

REVOLUTIONARY WAR VETERAN GETS NEW HEADSTONE



PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LOREI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

John Carberry (left), Seth Roderick and Steve Boulton level the headstone for John Wallace's grave in Stafford on Saturday.

'We're all custodians of a rich and dynamic history'

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

A Fredericksburg man distressed by a desecrated family cemetery just over three years ago found some solace Saturday when a government-issued tombstone was officially set in place at the gravesite of his distant relative.

"I think it's fantastic," Gordon Silleck said. "I would have rather had the original stone in perfect condition there, but since that was destroyed, this is fantastic."

Since his early childhood years living in rural New York, Silleck has never given up learning about, preserving and honoring the memory of his very distant relatives—all interred at southern Stafford's Wallace family cemetery, located



The old, broken headstone for Wallace sits on the grass next to his grave.

in Liberty Hall Estates subdivision off Truslow Road.

"It's just an interest in history that I've always had combined with that ceme-

tery," Silleck said. "Who was buried there and what their lives were like. That was the main attraction for me."

In the 1960s, Silleck had an aunt who lived at in Falmouth. Each year, Sillecks' parents, Katherine Wallace and Sidney Bayley Silleck of Scarsdale, New York, piled Gordon and his four young siblings into a Ford station wagon and headed south on U.S. 1 to visit Agnes "Nannie" Wallace and her daughters at Clearview, the family's estate. During those visits, one of Nannie's daughters with a keen interest in family genealogy would take the children to visit the old family cemetery, which during colonial times was 975 rolling green acres known as Liberty

SEE TOMBSTONE, A5



PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LOREI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Gordon Silleck (top middle), the great-great-grandson of John Wallace, watches as the base of the tombstone is removed, along with members of the Colonel Fielding Lewis Chapter and other volunteers.

TOMBSTONE

► FROM A1

Hall farm.

While visiting the family cemetery located deep in the woods and surrounded by an old wrought iron fence, the children rubbed charcoal etchings of the white marble and sandstone grave markers to permanently retain their images before time, weather and age took their toll.

Among those buried there are Silleck's great-great-great-grandfather John Wallace of Fredericksburg, as well as Silleck's great-grandfather Samuel Gordon Wallace, a Civil War soldier who served in the 30th Virginia Infantry Regiment.

Decades later, when Silleck moved from New York to Fredericksburg after a career with Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation in Connecticut, he made it back to the Wallace family cemetery to discover the woods he once trekked through as a youngster were now bulldozed, leveled and cleared by a developer to make way for a collection of large homes that has now become Liberty Hall Estates. To Silleck's dismay, the bulldozers and their steel blades used during the land clearing passed directly over the historic Wallace family cemetery without care.

"The dirt had been dug to about 4 inches and graded across the whole cemetery," Silleck said in early 2019. "Stones were sitting at all angles, there were footstones that didn't match the headstones and it looked terrible. There was a debris pile which had marble and granite in it which could not have come from anywhere else but the cemetery."

Stafford County officials eventually cited the developer for violating the county ordinance on preserving cemeteries. In April 2019, officials sent the developer a notice that included nine alleged violations for disturbing soil and vegetation near the cemetery and for removing concrete slabs, as well as the iconic black wrought iron fence. The developer was also cited for headstones and footstones being pulled from the ground and improperly grading the terrain.

Although the developer's attorney said his client did not move any headstones or damage the cemetery, eventually the developer agreed to piece together the broken cemetery to Stafford County's satisfaction. But the end result did not meet Silleck's expectations.

"I'd give him a 4 on a



Wallace's new headstone is cleaned off with water.



Members of the chapter wheel the new Georgia marble headstone into the cemetery in Stafford.

scale of 1 to 10," Silleck said. "I'm a little disappointed that no one was held responsible and there was no accountability, but it turned out OK."

Silleck said the builder eventually installed a 4-foot-high aluminum fence around the cemetery and a plaque was also placed on the grounds bearing the family name. Silleck said both the fence and the plaque "look like it's the cheapest thing (the developer) could do" and said the permanent damage done to some of his relatives' headstones allegedly by the developer was "beyond comprehension."

"[John Wallace's] headstone was standing when [the developer] took over, then it fell over and now, it's just broken all into pieces," Silleck said. "Of all the stones there, a Revolutionary War patriot, that was the one that got broken."

Shortly after a drenching rain passed over Hartwood late Saturday morning, John Wallace, the original owner of Liberty Hall farm who passed away May 4, 1829, finally received a new government-issued white Georgia marble headstone with the help of six volunteers from the Col. Fielding Lewis Chapter of the Virginia Society of

time in our shared history which was the founding of the United States."

Roderick said the process to obtain the official headstone took about four months. He said a chapter member who was familiar with submitting the necessary government paperwork led the way, while other members combed the internet to obtain the relevant military service documents associated with Wallace.

"I got online and pulled some proof of service for John Wallace from Fold 3 and other online sources," Roderick said. "I was able to find copies of his original muster paperwork."

During their search of military records, volunteers from the local chapter also discovered Wallace had served during the Battle at Valley Forge in late 1777 through June 1778, then onto the Battle of Monmouth. He also camped at the Middlebrook encampment in Bridgewater Township, New Jersey, at West Point, New York, and at Smith's Clove, a pass through New York's Ramapo Mountains. He eventually went on to join the Philadelphia Campaign, which lasted a year, from July 1777 to July 1778.

After decades of looking after the cemetery while worrying about its future, Silleck believes the residents of Liberty Hall Estates will become faithful stewards of the hallowed ground and said several of them have already stepped in to lend a hand maintaining the cemetery.

"During one of the storms a limb came down in the cemetery and they cleared it off, so they're watching over it," Silleck said. "I think the HOA in the future there is going to be taking care of it. It's a great feeling."

Next month, Roderick's chapter will officially dedicate the new headstone at John Wallace's gravesite, which will also include a brass Revolutionary War veteran marker. The Aug. 14 public ceremony takes place at 2 p.m. and will include members of Falmouth's Falls of the Rappahannock and Fredericksburg's Washington Lewis chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

"We're all custodians of a rich and dynamic history," Roderick said. "The founding generation pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor for liberty and their honor is our legacy. Remembering John Wallace and others like him is a small token of gratitude and a decent thing to do in the community."

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VIEW:

To watch volunteers place the new headstone,

point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

the Sons of the American Revolution.

Seth Roderick, a member of the chapter, said a 2019 Free Lance-Star story that reported Silleck's dilemma at the cemetery prompted him to get involved.

"We wanted to do something to support Gordon in his efforts to remember his descendant," Roderick said. "We came up with a few ideas and the most likely was petitioning the Veterans Administration for a new headstone."

Roderick, who said his chapter represents several counties in the region including Stafford, said the group keeps a stock of brass markers to place at veterans' gravesites, but the occasion to place a marble headstone for a Revolutionary War veteran is a big deal for chapter members.

"We hope this grave monument stands for another 200 years as a reminder of one of the citizens of Stafford and his contributions to his community," Roderick said. "It was during a difficult