

Tennessee Confederate Pension Applications

In 1891, Tennessee began granting pensions to indigent veterans of the Confederate Army who currently lived Tennessee and who faithfully executed their duties as a soldier during the Civil War. Initially, the eligibility requirements were quite stringent, but as the years progressed and fewer veterans were still living, the requirements relaxed.

Under the laws of Tennessee, each soldier had prove the following:

1. Service in the Army: Proven by officers or comrades
2. Present Disability: Proven by physician's certificate
3. Indigency: Proven by neighbors and by certificate of County Trustee
4. How the applicant got out of the army: Proven by filing parole or discharge, or in case these have been lost or destroyed, by officers or comrades who know the facts
5. Character as a Soldier or Citizen: Proven by comrades and citizens

The pension packet consists of two parts: the application and the supporting documents which address one or more of the above eligibility requirements.

- I. **APPLICATION:** The application consists of four printed pages.
 - A. Page 1: The initial page lists the applicant's name, application number, and whether accepted or rejected. It contains a transcription of the current law under which the applicant is applying. Although not always present, additional information may include the widow's application number, the applicants date of death, and additional notes made by the pension board.
 - B. Pages 2 - 3: The next two pages consist of a set of questions that must be answered by the applicant. Personal questions include: name, date and place of birth, residency, occupation, family size, and net worth. Military experience questions include what unit he served, what battles he was engaged in, was he injured in the military, did he take the oath of allegiance, etc.
 - C. Page 4: The final page consists of a certificates from the County Trustee indicating taxable property, from the applicants physician assessing his physical condition, and from two witnesses who were generally comrades who had served with the veteran.
- I. **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:** Supporting documents include all the letters and affidavits that were sent to the pension board in an effort to qualify for a pension. They include, but are not limited to, the following categories:
 - A. Correspondence between the Tennessee Board of Pension Examiners and the applicant
 1. The most common correspondence is from the applicant requesting to know the status of his application (Status Request).
 2. The board would reply to the request with a form that listed the above requirements and specified where the applicant was deficient (Status).
 - B. Correspondence between the Tennessee Board of Pension Examiners and the War Department in Washington, DC

1. The Tennessee Board of Pension Examiners would request a summary of the applicant's service records from the War Department in Washington, DC.
2. The War Department would respond with a summary of his service records, if they were able to find them. The return summary was a synopsis of what one would find in the Compiled Military Service Records available from the National Archives.

C. Certificates

1. Tax Assessment - The County Trustee wrote letter detailing the amount of taxes the applicant had been assessed.
2. Physician's Certificate - The applicant's personal physician wrote letters detailing the current physical condition of the applicant. If he had been his physician after the war, he recounted his war-time injuries and post-war condition.

D. Affidavits

1. Personal Affidavits - The applicant often submitted a personal affidavit which detailed his war record, described events that happened during the war, and/or described his personal history. These affidavits have the most information pertaining to the soldier. Unfortunately, not all applicant sent in an affidavit.
2. Comrade Affidavits - In an effort to prove that the applicant did indeed serve in the war, fellow soldiers sent in affidavits swearing that he served with the applicant. In some cases, these affidavits detail some of the events that occurred while the men were serving during the war.
3. General Letters of Support - These letters came from family members, friends, and community members attesting to the fact that they saw the applicant leave for the war and saw him after his return

Of the above requirements, proving how the applicant got out of the war was the most difficult. It had been 35+ years since the end of the Civil War. In most cases, paroles and discharge papers had long been lost or destroyed. The applicant had to rely on his memory of events and the memories of his comrades.