

Southern Campaign American Revolution Pension Statements

Pension Application of James Cotten (Cotton) W6942

Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris

Alabama

In the Circuit Court of Madison county held at Huntsville on the 30th day of October 1832 - his Honor William J Adair, judge thereof presiding —

Then personally appeared in open court James Cotton, resident of said county aged 67 years, who being first duly sworn according to law doth on his oath make the following declaration in order to obtain the benefit of the act of congress passed June 7th 1832.

That having no record of his birth, but confiding in the tradition in his father's family concerning it, affiant believes he was born in Guilford county in the then colony of North Carolina in October 1765. In January 1781, when visiting his relations in Henry County, Virginia, he substituted himself in place of one Nance, (thinks John Nance) in Capt Geo Harston's [sic: George Hairston's] company of men drafted from that county for a three month's tour to North Carolina to assist in combatting the British & Tories, who then infested that colony. He & his company were marched directly into N. Carolina, where at Dan river, as he thinks, they joined Maj'r Gen. [Nathanael] Greene's army [which arrived there 14 Feb 1781]. He proceeded with that army in its movements until the enemy under Cornwallis was met near Guilford courthouse [15 Mar]. Accordingly to his best impressions the General shortly after sunrise approached the large waste field of the battle ground from the east, leaving that portion of the militia in which affiant was on the eastern skirt of the field as a reserve. The enemy about the same time advanced from the west under a cannonade. The battle lasted several hours, when affiant with the reserve were led before the enemy to cover the retreat of the regiments which had been engaged & only fired a round or so & were ordered to retreat with the main body of the army. The whole retreat was in order & as affiant believes without pursuit, except some horse, who showed themselves in the rear as far as the bridge over Haw river, about two miles distant from the scene of action. Gen Greene halted at Troublesome iron works [on Troublesome Creek in present Rockingham County] about 10 [sic: 20] miles distant, & in a few days marched upon the enemy & again halted at Ramsey's mills on Deep river. when marching to the latter point, the army proceeded in files of four & an order was passed along the line to open the files so as to leave a space in the centre, when some field officers rode swiftly thro' the space, & during this movement the attention of affiant was pointed to a man hanging under a tree on the right of the line with a paper spread on his breast, which advertised, as was asserted, his name vocation & deeds as a Tory. Over against him on an eminence sat some ten or dozen men, by whom, as affiant supposed the Tory had been caught & elevated. Whilst the army was incamped at Ramsey's mills there was an alarm & the army put in motion toward the point as if to meet the enemy & a hollow square formed around a tree in an open space as if to repel a charge from Cavalry, when to the surprise of all two men were conducted into the centre & hung to the same limb of the tree: they too were doubtless Tories. Affiant & his company were then ordered to join Col [Henry] Lee's light horse at Cape Fear [River], where the Colonel addressed the company & urged twelve of them to enlist in his regiment, declaring that that number would complete it. Affiant & eleven of his comrades enlisted under Col Lee until the close of the war as regular dragoons or light horsemen. The rest of Harston's company were then discharged. The next morning Col Lee enquired for some one acquainted in Guilford county, & being informed by affiant that he was he stated he wished to send an express to Col Pacey [sic: John Paisley or Peasley] there, & affiant consented to bear it. On delivering it to Col Pacey, he directed affiant to go with him in his expedition against the Tories. In that expedition he was in capt John Macado's company. On returning Capt John May raised a company of horsemen into which affiant was put & appointed orderly sergeant; & another expedition against the Tories was performed. On affiant's return from this he was put in command of the men left at Guilford Courthouse consisting of a few regulars & militia, some of whom had recovered of the wounds rec'd at the Guilford battle & returned to duty. Here affiant remained - until on a certain day some officers, apparently in the regular service rode up & one of them, he thinks Majr [John]

Rutherford, ordered affiant to put his men under arms - to draw ammunition as for battle & besides full rations of rum. This being done & the men reported ready - & affiant expecting orders to march upon the Tories Rutherford appeared on horse & said aloud the proclamation of peace - & gave permission to expend the powder & rum in rejoicing. A written discharge was neither asked nor thought of by affiant. He had been nearly a year, (above six months) in actual continued service above six months of the time a dragoon regularly enlisted, & raised, as affiant then considered it, to the dignity of an orderly in his troop. He continued to reside in Guilford County until about 1789, when he emigrated to the settlement about Nashville in Tennessee. He afterward removed into Smith County in that state, where he was elected a captain of militia & received the commission of a justice of the peace as will appear by two copies of orders of the County Court of that county, herewith sent. About the first settlement of the County of Madison, now of Alabama, he removed thither, where ever since he has resided

He hereby relinquishes every claim whatever to a pension or annuity except the present and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any state without exception —

Affiant knows of no one by whom he can now prove a personal knowledge of his services except John Gibson [pension application S3395], whose affidavit he has procured by great exertion, which he is advised wants further authentication, but being unable to travel back to procure the authentication he annexes it hereto [signed] James Cotton

State of Tennessee
Lincoln County SS

Be it remembered that on this 20th day of September 1832, John Gibson a citizen of the county and State aforesaid, aged about seventy two years appeared before Elliot W Fletcher one of the Justices of the peace for said county, and makes oath that in the year 1781 then being a citizen of of Guilford County, North Carolina, he joined a company of mounted infantry, commanded by Capt John May, which company was composed partly of volunteers and partly of drafted militia, that James Cotton then being a citizen of the same county and state and now living in Madison county in the State of Alabama, was in said company. that said company formed a part of a force commanded by Colonel John Paisley, under whom we marched to the county of Randolph to fight the Tories - we likewise with the same object marched into the neighbouring county of Chatham, and after scouring the country, the expedition returned to Guilford Court House, and he being a volunteer for that expedition only returned to his home. — That the said James Cotton served with him on that expedition. [signed] John Gibson

NOTE: On 23 Sep 1843 Nancy Cotton, 78, applied for a pension stating that as Nancy Johnson she married James Cotton in North Carolina on 20 Dec 1786, and he died 18 Feb 1838. Other documents in the file state that she was the daughter of Gideon Johnson and married James Cotton in Rockingham County NC at the home of his uncle, William Cotton. In 1845 her brother, Abner Johnson (pension application R5649), age 86 and living in Maury County TN, deposed in support of her application. Her application was also supported by a deposition by her son, Peter J. Cotton, who provided the following record of the births of her children:

Peter Johnson Cotton, born 25 Dec 1787, with a wife and two children in 1811

Mary, born 15 Mar 1792

Martha, born 19 May 1796

Tabitha A., born 3 Feb 1801

Charles K., born 3 Oct 1805

Her daughter, Tabitha A. Lewis, on 12 Jan 1846 deposed that a family record showed that she had been born 23 Feb 1801, and she stated that her mother had been living with her for several years.