

## DUV TENT 19, TULSA

### NAMESAKE, ELIZABETH BACON CUSTER 1842 • 1933

Elizabeth Clift Bacon was born April 8, 1842 to Judge Daniel and Eleanor Sophia Page Bacon in Grand Rapids, Monroe County, MI. By the time she was eight, Libbie had shared much of the family's sorrow in the loss two sisters, Sophia, born in 1845 and living only four months, and Harriet, born in 1848 and living six months. Libbie's brother, Edward, also died in 1848 at age 12, following an accident. Libbie became the center of her parent's hopes.

Taught music when the family purchased a piano, Libbie more readily turned to her journal and writing vignettes based on lives and observations she made in the community. Even in her tenth year she wrote, "This morning I hope was profitably employed in doing what - if I am permitted to live to become a woman - will make me more useful and happy." Libbie was learning to live her life with intention. In August 1854, Sophia died after a short illness. At age 12, after a summer with her mother's sister, Aunt Loraine Richmond, Libbie went on to boarding school. Daniel Bacon, not able to bear life in an empty home, went to live at nearby Exchange Hotel.

Libbie was sometimes lonely, expressing it in her writing, but was also focused on achievements. She gave earnest search to ideas of doing right, but also how to be right - to be ok with God and others. With her father's remarriage in 1859, Libbie was comforted to join the couple at home, attending nearby Boyd's Seminary in Monroe.

While Libbie succeeded at school, giving the valedictorian address in 1862, Cadet Custer had finished West Point in 1861, with an outstanding number of disciplinary miles for demerits. He went from his graduation to assignment in the 2nd U.S. Cavalry by July, 1861, and by his performance, very quickly became aide-de-camp for General William F. Smith, and by summer 1862, aide-de-camp for Commanding General McClellan. George and Libbie met that summer, and began a correspondence. George earned a Captain's assignment, and by mid-1863, was appointed Brigadier General of Volunteers, assigned to duty as commander of the Michigan Brigade. "Daring gallantry" was descriptive of the man who became the youngest general in the Army at age 23.

While George was winning battles and rank, Elizabeth was winning consent from Judge Bacon for a marriage. Following their February wedding, and short intervals in New York and Washington, where the couple were given grand reception, Libbie found herself braced in a field ambulance, heading for Union headquarters in Virginia.



George Armstrong Custer  
and wife,  
Elizabeth Bacon Custer

Early in their life together, this couple made commitments to each other to be solely dedicated to one another, without children, knowing that their experience would not be ordinary. Their lives became word-pictures of the robust times and goals for U.S. expansion - and of individual and national mistakes, grievances and achievement. Following Little Big Horn, after a marriage of 13 years, Libbie lived 57 more years in awareness of and devotion to Aute. Living in New York City, she began writing books, using both their journals and notes. In 1885, *Boots and Saddles, or Life in Dakota with General Custer* was published; in 1887, *Tenting on the Plains* (life in Texas) and in 1890, *Following the Guidon, Life in Kansas Territory*. However, even though Libbie spent the last year of the War with Custer in the field, and gathered many letters and mementos, she never wrote the Civil War notes into a book. Elizabeth Bacon Custer's life, intertwined with Custer, is a unique study of a woman's courage, devotion and legend-making.

#### ELIZABETH CLIFT BACON CUSTER

BORN IN GRAND RAPIDS, MONROE COUNTY, MICHIGAN, 1842 - 1933

WIFE OF GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER, 1839 - 1876

MARRIED FEBRUARY 9, 1864, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

1. Reynolds, Arlene, *The Civil War Memories of Elizabeth Bacon Custer, Reconstructed from Her Diaries and Notes* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press) 1994  
2. Leckie, Shirley A., *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman, OK and London: University of Oklahoma Press) 1993  
3. Gen. George Custer & Wife, identified as George Armstrong Custer and Elizabeth Bacon Custer, *Brady-Handy Photograph Collection*, LC-BH831-702BP&P](Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division) 1860-1865