

[Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters](#)

Pension Application of William Cecil R1823                      Nancy Cecil    VA  
Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris. Revised 10 Jan 2015.

State of Virginia  
Tazewell County to wit

On this 16<sup>th</sup> day of October 1832, personally appeared in open Court, before the County Court of Tazewell County in the state of Virginia now sitting, William Cecil a resident of Tazewell County and State of Virginia, aged about Eighty three 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 7<sup>th</sup> 1832

That he entered the service of the United States early in the year 1776 in the now County of Tazewell in the state of Virginia under Captain Thomas Mastin, Lieutenant James Maxwell, and Ensign Thomas Witten [pension application S6407], and that the said company belonged to the Regiment of the Virginia state line [sic: Montgomery County Militia], commanded by Col William Preston, and Major Walter Crockett. That at the time when he first entered the service as aforesaid he resided in the County of Tazewell, then called Montgomery, where he has continued to reside ever since. That the company to which he belonged was never required by the commanding Officers of the Regiment to which it was attached, to perform any other duty in the war of the revolution, except as Indian spies to defend the western frontier of Virginia. That he continued with his said company to perform that duty fully six months in each year from 1776 till the final termination and close of the revolutionary war. The said William Cecil further states, that the company to which he belonged, consisted of men mostly resident upon the border line Country, and that during the period aforesaid from 1776 till the close of the war, they were kept in continual readiness, and were never regularly discharged, or called out for any definite period of time, as the militia from the adjacent country, who were drafted to perform regular routines of duty, and that they were permitted every year upon the approach of winter to return to their respective homes, subject to be called out against the Indians as fresh emergencies might require. That he was in no battle of any importance during the time of his service aforesaid, except those little skirmishes common to the savage mode of warfare. That he was an eye witness to some of the many instances of inhuman butchery and massacre committed by the Indians upon the families of the frontier settlers. That he does not think the company to which he belonged was drafted to perform tours of duty, but being composed chiefly of the frontier settlers where the Indians were more peculiarly troublesome, and which suffered most from their contiguity to the ruthless savage, with a sparse population, and in a situation comparatively defenceless and unprotected, they were always kept in readiness, and regarded by the officers of the said Regiment as minutemen. That the company to which he belonged was chiefly engaged during the period aforesaid in defending that part of the Western frontier of Virginia lying along the valley of Clinch river from the head waters of the Bluestone river to the forks of Clinch river in the now County of Russell. The said William Cecil further states, that none of the continental troops or officers of the regular army of the United States were ever sent to the relief of that part of the western frontier to which he belonged, that he now remembers, nor was he acquainted with any of the officers of the regular Army. That in the whole he served in the war of the revolution as an Indian spy aforesaid fully six months in each year from 1776 untill the close of that war, and that he knows of three persons now living, who can testify to his service as herein stated, Viz Thomas Witten, who was his Ensign, Joseph Oney [S8909] and Nancy Cecil. That being permitted to return to his home every winter to be recalled the ensuing spring, he never obtained a regular discharge in writing from his commanding officers, so that he cannot now produce that evidence of his services.

He hereby relinquishes every claim whatever to a pension or an annuity except the present, and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of any agency of any state

Sworn to and subscribed the day and year aforesaid                      William Cecil

[William Cecil's widow, Nancy Cecil, applied for a pension on 29 Nov 1843, and she died a week later. Her heirs pursued the claim, but it was denied for the reason stated in the following letter, apparently from Col. James L. Edwards, Commissioner of Pensions. See the endnote for further discussion.]

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Sir [Hon. George W. Hopkins, House of Representatives]

I have the honor to inform you that the claim of Nancy Cecil has been examined & disallowed. Upon an examination of her husband's papers with the better information acquired since the adjustment of his claim and with more time for investigation, it is not apparent that he was at any time in service in any corps organized by the laws of Va & called out quartered – subsisted & paid as soldiers in actual service by the competent authority. He represents that he was engaged in “spying” 6 mo in each year from 76 to the close of the war & that the company was regarded as minute men to protect the frontier settlements. The statement in no respects corresponds with the service required of the Militia by law – nor with the service of any corps organized by law for the prosecution of the revoly. war. No one who did not serve at least 6 months in the Land or Naval service of the revolution is entitled to a pension – You will be better satisfied with this decision if you would call & examine the papers upon which her husband was improperly allowed a pension

Jno. Spotts was informed on 20 ult of the decision in the case of Nancy Brooks.

#### NOTES:

On 19 Aug 1843 Nancy Cecil, 88, applied for a pension stating that she married William Cecil on 29 Mar 1774 in either Fincastle or Augusta County, and he died 11 Dec 1836. With her application is a page of an original family record transcribed below. Samuel Witten, a Justice of the Peace, certified that he had cut the page from a Bible bearing date 1766, formerly the property of William Cecil, and in the handwriting of William Webb, a teacher. John Cecil, 65, the oldest son of William and Nancy Cecil, also certified the authenticity of the record, and that Webb had been employed to write it because William Cecil could not read or write.

On 29 Nov 1843 Thomas Witten, Jr., son of the Ensign Thomas Witten named in Cecil's declaration, stated that Nancy Cecil was the sister of Ensign Thomas Witten, and that she and her brother were married to their respective spouses at the same time and were in the habit of celebrating their anniversaries together. He stated that Nancy Witten Cecil died 6 Sep 1843 survived by the following children: Susannah Sayers, John Cecil, Rebecca Cecil, Linny Price, Nancy Harman, Samuel Cecil, and Sally Caldwell. On the same day Thomas Barrett stated that he had known William and Nancy Cecil for at least 45 years and in the early part of his life had been a member of their family for a few years.

By 1835 the Pension Commissioner, Col. James L. Edwards, had been persuaded that service by frontier settlers as Indian spies during the Revolutionary War was not included under the pension act of 1832, even though that act and the regulations approved by Edwards himself state that it applies to “surviving officers, non-commissioned officers, musicians, soldiers, and **Indian spies**, who shall have served in the continental line, or State troops, **volunteers** or militia.” For further discussion see my appendix to the pension application of David W. Sleeth (S6111). Cecil's service was under the authority of William Preston, who was legally commissioned a Colonel and from at least Jan 1777 was the County Lieutenant in command of the Montgomery County Militia.

William Cicel born 28<sup>th</sup> May 1750

Nancy his Wife born 9<sup>th</sup> February 1755

Susanna born 19<sup>th</sup> Feb'y 1776

John born 17<sup>th</sup> March 1778

Rebekah born Oct 21<sup>st</sup> 1780

[apparently initialed REC]