

History of the Custer Battlefield Historical & Museum
Association, Inc.

The Custer Battlefield National Cemetery became part of the Department of the Interior in June 1940 and was designated part of the National Park Service in July of that same year. The first Park Service personnel, Superintendent Edward S. Luce, did not arrive until January 1941 – Luce would provide leadership of the “Custer Battlefield” for the next 16 years. Custer National Cemetery became the Custer Battlefield National Monument (CBNM) in March 1946 and was under the administrative supervision of Yellowstone National Park until 1953.

The Yellowstone Library and Museum Association (YLMA) was established in 1933 and, beginning in 1943, a sales outlet was opened at the Custer Battlefield – post cards and a battlefield pamphlet were the only sales items. Construction of the museum administration building began in March 1952 and was completed in time for a rainsoaked dedication on June 25. With the completion of building a more active and expanded sales program was initiated and it was proposed at the annual YLMA meeting in October that the sales outlet at the Custer Battlefield become a separate organization.

A memorandum from the Park Service’s Regional Director, dated December 5, 1952, approved the “establishment of an Association for the furtherance of the interests in historical research and related subjects to Custer Battlefield National Monument.” On January 11, 1953, several prominent citizens of Montana and government personnel met and organized the Custer Battlefield Historical and Museum Association (CBHMA). A constitution and by-laws were formally adopted at the meeting and were approved by the Regional Director of the National Park Service on January 27, 1953. The first Board of Directors and officers of the Association were elected:

Judge Ben Harwood, President
Mr. George G. Osten, Treasurer
Major Edward S. Luce, Executive Secretary
Mr. Joe Medicine Crow
Mr. Fred C. Krieg
Mrs. Evelyn S. Luce
Mr. Walter C. Nye

The Yellowstone Library and Museum Association made a final settlement with CBHMA with cash in the amount of \$1,135.79; equipment and library books valued at \$1,079.88; and sales publications inventories with a cash value of \$693.78. At the organizational meeting it decided, “no solicitation of membership should be made at this time and none was proposed for the future. It was the opinion of the Board that for the present a compact organization composed of members vitally interest in the Custer Battlefield could best carry out the purposes and intent of the Association.”

The first annual meeting of the Association was held on June 25, 1953, with the main focus of the meeting being about membership expansion. It was decided that until the Association “would be better established and in a more favorable financial position to

handle a larger membership,” any recruiting of new members would be delayed for at least a year.

During the next year sales of battlefield related publications and post cards continued to increase and the Association provided a limited service in the reproduction of photographs and microfilm. By the time of the second annual CBHMA meeting, sales for the previous year were in excess of \$5,000 with a net profit of more than \$1,800. Discussions at the meeting included increasing the membership and the purchase of land in the vicinity of the battlefield. No new members were admitted and the possibility of land purchases appeared remote. Fred Krieg was elected President and George Olson was re-elected Treasurer (a job he would hold for the next 24 years).

A general discussion on membership was held at the Association’s third annual meeting on July 25, 1955, with a decision that membership would be limited to those “genuinely interested” individuals. Don Rickey, Jr., was introduced as the new battlefield historian and was elected to the board to replace Mrs. Luce. Joe Medicine Crow was elected President of the Association.

In April 1956, at a special meeting of the Board, Superintendent Luce announced his retirement from the National Park Service and resigned his seat on the CBHMA Board of Directors. Historian Rickey was appointed to the position of Executive Secretary and both of Luce’s were designated as Life Members of the Association. It was also announced that John A. Aubuchon, Superintendent of Canyon de Chelly National Monument, would be the new Superintendent at Custer Battlefield.

At the annual meeting held on July 1, 1956, nine individuals were nominated for membership in the Association, including Ken Ralston, J. W. Vaughn and Charles Kuhlman – all were accepted by the Board – the membership of the organization now totaled 17. Walter Nye was elected President of the Association. A special meeting of the Board was held on December 5 to discuss the possibility of the Association purchasing the Fred Dustin collection – an important collection of books, papers, maps, etc., concerning the 1876 campaign collected over a period of 60 years. The Board voted unanimously to purchase the collection for \$2,500.

Sales continued to increase over the next two years and funds accumulated in the CBHMA treasury. At a special board meeting held on February 20, 1958, Historian Rickey requested \$3,000 to do “an archaeological research and restoration project on the Reno-Benteen Battlefield” – the Board approved the request unanimously. A second item of discussion was the possibility of a “Custer Battle Pageant.” The Board “expressed emphatic disapproval of having any battle reenactment or large gathering of performers on the actual Battlefield.” Walter Nye was reelected at the June meeting to serve an additional term as President.

Superintendent Aubuchon was reassigned in December 1958 and Thomas K. Garry became the new battlefield superintendent in March 1959. By the end of 1958 CBHMA membership had increased to 20. At the annual directors meeting in June 1959, it was decided to incorporate the Association in compliance with a request from the National Park Service. Ken Ralston was elected President of the Association and George Osten continued in his role as Treasurer. New by-laws and an incorporating resolution

were adopted on October 14, and the Association was legally incorporated as of December 14, 1959.

Historian Rickey resigned his position as Executive Secretary of CBHMA at a special board meeting held on January 22, 1960 – Mr. Rickey had been reassigned to the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. Superintendent Garry was elected to succeed Rickey as Executive Secretary. A continuing discussion by the directors on “pressing and urgent need to acquire, or otherwise control, the historic lands between Custer Battlefield and the Reno-Benteen Defense Site.” Superintendent Garry was requested to advise the Association on the land ownership situation. Two new members were admitted to the organization at the annual meeting held in June – Dr. Edgar I. Stewart and Mr. John S. duMont – bringing the total membership to 26. The new historian, Jim Petty, due to arrive in August, was assigned the duties of Executive Secretary and Ken Ralston continued in his role as President.

The next two years were quiet ones for the Association – no further action was taken on the acquisition of land between the two battlefields. Only one new membership was approved during this period. Kenneth Roahen was elected President at the 1962 annual meeting (a capacity in which he would serve for the next three years). A special Board meeting was held on January 16, 1963, to officially transfer the Dustin collection to the battlefield with the stipulation that the collection always remain at the battlefield. New members voted into the Association included Don Foote, Ernest Ernst and John Popovich bringing the total membership to 30.

Two important items were discussed at the June 1963 annual meeting – securing the services of an artist to paint a scene of the Little Big Horn battle to donate to the battlefield and the potential purchase of the private collection of letters written to photographer D. F. Barry. A special board meeting held on August 3, 1963, approved an expenditure of \$3,500 to Ken Ralston for his proposed painting of the “Last Stand” of the battle.

In September 1963 Historian Jim Petty was replaced by Michael Loveless who was assigned the position of Executive Secretary of CBHMA. It was during this period that the first major disagreement between CBHMA and the Park Service took place. An NPS program, known as “Mission 66” to upgrade a number of facilities at various park sites including CBNM, called for the removal of the 1894 Superintendent’s quarters, known as the “Stone House.” Opposition by the Association, along with an active public, saved the house.

The by-laws of the Association were amended at the 1964 annual meeting stating that both the superintendent and historian automatically become directors of the Association upon their assignment to the battlefield for the duration of their respective tours. The Board also approved the expenditure of \$1,200 to purchase the Berry collection, which was subsequently obtained and transferred to the NPS in January 1965. Ken Ralston’s painting, “Call of the Bugle,” which he started in May 1964, was completed in early 1965. Installation of the new painting awaited completion of improvements to the visitor center. The 1965 annual meeting saw William H. Bellingham elected President of the Association and George Osten continue as Treasurer. Membership in the organization remained static at about 30 members. Gross sales for

1965 exceeded \$18,000 and the Association donated almost \$5,000 to the Park Service for the year.

At the 1966 annual meeting Superintendent Garry reported little could be accomplished in acquiring additional lands for the battlefield because of the organized resistance of most of the property owners. Ken Ralston's painting, having been installed in the visitor's center, was formally donated to the NPS. William Bellingham was reelected for another year as the Association's President and would serve in that capacity until June 1969. In December Historian Loveless notified the Association of his imminent transfer from CBHM and officially resigned as Executive Secretary – Superintendent Garry was appointed to the position pending the arrival of new historian.

In 1967 the Board agreed to provide financial aid for printing a new edition of the battlefield handbook in the amount of \$5,000. Robert M. Utley completed the text of the new handbook and the Park Service was to provide the interpretative artwork to be used in the book. The Association also authorized the publication of the "History of Custer Battlefield" by Don Rickey. B. William Henry, Jr., arrived in July 1967 to become the new battlefield Historian and Executive Secretary for the Association.

Superintendent Garry retired in January 1968 and his replacement was Daniel E. Lee. The Association was informed that it was the Park Service's policy to not have Cooperating Associations involved in the area of land acquisition. Since more than \$14,000 had been set aside by the Association for this purpose the money would now be used for interpretive programs at the battlefield. In November a separate sales outlet at the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area as a branch of CBHMA was approved. Sales for 1968 exceeded \$28,000 but Association membership remained at less than 35.

In early 1969 a new conflict arose between the Association and Park Service. The artwork by Leonard Baskin for the new battlefield handbook proved to be controversial, in particular the "Custer Nude." It was finally agreed that this particular picture would be omitted from the first printing (later editions of the handbook would include the nude). Alvin S. Bielefeld was elected President at the June meeting – he would continue in that position until June 1971. The plan to present yearly awards for the best original writing, artwork, TV, or film done on the battle was dropped because of the Association's connection with a U.S. Government agency. Historian Henry's assignment to the battlefield ended in November and L. Clifford Soubier, who assumed the duties of Executive Secretary, replaced him. Superintendent Lee also ended his assignment in December and William A. Harris became the new superintendent in January 1970.

The formation of "Centennial Committee" was approved at the annual meeting of the Association in June 1970. Planning for the centennial event in 1976 was to be accomplished by a number of subcommittees and recommendations then made to the battlefield administration. Goals of the committee included the striking of commemorative coins, the reproduction of the 1873 Springfield carbine and the loan of Comanche from the University of Kansas. To encourage local scholars with an interest in the Little Big Horn battle a scholarship fund of \$500 was established for a deserving student at a Montana college.

By early 1971 much of the Association's focus was on the planning for the centennial observance – the subcommittees had been formed and were actively pursuing

their agendas. Funds were made available from the treasury for the use of the planning activities. Expanding membership in the Association was discussed at a special Board meeting in April 1971 and it was suggested that the invitational method be continued. Two categories of membership were approved: Active and Associate with only the active members receiving a notification of Association meetings. John A. Popovich was elected President and Walter Woodcock Vice President – Popovich would continue in the position of President until June 1974. In September the scholarship award of \$500 went to Daniel O. Magnusson. In 1974 Magnusson wrote “Peter Thompson’s Narrative of the Little Bighorn Campaign 1876,” published by the Arthur H. Clark Company. Sales for 1971 totaled more than \$43,000 with donations to the battlefield totaling \$4,300. Due to increased sales volume the Board authorized the hiring of the first business manager whose salary was not to exceed \$3,600 a year. Historian Soubier was reassigned in October and J. D. Young became the new battlefield Historian.

Planning for the centennial observance continued in 1972 with a cavalry camp and reride activities being considered. The Association’s expenses for 1972 included more than \$12,000 for employee salaries – a total of eight people, both part and full time, were employed by the Association this year. Although gross sales topped \$58,000 for the year, only \$1,200 was donated to the battlefield. In July 1972 Superintendent Harris left the battlefield for reassignment and in September Eldon Reyer assumed the duties as CBNM superintendent.

Thirty-four members attended the annual meeting in June 1973 – the largest turnout for an annual meeting in CBHMA history. As in the previous year, Association focus was on the planned activities recommended by the Centennial Committee. Superintendent Reyer was an active participant in the committee’s meetings and provided “Points of Importance” to the committee members. Included in Mr. Reyer’s “points” were Indian participation of the Crow, Sioux and Cheyenne tribes, transportation needs and control of the expected crowds, and, once the program was fully planned, communication with all local groups involved. Total membership for CBHMA in 1973 was 45 active members and 25 associate members.

On February 12, 1974, the Board approved an expenditure of \$4,000 to assist Brigham Young University and Dr. Kenneth Hammer for arranging, transcribing and editing the Walter Camp papers for publication of a book to be released during the Centennial year of 1976. The final results of this effort was Custer in ’76 – a book containing valuable information for those with an interest in the Little Big Horn battle. In April Historian Young accepted a transfer to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historic Park in Maryland and he was replaced in July with Rich Rambur from Cabrillo National Monument. A number of new items were added to the proposed list of centennial activities including an invitational art exhibit, publication of CBNM history and a bicentennial display. Several items were also dropped from consideration – Comanche would not be available from the University of Kansas and the cavalry camp was beyond the scope of the committee. Superintendent Reyer’s report upon his departure in July praised the cooperation of the Association in the planning of the events for the centennial and he stated that he had accomplished the task “of determining what programs would be needed.” He also indicated the final detailed planning would be accomplished by his replacement. Mr. Reyer’s replacement was Richard T. Hart who

became the new superintendent in September. New officers for the Association elected at the June meeting were Walter B. Woodcock, President, and Mike Reynolds, Vice President – Mr. Woodcock would serve as President until June 1976.

The first Association newsletter to the membership was published in March 1975 – future issues would be on a bi-monthly basis. An “Artists, Authors, and Historians,” seminar, sponsored by the Association, was held in Billings on June 26-28. Planning activities by CBHMA for the centennial observance continued but at a decidedly slower pace – most of the planning shifted to the Park Service staff. Amendments to the by-laws suggested by Executive Secretary Rambur included opening the membership to everyone with an interest in the battle – the change was approved at the June meeting and annual dues were set at \$3.00. At the Board meeting held on June 20 the Centennial Committee was “abolished and all remaining funds & receipts” were to be turned over to the Executive Secretary for accounting. The reason given for this action was “primarily because of the IRS concern over the funding of such a committee,” – no further explanation was forthcoming.

Emphasis for the Association now shifted to renovating the old Stone House. Gross income for 1975 exceeded \$81,000 – donations by the Association totaled \$7,700. Almost \$5,500 was donated to the Big Horn Natural History Association which allowed that organization to become independent of CBHMA. Membership in the Association was 79 as of March 13, 1976, up from approximately 55 members in December 1975. At the March directors meeting Superintendent Hart discussed the “Centennial Plan” which included two memorial and commemoration ceremonies – the Association approved the plan and agreed to provide support to the Park Service. Most of the events envisioned by CBHMA’s Centennial Committee never became reality although the Association did issue a commemorative medal in both bronze and silver. And Harrington and Richardson did produce an excellent reproduction of the 1873 Springfield carbine. A special award was approved for Henry Weibert and Bill Boyes for establishing a marker at the Crow’s Nest. Executive Secretary Rambur proposed a name change for both the battlefield and the Association – a ballot of the membership by mail of a proposed change was approved.

The Association’s first woman President, Mary E. Minton, was elected at the annual meeting she would serve in the position until June 1980. Meetings between Association and Park Service personnel were held to discuss critical comments about the Park Service’s handling of the centennial celebration and the Executive Secretary’s handling of the Association’s business affairs. Gross sales for the fiscal year exceeded \$100,000 for the first time and the Association made donations of almost \$12,000 during the same period.

After the turbulence of 1976, 1977 was a fairly quiet year for the Association. Historian Rambur was reassigned in March and a new Historian, S. Paul Okey, was scheduled to arrive at the battlefield in June. Superintendent Hart reported that the NPS had no plans to change the name of the battlefield in the foreseeable future. The poll of the Association’s member concerning changing the name of the organization indicated that about 55% wanted to retain the CBHMA name. The NPS completed an agreement that provided details of the responsibilities of both the cooperating association and the NPS – President Minton signed the agreement for the Association. Funds that were to be used for the centennial celebration, \$20,000, were set aside for use in restoring the

interior of the Stone House. Upon completion of the modifications a bronze plaque would be installed on the Stone House listing the founding members of the Association.

Activities for the Association in 1978 saw another quiet year. Plans for the restoration of the Stone House continued on schedule. In May Richard Hart's retired and James V. Court was assigned to the battlefield as the new superintendent – Jim would remain at the post for the next eight years. George Osten stepped down from the office of Treasurer after 25 years – the longest serving board member in the Association. Superintendent Court “stressed the need for a balance interpretive program including all cultural values.” Funds were authorized for Eastern Montana College to continue indexing the battlefield collections.

In 1979 the Association went on record favoring land acquisition for the battlefield and a committee was established to assist the Park Service in this effort. Restoration of the Stone House was completed. Paul Okey completed his assignment as the battlefield Historian in October and Neil C. Mangum was assigned the position which he would hold for almost nine years. The by-laws were amended increasing the number of Board members from eight to 11. Membership in the Association climbed to 217 by the end of the year. Gross income fell below \$100,000 for the first time in four years but Association's donations still exceeded \$7,000.

In early 1980 the commemorative plaque listing the founding members of the Association was installed on the north wall of the Stone House. The Association's first field trip, as suggested by Historian Mangum, was held in conjunction with the annual June meeting. There was a lengthy discussion at the annual meeting on the issue of voting by proxy or absentee ballot – a straw vote favored absentee balloting by a five to one margin. Robert Frazer was elected to a one-year term as Association's President. The Association's informal book review committee was dissolved to place the responsibility of book selection entirely with the Park Service. A donation of \$5,000 was made to Eastern Montana College for microfilming and photographing the battlefield collection. Dr. Michael H. Downing was elected President at the Board of Directors meeting held on June 28, 1981 – he would serve in that capacity for the next four years. Concern was voiced about inadequate supervision of Association employees and the auditing of its operations – steps were taken to provide closer monitoring of overall operations.

Cataloging and indexing of the Elizabeth B. Custer Collection housed at Eastern Montana College was completed in December. Under the direction of Executive Director Mangum the Association's first “Battlefield Dispatch,” was produced. Mrs. Lorraine Mintzmeyer, Rocky Mountain Regional Director, attended the 1982 annual June meeting and remarked that she was glad to see how active the members were in this Association. The status of the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee, established by Superintendent Court, was also reported at the meeting. A conflict arose between the Association and the NPS Harpers Ferry Center Publication Office concerning the reprinting of the battlefield handbook. The Publication Office wanted \$4.00 per copy and the Association indicated they could get it privately printed for less than a dollar – Superintendent Court and the author of the handbook, Robert Utley, finally settled the dispute. The final price of the handbook to the Association, printed by the Publication Office, was just \$1.00.

Beginning in September the membership dues were raised from \$3.00 to \$5.00 due to higher costs of both postage and printing. Gross income for 1982 was almost \$130,000 – over the last three years CBHMA made donations to the battlefield and other groups of more than \$50,000. There were 377 members in the Association at the end of 1982.

CBHMA celebrated its 30th anniversary in 1983 – more than 200 members and friends attended the annual June meeting. On June 18, prior to the annual meeting, nearly 100 people camped out on the slope of the Crow’s Nest and then walked or rode horses into the battlefield. A problem arose when members of another organization suggested that the restricted use of proxy voting for a position on the CBHMA Board of Directors was unfair. A meeting with Superintendent Court, the assistant secretary of the interior, members of the accusing organization and officials from the Park Service’s Denver office resolved the problem by agreeing the Association’s by-law were clearly written stating proxy voting was not allowed.

The major event of the year was the fire that swept across the battlefield charring about 600 acres. The fire cleared away most of the heavy brush from the battlefield and Superintendent Court suggested that the Association take advantage of the situation and fund an archaeology survey in 1984 – the Board agreed, providing an initial \$13,000 for the effort. Due to accounting discrepancies the Board decided to hire a new business manager and agreed to adopt additional accounting checks and balances.

The 1984 archaeology survey conducted on the Custer battlefield yielded more than 1,000 battle related objects. Superintendent Court recommended that Association fund an additional archaeology survey to be conducted in 1985 at the Reno-Benteen Defense Area and at a number of possible grave sites on the Custer battlefield – the Board approved \$10,700 for these tasks. The Association instituted summer bus tours for the battlefield visitors with a bus obtained through the efforts of Superintendent Court. As a result of the previously encountered accounting problems by the Association an Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit was conducted. Two significant recommendations were made as a result of the audit: 1) Board members should become more active in overseeing the financial affairs of the Association, and 2) the Association should establish and maintain new accounting and reporting procedures. Another review team (Publications and Interpretation Review Team) conducted a detailed analysis of the programs and facilities of the Park Service, including the book titles sold at the visitor’s center. The team concluded that while the programs and book titles sold were reasonably balanced, improvements could be made. Life memberships in the Association were now available for \$75.00 – total membership jumped to more than 900 by the end of 1984.

The archaeology survey conducted in 1985 at the Reno-Benteen was successful in collecting more than 3000 battle-related artifacts. Historian Neil Mangum published the first edition of the Association’s research magazine, “Greasy Grass.” The membership field trip, conducted during the annual weekend, visited various Wyoming Indian War battle sites. Thomas Zoesch was elected to a one-year term as President. At the request of the Park Service a formal six-member Book Review Committee was formed. Gross sales topped \$247,000 for the year with the Association donating more that \$27,000 to the battlefield. Funding was provided for both the archaeology survey and to produce a new

film on the Little Big Horn battle to be shown in the visitor's center. Membership at year's end totaled more than 1,900.

In 1986 the CBHMA Board approved a \$15,000 expenditure to refurbish the relief map located in the visitor's center observation room. The field trip, held in conjunction with the annual meeting, included breakfast at the Crow's Nest and a walk/ride back to the battlefield in the afternoon. Many members attended the reburial of the skeletal remains recovered during the archaeological survey conducted in 1984-1985. Ronald Nichols was elected President of the Association – he would serve in that office for the next six years. In December, Superintendent Court took retirement from the Park Service – the new superintendent of the CBNM was Dennis L. Ditmanson.

The development of the new interpretive film was started in early 1987. The 1st Annual Symposium was held on June 26 at the Hardin Middle School with eight speakers the featured speaker was Historian Neil Mangum with his paper, "Popular Reaction to Custer: The Public's Perception." The field trip was to Cody, Wyoming, which included a tour of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The Association granted \$1,000 for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the "Swordbearer Rebellion," also known as the "Crow Outbreak" of November 1887. Membership dues were increased from \$5.00 to \$7.50 for regular members and to \$100 for a life membership. Association's gross sales exceeded \$380,000 – \$51,000 was approved for support of Park Service personnel and interpretive programs. Membership in the Association climbed to more than 2,500.

The 1988 annual meeting weekend was successful in spite of temperatures that exceeded 100 degrees all three days. Joe Sills, Jr., was the featured speaker at the 2nd Annual Symposium discussing, "Were There Two Last Stands?" A field trip to Pompey's Pillar, Forsyth, and up the Rosebud to visit the 1876 7th Cavalry campsites, was both informative and entertaining. This year saw the departure of Neil Mangum as battlefield historian – Douglas McChristian was assigned to the position. A letter of protest from the CBHMA Board of Directors was sent to NPS Director William Penn Mott, Jr., about the illegal placing of a marker on the mass grave of U.S. soldiers on June 25 by A.I.M. activist Russell Means. The Board approved a \$454,000 budget which included funding of over \$108,000 in donations to the Park Service – \$40,000 was budgeted for an archaeological survey to be conducted in the spring of 1989 at Reno-Benteen defense site.

Early 1989 saw the departure of Superintendent Ditmanson and the first female to be appointed to the position of superintendent at the Custer Battlefield, Barbara A. Booher. The archaeology survey of the "dump" site near the Reno-Benteen defense site yielded more than 2,000 artifacts. During an "off" day a member of the archaeological team discovered a human skull on the banks of the Little Big Horn. The featured speaker at the 3rd Annual Symposium was David Humphreys Miller, author of Custer's Fall. The annual field trip took members down to the valley to Reno's first and second defensive positions and the retreat crossing. An unannounced visit by activist Russell Means gave him the opportunity to address the Association's members during their annual meeting at the Stone House. An interpretive sales outlet was opened by the Association at Shell Falls in Wyoming in the Bighorn National Forest. Gross sales hit the \$450,000 mark with more than \$100,000 being budgeted for the Park Service.

The 1990 field trip took members to various Wyoming Indian war battle sites included Fort Phil Kearny, Fetterman, Wagon Box and Connor. CBHMA purchased a new 25-passenger van to be used for summer battlefield tours. Featured speaker at the 4th Annual Symposium was John S. Gray, author of a number of books and articles on the battle. The cost of a life membership was raised from \$100 to \$200 to be effective March 1, 1991. A research project funded by the Association to locate the remains of Private Nathan Short was unsuccessful. A memo from the Park Service's Rocky Mountain Director's office praised the Association; "Of the 21 cooperating associations, CBHMA had the highest percentage of aid to the NPS." Fiscal year 1990 ended with gross sales exceeding \$500,000 for the first time.

With pending bills in both the Senate and House in 1991 to change the name of the battlefield to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, a poll of the CBHMA membership indicated, by a margin of 74% to 26%, their opposition to the change. In June President Nichols testified before a House subcommittee hearing in Billings opposing the change. Association members provided assistance for the temporary opening of the Deep Ravine trail from June 20 to June 26. The annual field trip, lead by former Historian Neil Mangum, followed the Custer trail from the Reno-Benteen Defense area into Custer Ridge – the march was dubbed "The Mangum Death March," because of the adverse weather. Neil was also the featured speaker at the 5th Annual Symposium with a talk: "Gall: Sioux Gladiator of White Man's Pawn." A heated discussion between Superintendent Booher and CBHMA members at the annual Stone House meeting (with newly appointed Rocky Mountain Regional Director Robert Baker in attendance) created a strained relationship between the two organizations. The disapproval of the book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by both the Association's book review committee and the Board of Directors did not improve this relationship. Legislation passed in late 1991 changing the name of the battlefield to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LBBNM). The bill also authorized the creation of an Indian memorial to be located on Last Stand Hill.

The 1992 Summer issue of the *Battlefield Dispatch* offered the official version of the Reno Court of Inquiry. The annual field trip, led by Brian Pohanka, was a repeat of following the Custer trail to Calhoun Hill. Brian was also the featured speaker at the 6th Annual Symposium. Roger Johnson was elected President and Bob Reece Vice-President. After several years of negotiations the Park Service gave the Association permission to open a small bookstore and storage facility in Hardin. Relationships between the Association and Park Service continued on a strained basis – the Park Service was concerned about the "independence" of the Association – not what the NPS wanted from a cooperating association. The NPS described the Association's general operations as "very good" but that CBHMA's members had "behavioral patterns that result in attacks on the park staff by letter, through the media, through congressional representatives, and by the membership directly." Recommendations from the Park Service to rebuild "a strong cooperative relationship," included educating both Board members and the membership how to "use proper channels to address park issues with park management." The Park Service was not interested in having the Association as a battlefield advocacy group. Adding to the conflict between the organizations was the signing of an agreement between the Park Service and North Shield Ventures (NSV), a Time-Warner group. A proposed project by NSV to be constructed near the battlefield

would establish a “theme” park with the battlefield itself being an integral part of the development – an idea opposed by many CBHMA members.

For the Association, 1993 had to be the most chaotic in its 40-year history – four individuals would serve as President during this calendar year. In the early part of the year the Park Service disbanded the Association’s book review committee – the same committee that they had suggested as a “model” for other cooperating associations. In February Superintendent Booher was reassigned to the NPS’ Rocky Mountain Regional office – Historian McChristian assumed the position on a temporary basis. Continued strong opposition by CBHMA members to the NSV “theme park” idea did not enhance relationships between the Association and Park Service. The Park Service extended the Memorandum of Agreement between CBHMA and the NPS, which had always been renewed for a five-year term, for only one year. Roger Johnson resigned in May and Bob Reece served in that capacity until the June annual meeting. The featured speaker at the 7th Annual Symposium was Dr. Gregory Urwin. A visit to the Rosebud battlefield was the annual field trip. Ms. Jo K. Johnson was elected President at the annual meeting. A meeting between the Association’s president and the NPS regional director in early July appeared to “provide a foundation for continued improved relations.” Just seven weeks later the regional director cancelled the Association’s Memorandum of Agreement and gave CBHMA until the end of October to end its status as a cooperating association – removing it from the battlefield after 40 years of service. Appeals to NPS Director Roger Kennedy, and to Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of Interior, failed. President Johnson resigned in September and Vice President Ron Nichols assumed the office. A donation of \$50,000, which would have normally gone to the battlefield for interpretive programs, was redirected to the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee for purchase of land in the vicinity of the battlefield. Gerard Baker took over as Superintendent of LBBNM in September. The Association’s bookstore and storage facility in Hardin was closed and all CBHMA employees were terminated.

It was a rebuilding year for the Association in 1994. Members of the Board took over, on a volunteer basis, all of the tasks that had been performed by the paid Association staff, e.g., bookkeeping, book orders, membership renewal, Battlefield Dispatch editor, etc. Most of the Association’s assets were sold to the new cooperating association at the battlefield (Southwest Parks & Monument). Membership dues were increased from \$7.50 to \$12.50 and life memberships were no longer being accepted. CBHMA members continued on their campaign in opposition to the North Shield Ventures’ theme park. The Forest Service terminated the Shell Falls agreement and the inventory was moved to Hardin and eventually sold to the Glacier National Park Association. The 8th Annual Symposium featured Dr. Douglas Scott and P. Willey discussing the cemetery human remains identification project. A trip to the Crow’s Nest and a walk/ride into the battlefield was enjoyed by a number of members during the annual field trip. A total of \$2,500 in scholarships was awarded to local Hardin high school seniors. Superintendent Baker had the Association’s historical plaque removed from the Stone House and the CBHMA name plate removed from Ralston’s “Call of the Bugle” painting located in the battlefield visitor’s center. In regards to the termination of the 40-year partnership between the Association and the Park Service, Mike Koury, at the 8th annual symposium, stated the situation clearly: “Last year as we gathered here...we

worked for National Park. Today, as we again gather for our annual meeting, NPS works for us.”

Due in part to the opposition from CBHMA members, the Park Service announced in January 1995 that it was dumping the North Shield Ventures plan for a theme park located near the battlefield. A meeting with the new Rocky Mountain Regional Director John Cook, reiterated the desires of the Association to work with the battlefield administration. Life memberships in the Association were again available for a single payment of \$200. The Board formed a Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield Committee to work with NPS at the battlefield – initial cooperation from the battlefield administration was not reciprocated. Two speakers were featured at the 9th Annual Symposium – Dr. Richard Fox and Brian Pohanka. The annual field trip into the area of Reno’s valley fight allowed members to see where Reno had his first and second defense lines and the location of the retreat crossing – the excursion became known as “The Mud March of ’95.” *Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry* was finally available for sale through the Association’s mail order catalog. Another \$2,500 in scholarships funds was awarded to local high school seniors and the Association also donated \$35,000 to the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee to retire their remaining debt on land around the battlefield.

Like a bad penny, North Shield Ventures was back in 1996 with another bad idea for a theme park – and again was opposed by CBHMA members. The Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield Committee was dissolved when Superintendent Baker made it clear he was not interested in working with the committee or the Association. Brian Pohanka returned as the featured speaker at the 10th Annual Symposium with the story of George and Annie Yates. The annual field trip was lead by former Historian Neil Mangum – visited were 7th Cavalry campsites near the Rosebud, the Nathan Short marker, Deer Medicine Rocks and the Two Moon Monument. Tom Pream was elected President of the Association and Jon Custer Vice-President.

In early 1997 a donation of \$5,900 was made to the battlefield for the purchase of an archival copier in memory of ranger Cliff Nelson. Speakers at the 11th Annual Symposium included Jim Brust, Chris Summitt, Sandy Barnard and Lee Noyes. The annual field trip visited the historic Hayfield Fight and old Fort C.F. Smith. Former CBHMA President John Popovich, noted author and historian, passed away. Another long time member of the Association, Henry Weibert, also passed away. On June 25, after an overnight campout near the Crow’s Nest, about 80 Association members walk or rode horses into the Reno valley fight area. CBHMA members also gathered for a couple of “off-campus” meetings during the year – one in February in Denver, Colorado, and a second in Seattle, Washington, in August.

Former battlefield Historian Neil Mangum returned to LBBNM in early 1998 as the new superintendent – President Tom Pream commented, “I have every reason to expect that the relationship between the Battlefield management and our Association will grow and become one of cooperation.” Donations approved by the Board of Directors included \$8,000 for the Battlefield, \$8,000 for Fort Abraham Lincoln and \$5,000 for the Preservation Committee. Dennis Farioli was elected President at the annual meeting and Bill Wells Vice-President. Two speakers were featured at the 12th Annual Symposium,

Dr. Louise Barnett and Thomas Buecker. The annual field trip with 165 Association members and led by the new battlefield superintendent, visited the Labre Indian School, the Broadus Historical Museum, Custer's campsite on the Heart River and area of General George Crook's battle on the Powder River in 1876. In September founding member Joe Medicine Crow spoke at the dedication of the White Swan Research Library in the Stone House.

Relationships between the Association and Battlefield administration continued to improve in 1999. The 13th Annual Symposium was held on June 25 at the Hardin Middle School and the annual field trip returned to the area of the battlefield under the leadership of Dr. Richard Fox – Rich discussed the significant findings of the 1984-1985 archaeological surveys. A second field trip was held on June 28 led by Neil Mangum to the Rosebud Battlefield that included a tough walk to Crook's Hill. Donations to the Battlefield included \$1,000 toward the Indian Memorial, \$2,000 for roadside exhibits and \$5,000 to the Preservation Committee. The Association also provided a scholarship of \$1,000 to a high school honor student from Champaign, Illinois.

Membership dues were raised in 2000 from \$12.50 to \$15.00 for one year – the first increase since 1994. Life memberships were increased from \$200.00 to \$350.00. The main attraction at the 14th Annual Symposium was the showing of the film, "Comanche: Treasured Hero of the 7th Cavalry," which was well accepted by Association members. The field trip was a nine-hour expedition, lead by Dr. Richard Fox, which included a stop where Custer encountered hostile Indians in 1873 during the Yellowstone campaign. Also visited were the sites on Rosebud Creek where Custer camped during the 7th Cavalry's march toward the Little Big Horn. Bill Wells was elected President and Tom Pream Vice-President at the annual Association meeting.

An increase in battlefield entrance fees from \$6.00 to \$10.00 was challenged by a number of Association members in early 2001 – the additional funds were to be used for the Indian memorial – battlefield management defended the increase. As part of the 125th anniversary of the Little Big Horn battle and in conjunction with the annual field trip the Association sponsored a Living History Encampment in partnership with the Frontier Army of Dakota. Special activities included infantry, cavalry and artillery drills, and the firing of a Gatling gun. The featured speaker at the 15th Annual Symposium was Jerry Greene with, "A Military Perspective of the Great Sioux War." A Little Big Horn 125th Anniversary commemorative medallion was created showing both the CBHMA logo and the Cavalry memorial monument. Bill Wells completed his one-year term as President and Dennis Farioli was again elected to fill that position – Nora Whitley was elected Vice-President. The number of members of the Board of Directors was decreased from nine to eight and will be further reduced in 2002 to seven.

Legislation passed in Congress provided \$2.3 million for the Indian memorial – entrance fees to the battlefield remained at \$10.00. Due to higher postage and printing costs dues were increased from \$15.00 to \$25.00 for a one-year membership. The 2002 field trip involved a journey to Fort Phil Kearny and the site of the Wagon Box Fight. Historian Jerry Keenan served as expert guide and commentator for the trip and was also the featured speaker at the 16th Annual Symposium. After more than four years Neil Mangum accepted a reassignment to the Southwest – Darrell J. Cook was named the new

superintendent. Funds have been allocated for cleaning the Cavalry memorial monument on Custer Hill – the task is expected to be complete by the time of the 127th battle anniversary. Planning was also begun for the 50th anniversary of the Association. Kevin Connelly was elected President and Rod Thomas Vice-President. The Association lost two long-time members this year, Bob Church and John DeMay.

Vice President Rod Thomas took on the task of updating the Association's website, www.cbhma.org – it had been several years since the website had been improved. Many Association members attended the dedication of the Indian Memorial on June 25. The Association donated \$6,000 to the battlefield to be used for two specific projects – two new interpretive panels, one identifying the locations of Indian casualties and the second to commemorate the recently rediscovered Horse Cemetery. The featured speaker at the 17th Annual Symposium was Ernest Grafe who talked about the Black Hills Expedition of 1874 – Ernest and his co-author, Paul Horsted, received the 2003 G. Joseph Sills, Jr., Book Award for the best book of 2002, *Exploring With Custer: The 1874 Black Hills Expedition*. The 2003 field trip was at the battlefield with the participants stopping at five important locations with talks at each site given by highly respected battlefield scholars. For the CBHMA's 50th anniversary, a formal banquet was held at the Billings Hotel & Convention Center. Kevin Connelly was reelected President and Tom Heski Vice President. Long time member and former board member Jerry Russell passed away on Dec. 5.

Planning began early in 2004 for the annual field trip – a trip to the Crow's Nest. The exact location of the Crow's Nest is still being debated. A subject discussed by Superintendent Darrell Cook was the potential expansion of the Visitor Center to include a new multipurpose theater and observation room – a subject sure to be watched carefully by Association members. The Association lost another long time member and former director Rick Meyer on Jan. 30. The bronze plaque dedicated to the founding members of the Association that was removed from the Stone House by a former superintendent was replaced in a prominent location near the house, now the White Swan Memorial Library. Rod Thomas was elected President and Tom Heski Vice President at the June Board of Directors meeting. The 18th annual symposium was held at the Hardin Middle School with the featured speaker Mike Donahue's presentation of, "The Battle of the Little Bighorn: A New Timeline." On Saturday, June 24, 90 members and friends made the same trip as Custer's 7th Cavalry did on June 24 and 24, 1876, ending up at the Crow's Nest. There was some controversy about the use of the Association's membership list to recommend election of certain Board of Director candidates – it was concluded no rules were broken. The G. Joseph Sills, Jr., award for 2004 went to Kenneth Hammer in recognition of his *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight*.

As in previous years planning for the 2005 annual field trip was underway – following the march of Custer's 7th Cavalry from the Yellowstone River up Rosebud Creek to the area of Sitting Bull's Sundance. Congratulations went to Sandy Barnard who began his 17th year as *Greasy Grass* editor. Park Service planning continued for the expansion of the Visitor Center – inputs were solicited by the NPS from Association members. Some opposition to the expansion began with a letter from former NPS Chief Historian Robert Utley who indicated that Superintendent Cook was not following the proper procedures. Secretary Jolene Hall reported a total of 1510 members from the 50

states and 87 foreign members – a significant drop from 2107 US members and 113 foreign members in December 2001. The Association lost its oldest member on April 5, Michael Harrison, who had celebrated his 107th birthday the previous December. And on June 15 the Association also lost probably its best-known and most-respected member, Brian C. Pohanka. Jon Custer was elected President and Tom Heski reelected Vice President. The G. Joseph Sills, Jr. 2005 Award went to Bruce Liddic’s for his excellent 2004 book *Vanishing Victory*. The 19th Annual Symposium featured a stirring tribute to Brian Pohanka delivered by Sandy Barnard – future symposiums will be entitled The Brian C. Pohanka Symposium.

Early in 2006 the proposed expansion of the battlefield’s Visitor Center was drawing fire from a number of sources – again including Robert Utley and several long-time Association members. A major concern with the expansion was the intrusion on historical land. The Association took the position that the best solution, although probably the least feasible, was the location of a new Visitor Center off the grounds of the present monument. The annual field trip dealt with the part played by Major Marcus A. Reno at the battle as well as the actions of Captain Frederick Benteen. It became more obvious that the Association was having a financial crisis – raising costs, reduced income and the loss of members. Membership dues were increased by 20% for US members and almost 15% for foreign members. The 20th annual symposium featured author John Lubetkin (*Jay Cooke’s Gamble*) a paper on the 7th Cavalry’s 1873 skirmishes with the Lakota. Jon Custer continued as the Association’s President and Tom Heski as its Vice President. The G. Joseph Sills, Jr., 2006 Award for the best book of 2005 went to James Brust, Brian Pohanka, and Sandy Barnard’s outstanding book, *Where Custer Fell: Photographs of the Little Bighorn*. A controversy arose with the Friends of the Little Bighorn Battlefield when they continued to run an inaccurate article on their website about the removal of the Association as the cooperating association from the battlefield. A survey was conducted of Life members to update the Association’s membership list – the response was over 95%.

The survey of Life members conducted in late 2006 raised some concerns that the Association was going to cancel Life memberships. In the Winter 2007 issue of the *Battlefield Dispatch* President Custer stated categorically, “We will not end Life Memberships.” The Park Service was notified that the Montana State Historic Preservation Office found the modifications to the Visitor Center would have an “adverse effect” on the cultural landscape of the battlefield. The 2007 field trip, planned by Vice President Tom Heski, was a walking tour starting at the Reno-Benteen Defense Site and continuing into the Keogh and “Last Stand Hill,” areas. Dennis Farioli was elected President and Jon Custer Vice President at the June Board of Directors meeting. Donations of \$1,500 were made to both the battlefield and the Custer Battlefield Preservation Committee. The 2007 G. Joseph Sills, Jr., Award for the best 2006 book went to scholar Kingsley Bray for his *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life*. Membership in the Association continued to decline from about 1,500 US members in 2005 to 1,329 as of May 2007. A new “Premier” membership category was approved by the board – for an additional \$25.00 per year, both regular and Life members could upgrade their memberships to include first class postage and recognition in the Association’s annual magazine *Greasy Grass*. Five speakers made presentations at the 21st annual Symposium including Ephriam Dickson’s update of his 2006 paper about the 1881 Sitting Bull

Census. Rod Thomas announced that the Association's website was back with a new address (www.custerbattlefield.org) after the old website was hacked and destroyed in the Spring. Long time member Philip Custer Gates passed away – he was a World War II veteran.

The Association was notified early in 2008 that Brice Calhoun Custer, the oldest living relative of George Custer, passed away on Oct. 27, 2007, in Georgetown, Texas, at the age of 80. Brice was George's great-grand nephew. The Association also lost long-time member Roger Hoffman on April 6 – Roger attended every annual Association weekend for more than ten years. Superintendent Darrell Cook announced his retirement in mid-year with Park Service employee James Charles taken over on a temporary basis. On June 25 founding Association member Joseph Medicine Crow was honored for his World War II service and was awarded the French Legion of Honor Chevalier Medal and the Bronze Star. The first speaker at the 2008 Symposium was Ernie LaPointe, the great grandson of Sitting Bull, who spoke on the struggle to tell the correct story about his famous ancestor. Tom Heski and Jim Court led two buses to Wyoming on this year's field trip to Fort Phil Kearney State Park. Dennis Farioli and Tom Heski were elected President and Vice President respectively at the June Board meeting. On August 19 the Park Service announced it would abandon controversial plans to expand the Visitor Center after the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) filed a lawsuit in federal court – the Association and many of its members were a party to the lawsuit. In late 2008 the National Park Service announced the appointment of a new superintendent to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Kate Hammond, a 14-year Park Service veteran.

The new battlefield superintendent Kate Hammond reported to the battlefield in mid-January 2009 and indicated she looked forward to working with the Association. The annual field trip was a return to the Davis Creek, Crow's Nest, Reno Creek area and was led by Tom Heski, Kevin Connelly and Jim Court. In Washington, DC, Joe Medicine Crow received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. At the 23rd Symposium relatives of the Crazy Horse family were the first presenters and spoke of their ancestor's ongoing legacy as a warrior and leader. The annual Association meeting at the Battlefield's Stone House was well attended and included an interesting talk by Kate Hammond. Michael Donahue was presented with the CBHMA Book Award for his 2008 *Drawing Battle Lines: The Map Testimony of Custer's Last Fight*. At the June Board of Directors meeting Ted Heath was elected President and Dennis Farioli Vice President. Additional funds were allocated to hire a consultant to redesign the Association's website. Battlefield Chief Historian John Doerner announced that the White Swan library had more than 5,000 books covering the events on the Northern Plains from 1865 to 1890. Membership in the Association stabilized at about 1,350 including both domestic and foreign members although the lack of younger members was still a critical concern.

Late in 2009 the Association's new website (www.custerbattlefield.org) went on line and the "bugs" were being worked out in early 2010. President Heath attended a two-day planning workshop at the Battlefield in April to provide the Association's inputs on various subjects. The Association released the updated *Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry*, edited by Ron Nichols with Daniel I. Bird. At the 2010 Symposium a paper was presented by the Association's oldest member, 97 year-old Myron F. Steves,

Sr. He contrasted the differences between the statements made in George Custer's *My Life on the Plains* and Captain Frederick W. Benteen's own views on the same subjects. Myron was married for 62 years to the late granddaughter of Captain Frederick W. Benteen, Maria Luisa Benteen Steves. The annual field trip followed Custer's advance from the Morass on Reno Creek to the site of Major Reno's valley fight. The afternoon session was at the Big Horn County Historical Museum with a showing of photographs from the Kenneth Roahen collection (Ken was President and Director of the Association in the 1960s). Ted Heath and Dennis Farioli were reelected President and Vice President respectively. The 2010 G. Joseph Sills, Jr., Award for the best 2009 book went to Paul Horsted with Ernest Grafe & Jon Nelson, for their book, *Crossing the Plains with Custer*. A donation of \$500 was made for the purchase of a plaque to recognize the military service of Private William E. Smith, Company D, 7th Cavalry. A dedication service was scheduled for 2011 in South Deerfield, Mass.

In the Winter 2011 issue of *The Battlefield Dispatch*, Sandy Barnard, editor of the Association annual magazine *Greasy Grass*, announced his retirement after performing the task for 23 years. Rod Thomas was selected as the new *Greasy Grass* editor. The Park Service Battlefield Superintendent Kate Hammond announced that the battlefield's priceless archives and museum collection would be temporarily relocated to a NPS center in Arizona. Battlefield Historian John A. Doerner retired from the Park Service after 21 years of service. A memorial service was held on May 7 in South Deerfield, Mass, for Pvt. William E. Smith, Company D, 7th Cavalry. The Association provided the funding for a memorial plaque – the service was attended by Association member Dennis Farioli. Neil Mangum guided the annual field trip to the Rosebud Battlefield. Mike O'Keefe was elected President at the June board meeting and Jon Custer took over the duties of Vice President. A \$2,000 donation was made to the battlefield. The 25th annual Symposium was headlined by Danny Martinez, Chief Historian at the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, and author Louis Craft. Rodney C. Thomas, author of *Rubbing Out Long Hair Pehin Hanska Kasota: The American Indian Story of the Little Big Horn in Art and Word*, received the G. Joseph Sills award for the best 2011 book.

In March Superintendent Kate Hammond finished her tour at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument with a new assignment to the Valley Forge National Historical Park in Pennsylvania. The Association lost long-time member Carl Darigo on January 27 – Carl was a regular attendee at the annual meetings. David Harrington, a CBHMA member for many years and Park Service veteran was named Acting Superintendent of the battlefield. The annual field trip, again lead by Neil Mangum, followed Custer's 7th Cavalry trail up the Rosebud with stops at Deer Medicine Rocks and the graves of Dull Knife and Little Wolf at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Symposium speakers included the longest serving member of the Association, Mike Koury. The G. Joseph Sills award for the best book of 2012 went to Paul Hedren for his *After Custer: Loss & Transformation in Sioux Country*. At the June Board of Directors meeting Mike O'Keefe and Jon Custer were reelected President and Vice President respectively. For the first time in 30 years the total membership of the Association dropped below 1200 – the "Graying of the Association," has become a more serious concern. In October Denice Swanke was named as the new Little Bighorn Battlefield

National Monument Superintendent replacing Acting Superintendent David Harrington who retired from the Park Service at the end of 2012.

This history was written in January 2013 – activities planned for 2013 include an extensive field trip to the site of the 7th Cavalry’s fight with the Nez Perce. It has been an interesting and productive 60 years for the Association – the interest in George Custer and the Little Big Horn battle continue at a strong level. The Association will continue as an independent organization and be an advocate for activities at the battlefield.