

IN MEMORIAM:
Brevet Major

Louis McLane Hamilton
 Captain 7th U.S. Cavalry

"remember only
 Such as these, have lived, — and died."

These same words appear printed on the title page of a small pamphlet containing a letter written to Mrs. Philip Hamilton, mother of young Captain Louis McLane Hamilton who died in action leading the first charge of 7th Cavalry troops against the Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Washita, November 27, 1868. The pamphlet is one of the mementos of Captain Hamilton, sent under the date of 1908, as a gift from his family to the Oklahoma Historical Society. Another item of this collection is the Captain's army coat with his cap shown in a special exhibit in the Historical Society's Museum, commemorating the Centennial of the Battle of the Washita in 1968, upon the field of which this young soldier, grandson of the noted Alexander Hamilton in American History, had lost his life. The letter dated August 29, 1869, to Mrs. Philip Hamilton, paying tribute to her son was written by George A. Custer who signed himself Brevet Major-General, U.S.A. General Custer was stationed near Fort Hays, Kansas, when he wrote the letter. This was after his return from his campaign as Colonel commanding the 7th Cavalry, under orders of General Philip H. Sheridan against the Plains Indians southwest. After the Battle of the Washita, Custer's forces were at Fort Cobb, and then at Fort Sill at the time of its founding in January, 1869. Early in the spring, Captain Hamilton himself was posthumously commissioned "Brevet Major" of the 7th Cavalry, U.S.A. The letter to Mrs. Hamilton from General Custer along with other notes and reports printed in the "Memorial Pamphlet"¹ makes its republication here in *The Chronicles* another memorial to Captain Louis McLane Hamilton, in the history of Oklahoma and the Western Plains during this centennial year of the Founding of Fort Sill, 1969.

—The Editor

¹ A crude paper cover is pasted on the pamphlet, bearing a note written in ink "Custer — Memorial, 1868." This date does not coincide with the dates (1869) given in the pamphlet so the crude cover with its inscription in ink must have been pasted on many years after the pamphlet was printed. Also, there is no date nor credit line given for its publication. The pamphlet was probably printed by Captain Hamilton's family or friends in his honor within a year or so after the Battle of the Washita when criticism and controversy had arisen over the attack and annihilation of Chief Black Kettle's Cheyenne village. (All numbered footnotes added by the Editor.)

MEMORIAL PAMPHLET: LETTERS AND NOTES

In Camp, near Fort Hays, Kansas,
Sunday, August 29, 1869.

Mrs. Hamilton:

My Dear Madam:

I now undertake what I have long promised myself to do, to write you a few lines relative to your son, and to his untimely death, which, although occurring almost one year ago, seems as fresh in my mind as if but yesterday. At times, since that event, I have feared that my unbroken silence might be unfavorably judged therefore; but knowing how well you understand the character of the soldier, his aspirations, his fraternal associations with comrades, I was content to bide my time, fully believing that though my tongue was silent and my pen idle, the sympathies of my heart were throbbing in unison with yours. To clearly convey upon paper a correct idea of the relationship existing between myself and your son, prior to his death, is simply impossible. My position was both peculiar and pleasant. While holding commissions in the same arm of the service, and in the same regiment, and while mutually sharing in that esprit de corps, which seems to prevail more largely among officers of the 7th than is usually observable, I occupied, as it were, the position of military head, or adviser, to those over whom I had the honor to command, and however lacking I may have been in fully discharging the many and responsible duties which fell to my lot, I never failed to appreciate the importance of my trust. Standing as I did in the two-fold light of comrade and commanding officer, I was, from necessity, brought into more or less intimate fellowship with the officers of my command. As commanding officer it became my province and duty to study closely the character and qualities of those serving under me, to the end that in times of need, when emergencies were pressing, I would know upon whom to rely for co-operation. In this way I came to know Captain Hamilton as probably no other person knew him. How shall I speak of this knowledge of one of whom it can be truly said, "to know him was to love him." In garrison, where the duties of the soldier are discharged in the most perfected manner, and where all the little niceties, formalities and courtesies of military life are closely observed, Captain Hamilton, in my experience, was without a superior, and with few equals; I might say with none. His brother officers, thinking it needless to study the regulations or forms of service, were content to take him as their standard, and no officer commanding a troop, or squadron, desired a higher compliment than to be told that its appearance or conduct rivalled that of Captain Hamilton's command. Upon the march, or when engaged in an active campaign,



(Photo Oklahoma Historical Society)

THE BATTLE OF THE WASHITA CENTENNIAL EXHIBIT 1908

Exhibit of relics relating to the Battle of the Washita, November 10, 1870, on display in the Museum of Oklahoma Historical Society, 1908

his strict and earnest attention to duty, and to the care and comfort of his men, was equally remarkable. When, as was often the case, detachments were necessary, and an officer to be selected in whom I had the greatest confidence, whose judgement was always correct, and whose conduct was equally so, I would direct the Adjutant to detail Captain Hamilton; and once, when I had a hazardous march to make, of hundreds of miles through an Indian country, I was to select from several hundred men one hundred and fifty "picked men," and from all the officers of my command one to command this detachment, without hesitating as to choice, I at once designated your son, and after almost three years of continuous service and intimate association, I have the happy satisfaction of saying that never, not even once, or in the slightest particular, did Captain Hamilton ever fail to answer my fullest expectations and those of his brother officers. Page after page might be written in testimony of the high character and manly qualities of him of whom I write, and in giving expression to these sentiments I know that I but echo those of every member of this regiment.

Among the officers of the army are numbered those whose every instinct is soldierly duty, and its proper discharge their constant study; but in those qualities of the heart and mind which go to make the accomplished gentlemen, they are lacking. Then, too, we have those who, while fitted for every association of the gentleman, are totally disqualified from acquiring or performing the duties of the soldier. In Captain Hamilton, I believe, was to be seen the most happy blending of the desirable traits just attributed to those two classes of officers. He was without question, the true representative of the ideal soldier and accomplished gentleman. Passing over the many events and incidents which might be referred to, I will come to the day preceding the battle of the Washita.

Under the regular routine of duty, it was Captain Hamilton's tour as officer of the day, which duty separated him from the active portion of the command and placed him, with but a few men, in charge of the train. Usually the trains and troops march in close proximity to each other, but on this particular day our scouting party sent us the intelligence that they had discovered a fresh trail of an Indian war party. In a moment all was excitement. I gave directions for immediate pursuit; to this end it was necessary for us to leave our large trains under suitable escort, and provided with a small amount of provisions for the main body of the command, to push forward as rapidly as possible.

Captain Hamilton being officer of the day, it devolved upon him to remain in charge of the train and escort. To a soldier of

his pride and ambition, to be left behind in this inglorious manner was galling in the extreme. He foresaw the situation at once, and the moment that the intelligence reached him he came galloping up from the rear in search of me. I was busily engaged at the moment superintending the issue of ammunition to the men. Coming up to me, and with a countenance depicting the most earnest anxiety, his first words were, "Why General, you are not going to leave me behind, are you?"

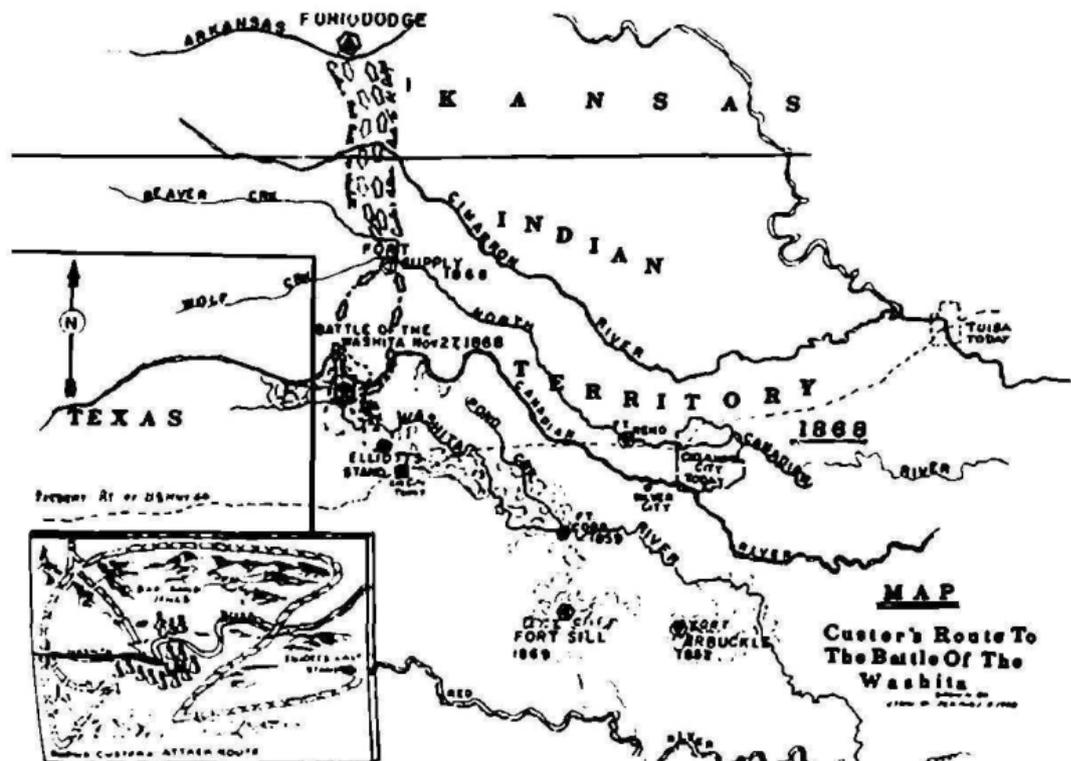
Fully appreciating his anxious desire to share with his comrades the perils of the approaching conflict, and yet unable to substitute another officer for him without the consent of the former, I could not give him the encouragement he desired. In the army, as you are doubtless aware, duty is performed by detail in regular order, and upon this occasion, Captain Hamilton's detail placed him in the rear, beyond the probability of all danger. The moment I began forming my plans for pursuit and attack, I remembered that the accidents of service were to deprive me of the assistance of him upon whom I had always relied. Some of his brother officers had bethought themselves of the same, and at once came to me with the remark, "General, we ought to have Hamilton with us;" another said, "It will kill Hamilton if he has to remain behind, and his men are led into battle by another."

My only reply was, that while my desires were all one way, my duty prescribed that Hamilton should remain with the wagon train, it being his detail, and it also being necessary that some officer should remain. I had thought the matter over before your son came to me with the inquiry I have given above. I replied, "Hamilton, you know I desire you with me in command of your squadron, particularly now, of all times, but I am powerless to have it so without being unjust to some other officer." He admitted that this was true, also that some one must remain behind, but added, "General, it seems hard that I must remain." Finally I said to him that all I could do would be allow him to get some other officer to willingly take his place, adding that some officer might be found in the command, who, from indisposition, or other causes, did not feel able to undertake a rapid and tiresome pursuit such as we would probably have, and under such circumstances I would gladly order the change. He at once departed in search of someone who would assume his duties with the train and leave him free to resume his post at the head of his noble squadron, that squadron on whose organization and equipment he had displayed such energy and forethought, and whose superior excellence and efficiency to this day, bears the impress of his hand.

He had been absent but a few minutes when he returned overflowing with joy, and remarked, "General, Lieutenant Mathey consents to take my place as officer of the day. Shall I join my squadron?" To which I gladly assented, and he galloped to another part of the field to where his men were, to hasten and superintend their preparation for the coming struggle. Lieutenant Mathey had that day been afflicted with snow blindness, and felt himself disqualified and unable to join in the pursuit, it was exceedingly proper for him, under the circumstances, to forego sharing with his troop the coming danger and privations.

As you have probably been informed already, we marched steadily all that day (Nov. 26) until nine o'clock at night, when we overtook Major Elliott and his party, consisting of three companies, who had discovered the trail in the morning and sent scouts to us with the intelligence. Upon overtaking them we formed into one party, and I concluded to halt for one hour to enable the men to prepare a cup of coffee, and the horses to obtain a little rest. The moon too, by this time, would be up, and by its light we could follow the Indian trail through the snow. At once small fires were started along the banks of the creek, and our simple meal of coffee and bread was soon prepared. No bugle calls were permitted, as in this peculiar country, sound travels a long distance, and we knew not but that our wily foes were located near by. Ten o'clock came and found us in our saddles. Silently the command stretched out its long length as the men filed off four abreast. First came two of our Osage scouts on foot; these were to follow the trail and lead the command; they were our guides, and the panther, creeping upon its prey, could not have advanced more cautiously, or quietly, than did these friendly Indians, as they seemed to glide, rather than walk, over the snow clad surface. To prevent the possibility of the command coming precipitately upon our enemies, the two scouts were directed to keep three or four hundred yards in advance of all others; then came, in single file, the remainder of our Osage guides and our white scouts; with these I rode, that I might be as near the advanced two as possible. The cavalry followed in rear at the distance of a quarter or half mile; this precaution was necessary from the fact that the snow had thawed slightly during the day, and was then freezing, forming a crust which, broken by the tread of so many hundreds of feet, produced a noise capable of being heard at a long distance. Orders were given to prevent a single word being uttered above a whisper. No one was permitted to strike a match or light a pipe, — the latter a great deprivation to the soldier.

In this silent manner we rode mile after mile; occasionally an officer would ride by my side and whisper some inquiry or



**MAP OF CURTIS'S CAMPAIGN OUT OF KANSAS TO THE WASHITA RIVER
IN THE INDIAN TERRITORY 1868**

This map (not to scale) shows the locations of forts in the Indian Territory with dates of their founding, and cities in Oklahoma today relating to the site of the Curtis fight on the Washita River.

suggestion, but, aside from this, our march was unbroken by sound or deed. Soon we discovered that our two guides in front had halted, and were awaiting my arrival. Word was quietly sent to halt the column until inquiry in front could be made. Upon coming up with the two Osages we were furnished an example of the wonderful powers of the Indian. One of them could speak broken English, and in answer to my question as to "What is the matter?" he replied, "Me don't know, but me smell fire." By this time several of the officers had ridden up, and upon being informed of the Osage's remark, each endeavored, by sniffing the air, to verify or disprove the report. All united in saying that our guide was mistaken. Some said frightened; but we were unable to shake the confidence of our guide in his first opinion. I then directed him to advance even more cautiously than before, and the column, keeping up the interval, resumed its march. After proceeding about half a mile, perhaps further, again our guides halted, and upon coming up with them I was greeted with the remark, uttered in a whisper, "Me told you so;" and sure enough, looking in the direction indicated, were to be seen the embers of a waster fire, scarcely a handful, yet enough to prove that our guide was right, and to cause us to feel the greater confidence in him.

I called for a few volunteers to quietly approach the fire and discover whether there were Indians in the vicinity, if not, how long since they had been there. This point was soon settled again by the knowledge of our Osage friends. From examining the fire, and observing the great number of pony tracks in the snow, the Osages were convinced that we were on the ground used by the Indians for grazing their herds. The fire had been kindled by the boys, who attend to the herding, to warm themselves by, and, in all probability, we were then within two or three miles of the village. I will not endeavor to describe the renewed hope and excitement that sprung up. Again we set out, this time more cautiously, if possible, than before. The command and scouts moved at a greater distance in rear than ever.

In order to be able to judge of the situation more correctly, I this time accompanied the two Osages. Silently we advanced, I mounted, they on foot, keeping at the head of my horse. Upon nearing the crest of each hill, as is invariably the Indian custom, one of the guides would hasten a few steps in advance and peer cautiously over the hill. Accustomed to this, I was not struck by observing it until once, when the same one who discovered the fire advanced cautiously to the crest and looked into the valley beyond. I saw him place his hands above his eyes as if looking intently at some object, then crouch down and come creeping back to where I waited for him. "What is it?" I in-

quired as soon as he reached my horse's sides. "Heaps Injuns down there," pointing in the direction from which he had just came. Hastily dismounting and giving the reins to the other guide, I accompanied the Osage to the crest, both of us crouching low so as not to be seen against the horizon, looking in the direction indicated I could indistinctly recognize the existence of a large body of animals of some kind at a distance of what seemed about half a mile. I looked at them long and anxiously, and was unable to discover anything in their appearance different from what might be presented by a herd of buffalo under similar circumstances. Turning to the Osage I inquired if he thought there were Indians there. "Me heard dog bark," was his satisfactory reply. (Indians are noted for the number of their dogs.) I waited quietly to be convinced; I was assured, but wanted to be doubly so. I was rewarded in a moment by hearing the barking of a dog in the heavy timber just beyond the herd, and soon after I clearly heard the tinkling of a small bell, this convinced me that it was really the Indian herd I then saw, the bell being one worn around the neck of some pony who was probably the leader of the herd. I turned to retrace my steps when another sound struck my ear; it was the cry of an infant; and savages though they were, I could not but for a moment regret that in a war such as we were forced to engage in, the mode and circumstances of battle would present discrimination.

Hastening back to where I found the main party of the scouts and Osages, they were halted and a message sent to halt the cavalry, enjoining complete silence, and directing every officer to ride to the point we then occupied. Soon they came, and after dismounting and collecting in a little circle, I informed them of what I had seen and heard, and in order that they might each learn as much as possible of the character of the ground and the location of the village, I proposed that all should remove their sabres, that their clanking might make no noise, and we proceed quietly to the crest and there obtain a view beyond; this was done; not a word was spoken until we crouched together and cast our eyes in the direction of the herd and village. In whispers I briefly pointed out all that was to be seen, then motioned all to return to where we had left our sabres, then, seated upon the ground or crust of snow, the plan of the attack was explained to all and each assigned his part. The command was divided into four nearly equal columns; two of them set out at once, as they had to make a circuitous march of several miles in order to arrive at the proper points for making the attack. The latter was to begin the moment it began to grow light; the third column moved to get in position an hour before day. The fourth I commanded in person, and was to make the attack from the point from which we had first observed the herd and

village. In dividing the command, I so arranged it that the column I was to accompany should have the greater number of the most efficient officers and men. First of all I designated Captain Hamilton and his squadron, consisting of "A" and "D" troop to form part of my column. Colonel West with his troop and "C" troop were added, and Colonel Cook with forty chosen sharpshooters formed the advanced guard. After the first two columns had departed for their posts, it was still four hours before the hour of attack; the men of the other two columns were permitted to dismount, but much suffering was unavoidably sustained. The night grew extremely cold towards morning; no fires could be permitted, and the men were even ordered to desist from stamping their feet and walking up and down to keep warm, as the breaking of the snow produced so much noise. During all these long weary hours each man sat, stood, or laid by his horse, holding to the rein of the latter. The officers buttoning their huge overcoats closely about them, collected in knots of four or five, and seated or reclining upon the snow's hard crust, discussed the probabilities of the coming battle, for battle we knew it would be, and we could not hope to conquer or kill an entire village without suffering in return more or less injury. Some wrapping their capes about their heads, spread themselves at full length upon the snow, and were soon wrapt in deep slumber. All remained quiet during the night.

I anxiously watched the opening signs of dawn in order to put the column in motion. We were only a few hundred yards from the point from which we were to attack. The moon disappeared about two hours before dawn, and left us enshrouded in thick and utter darkness. At last signs of approaching day were visible, and I proceeded to collect the officers, awaking those who slept; all were ordered to get ready; not a word to officer or men was spoken above a whisper. It began growing lighter, and we moved forward; Colonel West on the extreme right; Captain Hamilton with his squadron forming the main and centre part of the column. In forming for the attack I had frequent occasion to confer with your son regarding the dispositions for battle. And when once formed, and moving forward to the attack, he and I rode side by side. Never had I seen him more calm or self possessed, and never had I seen him when he so completely answered my idea of the model soldier as on that morning. In executing an order, or giving his direction to his command, he preserved his calm demeanor as perfectly as if moving upon the parade or review, and just before the first assault, he rode along the front of his line, although I was fully occupied with the responsibility of what was transpiring there and elsewhere upon the field of battle, I could not but be



(Photo Oklahoma Historical Society)

**CAP AND COAT WORN BY CAPTAIN LOUIS McLANE HAMILTON,
7TH U.S. CAVALRY, 1868**

**Captain Hamilton's cap and coat were sent in his memory to the Oklahoma
Historical Society in 1908**

thrilled with admiration as Captain Hamilton addressed his command, saying, "Now men, keep cool, fire low, and not too rapidly."

I was with him a few moments longer, conversing upon the subject which was then uppermost in the minds of all of us — the battle — and how to make it a success, when I was called to that part of the field held by Colonel West. That was my last interview with your son; he met his death within a few minutes after I left him. I was in a distant part of the field when one of his men reported to me that he had seen Captain Hamilton fall from his horse as if shot. I could not believe it, but caused steps to be taken to verify the truth or falsity of the report. Alas! it was but too true!

His faithful followers, hearing the statement of his fall, instituted instant search in that part of the field where the Captain had been last seen. There his lifeless remains were found, and by sorrowing comrades borne to a spot in the interior of the village where our wounded were being collected. It was there I first saw him — wrapt in the embrace of death — and never shall I forget the sad scene, nor its attendant circumstances.

A guard of honor, chosen from his immediate followers, had been placed on duty in charge of the corpse. While seated here and there, in the immediate vicinity, could be seen the men of his troop, some badly wounded, but all seemingly forgetful of everything but the fact that their beloved leader was no more. My brother, the Colonel, who was Captain Hamilton's 1st Lieutenant, was placed in charge of the prisoners, and it was only by a great effort that the lives of the latter were not taken in retaliation for the Captain's death.

Officers and men would gather round the body of their loved comrade and leader, and as they gazed upon his calm quiet face, tears would start unbidden, and those who were willing to brave the perils of the battlefield unterrified, were not ashamed to weep over the loss of their favorite. I will not attempt to describe how the joy of our successful encounter was suppressed, if not forgotten, in our grief for him who was not permitted to rejoice with us; nor will I refer to the long weary march while returning to Camp Supply. My letter has almost imperceptibly been drawn to an unreasonable length. You have been informed, doubtless, of all the circumstances of his funeral; a funeral, which, in the manifestation of spontaneous and unbounded grief, in the universal attendance of all whose presence was practicable, and in the strict but sincere observance of all those details which render a military funeral so imposing and solemn, might have been appropriate for a commander-in-chief. Yet not one of us but realized that the cherished and departed

hero was more than worthy of all the respect we could offer.

I must close, and yet I have said but little of that I would love to say. But who speak of his goodness, his gentleness of mind and manner, his generosity and kindness of heart, his affable and genial disposition, and last, but not least, his high sense of manly honor. And I know it will be pleasing to you to know that it was often remarked of him, "How devoted he is to his Mother." Of all his noble traits you, who knew him so well, must have been aware. He has left us, no more to return; he cannot come to us, but we may go to him; and his close observance of the rules of morality and virtue, his great and unvarying respect for all matters pertaining to sacred things, his regularity in attending divine service whenever such a course was practicable, in fine, his whole character and life justifies us in the happy belief that he has gone where there are neither wars, nor rumors of war. Where the soldier is at rest, and all is peace. May He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, comfort you in your great affliction, is the heartfelt prayer of

Truly yours,

G. A. CUSTER

Brevet Major-General, U.S.A.

From THE ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL, January 2, 1869.

CAPTAIN L. M. HAMILTON

Died, on the field of battle, November 28, 1868, Captain Louis McLane Hamilton, aged 24 years.

Such are the words which announce to family and friends a heart-rending bereavement. No eulogy is needed to place this brilliant young soldier's name on the scroll of fame, by the side of his grandsire's, the illustrious Alexander Hamilton, or to keep his memory pure and fresh in the hearts of his sorrowing comrades.

The battle of the Washita was fought on the morning of Nov. 27, 1868, by General Custer's command — eleven companies of the 7th cavalry, and Black Kettle's band of Cheyenne Indians, assisted by other bands of Sioux, Kiowas, and Arraphoes. The fighting commenced at dawn of day. The dispositions for attack, which had been arranged, placed Hamilton's squadron in the centre to charge the enemy's camp mounted. Thus charging and marshalling his squadron in splendid style right up to the enemy's lodges, the heroic Hamilton fell dead from his horse, shot by a bullet from a Lancaster rifle in the hands of a savage, who was concealed in his wigwam. Yet he could see that complete success was secured; he could hear the shouts of victory going up from the throats of his men. So the angel of death met him

with a beaming smile on his countenance, the thrill of glory in which he died.

Tenderly his comrades lifted him and bore him from the scene of his death, leaving only his precious blood to be absorbed by the hard, red clay of the Washita. Friends and comrades gathered around; manly hearts swelled with deep emotion, and eyes became suffused with tears, as they looked upon the lifeless form of the genial, gentle Hamilton. He had become indispensable to us. His ready wit, his keen appreciation of the ludicrous, his admiration for the beautiful, and, more than all, the sympathy of his great, warm heart, had served to entwine him so completely around us, that in losing him, we felt that we had lost the better portion of ourselves.

He was devoted to his men, and to the regiment. On the day before the battle he was officer of the day for the command, and when, for the purpose of more rapid pursuit, the troops were ordered to leave the train behind under guard, his place, as officer of the day, was with the train. But his soldier spirit could not brook the thought of allowing his squadron to face danger without him. So he appealed to his commander, with the earnestness almost of demand, to be allowed to accompany the pursuit. The request was granted, and we mourn the dead soldier all the more, as we reflect that the shaft of death might have been averted had he remained with the guard and train.

Though we knew him well and loved him dearly, he was not all ours, nor was his fame all made with us. Long before we knew him he had won encomiums from great heroes on the bloody fields of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. He entered the Third Regular Infantry in September, 1862, and served in the famous Regular Infantry Division until the close of the war, partly with his regiment, and for some time aide to General Romeyn B. Ayres, for whom he cherished the most devoted affection up to the hour of his death. From thence he came to us upon the re-organization of the Army in 1866, when, as First Lieutenant in the Third Infantry, he was commissioned Captain in the Seventh Cavalry, a distinction conferred upon him in consideration of his gallant bearing and the enthusiasm of his nature, which better fitted him for dashing service. Here the resources of his fruitful mind and the energy of his character came into full play. Out of the chaos in which he found his recruits in December, 1866, he brought a company the finest in his regiment, and equal to any in the service. Thus laboring, he contributed largely toward perfecting the organization and discipline which enabled his regiment to win victory and distinction in the battle which cost him his life.



(Oklahoma Historical Society Collections)

**PEN AND INK DRAWING
BY CAPTAIN LOUIS McLANE HAMILTON**

This drawing by Captain Hamilton is on the front of a page received in the Hamilton Collection to the Historical Society in 1908. The character shown could have been seen by the artist as one of the motley crowd of politicians, government agents, troops and Indians outside Major General Philip H. Sheridan's conference that resulted in the Expedition against the Indians southwest out of Kansas, under the command of Colonel George H. Custer in the fall of 1868.

Hamilton's ambition was to be a perfect soldier. He was gallant in everything. It would have been safer to have aroused a sleeping lion than to have cast a shadow of suspicion upon his honor. While he was susceptible of the perfect phrenzy of enthusiasm, and would brave danger and death in every form of duty, yet, in the quiet hours of life, he was gentle and winsome as a maiden. His strong intellect, refined by careful culture, enabled him to comprehend the "fluctuations and vast concerns" of life with rare discrimination. His well stored mind was as delightful and fragrant, so to speak, as a beautiful garden. — The training of his youth, and the examples suggested by parental affection and solicitude, were kept green in his memory by his overpowering attachment to parents and home. His conceptions of the *Holy Scriptures* were sublime. Thus attuned and trained, he lived a noble and blameless life, an honor to his profession and a worthy possessor of the great name which he inherited.

He died on the field of honor

The roll of the funeral drum, and the volleys which will be fired by his devoted men, will be the last outward token we shall have to give of his great worth and of our undying love. That His feet with angel feet may vie

And tread the palace of the sky,

will be the aspirations which will arise from our breasts as we mournfully leave him in his grave

*R. M. W.

Camp on the North Fork

Canadian River, I. T., December 3, 1868.

CAMP ON NORTH FORK CANADIAN RIVER, I. T.,

December 6, 1868.

Philip Hamilton, Esq., Poughkeepsie, N. Y.:

Dear Sir: I respectfully transmit herewith the proceedings of a meeting lately held in this Regiment, expressing in a feeble manner the estimation in which your beloved Son Louis was held by his contemporaries here, and the sincere sorrow they feel for his untimely end.

The resolutions fail entirely to express the depth of our affection for the deceased, or the extent of the loss we sustain

*Brevet Colonel West resigned his commission in the army in the following February, and died of sunstroke near Fort Arbuckle, September 8, 1869. He was an accomplished soldier and noble hearted man. He served in the Mexican War, and with distinction throughout the late civil war, at the close of which he was appointed Captain in the 7th U. S. Cavalry.

by his death.

In the earnest hope that the sympathy we have endeavored to express, may serve in some measure, however slight, to assuage the grief which this sad bereavement has brought upon you, I remain, dear sir, with profound respect.

Your obedient servant,
ROBERT M. WEST,
7th Cavalry, Bvt. Col. U.S.A.
Secretary of the meeting.

A meeting of the officers of the 7th U.S. Cavalry was held in the camp of the regiment, on the North Fork of Canadian River, Indian Territory, the fourth day of December, 1868, to take into consideration the untimely death of Captain Louis M. Hamilton, of the regiment, who was killed in the battle of the Washita, Nov. 27, 1868, and to testify by resolution the respect and estimation in which the deceased was held by his comrades in arms; Brevet Major General Geo. A. Custer was chosen to preside over the meeting, and a committee was appointed to draft resolutions. The following were reported by the committee:

Resolved, That the death in battle of our late comrade, CAPT. LOUIS M. HAMILTON, has bereft us of a dear and valued friend, who, while living, we cherished as a rare and gifted gentleman of unsullied honor and spotless fame; that we miss the genial face, the sparkling wit, the well-trying, warm and trusty heart of him whose loss we mourn more deeply than words can tell.

Resolved, That by the death of the heroic Hamilton, the Army has lost one of its brightest ornaments; that he was a thorough, gallant soldier, with heart and hand in his work, whose highest aim was to be perfect "without fear, and without reproach" in all things pertaining to his profession; that among the brilliant soldiers who were selected after the closest scrutiny from the Armies of the East and the West, for the new Army which was organized at the close of the late war, our lamented Hamilton stood in the foremost rank; that the genius of his mind, and the qualities of his heart stamped him as one of the purest and brightest soldiers of his years and time; that his blameless life and glorious death entitle him to a place among the departed heroes of his race.

Resolved, That the patriotic ardor and devotion to country and duty, which rendered the Grand sire, Alexander Hamilton, illustrious, were truthfully perpetuated in the Grandson, the best efforts of whose life were directed towards the re-establishment

of the government which his progenitor had aided to build; whose life's blood was shed in visiting just retribution upon those who had savagely outraged every principle of humanity, and who had persistently refused to recognize the authority of that government which he had learned from infancy to venerate, and for the supremacy of which he had fought on many famous fields.

Resolved, That the officers and soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry do express their heartfelt sympathy with all who mourn the loss of the deceased, especially do they tender the same to his relatives and family friends.

Resolved, That the Secretary of the meeting be directed to transmit a copy of these proceedings to the relations of the deceased, and that he also be directed to transmit a copy of the same for publication to the Army and Navy Journal, and to *The Daily Eagle*, a paper published at Poughkeepsie, N. Y., where the deceased resided.

The report of the committee was approved, and the meeting adjourned sine die.

G. A. CUSTER,
Bvt. Maj. Gen. U.S.A., President.

R. M. West, *Bvt. Col. U.S.A., Sec'y.*

A correspondent of the *New York Herald*, wrote as follows, from the Camp: "Captain Louis M. Hamilton, killed in the battle of the Washita, was buried this afternoon with military honors. The entire regular troops at present here turned out. The body of the deceased captain was carried in an ambulance as a hearse and covered with a large American flag. The ambulance was preceded by Captain Hamilton's squadron, commanded by Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Weir, as escort, and was followed by his horse, covered with a mourning sheet. Major General Sheridan, Brevet Major General Custer, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Crosby, Cook, and T. W. Custer, Brevet Major Beebe, and Lieutenant Hale acted as pall bearers."¹

After his death, the Brevet of Major was conferred "for gallant and meritorious services in engagements with the Indians, particularly in the battle with the Cheyennes on the Washita River, November 27, 1868, where he fell while gallantly leading his command."

From *The New York Evening Post*.

CAPTAIN LOUIS M. HAMILTON

Captain Hamilton, who was killed in the battle of the Washita, fought between United States cavalry under General Custer, and Indians under Big Kettle, on the 27th of November, 1868,

¹ See Appendix at the end of this article.

was the youngest officer of his rank in the regular service. He was born in the city of New York on the 21st of July, 1844. He was the eldest son of Philip Hamilton, Esq., of Poughkeepsie, who is the youngest of the surviving sons of the eminent statesman, Alexander Hamilton.

His maternal grandfather was Louis McLane, of Delaware, who was twice minister to England, and was a member of President Jackson's cabinet, as Secretary of the Treasury, and also as Secretary of State.

In the second year of the late Civil War, young Hamilton, then not eighteen years of age, went into the service for three months at Harper's Ferry, as a volunteer private in the Twenty-second New York State militia. On his return to Poughkeepsie he immediately engaged in raising a company of volunteers for the service, and while so employed he received (September 21, 1862) the commission of second lieutenant in the Third Regular Infantry. In that capacity he commanded a company in the battle of Fredericksburg, in December following. There, where the regulars were most fearfully exposed under the most trying circumstances, young Hamilton's calmness, fortitude and bravery were fully tried. He was again in command of a company in the desperate struggle at Chancellorsville, early in May, 1863, when the regulars covered the retreat of the army across the Rappahannock. So conspicuous was his soldierly behavior on that occasion, that on the day after the passage of the river he was placed on the staff of General Ayers, who commanded the division of regulars. In that capacity he performed excellent service in the battle of Gettysburg, when he was not yet nineteen years of age. He soon afterwards received two brevets, on the recommendation of a board of officers, one for "gallant and meritorious conduct" at Chancellorsville, and the other for the same at Gettysburg. In every position in which he acted during the war, young Hamilton was distinguished for his ability and faithfulness.

On the reorganization of the army in 1866, Lieutenant Hamilton was appointed captain of the Seventh regiment of regular cavalry, and went with General Custer to the hostile Indian country. He at once took rank as one of the best officers in that arm of the service. During the winter and spring of 1867, he so perfected the discipline of his company that the Inspector General, in his report, mentioned it as the best at the post. In the ensuing summer he was in active service on the Plains. In June he had his first conflict with the Indians, concerning which General Custer said in his report to General Sherman: "On the 24th ultimo, forty-five Sioux warriors attacked a detachment of twenty-five men of this regiment under Captain Louis M.

Hamilton, near the Forks of the Republic. Captain Hamilton's party, after a gallant fight, defeated and drove off the Indians. . . . To Captain Hamilton, as well as to his men, great praise is due for the pluck and determination exhibited by them in this, their first engagement with the Indians."

Since last August, the service of the Seventh regiment has been particularly severe and perilous. General Sheridan had determined to carry on the campaign against the Indians with great vigor. General Custer was restored to his command early in November; and under that, his old gallant and energetic commander, Captain Hamilton, full of the chivalric spirit of his profession, addressed himself assiduously to the important business before them. In a letter written to his parents only a week before his death, and received after the sad intelligence had reached them, he said, in describing the new arrangements in the regiment, made by Custer: "He has transferred the horses from squadron to squadron, so as to have them assorted by color. I have got black horse, (picked,) and he has given me the honor of arming my squadron with Colt's revolvers, and making mine the light squadron."

A few days afterwards the troops, marching, struck the trail of an Indian war party in snow a foot deep. The savages were pursued with vigor until past midnight, when they were discovered in fifty lodges, with their families and provisions. A simultaneous charge of the troops in four columns, was made at dawn on the 27th of November. The national forces were victorious. Big Kettle the leader of the hostile band, and others, were killed; and all the survivors, with their effects, were captured. In the charge that struck this first serious blow which the savages have received during the war, Captain Hamilton fell. General Sheridan, in a congratulatory order to the troops dated in the field, Nov. 29, 1868, says: "The energy and rapidity shown during one of the heaviest snow storms that has visited this section of the country, with the temperature below freezing point, and the gallantry and bravery displayed, resulting in such signal success, reflects the highest credit upon both officers and men of the Seventh Cavalry; and the Major-General commanding, while regretting the loss of such gallant soldiers as Major Elliot and Captain Hamilton, who fell while gallantly leading their men, desires to express his thanks to the officers and men engaged in the battle of the Washita."

Such is the brief outline of the military record of one of the most promising young men of our country. His character and his achievements during his short but eventful life deserve more than a passing notice, yet only such may here be given. Goodness, integrity, and a deep religious sentiment, formed the basis of his

moral character. From earliest childhood he was governed in his conduct towards others by the nicest sense of honor. His ever-flowing good humor, sparkling wit, quiet vivacity, and generous modesty, made him one of the most loveable companions, and the favorite among officers and men. While he possessed all the tenderness of a woman, when human sympathies and sweet emotions stirred his heart, and was oblivious of self, he was stern, inflexible and uncompromising towards all that was mean, false, oppressive and unrighteous.

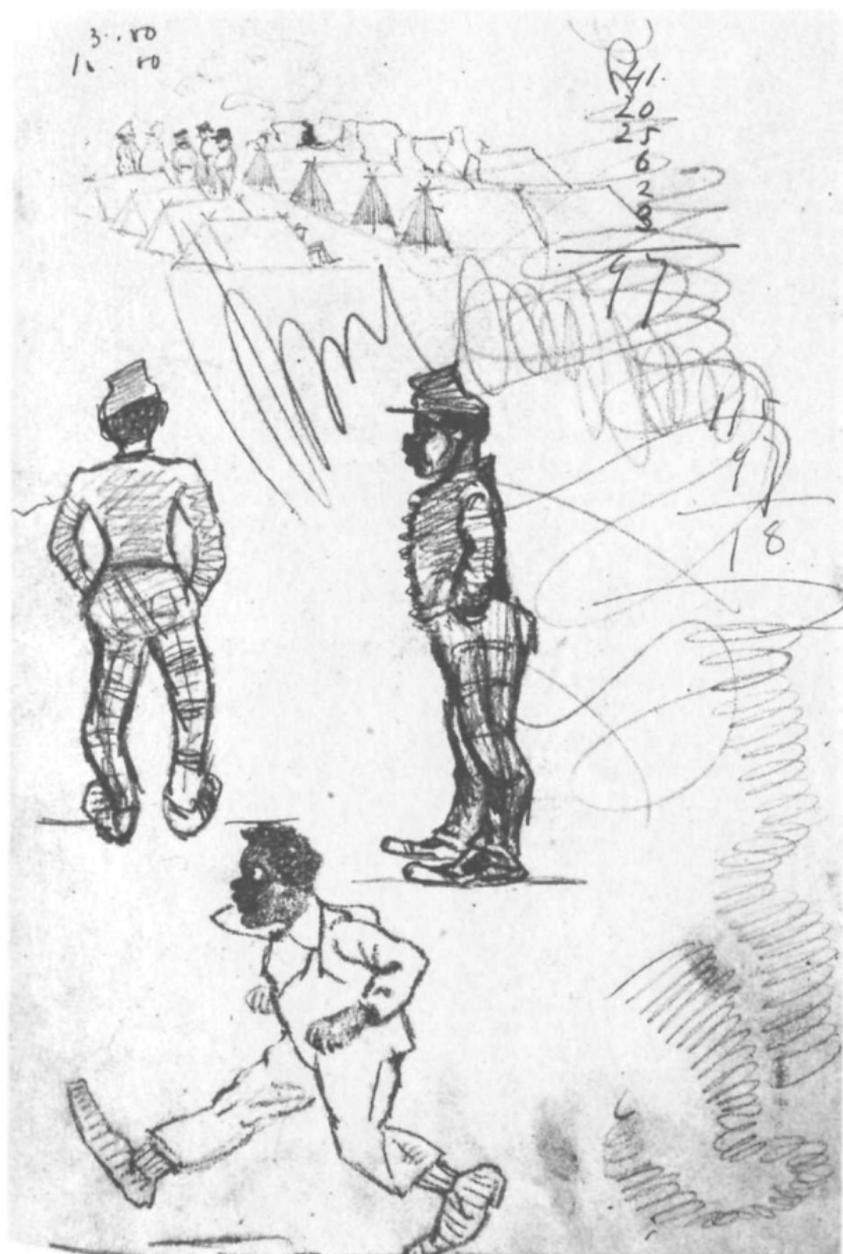
His intellectual qualities were in unison with those of his moral nature. He was fluent and impressive in conversation; and he wrote with force, perspicuity and purity of diction. His contributions to the press before he was seventeen years of age, were marked by a breadth and strength of thought, and by terseness of language seldom displayed excepting by experienced writers; and his private letters from the camp and field would need very little revision to please the most fastidious taste. He possessed the elements of an accomplished artist. The products of his pencil, thrown off as occasion offered, generally in illustration of something ludicrous in his experience, were quite remarkable.¹ His patriotism led him into the military service in defense of the life of his country. He acquired such a taste for the profession of arms, and so perfect a knowledge of its requirements, that he chose it as his vocation. His bravery, General Ayres said, was "perfect." His devotion to his country, on all occasions, was most generous and disinterested, and gives him an abiding place among the purest patriots. B.J.L.

APPENDIX

Special research on the death and reburial of Captain Louis McLane Hamilton was done by the Editor of *The Chronicles*, in the Civil War Records Division of the National Archives, Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1959. Documents checked included the Custer reports, the Louis M. Hamilton file, Regimental Returns of the 7th Cavalry (1868), Selected Letters Sent—Fort Supply Indian Territory, and the Fort Dodge (Kansas) Letter Book 10. The following communication was found in the file "Selected Letters Sent" given here:²

¹ *Sheridan's Troopers on the Borders* by De B. Randolph Keim. A journalist present at the burial, describes (p. 125) the funeral services for the "gallant, young officer, Hamilton," held on December 4, 1868, at Camp Supply.

² Early in 1959, the Oklahoma Historical Society's Committee on Historic Sites planned to erect a memorial plaque and marker at the grave of Captain Louis McLane Hamilton at Fort Supply. Nothing was found in this vicinity to indicate the burial place of the young officer, and only a rumor that the remains had been removed from Fort Supply many years ago. The Appendix at the end of this article gives a brief report on the discovery of Captain Hamilton's grave given in Notes and Documents, *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, pp. 355-59.



(Oklahoma Historical Society Collections)

PENCIL DRAWINGS
BY CAPTAIN LOUIS McLANE HAMILTON

These drawings and "doodling" by Captain Hamilton are on the back of the page in the Hamilton Collection of the Historical Society. Here is the artist's sense of the ludicrous that he saw in his army life on the frontier.

Head. Qr. Infantry Battalion
Camp Supply, Ind. Ter.
January 20, 1869

Mrs. Phillip Hamilton
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
Madam:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of special Order No. 24 O.S. from these Hdqtrs., in order to advise you in regard to the action taken in forwarding of the body of L. M. Hamilton, late Captain 7th U.S. Cavalry.

I have the honor to be Madam

Very Respectfully
Your Obt. Sv't.
Signed/ W. N. Williams
2nd Lt. 3rd Infantry
Batt. Adjutant

SPECIAL ORDER NO. 24

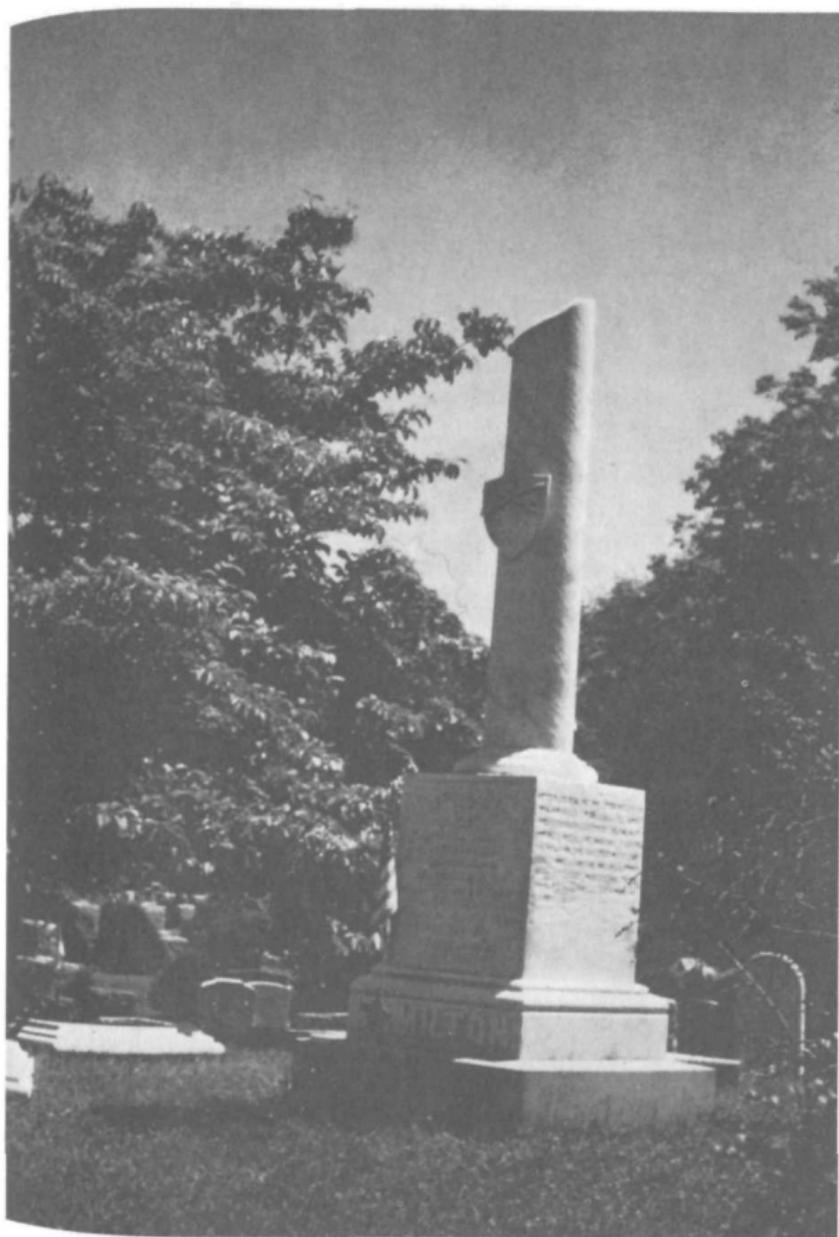
Bvt. Maj. Henry Asbury, Capt. 3rd Infantry, with Srgt. Scott and Pvt. Kelop, Co. A 7th Cavalry, Srgt. Geary, Co. F 3rd Infantry and Srgt. Lockman; Co. B 3rd Infantry will proceed to Fort Dodge, Kansas as escort to the remains of Capt. L. M. Hamilton, 7th Cavalry. Upon arrival at Fort Dodge, Bvt. Maj. Henry Asbury will report to Comdg. Officer of that Fort. The Quartermaster Dept. will furnish necessary transportation.

By order of Bvt. Maj. Page

Signed/ W. N. Williams
2nd Lt. 3rd Infantry
Batt. Adjutant

The monument at the grave of Louis McLane Hamilton in the old "Rural Cemetery" on Livingston Road out of Poughkeepsie, New York, represents the broken trunk of a tree hung with the shield of the 7th Cavalry with the following inscriptions on three sides:

- (1) Brev't. Maj. Louis McLane Hamilton
Capt. 7 U.S. Cavalry
Aged 24 Years.
Son of Phillip &
Rebecca Hamilton.
Killed in the Battle of
the Waabita Nov. 27, 1868
While gallantly lead-
ing his command.
*"A little while and ye
shall see me."*
- (2) Born July 21, 1844, at the City
of New York. Joined 22 N.Y.
Militia as private June 1862.
Entered the 3 U.S. Infantry as
2nd Lieut. the following Sep-
tember. Served throughout the
War with the Army of the
Potomac, in Sykes Division.
Brevetted for gallantry at
Chancellorsville and again
at Gettysburgh, and was
appointed Capt. 7th Cavalry
July 1866



(Photo by Mary Jeanne Hansen, 1969)

**GRAVE OF
LOUIS McLANE HAMILTON**

BREVET MAJOR 7TH U.S. CAVALRY

The final burial place of young Hamilton with its handsome monument is in the old "Rural Cemetery" on Livingston Road out of Poughkeepsie, New York.

(8) After death, he was brevetted Major U.S.A. "For Gallant and Meritorious Services in Engagements with the Indians, Particularly in the Battle with the Cheyennes on the Washita River. Nov. 27, 1868, where he fell while gallantly leading his Command."