

# Winder historian faced conflicting stories in search for elusive grave

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Harry C. Dashiell began his search for the lost grave of Maryland Gov. Levin Winder (who died in 1819) in the late 1940s. As the years passed, Dashiell had managed to concentrate his search on what is known as the Lewis Farm, near Venton, in Somerset County. From time to time the attorney faced conflicting theories as to the exact location of the grave. Even by the early '70s Dashiell held firm to his belief that the graveyard was along the banks of Little Monie Creek on the Lewis Farm, but a number of investigations failed to yield a trace of the elusive grave.*

*By the 1960s Salisbury businessman David Grier became involved with the search and he to met with silence from local residents that he thought might know where the grave was located. Grier may have even been the subject of a hoax, a hoax that apparently benefited no one.*

*Isolating one site out of a four-acre lawn on the Lewis Farm that was said to contain the grave, Dashiell dug and bulldozed in hopes of finding the grave or at least a trace of it. He found neither, and would not abandon his belief that he was at the right place, despite finding no clues. The search continues.*

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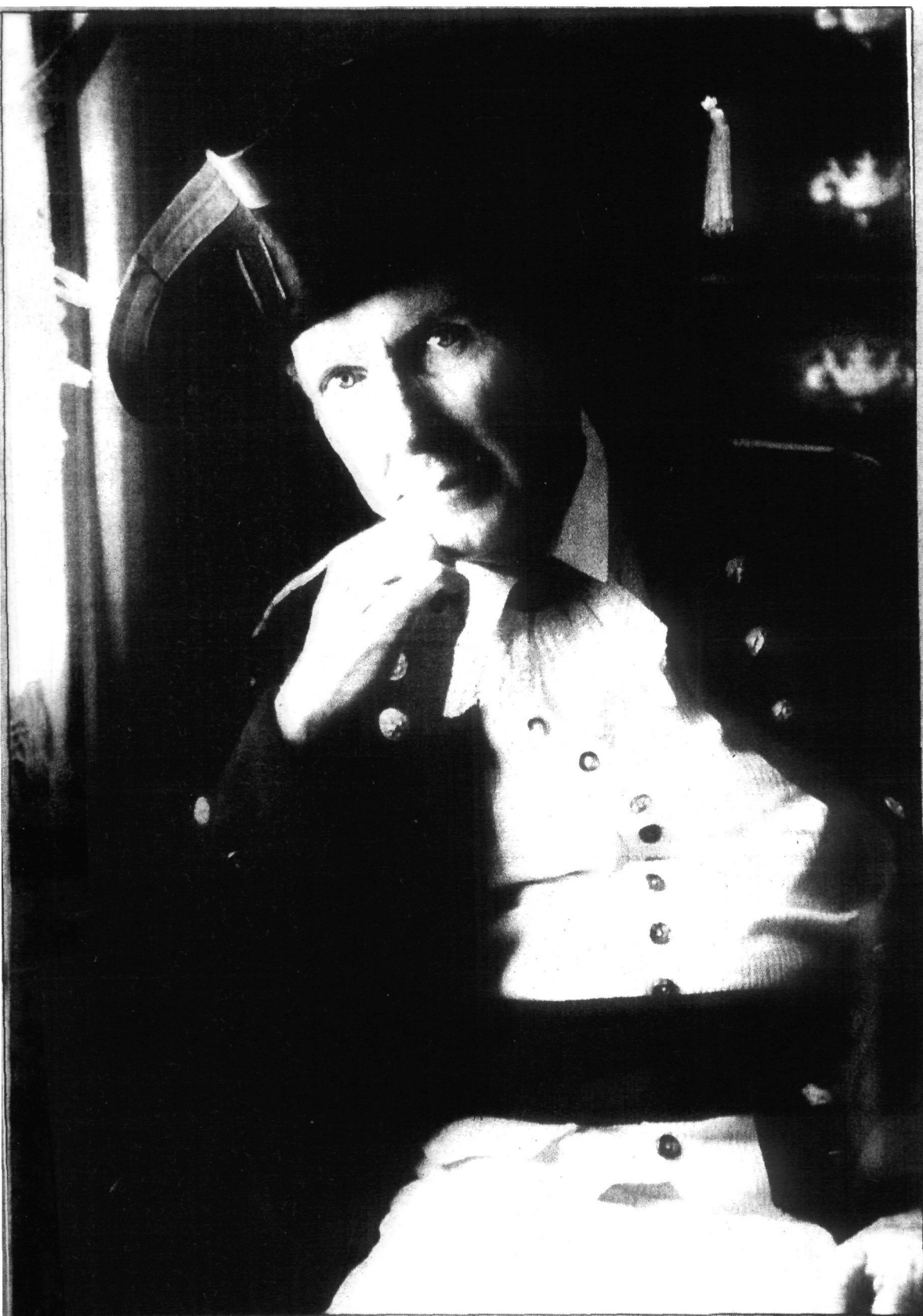
On virtually every intensive search, Dashiell concentrated his efforts on a northwestern section of the four-acre lawn that fronts on the Little Monie Creek. From the first search in the late 1940s until his last in the late '60s, Dashiell held fast to a hunch that the graveyard was in that specific site, but there were disturbing doubts.

The late Winder G. Keating, a descendant of the Winder family had a memorandum from other family members who visited the Anderson farm in 1928 to locate the graves. He wrote: "I went to the old Monie homestead of the family of Gov. Winder's wife ... both of them were buried on this estate, but the most careful search failed to disclose any signs of their graves ... The old brick house was gone, and one could barely trace its foundations. The whole place is in a very poor condition. It is in the hands of a tenant who certainly could not make a good living there. The best evidence of this is that he didn't even own a 'flivver'" (a small cheap automobile).

Writing to Keating in 1952, Dashiell said, "Mr. Laird, who was a tenant on the (Samuel Anderson) farm ... told me that two men and a woman who came down in 1928. (One of the men)

said he understood that Gov. Winder was buried in a steel casket or that his grave was covered by a steel slab, but no evidence of any such material has ever been found... He said they had a paper showing that the graves were so many feet from a certain kind of tree. But the next year they came back and said that they were looking on the wrong farm, and he did not know where to look."

The "map" may have been a sketch by an elderly Winder



Times Photo by Bruce Stamp

**LIVING HISTORY.** When dressed in a copy of an 18th century military costume made by his wife, Salisbury businessman David Grier becomes Gov. Levin Winder. For years Grier has played Winder as a lieutenant colonel in the Revolutionary War. Speaking in the first person as Winder, he gives an account of his life at meetings and history-related festivals. For almost 25 years Grier has been searching for Winder's grave. A Winder heirloom for generations has been a four-tine fork, at left, said to have come from the camp chest of Gen. George Washington.

descendant as to the location of the graveyard. This map has never been found nor is it ever mentioned again by Dashiell or any of the Winder descendants that he contacted.

Dashiell was excited about the reference that the visitors to the Samuel Langford place later said they were on the wrong farm, which Dashiell believed was correct; the farm they sought and the farm Winder's daughter sold to James A. Phoebus in 1894 were one and the same.

In her research on the Anderson property Shirley Richards of Princess Anne found a notation in a settling of the Holbrook estate that may have eluded Dashiell. While he had heard that a graveyard on the Anderson farm was said to have been located "... in a grove of trees between the (site of the) house and creek ..." he had no other evidence that such a graveyard existed.

But Richards found such evidence, evidence that turned oral tradition into fact.

A commission formed to divide the estate of Samuel Holbrook, in 1855, made the following recommendation relating to the widow's share: "... We also allotted to the said widow one third part or common privilege to the woodland, marshland, yard and garden, it being all that part of the garden estate of the main walk which leads from the gate up to the graveyard ..."

Since the Holbrook family had owned the estate for almost 30 years, and given the number of

children fathered by Holbrook, (and the high infant mortality rate) it may be that a family burial ground had been established years earlier at the site by members of that family, and not by the Winders.

It appears Dashiell never found this reference, as there are no indications in his Winder papers to indicate that he wrestled with the problem that this reference would have created.

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Richards found a notation in the St. Andrew's Somerset Parish Records for 1854 that Samuel Holbrook was interred "at burial place on his farm, Monie." This is the first evidence found that confirms a burial ground near the site of Winder's home on Bloomsbury, now owned by Samuel Anderson. Tradition also holds that a slave graveyard also exists on the Anderson farm, though even its approximate location is unknown.

At present fill-dirt is being taken literally from the yard of Winder's home site, and a graveyard or building foundation may be uncovered.

When Holbrook's second wife, Maria Woolford Holbrook, died in 1894, she was buried in the graveyard at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Princess Anne, sharing the plot with Holbrook's first wife, Priscilla A. Leatherbury, who died in 1841. With both women is a grave marker to Samuel Holbrook, raising the question as to whether Holbrook was later removed from the Monie farm he once owned, or that the tombstone at the church cemetery is in his memory.

Whatever the case with Holbrook, it is doubtful all the graves at the burial place on the farm were opened and the remains removed to other places.

Dashiell had heard stories that Winder was buried at Tusculum and on a piece of property near Whitehaven that was also in the Winder family as well as in a graveyard on what is now known as the Gallaher Farm, at one time

owned by the Winders. With a graveyard confirmed on the Anderson farm, Dashiell may have been faced with the probability that the graveyard there was originally used by the Winder family in which to bury Gov. Levin Winder and later taken over by the Holbrooks as a family cemetery.

Even with the possibilities, Dashiell was still faced with an 1834 deed that clearly indicated a small graveyard on the Lewis Farm, which Winder's daughter acknowledged had been the "burying ground of the Winder family."

*In the fifth of this six-part series, investigators find a valuable clue in settling of Winder's estate that hints that Winder's funeral expenses were "extraordinary," an indication that an unusual and very expensive coffin was purchased. The finding of an iron "mummy" at Wye Mills in 1970 enforces Dashiell's belief that Winder too was buried in a "metal case."*