

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters

Pension application of Alexander Willson or Wilson W11834

Catharine

F45MA

Transcribed by J Wilson Richards

8/20/12

[Punctuation, grammar and spelling have been maintained from the original; no modifications have been made.]

[f p.16]

State of New York, Chautauqua County

On this thirtieth day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand and eight hundred eighteen before me the subscriber one of the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas in & for the county of Chautauqua aforesaid in the State aforesaid personally appear Alexander Wilson aged fifty six years ten months and fourteen days resident in the State & County aforesaid who being by me first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the provision made by the late act of Congress entitle "An act to provide for certain persons engaged in the land and naval Service of the United States in the revolutionary war." That the said Alexander Wilson enlisted in the month of October one thousand seven hundred & seventy eight in the State of Massachusetts in the company commanded by Captain Asa Coburn of the seventh Massachusetts Regiment was commanded by Colonel Alden; that he continued to serve in said company until Captain Coburn was taken sick when our Captain William White who was killed in the battle of Yorktown took command of said company and the said Alexander continued in the service until the eight of June one thousand seven hundred and eighty three when he was discharged from services in the State of New York; that he was in the Battle of Cherry Valley (when Colonel Alden was killed) at Newtown on the Chemung River under General Sullivan - and in the Battle near James River in the State of Virginia and in the army commanded by the Marquis De Lafayette - and also at the siege of the taking of Cornwallis at Yorktown in the State of Virginia; & that he is in reduced circumstances and Stands in need of the assistance of his country for support; & that he has no other evidence now in his power of said service.

(signed) Alexander Willson

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alexander Willson". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

Sworn to, subscribed and declared before me the and year aforesaid

(signed) Matthew Prendergast

I Mathew Prendergast Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in and for the County of Chautauqua & State of New York or aforesaid, do certify to my satisfaction that the said Alexander Willson did serve in the revolutionary war, or State in the preceding declaration – against the common enemy; and I now transmit the proceedings and testimony take & had before me to the Secretary for the war department pursuant to the directions of the aforementioned act of Congress

Dated at Mayville Chautauqua County  
April 30<sup>th</sup> 1818  
(signed) Matthew Prendergast

**The following is a summary of a several depositions in the application packet. The documentation addresses specifics of his “reduced circumstances” and names some of his family members, provides a notification that he has moved from New York to Pennsylvania, and provides his widow’s pension applications following his death:**

[f p. 14] A deposition of 30 June 1820 in a Chautauqua County, New York court records Alexander Wilson swears that he is age 59 and served as a private soldier in the Revolutionary War as follows: “I enlisted in October 1778 in the state of Massachusetts in the company commanded by Capt Asa Coburn of the 7th Massachusetts Regiment commanded by Colonel Alden and I continued to serve in said Coburn and afterwards under Capt Wm White until the 8th of June 1783 when I was discharged from service in the State of New York. I also declare that I have received a pension certificate under the law of Congress of Mar 18, 1818 and that the decree is numbered 13,178. I have no income other than what is contained in this schedule hereto inscribed and by me subscribe that is today I have no real estate and have only personal estate necessary to clothing and bedding. I have one cow and some hay but I am still indebted for the hay. I have also 3 old chairs, 1 old table, 6 knives and forks and table pieces, 1 iron pot, 1 kettle and have sundry items about the house in about the sum or amount of \$150. I have no income whatsoever except the monies I receive on the aforementioned pension certificate. I further declare that I am unable to support myself and my wife Katherine, about 57. She is infirmed and quite feeble and unable to support herself. My children are as follows: My daughter the widow Polly Rice aged about 32, who is able to support herself but I have to support her two children -- Cyrus Rice aged 10 and Diana Rice aged 6. My two sons -- John aged 20 and Alexander aged 18 -- work for themselves, their time having been given to them by me about 5 or 6 years ago. I have 2 other daughters, Margaret aged 14 and Jane aged 12, who are not wholly able to support themselves.” Thomas Campbell, clerk in court, estimates the property of the said Willson in the above at \$21.00.

[f p.11] A Crawford County, Pennsylvania court record of 19 October 1835 reports that Alexander Wilson declared that he formerly belonged to the company commanded by Captain Coburn in the Regiment commanded by Colonel John Brooks in the service of the United States, that he is on the pension roll of the State of New York from whence he has lately removed -- that he now resides in the state of Pennsylvania where he intends to remain and wishes his pension to be there payable in the future. And that his reason for removing to the State of Pennsylvania was to reside with his son. His son, Alexander Wilson, Jr., appeared and swore that his father was who he said he was.

[f pp. 7 & 8– image is very poor quality] An Erie County, Pennsylvania court record of 15 March 1844 filed by Catherine Wilson states that she is the widow of Alexander Wilson who had died 7 September 1843 in Harbor Creek Twp, Erie County, Pa and she had married him 18 May 1784 in Stone Arabia, New York. She was unable to locate the marriage certificate, but wished to continue receiving his Revolutionary War pension.

Catherine's daughter, Jane Bowen, also swore that she was the daughter of Alexander and Catherine Wilson, was the youngest child of eleven, and was 35 years old. Since her earliest recollection she has lived with her father and mother and has seen the certificate of marriage of her parents repeatedly and now believes it lost. She states her parents lived and cohabitated as husband and wife -- that her parents resided with her for about a year before the death of Alexander and that her mother has resided with her since that time.

(Since the marriage certificate was in Alexander's pension file, the women were probably unaware that it had previously been submitted to the government)

[f p. 37] War Department Widow's Pension certificate dated 14 Dec 1848 stated that Catherine Wilson was the widow of Alexander Wilson, a private in the Revolutionary War, and is entitled to a pension of \$80 per year, commencing on 4 March 1848 and continuing for life unless she should marry.

### **Military Service in Virginia**

While there are no service records reporting Alexander being present at the “Battle on the James River” or the Siege of Yorktown as stated in his pension application, elements of his unit did deploy to this area led by Captain William White, Alexander’s company commander. Research indicates that on February 19, 1781, Captain White and the Light Company of the 7<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment marched from West Point, New York with Lafayette's Corps to counter Cornwallis in Virginia. Captain William White was killed by British artillery fire during the Siege of Yorktown and is memorialized on markers in that area.

“The Battle on the James River” to which Alexander refers in his pension application most likely is The Battle of Green Spring. This engagement took place near Green Spring Plantation in James City County, Virginia. On July 6, 1781 American Brigadier General “Mad” Anthony Wayne, leading the advance forces of the Marquis de Lafayette, was ambushed near the plantation by the British Army of Cornwallis in the last major land battle of the Virginia campaign prior to the Siege of Yorktown. Following a month of marching and countermarching in central Virginia by Cornwallis and Lafayette, Cornwallis in late June moved to Williamsburg, where he received orders to move to Portsmouth and send some of his army to New York City. Lafayette followed Cornwallis fairly closely, emboldened by the arrival of reinforcements to consider making attacks on the British force. On July 4, Cornwallis departed Williamsburg for Jamestown, planning to cross the James River en route to Portsmouth. Lafayette believed he could stage an attack on Cornwallis's rear guard during the crossing. Cornwallis anticipated Lafayette's idea, and laid an elaborate trap. General Wayne's forces were very nearly caught in the trap, and only a bold bayonet charge against the numerically overwhelming British enabled his forces to retreat. Cornwallis did not follow the victory with pursuit, instead following his plan to cross the river. The action reinforced the perception among contemporaries that justified the moniker “Mad” to describe Wayne, although opinion on the merits of his actions was divided.

**Proof of Service:** While the National Archives microfilm has very limited information on the unit in which Alexander Willson/Wilson served, a great deal of service records are housed in the Massachusetts State Archives and have been extracted and compiled in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, Volume 17, a Compilation from the Archives prepared and published by Secretary of the Commonwealth* (Boston, Wright and Potter Printing Co., State Printers, 1908). Pages 532 and 558 provide information on him under 2 different spellings -- Willson and Wilson, but they are the same person. Specifically, Alexander Willson was born in Ireland and was a resident of Cherry Valley in the Mohawk Valley of New York when he enlisted. A unit descriptive list indicates he was 5’7” tall with dark complexion and dark hair. Alexander enlisted on 9 September 1778 and was discharged by General Washington on 8 June 1783 upon expiration of his enlistment. The following quotes the narrative in this book:

WILLSON, ALEXANDER, Cherry Valley. Private, Capt. Day's co., Col. John Brooks's regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Sept. 9, 1778, to Dec. 31, 1779; residence, Cherry Valley; also, Capt. Asa Coburn's (Light Infantry) co., 6th Mass. regt. formerly commanded by Col. Ichabod Alden; muster roll for March and April, 1779, dated "Fort Harkimer;" reported on scout.

WILSON, ALEXANDER, Sturbridge (also given Cherry Valley). Private, Capt. Coburn's co., Col. Brooks's regt.; Continental Army pay accounts for service from Jan. 1, 1780, to Dec. 31, 1780;

residence, Sturbridge; also, descriptive list endorsed "January 11th 1781"; Lieut. Col. John Brooks's regt.; age, 22 yrs.; stature, 5 ft. 7 in.; complexion, dark; hair, dark; birthplace, Ireland; enlisted March -, 1779, by Capt. Coburn; also, Private, Capt. William White's (Light Infantry) co., Lieut. Col. Brooks's (7th) regt.; muster roll for Jan., 1781, dated West Point; enlistment, during war; also, Capt. Asa Coburn's (Light Infantry) co., commanded by Capt. William White prior to Oct. 13, 1781, Lieut. Col. Brooks's regt.; muster roll for Feb.-Nov., 1781, dated York Hutts; also, Capt. Coburn's co., Col. Brooks's regt.; muster rolls for Dec., 1781, Jan. and Feb., 1782, dated York Hutts; reported on command at Albany in Jan., 1782; also, descriptive list dated Feb. 20, 1782; Light Infantry co., Lieut. Col. Brooks's regt.; age, 20 (also given 21) yrs.; stature, 5 ft. 7 in.; complexion, dark; hair, dark; occupation, farmer; birthplace, Ireland; residence, Sturbridge (also given Cherry Valley); enlisted March -, 1779, by Capt. Coburn; enlistment, during war; also, Light Infantry co., Lieut. Col. Brooks's regt.; list of men who died or were discharged subsequent to Jan. 1, 1781; said Wilson discharged June 8, 1783, by Gen. Washington, term of enlistment having expired.

**(Note:** York Hutts was headquarters of a New York regiment located near present-day Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. General Washington often stayed here.)