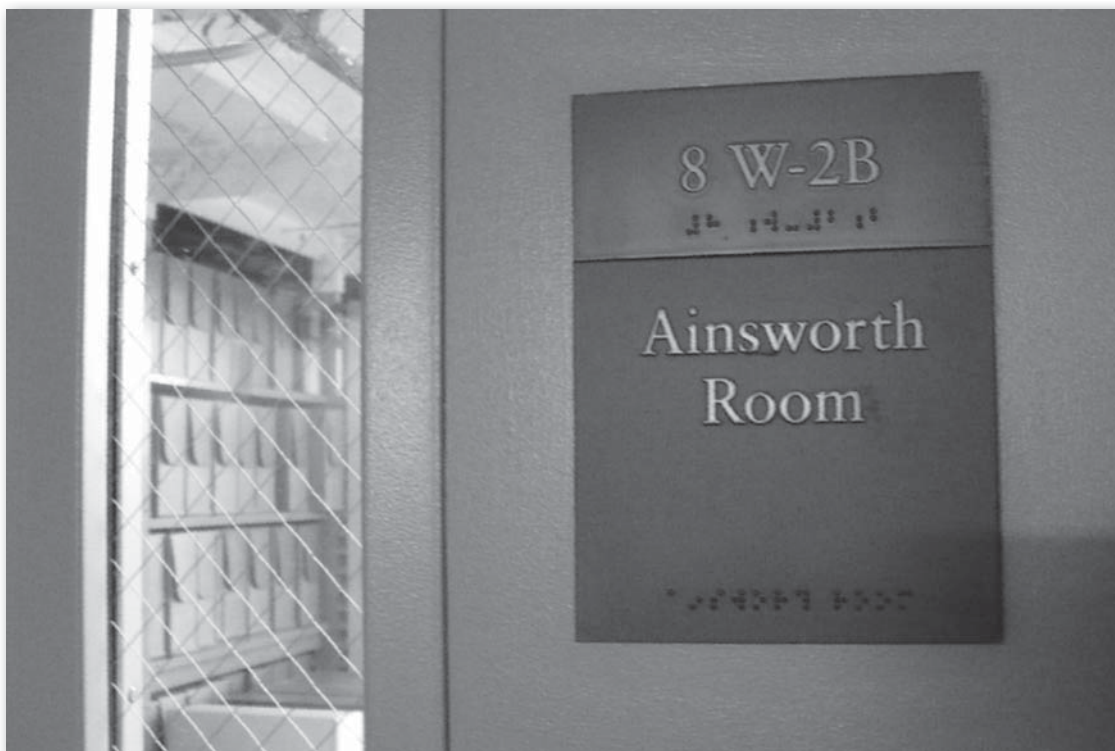


Ainsworth Room sign outside Stack 8W-2B, National Archives Building, Washington, DC.



Thank you, General Fred C. Ainsworth!

In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the second in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., that are useful in researching the war and its participants.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to General Fred Crayton Ainsworth by every researcher who has consulted any of the 58 million cards that comprise the Compiled Military Service Records (CMSR) of a volunteer soldier of the Revolutionary War, Post-Revolutionary era, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War (Union and Confederate), Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, various Indian wars, or the carded medical records of the Mexican War or Civil War (Union).

Ainsworth didn't have this work done for your benefit, of course. He did it to successfully achieve government efficiency, that holy grail that so often eludes others.

Ainsworth was born at Woodstock, Vermont, on 11 September 1852, the eldest son of Crayton

Ainsworth and Harriet Batchelder Carroll. After studying medicine, he entered the U.S. Army in November 1874 as an assistant surgeon with the rank of first lieutenant. He served tours of duty at various U.S. forts until 1886.

Ainsworth was appointed head of the Record and Pension Division (R&P) of the Surgeon General's Office (SGO) in December 1886. This unit furnished information about soldiers' hospitalizations and deaths to the Commissioner of Pensions (Pension Office) to use in deciding pension claims against the government. It was difficult, tedious, and time-consuming work to locate information about individual soldiers because there was no index to the nineteen thousand Civil War hospital registers in which names were recorded chronologically by date of admission. Many of these leather-bound volumes were dilapidated and the handwriting faded or difficult to decipher. The huge backlog of work at the R&P Division meant there was also a huge backlog of undecided pension cases at the Pension Office. This was politically unacceptable.

1042
Inman William P.
Co. F, 25 North Carolina Inf.
(Confederate.)
Private Private
CARD NUMBERS.
1 48661773
2 16820
3 1568
4 1964
5 22626
6 2152
7 2240
8 2336
9 2449
10 2499
11 2568
12 2638
13 2704
14 2776
15 2846
16 2913
17 2994
18 4710
19 4792
20 46667939
Number of medical cards herein...?
Number of personal papers herein...?
BOOK MARK:
See also

(Confederate.)
J. 25 N. C.
William P. Inman
Privt., Co. F, 25 Reg't North Carolina
Infantry (State Troops).
Appears on
Company Muster Roll
of the organization named above,
for Nov & Dec, 1864
not dated
Enlisted:
When June 29, 1861.
Where Haywood,
By whom Thos. S. Connor
Period 12
Last paid:
By whom A. J. Miller
To what time Aug 31, 1864
Bounty: Paid, \$ 100; due, \$ 100
Present or absent Present
Remarks: Joined from
desertion & accompanying
mail since been
pardoned
Book mark: J. B. Hyatt
(642) Copyist

(Confederate.)
J. 25 N. C.
William P. Inman
Privt., Co. F, 25 Reg't North Carolina
Infantry (State Troops).
Appears on
Company Muster Roll
of the organization named above,
for Nov & Dec, 1864
Enlisted:
When June 29, 1861.
Where Haywood Co.
By whom Capt. Xenot
Period 1 year
Last paid:
By whom Capt. Miller
To what time June 30, 1864
Bounty: Paid, \$ 100; due, \$ 100
Present or absent
Remarks: Deserted from Hospital
Raleigh N. C. Hooped
Nov 12 1864
Book mark: J. B. Hyatt
(642) Copyist

(Confederate.)
J. 25 N. C.
W. P. Inman
Privt., Co. F, 25 Reg't N. C. Inf.
Name appears as signature to an
Oath of Allegiance
to the United States, subscribed and sworn to at
Office of Pro. Mar. Gen'l of East Tenn., during
the month ending Dec. 31, 1864.
Dec. 31, 1864
Place of residence Haywood Co. N. C.
Complexion fair; hair dark
Eyes dark; height 5 ft. 7 in.
Remarks: Deserted the 12th
Apr. 1865. N. C. Hooped
Nov 12 1864
Number of rolls:
103 sheet 2 W. L. Taylor
(642) Copyist

Jacket and selected records from *Compiled Military Service Record, William P. Inman, Co. F, 25th North Carolina Infantry (Confederate), Civil War*. The book and movie, *Cold Mountain*, was loosely based on this man's war experience.

Ainsworth figured out a way to substantially reduce search time. He had clerks copy the name, rank, military organization, and medical history of each soldier from the volumes onto high quality paper cards that measured 3 1/4 by 8 inches. The cards were sorted by regiment then alphabetically by name. When the project was completed in January 1890, there were seven million "carded medical records" that provided, in one location, the entire treatment record of every man in every regiment. Searches took minutes instead of hours or days. It was fast, efficient, and eliminated the backlog of unfinished work.

Ainsworth's successful project caught the attention of Congress, in particular the Senate's Cockrell Committee that studied and made recommendations to improve the business methods used in the federal government.

Meanwhile, the Adjutant General's Office (AGO) still had clerks searching through thousands of decrepit muster rolls to verify details of Union Civil War military service in

order to report that information to the Pension Office. Delays in deciding pension cases caused by the AGO's backlog was likewise politically unacceptable. Congress became convinced that Ainsworth's card system offered "the only practical, feasible and economic solution" to the problem facing the AGO.

Thus in July 1889, the Secretary of War ordered that the SGO's R&P Division and thirteen AGO divisions be consolidated into one new organization—the Record and Pension Division (renamed the Record and Pension Office in 1892). The new division had charge of all military and medical records of volunteer forces, and all non-current medical records of the regular army, in all about 400,000 muster and hospital rolls and 140,000 bound volumes. Work began on carding information from the Civil War muster rolls, and by July 1892 more than 26 million cards had been created. By mid-1894 the carding of service records from the Civil War (Union), Mexican War, and various Indian wars was nearly finished. Carding of Revolutionary

What is a Compiled Military Service Record (CMSR)?


Each CMSR contains the service record of a volunteer soldier (including draftees). It consists of an envelope (jacket) that contains card abstracts taken from records such as muster rolls, returns, pay vouchers, orders, and other records that relate to the individual soldier. Information in the service record may include references to mustering-in, mustering-out, wounds, hospitalization, absence from the unit, capture and imprisonment by the enemy, courts-martial, and death.

These records are arranged by war, then by state, then by military unit. For each war, there is a related index that is arranged alphabetically by name of soldier. Indexes to CMSRs and some CMSRs have been microfilmed, and are also available online at Ancestry.com or Fold3.com.

What is a Carded Medical Record?

Carded medical records (Record Group 94, Entry 534) are available for volunteer soldiers of the Mexican and Civil Wars who were admitted to hospitals for treatment and include information such as name, rank, organization, complaint, date of admission, hospital to which admitted, date returned to duty, deserted, discharged, sent to general hospital, furloughed, or died. This series is arranged by state, then by regiment number, then by first letter of the soldier's surname. Copies can be obtained from the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

For more information

For more information about military records in the National Archives, consult Trevor K. Plante, *Military Service Records at the National Archives*, Reference Information Paper 109 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2009), available online <http://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/rip109.pdf>. 



General Fred Crayton Ainsworth.

War and War of 1812 service records soon began. The Revolutionary War project required using Treasury, Interior, and State Department records, as well as records borrowed from some state governments to substitute for records lost in the disastrous War Department fire of 8 November 1800. When records of the Spanish-American War (1898) and Philippine Insurrection (1899–1902) arrived at Ainsworth's office, they were carded immediately. Beginning in 1903, Confederate service records were also carded from the War Department's collection of captured records plus records borrowed from Southern state governments. The ultimate result of all these projects was 58 million card records and related index cards!

On 15 May 1894, Secretary of War Daniel S. Lamont issued an order that had long-term impact to historical and genealogical research. He ordered that the R&P Office would have custody of all records relating to *volunteer* military service, while the AGO would have custody of all records relating to *regular army* military service. Thus, while Ainsworth's R&P Office diligently created compiled records for *volunteer* soldiers of all wars from the Revolution to the Philippine Insurrection, the AGO made no such effort to do the same thing for regular army soldiers.

In 1904, the antiquated structure of the War Department was reorganized. The R&P Office and AGO merged and all records and

functions became controlled by Ainsworth in the new position of Military Secretary, which was redesignated Adjutant General in 1907. Ainsworth finally controlled both regular army and volunteer records. But it was too late—the momentum was gone. He had additional administrative responsibilities and challenges. He didn't order clerks to card regular army records; they were still busy transcribing Confederate records. In 1912, after clashes with Army Chief of Staff General Leonard Wood and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Ainsworth resigned rather than face a court martial.

Legacy

Ainsworth's legacy demonstrates how one person can make a significant difference. The value of his idea and the work of hundreds of government clerks under his command lives on. CMSRs and carded medical records for volunteer soldiers daily prove their value to researchers who would otherwise have to pour through voluminous quantities of muster rolls, pay rolls, hospital records, and so forth. Ainsworth spoiled us by making it absurdly easy to access information that would otherwise be incredibly challenging and time consuming to access in its original form. In stark contrast, researching most regular army soldiers and navy personnel remains fundamentally more difficult.

Archivists and historians quickly recognized the value of Ainsworth's work. Articles about him were published by Siert F. Riepma (1938 and 1941), and National Archives staff member Mabel E. Deutch (1959), and culminated in Deutch's definitive biography, *Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (1962).

Ainsworth was an advocate for the creation of an archives where researchers could study historical U.S. government records. He lived long enough to witness construction of the National Archives Building, which began on 9 September 1931, but he died 5 June 1934, just two weeks before the agency charged with protecting those records—the National Archives—was created by act of Congress of 19 June 1934 (48 Statutes at Large 1122). The National Archives Building even

has a room named for Ainsworth. Stack 8W-2B originally opened as the Civil War Research Room on 10 June 1958, but became known as the Ainsworth Room by the 1970s. For the last forty years it has been used by projects archivists who arrange, describe, and process records.

Since nearly fifty years have passed since Ainsworth's legacy was discussed in print, it is appropriate to revive his memory and remind researchers of the gratitude we owe him. Thanks, General Ainsworth, you did great work. 🌳

For further reading

Deutch, Mabel E. "Fred C. Ainsworth: The Story of a Vermont Archivist," *Vermont History* 27 (January 1959): 22–23.

_____. *Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1962).

Riepma, Siert F. "Portrait of an Adjutant General: The Career of Major General Fred C. Ainsworth," *Journal of the American Military History Foundation* 2 (Spring 1938): 26–35.

_____. "A Soldier Archivist and His Records: Major General Fred C. Ainsworth," *American Archivist* 4 (July 1941): 178–87.

Claire Prechtel-Klusens, a microfilm projects archivist at NARA, served as NGS registrar (1996–98) and director (1998–2000). She can be reached at cklusens@verizon.net.