



Gilman descendants refurbish gravestone of Constitution signer

By Alex LaCasse

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EXETER -- When Quentin Gilman of Silverdale, Washington first made the journey to Exeter to see where his ancestors were buried two years ago, he immediately took notice of the weather-beaten stone that marked the grave of one of America's first revolutionaries-turned statesman Nicholas Gilman.

Gilman said he wanted to replace the memorial stone marking the burial site of a soldier in George Washington's Continental Army, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, signer of the Constitution and former Congressman so future generations would understand Nicholas Gilman's contributions to the founding of United States.

"Exeter has tremendous heritage," Quentin Gilman said. "This stone represents Exeter, the Gilman family, the state of New Hampshire and the United States of America."

On Sunday, Gilman family members and local history buffs returned to the Gilman family cemetery plot in the Exeter Cemetery for the formal rededication of Gilman's stone. The ceremony was organized by former Exeter American Legion Post 32 Auxiliary Secretary and Treasurer Anita Shaffer, who helped connect Quentin Gilman with a local stonecutter. She also pulled in help from Newmarket American Legion Post 67 and Hampton Post 35 to put on a formal military memorial.

The ceremony was attended by Mark Gilman, the caretaker of the Gilman family cemetery plot, Greg and Julie Gilman, Brenda Gilman and Rob Gilman, in addition to a large contingent of Quentin Gilman's extended family from out West.

Quentin Gilman is a U.S. Army veteran himself and a member of American Legion Post 109 in Silverdale, Washington. He is a descendent of Nicholas Gilman's uncle and said the new Gilman memorial was an extension of why he joined the American Legion following his military service; to serve his fellow veterans.

"I never had to go into combat and none of my family has ever been hurt in battle. I joined the American Legion to help those who are less fortunate and we take care of the veterans who were wounded," he said. "The memorial is just an extension of my mission of giving back and honoring my family's history. Nicholas Gilman is a hero in Exeter, he's a hero in New Hampshire and he's an American hero for his combat service and his government service at the onset of our nation."

U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-NH, addressed the ceremony's attendees and said the ceremony served as a day for "renewal and commitment" to honor Nicholas Gilman.

"(Gilman) represented New Hampshire at the Continental Congress, signing the United States Constitution, but then as if that wasn't enough, (he understood) that you couldn't just rest with signing the Constitution. You had to ratify it," Hassan said. "When you went to Washington as a senator or House member back then, you went for a long time and you missed home. And you did it anyways because your country needed you and Nicholas Gilman understood that."

During his remarks, Quentin Gilman presented Shaffer with a gift for all her work in putting together the ceremony for his ancestor.

"It was a huge honor to be able to help Quentin," Shaffer said. "I thought I knew a lot of history but I learned so much about Nicholas Gilman and his family, it was so interesting."

Emma Bray, executive director of the American Independence Museum, said among all of the extraordinary historical accomplishments Nicholas Gilman had a direct hand in during his life, after the revolution, none may have been more important than his service in the Committee of Postponed Parts in the Continental Congress in 1787. The committee was tasked with resolving all the

leftover issues that were broached over the course of the debate on the Constitution, and one issue, in particular, was the Oath of Office the president would take.

“One of the things I love about the draft of the Constitution (at the Independence Museum), is you can see Nicholas Gilman’s handwriting in that draft,” Bray said during the ceremony. “In it one of the best lines, I think, is when they talk about the Oath of Office the president will take, they have written in, ‘I will faithfully execute the office of the president,’ and Nicholas Gilman writes in his notes, ‘and I will uphold the U.S. Constitution.’”