

Pension Application for John Bell

S.12189

That at or about the commencement of the War, I enlisted into a Company of Rangers, commanded by Capt. DeWitt (now deceased), for one year & whether said company were disbanded or otherwise disposed of, before said one year expired, I do not now recollect—

That subsequently, I enlisted into a company commanded by Capt. John Nicoll, of which John Wilkin was one of the Lieut's and the same who enlisted me, (both of those officers are now dead), where I served six months, & was stationed at Fort Independence near Peekskill in this state; which service is proved by the affidavit of the Hon. James W. Wilkin, now among my papers at Washington & who was with me in that service—

That, Subsequently to that service, I was enlisted by Lieut. William Bull into the Continental Army in April 1777 for three years or during the War as, I then thought & have ever since sincerely believed—soon after this event, I marched from the house of Moses Bull, (whose affidavit is also among my papers at Washington), in company with upwards of twenty more newly enlisted soldiers to join the American Army at Morristown in the State of New Jersey, every five of whom were supplied by the said Moses Bull with a loaf of bread and a piece of boiled pork as provision for the journey, until we reached the said army—on arrival at Morristown we were attached to a company under Capt. Dallas in the fifth Jersey Regiment commanded by Col. Oliver Spencer.—

That, the said Capt. Dallas was either killed or mortally wounded a short time before the battle of Brandywine & was succeeded by Capt. Edsall; now said Capt. Edsall was afterwards disposed of I do not now remember; however, the said Lieut. William Bull, succeeded him and became my Capt. & continued such until the end of the war—

That at the time of all these enlistments, I resided in the Town of Walkill in this County—

That I fought in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown & Monmouth & went in the expedition under Gen. Sullivan against the Western Indians.

That after my return from this expedition I continued with the Continental Army in service to the end of the war; and was then honourably discharged by Gen. Washington.—

That during the whole time, after my enlistment by Lieut. William Bull I served in the capacity of a Corporal.

That as near as I now recollect, in the year 1789, while I and my wife were absent on business, my swelling house, together with all its contents were consumed by fire, by that severe calamity, I lost all my papers, including the said certificate of the discharge from Gen. Washington & also a Bible in which was a correct record of my birth & age, notwithstanding, I am certain that, I am seventy eighty years old & upwards from other circumstances, that cannot mislead me—

That my Capt. the said William Bull died several years ago; and all the other officers & soldiers, that knew me & served with me to the end of the War, (by whom I could prove my services), are either dead or removed beyond my knowledge of their residence—

That, I was wounded in my right leg at the battle of Germantown and would have been killed or taken prisoner by the enemy had it not been for the kindness & intrepidity of Adjutant William Barber who grasped me by one hand & succeeded in mounting me on his own horse, behind the saddle; then putting spurs to the noble animal he galloped away, carrying both out of the reach of the British army.—

That I was on the pension roll under the act of 1818 for a short period of time, and as far as my recollection serves me now, either received a whole or a half years pension under that act—

That I was subsequently denied the benefits of that act, being unwilling to make oath, that I was unable to support myself, which, I understood were the conditions required of all those who in future were to receive its benefits in consequences of an amendment to the law, or a new construction having been applied thereto —

When the war was ended, & the implements of death, were to be converted into the implements of husbandry & the war-worn soldier was to be transformed into a peaceful citizen –

I returned home to the same house; which I had left years before; then with a knapsack, a loaf of bread & a piece of boiled pork—now with a country redeemed from tyranny & a soldiers honour; but without clothing, without money, nothing gin my pickets but my certificate of discharge & a government note for my wages, which she was utterly unable to pay at that time—by reason of her inability to pay, and my own poverty pressing hard upon me, I was obliged to sell her paper, for what, I could get in the market, which was precisely five pounds New York currency or Twelve dollars fifty cents, this amount, with the pension for a short time as above stated, is every cent that I have ever received for seven years service, of uncommon hardship, imminent danger & unequalled privation—

Well may it be said of the American Army; that they lost all, except their country, their services, and their honour—after existing a short time at the house of Moses Bull & delivering my certificate of discharge & government note to his wife for safe keeping, then I proceeded to the house of William Shaw who resided in the upper part of the same town & who came from the same part of Ireland, that I did; & went to work for him on his farm.—

After remaining in his & other's employ for 2 or 3 years; I married; then purchased about 48 acres of new & uncultivated land, adjoining the farm of the said William Shaw erected me a small loghouse thereon, brought my wife into it & began to clear away the forest & improve the land—this loghouse is the same that was burnt with the whole of its contents—this severe accident threw me again penny less upon the world and had it not been for the immediate aid & liberality of my neighbours & acquaintances, I should have sunk under the misfortune—

By this marriage which I never had any reason to regret, I became the father of a numerous family of children, this circumstance alone obviously called for increased toil & economy in order to support & obviously called for increased toil & economy in order to support & educate the; which we both cheerfully endured—

But in the year 1810 it pleased God to take this wife to himself in to a better & happier world, I hope & sincerely believe, together with the fruit of her womb, being three male children at that birth, who all perished with the mother & even interred in the same grave—

Some years after this event, I married again to the woman with whom I now live, in frugal & very limited circumstances—

I wish Sir, you could see or that I could make you fully sensible of my narrow means of living—methinks you would say it is a sorry condition for an aged soldier, who helped to lay the foundation of this prosperous government—aye sir, helped to lay the corner stone; at the same risqué of life & limb, that the three mighty men of Israel obtained water for David out of the camp of his enemy—this achievement was at the peril of our lives—It was accepted in barter for our blood.

Then can it be possible when all around us bears the impress of peace & duty, that we shall in old age & decrepitude still remain in penury & want, I trust not—

It is true Sir, that I now have nearly 100 acres of [swamp?] land which is involved in a debt of nearly one thousand dollars; but I am old & unable to labour; therefore in order to keep this farm in some sort of repair & pay the annual interest on the debt for which it is pledged; I am obliged to have it rented out, & rent for myself & wife (who is also old), a small house & garden—

All that, I derive from my own farm is about \$70 a year—this is the sum total of our yearly support—

Then Sir, estimate for yourself how, we must live, being unable to keep a horse for our use, or even a boy to do our errands or cut our firewood—

Sir, perhaps you will now ask; why, I did not make oath; that, I was unable to support myself & obtain the benefits of the pension act of 1818—

Sir, I will tell you why—no Revolutionary soldier who is sincerely honest can hold this government responsible for a single dollar unless he believes, it is for services rendered and not yet paid for; any more than one individual can hold another, where no value has been received—the doctrine of a debt of gratitude, is entirely exploded by me—full compensation for that demand is derived from the blessing of freedom and independence under our happy form of government.

Then, Sir, it is a debt due from the government to the soldiers for value long ago received, (and standing before God & county, I now [?] declare it is) should any soldier who has braved the dangers & periled his life in the most hazardous of all wars, (that of revolted colonies against the mother country), be obliged to swear to his poverty in order to collect a just & legal debt—I have said a just & legal debt—I will state sir, how, I think it became so—

The inability of the government to pay her soldiers, at the time, that their services were terminated, was the prominent cause of all their subsequent misfortunes—

For what could the poor and ragged soldier do, but sell her paper, which was given to him in payment for his service, for what it would bring in the ;market, which was from 1/6 to 2/6 on the pound at the time given—

Now Sir, this inability in the government to pay her contracts to the soldier, at the time it could not be dispensed with;, by him, was the real cause of his losing almost all he had earned in fighting her battles, and from thenceforward, it became a debt due from the nation to the soldiers which they have never yet received—

They done her work & done it well, and were told that they should have their wages when it was done—and I hope Sir, that I have rendered a satisfactory reason to you & every other honourable man, why I did not comply with terms as degrading as those required from the soldier, in order to remain a recipient under the act of 1818—When I heard of the pension act of 1828, I believe that no reasonable difficulty lay in the way to deprive me from receiving the benefits of that act—but in this I was mistaken—for I was informed that the Muster Rolls at the War Office day, I was enlisted 22nd April 1777 for three years and that, I was discharged 22nd April 1780—and I stated in my affidavits that I enlisted for three years or during the war—so, I thought and sincerely believed was the fact & so it remains strongly impressed on my mind & nothing but the contradiction; to my statement found on the Muster Rolls at the office, could shake my belief as to that fact—one this I do know & nothing but, a loss of reason or death can ever destroy that fact in my mind, (and it is the material thing), that I served from the commencement to the end of the War & was honourably discharged by Gen. Washington as herein before stated—I cannot be mistaken as to that fact, for I remember the joyful scenes that took place at his head quarters near Newburgh in this county on that occasion with vivid recollection; and the very house in which he was when, I received my discharge—and nothing but the loss of my discharge & the death & removal (beyond my knowledge), of all those who continued with me until the war was ended prevents me from showing the facts herein stated beyond prevents me from showing the facts herein stated beyond contradiction or dispute—and how can I or any other soldier (situated as I am), show you except by our own statements, after such a lapse of time—believe me Sir when I tell you that I have travelled hundreds of miles and endured fatigue & expenses beyond my strength & means to obtain this very evidence in order to strengthen my case & fortify my own declarations—

And Lastly, I am still doomed to meet with more disappointment and delay, in consequence of my papers at the War department containing incongruities—

Sir, far be it from me to censure you for your caution, no such thing is intended by me—for I know you are a responsible officer under this government (and God grant that the day may be far distance when any officer can become irresponsible), yet, from your own equitable construction,—that where the name of a soldier in the regular troops is found upon the rolls, no other testimony is or should be required, and as my name is found, I presume no delay would have occurred had it not been

for the incongruity alluded to – and as I want nothing but strict & impartial justice in my case—I will here notice the objections—

Then first, my affidavit at one time is signed with ;my mark, and at another time or times in my hand writing; it is true & I am the man that done both; and although I can write my name in a clumsy manner, yet, I have sometimes made my mark—knowing my bad penmanship, when any written & account from me is to be laid before gentleman of education, I invariably apologize for my bed education & plead to be excused; in this case, I believe, I was told my mark would do; and I made it accordingly as you see it—

At other times notwithstanding my apologies, my friends have urged me to write my name, as well as I could, and let it go good or bad, and I have done so, & you have that also before you—and I have on numerous occasions through life (for I have always had to get my writing done by my friends), asked my friends when writing any letter or other communication in writing for me, that did name to them & they have done so—this is a true statement of facts & I presume altogether satisfactory to you on this point & I will removed the first objection—second, that I have stated in my testimony that I was a Corporal in the army, and that Samuel Sly has stated in his affidavit in my case, that he knew me in the service as a private & left me in the service a private when he went away; I knew said Samuel Sly in the army, he belonged for a while to the same company that, I did—how it happens that we disagree on that point, I cannot tell, unless he had forgotten the fact, or did not notice the omission when his affidavit was drawn up for him—

Notwithstanding, I confidently re-assert that I acted in the capacity & done the duties of a Corporal as herein before stated and although, I have ever felt my own disqualification for any office & certainly could not be very strenuous to have been called Corporal Bell—

Yet I state & swear to the fact as ti is in the truth & touching is a matter that have a good right not to be mistaken in--& I confidently believe my declaration will be accepted by you Sir, and the second objection thereby removed—

Third, you will find the name of John Bell on the Muster Rolls at Washington enlisted 22nd April 1777 for three years and discharged 22nd April 1780—I am undoubtedly that same John Bell, for I knew none by that name in the Regiment but myself; but my testimony on that subject is found at variance with the Muster Rolls, which, I sincerely regret, as I supposed that I was enlisted for three years or during the war & so it has ever been impressed on my mind & I remember well that my Capt. the said William Bull told me that I would not get the bounty land unless, I served or enlisted for during the war & do not see how, I could be mistaken about the matter & as I have herein stated before nothing but the record of the War Office could shake my belief on that subject—and whether the Muster Rolls at the Department are correct or not, I suppose they must be your guide in all cases, unless direct proof to the contrary is shown—

Then Sir, three years service is found there that you must be certain that, I did perform, therefore it appears to me, that no reasonable objection can remain with you sufficient to withhold my pension certificate under the act of Congress passed June 7th 1832, as I understood that act two years service entitles the soldier to its benefits—I have written my name to this communication with my own hand that you may compare it with that which is now before you--

You will please Sir, to write to my friend the Hon. Samuel J. Wilkin as soon as convenient on this subject, he is requested by me to attend to the business—

Sir I shall in the mean time, await your answer not without solicitude, for on it in some measure (you must have seen), brings the future weal or woe; in this world, of an old man who must soon cease to trouble you & the government in whose defence, he had the honour to fight & shed his blood—

Sir I was an humble; yet fractional part of that gallant Army whose fame can never die; until this nation, ceases to be Just—

Sir I have now done, & I most sincerely ask your pardon, for so great a trespass on your time & patience, in matter relating to me.

I am Sir with sentiments of respect your, obedient servants. John Bell
Calhoun, Orange County, State New York, September 1st 1832.

Letter in file dated November 9, 1928, written in response to an inquiry.

I advise you from the papers in the Revolutionary War pension claim, S.12189, it appears that John bell was born, date not stated, in the northern part of Ireland and came to this country in early manhood and settled in New York City.

While residing in Wallkill, Orange County, New York, he enlisted in the beginning of the war and served in a company of rangers under Captain DeWitt, and in 1776 he served six months in Captain Nicoll's Company, Colonel Pawling's New York Regiment.

He enlisted in April 1777, and served as corporal in captains Dallas', Edsall's and William Bull's Companies, Colonels Oliver Spencer's and Malcolm's Continental Regiment, he was in the battles of Brandywine, Germantown, where wounded in the right leg, Monmouth, and in General Sullivan's Expedition against the Indians and served until the close of the war.

He was allowed pension on his application executed June 3, 1819, at which time he was living in Orange County, New York, aged sixty-eight years.

In 1832 he was living in Calhoun, Orange County, New York.

His first wife, her name not stated, died in 1810.

They had a large family of children, no names given. He married the second time date of marriage and her name are not given, she was living in 1832.

There are no further data as to family.