31st Congress, 2d Session. Rep. No. 45. Ho. of Reps.

WILLIAM K. BLAIR.

March 3, 1851.
Ordered to be printed.

Mr. Waldo, from the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions, made the following

REPORT:

The Committee on Revolutionary Pensions, to whom was referred the petition of William K. Blair, respectfully report:

The petitioner represents that he was appointed agent for the payment of pensions in East Tennessee in the year 1833, which office he now holds; that, from the time of his appointment to the year 1836, he received two per cent. on the amount of money by him paid out, as a compensation for his services; that, from the year 1836 to the year 1847, he performed said service without any other compensation than a gross sum once allowed him by Mr. Secretary Wilkins for house-rent and fire-wood; that he was at great trouble and expense in obtaining specie to make the payments in the currency required by law; and that, during all that time, he performed the duties of his station promptly and with accuracy, fully accounting for all the public money intrusted to his care; and he now asks Congress to allow him, for his services from 1836 to 1847, the same commissions he received before 1836, being two per cent. on the amount of money by him disbursed.

From the establishment of the United States Bank, in 1816, to the 20th day of April, 1836, that institution discharged the obligations of government to its pensioners, without charging any commissions therefor, except in a very few localities, where it had no branch located. In these instances, a small commission was usually allowed to those who performed this service. But on the 20th day of April, 1836, an act was passed by Congress repealing "all laws and parts of laws authorizing or requiring the Bank of the United States or its branches to pay any pensions granted under the authority of the United States," and providing that "such payments should thereafter be made at such times and places, by such persons or corporations, and under such regulations, as the Secretary of War should direct," and expressly declaring that "no compensation or allowance should be made to such person or corporation for making such payments, without authority of law." No authority by law for any allowance or compensation for these services was provided until the act of February 20, 1847; and to this time the whole business of paying the pensions of this government was performed by persons and corporations, under the direction of the Secretary of War, without charge. Large sums of money, belonging to the government, were constantly on deposite with these

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agents, and the advantages derived from the custody of such deposites were, by the parties in interest, deemed an equivalent for the services rendered; and if at any time the duties became too onerous, or the compensation too trifling, the agent could have been relieved of his burden by his own act, inasmuch as no person can be compelled to serve his country in any official capacity against his own will.

The services of the petitioner for which he now seeks further compensation were rendered under the law of April 20, 1836, and were such as were performed by all other persons employed by government in the payment of pensions. If Congress should recognise his claim, and allow him two per cent. on the amount of money by him disbursed within the time aforesaid, it is difficult to see how the claims of other persons for the same rate of compensation for similar services can be successfully resisted. As a consequence, we shall be required to pass a law allowing all persons employed in paying pensions between the years 1836 and 1847 two per cent. on all sums by them paid out—a law that would appropriate nearly a half million of dollars for services that have, in the judgment of your committee, been already fully compensated. As the committee are not prepared to aid any action of this kind, and are of the opinion that the claim of the petitioner has no merit, they respectfully ask to be discharged from the further consideration of this subject, and recommend that the petition be laid upon the table.