

## Book tells story of Pewee Valley Confederate home

BY MELISSA POORE • MPOORE@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • FEBRUARY 24, 2010

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For years, the Kentucky Confederate Home in Pewee Valley took in a number of characters, old Civil War heroes looking to live out their days in the peace and comfort that the hillside home provided.

Now those characters are coming back to life as their **stories** are told in a new book.



1937 File photo of the former Confederate Veterans Home in Pewee Valley

Rusty Williams noticed the historical marker for the home and nearby cemetery at Ky. 146 and Maple Avenue while out for a Sunday drive with his wife. Having never heard of the home, he decided to look into the history of the building that housed Civil War veterans from 1902 until 1934.

“I became fascinated with the story,” he said.

So fascinated, in fact, that he has since written “My Old Confederate Home, A Respectable Place for Civil War Veterans.” The 352-page book being published by the University Press of Kentucky will be available in June.

Williams said working on the book was an interesting endeavor, and his quest was made **more** difficult because of a fire at the home in 1920 that destroyed many original documents. (The marker also is gone after someone vandalized it last year.) Williams got help on the project from the Kentucky Historical Society, the University of Louisville, the Filson Club and Pewee Valley residents like Bill Herdt and Gin Chaudoin.

“They were people who had actually seen it, who had met a number of the veterans there,” he said.

Chaudoin, 88, said she remembers going to the home to visit with soldiers as a girl.

“Some of those old fellas didn't have a visitor, and they were all so nice,” she said.

Williams said his goal was not just to write about the home and its history, but to bring life to the stories of the men who lived there. For example, the book includes the story of Bennett H. Young, the head of the board of trustees, who was a cavalry man turned bank robber turned attorney.

He explained that after the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of men who fought for the Confederacy trudged home and many found they were unable to care for themselves.

At the end of the war, more than a million soldiers went home — most went back to work, but as years went by it became more difficult for them to cope, he said. Some were missing limbs, and many had what we know of now as post traumatic stress disorder, he said.

“These valiant soldiers who fought on our behalf, they weren't guys who were needy,” he said. “These are guys who accepted help at a time when accepting relief was a moral issue.”

Williams now lives in Texas, but plans to return to Pewee Valley while promoting the book. He's a retired marketing executive and freelance writer, and said he's more a storyteller than a historian.

“The book contains more personality than just dry institutional history,” he said.

While the Kentucky Confederate Home was not the only home of its type, it stood out because of its location and the people who lived there, Williams said.

“It was probably the brightest jewel in a network of 17 such homes around the country,” he said.

Reporter Melissa Poore can be reached at (502) 582-4117.