

To the Honorable the Governor & Council of Virginia

Your memorialist Thomas Chapman respectfully sheweth that he has for upwards of 22 years served in the 36th Regiment of Virginia Militia as lieutenant, captain, & major, of which your memorialist served 3 years as lieutenant, 9 as captain and upwards of 10 as major, that in all those situations your memorialist has diligently and faithfully discharged his duty to his country, as a soldier, as an officer & a man without imputation or reproach.

That your memorialist considered himself as having merited and being justly entitled to military promotion, whensoever any vacancy might occur in the higher offices of his regiment. That latterly the office of lieutenant colonel has become vacant by the resignation of Philip Alexander Esq. as your memorialist is informed, and at a late nomination by the county court of Prince William of an officer to supply that vacancy, your memorialist preferred to that court his claim as the oldest officer to fill the vacancy so created.

That the court regardless of the past services of your memorialist, regardless of his claim to fill the vacancy this created, regardless of the rules of military promotion & governed by favoritism alone, passed by your memorialist and recommended John Gibson Esq. to your Honorable Body as a fit person to fill that vacancy, a gentleman taken from the ranks, one holding no commission in the military whatsoever when nominated, but at one time was captain of cavalry attached to the 36th Regiment, your memorialist feels himself aggrieved by the recommendation of the county court not merely because it unjustly puts him out of the way of an honorable military appointment, to which he conceives himself upon every principle entitled, but because it indirectly and covertly casts upon his character and reputation as a military man obloquy and reproach. All personal considerations apart your memorialist deems the recommendation of Mr. Gibson by the county court and the principles by which that court was governed in its nomination if indeed it were governed by any principles, as grossly unjust, mischievous to and destructive of the best interest of the state, directly calculated to weaken and render ineffective if not destroy that which is deemed the life guard of the country in the hour of peril & danger.

The laws of the state requiring the militia to be mustered and regularly trained at stated periods, and requiring that the officers of every grade in like manner be regularly drilled and tutored in their various military duties, necessarily presupposes the usefulness of military experience, and the great expense which the state is willing to encounter to attain this end evidences at least the value and great importance which the legislature and the country at large give to that qualification in the officers particularly and the whole militia of the state. If the principle adopted by the county court of Prince William in the recommendation alluded to be sanctioned by your Honorable Body, your memorialist humbly conceives that the object which the legislature seems to have held in view & seems to have laid so much stress on will be entirely lost sight of once admit the correctness of the position that one without any training as an officer and without the military tuition necessary to form one – one taken from the ranks and at once placed in a high military command is as useful and as well qualified to discharge the duties of that command, has as strong claims to it as he who has served an apprenticeship to the trade as it were, who has devoted years to the acquirements of the duties of a soldier – admit the correctness of the principle that mere favoritism and not military services and experience, grade and rank shall govern in military promotion, and you frustrate the will and design of the legislature so far as that can be perceived in her acts. You set at naught the past experience & practice of our own country upon the subject and the usage of all nations that have pretended to any military reputation. It will have moreover the effect of embroiling individuals, neighborhood

and communities with each other, and lend to the continued derangement, and disorganization of the whole militia of the state.

The honor of a soldier and the feelings of a man, impose it upon an officer as a duty he owes to himself not to hold his commission after he has been without fault on his part passed by in promotion & one from the ranks placed over his head, the principle therefore adopted by the county court does not tend merely to the injustice of depriving your memorialist of the appointment which his grade rank and age as an officer gave him the highest claim to, but tends indirectly to deprive him of the commission which he now holds and which he has long held.

Your memorialist is at a loss to conceive upon what grounds the recommendation of the county court can be sanctioned. If the past services, military experience and even rank of the gentleman recommended placed him upon equality of your memorialist in front of right to the appointment the superior age of your memorialist as an officer he humbly conceives should alone give him superior claim, much stronger is his claim then when he has the advantage in all other. The recommendation of the county court it is conceived imposes no duty upon your honorable body, and can give no superior claim to Mr. Gibson if that recommendation has been made upon improper principles, and your honorable body is left at large, to do that justice to your memorialist which has been denied him by the court; your memorialist begs leave to refer you to one of your honorable body James E. Heath Esq. for information as to the past services of your memorialist & the zeal faith and promptitude with which your memorialist upon all occasions discharged his duty as an officer and how far your memorialist merits the confidence of his country whenever he may be called into her service.

Your memorialist appeals to your feelings as men of honor and claims to be judged of by those feelings and he submits it to your honorable body whether it is warrantable in a court in discharge of a duty confided to them by their country, to wound the feelings of a man and officer against whom there is no imputation, who is without reproach and having the strongest claims upon them for a just discharge of that duty, in order that their personal feelings and affection for another, their caprice when or prejudice or some worse passion may be indulged.

And your memorialist makes bold to say that the passing by your memorialist and the recommendation by the county court of Prince William is not defensible upon better grounds. Your memorialist in addition to what is before stated begs leave to call your attention to this fact, that at the time of the nomination aforesaid there was not a majority of the acting magistrates of the county present & believes that not more than 13 of the said magistrates were summoned to attend and in conclusion begs leave to submit to your consideration the enclosed papers hoping that your honorable body will do him justice which he conceives himself entitled to.

Thomas Chapman
Prince William
Nov 10th 1819