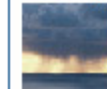




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September 30, 2002

Book chronicles flamboyant life of Gen. George Armstrong Custer

Have a question about the history of the Grand Traverse region? Call Larry Wakefield at 231-946-8309 or mail him at 12047 S. Elk Run, Apt. N105, Traverse City, MI 49684.

It's said that more books and articles have been written about General George Armstrong Custer than any other American except Abraham Lincoln.

One of the most recent (1996) is a well-written, well-researched book by Civil War historian Jeffrey D. Wert. It covers Custer's meteoric career from his birth in 1839 to the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. The two words that best describe Custer are flamboyant and fearless. Both led to his untimely end.

The following passage from Wert's book appears on pages 167-168:

"The next day, July 11 (1864) Custer requested a twenty-day furlough because of illness, 'remittent fever and diarrhea,' and it was granted. He left for Washington on the thirteenth, moving James Kidd to write home that 'I could not imagine a greater disaster to our brigade if he does not return before we take the field again.' Gathering up Libbie and luggage, the couple entrained for Michigan, spending the next two weeks with family in Monroe and Traverse City. They were back in the capitol by the twenty-ninth, and Custer reported for duty on the thirtieth."

The furlough closely followed the bloody two-day cavalry battle of Trevillian Station, where Custer's Michigan Brigade suffered severe casualties.

Monroe, Mich., was Elizabeth "Libbie" Bacon's birthplace and where Custer, after a long courtship, married her on Feb. 9, 1864. Her father, Daniel S. Bacon, was one of Monroe's distinguished citizens, a circuit court judge and Michigan state senator. Over the years, the Bacon family had spent considerable time in Traverse City, where Judge Bacon had family ties and business interests; his brother Andrew and family lived there.

On July 22, 1864, the Grand Traverse Herald ran the following paragraph:

"Hon. Daniel S. Bacon of Monroe has been appointed Administrator of the Estate of the late Albert W. Bacon, and is now in town giving his personal attention to the matter, and is placing the Estate in proper shape for adjudication and settlement."

There is no mention of Custer and Libbie, but undoubtedly it was also the occasion for their visit to Traverse City that Wert refers to in his book.

Larry Wakefield, a 60-year resident of Traverse City, is the author of 17 books on Michigan history. His column appears every other Monday in the Record-Eagle.



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