

The granite base of the Confederate statue references the Lost Cause of the Old South, the secession of slave states to form a separate union where slavery would remain legal and the plantation economy would survive.

## Judge wants to 'repurpose' local Confederate statue



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Published 10:27 am Wednesday, June 17, 2020

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First he was a Billy Yank. Then he was a Johnny Reb. Now, County Judge-Executive David West wants the bronze soldier on the front of the courthouse lawn to become a symbol of unity instead of division and a tribute to all who served in the Civil War, regardless of their allegiance.

Across America, statues of historic figures who represent the Lost Cause have been coming down. Just this week, the statue of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, was quietly removed from the Capitol Rotunda in Frankfort, where it had stood since 1936, and in Richmond, Virginia, the governor wants to remove the statute of Gen. Robert E. Lee from Monument Avenue after it was vandalized during racial justice protests.

In Nicholasville, rather than erase an important part of history, West wants to preserve the marker, but make it more inclusive.

"I think that instead of removing it," West said, "let's repurpose it. Instead of losing a \$100,000 statue ... let's take the Confederacy off of it. ... It's a Union soldier. Make it a tribute to all men and women of Jessamine County who served. Make it healing instead of divisive."

West said that for about a year, he has been working with a group on coming up with "appropriate wording" for a new plaque that would reference the intent of the heirs of Confederate veterans to honor the rebel soldiers, but it would also include something about the legacy of the struggle for black freedom, including the Civil War and Jim Crow eras.

What is somewhat unusual about the Jessamine County statue is that it has represented both sides in the past.

According to a 2019 article on Wikipedia, citing work by Joseph E. Brent for submissions to the Kentucky Heritage Council and the National Register of Historic Places, and other online sources, the seven-foot-tall statue, which stands atop an 11-foot granite base, was originally created in Louisville as a Union soldier. But the buyer backed out, and so the Confederate veterans group purchased it at a significant discount and had the Yankee converted into a Rebel by altering his belt buckle and knapsack to include the letters CSA for Confederate States of America.

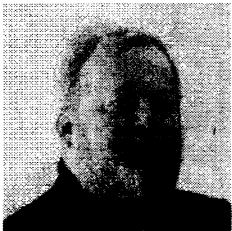
When it was erected and dedicated in 1896, there were 3,500 spectators who came to witness the occasion. The speaker was Bennett H. Young, a Jessamine County native and member of John Hunt Morgan's cavalry.

On July 17, 1997, the monument was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

It is one of three locations in Jessamine County commemorating the Civil War, along with Camp Nelson National Cemetery and Camp Nelson Civil War Heritage Park, which was one of the largest recruiting camps for African-American Union soldiers in the country.

West said he has talked individually with some of the county's magistrates, but his proposal to repurpose the Confederate statue has not yet been formally discussed by the Jessamine County Fiscal Court.

### **About Randy Patrick**



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