

Charles Henry Welch

Born

March 16, 1845, New York, New York

Entered Service

Fort Snelling, Minnesota

Branch

Army

Conflict

Indian Campaigns

Little Big Horn, Montana

Died

June 22, 1915, LaSalle, Colorado



Early Years

Charles Henry Welch was born March 16, 1845 in New York, New York, although his Medal of Honor gravestone shows his birthdate as March 16, 1840.¹ While the funeral home record² lists the birth year as 1840, the document also shows Welch's age at death (on June 22, 1915) as 70 years, 3 months, 6 days, consistent with a birth year of 1840. The funeral home error likely caused the wrong year to be entered on the MOH gravestone. The gravestone he shares with his wife reflects his birth year as 1845.

His parents may have been James and Alice Welch, but we have been unable to confirm any facts about his growing-up years.

Indian Campaign Wars

Charles H. Welch enlisted in the Army on June 8, 1873 at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, and was assigned to Company D, 7th U.S. Cavalry.³ The Seventh Cavalry Regiment patrolled the plains of Kansas, Montana and Dakota Territory to protect the western movement of pioneers.⁴

In June 1876 the Battle of Little Big Horn was waged against northern tribes of Indians including the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho while the Cavalry was attempting to force the Indians back to their reservations. One of the columns, led by Lt. Colonel George Custer, was effectively trapped, and 268 soldiers killed in less than an hour.⁵

“That greatest of Indian fights on the American continent, which occurred June 25-26, 1876, known variously as “Custer’s last battle,” and erroneously as “The Custer Massacre,” developed many heroes, but none to whom the title is more apropos than the twenty-four troopers of the Seventh Cavalry who won Medals of Honor for extraordinarily-hazardous duty during two days of this remarkable and thrilling engagement.”⁶

“Five men received awards for direct combat actions...nineteen men (were) cited for heroism in obtaining critical water for the wounded. Four brave troopers exposed themselves to the enemy for four hours from a position ahead of the line while Sergeant Welch and fourteen of his comrades slipped out of the right wing of Captain Benteen’s line to cross eighty yards of fire-swept ground to reach a deep ravine. With camp kettles, the fifteen brave men made repeated trips to the river while under protective fire from the four troopers at the head of the line. Despite the great danger, and Indian warriors who concealed themselves in bushes along the river in order to ambush the party, only one of these men was wounded. Had not the critical supply of water been obtained, many more of the wounded would have died.”⁷

Another, matter-of-fact and extremely understated account of Welch’s experience at Little Big Horn was published in a Weld County, Colorado, local history:⁸

“Charlie Welch, a resident of the Godfrey Bottom area, was with Custer’s forces at the Little Big Horn. The night before Custer’s Last Stand, Charlie and two others, sent out to scout, were fired upon by some Indians, and Charlie was hit in the leg. He was taken to the rear for care. So, he could not participate in the battle. Charlie considered the wound a definite asset, as a lame leg was a small price to pay for saving his life.”

Sgt. Charles H. Welch was discharged on June 2, 1878, “for disability” at Fort Rice (Dakota Territory).⁹

Post-Military Life

After his discharge, Charles settled in Weld County, Colorado, possibly near family members who’d settled there. A biographical sketch of Allen R. Godfrey states Godfrey “met and married Katie Welch, daughter of a pioneer family living in the Godfrey Bottoms, June 5, 1873.”¹⁰ Katie and Charles were likely siblings.

In 1880 Charles married Allen Godfrey’s 16-year-old sister, Carrie. They lived near her parents, and Charles farmed with his father-in-law, Holon Godfrey.¹¹ Charles and Carrie had nine children, five of whom survived to adulthood: Katie Augusta (b. 1881), Alice Maude (b. 1885), Elmer (b. 1889), Lyda/Lydia (b. 1892), and Charles Custer (b. 1896).¹²

Gravestone

Charles Henry Welch died June 22, 1915 at LaSalle, Colorado. He and his wife Carrie are buried in Evans Cemetery, Evans, Colorado.¹³

Submitted by Georgetta “Gigi” Hickey
Lake Minnetonka Chapter DAR



Photo by Don Morle; photo found at homeofheroes.com

ENDNOTES

¹ Find-a-grave photo by Paul. M Branum.

² "Record of Funeral, Charles H. Welch," Allnut Funeral Records, 1914-1915, page 283, copy provided by Weld County Genealogical Society, Greeley, CO.

³ U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914, image 428. Ancestry.com (database online).

⁴ "7th Cavalry Regiment," from Wikipedia.org.

⁵ "Battle of Little Big Horn articles," from Historynet.com.

⁶ E. A. Brininstool and J. W. Vaughn, *Troopers with Custer: Incidents of the Battle of the Little Big Horn*. Chapter 14.

⁷ Description of incident found at www.Homeofheroes.com.

⁸ *Around and About LaSalle*, by LaSalle (CO) History Book Committee, Carol Connell and Helen Connell, editors, 1988, page 27.

⁹ U.S. Army Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914.

¹⁰ *Around and About LaSalle*, page 115. The Welch family apparently arrived after 1870 as none is listed among Weld County residents in the 1870 U.S. Federal Census.

¹¹ 1880 U.S. Federal Census, Household of Holon Godfrey, Weld County, Colorado. Ancestry.com (database online).

¹² 1900 and 1910 U.S. Federal Census, Household of Charles H. Welch, LaSalle, Weld County, Colorado, Ancestry.com (database online).

¹³ Photo of gravesite found at www.Homeofheroes.com.