

# Uncle Sam's Pension Bill



By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

UNCLE SAM, who is the head—and also all the officers and employees—of one of the biggest businesses in the world, naturally has some big bills to pay. One of the biggest is the bill which Old Man Mars, who deals in war, brings around every year and after he has left Uncle Sam finds that he has handed over to this dealer in wars nearly one-fourth of all the money which he had laid aside to pay all of the expenses of running this business which operates under the name of the United States of America.

For instance, this year Uncle Sam will have to pay to Old Man Mars the staggering sum of \$828,000,000. That is almost \$100,000,000 more than the total cost of running the entire federal government back in 1916. It is more than one-half the cost of running the entire nation of France for one year. It is almost equivalent to the annual cost of maintaining the navies of the United States, France and Japan. Back in 1917 when it was announced that it would require \$1,000,000,000 to run our government, there were those who shook their heads and wondered "what we are coming to." Now, 13 years after that first "billion-dollar year," we are facing the necessity of spending nearly that amount, paying for wars which ended long before most of us were born.

If anyone wants a lesson against war, let him talk to Gen. Frank Hines, head of the veterans' bureau, or to Col. Earl D. Church, United States commissioner of pensions, and from them learn something of the cost in careers, lives and money of the mere aftermath of war. Being more or less intangible, it is difficult for us to visualize those first two careers and lives—but for the third, let these figures from their own story:

(WORLD WAR) VETERANS' BUREAU	
Salaries and expenses.....	\$ 43,500,000
Printing and binding.....	125,000
Military and naval compensation.....	191,450,000
Medical and hospital services.....	1,550,000
Adjusted service certificate fund.....	112,000,000
Military and naval insurance.....	115,250,000
Hospital facilities and services.....	6,900,000
U. S. government life insurance fund.....	97,400,000
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$597,375,000</b>
PENSION OFFICE	
Army and navy pensions.....	\$221,000,000
Salaries, pension office.....	1,225,000
Investigation pension census.....	105,000
Fees of examining surgeons.....	450,000
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>\$223,780,000</b>
UNITED STATES SOLDIERS' HOMES	
National homes of disabled volunteer soldiers.....	\$ 8,689,100
<b>Grand total.....</b>	<b>\$828,544,100</b>

Nor will the paying of Old Man Mars' bill this year be the end of the matter. Next year it will be the same, only larger, and the next and the next and the next until the estimated peak is reached in 1965. For, even though by that time Uncle Sam probably will be through paying pensions for the War of 1812, and the Mexican war, he probably will still be paying some for the Civil war and certainly some for the Spanish-American war. And then there are the World War pensions yet to be paid. We haven't come to those yet, but it seems certain that we will come to them. As the number of our World War veterans grow less, the needs of the aging survivors and their families and dependents will increase. And no one dares predict how far in the future Uncle Sam will be paying out World War pensions.

The War of 1812 has been over 115 years but during the fiscal year which ended June 30, 1929, the government paid \$50 a month each to 11 gray-haired women whose husbands fought under the American flag when it had only fifteen stars in its field of blue. The Mexican war ended 83 years ago but until September of last year Uncle Sam was paying a monthly pension to Owen Thomas Edgar who served in the navy during that war. And when he died at the age of ninety-eight

Above—One of the best known buildings in Washington, D. C., is the Pension building which stands in Judiciary Square about halfway between the Capitol and the White House. It is built of red brick and has a remarkable frieze, depicting the various divisions of the army in action, which runs all the way around the building. Four hundred by five hundred feet is

the size of the building and the offices are built around a huge hollow square. Filing cabinets in this building hold the documents which pertain to the record of every man who ever enlisted in the army. From these the pensions of the veterans are computed.

Inset—Col. Earl D. Church, United States commissioner of pensions at his desk.

there still were 730 widows of Mexican war veterans on the rolls of the pension bureau. The Civil war has been over 55 years but last year pensions were being paid to 59,945 soldiers who served in that war, to 39 nurses and to 181,235 widows of veterans.

Other pensioners last year were 178,804 soldiers, 414 nurses and 28,643 widows placed on the rolls by the Spanish-American war; 5,574 soldiers and 4,000 widows by the Indian wars; 45 soldiers and 15 widows by the World War and 14,758 soldiers and 3,660 widows by the regular army. These, with the pensioners previously mentioned, made a total of 477,915 persons who received a total of \$229,890,189 from Uncle Sam. There were 13,279 fewer persons drawing pensions in 1929 than in 1928 but the total paid the last year was \$924,517 greater because the level of expenditure was raised by new legislation which increased pensions to Civil war widows more than seventy-five years old.

The history of pensions for veterans of American wars goes back to the earliest days of the republic. On June 20, 1776, even before the Declaration of Independence had been adopted, the Continental congress appointed a committee to "consider what provision ought to be made for such as are wounded or disabled in the land or sea service."

This committee made a prompt report, and on August 26, 1776, the first national pension act in America was passed by the Continental congress. That part of the law fixing the amount was as follows: "That every commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer, and private soldier who shall lose a limb in any engagement, or be so disabled in the service of the United States of America as to render him incapable afterwards of getting a livelihood, shall receive, during his life or the continuance of such disability, the one-half of his monthly pay from and after the time that his pay as an officer or soldier ceased."

After the Constitution had been adopted and the new government had been organized, it continued for a time the pensions which had been previously granted and assumed their payment. Soon, however, a strong demand arose for a new pension law, and on March 23, 1792, the first pension law passed by the new government went into effect.

Later there grew a demand for a pension law not based upon disability incurred in the service and in his annual message to congress on December 2, 1817, President Monroe recommended such a law. A bill was passed by the house on December 24, as a sort of a Christmas present to the veterans of the Revolution, passed by the senate immediately afterwards and approved by President Monroe on March 18, 1818.

The loose wording of this law, however, made frauds easy and the grant of pensions became a public scandal. A law passed in 1820 required all pensioners already on the rolls and future applicants to file a statement of property as proof of their alleged dependence upon government bounty for a livelihood. As a result, the names of many pensioners were stricken from the rolls.

In 1832 a law was passed which granted full pay for life to all who had served at least two years in the Revolution and proportional payments to those who had served less than two

years but more than six months. In 1836 there began the enactment of a long series of pension acts in favor of the widows of soldiers of the Revolution, restricted at first to those who had married before the close of the Revolution. These grew more liberal later until pensions were granted to all widows, regardless of the date of marriage. Out of these pensions, and similar ones for widows of veterans of later wars, grew many abuses of the pension system, for it became a practice for young women to marry aged veterans in order to benefit by a government pension after the death of their husbands.

The pension rolls of the Revolution had scarcely grown to their peak when the United States became engaged in another war—the War of 1812—to add to its list of veterans and dependents drawing pensions. And the same thing was repeated later at intervals of two decades with the Mexican war and the Civil war. The first law pensioning soldiers of the Civil war was a disability pension act of July 14, 1862, which provided for the disabled survivors, for the widows, orphan children and dependent members of those who died because of wounds received or disease contracted while in the service of the United States and in line of duty. Rates for total disability ranged from \$8 to \$30 a month, according to rank, and these same rates were applied to the widows of the soldiers. Successive laws, beginning July 4, 1864, and culminating in the recent act which increased the pensions of Civil war widows more than seventy-five years old, have increased the rates, setting fixed rates for various kinds of disability.

The passage of the arrears act in 1870 added greatly to the burden of debt which Uncle Sam bears because of the wars in which he has engaged. This act provided that all pensions which had been granted or might hereafter be granted should date from the time of disability, provided application were made before January 1, 1880. The effect of that law is shown by the fact that the total sum paid for pensions jumped from \$32,000,000 in 1870 to \$56,000,000 in 1880, the greatest increase in any one year in the history of our pension system.

A bill to establish service pensions for persons in dependent circumstances was vetoed by President Cleveland in 1886. A similar bill was passed June 27, 1890, providing that all persons who had served 90 days in the war and who were suffering from any mental or physical disability of a permanent character which incapacitated them from performing manual labor might receive pensions ranging from \$0 to \$12 a month, according to the degree of disability. Widows of soldiers who served 90 days who are dependent upon their daily labor for support could receive \$8 a month.

In addition to the pensions granted under the general laws, many claims for pensions, some of them rejected by the pension bureau, have been passed by act of congress. In fact the consideration of pension bills forms a large part of the activity of congress, as will be seen by an inspection of almost any issue of the Congressional Record. As this article is being written many such bills are being introduced in the present session of congress, all of which will add to the staggering total which Old Man Mars has collected from Uncle Sam for wars long since past.

## Community Building

### Country Highways Not Adapted to Speeding

An analysis of highway accidents by the department of motor vehicles of Connecticut appears to show that those in country sections are relatively more costly in loss of life and limb than are those in large cities. It was found that one death could be expected in every forty-one accidents on a country highway. The ratio of deaths to accidents in city streets was 1 to 75.

There is little mystery about this. A considerable proportion of accidents in towns is due to collisions when neither car may be going at great speed. Persons driving in a city naturally expect danger at street intersections and perhaps keep sharper lookout than do those bowling along an open highway. Speeding in a well-policed city is attended by greater risk of arrest than is the case on a rural highway.

Drivers from a city when touring through the country, says the New York Sun, will do well to remember, however, that driving recklessly there is foolish and dangerous, just as driving recklessly in town is foolish and dangerous. Although a clear, well-paved highway offers temptation to step on the gas, the chance of escaping unharmed from an accident is relatively less there than it is on a city boulevard.

### Virginia Planning Tree Planting Along Roads

Plans for beautifying the highways of Virginia were discussed at a meeting called by Gov. Harry F. Byrd, at the request of the garden clubs of Virginia, and attended by many prominent women from various sections.

It was decided that the garden clubs would appoint a committee to co-operate with another committee to be appointed by Governor Byrd, and that these two bodies would formulate a program for preserving the trees and shrubs already growing along the state highways, and also for planting others. It was emphasized that the state will not be asked to pay for planting the trees.

William O'Byrne, extension forester at the Virginia polytechnic institute, suggested that nursery shrubs for planting along the highways be raised at the state farm by the convicts, and this proposal met with considerable favor.

Another suggestion which was well received was that the fifty or more motorcycle police operating throughout Virginia under the division of motor vehicles, be especially instructed to keep an eye out for violators of the law forbidding promiscuous cutting of shrubs and trees.

### Their Own Will

The will to live as well as local pride is revealed in the purchase by the town of Huntington, in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts, of the woolen mill upon which the majority of the residents depend for occupation. Closed for sometime, the mill has been bought by the townspeople, who have also raised funds for the purchase of needed equipment. The mill will not be run by the town, but will be leased to a manufacturing company on long terms; an offer is already said to have been made.—Hartford Courant.

### Energetic Citizen

In the city of a neighboring state it is said one man has by himself succeeded in locating 16 different industries in his town with a pay roll up into the millions annually. Is there not food for thought in this item when you so often hear the remark made, "we could and should have more industrial plants in our town, but just can't get all the people to unite upon a plan by which we can be able to secure them." A leader and captain of industries is worth while anywhere.—Cullman (Ore.) Tribune.

### Unightly Billboards

The attempt to promote harmony between billboards and civic improvement ideals is a monumental task. The billboard people naturally desire to carry on their business and at the same time they want to soften the growing animosity against their interests. In short, they do not want to see any curtailment of their billboard privileges, while a very large part of the public would like to see billboards entirely eliminated from the landscape.—Providence Journal.

### Movies Teach Beauty

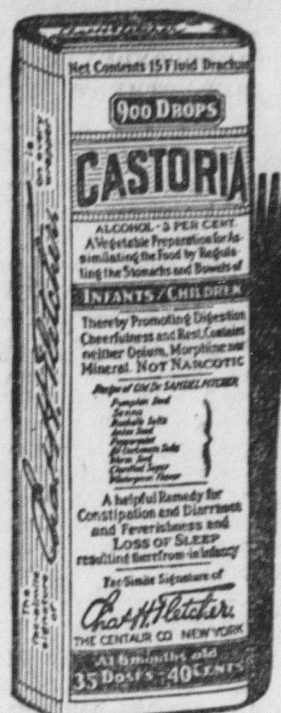
To eliminate "the careless ugliness" of the nation's cities, the American Institute of Architects has started a campaign of public education in "good architecture and good environment." Moving pictures are being employed to illustrate how Washington is being developed as the city beautiful in high schools and colleges and before civic bodies.

### Individuality

A well-designed building should express on its exterior the general scheme of its plan. That is, the larger units should be indicated in the design. In this way each building has its own individuality and the elevations show the particular reasons for its being.

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### Blame Wireless Waves

for Deaths of Pigeons

English pigeon fanciers are blaming wireless waves for the loss of many valuable birds. Lord Devar, who owns some of the finest racing pigeons in the country, has lost about thirty birds this season, and one of the assistants on his Gristead (Sussex) estate said recently that it was believed they had lost their way owing to the disturbed atmospheric conditions. Other fanciers owning hundreds of birds reported losses which could not be accounted for in the ordinary way. Prof. A. M. Low expresses the opinion that pigeons lose their sense of direction when wireless waves put their "mental integrator" out of action. "Everybody," he says, "agrees that the brain is entirely electrical, and I think it is distinctly possible that these pigeons have become helpless when flying near broadcasting stations."

### No Hope

Husband—Did you get a maid from the registry office?  
Wife—No.  
Husband—Weren't there any there?  
Wife—Dozens—but we have had them all.—Kasper (Stockholm).

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