

**The George Armstrong Custer Collection of the
Monroe County Library System**

Custer Related Sites in Monroe



Monroe County Historical Museum

This site at 126 South Monroe Street was the original location of the Bacon house where the young Libbie first cried out to the equally young George Custer. At first adamantly against Custer as a potential son-in-law, Judge Bacon would send Libbie away to visit with relatives in upstate New York to separate the pair. That Custer would escort her to the train and "dared" to hold her elbow was almost too much for the stern judge. To his apparent dismay absence seemed to make their hearts grow fonder.

In time the judge would become Custer's greatest fan telling his daughter, "No man could be made a general at twenty-three without influences, unless there was something in him as a man and soldier."

After the Judge's death from cholera in 1866 the home would serve as a temporary residence for the Custers. In 1911, the house was moved to its present site on Cass Street, so the Monroe Post Office could be erected on the old homestead. In time this building came under the auspices of the Monroe County Historical Commission. With a gift from the La-Z-Boy Foundation, the post office became a museum; one of the best small town museums in the country. An extensive area is devoted to a notable collection covering all aspects of the Custer' lives.



The First Presbyterian Church - Present Day

February 9, 1864, marked the wedding of Brigadier General George A. Custer and Elizabeth Bacon; a marriage that was to last until his untimely death in 1876.

Although the Custer family were Methodists, the young officer had fallen away from organized religion. Once he became smitten with his bride-to-be he regularly attended her church - Monroe's First Presbyterian. Apparently, a master of stealth in battle, Custer was not very inconspicuous in church for his worship of Libbie was so pointed that she wrote him, "You were looking such eyes at me!" Luckily, for Judge Bacon's disposition he did not see this going on.

The wedding ceremony was performed by the Reverend Boyd, who figured greatly in the lives of both families. Custer's best man was his military aide, Jacob Greene. Greene had another reason to want to be in Monroe; he was in love with Nettie Humphrey, who had served as the Cupid between Autie and Libbie when the Judge had tried to keep them apart. In time Greene would go on to head one of the nation's largest insurance companies.

At the conclusion of the services the wedding party went to the Bacon home for a reception. By now Judge Bacon had become a true champion of his son-in-law; he stayed up the entire night guarding the couple's presents from any possible burglars. The church today stands much as it was at the time of the wedding ceremony except for the addition of a roof over the steps.



The Emanuel Custer House - 1997

As it stands today at the corners of Cass and Third Streets, this house, with the exception of the added siding, is much as it was in the last century. The General's father, Emanuel, had once been persuaded to leave Ohio for Monroe prior to his daughter Lydia's marriage to David Reed. Trying to get established locally, the elder Custer was almost immediately soured on "city life" when some of his farm animals were stolen; he left to go back to the Harrison County, Ohio farm.

While in the army, George Custer wanted his young sister, Margaret, to have the advantages of the education that was possible in Monroe. Custer's persuasion encouraged Father Custer to give Monroe another chance. Emanuel borrowed part of the down payment for the house from his son-in-law, David Reed. In 1863 he left Ohio for good bringing along his wife, Maria, and sons, Nevin, Tom, Boston, and daughter, Margaret, to this house on the corner of Third and Cass.

The Boyd School

Just across the street from the Emanuel Custer home is the site of the school so important to both the Custer and Bacon families, the Boyd School (Boyd was educator). After the death of Libbie's mother, Judge Bacon saw to it that Libbie received an excellent education which would be of enormous value to her following her husband's untimely death.

Very impressed with the school himself, Custer insisted his family leave Ohio so his young sister, Margaret, could be educated in Monroe. Lydia, Custer's older sister, was against the idea of this education for Margaret. Lydia had an enormous moral effect on her younger brother; it was she who persuaded him to give up alcohol after he once visited her home drunk. The young Custer kept that pledge to not drink for the rest of his life.

In one of the very few times Custer did not heed Lydia's advice he had Margaret enrolled in the Boyd School. Like Libbie, her education would be a major advantage when her husband, James Calhoun was killed with her brother in the Montana battle.

None of the original buildings making up the school remain today; the site is a city park.



The Bacon House - Present Day

Originally located where the Museum stands today, this is the house where young Libbie first playfully cried out to her future soldier husband. If one could take away the siding and add on the original porch, it is easy to image the house as it was when occupied by the Bacons and Custers.

Previous to that, when the young Custers returned from the battlefields of the East, the townspeople would meet them at the train station and form a parade to escort them home. Constantly urged by the crowds to make a speech, the shy Custer said a few words, and then had the accompanying band strike up the "Garry Owen" - a rollicking Irish marching tune soon to be identified with his famed United States Seventh Cavalry.

With the planned erection of a new post office in 1911, the house was moved to its present location at 703 Cass Street.



The Nevin Custer Farm - Present Day

This farm is located just outside Monroe proper at 3048 North Custer Road. On August 22, 1871, George and his brother, Nevin, and their wives jointly purchased this house and its 116 acres for

\$5,280. Nevin was unable to enter the army because of his rheumatic condition coupled with asthma. This probably saved his life for a healthy Nevin would no doubt have been with his relatives in Montana. Nevin was the only Custer brother ever to have children.

The farm was an investment for George Custer since he and Libbie had talked of purchasing a farm in Kentucky some day in order to raise horses.

Libbie spent the first year of her widowhood at this farm before moving to New York City to make a life for herself - quite a courageous move for a woman at that time. Before she left she sold the farm to Nevin for one dollar. Custer's favorite horse, Dandy, was sent there by the officers of the Seventh Cavalry after the battle. Libbie gave the animal to Father Custer, and he and the horse became inseparable. The old man rode the horse for many years afterward, and always remarked the horse was a constant source of pleasure to him. It is believed "Dandy" is buried somewhere on the property today.

The house saw many famous visitors over the years including William "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Annie Oakley.



The Boyd House - Present Day

Located at the corner of Washington and Fourth Streets this residence is simply one of the most gorgeous in Monroe; a stately mansion. It was originally built in 1848 for Harry V. Man. Mr Boyd purchased it in 1855. Legend has it that the house was used to hide runaway slaves, and that it is haunted by the spirit of Boyd's three year old daughter who died in a scarlet fever epidemic in 1860.

Woodland Cemetery

This old resting ground located at the south end of Jerome Street is, in effect, a history of Monroe itself. Plots date from the earliest times to the present.

Markers indicate the location of the Custer family plots. Here are found the remains of General Custer's brother, Boston, and nephew, Harry "Autie" Reed, who were killed with him in Montana. Reed, who was named for his famous uncle, was only eighteen at the time of his death.

Both Autie Reed and Boston Custer had been near the rear of the column and out of harm's way when they advanced to join their relatives as they engaged the Indians.

Custer's parents are also in this plot as well as his sister Margaret. Near the entrance to the cemetery are the burial places of Libbie's parents.



The Custer Statue

This memorial is regarded as one of the finest of its type in the world. Built to the heroic scale (one and a half life size) it was unveiled in 1910 at a cost of \$25,000 - quite a large sum in those days. Designed by the famed sculptor, Edward Potter, with suggestions by Libbie Custer, it did not follow the traditional norms of the times.

Normally, if a rider of a horse has been wounded in battle, the animal is depicted with one leg raised; if the rider has been killed in battle both front legs are in the air. An earlier proposed model (now in the Museum) showed Custer on a horse with both front legs raised, but in the depiction Custer was in his Civil War uniform of a major general.

Potter's positioning is indeed fortunate. The statue shows Custer as he was at Gettysburg when his famed Michigan Brigade defeated Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart despite being badly outnumbered. This fight helped save the day for Union forces, and according to some experts the battle of Gettysburg itself. Despite having eleven horses shot out from under him during the course of the war Custer was only wounded once.

The statue is titled "Sighting the Enemy" as it shows Custer as he rode to the front of his forces to spy out the enemy prior to an offensive attack. The dedication for the monument took place on June 4, 1910 when President William Howard Taft, an admirer of Custer's, made a special trip to Monroe. Libbie was also a guest for the occasion, and she pulled the yellow ribbon that undraped the statue.

Originally in Loranger Square fronting the First Presbyterian Church and the Court House, the statue became the center of a "political battle," and in time was declared a traffic hazard! Much to the consternation of Libbie and most of the townspeople it was moved to a location alongside the River Raisin known as Soldiers and Sailors Park; it languished there in relative obscurity for many years. Indeed so much did the area become overgrown in weeds and shrubs and other wild growth, that years later when truckers came to move the statue they drove past it without even seeing it!

In the 1950's noted Custer authority and resident Dr. Lawrence A. Frost spear-headed a movement that brought the statue back to prominence at its present location at Elm and Monroe Streets. Now lighted at night it is an especially impressive sight.

The Monroe County Library System

The Ellis Library & Reference Center houses an impressive collection of Custeriana known as the [Lawrence A. Frost Collection](#), it also serves as a depository for the Little Big Horn Association, the international organization devoted to the study of Custer and his times. Over 35,000 items are housed here that relate to the Custer saga.

The library's Custer collection is an indispensable resource for the serious as well as the recreational Custer researcher.

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