

FORT MILL TIMES

JULY 2006

John Rooker rewarded Revolutionary War veteran's pensions

By Louise Pettus Fort Mill Times

(Published July 2006)

On June 7, 1832, the United States Congress, for the first time, voted to reward eligible Revolutionary War veterans with pensions. It was a little more than 50 years after Yorktown, the last battle of the Revolution.

Surviving veterans had to prove their service at the courthouse or swear to a judge. They were required to furnish evidence by "living witnesses, by documentary proof, by traditionally evidence, by incidental evidence, or by the rolls."

John Rooker, 77, of York District, went to the courthouse and took with him what George Taylor, the examining clerk, called "traditionally evidence." What Rooker furnished was his statement that he entered the service in Franklin, N.C., in Aug. 1776 as a private for six months "to go to Kentucky to guard its Inhabitants from the Ravages of the Indians." In March 1777, he volunteered to serve under Col. Daniel Boone and served under him for seven months until Col. Hagans of Virginia brought a reinforcement of 100 men.

After this service Rooker returned to North Carolina and stayed until Dec. 6, 1790, when he "Removed to South Carolina York District." Rooker had no written evidence, no discharge papers, and knew no one in 1832 who could testify of his service. He offered as character witnesses the name of Benjamin Chambers, the judge of the Court of Ordinary (probate judge) of York District and Bartlett Meacham, a citizen of Fort Mill District.

Rooker's claim was approved. For the rest of his life, Rooker would earn a U.S. treasury check for \$43.35 annually.

The widows of veterans were eligible for pensions of lesser amounts if they were married to the pensioner before Jan. 1, 1794. Five years after her husband's death and a year before she died, Anna Hawkins Rooker, then 86,

applied for her pension. She swore that she married John Rooker in Lincoln County, N.C., sometime in 1780.

In neither pension application was there any reference to children or other family members who might be able to support their parents. The Rookers had nine children – four sons and five daughters.

Anna Hawkins Rooker also had to have character witnesses. Willis Reeves appeared before James Quinn, a York District justice of the peace, and testified to Anna Rooker's character. Reeves also submitted a two-page preface torn from a book written by John Rooker. The book was titled "An Essay on the Sovereignty of God" and was published in Charleston by W. Riley in 1839 (the only known copy of the book is in the Louisville Baptist Seminary).

In his book preface, Rooker described his military service and its aftermath more fully than he had on his pension application but in neither case did he mention having being wounded in the war. Some of Rooker's parishioners, however, vividly recalled his hands as wounded in the Revolution. In a letter to Lyman Draper in Draper's MSS one man recalled that while Rooker was preaching he would hold up his hands "cut all to pieces by sabre wounds." This in contrast to another veteran who hid his hand inside his coat.

Rooker occasionally filled in at other Baptist churches. He tried very hard to establish a successful mission among the Catawba Indians.

Rooker died June 24, 1840, and is buried at Flint Hill Baptist Church, one of three churches he founded in York County. Six years later his widow was buried in a field on a farm they once owned near Clover beside two sons, Jennings and Joseph Dorris Rooker. Anna never joined her husband's church. She remained a faithful Episcopalian all of her days.

Louise Pettus is a renowned local historian. "Fort Mill History" is sponsored each month by the Fort Mill Downtown Association. Check them out on the Web at www.fortmilledowntown.com.