

## Capt. Davis' Revolutionary War Pension by Louise Pettus

The number one hobby in America is said to be fishing. Genealogy is number two (and also number two in web site hits).

If you happen to have a Revolutionary War veteran ancestor, there is the possibility that he, or his widow, left behind the pension papers. The application for the pension has been preserved by the National Archives in Washington.

Oddly, if your ancestor were wealthy he probably had no need to apply. If he and his widow died before June 7, 1832 then there was no opportunity to apply because that was the first time Congress voted to reward eligible veterans with pensions. In other words, you got a pension if you lived 50 years after the Battle of Yorktown, the last battle of the Revolution.

The surviving veteran had to prove his service at a courthouse or, lacking papers, swear to a judge and come up with witnesses that you were served. They labeled this "traditional evidence." It was easy for a Continental Army veteran but demanding for a local militiaman such as those who served locally in the army of Gen. Thomas "Gamecock" Sumter.

Once a veteran received the pension, his widow became eligible for a reduced pension if the marriage occurred before January 1, 1794. When she died there was a final "death payment" to her heirs. Never a large sum, it was nevertheless sought by numerous survivors.

The case of Capt. William Davis of the Bethel community in York County serves as an example. William Davis had been a "horseman" in the Battle of Hanging Rock, Sumter's Defeat (Rocky Mount), Guilford Courthouse and the Battle of Kings Mountain. He died in 1820. His wife, Martha Spence Davis, died in 1840. He died before the pension law was enacted. She married Davis in 1783 or 1784, making her eligible for the widow's reduced pension in 1832.

When Martha Davis died at the home of her son Thomas. On November 14, 1850 he applied for continuation of the pension for himself and his siblings. The Bible record he submitted showed twelve children, the first born in 1785. Thomas was the 11<sup>th</sup> child, born in 1803. Two brothers were deceased.

A supporting paper came from a neighbor, Mary Patrick who was then 57 (therefore could not have had any personal recollection of the war). She stated that she was raised within a half mile of the William Davis and that at the time of his death he was a ruling Elder in the Bethel Presbyterian Church.

Apparently Davis' children received the "death payment." There was no requirement in the law that the heirs prove any need for the money.

A few eligibles never applied out of pride. In Lancaster County's Old Waxhaw Presbyterian cemetery William Blair's tombstone carries the words: ""With is Father's waggon he assisted in transporting the baggage of the American Army for several months.—He was also in the battles of the Hanging Rock.—The Eutaw, Ratliff's bridge, Stono and the Fish dam ford on broad river.—In one of these battles (it is not recollected which) he received a slight wound: — but so far from regarding it, either then or afterwards, when it was

intimated to him that he might avail himself of the bounty of his Country and draw a Pension (as many of his Camp associates had done) he declared that, if the small Competence he then possessed failed him, he was both able and willing to work for his living; if it became necessary for him for his Country without a penny of pay."

William Blair, a native of County Antrim, Ireland, came to America when he was about 13. He died July 2, 1824 at the age of 66. When he made the statement that many of his fellow soldiers had taken advantage of the "bounty of his Country" he was referring to his state, not the national government.

South Carolina in 1791 began paying pensions to widows and orphans of militiamen who fought for independence. This was the "bounty" Blair referred to. This system lasted until the Federal pensions were authorized in 1832.