Did Your Civil War Ancestor Respond to Call Number 13?

In honor of sesquicentennial of the American Civil War and its aftermath, this is the eighteenth in a series of articles about records at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., that are useful in researching the war and its participants.

Call Number 13 sounds rather mysterious and unlucky. Fortunately, the opposite is true! The answer to Call Number 13 may give you your Union Civil War ancestor’s life story from discharge from military service to the 1890s.

On 21 October 1889, former Civil War General Green Berry Raum was appointed Commissioner of Pensions. He immediately discovered problems that sound much like those in today’s headlines. Union Civil War veterans faced wait times of two or three years for their claims to be examined. Some claims languished even longer because the records management system was ineffective. Five hundred thousand pieces of unfiled evidence had accumulated. Thousands of letters from pension claimants asking about the status of their cases routinely went unanswered. The Pension Office Building desperately needed maintenance and repairs.

Determined to make government work for the people, General Raum took decisive action.

General Green Berry Raum was Commissioner of Pensions from October 1889 to April 1893. His tenure was marred by scandals and Congressional investigations. Photo LC-BH832-387 P&P Lot 4192, Brady-Handy Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.
He changed the organizational structure of the Pension Office. He changed procedures to ensure that claims were acted upon in a timely manner. He established “13 calls for evidence” that—when answered—would provide all the information needed to make a veteran’s pension claim file complete and ready for adjudication on the merits.

Call Number 13, the “Call for History of Claimant’s Disability” (also known as Form 3-079) requested the veteran state his places of residence and occupation from discharge from military service until the present time (in the early 1890s). He was to “give a full and circumstantial history of the origin of his disability, and its continuance...” and he was to state the medical treatment he had received, the names of his physicians and their places of residence. He was to state when he had been “prevented from following his usual occupation by reason of the alleged disability.”

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assistance of a lawyer, a justice of the peace, or some other officer authorized to take testimony under oath. (Some veterans had their statement notarized even though it wasn’t required.)

Veterans’ answers to Call Number 13 give precious insight into their lives.

William M. Horton

William M. Horton served as a private in Co. E, 26th Michigan Infantry, and then as an officer in the 118th U.S. Colored Troops Infantry. On 25 March 1892, he wrote three pages in neat handwriting. His spelling and punctuation are quite good, reflecting good education.

William reported living at Oceola Center, Livingston County, Michigan, from December 1865 until July 1870, except when he was attending school at Albion or Grand Rapids. He lived at Rockford, Kent County, Michigan, from July 1870 to August 1871, and at Fowlerville, Livingston County, Michigan, from August 1871 until March 1892. He was a farmer from 1865 to 1870 and again from 1884 to 1892, a telegraph operator in 1870-71, and a railroad agent from 1871 to 1884. He first started having intermittent fever and diarrhea in early 1865, which progressed to rheumatism. “I was a physical men of the claimant’s company that indicated the circumstances under which the injury or disease occurred.

Call No. 9 (Form 3-078) requested that an affidavit be submitted from the surgeon or assistant surgeon of the claimant’s regiment that described the claimant’s treatment for injury or disease while in service.

Call No. 10 (Form 3-061) requested the Adjutant General’s Office to state the presence or absence on [date] of [named individual] of [military unit] and the station (location) of the unit at that time.

Call No. 11 (Form 3-474) requested that affidavits be submitted from physicians who had treated the veteran since his discharge from military service that include the history and degree of disability of alleged injury or disease, along with dates and duration of treatment.

Call No. 12 (Form 3-474) requested that affidavits be submitted from fellow workman or neighbors describing the veteran’s physical condition from their first acquaintance to the present time, and the extent to which they believed he was incapacitated from subsisting on manual labor due to his alleged injury or disease. This testimony was to be provided if the veteran could not obtain physicians’ affidavits in response to Circular Call No. 11.

Call No. 13 (Form 3-079) (“Call for History of Claimant’s Disability”) requested the claimant state his places of residence and occupations from his discharge from military service to the present, as well as the history of the origin of his disability, medical treatment, names of physicians, and if and when he was prevented from following his usual occupation.

John A. Bachelder

John A. Bachelder served in the 7th Maine Infantry. In 1891, at age 68, he wrote a single page in his own handwriting, with words creatively spelled. He resided in Old Town, Maine, from discharge until 1867, when he went to San Francisco, California. He worked in a "sash doors Blin manufactory" and suffered three amputated fingers when his left hand got caught in machinery. From April 1870 to 1891, he lived and worked as a rancher in Santa Cruz, California. His first attack of rheumatism was in March 1862, when his unit marched to Chain Bridge [Fairfax County], Virginia, to Alexandria, Virginia. It was a "rainey and coald day" and they "camped on ground that was nearly covered with watter." Bachelder said "for the last eight years I hav ben failing" and "I am incapable of doing eney work that is eney laborious." He used a "crutch in orde[r] to get around," and consulted Dr. P. B. Fagan of Santa Cruz when needed.1

Thoughts on Call Number 13

Veterans' answers to Call Number 13 (Form 3-079) can only be found in files meeting certain criteria. First, General Raum was Commissioner of Pensions from October 1889 to April 1893, and it is likely that Call Number 13 was only used during those years. Second, the Bureau of Pensions would only have sent it to veterans whose claims had not yet been approved. Third, it would not have been sent to veterans whose claims had already been approved unless—perhaps?—the veteran was claiming an additional disability. Fourth, it would not have been sent to widows or other dependents. Thus, an answer to "Call Number 13" will only be found in certain Union Civil War pension files.

However, it is possible that a different version of Form 3-079 was in use before and after

1. Loana L. Horton widow's pension, certificate no. W.C. 796,261; service of William M. Horton (Pvt., Co. E, 26th Mich. Inf., 118th U.S. Colored Inf., Civil War); Case Files of Approved Pension Applications..., 1861–1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

General Raum’s tenure. For example, Charles M. Easton, a resident of Oak Grove, Livingston County, Michigan, who had served in the 111th New York Infantry, wrote a two-page letter to Raum’s predecessor, James Tanner, on 12 October 1889, which was a response to Commissioner Tanner’s request for information dated 7 October 1889. Easton’s letter has the same contents as an answer to Call Number 13, even though he doesn’t use that term. Easton describes his injury, where he’s lived, who his physicians have been, what kind of work he’s done, and the extent to which he was disabled.  


**Conclusion**

The content of every Civil War pension file is different, depending upon the individual circumstances of the veteran or his widow or dependents. The more difficulty an ancestor had in proving his or her need or qualifications for a pension, the more records the file contains. An answer to “Call Number 13” is just one of many possible records that may be found in a file.

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