

Investigators face possibility the mystery may be solved

This concludes the six-part series on the search for the grave of Maryland's Gov. Levin Winder, who died in Baltimore in July 1819 and was brought back to his 840-acre estate, Bloomsbury, near Venton in Somerset County for burial. The search for Winder's grave and that of his wife, Mary Stoughton Sloss Winder, and young daughter, Marianna, has been ongoing for almost a century.

The late Harry C. Dashiell, a Princess Anne attorney, spent most of his adult life searching for the grave and narrowed his investigation to a four-acre site on the farm of Donald Wilson on the Little Monie Creek.

For decades Dashiell struggled with the problem of Winder's house on one farm and the graveyard on another. Though both farms were part of Winder's estate, a ditch has always separated the two farms, one of which is owned by Wilson (where the grave is believed to be located) and the other by Samuel Langford Anderson, on whose farm the foundation of the Winder home can be found.

Despite years of media coverage, Dashiell located only one man who claimed to have seen the Winder's grave, but an investigation of that site ended in failure.

After Dashiell's death in 1975, Salisbury businessman David Grier has continued the search, which has gained momentum with the aid of landowner Donald Wilson.

Now, almost a century after the search began, Leroy Jones has become the second eye witness that recalls seeing the grave. With Jones' aid, Grier and Wilson face the possibility that the mystery will be solved and success may be only months away.

By BRICE STUMP
Daily Times Staff Writer

The key to solving the mystery of the location of the Winder graveyard is shared by an eyewitness to the graveyard and by new technology. Leroy Jones, 83, near Venton told Donald Wilson, owner of the farm where Winder's grave is believed to be located, that he

saw the graveyard as a boy of 8, but never realized that it might hold the remains of Winder and his family. Jones has lived his life within a couple of miles of the Bloomsbury plantation, and said he knows where the graveyard is on the farm, known as the Lewis Farm or Lewis Landing. "My grandfather, Joseph Waters, said there was a graveyard near the house, up there by the fence. I came up with him and saw the graveyard," Jones said. Without hesitation Jones said the graveyard was facing north, to "the right of the gate, along the fence" at the Lewis Farm. The gate is gone now, but it once intersected the lane going north toward the house which has also vanished. The gate and fence, which ran east and west, was less than 200 feet from the house site. The gate and

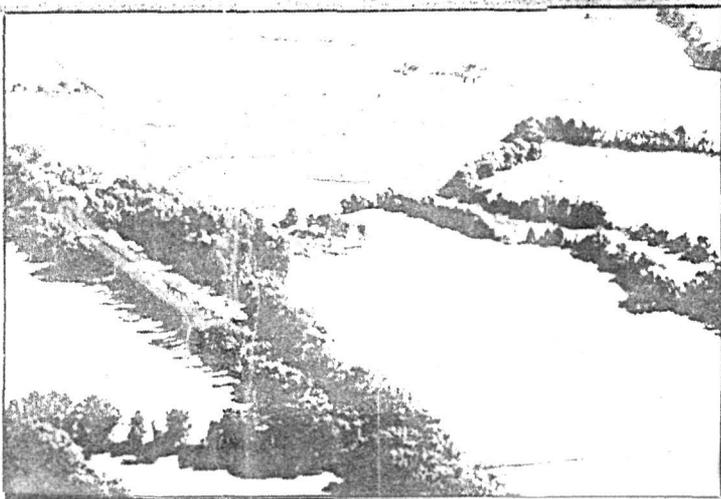


Photo by Frank MacKinnon

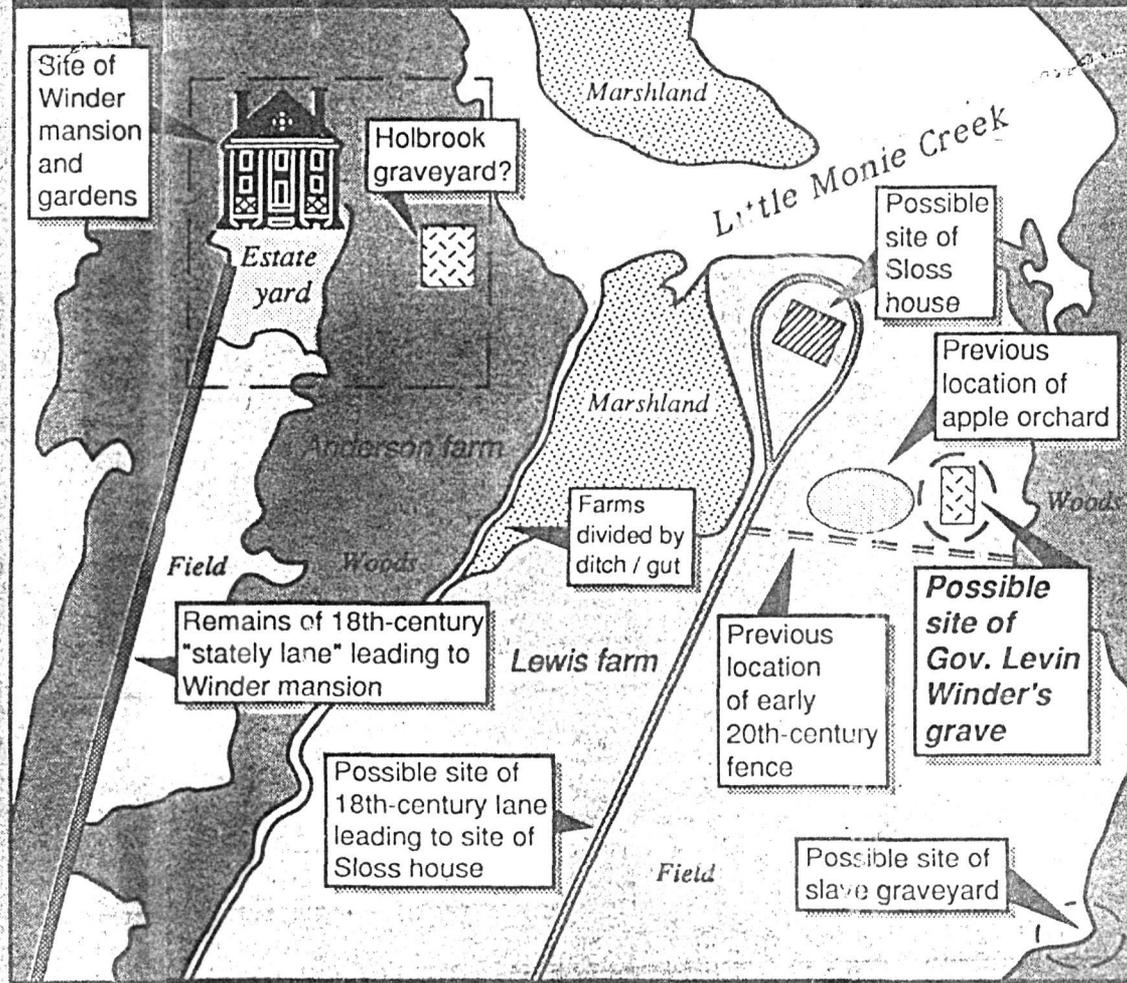
HISTORIC LANE. An aerial view of Bloomsbury, taken in June, shows the marsh, fields and woods of Gov. Levin Winder's plantation. The lost grave of Winder and his daughter and wife are said to be buried somewhere on the estate.

fence also bounded the four-acre lawn on the south, the other three sides are surrounded by water. "I saw one grave that was open or caved in like, and there was leaves and stuff inside, and there were other graves nearby, with the tops rounded off," Jones said. Jones said he has always known about the graveyard, but never associated it with the Winder family, not even knowing

CLUES TO THE PAST

Bloomsbury Plantation
Possible site of Gov. Levin Winder's grave

circa 1800



Times Graphic by Rick Bremer



Times Photo by Brice Stump

CLOSING IN. Leroy Jones, 83, of near Venton, left, shows Donald Wilson the approximate location where he saw a graveyard on the Lewis Farm in the early 1900s. The site is within a four-acre area where researchers believe the grave of Gov. Levin Winder is located. Wilson, owner of the property, hopes an investigation this fall will solve the mystery of the lost grave.

until recently that Winder lived on and owned the farm. There were no tombstones on the graves, Jones said, but one of the graves was outlined in brick, not in a mint-condition fashion, but straight enough and intact enough to indicate that the bricks may have been part of a foundation for the walls of a brick vault. Whatever it was, the outline See WINDER, page E7

Researchers face possibility that grave may be found

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certainly wasn't large enough to be the remains of a building.

Jones also remembered the old house near the graveyard, but he didn't investigate "because there were too many snakes back here in those days."

Like others, Jones said he never saw or heard of any other buildings on the Lewis Farm near the creek, which raises questions as to where the building was that the grave-stones were said to have been leaning against.

Jones has a specific reason for remembering this farm as one of his boyhood friends drowned here back in the 1920s.

In the 1950s, Gus White told the late Harry C. Dashiell that the grave of the governor was also near the gate and along the fence, but instructed Dashiell to search the west side of the gate. Digging revealed nothing.

"Harry Dashiell never did dig on the other side of the gate that I know of," said David Grier who has spent years pursuing the search for the Winder grave. "It was pretty well grown up with bushes when we were there and he didn't think the grave was in that direction, so he never looked," he said.

Shirley Richards has also been searching for the Winder grave and said she picked up a clue years ago from a woman in Venton about the grave.

"She was an elderly lady and she said Gen. Winder was 'buried to the right of the gate.'"

When Gus White went to the property with Dashiell, he too said Winder was buried near the fence or gate, but indicated the grave was on the opposite site of the gate.

Changes in the topography, his age and loss of landmarks may have confused White, but he believed the grave was near the fence.

Remains of this fence can still be found, weathered posts still visible in the marsh near the land.

David Grier said that a woman called him years ago during his initial investigation on the location of the graveyard, and she told him she grew up in the area and visited friends who lived in the house on the Lewis Farm.

As a child she said she was frightened by the graveyard which she had to pass when going up to the house.

Wilson remembered that an old apple orchard once grew on the



From bottom right, a rare picture of Gov. Levin Winder shows him several years prior to his death in 1819. Winder looked less plump when he had his portrait painted years later, probably while serving as governor in 1812 and was in his 30s, above, when he had his portrait painted at his Bloomsbury home in Somerset County.



eastern side of the gate, near the fence. Jones too remembers a few of the old orchard trees. Dashiell indicates that this orchard was on the south side of the fence, while Wilson says it was on the north side. If it was on the north side, it would be in the immediate area of where Jones said the graveyard can be found.

Dashiell may have thought a graveyard would not be within several feet of an orchard, a presumption that eliminated the site from investigation.

Jones is the only eyewitness known who has pinpointed the site as the Winder grave, but technology may back up Jones.

For years infrared film has been used in aerial photography to make it easier for map interpret-

"The place Leroy said where the graveyard is, is the most logical place and the aerial photographs show there is something different about that spot," Wilson said.

"I really believe that area is the best possibility for having the graveyard, but I'm still not convinced the grave isn't overboard (in the Little Monie Creek).

"All the people I have spoken to have said that Dashiell did not look at this spot, but in the early 1960s a bulldozer did go over it to clear off the brambles and bushes that were all over here, it was a mess. But the bulldozer only took off a couple of inches of topsoil, it didn't scrape

down five feet like Dashiell had his bulldozer do," Wilson said.

Wilson has corn planted in the field that was once a four-acre lawn. All of his life he has heard stories that Winder was buried somewhere on his farm and he would like the mystery solved.

"I'm definitely interested in finding the grave, and I don't see any reason why we shouldn't take a closer look this fall when the crops are out," he said.

This fall Robert F. Lord of Easton will try again to find what is hoped to be a metal casket containing the remains of Gov. Levin Winder. For Lord, he will cover an

area he couldn't gain access to before.

"There was no way we could get through the briars, even a truck couldn't get through, so we couldn't search that part of the lawn," Lord said.

Though retired, Lord will use the same equipment and skills that led him to finding the lead coffin of Charles Dickinson in Caroline County in 1965 and to a mysterious iron coffin at Wye Mills in 1970. With Lord and Wilson will be Dave Grier who continued the elusive search for the Winder grave after the death of Harry C. Dashiell in

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ers to identify topographical features.

A 1988 aerial infrared photograph of the Lewis Farm shows an area of "disturbed" soil from the air that is not readily seen at surface level. According to Thomas Tiner, a photo interpreter for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at Salisbury State University, the roughly 15 foot by 20 foot area is a "disturbed dry site, and the highest place on the farm," located just feet from where the old fence stood. The site is just north of the fence area and southeast of the house site in an area that was not investigated by Dashiell.

It is the site that Jones has identified as being the graveyard he saw as a child.

Researchers ready for new expedition

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1975.

"If it's on my farm, this new spot is the most logical place for it to be," Wilson said, "and it has everything right going for it; the location is right and it's high enough for a graveyard. If the grave hasn't washed into the creek, we may find it here. I don't know what I will do with it if we do find it, I've got plenty of time to think it over. Whatever I do, it will be to protect and preserve the remains."

In just months an exploration of

the site may end the century-long search or raise new mysteries. Success depends on tradition that a metal case enclosed Winder's body. Without the metal to be picked up by the detector, no one expects the grave to be found.

Wilson said he vaguely recalls a story that a "window" was said to have been built into Winder's casket, much like the iron "mummy" found at Wye Mills. A iron plate covered a piece of glass over the face of the deceased could be swung away, allowing a view of the face.

Yet the remains of two wooden caskets found last year near Fairmount dating from the mid- and late 1880s also had such windows. It was the windows and handles from the caskets that remained and nothing of the skeleton, casket or clothing remained in one of the graves.

Investigators can only hope that the Winder casket was not made almost entirely of wood with a glass window over the face. Nothing would remain to be picked up by the metal detector.

The final chapter of the search

will be carried in *The Daily Times* this fall. It will be a case of history repeating itself, as many of those who have been involved with the search over the years are expected to be present. *The Daily Times* Managing Editor, Mel Toadvine, who covered the story as a reporter 25 years ago, said he expects success. "I think the grave will be found this time, and I want to be there when it is," he said.