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# The Somerset Herald.

ESTABLISHED, 1827.

VOL. XXIX. NO. 19.

SOMERSET, PA., WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1880.

WHOLE NO. 1527.

**H. McCALLUM,**  
77 FIFTH AVENUE.  
(Above Wood Street.)  
PITTSBURGH, PA.  
Carpets, Oil Cloths,  
China Matting,  
Druggets,  
Shades, &c., &c.

**The Best Quality that is Made of each Particular Kind of Goods.**  
AT PRICES AS MODERATE AS CAN BE FOUND.  
**H. McCALLUM.**  
CHARLES HOFFMAN,  
MERCHANT TAILOR,  
Above Henry Hoffman's Store,  
SOMERSET, PA.

**WALTER ANDERSON,**  
MERCHANT TAILOR,  
COR. WOOD ST. AND SIXTH AVENUE,  
PITTSBURGH, PA.

**S. T. LITTLE & SONS,**  
108 BALTIMORE STREET,  
CUMBERLAND, MD.

**NEW BANK.**  
Somerset County Bank,  
CHARLES J. HARRISON,  
Cashier and Manager.

**SELL 1880.**  
FRESH GOODS.  
CARPETS  
IN ALL QUALITIES.

**BOVARD, ROSE & CO.,**  
No. 39 FIFTH AVENUE,  
PITTSBURGH, PA.

**EXECUTORS SALE**  
OF VALUABLE REAL ESTATE.  
SOMERSET, PA., October 24, 1880.

**PAINTERS,**  
SOMERSET, PENN.

**AUCTIONEER.**

## Pensions and Pension Claims.

FULL TEXT OF COMMISSIONER BENTLEY'S SPEECH AT ALTOONA, SEPTEMBER 28, 1880.

**Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:**  
I thank you for your cordial reception as indicated by your demonstration of approval and also by your staying so late to hear a few words from me. I have come up here to-day at the invitation of two of your townsmen—ex-soldiers—who explain to them and their comrades the causes for the delay in settling the pensions.

The subject is one of very great importance. Twice before have I received a similar invitation from the Grand Army of the Republic and at Pittsburgh. On both occasions I have endeavored, as well as I could, to make the explanation and give the information desired. Now, in the outset, let there be some here who misunderstand my purpose. I wish to say that I have been invited to speak in no way political, whatever politicians may do with it. It is simply a matter of business.

I am not here to make a political or campaign speech, but come to respond to the interest which you have manifested upon a subject in which I have been interested for four years and a half—one which I have studied and which I have presented in one form or another to Congress, in my annual reports and on every other proper occasion.

I say this in a subject in which I have endeavored for the last four years to interest the soldiers and their families. They had their delays in the settlement of pensions which seem to them unnecessary, and unjust, and therefore they are dissatisfied and make complaint. Now let us go directly into the subject. I cannot give you the explanation of the delay in settling the pensions of 1862 down to the present time. You will not expect anything oratory or eloquence, but must expect to listen to facts and figures which cannot deceive.

On the 14th of July, 1862, the act which is the foundation of the pension system under which the soldiers of the war of the rebellion were pensioned, was passed. Since the passage of that act there have been more than fifty changes in the pension laws of one kind or another. I mean general, and not the amendments which are made from time to time. When the war of the rebellion broke out there were very few pension claims coming forward, and the entire pension roll consisted of only 10,500 names, and the number was fast decreasing. As the passage of this act, the pension claims began to come in with great rapidity, and from that time down to the 30th of June last there have been 633,859 original pension claims for pensions filed in the pension office. There were during that time 362,350 original claims settled. You see, this is a very large margin, some of these consist of what we call live pending claims and about 45,000 which represent claimants who died before their claims were settled or who had abandoned the prosecution of their claims, and we find that there were pending on the 30th of June last not less than 290,000 claims for pensions. There are upon the pension rolls 245,000 pensioners, and there are 290,000 persons who are now claiming pensions and whose pensions are unsettled, and this number is increasing daily.

I have a table here in my hand which shows the number which have been filed from 1862 down to the present time; the number of original claims which have been allowed year by year down to the present time and the amount of money which has been paid out yearly for the settlement of the pension claims who are engaged in the pension office in settling the claims. If you will bear with me while I call your attention to some of the characteristics of the pension business as shown by this table you will observe that it is a condensation of the history of the filing and settling of pension claims from 1862 to the present time, and if you examine the column which shows the number of claims filed you will find that there was a great rush of claims coming in down to 1866. You will find in another column that the settlement and allowance of claims went forward with great rapidity down to 1866; then if you will refer to the column of claims filed you will find that from 1866 to and including 1874 (8 years) the number of claims filed gradually dropped off year by year from 1866, when there were 256 to 15,284 in 1874. If you look in the column which represents claims that were allowed, you will find that from 1866 to 1876 the number of claims allowed fell off just as regularly and certainly as did the number of claims filed. Then if you look at the column which shows the appropriation for the pension office and officers whose business it is in the pension office to settle these claims, you will find that from 1866 down to 1876 inclusive, there was a gradual and constant increase in the money that was appropriated for the clerks and officers in the office. In 1876 there were \$485,000, which was a great increase in the number of clerks. In 1876 the office was able to settle, with \$258,000, 5,176 original claims. In 1876, with \$480,000, it was able to settle and allow 9,736 cases. The years following 1876 I do not refer to because that period was not under my own administration. I need only mention them and say that there has been an increase in the number of claims settled.

These figures show that after 1866 there was a radical change in the business of the Pension Office, in the amount of work accomplished, and the change cannot be accounted for

by any difference in the efficiency of the clerks or of the management of the office. It is too great, almost ten fold; the change must be looked for in the character of the business itself. There is one other point: If you will divide the amount of the appropriation year by year with its corresponding year of allowances, you will find the difference in the cost of settling each case. In 1866 the average cost per case was \$5 14 for the clerical force and to pay the Commission on the claims and the officers of the Bureau. In 1876 it reached the enormous figure of \$49 27.

Now there is another thing that will show this change and that should be mentioned. If you go to the files you will find early 20,000 cases which have been filed upon looking at them you will find cases filed as far back as 1862, and in every year from that day to this; and if you look at these old cases you will find the back of the jackets are black with endorsements; they are covered with signatures and initials with correspondents and affidavits and all kinds of papers touching the case.

If we go to the files of admitted claims there we find the cases admitted from 1862 to 1868, and the paper upon which they were admitted are not there. This illustrates the difference in the business. When I first came into the office, four and one-half years ago, one of the first things I noticed was the great accumulation of unsettled pension claims, and the great delay in settling them. I was assigned into the office and found there cases from 1862; there were nearly 105,000 pending claims in the office, and I began to hear complaints of the delays, although not as many as I hear during this last year. I examined into the history and found it a substantial report, and it is that explanation which I propose to give you to-night. Let it be said that I am attempting in presenting this subject to advocate a scheme of my own, I wish you to understand that the plan proposed is not mine, but is the plan adopted by the fathers in pensioning the Revolutionary soldiers. It is the plan upon which pensions were granted for more than forty years. This plan was presented in my first, second, third and fourth annual reports, and I intend to repeat it in my forthcoming report, because I believe that in the adoption of the recommendations which I have made, and in them only, the relief which the pension claimants are entitled to have. So I don't believe there is any other permanent and just relief, and I will proceed to tell you what it is. In the first place let me explain the system under which we are now working. If there is a controversy between any two neighbors and you take it to court you take your witnesses to testify in open court, and it is seen by looking at them and noticing the manner in which they tell their stories. When the court and jury meet men face to face they see by looking into the witness eye whether he speaks the truth. Nature has so made up men that they can be seen as it regards dishonesty. If you have a controversy with a neighbor, and if I take up a paper and it is written over with a story, it is impossible for me to know if it is true or false; that is to say, there is no talisman by which the Commissioner can tell the difference between truth and falsehood. You get your witnesses in the office, and they are not in court, and they are not in the presence of the Commissioner. If you get your witness in your presence, talk with him, hear his voice, see his eye, you get the story, and if there is a point which differs in detail you have only to ask him questions and the whole matter is brought to light. The system which we have is a secret system, as well as *ex parte*. The claimant need not have any body know that he has a claim for a pension except his own friends and friendly witnesses. It is not brought to light. The neighbors do not know it in many cases. It is a secret system, and it is not brought to light. The system which we have is a secret system, as well as *ex parte*. The claimant need not have any body know that he has a claim for a pension except his own friends and friendly witnesses. It is not brought to light. The neighbors do not know it in many cases. It is a secret system, and it is not brought to light. The system which we have is a secret system, as well as *ex parte*. The claimant need not have any body know that he has a claim for a pension except his own friends and friendly witnesses. It is not brought to light. The neighbors do not know it in many cases. It is a secret system, and it is not brought to light.

do with the force, by which I could hasten the settlement of the claims. I modified some of the rules and abolished some which I deemed not necessary and did not do very far enough to indicate, and reorganized the office from bottom to top, and as I told you there was an average of 25 per cent more cases settled since I took charge of the office; but I cannot go farther in this direction; I have got to the bottom, but the bottom is so many hundred feet below the surface, and as regards the improvement in the settling of war claims, and the present system is so utterly inadequate, that there is no use attempting to sink it any lower. It cannot be done under that system. I have already said that the *ex parte* system should be put out of the way, both in the interests of the claimant and the Government. I want to tell you what I propose. I propose that the proceedings for the settlement of pension claims, the proceedings to take the testimony of the witnesses, and the presence of your neighbors and before an officer who shall be from among your neighbors and before whom the pension claimants shall come with the witnesses and tell their stories. I propose and have recommended the adoption of a system which has resolved the favor of all civilization on similar questions. I recommend a system which was adopted by our fathers for more than forty years settling the claims of Revolutionary soldiers to pensions. I recommend it not because it protects the Government, because it is simple, and easy to understand, and because it enables the claimants themselves to present their cases in such a form that they can establish their claims and procure their pension within a reasonable time and without great delay. It is simple, and easy to understand, and because it enables the claimants themselves to present their cases in such a form that they can establish their claims and procure their pension within a reasonable time and without great delay. It is simple, and easy to understand, and because it enables the claimants themselves to present their cases in such a form that they can establish their claims and procure their pension within a reasonable time and without great delay.

His statement might be tested by putting the claimant in court, and settling the point which seems doubtful. His statement would thus be the most important testimony in the case, only requiring a little corroboration on this or that point in order to establish his right to pension. As it is now the Commissioner depends upon the report of the claimant from the bottom, and such is the rule which has come down from the beginning. Before I leave this point I want to say one word in favor of the present system, which I have condemned. You see that down to 1862 the claims were settled with great rapidity, and as cheap as five dollars and a few cents per case. That was under this *ex parte* system. Why was that so? The claims coming in at that time came in with a record. The man came with his arm or with the mark of the bullet in his side, and the Commissioner adopted "Othello's" occupation is gone; that you employ anybody else and it will be your neighbor, who will not be a party to any fraud. These men know that the great business which they have built up under these false pretenses will be destroyed if the Commissioner should adopt "Othello's" occupation is gone; that you employ anybody else and it will be your neighbor, who will not be a party to any fraud. These men know that the great business which they have built up under these false pretenses will be destroyed if the Commissioner should adopt "Othello's" occupation is gone; that you employ anybody else and it will be your neighbor, who will not be a party to any fraud. 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