitt, and her documents show that she's related to this Broadstreet Wiggins guy, but my research in this family and this town shows that they're all inter-related so she somehow got the diary through family connections, obviously. They're not detailed in the paperwork, but still there.

The diary is pretty important for the fact that it details a common soldier's experience traveling through New England. It's obvious that this guy was an experienced soldier because he's recording the mileage between each town and where he stops, and that's important because they're paid for their mileage. And so he knew that. He'd probably been in service before. Research is inconclusive now to determine whether he actually served prior to this, but we think he did; there's a number of guys with the same name who served in the same part of the country. And in fact, we're not sure if the diary is written by a father or a son. There's two men, the same unit, the same exact time, both named Samuel Leavitt. It doesn't state in the diary who he is but I'm leaning to thinking that it's the father because of some details in the diary. But he also mentions seeing General Washington and hearing about the betrayal of West Point, or the attempted betrayal of West Point, by General Arnold. And that's one of the most exciting parts of the diary because there's a long passage where he hears that, he said: "They came and told us we're going to be put to the sword," if Arnold is successful; but, you know, apparently that didn't happen. But it's just interesting how it shows that kind of information.