

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters

Pension Application of Corbin Griffin R56

VA Sea Service/ Half Pay

Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris.

Auditors Office Va/ Feb. 13 1835

Sir [Hon. Levi Woodbury/ Secretary of the Treasury], I have duly rec'd. your letter of the 7th inst, asking information respecting the services of Corbin Griffin represented as a Surgeon in the State Navy.

I do not find any evidence of Mr Griffin's services in the capacity of Surgeon. He settled no pay account and did not draw land bounty. I enclose you the copy of an account against him on one of our ancient ledgers which if it proves any thing would rather establish the fact that his medical services in Dec. 1776 were rendered as a private physician and not as commissioned Surgeon with fixed pay. It is not usual for Surgeons in Commission to render accounts for medical services &c.

I have not been able to find any evidence of their being a regular State Hospital at York. That there was a Hospital there, I have no doubt – but it is as likely that it was a continental establishment as any other

I am very respectfully/ Your obedient serv't

Jas. E. Heath/ Aud. of Va. [James E. Heath, Auditor of Virginia]

PS. Since writing the foregoing letter, I have been furnished with an entry from the Naval journal which I have had copied upon the enclosed account. This entry establishes the fact that there was a Hospital at Yorktown. It is in fact an amplification of the last item on the credit side of the account.

Jas E Heath

Treasury Department/ 3^d Auditors Office/ 25th February 1835

Sir [Hon. Levi Woodbury], I have the honor to state, in reply to your note of the 24th instant, that the revolutionary records, on file in this Office, furnish no information whatever of Dr. Corbin Griffin's services, as a Surgeon, either in the Virginia State Navy, or of a Naval Hospital at York Town – indeed his name does not appear on any of the records in this Office.

The affidavit of Thomas Griffin Esq'r. which accompanied your note, is herewith returned.

With great Respect/ Peter Hagner Aud

Pension Office/ April 3^d 1851

I certify that I have examined the Claim of the administrator of Doctor Corbin Griffin deceased under the act of Congress of July 5th 1832 & find that said Corbin Griffin was a Surgeon in the Virginia State Navy until the Manley Galley in which he served was dismantled by order of the Government of Virginia in the year 1779 at which time he was transferred to the charge of the Naval hospital at Yorktown as Surgeon thereof & continued in that capacity to the end of the War & that he was entitled to half pay at the rate of Three hundred & Sixty dollars per annum from 22^d April 1783 to the 1st day of September 1813 [the month of his death], which is payable to Vespasian Ellis Attorney in fact of Robert P. Waller administrator of said Corbin Griffin deceased
J. E. Heath Commissioner
[James E. Heath, Commissioner of Pensions; formerly Auditor of Virginia]

[The federal file includes the following clipping of a letter to the editor of the *Virginia Republican* and the subsequent correspondence that indicates that Randolph was the author of the letter.]

To the Editor of the Republican:

In a late communication I proved that the Commissioner of Pensions had allowed half pay under the act of Congress of the 5th of July, 1832, to the heirs of Dr. Griffin, for his services as a State surgeon, contrary to the law, and *record evidence*. Two of the parties, participants in this claim, are whig members of the Virginia Legislature. I will now recite a case which the Commissioner has rejected, contrary to the law and the evidence. The Legislature of Virginia promised a bounty in land to the officers and men of

her army who should serve three years in the revolutionary war. Applicants for this bounty were directed to apply to the Commissioner of War, for a certificate of their services, and, upon this certificate, and, “not otherwise,” the register of the land office was directed to issue warrants for bounty land. Mr. Attorney General Crittenden, in his letter to Mr. Fillmore [Millard Fillmore, President 1850-1853], after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, says: “The certificate of a commissioner is to be regarded as the act of judgment, after a fair and impartial trial of a judicial tribunal having competent jurisdiction.”

The certificate of a commissioner acting under a law of Virginia, that T. S. was entitled to bounty land for a service of three years, as a Lieutenant in the first State regiment, is a judicial decision which cannot be repudiated. John Slaughter applied for the half pay due for the services of his father, Thomas Slaughter [pension application R17889; see endnote], as a Lieut, in the first State regiment: he exhibited his warrant for land bounty, as proof of his rank and service, and, a letter from his father, to the Governor of Virginia, written in May, 1783, informing him that he then had in his possession, public property which was put into his hands as a State Quartermaster, at the siege of Yorktown in October, 1781.— Slaughter is a poor man, and the Commissioner cares naught for *him*. In this case, the opinion of Mr. Crittenden, and the certificate of a commissioner of Virginia, avails nothing. Slaughter’s claim is rejected.— Here. Mr. Editor, we see the Commissioner of Pensions granting ten thousand dollars of the public money to a continental surgeon, who was out of service two years before the law of Virginia promising half pay passed, *that very surgeon*, being a member of the Senate of Virginia when the half-pay law passed; and refusing it to the son of a man who was in service at Yorktown, when the “Star-spangled Banner” waved triumphantly over the vanquished army of the King of the British. R. R.”

“Washington 14 June 1852

My dear Sir [Richard Randolph, Esq., Martinsburg VA],

I rec’d the Virginia Republican of the 5th on the 11th. I suppose you sent it as it contains an article which I presume you wrote. I must say I was sorry to see that article. I think it will do harm. The claim of Griffin I am inclined to believe to be a good one. that the Pension Office has been and still is most shamefully managed there can be no doubt. It is also very clear that there is corruption there, and that Mr. Stuart has unbounded confidence in and will support Mr. Heath in all his acts. It is of no use for you to take the course you are doing. You only injure yourself and your cause. No one approves of Mr. Heath’s conduct. I am yet to see the First man who approves it, save and except his own son and Mr. Stuart I tell you that he has no friend except Stuart. Why then go and attack others and force them. Segar has been friendly to you Why then will you make him your enemy, and force him to support and defend Mr. Heath There have been plenty of bad cases – attend the good ones. I consider that I have been myself ill used by the Pension Office and have been compelled to apply to the Secretary of the Interior for redress, and my applications are now pending. I have had to strike hard and may have to strike harder.

Yours truly/ Francis A. Dickins

[In Randolph’s handwriting:] Strange doctrine, Mr. Dickens. Am I not to expose a fraud in the government, because it exposes those who profit by it.”

Washington 26 June 1852

Dr. Sir [Randolph], I have rec’d. yours of the 24th inst As to doing anything with Mr. Heath in any case in which you are interested is impossible. You being concerned would be sufficient to defeat it. If you will send me the papers & I should find that I can use them to your advantage in any way I will do so.

I am told that Mr. Heath is very angry at an article which has appeared in the Union and has written to the Editor to enquire who is the Author as he intends to prosecute him. I cannot think that he would be so blind as to do so because if he did all the acts of the Pension Office might be brought before the court and there would be such an exposure. I should not however, be surprised if you come here at his having you arrested as he is under the influence of those who are mad enough to attempt anything.

Yours truly, Francis A. Dickins

Washington Aug't 10th 1852

Dr Sir [Randolph]

I have brought your letter to the attention of the Committee & the Committee has directed me to request you to forward the "record proof" showing that Doctor Corbin Griffin had no claim so that it may be examined & considered.

Be pleased to give specifications of any other frauds on the Government of which you may have knowledge

Should the Committee need your evidence & your attention as a witness will you come on receiving a letter requesting your attendance or must we send an officer with a subpoena?

Respectfully yours/ J. R. Underwood

Washington 10 Dec'r. 1852

Mr Richard Randolph/ Sir. I duly rec'd. yours of 2^d December I now have to say, that, as it regards the validity of Dr Griffin's Claim, I have no fears of any kind of investigation before any sort of tribunal. You seem to labour under many erroneous impressions on the subject, and if it be your desire to be informed fully on the merits of the claim I am ready at all times to give you the facts on which I base my statements if you think proper to come to my Office. Whether my remarks, which you quote, apply to yourself, depends on whether you were the author of the publications on which I made comment. I am told you disclaim their authorship, – if so, you have no right to apply the remarks to yourself.

Having on no occasion interfered with your affairs I am wholly at loss to understand why you assail my claims when I am constrained by every consideration of propriety from making any opposition to any, the most rigid investigations into claims, I cannot but foresee that such investigations, though they may not result (& in Griffins case cannot result) in any impeachment of the Claims by a Committee; they will probably give rise to more stringent action by the departments, and perhaps to the repeal of the act of 5 July 1832. If this be your desire you may be perhaps gratified. But I am told your only purpose is to arraign the pension Bureau. On this point I feel perfectly able to convince you, & the world, that the effect must fail, in the case of Dr Griffin. [signed] Vespasian Ellis

H. D. [House of Delegates] Dec. 10th 1852

Dear Sir,/ On my return home a few days since, I found yours of the 23 Ult.

I do not by any means design to defend Mr. Heath for the mistaken rigour with which he deals with Va half pay claims; but I must [illegible word] to assure you, in justice to him, that your inference of hostility to yourself from the fact that he sent an agent to Richmond to look into Slaughter's case, is not altogether correct. I know the fact, and so does Mr Ellis, & I presume other agents, that he has pursued the same course with regard to every halfpay claim that has been before him. I have had before him no case that was not subjected to a rigid examination here by an agent of the Pension Department. Even-handed justice requires me to say thus much.

I beg now to assure you that in insisting that the investigation before the Senate Committee be abandoned, I have so insisted, not on account of any apprehension of the result in Griffin's case, but because I am satisfied that the effects of such investigation will be increased [illegible word] upon Va. Claims, and ultimate injury to all who are concerned in the prosecution of them. I have no doubt that the late scrip law will be reached[?] by its influence, and a rigor practised in the [illegible word] of the cases filed for scrip, which might not otherwise be practised. This consideration alone has rendered me averse to the investigation you propose. And the course I recommend seems the more proper from the fact that in a few weeks the present Comsn'r. is to go out of office.

By the way, have you carefully examined the evidence in Griffin's case? I think if you will apply to Mr. Ellis & look over the papers with him, you will find it an exceedingly strong one.

In looking over an old Journal a few days since I found the name of a Lieutenant Slaughter – no Christian name. It was a payment of rations &c to him. Whether it was Thomas Slaughter, I cannot say.

Very Resp'lly/ Yr. obt. Servt./ [signed] Jos. Segar

Washington 20th June [1858?]

Dear Sir [Mr. Stark],

Sixteen years ago, I was employed to present a claim for the services of Dr Corbin Griffin, as Surgeon in a State hospital at Yorktown, Virginia. I found that Dr Griffin acted as surgeon to a continental hospital in York, from 1776 to May 1777. that, in May 1779 he was a member of the Virginia Senate, elected for three years. I gave this information to my employer, and declined the agency. In April 1851 Mr [Joseph] Segar, the personal friend of the Com'r (Mr Heath) presented the claim, and recieved ten thousand dollars; one half of which he retained, as his fee. I told Mr Heath, that it was a fraud, and offered to prove it by record evidence. He declined my offer, and, became my enemy. I then appealed to President Phillmore, and his Secretary, Mr Suart: they sent my communications to Mr Heath, who denied the truth of my charge: his conduct was approved, as you will see, in Mr Stuarts letter to me; and my charge, repudiated without investigation. I felt the indignity, and resolved to force and investigation; for which purpose, I published the article, signed R. R. which you will find in Mr Dickins letter to me. My article, with comments, was published the Union: for which publication, Mr Heath sued Gen'l Armstrong, to whom, I rendered my services, to prove the fraud. Heath has withdrawn his suit; and avoids the exposure. You will see, in the letters of Segar, and Ellis, that I made the charge to the select committee of the Senate where, I expected to resent the indignity offerd to me by the President, and his Secretary; and to prove that the allowance of Griffins claim, was a fraud on the government, but, the committee have not noticed it.

Forty six years ago, I mounted my horse, in defence of my country, and was in service throughout the war of 1812 and now, I am treated with indignity, because I desire to protect the purse of my country, from fraud. I feel Sir, that I have a right to be heard, and to prove publickly, that the charges which I have made, are true: the late President, denied me that right; and I now, through you, appeal to Gen'l Pearce [sic: Franklin Pierce, President 1853-1857], and ask him to direct an investigation to be made, and give me an opportunity to prove that my allegations are true, and, that the publick money has been very improperly expended, by order of the late Com'r of pensions.

Accepting most friendly salutations/ Richard Randolph

[The following are from [bounty-land records in the Library of Virginia](#). Other online images of the 39-page file are illegible.]

Report on the claim of the Heirs of Dr. Corbin Griffin, Surgeon, in the State line for bounty land for his services.

To the Governor, Sir,

The following [illegible word] appear from the proof [illegible word] by the [two or three illegible words]

That Dr Corbin Griffin was in the early part of the Revolutionary War, Surgeon on board the Manley galley and continued to act in that capacity until he was transferd to the Hospital Department; that he acted as Surgeon of the State Hospital near York Town in Virginia until the war ended that Dr. Griffin was appointed Surgeon of the said Hospital near York about 2 years before the Siege of York [28 Sep - 19 Oct 1781], and continued in service (as before stated until the end of the war. (as certified [illegible word] of the affidavits of Wm. Stroud, Henry Buchannan, Benjamin Marnex, Wm. James in the [illegible word] & the certificate of Commodore James Barron & of the aff'ts. of Sam'l. S. Griffin & James Hubbard)

a second affidavit of Henry Buchannan and another also of Benjamin Marnex have been filed. The facts, which they prove, are that Dr. Griffin was Surgeon, on board one of the gallies, from late in 1776, or early in 1777, and afterwards was a regular Hospital Surgeon to the end of the war. That the Hospital at York was a regular State Hospital. that Dr. Pope [Matthew (Mathew) Pope, R17152] was the first surgeon of this Hospital and Dr. Corbin Griffin was his [illegible word] and served as such to the end of the war. (in the 2nd aff'ts of Henry Buchannan & Benjamin Marnex.)

The large Journal of the Navy Board contains several entries, in relation to the services of Dr. Griffin, in the navy &c. (See N. Journal pages 52 - 85 - 137 --

It appears, that Dr. Mathew Pope acted as Surgeon of the Hospital at York, upwards of three years, and afterwards was Director General of the State Hospitals. (See Journal of the House of Delegates Dec'r. 8 1783 p. 54:) It appears, by the additional affidavit of Henry Buchannan & Benjamin Marnex, that when Dr. Pope left the State Hospital at York, Dr. Corbin Griffin succeeded him (being appointed in his place) and served to the end of the war.

The testimony of respectable witnesses is very strong, in favor of this claim.

Dr. Griffin has never received bounty land, for his services.

Respectfully submitted/ John H. Smith Com'r./ August 22, 1850[?]

14th Sep'r 1850

The above has several times [the rest illegible. The following in different handwriting.]

I cannot conceive how it would be possible to make out a case [illegible word] than this. I think a verdict of a Jury would be had upon such evidence. His service is proved [illegible word] no doubt to have continued until the close of the War. It is proved too, that he entered the service at an early period of the Revolution. Claim allowed for services as Surgeon of the State Line for a service of three years to the close of the War

[signed] Gov. John B Floyd

NOTES: The rejection of the claim of the heirs of Thomas Slaughter was explained as follows by the then Pension Commissioner, James L. Edwards: "To entitle his heirs to half pay, it must be shown that Slaughter belonged to one of the regiments mentioned in the Act of July 5, 1832 and that he served until he became a supernumerary. Commutation cannot be allowed unless it can be clearly shown that he served in one of the regiments designated in the law of 1832 up to the 22nd April 1783."