

WAR DEPARTMENT,

WASHINGTON, May 21st, 1853.

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SIR:—

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 22nd ultimo, enclosing a copy of a Resolution passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, requesting the return of the Muster and Pay Rolls of the Soldiers of Maryland, in the War of 1812, which were sent to the War Department to settle the accounts for their services, or certified copies of them.

This Department has uniformly declined to accede to requests of this kind, and I feel constrained to adhere to that course in the present case.

The many thousand applications for bounty land, presented under recent laws, as well as numerous claims for arrears of pay, and various other questions relating to accounts, are settled chiefly by reference to the Muster Rolls, which are, therefore, in hourly use, and as whatever may be granted to one, cannot be denied to any, to attempt to have copies made, or to suffer them to be made, would greatly impede the settlement of the claims above referred to, and otherwise embarrass the public business. Another, and not less cogent reason, is, the use that would be made of the information thus made public, in the prosecution of fraudulent claims, by persons who would not fail to avail themselves of it for that purpose. The surest, and almost the only safe guard the Government has against the numerous attempts that are made to obtain bounty land and other dues, by personating Volunteers and others justly entitled thereto, is in the possession of a full and accurate history of the military service of the true claimant. To make this public, would inevitably increase the temptations to this species of fraud, and the means for its successful accomplishment.

Similar applications have been made to this Department by other States, which have, in every case, been refused.

Very Respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

(Signed) JEFFERSON DAVIS,

*Secretary of War.*

His Excellency, E. LOUIS LOWE,  
Governor of Maryland,  
Annapolis, Maryland.