



Times Photo

Gov. Levin Winder

Maryland's 'forgotten patriot'

By BRICE STUMP
Daily Times Staff Writer

While Gov. Levin Winder is virtually an unknown name today, he lives with distinction in the annals of Maryland history.

Winder was born at the family estate on Rewastico Creek near Quantico, in what is now Wicomico County, on Sept. 4, 1757.

Winder studied law, but at the age of 20 he was a 1st lieutenant in the Fifth Company, Smallwood's First Maryland Battalion of the Flying Camp in January 1776. By December of that year he was a captain, 1st Maryland Regiment, and a held the rank of major, 4th Maryland Regiment in 1777.

While fighting in the Battle of Camden in 1780, according to the *Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature*, he was taken prisoner, and exchanged in 1781 and served as a lieutenant colonel, 2nd Maryland Regiment in that same year.

Winder was transferred to 1st Maryland Regiment and discharged in 1783. He was commissioned as a major general, 2nd Division of the Maryland Militia in 1794.

On May 13, 1790 Winder, then 33 married Mary Stoughton Sloss of Somerset County. Through his wife he inherited a portion of Bloomsbury, an 840-acre plantation along the
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Little Monie Creek, several miles west of Princess Anne.

It is believed he began construction of his home in the early 1790s, within walking distance of the ancestral home of his wife.

According to the will of Thomas Sloss, father of Winder's wife Mary, she received her father's house on the Little Monie, three slaves and one-third of his livestock and one-third of his crops at his death in 1797. By 1798 Winder had 30 more slaves; by 1800 he owned 43 and in 1810, he had 53 slaves.

In addition to 400 acres of land in Western Maryland awarded him for his military service, Winder owned two lots in Vienna, which were confiscated British property and more than 2,000 acres in Somerset County.

Increasingly interested in politics, gentleman planter Winder represented Somerset County in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1789 to 1793, and as Speaker of the House from 1791 to 1793.

Elected again in 1806 to the House of Delegates, Winder served until 1809, and was elected as Speaker of the House in 1807.

Winder was elected governor of Maryland prior to the War of 1812

and served until 1815. At the same time he was senior major general of the Maryland Militia, a position he held until his death in 1819.

Winder was also a presidential elector for President George Washington. He was an original member of the Society of the Cincinnati of Maryland.

Winder won the admiration of his constituents when, as governor, he took steps to save the state from attack by the British in 1812. When the national government failed to provide for the defense of the state, Winder called upon the state legislature to protect Baltimore and Annapolis. It was during his term as governor and the defense of Fort McHenry that "The Star-Spangled Banner" was written by Frances Scott Key.

According to Salisbury businessman David Grier, who has spent decades searching for the grave of Gov. Winder, in 1812 the governor raised the largest number of soldiers to fight a battle since the Revolutionary War in protecting the state from a British invasion.

A trustee of the famous Washington Academy which once stood near Princess Anne, Winder encouraged adoption of an educational system for all people.

Like Washington, Winder was a Mason, and was the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Maryland in 1814.

On July 4, 1815, Winder presided over Masonic ceremonies in Baltimore for the laying of the corner stone of the first monument erected in honor of President Washington.

Winder died at age 63 "after a painful and protracted illness," on July 1, 1819 in Baltimore, where he had gone for medical help for a liver problem.

Earlier that day the man who Grier claims can be credited with stopping the British from seizing the state and nation, made his brief will, leaving his estate and personal belongings to his wife.

According Winder's obituary,

"... he left the world so tranquilly that it could hardly be discerned at what moment he breathed his last."

According to the *History of Freemasonry in Maryland* by Edward T. Schultz, "Among the many who paid the last sad tribute of respect to his memory, were all the brethren of the army of the Revolution in the city, except one, who was detained by domestic affliction, and by the members of the Grand Lodge and its subordinates of the city, who after the church services by the Rev. Brother James Inglis of the Presbyterian Church (in Baltimore) committed his mortal remains to the grave with the solemn and affecting rites of Freemasonry.

"It is thought the remains of Brother Winder were deposited in a vault in the First Presbyterian graveyard, corner of Greene and Fayette streets, and that they were afterwards removed to the family burying ground on the family estate 'Monie Creek', two miles from Princess Anne where the grave is pointed out to visitors," Schultz wrote.

Through marriage and birth Winder was among one of the state's most prominent families, and with J. Millard Tawes, and Thomas King Carroll became one of three governors from Somerset County.

Grier said Winder is Maryland's "forgotten patriot." So impressed was Grier with Winder's credentials that while serving on the Wicomico County Council from 1966 to 1978, he suggested that the county's new high school be named after the governor, but failed. It is now known as Parkside High School.

Grier has also suggested that a statue of Winder be erected in Salisbury. A plaque honoring Civil War Confederate Brig. Gen. John Henry Winder stands on the lawn at the old Wicomico County Court House in Salisbury. He was the grandson of Levin Winder's oldest brother William, and his name was selected for the plaque during the Civil War Centennial celebration

as the county's most famous military officer of that war.

But Grier said Maryland's most distinguished leader should also be remembered for his bold and decisive leadership.

The "forgotten patriot" is also the state's lost governor whose grave and possible rare lead casket have been sought after for almost a century in Somerset County.