



Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table



November 10th 2009 Meeting #103

Dino's Restaurant at I90 & State Rt. 306 Willoughby, Ohio

Guest Speaker: Mark Miner

Topic: Tontogany's Deep Secret

Canteen at 6:00 pm

Dinner at 7:00pm

Guests are welcome

Reservations required Please call Steve Abbey

Phone 440 255 8375 e-Mail: abbeysr@yahoo.com

Mark Miner will present a power-point talk on "Tontogany's Deep Secret." He will tell us the story of George Armstrong Custer's illegitimate nephew of Tontogany, Wood County, who happens to be a distant relative of the speaker. The boy's father, Capt. Thomas Ward Custer was a two time Medal of Honor winner in the Civil War who was slaughtered at Little Big Horn with his brother, George Custer. The talk is based on Mark's article published in the "Research Review," magazine of the Little Big Horn Associates, which received the Lawrence A. Frost Award as the best article in the magazine for 2005. Mark will bring copies of the article as a handout. Mark first came upon the story of Tontogany's Secret while researching for his genealogy and regional history website: Minerd.com. Founded in 2000, Minerd.com was ranked by Family Tree Magazine in September among the nation's 10 best personal genealogy and regional history websites. Mark Miner wears 2 hats. He is the chief marketing officer for Main Bergquist (Erie's largest CPA firm with offices in Pittsburgh) and he is the founder and CEO of his own marketing firm, Mark Miner Communications, LLC, of Beaver, Pa.

Mark Miner has authored many historical articles including: "Family is Everything (Pittsburgh Quarterly, 2008); "Sarah Miner Boyd" (Illinois State Genealogy Society Bulletin, 2008); Younkin Family News Bulletin, 1937 – 1941 (2008); "Why and How to build your own Genealogy Website," (Ohio Genealogy Society News, 2003); "Al Ed Ha: Fayette County's Forgotten Mountain Poet," (Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, 1999); The 12th WV Infantry at 2nd Winchester," (The Winchester County Va. Historical Society Journal 1989).

George Armstrong Custer: Dust and Vainglory



In June of 1876 thousands of American citizens flocked to Fairmont Park in the City of Brotherly Love to view the Centennial Exposition, the very first world's fair ever held in the United States. This was a very special event for America, for the exhibition was held not only to mark the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence but also to showcase the scientific and industrial achievements of our nation. President Grant and a host of dignitaries visited the fair in the early spring when it first opened.

George Armstrong Custer was in New York City that spring to talk to a publisher about a possible book heralding his adventures in the West. He also was among the many dignitaries who stopped in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to view the fair. Attired in an exquisite black wool suite with white shirt, red tie and gold medallion pin, (a gift from Macy's), the general was the picture of sartorial splendor. Custer was a national hero, with the reputation of a fearless, if somewhat brash fighter. He possessed the uncanny ability to quickly judge his enemy's weakness and immediately take advantage of the opportunity. But on June 25th, 1876 he found himself and the 208 men of his detachment from

the 7th U.S. Cavalry surrounded by thousands of hostile Sioux, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho warriors. Custer had misjudged his enemies' strength and led his men into a fight from which they would not return.

George Armstrong Custer was born on December 5, 1839 in New Rumley, Ohio (in Harrison County) to Emanuel Henry Custer and Marie Ward Kirkpatrick. Both parents were widowed and had children from their previous marriage. The marriage of Emanuel and Marie Custer produced 5 additional children that strained the resources of the family. Emanuel was a blacksmith and could not adequately support his family. George was sent to Monroe Michigan to live with his married half sister although he was quite young. George attended the McNeely Normal School in Monroe and graduated in 1856. He secured an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point but was not a very good cadet. George Custer ranked last in the West Point class of 1861. He was actually lucky to graduate at all, for Custer had amassed a number of demerits and was scheduled for court martial when the Civil War broke out in April 1861. The Union army needed young officers and the court martial was cancelled.

Because of his low class ranking at West Point, Custer should have been assigned to mundane duties at some remote army post but George had a knack for being lucky. Custer was commissioned a second lieutenant and assigned to the 2nd U. S. Cavalry. He saw action shortly after graduation in the First Battle of Bull Run where he was a dispatch rider and delivered messages for General Irvin McDowell to General Winfield Scott. After the bitter Union defeat at Bull Run, Custer was assigned to the 5th U. S. Cavalry and served on the staff of General George McClellan during the Peninsula Campaign in the spring of 1862. Custer was permitted to conduct a cavalry raid against Confederate positions north of the Chickahominy River and captured 50 enemy prisoners. McClellan was impressed with Custer's bravery and had him promoted to Captain.

In August of 1862, the Army of the Potomac was removed from the Virginia Peninsula and President Lincoln removed General McClellan from command. Custer was left temporarily without an assignment until he joined the staff of Major General Alfred Pleasonton. Pleasonton was impressed with Custer's fearless style and wanted him on his staff.

In the summer of 1862, Custer went on leave and returned home to Monroe, Michigan where he met Elizabeth Clift Bacon. Elizabeth was the lovely young daughter of District Judge Daniel Bacon. Elizabeth was not at first all that impressed with the brash, George Armstrong Custer. Judge Bacon did not approve of the courtship of his daughter by Captain Custer. The Judge did not want his daughter to marry the son of a blacksmith. Later when Custer was promoted to brigadier general, the judge was able to overlook Custer's lowly birthright.



George Custer reclining in the lower right. Library of Congress photograph

The Union cavalry developed into an effective fighting force under Alfred Pleasonton and George Armstrong Custer's star was also on the rise. Custer distinguished himself at the Battle of Brandy Station where the Union Cavalry stood toe to toe with J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate Cavalry. Brandy Station may have been a tactical draw in terms of who actually won, but the Union Cavalry was now every bit the equal of the Confederate Cavalry. George Custer was promoted to brigadier general and given command of the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Cavalry Division under Judson Kilpatrick.

Late in the afternoon of July 3rd, 1863 a Union Cavalry division commanded by General David Gregg confronted J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry in the pasture land east of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Stuart wanted to "make amends" for his absence during the first two days of the battle and also for leaving General Lee without cavalry support. Stuart's goal



George and Elizabeth Custer Library of Congress photograph

was to out flank The Army of the Potomac and disrupt its supply and communications. Stuart's attack was directed at the Union right and was to be accomplished in concert with the Pickett- Pettigrew assault against Cemetery Ridge. George Custer's 2nd Brigade of cavalry regiments from Michigan. He led his Michigan "Wolverine" regiments against Stuart's Confederate cavalry. The Michigan regiments under Custer helped stop Stuart's attack but Custer's brigade sustained many casualties.

On February 9, 1864 George Armstrong Custer married Elizabeth Clift Bacon at the First Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Michigan. The local newspaper "The Monroe Commercial" reported that every pew and every possible inch of standing room only space in the church was filled to capacity. Judge Daniel Bacon stated that "it was the most beautiful wedding ever held in the state." A reception was held in the Judge's house from 7pm until 10pm and the newlyweds received many wonderful gifts. The 1st Vermont Cavalry sent a silver tea set while the 7th U.S. Cavalry sent a plain silver set. The entire wedding party departed by train for Washington, D. C. and accompanied the

newlyweds as far as Cleveland, Ohio.

On March 2nd, 1864 President Lincoln appointed Ulysses S. Grant, General –in-Chief of all the Union armies. General Grant and General William Tecumseh Sherman had developed a battle plan to destroy the Confederacy’s ability to wage war and to continue to supply its armies. Grant reassigned General Phillip Sheridan to the Army of the Potomac to command the newly created Union Cavalry Corps. Sheridan got into a dispute with General George Gordon Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac on how the Union Cavalry was to be used.

Meade wanted the cavalry to screen the army’s movements and protect the supply trains. Sheridan wanted to use his cavalry to conduct large scale independent assaults against Confederate positions. Sheridan went to Grant and Grant sided with Sheridan. On May 9th, 1864 Sheridan led the Union cavalry on a large raid to the outer defenses of Richmond, Virginia. The Union cavalry raid was less than successful but George Custer was promoted to division command and his unit fought at Yellow Tavern where J.E.B. Stuart was mortally wounded. Custer participated in Grant’s Overland Campaign and a number of battles including the Battle of Trevilian Station where his personal baggage was taken by the Confederates. Custer’s division fought in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864, including Third Winchester and helped defeat Jubal Early at the Battle of Cedar Creek. Custer’s forces rejoined the Army of the Potomac at Petersburg, Virginia. On March 13, 1865 George Custer was promoted to the temporary rank of brevet major general. In the early spring of 1865 Custer’s division helped defeat Lee’s retreating forces at Five Forks. George Custer was present at signing of Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House. General Sheridan purchased the table that was used for signing the documents of surrender and gave it to George and Libby Custer as a wedding gift.



General Sheridan and staff Custer is on the right

After the Civil War George Custer was assigned to the 5th U.S. Cavalry and went on extended leave. He visited New York City and tried to get a one year leave of absence from the U.S. army to accept the job of adjutant of the Mexican Army. His request was denied. In 1867 he was assigned to the 7th U.S. Cavalry located at Fort Riley, Kansas. General Sheridan also got him appointed brevet major general. The 1873 Custer’s detachment was sent to protect the work crews of the Northern Pacific Railroad in Dakota Territory. Gold was discovered in the Black Hills and fortune seekers invaded the sacred tribal lands of the Sioux.

At first President Grant tried to enforce the Treaty of Fort Laramie that forever protect the sacred Black Hills from encroachment by white settlers. However, Grant was subjected to a great deal of pressure from mining companies and eastern bankers to change his mind. The President relented and signed an order requiring that all Indians in the Dakota territory move to the reservations by January 31, 1876, or be considered hostile. President Grant then ordered 3 detachments of Federal Cavalry into the Dakota Territory to enforce the order.

In the spring of 1876, George Custer was ordered to Washington, D.C. and testified before the Congressional Committee on Indian Affairs. President Grant’s brother Orville was implicated in corruption while supplying food and supplies to the Indians. Members of Grant’s administration felt that Custer had betrayed them and perjured himself before Congress. President Grant was embarrassed by these disclosures. The President had Custer removed from command. Once again General Phil Sheridan convinced Grant that he needed Custer to help him deal with the Indian problem. Custer was restored to command but President Grant and the Republican administration regarded Custer as a man not to be trusted.

The death of George Armstrong Custer and the 208 men of his 7th U.S. Cavalry detachment created a legend and symbol for American heroism and valor. Elizabeth Custer devoted the rest of her life to enforcing the image of her late husband as a true American hero. She published three books that chronicled his achievements during the Civil War and his efforts to bring civilization to what she saw as the savage native peoples of the American frontier. Hatred of the Indian came to fruition in the blood stained snow at Wounded Knee on December 29th, 1890, when hundreds of Lakota Sioux women and children were slaughtered in retribution for “Custer’s Last Stand.”

CIVIL WAR MINUTES by Franco M. Sperrazzo Special Events Coordinator

It was good to see **Robert Tribby, Herb Jacobs, Dr. Daniel Cudnik, Dr. Phillip Price** and **Rebecca Stabile** among 38 members and 4 guests in attendance at our October 13th meeting. **Dr. Robert Stabile** gave one of our more thought provoking, emotional talks on a subject that always stirs controversy, "The Cause was Just." By examining the politics and climate of the country leading up to 1860, **Bob** was able to present strong views why both North and South would hold their ground in believing their way of life was right. **Dr. Stabile** also compared how the nation would stand as one or be divided into 2 independent nations. After the war our entire country suffered tremendously from economic and sociological issues during the reconstruction period through the late 1870's. Clearly **Bob** argued strongly for the devastated South that struggled for decades to re-establish an identity. We are not surprised but honored to have a special speaker and published scholar like **Dr. Robert Stabile** in our membership.

WRHS: JET Tirpak, Norty London, President A. Byrne, Theo Karle and **Franco** attended the first week opening of the exhibit "Do You Know Your Lincoln" at **Western Reserve Historical Society**. Our organization will enjoy exploring this museum and the programs it offers through the 150th anniversary celebration of **The Civil War**.

Abraham Lincoln: Try this easier quiz on our beloved 16th President "**Honest Abe**." I will give the answers at our November 10th meeting.

- 1) If Lincoln had run as a real "favorite son" candidate for the Presidency in 1860, which state would have claimed him as its own?
- 2) What was Lincoln's occupation?
- 3) Before he was a Republican, to what major political party did Lincoln belong?
- 4) How many children did Abraham and Mary Lincoln have?
- 5) Some assume Lincoln is buried beneath the Lincoln Memorial, though that is not true. Where is Lincoln Buried?
- 6) When Lincoln visited Cleveland in 1861, where did he stay?
- 7) Lincoln first made his appearance on the penny in 1909. Who was on the penny when Lincoln was President?
- 8) Lincoln towered over nearly all he met. How tall was he?

Holiday Meeting: We are working on final details regarding the December 8th holiday meeting. We will have a pianist, **Bryan Bird** playing musical favorites of jazz, standard classics and show tunes. Our speaker will be an upbeat gifted author specializing in Presidents and First Ladies, **Richard L. McElroy**.

Book Raffle: Besides Civil War and American History, we would like to expand our topics of interest in books for the December holiday gathering to accommodate our guests. Please bring in books that you wish to donate for the Ladies' night book raffle on subjects that will appeal to our better half!

Future Field Trips: The executive committee met after our October 13th meeting. Certain changes and considerations need to take place to keep our future journeys cost effective. We are in capable hands with **Norty London** heading up the future **Civil War Sites** committee. A typed list was passed out by well traveled member **Brian Kowell**. At least a half dozen places are being considered. Any ideas should be presented to the committee. I will report the findings over the Winter months.

November 10th, Meeting: Our speaker is traveling due east of here from Pittsburgh named **Mark Minor**. A native son of that area and Steelers fan is **John Sandy**. He will inform us of **Mr. Minor's** background and topic of discussion.

Thanksgiving In The Civil War

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battle-field, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the

Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington this third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

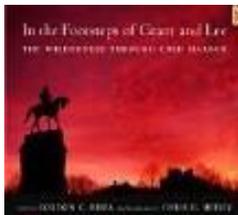
CIVIL WAR THANKSGIVING



THANKSGIVING IN IRAQ



Book Review by Tom Horvath



In the Footsteps of Grant and Lee by Gordon C. Rhea and Chris E. Heisey

Beauty is rarely associated with the battles of the Civil War. There is sometimes pageantry, as with a massed, orderly charge of thousands of men, or a military review. But war is never beautiful. Yet many of the photos that Chris Heisey took on and around the battlefields of the Overland Campaign are, indeed, beautiful. They are the centerpiece of this volume.

The idea for the volume apparently came from Gordon Rhea, who wrote the text. The text is actually a condensation of his four volumes covering the Overland Campaign from the Wilderness to Cold Harbor and the beginnings of the siege of Petersburg. What make this volume different from a Readers Digest version of the same material are the photographs.

Chris Heisey, the co-author of this volume, is a photographer. Mr. Heisey's objective was to visit the battlefields of the Overland Campaign and capture images that showed them as they are now. He spent more than a year doing it, and did it very well. The Rapidan, Pamunkey, North Anna, and Mattaponi rivers, ice on the Po, the trees of the Wilderness, fog on the Harris family farm, the Massaponax Church near Spotsylvania Court House, lightning at Ox Ford on the North Anna River – all are subjects of his camera and all show a beauty that belies the horror and carnage that took place in those same places some 150 years ago. The carnage and military life are illustrated by contemporary photographs and drawings, adding a grit and reality that counterpoint the beauty of the modern photographs.

That being said, I read the book to increase my knowledge of the Overland Campaign, and that knowledge comes primarily from the text. I was anticipating a volume about the same length as Mr. Rhea's other books but covering the entire campaign rather than a portion of it. Instead, this volume is only 125 pages long. It covers the entire campaign but, obviously, not at much depth.

Overall, this is a well-written, very high level view of the Overland Campaign, but it lacks the detail and anecdotes that provided the flavor of the earlier volumes. Enough maps, identical to those used in the detailed volumes, are included to illustrate troop movements. The photos are very striking and add another dimension to the text. In a limited way, this could be used as a guide – not a guidebook – to the battlefield parks. Serious students of the campaign, even semi-serious students, will want much more detail, but someone new to the campaign could find it an interesting introduction.

The book was published in 2007. It includes an order of battle and a brief section of notes that lists source volumes and refers the reader to Mr. Rhea's other volumes for detailed references.

Amazon has the hardcover available for \$30.36. The ClevNet system has two copies. The Mentor Library does not own a copy,

References for Dust and Vainglory

Wert, Jeffrey D. (1996) *Custer, The Life of George Armstrong Custer*, N.Y. Simon & Schuster

Ambrose, Stephen E. (1975) *Crazy Horse and Custer, The Parallel Lives of The American Warriors*. N.Y. Anchor Books.

Connell, Evan S. (1984) *Son of the Morning Star*, San Francisco, California. North Point Press.

Utley, Robert M. (2001) *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier*.

The George Armstrong Custer Collection of the Monroe, Michigan Library

Do You Remember

I know that many of you have seen or read some version of the following coincidences as they relate to Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. However, as I paused to reflect on the meaning of these coincidences I do remember vividly how I felt when I first received word of President Kennedy's assassination. Perhaps these two former Presidents are linked by some generational oddities too complex for me to fathom? Maybe there is a linkage between these two presidents that some of you have figured out? In any event I'm interested in your response.

If we were to measure these coincidences on some type of "Richter Scale" I think they would be off the chart!

Lincoln was elected President in 1860, Kennedy was elected in 1960

Both were slain on a Friday, from behind, in the head, and in the presence of their wives

Both lost children through death while in the White House

Both were succeeded by Southern Democrats named Johnson

Andrew Johnson was born in 1808, Lyndon Johnson was born in 1908

John Wilkes Booth was born in 1839, Lee Harvey Oswald was born in 1939

Booth shot Lincoln in a theater and ran to a warehouse. Oswald shot Kennedy from a warehouse and ran to a theater.

Lincoln's secretary was named Kennedy. Kennedy's secretary was named Lincoln.

Of this I am sure:

Each of us is old enough to remember that fateful day when Kennedy was slain, can recall exactly where we were at that moment.

Each of us can remember exactly what we were doing.

Each of us can remember exactly how we felt as witnesses to this shocking historical event!

Yes, it is etched in our minds forever!

Joe Tirpak, Founder

November, 2009

The Courier is the monthly newsletter of the Northeast Ohio Civil War Round Table.

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