

OFFICIAL COUNTY PAPER

THE WEST SIDE

R. C. PRESTLAND, Manager.

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Registered at the Postoffice in Independence, Oregon, as second-class matter.

PHONE 12.

THE PENSION PROBLEM

There are now more war pensioners on the rolls than ever before, says Henry Clay Evans, United States Commissioner of Pensions, in the August Munsey, and it is probable that the number may be slightly increased during the present year.

But high water mark has been nearly attained, and it can be predicted with safety that we shall never have a million pensioners on the rolls of the Pension Bureau.

In this statement I am in no sense endeavoring to prophesy what future legislation regarding pensions may be. We have practically a service pension law now on the statute books in the Act of Congress passed in 1890; almost any one under the provisions of that Act can obtain a pension by proving service in the Federal forces during the Civil War, so that the bars could not be let down much lower by future legislation.

If I were to hazard an opinion on the subject, it would be that future legislation by Congress would restrict, rather than facilitate, the granting of pensions.

It is apparent that we are approaching the beginning of the decline in numbers of pensioners. And when this decreasing process starts, it will be very rapid.

During the fiscal year 1897, an army of nearly 35,000 pensioners passed from life's battle to the bourn that knows no returning. Three fourths of these, approximately speaking, were veterans of the army and navy. It is estimated that fifty thousand more will pass away this year, and that the number of deaths will steadily increase for several years to come.

There will also continue to be a diminution of the pension list from other causes, such as remarriages of widows, expiration of minorities, and failures to claim pensions within stated periods.

Notwithstanding a reduction of the pension rolls in 1897, which amounted in the aggregate to 41,123 names, there was no actual decline in the total number of pensioners. There were enough new pensions, reissues of certificates and restoration of names previously dropped, to make a net increase of 5,336, bringing the total up to 976,014, the largest recorded.

The inquiry is often made whether our annual pension appropriations have yet reached their maximum figure. President Garfield, while a member of Congress, more than twenty years ago, declared that at that time, when we were paying something like thirty millions annually in pensions, they had already nearly attained their highest totals. But this was long before the passage of the Act of 1890, under which more than forty five millions of dollars were paid during the last fiscal year to half a million pensioners. The total expenditure for the year, for pensions and expenses of the department, was a few thousand dollars less than one hundred and forty-two millions.

From the operation of the pension laws and the work of the Bureau of Pensions since they came within my closer observation, I am inclined to the belief that while the number of pensioners has nearly reached the highest possible limit, considerably larger appropriations will yet be made before the maximum of annual expenditure will be attained. This will be due to the heavy arrearages carried with many of the new claims allowed. The depletion of the rolls by death, or by dropping of names for other causes, only carries with it a stoppage of annual pensions, while new claims often carry many years' arrears. In fact we may for two or three years witness the apparently anomalous condition of steady reductions in the number

of pensioners, and increases in the annual expenditures for pensions. And yet it is improbable that the total annual appropriations will rise above one hundred and fifty millions in their highest year.

This estimate, of course, does not consider the possibility of future legislation dealing with the veterans of the Civil War, or possibly with the soldiers of the present war with Spain. Speculation on that subject is not profitable. Some of the estimates that have been made by experts indicate that some of the additional legislation that has been proposed would swell the appropriations beyond the two hundred million point. It has been estimated that it would take sixty million dollars a year to meet the lowest of the service pensions which have been projected and discussed.

Of the pensioners now living, 733,527 are war veterans. The remainder are widows, minor children, and other dependents. Among the veterans are six soldier patriarchs who are now the only survivors of the quarter of a million men who were engaged on land and sea in the young republic's second war with Great Britain.

Three of these aged warriors are more than a hundred years old. The venerable Hosea Brown, of Oregon, who is the eldest of these antique heroes, was of age when the war began, and was able to cast his vote for President James Madison during the very dawning of the struggle. One of the younger of the six is James Hooper, of Baltimore, the last survivor of the brave sailor lads who humbled the mistress of the seas on the very waters over which she claimed dominion. Senator George F. Hoar in a recent speech called attention to the fact that, except for the brilliant exploit at New Orleans—achieved after the conclusion of peace—the land operations of the American army in the war of 1812 were generally characterized by failure, while the naval engagements in which American vessels were victorious and were so brilliant that eighteen of them are still considered to be worthy of appearing in standard British books on naval warfare as examples of tactics in battle on the high seas that British sailors can well afford to study.

The last sailor of the war of 1812 and the five surviving soldiers of that struggle draw from the Treasury, altogether, only \$1,080 a year. There are about eleven thousand survivors of the war with Mexico on the rolls, and 2,373 survivors of the old Indian wars.

It is an interesting fact that there are pensioners of the United States living under nearly every foreign flag, and in the most unfrequented byways of the earth. It will surprise no one to learn that Canada, Germany and Ireland, in the order named, lead in the number of foreign pensioners. But some of the six hundred and twenty thousand dollars which we pay to pensioners abroad finds its way to the very ends of the earth. Vouchers go alike to the Land of the White Elephant and the lone rock of Saint Helen; to the plains of the Transvaal and the steppes of Siberia; to every continent as well as to the isles of the sea. There are pensioners of the United States in Malta and Cyprus, Maderia and Mauritius, New Zealand and Tahiti, and many other remote islands. Although so widely scattered, the pensioners who reside abroad are not numerous. There are something like four thousand in all, one half of them in Canada.

It has been noted by some of my predecessors, and it has also come to my attention, that the longevity of these self-expatriated pensioners is quite remarkable. The difficulties attending access to information from some of these distant places may be responsible for some of this persistent adherence to life on their part. I shall at an early date take steps to have the foreign pension rolls overhauled and verified. This can be done, I think, through our consular agents.

There are still living and drawing pensions, seven aged ladies who are the widows of soldiers of the Revolution. These draw pensions under the general act covering all Revolutionary soldiers and widows. The oldest of these ladies is Nancy Aldrich, long a resident of Michigan, but now of Los Angeles, California. She is the relict of Caleb Aldrich, who saw service in the New Hampshire and Rhode Island line in the Revolution. She is of even age with the nineteenth century, and may live to see the early twilight of the twentieth. The youngest Revolutionary war widow is Mary Sneed, of Parkaley, Vir-

ginia, whose husband served in the Old Dominion's troops under Washington. She is now eighty one years old. If she were to live to the present age of Mrs. Aldrich, the United States will still be paying Revolutionary pensions one hundred and thirty four years after the surrender of Cornwallis.

If women are to be pensioned who marry soldiers of the Civil War forty or sixty years after that struggle closed, as these venerable ladies married their husbands many years after the Revolution, the United States may be paying Civil War pensions well into the distant twenty-first century. It was with no wish to disturb aged widows who now draw pensions that I officially recommended the passage of a law to the end that no pension shall be granted to the widow of any soldier who shall marry hereafter. As I said in that recommendation, there should be no discrimination, and a woman that marries a soldier now (nearly thirty three years after peace was declared) takes him for better or for worse. She was not his wife during the war; she experienced none of the hardships, deprivations and anxieties incident to the life of the wife of a soldier, and should not be placed on the roll as such. If there should in the far future arise specially needful cases of such widows who have reached extreme old age, their pensions could well be left to special acts of Congress in individual cases, as has been done with the several daughters of Revolutionary soldiers whose names now appear on the pension rolls.

As for the venerable survivors of the old wars themselves, "Hands off these best beloved of our household!" It is these we should most delight to care for and honor. The last survivor of the Revolution, Daniel F. Bakeman, of New York, died on the 5th of April, 1869, eighty eight years after Yorktown, aged one hundred and nine years. The survivors of the war of 1812 now borne on the rolls have only to live five years longer to have survived the battle of New Orleans for the same period. If the same relative longevity can be counted on in the cases of the venerable men who will be the last survivors of the Boys in Blue, there will be a handful of the lads who followed of pensioners from the rolls. Whether the saving by this means would be sufficient to offset the expense of the publication of the lists is not easy to estimate.

Sentiment has in the past figured largely in preventing the publication of the names of pensioners. It has been assumed that the worthy pensioner would object to having the fact that he was drawing a pension from the government the Stars and Stripes into the great American conflict still on the pension rolls in 1933.

It is an interesting fact that at least one pension for actual service in the revolutionary War was drawn by a woman.

As to my recent suggestion that the names on the pension rolls should be published to the world, I believe their publication would lead to the dropping of a number paraded before the world.

Personally I do not sympathize with this sentiment. The pension roll ought to be a roll of honor. No man need be ashamed to have his name on it if he is entitled to have it there. It is highly important to eliminate the frauds, if there be any, from the pension rolls, but it is equally important, if not more so, to prevent the dropping of worthy and deserving men who are actually dependent on their pensions for their sustenance. —Munsey's Magazine for August.

The next legislature should cut down some salaries, or else raise others, in the different counties of Oregon. Here in Polk county it is manifestly unjust that the sheriff, who has so much expense attached to his office, should only get \$1600 a year and the clerk the same, with no expenses. If the county clerk of Polk county were paid \$1000 a year, that would be enough, and the sheriff \$1600 and the actual expenses outside of his office. The office of county judge, at \$800 a year, is a better position than sheriff in Polk county, in clear money. There is no comparison in the duties of the two offices. In one case it is simply clerical work, while in the other there is risk of life and limb. The next legislature should look after this matter.

In one of our soldiers' homes only a few days ago an old man 78

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years of age, and high into death, was married to a young woman and the next day he died. They call it a romance. The real interest the public has in that romance is the fact that for perhaps the next fifty years that old man's widow will draw a pension. It is a disgrace that the pension privileges are so flagrantly abused.

The flag staff on Capt. Skinner's new boat needs a flag. Why could not some of our ladies take up a subscription and buy a set of flags for the new boat and present them on her first trip? Who will make a move in that direction?

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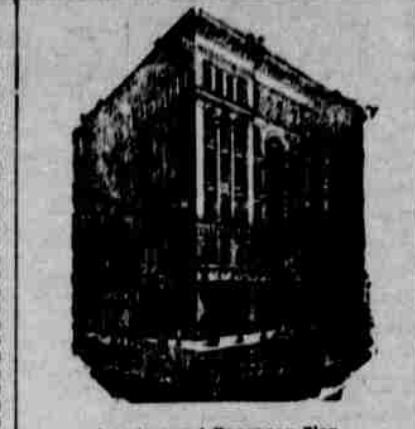
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