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Rusty Williams. *My Old Confederate Home: A Respectable Place for Civil War Veterans.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. Illustrations. viii + 313 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2582-4.

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Shedding Light on an Old Kentucky Home

At a time when military veterans' struggles both with posttraumatic stress and readjustment to civilian life dominate media and political discourse with far-reaching consequences, historical perspectives can offer invaluable precedents and potentially useful lessons. In *My Old Confederate Home*, freelance writer and historian Rusty Williams describes the history of the Kentucky Confederate Home, the refuge for nearly one thousand needy, destitute, or disabled Confederate veterans between 1902 and 1934. In telling the home's story, Williams details its inhabitants, its supporters, and its sociopolitical role. Rather than a strongly analytical work driven by a central thesis, Williams's book teems with human interest stories that undergird an institutional history. *My Old Confederate Home* will find broad appeal among scholarly and popular audiences who have an interest in the post-Civil War lives of Kentucky's Confederate veterans, social welfare, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the mythology of the Lost Cause.

By the 1880s, age and the lingering effects of war had impaired many veterans' ability to make a living. Unrecognized by the federal government for pensions, assistance, or medical care, Confederate veterans needed to seek support elsewhere. Chapters of the United Confederate Veterans, the Confederate Veteran Association, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, moved by humanitarian impulses and efforts to memorialize the Civil War through the distorted lens of the Lost Cause, agitated on behalf of destitute veterans. Although the Commonwealth of Kentucky never joined the Confederacy, more than forty thousand of the state's white male inhabitants fought in Confederate armies. The home served those men who were financially, emotionally, physically, or mentally unable to cope with postwar life. The institution's success–as demonstrated by similar efforts throughout the South–demanded an active group of lobbyists, a sympathetic public, and generous state support–all of which Kentucky offered. Ultimately, the Kentucky Confederate Home represented a "grand gesture of fraternal benevolence, [and] a respectable institution far superior to the publicly funded almshouses, poor farms, and asylums typical of the time" (p. 4).

The impetus behind founding the Kentucky home was not unique. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, needy individuals and families received increased recognition and aid from state and federal governments. As such scholars as Theda Skocpol and Stuart McConnell have demonstrated, northern soldiers and their families benefited from such governmental support. Curiously, scholarship on the care of disabled and impaired Confederate veterans remains underdeveloped. Williams's book thus makes three valuable contributions. First, by focusing on the Kentucky home's story–the first sustained treatment–this study nicely supplements R. B. Rosenburg's definitive work on Confederate soldiers' homes across the South, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (1993), which makes short mention of Kentucky's efforts. Second, the support generated at the local and state levels on behalf of Confederate veterans corroborates Jeffrey W. McClurken's recent findings in his book on Virginia, *Take Care of the Living: Reconstructing Confederate Veteran Families in Virginia* (2009), where the neediest Confederate veteran families appealed to prominent citizens and the state for assistance. As Williams notes, southerners largely acted independently of each other in financing and operating homes, thereby demonstrating the need for state-level studies. Finally, the trials, tribulations, and human failings of the home's residents, as witnessed by bouts with alcoholism, violent outbursts, physical ailments, and mental disorders, demystifies the Lost Cause mythology, which so often defined these men then and now.

Chronologically driven, each chapter of the book is

organized around two central figures who introduce a host of characters and a particular thematic thrust. For instance, chapter 8, "The Knight and the Icemaker," one of the book's strongest chapters, discusses roommates Andrew Jackson Lovely–a member of the Order of the Knights of Pythias–and Otway Bradfute Norvell–an artificial ice plant owner–to reveal everyday life and conditions in the home, and the burial and memorialization of deceased inmates in the nearby Confederate Cemetery. This writing device proves both interesting and distracting. On the one hand, the collection of biographies effectively describes a host of veterans, administrators, politicians, women, and veteran advocates, and their social and political role. These figures humanize and personalize a sometimes dry institutional history. On the other hand, each figure's biographical introduction disrupts the book's overall narrative. Each chapter is relatively short in length; thus the continual insertion of new figures and their rather extended personal histories can be disconcerting.

In writing this book, Williams confronted two significant hurdles in collecting his evidence. First, as he explains, many documents were destroyed in a 1920 fire, and, second, many sources generated after 1920 were mishandled in the 1950s. Nonetheless, manuscript collections, state records, census data, newspapers, personal recollections, and published materials underpin the book's description of the home and its administration. Williams's evidence on the home's Confederate veterans is largely derived from admission applications, death certificates, and census data, which are supplemented by scattered manuscripts sources. Williams freely draws from these materials to construct and enliven his narrative. Although the author is clearly versed in the relevant secondary literature (as indicated sparingly within the text and throughout the footnotes), *My Old Confederate Home* is rarely contextualized by either secondary source materials or events at the regional or national levels. This does not necessarily detract from the work, but rather suggests the book's aim at more popular audiences.

Operational documents largely direct Williams's history, which thoroughly considers the home's financial problems, managerial issues, and everyday operations. Ultimately Williams gives readers a tantalizing but incomplete view of the veterans within the home's walls. Strict rules governed daily life, and inmates who broke the regulations were tried and punished through a lengthy process not unlike a military court-martial. As Williams notes, clocks moved slowly in the home with few activities offering distraction. Visitors, music, and Duke Hall (a venue for programs and entertainment) provided the best sources for stimulation. Most days started at 6:00 a.m., with roll call and breakfast to follow; inmates might then stroll the grounds but could not leave the property without the commandant's permission. Attendants provided a heavy midday "dinner," and then served a light meal at 5:00 p.m. Veterans' responses to these conditions, while certainly hinted at, deserve more sustained attention. Did destitution, the home's strictures on personal liberties, and men's pliant position threaten veterans' notions of manhood? Moreover, inmates' struggles with the Civil War's psychological and emotional consequences–if discussed broadly throughout the work and directly in chapter 9–never receive extended and personalized treatments. The book, then, raises many important questions but leaves a number of key issues unresolved.

Williams makes great strides in unraveling the Lost Cause mythology that encased the Kentucky Confederate Home, its inhabitants, and its supporters; still, the work falls prey to its sway in three respects. First, the book is peppered, however infrequently, with phrases and viewpoints that reduce the war, its causes, and consequences, to simple dichotomies. It remains unclear if these interpretations were the perspective of the author or his subjects. For instance, the Freedmen's Bureau, whose task was to assist freedpeople and to mediate relations between African Americans and white southerners, is described as conducting "objectionable operations," and the travails of Confederate soldiers, of any rank, are reduced to stark divisions: "The officer is always warm, dry, clean, and safe; the private is invariably cold, wet, and a mile from food or relief" (pp. 29, 24). Second, Williams largely ignores race and racism. These complex and pressing issues are briefly addressed in William Pete's application to the home. Pete was an African American who claimed to have acted as personal servant to Confederate General Joseph Wheeler during the Civil War. Pete's application to the Kentucky Confederate Home created a stir and resulted in a compromised solution; he would become an employee sleeping and eating with black employees not white Confederate veterans. This fascinating episode is given short shrift and could have been better exploited to introduce a broader discussion about race relations and Confederate veterans' attitudes toward African Americans. Finally, although Williams dedicates attention to Kentucky's shifting political terrain–citizens repudiated the Republican Party after the Civil War and voted solidly Democrat for almost three decades–the state's population assumes a degree of consensus about the home and its inhabitants that surely cannot reflect a more complex reality on the

ground. What was the Civil War's lasting legacy in a state so divided during the conflict? By extension, how did Kentucky Union soldiers feel about the home and its inhabitants? Again, Williams mentions but does not develop these concerns.

My Old Confederate Home tells the story of a period in which some veterans returned home from war to find inadequate institutional support. Lobbyists, a sympathetic public, and governmental support were all necessary for the founding and support of a comfortable, safe refuge for these men. Williams's story and its lively characters illuminate Kentucky's responses to its needy veterans and how these efforts ensured a proper place for the state's citizen-soldiers.

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