

# DECATUR COUNTY HISTORY

A project of the Greensburg-Decatur County Public Library

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## John O. Gullian: Decatur County Revolutionary War Veteran

By Guest Columnist Josh Rutherford

Within Decatur County there are roughly thirty-six Revolutionary War veterans buried throughout the local cemeteries. Many, like John Gilleland (Swinney) and George King (Milford) are easily available to the public. A few, like Lucius Tanner (Mowrey) and High Montgomery (Watts) are buried on private property. Because the establishment of military headstones was not adopted until 1873 by Secretary of War William W. Belknap, most veterans of the Revolutionary War have traditionally civilian headstones. There are those, however, that were given one because their grave was either unmarked or had deteriorated. Once such veteran is John O. Gullian.

Located on what is now the Spillman land, around the area of E County Road 500 N and N County Road 150 W, sitting atop a hill overlooking Clifty Creek, the lone headstone of John O. Gullian resides deep in the woods. The surrounding area is quiet and the view is remarkable, a perfect resting spot to end one's journey in life. However, there are serious doubts as to whether or not this spot is in fact the ground where John Gullian is buried.



The Gullian headstone in Decatur County

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Photo by Josh Rutherford

According to family trees available online and local history, John Gullian was born around April 28, 1760 in Carrol County, KY to Edmund Gullian (b 1739). His mother is not known. At the outbreak of conflict with the British, John enlisted in Pennsylvania in 1776, as a private in Capt. Joseph Erwin's CO., Col. Miles' Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment. According to records, he was wounded and discharged at Valley Forge after serving 18 months. In 1778 he re-enlisted, served 6 months in Col. Bayard's Pennsylvania Regiment, and then 6 months in Col. Davis' Pennsylvania Regiment. Finally, he was in Col. Crawford's Regiment by 1782. After the war, around 1787, he married Catherine Riffle in Washington County, Pennsylvania. From there he moved to Ohio and then in 1819 to Switzerland County. Local records claim he was one of the first settlers in Adams Township, Decatur County when he arrived in the area around 1818-1819. It is thought that he either had five or six children, all born before his move to Switzerland County. Only two are known to have survived in the records. In 1831 he applied for his Revolutionary War pension in Decatur County. In 1845, Catherine died and is buried in an unknown location.

John Gullian died in 1850. Most records show he died near Kokomo in Howard County. When he left Decatur County for Howard county, and why, remains unknown. However, the bigger mystery is who is buried on the Spillman farm? Located in Twin Springs Cemetery near Kokomo lies the reported grave of John Gullian complete with a military headstone. The added inscription on it reads, "In Battle of Long Island wounded in New Jersey served eighteen months honorably discharged at Valley Forge. Erected by Gen. James Cox – Charter of Daughters of American Rev." So now we have two US Government issued headstones for the same person. One in a cemetery in Howard County, and the other alone and secluded in rural Decatur County.



The Gullian headstone in Howard County

Photo from [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)

So which county has the actual grave and which is wrong? I don't think that can ever be determined, but there are some additional clues which to me point to him being buried in Howard County. Both of his surviving children lived in Howard County in 1860, according to the census records. The application for the headstone on the Spillman farm was submitted in 1902, fifty-two years after his death. I feel that there is someone buried on that secluded hill. A small, broken or worn away stone, much like a foot stone, lies in the ground below the headstone. It looks to be from the time period of his death.

Gullian John O	
Co.	Regt.
U S Soldier - Res Man	
Cemetery	Shiloh
at	Decatur Co Ind
Grave	
Date of death	-
Headstone supplied by	
Vermont Marble Company, Proctor, Vermont, Contract dated Aug. 25, 1902.	

Headstone application for John O. Gullion  
Source: www.ancestry.com

My guess is that the final resting place on the Spillman farm is that of John Gullion's wife. Even his oldest child would have been in their 20s by the time they settled into the area. The grave may have been unmarked, or just marked with a small stone with initials or just a last name. Local lore and history around 1900 had him living in that area, so it's quite possible that a distant relative had a stone placed there completely unaware there was already one in Howard County and that the grave was actually not his.

The issue you encounter with history is that over time documentation and fact gets replaced with stories and lore. Unfortunately, there will always be more questions than answers when it comes to research of this kind.

Sources:

Ancestry.com


www.findagrave.com

Descendants of Patrick Gullion: <http://www.ingenweb.org/inswitzer/bios/gullionPatrick.html>

John O. Gullion: <http://graves.inssar.org/G/gulljohn.html>

Thank to Pat Smith, local historian and writer, for the tip on the location of the grave.

Posted by Greensburg-Decatur County Public Library at 12:43 PM

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