

# Dashiell spent decades in search of Winder grave

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the third in a six-part series on the search for the grave of Maryland Gov. Levin Winder who died in 1819. In the late 1940s, the late Harry C. Dashiell of Princess Anne resorted to bulldozing a site on a farm near Venton now owned by retired school teacher Donald Wilson. Dashiell's eventual decades-long search for the graveyard where the tombstone had been removed was motivated by a deed to Mary Anne Winder Emory, the governor's daughter, from James A. Phoebus of a graveyard on the land Phoebus had originally purchased from the daughter.

Unable to find the tombstones that were believed to mark the grave of Winder and that of his wife Mary Stoughton Sloss Winder and young daughter Marianna (or Mary Anne, the first of two daughters with that name), Dashiell relied on tradition that the governor was buried in a metal casket which he believed could be located with metal detectors or bulldozers.

An eyewitness to the location of the grave further stimulated Dashiell's interest in the search.

He felt he was on the verge of uncovering the coffin of one of two lost governors of Maryland.

Writing to request aid in his search from Gov. W. Preston Lane Jr. in 1948, Dashiell informed the governor that "Tradition further states that he (Winder) was brought back in a metallic casket or case, which probably was correct, if he died in the summertime (July 1) and it required two weeks to bring his body back here..."

Through the cold winter months Dashiell and his friends walked over the frozen lawn which was believed to hold the remains of the governor and some of his family. Through intensive study Dashiell had turned Winder from a name on the roster of history into a friend and he wanted so desperately to provide this friend with a safe and marked resting place.

In October 1948, near Halloween, Dashiell began coaxing the earth to yield its

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Times Photo by Brice Stump

**REMEMBERING YESTERDAY.** Emily Lecky of Princess Anne holds a picture of her father, the late Harry C. Dashiell. For almost 30 years Dashiell searched for the grave of Gov. Levin Winder, it was a search Lecky said, that became an obsession.

# Winder grave hunt was Dashiell's passion

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hiding place for the grave of Gov. Winder.

The record is cloudy, but apparently Princess Anne attorney Harry C. Dashiell initiated several searches for the grave of Maryland Gov. Levin Winder between the summer of 1948 and June of 1949.

Frustrated by previous efforts to locate what he thought would be a casket made of lead, Dashiell opted for the bold and unusual move of using a bulldozer to peel away the earth. C. Allen Carlson, superintendent of Somerset County schools, shared Dashiell's enthusiasm for the project.

"We know he is buried on the four acres of land which were on a part of his 800 acre estate," Dashiell was quoted in the Somerset County *Marylander* and *Herald*, "but the question is, where?"

A reporter for the paper wrote on June 3, 1949: "A third attempt to find the grave of Gen. Levin Winder ... has failed.

"Saturday a bulldozer under the direction of Harry C. Dashiell ... whose hobby is early Somerset County history, scraped out a five-foot deep area about 25 feet square

without finding a trace of the grave ... Two attempts were made last winter to find it.

"The attempts by Mr. Dashiell and other local historians, to locate the grave, are being made in order that it might be marked."

The attorney leaned heavily on a brief remark about the Winder graves written by Levin Waters of Princess Anne, (one time clerk of court and editor of the *Somerset Union*) about 1898 and contained in the book *Historic Graves of Maryland and the District of Columbia* by Helen West Ridgely in 1908. "The burial ground of the Winder family in which rests the remains of the late Gov. Levin Winder, on Little Monie Creek, is now owned, and if I am correctly informed, is occupied by a woodpile, by a man who is a stranger to the family and without respect for the honored dead who lie there."

At that time the land was owned by William J. Lewis, the same Lewis who had purchased the property from the heirs of James Phoebus, "excepting the burying ground."

In a letter written in December 1954, Dashiell said "I thought I had located the woodpile area and I bulldozed the area to a depth of five feet but never found the first trace of the grave ... I have had

two spaces on this lawn bulldozed but have never found any sign of the location of the graves ...."

During one of his explorations, Dashiell was interviewed by a reporter from the *Baltimore Sun* in 1957 as to why he had selected a particular place to dig.

"We've listened to all the old stories now ... We've written all the letters we can write and we've asked all the people we can ask. Now's the time for logic," Dashiell said.

"I say to myself, 'Where would I put a burial plot? Why, right here on this point on the Little Monie.' It was well kept back in the old days; it was the lawn for the ruins of the house we see right here, the house the governor built for his daughter Marianna. So we'll dig here and when we hit brick, maybe we'll hit the coffins of the governor and his wife because in those days they lined the graves with brick," Dashiell said.

But Clarence Laird, who was there that day, said the bulldozer never hit brick.

They found no trace of a grave. Not one scrap of metal that could be associated with a casket has been found.

Dashiell believed the house was built by the governor for his daughter,

but no documentation supporting this has been found during research for this story. What was important was that Dashiell had to associate the house in some way with the Winder family to justify a graveyard at that site and not at Winder's home several hundred

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