



Whitehall resident Rusty Wilson gave the original grave marker for Weston Harrington to Hilliard's Weaver Park when it was moved in December from Alton Cemetery in Galloway. Harrington, Wilson's great-great-uncle, was a member of the 7th Cavalry Regiment commanded by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer. The marker says he was "killed in Custer massacre" – the Battle of the Little Bighorn – on June 25, 1876. Go to the ThisWeekNews YouTube channel to learn more.

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Hilliard Ohio Historical Society

## Marker memorializes Custer soldier

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A weathered stone obelisk that arrived last winter at Weaver Park in Old Hilliard says that 21-year-old Weston Harrington was killed at the Battle of the Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876.

But Harrington's great-great-nephew can say much more about the Prairie Township man who lied about his age to become a trooper in the 7th Cavalry Regiment of the U.S. Army under the

command of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer. Custer died with many of his soldiers at Little Bighorn, one of several battles during the Great Sioux War of 1876 that involved several Native American tribes.

Rusty Wilson, 66, of Whitehall has a doctorate in sports history and is the recipient of the Vikelas Plaque from the International Olympic Committee for his published contributions to Olympic history.

His passion for history in

general led him to uncover as much as he could about Harrington, his maternal great-great-uncle.

Wilson's family recently replaced a gravestone for Weston Harrington and other family members at Alton Cemetery in Galloway, on the west side of Alton Darby Creek Road just north of U.S. Route 40.

In December, the original marker was moved to Weaver Park, adjacent to the Franklin County Fairgrounds at 4100 Columbia St. in

Hilliard.

"I'm happy it is preserved and being used for history," Wilson said.

Wilson said Harrington's involvement in one of the nation's most famous military actions, commonly referred to as Custer's Last Stand, "always fascinates me." A grave-registration card provided by the Hilliard Ohio Historical Society and the marker itself list Harrington's death place as the

MARKER >> A9



# MARKER

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“Custer massacre.”

After retiring from Ohio State University, where he was a member of the graduate-school staff, Wilson turned more attention to studying Harrington’s role in the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

“I’m a (sports) historian, so a lot comes natural, and I dug up as much as I could,” he said.

Harrington was born Feb. 9, 1855 in Alton, an area along Route 40, just west of Alton Darby Creek Road.

Harrington’s father, Peter, was a member of the 40th Ohio Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War and was part of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea in late 1864, Wilson said. The campaign began when an army led by Sherman left the captured city of Atlanta on Nov. 15 and ended with the capture of the port of Savannah on Dec. 21; the operation is considered one of the factors that led to the Confederacy’s surrender.

“I imagine Weston grew up hearing stories like that and he wanted to join the army, too,” Wilson said.

After fibbing about his age to enlist early, Harrington eventually became a trooper in Custer’s 7th Cavalry Regiment, Wilson said.

Harrington was a carpenter and teamster whose responsibilities included driving the supply wagon, but he was trained to fight the same

as any trooper, Wilson said.

Wilson discovered in his research that unlike most of his fellow soldiers, the Native Americans who killed Custer’s soldiers did not mutilate Harrington’s body. Some Native Americans believed that mutilating the corpses of soldiers prevented their spirits from advancing in the afterworld, he said.

An explanation might be the Native Americans were aware that about two years earlier at Fort Abraham Lincoln in North Dakota, Harrington had been among a group of troopers who facilitated the escape of a Lakota warchief named Rain-in-the-Face, who was present at Little Bighorn, and as a result, the warriors covered Harrington’s body with a blanket, Wilson said.

Other troopers found the massacre site and buried the remains, including Harrington’s body, in a common grave, but set stones that exist today mark where the bodies were found, Wilson said. Harrington is stone 36 at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana.

The original Harrington obelisk was removed from Alton Cemetery early last year and taken to the Modlich Monument Co. near the Hilltop neighborhood in Columbus to be replicated, Wilson said.

The marker bears the names of other Harrington family members in addition to Weston Harrington.

Paul Tuhy, Wilson’s fel-

low 1972 Whitehall-Yearling High School classmate and graduate and a historian who lives in Arizona, paid for the new marker that was placed last summer.

Modlich Monument Co. then placed the original stone marker at Weaver Park in December.

Randy Smith, a historian and past president of the Hilliard Ohio Historical Society, said he is thrilled to have the original marker donated by Wilson.

“I presented (Wilson’s) request to the (historical society) board, and they approved the donation,” he said.

The historical society planned a dedication of the marker this month but was required to postpone it because of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

The historical society plans to move it within Weaver Park, but it has no timeline to do so and costs are a consideration, said historical society president Tim Woodruff.

Potential sites are the south side of the historical 19th-century church building in Weaver Park or near the grandstands of the fairgrounds, Woodruff said.

“We’d like to put a fence around it and also add other gravestones” the historical society has acquired in the past from replaced markers at Wesley Chapel Cemetery, Woodruff said.

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