

Tommy of Tontogany

The
Little-Known Son of

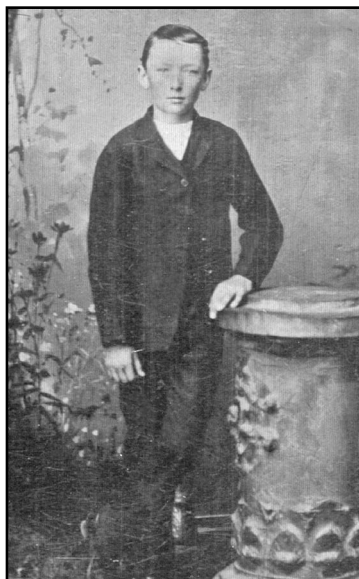
Thomas Ward Custer



By Mark A. Miner

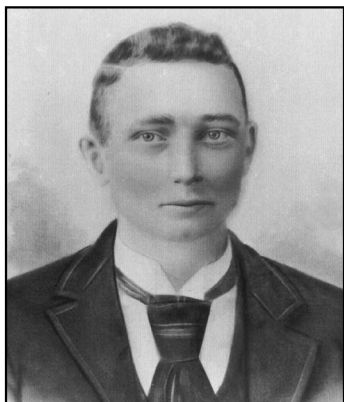
The village of Tontogany, Ohio, once home to General George Armstrong Custer's parents, harbored a deep family secret for many years. Everyone knew it, but the topic was not publicly discussed. When it was forced into the open, in a newspaper, the facts were downplayed to an almost ridiculous extent. *(See page 47 for more more photos on the old homestead.)*

Tontogany's hush-hush secret was a boy, Thomas C. "Tommy" Custer, born out of wedlock and raised by his mother's parents. He had the fate of being the son of a local farm girl, Rebecca Miner, and a well-known father, two-time Medal



**Thomas C. "Tommy" Custer
as a Boy in Tontogany, Ohio**

(Courtesy: Miner.com Archives)



**Thomas C. Custer as a
Young Man**

(Courtesy: Minerd.com Archives)

of Honor recipient Capt. Thomas Ward Custer. Tommy probably was conceived when his father was home on military leave, and was born about six years after the end of the Civil War. Just a boy when his famous father was killed at Little Bighorn, Tommy presumably had no memory of the man.

Tommy's story went public only upon his own untimely death in 1896. In printing it, the editor of the *Wood County Sentinel*, perhaps worried that a detailed obituary would upset the delicate anonymity that the story enjoyed, buried the material. Tommy's relationship to his famous father was treated as an afterthought. It appeared on an inside page in the Aug. 7, 1896 issue, below items about John Miller's barn fire in West Millgrove and Irv M. Wiggins' new home in Indianapolis.

Nephew of Gen. Custer Dead.

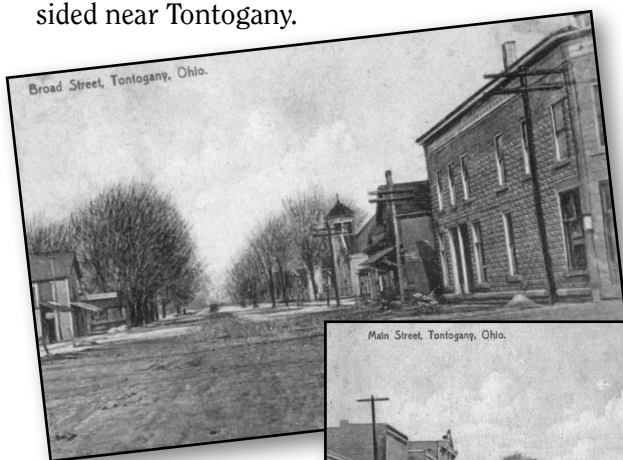
Saturday evening occurred the death Tom Custer, at his home at Tontogany, from an attack of typhoid fever. Deceased was aged 30 years, and leaves a wife. He was a nephew of General Custer, of Indian fighting fame. The funeral was held on Monday. Tom Custer, father of the deceased, was also killed at the Battle of the Big Horn, where Gen. Custer was slain.¹

Tommy's identity only became more widely known as a result of Beverly (Hansen) Miner's genealogical research in the mid-1980s, coinciding with research for Carl F. Day's biography, *Tom Custer: Ride to Glory*. Tommy's existence is found in no history books of Wood County or of northwest Ohio and certainly not in any biographies of the General.

The irony is that Tommy and his wife produced no children, and thus have no direct offspring living today as a legacy. It was his elderly Miner/Miner cousins who related the wisps of stories they remembered from long ago.

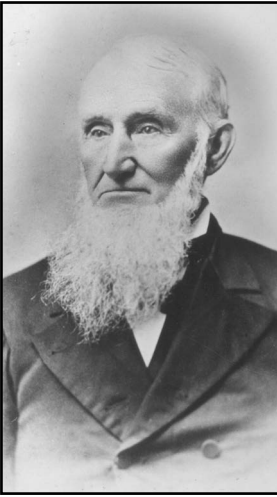
Tommy's saga spans three generations of close relationships between the Custer and Miner-Miner families. It harks back to the villages of New Rumley and Scio, Harrison County in eastern Ohio in the early 1800s, when both sets of Tommy's grandparents lived there as neighbors—Samuel and Susanna (Hueston) Miner and Emanuel H. and Maria (Ward) Custer. The story continued as both clans migrated in the mid-1800s as pioneers of the flat, rich-soil farm fields of Tontogany, in northwest Ohio. There, they continued to be neighbors and transacted business together, leading to the fateful liaison that produced Tommy.

Tommy's life brings into sharper focus the misty, hazy years between 1856 and 1887 when the Custers and their adult children resided near Tontogany.



(Top and Middle):
Old Postcards
Tontogany, Ohio.

(Bottom Left)
This view the Tontogany depot
of the Cincinnati, Hamilton &
Dayton (CH&D) Railroad.
(Courtesy: Miner.com Archives)



**Thomas C.
Custer's
Paternal
Grandparents,
Emanuel and
Maria (Ward)
Custer**

*(Courtesy of
the Little
Bighorn
Battlefield
National
Monument/
National Park
Service)*

The Quiet, Early Days in Harrison County

Tommy Custer's maternal grandfather, Samuel Minerd was born near Scio, Harrison County, Ohio, the son of John and Mary Magdalena (Kohl) Minard Sr. Like his father and brothers, Samuel was a farmer. In 1839, in Harrison County, Samuel married Susanna Hueston, and they began to raise a family.

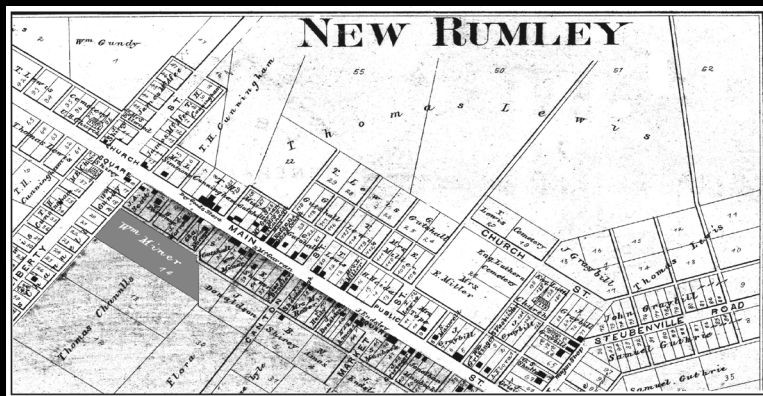
The Couple who Raised Thomas C. Custer *(Courtesy: Minerd.com Archives)*

Seen here are his grandparents, Samuel and Susanna (Hueston) Minerd, longtime neighbors and friends of the Emanuel Custers in both Harrison and Wood Counties, Ohio.



Among their neighbors in the 1830s and 1840s was the family of Emanuel H. and Maria (Kirkpatrick) Custer and young children, including George Armstrong “Autie” Custer and Thomas Ward Custer.

The Custers and Minerds knew each other. Emanuel was a blacksmith and justice of the peace and would have been intimately familiar with the details of most every household’s business and personal affairs. Their house in New Rumley was just a few dwellings away from Samuel’s nephew William Miner. As well, Emanuel is known to have performed the 1841 wedding ceremony of Samuel’s nephew John William Miner to Catharine Gillespie.



1875 Atlas of New Rumley

This much-published 1875 atlas of New Rumley shows the tract owned by Samuel Miner’s nephew (*in white on solid gray*). (Courtesy Puskarich Public Library, Cadiz, Ohio)

The Migration to Tontogany

In about 1846, the Minerds migrated to Tontogany. They no doubt were attracted to the flat, rich farmland known as the “Black Swamp”—so named because in an early day, it would not drain, leading to exceptionally fertile earth. On Sept. 29, 1846, Samuel purchased 40 acres there from Joseph Jeffries.²

The Custers made their move to Tontogany, perhaps as early as 1856 but certainly for good by April 1860. Emanuel and his son Nevin acquired several tracts, including a farm adjacent to the Minerds’. In a twist, Thomas W. Custer only lived on the farm for a short time before his Army enlistment in September 1861.



Nevin and Ann Custer

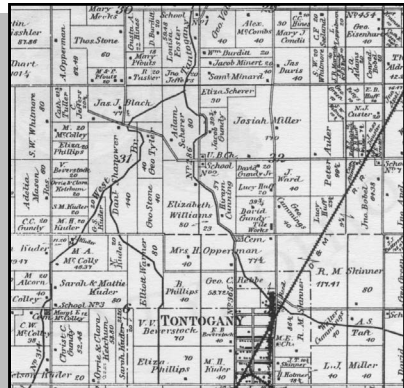
*(Courtesy of the Little Bighorn
Battlefield National Monument/
National Park Service)*

Tommy's Mother, Rebecca

Tommy's mother, Rebecca (Minerd) Behme Kearns was born on June 24, 1850 near Tontogany, the youngest of six children. She and the younger Custers attended school under the supervision of teacher Capt. Luther Black. Another teacher, Mrs. George W. Carpenter, once said that she:

...taught school in the Custer district two or three consecutive terms. Emmanuel H. Custer, his wife and family lived on the bank of the creek at the place in Wood County you speak of. Boston Custer and Margaret Custer, the youngest two children of the

family, went to school to me. As I remember, I had some 40 pupils, and the school house stood across the creek from the home, near the old cemetery.³



(Upper Left): 1871 Map of Wood County

Here are the adjacent Custer and Minerd farms, just east of Tontogany Creek. The 40-acre farm marked "N.J. Custer" was owned by Nevin Custer; the farm marked "S. Miner" belonged to Samuel Minerd; and the 40-acre tract marked "Miner & Burdett" was co-owned by Samuel's son Jacob. The primary Custer farm was south and west of the Minerd farm. *(From the Wood County District Public Library)*

(Upper Right): Griffing Gordon's 1886 Atlas of Wood County, OH, shows the proximity of the Nevin Custer and Samuel Minerd farms. *(Courtesy: Wood County District Public Library)*



**All three
photos on
this page
show
Thomas C.
Custer's
Mother, Rebecca
(Minerd)
Behme-Kearns.**

*(Courtesy: Miner.com
Archives)*



A map of Wood County (*See above, page 24.*) published in 1871 displays the Custer and Minerds farms side by side, just east of Tontogany Creek. The primary Custer farm was south and west of the Minerds farm.⁴

After the outbreak of the Civil War, Thomas W. Custer enlisted in the 21st Ohio Infantry. He was the first U.S. soldier in history to win two medals of honor for capturing enemy flags at Namozine Church and Sailor's Creek. After the war's end, Tom continued serving in the Army with the 1st U.S. Infantry and the 7th U.S. Cavalry, primarily in Kansas during the Indian Wars. The General wrote of their shared western experiences in his popular book, *My Life on the Plains*.

In 1867, Emanuel and his son Nevin Custer sold a 20-acre parcel of their farm to the Minerds, about the time that Emanuel was preparing to move to Monroe, Michigan. Nevin continued to own his 40-acre Tontogany farm for several more years, and was the last Custer to reside there.

Among other times, Tom is known to have been granted leaves of absence from December 1869 to March 1870 and again in February 1871.⁵ It is likely that during one or more of these leaves, Tom returned to his brother Nevin's home in Tontogany and became intimate with Rebecca Minerds.

From Flower to Flower

Famous, charming and sporting a battle scar, the bachelor Thomas was popular with women. In the words of his famous sister in law, Libbie, he "honored and liked women extremely." She wrote this in her 1885 book, *Boots and Saddles or Life in Dakota with General Custer*, and went on to say:

Colonel Tom used to pay visits of an unconscionable length to ladies of the garrison, and no amount of teasing on his brother's part would induce him to shorten them. [Tom] never knew, when he started to go home from these visits, but that he would find on the young lady's door-mat his trunk, portmanteau, and satchel—this as a little hint from the general that he was overtaxing the lady's patience.⁶

In Libbie's book, *Tenting on the Plains*, she alluded to Tom "jumping from 'flower to flower.'" ⁷

Tommy's Life

At his birth circa 1871, Tommy was named "Thomas C. Custer," with his middle name not known. He did not receive the Minerd name, which would have been a more common practice for children born out of wedlock. Says Day's book, "In a time when such activity carried a social stigma, Rebecca very conspicuously showed no hesitation of naming the boy's father."⁸

The responsibility of raising the child fell to her parents. The federal census for 1880 shows nine-year-old grandson "Thomas Custer" in the Minerd household. The census indicates that Tommy had attended school within the year and that both parents had been born in Ohio.⁹

FEDERAL CENSUS 1880		CUSTER		MINERT		BANKS		BANKS		BANKS		BANKS		BANKS		BANKS		BANKS	
Minert, Samuel	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Susan	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Rebecca	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Minert, Jacob	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Louisa	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Edith	W 36	63	Ohio	1	1	Paranewy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

1880 Federal Census of Wood County

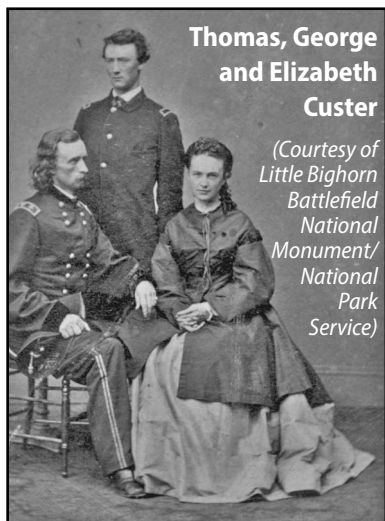
This shows a 9-year-old "Grandchild" Thomas Custer residing in the household of Samuel and Susan Minert (Minerd). (Courtesy: Minerd.com Archives)

Custer experts have noted the close facial resemblance between son and father, as seen in old photographs. Day's *Tom Custer* says that Tommy bore "more than a passing resemblance to the Custer clan."¹⁰ (See also photo of the three Custers, following page.)

There is no evidence that the Custers ever acknowledged Tommy's existence. But piercing questions remain. Given the longtime friendship between the boy's grandfathers, and



(Above): Thomas Ward Custer
(Courtesy of the Denver Public Library)



**Thomas, George
and Elizabeth
Custer**

*(Courtesy of
Little Bighorn
Battlefield
National
Monument/
National
Park
Service)*

the proximity of their farms, the Custers had to have known of the boy. How would Emanuel, who was religious, had strong political instincts, and understood that his soldier-son would not take responsibility, have responded? Did he make a private arrangement with the Miners for the boy's upkeep?

When Thomas Custer wrote a will in 1873, in Monroe, Michigan, he did not name the son, and left everything to a fiancée and to his mother. In Thomas' Civil War pen-

sion papers, the boy is not identified in any way.¹¹

The whereabouts of Rebecca Minerd during these critical years are unknown. By 1876, she had married Nathaniel Arthur Behme (1851–1914). They produced three children—Fred Behme, Clara (Behme) Jensen Young and Samuel Behme. In 1890, Rebecca and Nathaniel resided together in Bowling Green. In the 1890s, they migrated to south of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Many family portraits of the Behmes were taken in Minnesota. Later still, they moved to Iowa.

Penetrating Questions

Tommy's grandmother Maria Custer, a warm, loving woman, never got over the heartbreak of Little Bighorn. What would have been her emotional urge to reach



Rebecca's First Marriage

Rebecca (Minerd) Behme Kearns with the children from her first marriage, left to right: Samuel, Fred and Clara.

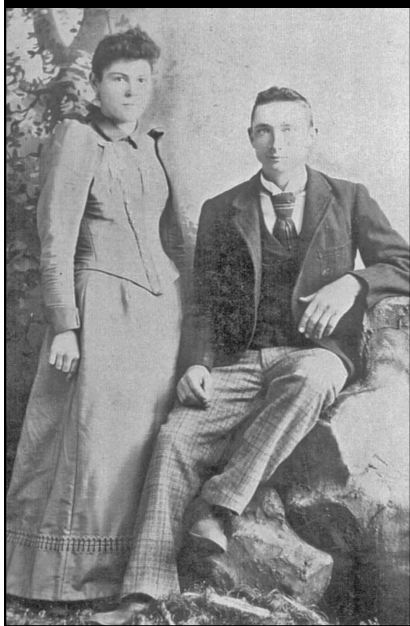
(Courtesy: Minerd.com Archives)

out and connect—especially when the boy looked so much like his dead father?

Sadly, Maria passed away in Monroe on Jan. 14, 1882. The *Sentinel* said in a one-paragraph story that “She used to be a resident of this county, living a mile north of Tontogany. She is said never to have fully recovered from the shock caused by the butchery of her two sons by the Indians in the Bighorn fight.”¹²

A decade later, on Feb. 11, 1892, Tommy married his longtime neighbor, Addie Viola Benn (1876–1933). The Rev. George R. Fisher

Thomas C. and Addie Viola (Benn) Custer They pose here, perhaps on their wedding day.
(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)



performed the ceremony. The farm where she had grown up was along the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad and just 200 feet from Nevin J. Custer’s tract.

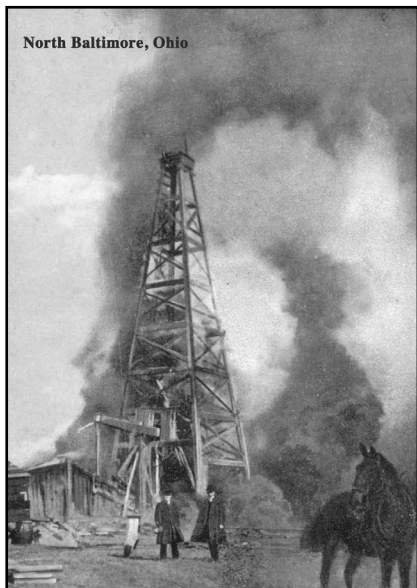
Later in the same year Tommy and Addie were married, Emanuel Custer died in Michigan on Nov. 27, 1892. The news was covered in the *Wood County Sentinel*, but Tommy was not mentioned. The *Sentinel*’s article began:

The death of Emanuel Custar [sic], the father of Gen. Geo. A. Custar, at Parsons, Michigan, last week, reminds the SENTINEL a bit of history not generally known to the people of Wood County. Emanuel Custar and family lived for ten years, from 1856

to 1866, in Washington township, Wood county, on what is now the Armstrong farm one mile north of Tontogany.¹³

Tommy and Addie resided near Tontogany. He was employed as an equipment operator in local oilfields. Petroleum had been

North Baltimore, Ohio



Typical Oil Pumping Operation in Wood County, Ohio

Thomas C. Custer would have been very familiar with this scene.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

Socially, Tommy was a member of the John B. Creps Camp, Tontogany, Sons of Veterans No. 61, Division of Ohio. The S. of V. was founded in about 1881 by the Grand Army of the Republic. Any man could join who could prove ancestry to a GAR member, or to an eligible veteran. Tommy's membership proves that his father's identity was known, that Tommy knew this fact, and that the truth was widely and favorably accepted.

Sadly, Tommy's grandmother Susanna MinerD died on May 28, 1893. The specifics are not known. The

discovered there in 1885. Unfortunately, the oil "had intractable quality problems that threatened to destroy its value," writes Ron Chernow in *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller Sr.* "[Its] high sulfur content corroded machinery and gave off a deadly smell."¹⁴

The *Commemorative Historical and Biographical Record of Wood County* states that in the year 1895 alone, there were nearly 1,800 new wells in operation in the county: "[T]he driller was at work day and night, and derricks appeared everywhere..."¹⁵



Insignia of the Sons of Veterans

Thomas C. Custer was a member.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

Sentinel simply reported: "Mrs. S. Miner, north of Tontogany, aged about 80 years, died Sunday, and was buried Tuesday. She was grandmother of Mrs. Thomas Farmer, of [Bowling Green]." ¹⁶ This is an excellent example of how Tommy's privacy was protected, as he also could have been named in print as a surviving grandson.

An Untimely Death

During the summer of 1896, Tommy contracted a deadly case of typhoid fever. Finally, on Aug. 1, 1896, he passed away at the age of about 25. The funeral was held at the Presbyterian Church. The remains are believed to have been interred in the Union Hill Cemetery. His grave was not marked.

His obituary was printed in the daily and weekly editions of the *Sentinel*. Several days later, the *Sentinel* reported: "The funeral of Thomas Custer was held on Monday... Mr. Custer was a very estimable young man with a large circle of friends, who deeply sympathize with his young widow in her sad bereavement." ¹⁷

Nephew of Gen. Custer Dead.

Saturday evening occurred the death Tom Custer, at his home at Tontogany, from an attack of typhoid fever. Deceased was aged 30 years, and leaves a wife. He was a nephew of General Custer, of Indian fighting fame. The funeral was held on Monday Tom Custer, father of the deceased, was also killed at the Battle of the Big Horn, where Gen. Custer was slain.

Thomas C. Custer's Obituary in the Aug. 6, 1896 edition of the Wood County Sentinel.

(Courtesy: Wood County District Public Lib.)

The S. of V. published a resolution (*See following page.*) in the Aug. 7, 1896 edition of the *Sentinel*. It was headlined "On the Death of T. C. Custer" and signed by L.A. McCombs, J.E. Phillips and R.W. Johnson:

Resolved, That the sudden removal of such a life from among us leaves a vacancy and a shadow that will be deeply felt by all the members of our order and a loss to the community and public.

Resolved, That with deep sympathy with the bereaved widow and relatives of the deceased we express our hope that even so great loss to us may be overruled by him who doeth all things well." ¹⁸

Tommy's mother was not in Tontogany at the time. Years later, far away and ridden with guilt, she wrote to a sister of her regret of having not "come to see my dear boy when he was on his death

bed. My heart aches to come home & see you all & my dear old father & the graves of my dear boy & my mother.”¹⁹

Rebecca became obsessed with the idea of communicating with her dead son through séances. In 1897, she wrote:

Grama & Tomie both have spoken to me through a medium in spiritual circles... Well Tomie came & stood behind me. I could feel his presence near me, & the medium said he was standing with his hand on my shoulder, that it was a young man & a relative of mine. Then she said he is going now up a ladder. He must [have] been in some kind of business he had to climb up. Now she says he is coming down again. Now she says he has a package in his hand & throws it in your lap. I felt it drop in my lap plain as could be. She says he has some papers or a package that he wants you to have that you never got. & for me to try & find out of friends if they knew what it was.²⁰

Three years after Tommy's death, Rebecca wrote to the sister, asking for the address of Tommy's widow, saying “I want to write to her in regards to Tomie. I have something I want to ask her. Please do not forget it & write soon.”²¹

On the Death of T. C. Custer.

Resolutions on the death of Thomas C. Custer in behalf of John B. Creps camp, Tontogany, S. of V. No. 61, division of Ohio:

Whereas, the great supreme ruler of the universe has in his infinite wisdom removed from among us our worthy brother, Thomas C. Custer, and whereas, the long and intimate relation held with him in the discharge of his duties in our order makes it eminently befitting to record our appreciation of him,

Therefore, be it resolved, that the wisdom and ability which he has exercised in our order will be held in grateful remembrance.

Resolved, That the sudden removal of such a life from among us leaves a vacancy and a shadow that will be deeply felt by all the members of our order and a loss to the community and public.

Resolved, That with deep sympathy with the bereaved widow and relatives of the deceased we express our hope that even so great loss to us may be overruled for good by him who doeth all things well.

Resolved, That our charter be draped for 30 days and a copy of these resolutions be presented to the bereaved widow and spread upon the records of the camp and printed in the county paper.

L. A. McCOMBS,
J. E. PHILLIPS,
R. W. JOHNSON,
Committee.

A Resolution

Thomas C. Custer's friends in the Sons of Veterans published this resolution in the Bowling Green Daily Sentinel on Aug. 7, 1896, just a few days after his death.

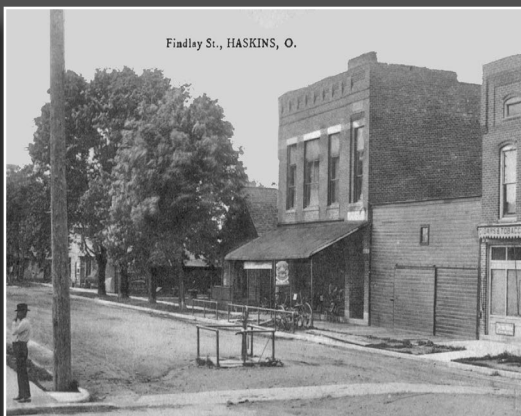
(Courtesy: Wood County District Public Library)



Composite Portrait of Addie and Thomas C. Custer This was possibly made after his death. *(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)*



(Left): Thomas C. Custer's Widow, Addie (Benn) Custer
(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)



Postcard View of Haskins, Ohio
Addie (Benn) Custer lived there after Tommy's death.
(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

The Aftermath

The General's widow Libbie worked diligently to preserve the memory of her dead hero-husband and the adventuring brother-in-law she adored. She aggressively fought a propaganda war with journalists and authors who published negative content. Shirley Leckie, in *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth*, wrote, "Her perception of who her husband was and what his life and death meant, shaped and colored public opinion until she died. By then, more than half a century had passed, and, and as she intended, 'tradition and history' had become 'so mingled' that scholars are still untangling the skeins today."²²

By about 1898, Rebecca and Nathaniel had separated. In her own words:

[Son] Fred could not get much work & the old man did not try. I had a good place in a Tailor shop & made from 12 to 15 a week & he did not even try to get me wood. I had to by coal to roast his shins. His brother Jule told him he could have his team & all the wood if he would haul it & cut it but that was too hard work to go about nine miles to get it but it was not too much for me to wade in the snow up to my knees to work in the winter.²³

Rebecca made the decision to push further west to Washington State, while their children initially remained with Nathaniel in Iowa. Once on the Pacific Northwest, she sent a letter home, saying:

I do not know if we will go to Seattle to live or live here. Will decide when Clara gets here. We are getting beautifull weather here. The grass is nice & green & it is so warm. We have a nice country, no cyclones & very hard storms here which makes it so nice.²⁴

She wrote many other letters to Ohio family, articulate and filled with feeling. She longed to be with them again, and carried the quiet desperation of knowing that was impossible. On Nov. 18, 1901, she wrote from Washington State:

We are as poor as ever. I don't ever look to be able to have a home any more but if I could only be able to come to see my old home once more I would be satisfied... I can tell you this much it has only been poverty that kept me away from you folks

but it takes money to travel. I could not come there & back for less than a hundred.

Moving frequently, Rebecca resided in Spokane (1899), Everett (1901), Seattle (1906) and Port Townsend (1906). In one letter, she wrote: “Kiss my father for me + tell him I said for you to do so + that I would work my nails off to help to take care of him if I could only do so.”²⁶ Another time, she wrote: “I wish I was where I could do something to make his old days a little pleasant. I would do all I could for him but here I am away out in this wooly west, many thousand miles away...”²⁷

She entered into marriage with a second spouse, G. Frank Kearns. At first the marriage was smooth, and she wrote about her new life, saying:

...I don't have a man that comes home & curses me. He is too nice for that. He has never [given] me a cross word in his life & I think sometimes I am not thankfull enough... My husband thinks the world of [Clara] & is so good to her he don't want her to work [outside the home].²⁸

The Kearnses operated a small barber shop of three chairs and five porcelain bath tubs. But the marriage soured. In a letter from Port Townsend, Washington, Rebecca wrote: “He never tells me his business. Sometimes I think he sends his money to some one I don't know of.”²⁹ Citing abandonment, non-support and cruel treatment, she sued for divorce in the Superior Court of the State of Washington in May 1909, as advertised in the *Seattle Republican*.

In 1914 and 1915, Rebecca lived with her daughter Clara in Blaine, Washington. During that time, she suffered from cancer of the uterus, which spread to her bladder and bowels. On Aug. 15, 1915, at the age of 64, she passed away. She was laid to rest at the Enterprise Cemetery in—of all places—Custer, Washington.³⁰

Preserving the Legacy

Beverly (Hansen) Miner of Bowling Green, Ohio stumbled onto the Tommy story when researching the genealogy of her husband, Charles Robert “Bob” Miner, in about 1984. While interviewing

elderly Edna (Miner) Asmus, one of Tommy's first cousins, Edna mentioned offhandedly that "Aunt Beck was married to General Custer's brother." Beverly became intrigued, dug into this question and talked with Addie's daughter Helen Hadley. Generously, Beverly shared her findings with biographer Carl Day, and introduced him to the author of this article, and the story caught fire.

Tommy Custer's grave remains unmarked. According to a recent issue of the *Sentinel-Tribune*, "There is no tombstone or sexton's record of him, only the wisp of a family memory of his widow visiting the cemetery." The article also says that "No birth or death records have been located... The records might have been misplaced, and also, 'illegitimacy at that time was hidden'..."³¹

Perhaps it is time to complete the story that has been under cover for far too long. 🌟



Stahmann



**Rebecca (Minerd)
Behme Kearns**

Stands above with a man thought
to have been her first husband.

(Courtesy: Miner.com Archives)

MRS. JOHN P. CAIN IS CALLED SUDDENLY

Mrs. John P. Cain passed away this morning at 6:45 at her home, No. 121 Lehman avenue. While she had been bedfast for the past eleven weeks with a complication of diseases, her death came with an unexpected suddenness. She had seemed to be improving.

Funeral services await word from relatives in other places and will be announced later. Burial will be at Union Hill.

**(Above): Obituary of Addie
(Benn) Custer Cain**

As seen in the *Wood County Newspaper*.

(From the Wood County District Public Library)

Gen. Custer's Home In Wood County Still Intact Despite Ravage Of Time

House Now Used For Storage Shed At Williams Farm

By WAYNE COLLIER

TONTOGANY—The old General George Custer home, near Tontogany, remains intact today despite the ravages of time and weather. The house has been moved from its former location on the brow of a hill on the Frank Williams farm on Tontogany Creek road and now is used as a storehouse for farm machinery, a short distance away from the Williams home.

Some doubt has existed in the

mind of some people regarding Gen. Custer's residence in Wood County but preserved records reveal that this famous warrior, along with his brother, Tom, and other members of the family resided in this area. Some of the biographies of Custer fail to mention his stay in Wood County.

Records in the County Auditor and Recorder's office at the Wood County court house show that E. H. Custer (father of General George

Custer) purchased from E. H. Bates et al. eighty acres of land, the east half of southeast quarter of Section 31, Washington Township, (the present Williams farm) for \$2,000, on March 1, 1861, and on August 5, 1865 sold it to John Henry Tanke for \$5,000.00.

This was the Custer home for four years longer, and frequented by General Custer in his earlier life and it is strange that in an extended biography, the important fact is omitted.

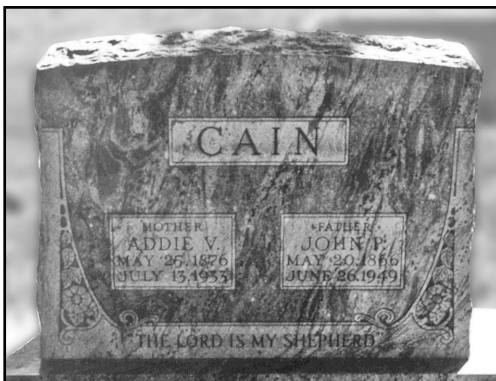
The writer, in company with Advertising Manager Robert Reider and Staff Photographer Weldon Dukes, of this paper, recently stopped at the Frank Williams home on Tontogany Creek Road just beyond the cemetery. Mrs. Williams greeted the writer very cordially and in answer to the question of whether Gen. Custer formerly resided at the location as now the in-

Custer Homestead As It Looks Now



Photo By Woodworth Studio

The remaining portion of the doors have been boarded up and former General Custer home still roof changed, otherwise the building on the Frank Williams farm is very much like it was when occupied by the Custer family.



Grave of Addie (Benn) Custer Cain

This gravestone shows Addie, along with her second husband, John P. Cain, at the Union Hill Cemetery near Tontogany, Ohio.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

The Custer Birthplace

This sketch was drawn in 1886 in New Rumley, by Henry Howe, and published in the book, *Historical Collections of Ohio*.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)



Drawn by Henry Howe in 1886.



Old Custer Homestead in a Postcard

The old postcard has a view of the Custer birthplace in New Rumley.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)



Ohio Historical Society's Custer Memorial

The memorial now sits on the site of the Custer home in New Rumley.

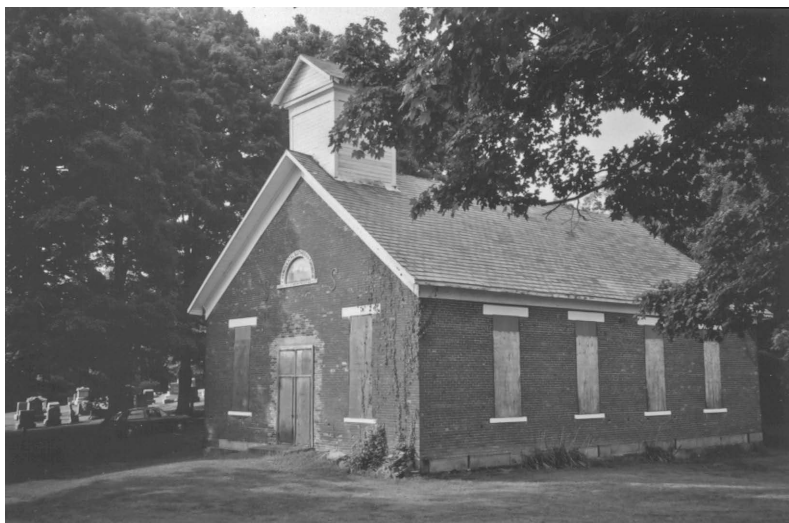
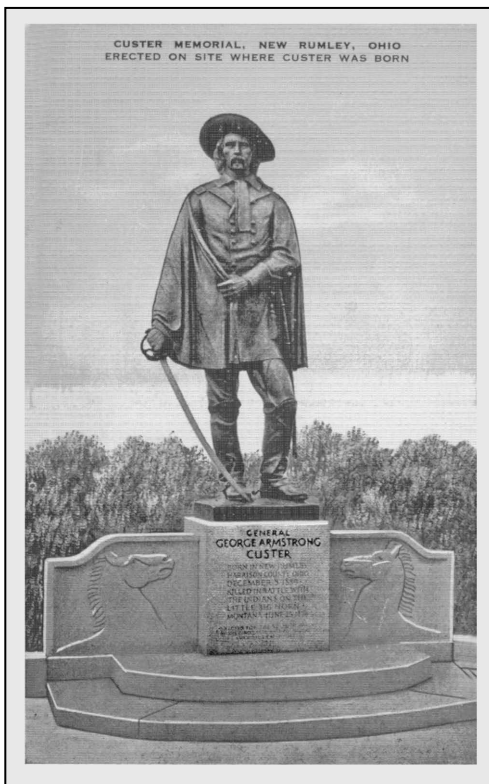
(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

**(Right):
Old Postcard
of a Statue of
Gen. George A. Custer
In New Rumley.**

Author's collection

**(Below): St. Bart's
St. Bartholomew's Evangelical
Lutheran Church in New
Rumley, where two of
Emanuel Custer's infant sons,
and many of Samuel Miner's
extended family, are buried.**

*(Courtesy: Miner's.com
Archives)*





Graves at St. Bartholomew

The grave marker of Emanuel and Maria (Ward) Custer's infant sons, James and Samuel, at St. Bartholomew Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Rumley.

(Courtesy: MinerD.com Archives)

Footnotes

- 1 *Wood County Sentinel*, (Bowling Green, Ohio, Aug. 6, 1896) 3.
- 2 *Wood County Deed*, (Bowling Green, Ohio, Sept. 29, 1846), Vol. 27, Pages 206–207.
- 3 Coller, Wayne, “Gen. Custer’s Home In Wood County Still Intact Despite Ravage of Time,” *Bowling Green Sentinel*, July 26, 1949.
- 4 *Wood County, Ohio, Atlas*, “1871 Map of Wood County, Ohio” by Earl W. Merry, (Wood County Chapter, Ohio Genealogical Society, 1999), 35.
- 5 Day, Carl F. and Brian Pohanka, *Tom Custer Chronology Website*, (<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~pardos/TomCusterChron.html>).
- 6 Custer, Elizabeth Bacon, *Boots and Saddles*, (New York: Harper & Brother, 1885), 233.
- 7 Day, Carl F., *Tom Custer: Ride to Glory* (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2002), 94.
- 8 Day, 93.
- 9 1880 United States Census of Ohio, Wood County, Washington Township, Enumerator’s District 1B, Supervisor’s District 1, Page XXI.
- 10 Day, 94.
- 11 Custer, Emanuel H., Declaration for an Original Pension of a Father, Claim No. 289.960, Certificate No. 178.408 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration).
- 12 *Wood County Sentinel*, Bowling Green, Ohio, Jan. 26, 1882.
- 13 *Wood County Sentinel*, Bowling Green, Ohio, Dec. 8, 1892.
- 14 Chernow, Ron, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 1998), 284.

- 15 *Commemorative Historical and Biographical Record of Wood County, Ohio* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1897).
- 16 *Wood County Sentinel*, Bowling Green, Ohio, June 1, 1893.
- 17 Ibid, Aug. 13, 1896.
- 18 Ibid, Aug. 7, 1896.
- 19 Kearns, Rebecca Miner, Private letter, Aug. 7, no year.
- 20 Ibid, 1897.
- 21 Ibid, Aug. 18, 1899.
- 22 Leckie, Shirley A., *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth*, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), xiii.
- 23 Ibid, Private letter, Aug. 18, 1899.
- 24 Ibid, Undated letter.
- 25 Ibid, Private letter, Nov. 18, 1901.
- 26 Ibid, Undated letter.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid, Private letter, Aug. 7, no year.
- 30 Washington State Board of Health, Certificate of Death, No. 136 of 1915.
- 31 Ibid.

About the Author



Mark A. Miner has spent decades writing about his family's connection to Thomas Ward Custer. He has made several visits to Little Big Horn, Monroe, Michigan and New Rumley, Ohio, and Tontogany, Ohio and is a member of the Little Big Horn Associates and the Custer Memorial Association and CBHMA.

Trained as a journalist, he has devoted his career to public relations with large law, accounting and engineering firms and his own independent consultancy. In 2005, he was inducted by his peers into the "Renaissance Hall of Fame" of the Public Relations Society of America in Pittsburgh. He has published two books: *Well At This Time: The Civil War Diaries of Ephraim Miner* and *Forged in Steel: The Seven Time-Tested Leadership Principles Practiced by the Pittsburgh Steelers*.

His genealogy website, Miner, twice has been named a "Top 10 Family Web Site" in the nation by *Family Tree Magazine*. He has authored two articles in the Little Big Horn Associates' Research Review Magazine and received the organization's 2006 Lawrence Frost Award.

He and his wife Liz reside in Beaver, PA. He chairs the board of trustees of the Beaver Area Heritage Museum, is vice chair of the Beaver Station Cultural & Event Center and a board director of the Beaver County Foundation. He is a 1983 journalism grad of West Virginia University. 🌟