

Published on C & G Newspapers (<http://www.candgnews.com>)

Rochester

August 15, 2012

Graves of two Revolutionary War patriots to be rededicated

By Mary Beth Almond
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Two Revolutionary War veterans will be remembered with a special ceremony Aug. 18 at Mount Avon Cemetery in Rochester.

The graves of Benjamin Loomis and George Horton will be rededicated at 1 p.m. The public is invited to attend the event, which is organized by the Oaks Chapter of Sons of the American Revolution, the Stoney Creek Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Rochester Historical Commission, the Rochester – Avon Historical Society and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. A number of the descendants of the two families will be present.

Rod Wilson, of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society and the Oaks Chapter of SAR, said four Revolutionary War patriots are buried in the Mount Avon Cemetery, which was the first platted cemetery in Oakland County in 1827. He said the first burial in the new cemetery occurred in February 1827 and was of Elsie Shoemaker Horton, wife of Revolutionary War patriot George Horton.

The involvement of two of the four Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Mount Avon — Cyrus Chipman and Nathaniel Baldwin — is marked on their graves, but the graves of the other two — Horton and Loomis — are not properly marked, Wilson said.

“Here are two gentleman of four that have been lying there for 170 years basically with no recognition for their efforts in the Revolutionary War to give us our freedom that we have today. So, to us, it’s very important that we mark these graves as they are located, and make everybody aware of their service. Both died in 1845,” Wilson said.

The rededication ceremony has been in the works for a number of years, according to Wilson, who said it was just a matter of finding the right contacts and conducting the research needed to move forward.

Although Horton’s burial at Mount Avon Cemetery was mentioned in various books, as well as DAR



Photo by Erin Sanchez

Dressed in his George Washington Sons of the American Revolution Color Guard uniform, Rod Wilson holds the first American flag flown at the Revolutionary War Battle of Bennington at the grave of patriot Benjamin Loomis.

records, when Wilson and others went to look for his headstone, they discovered it was missing.

“We couldn’t find his headstone. We looked and looked and looked ... and the cemetery didn’t have any records of where it could be because they all burned during a fire in the 1880s,” he said. “We don’t know when the headstone came up missing. So nobody even knows he is buried there.”

One day, Wilson got a call from Horton’s fourth great granddaughter — who now lives in Birmingham — looking for information on another family. They made the family connection during the call, and she noted that she had records showing where Horton was buried. The city of Rochester is paying to replace Horton’s headstone, which will be rededicated during the ceremony. The headstone was ordered by the Rochester Historical Society through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which provide the stone at no cost. The city will install the stone free of normal charges, and the Stoney Creek Chapter of the DAR is supplying a bronze marker on his grave.

“The marker is approved by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution to recognize the services of Revolutionary War patriots,” said Kelly VanWormer, regent of the Stoney Creek Chapter of DAR.

In order to receive a plaque from DAR, VanWormer said DAR has to prove specific information about the patriot’s dates and places of birth and death, as well as their military service.

“At this point we have been approved to mark George Horton, but we are still doing research on Benjamin Loomis, and we’ve had some complications, but we hope to mark his in the future,” she said.

After receiving a call from SAR Color Guard Cmdr. Gerland Burkland, Wilson went to find out if Loomis’ grave was properly marked in Mount Avon Cemetery. After much searching, Wilson finally discovered that Loomis’ name was on a headstone with his daughter’s family, under the Underwood name.

“It’s very hard to read because it’s a very dark gray granite headstone, and unless you are standing right on top of it, you can’t read the name. ... It just gives when he was born and when he died, but there is no mention of Revolutionary War activity,” he said.

SAR purchased a 12-by-24-inch granite marker to put at the base of the headstone noting his involvement in the Revolutionary War, which will be rededicated during the ceremony.

Wilson said it’s not very often you find the grave of one Revolutionary War soldier, let alone two.

“We do two or three rededications a year, but this is the first time anyone knows that two graves will have been re-dedicated on the same day. It’s very rare that you find two that are fairly close together,” he said.

For more information, call Rod Wilson (248) 651-6178.

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