

Civil War Treasures: Hire a Vet: Ex-Confederates Look for Work in the New South

Hans Rasmussen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Rasmussen, Hans (2014) "Civil War Treasures: Hire a Vet: Ex-Confederates Look for Work in the New South," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 16 : Iss. 4 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.16.4.04

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol16/iss4/4>

Feature Essay

Fall 2014

Rasmussen, Hans *Civil War Treasures: Hire a Vet: Ex-Confederates Look for Work in the New South.*

Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan can turn to entities from the Federal Government to Hire Heroes USA to Spike TV for help in finding jobs in a tough economy, but the problem of unemployment among veterans and the need for assistance is hardly new. The Bonus Army of unemployed veterans from World War I marched on Washington in 1932 demanding cash-payment redemption of their service certificates, while the post-World War II G.I. Bill was passed to avoid a repeat of that outrage partly by providing unemployment compensation. A diminutive pamphlet in the LSU Libraries Special Collections illustrates how unemployment cursed veterans of the Civil War as well, and how their fellow comrades came to their aid.

List of Applicants for Employment (second edition) is a pamphlet only eight pages long and not 3 x 5 inches in size issued by the Confederate Veterans' Employment Bureau of New Orleans probably around 1900.¹ With the nation still mired in the Panic of 1893, the United Confederate Veterans camps in New Orleans organized an employment bureau in November 1895 to aid veterans still able to work or unable to enter the Confederate soldiers' home because of ties with wives or children. The bureau requested that camps include, as part of their regular business, calls for names of veterans needing employment and news of any available job opportunities, reporting both to the bureau. It kicked off its campaign with a published appeal for planters, merchants, and industrialists to "obtain help, and at the same time benefit a worthy class of citizens."

The claims of these patriotic citizens cannot be disregarded—they are enforced by a record honorable to the State—they are accentuated by a history of bravery and self-sacrifice that has rendered their deeds memorable. Their exemplary and law-abiding citizenship since the war enhances their soldiery records, and calls for favorable consideration. They make no appeal for charity;

they but ask opportunities for work.²

The Confederate Veterans' Employment Bureau printed pamphlets like this one to spread the word about veterans down on their luck. The brochure lists alphabetically the names of veterans seeking employment. Each entry gives his name, regiment, address, and type of employment sought. Although most resided in New Orleans, applicants came from across the region. Nearly all sought working-class occupations, especially as clerks, watchmen, porters, or laborers. Most entries followed these common patterns:

B H Collins, Co H, 7th La Vol Inft Hays Brig. 1132 Valmont st. Watchman, carpenter.

P A McDonald, Co A, St Paul's Battalion Memorial Hall. Collector, clerk or watchman.

John Reaney, Priv Co B, 8th La Vol Inft 1st Brigade, A N Va. 2334 Chippewa st. Clerk or light labor.

Several applicants listed specialized trades like civil engineer, cotton classer, baker, confectioner, railroad conductor, even a man with experience as a pilot on the Atchafalaya River and Bayou Teche.

J B Lebas, Co D, 5th La Regt Charenton, La. Sugar maker and refiner.

M D Fazende, Co F, Orleans Guard. 1916 Felicity st. Overseer or manager.

More were just desperate.

Philip Duvernay, Co E, 20th La Regt. 1813 Tulane ave. Anything.

The bureau included names of veterans' family members when the head of household was unable to work.

Miss Mary L. Connelly, daughter of John Connelly, Co B, 14th La. Any ladies position.

Mrs M E Jones, wife of Capt E Jones, Co K, 17th Va Regt. North street, Vicksburg, Miss. Sales lady.

Julien Porta, son of [C]esare Porta, Co A, 18th La, Army Tenn, [C]amp 2. Central La. Apprentice or clerk; wants to learn a trade.

While the desire for state pensions and soldiers' homes dominated the lobbying efforts of the United Confederate Veterans—these issues received mention in its appeals for the unemployed as well—the crisis of general unemployment remained a persistent if often overlooked worry among veterans of the Civil War.

¹ Confederate Veterans' Employment Bureau (New Orleans) List of Applicants for Employment, LLMVC Ephemera Collection. Subgroup II, War & Military Affairs, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

² Scrapbook, Nov. 17, 1895, United Confederate Veterans Papers, Mss. 236, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.; Herman Hattaway, "The United Confederate Veterans in Louisiana" *Louisiana History* 16 (Winter 1975): 24.