

## **Report on location of Gen. Leonard Covington's home and recommendations of suitable location for a commemorative marker**

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### **Summary**

The purpose of this investigation is to determine the location of the birthplace and residence of Gen. Leonard Covington (1768-1813) in order to place a historical marker at an appropriate location.<sup>1</sup> The Covington house is no longer standing, and its precise location is unknown, although a portion of the Covington family cemetery does still exist. Ultimately, without any definitive information about the location of the house, there is a certain amount of flexibility in placing a historical marker.

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### **Covington Land**

The bulk of the Covington family land in the Aquasco region of Prince George's County was acquired in the 1710s by Levin Covington I (?-1725). Of the 1,111 acre tract that would become Covingtons Farm, some 750 acres were assembled by 1715.<sup>2</sup> This land was in addition to the 900 acres on the Eastern Shore he inherited from his father Nehemiah in 1713.<sup>3</sup> By moving to Prince George's County, Levin separated himself from his family, which was a well-established part of the Eastern Shore aristocracy, although his reasons for doing so are unknown.<sup>4</sup>

Levin I willed the land in Aquasco "whereon I now live" to his wife Margery and son Leonard I (c. 1713-1742); it became fully Leonard's land with his mother's death.<sup>5</sup> Levin Covington II (ca. 1740-ca. 1781), father of Gen. Covington, received a patent in 1769 for Covingtons Farm, a 1,111 acre tract that consolidated and enlarged these landholdings. Over time a few portions of the property were sold, and at the time of Gen. Covington's death in 1814, he owned 1,056 acres of Covingtons Farm, in addition to about 250 acres elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> His estate was not settled until many years after his death, and Covingtons Farm was sold in 1830 to Joshua Estep.<sup>7</sup> After Estep's death, the land was divided between his heirs, and gradually subdivided into increasingly smaller parcels over time.<sup>8</sup>

### **Covington House**

Information about the Covington residence is limited. According to his inventory, Levin I's house had three dwelling rooms or chambers, a nursery and a parlour. It also had a kitchen, shed room, and store [i.e. storeroom], any of which may have been detached, and a cellar. The farm complex also consisted of a barn, milk house [i.e. dairy], and a plank house. The house's age is

unknown, although family tradition held that it was built in 1722. However, at least a portion of the house was considered “old” in 1726: the inventory described two “Old Dwelling Rooms” and an “Old Dwelling House Chamber.” It seems most likely that the 1722 construction consisted of the expansion of an existing house.<sup>9</sup>

There is no further information about the Covington house until the end of the eighteenth century. In 1798, Federal tax assessors described Gen. Covington’s home as a “Brick Dwelling House 40 by 20 feet” located on Covingtons Farm, about two miles from Lower Marlboro. It was one of the largest houses in the district; only five were bigger.<sup>10</sup> Whether the Covingtons had replaced or altered the house of the 1720s is not known. However, by the 1810s, the house’s stature had begun to decline, and all the improvements on the property—houses, barns, and the like—were valued at an unimpressive £60 (\$160); it had been assessed at \$400 in 1798.<sup>11</sup> By 1819, no improvements were listed at all.<sup>12</sup> In 1820, the Prince George’s County Orphan’s Court ordered an evaluation of Covingtons Farm as part of the continuing efforts to settle Gen. Covington’s estate. The resulting report noted: “There is on the land ... one brick dwelling house 20 by 60 feet in very bad repair.” Many of the tenants’ houses and other outbuildings on the property were in similarly poor condition.<sup>13</sup>

Gen. Covington himself was away from home for several extended periods of time while serving in the army. He spent much of 1792-1795 fighting in the western territories, not returning to Maryland until early 1796. He left again for Mississippi Territory on military service in 1809, likely never returning to his home before his death in 1813.<sup>14</sup> During the latter absence, Gen. Covington evidently brought his family to live with him, “consigning his estate to the charge of an agent.”<sup>15</sup> Without occupants for such an extended period, it is easy to imagine why the Covington house was in such poor repair in the years immediately after Gen. Covington’s death.

None of the descriptions of the Covington house give any clue as to its location on the property. However, one account notes of Gen. Covington:

“Among the earliest recollections of his childhood was watching from an eminence at his home, commanding an extensive view down the Patuxent...the burning [by the British] of the mansion of a near relative at Hallowing Point, opposite Benedict.”<sup>16</sup>

Within the Covington property, there are a number of high points which would have afforded a clear view of Hallowing Point, on the other side of the Patuxent River. One in particular, located in the vicinity of 17600 Aquasco Farm Road, near the family cemetery, seems a possibility for the house site.

### **Covington Family Cemetery**

In 1830, the heirs of Gen. Covington sold the property in Aquasco to Joshua Estep, finally settling his estate. The deed specifically excluded a “one half of an acre [plot] including the

burial ground.”<sup>17</sup> This site, which is not mentioned in subsequent deeds of the land, is located a short distance down hill from 17600 Aquasco Farm Road.

Although the site is today largely overgrown, there is a clearly-defined raised plateau in which two surviving graves with ledger markers are located. One is the grave of Leonard Covington I (ca. 1713-1742), and the other belongs to Levin Covington II, c. 1782. An account from the late 1970s or early 1980s describes finding Leonard’s marker under eight inches of dirt, and reports that the owner of the property “thought there were three or four” graves, along with “another plot to the west.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Possible Locations of Historical Marker**

As Gen. Covington’s residence no longer exists, it is necessary to determine an appropriate location for a historical marker. Since there is no definitive information about where the Covington house was, a marker making reference to the area in general, rather than a particular site, could be placed anywhere within the Covington tract. A marker could be placed at a high visibility location, such as a main road.

Plat of Covingtons Farm, 1769. The portions of Brooke Court Manor and The Joseph & Mary included in the tract were purchased by Levin Covington I in 1711.



**Figure 2**

Approximate outline of Covingtons Farm on modern-day tax map, based on property research by the author. Note that some uncertainty regarding the northwestern edge of the property exists.



Source: Department of Assessment and Taxation Map Division, Tax Map, Prince George's County, 1990, maps 174, 175, 178, 179 [MSA SM125-273], Maryland State Archives.



**Figure 3**

Grave of Leonard Covington (ca. 1713-1742)



Photograph courtesy Steve Kensinger

**Figure 4**

Grave of Levin Covington (ca. 1740-ca. 1782)



Photograph courtesy Steve Kensinger



## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Covington was born October 30, 1768 to Susannah (Magruder) Covington and Levin Covington (ca. 1740- ca. 1782); he had one brother, probably younger, named Alexander. He married Susannah Somerville (? - ca. 1790) on October 22, 1789; they had one daughter (name unknown), who died young. Covington joined the Army as a cornet in the Light Dragoons, 1792, and fought in the Indian Wars in the Northwest Territories. He left the Army as a Captain in 1795, returned to Prince George's County, and married Rebecca Mackall on March 29, 1796. They had five children: Levin; Rebecca; Benjamin; Susan; Edward. Covington served in the House of Representatives, 1805-1807, and the Maryland Senate, 1807-1809 as a Democratic-Republican. He re-joined the Dragoons in 1809, ultimately rising to Brigadier General. Mortally wounded at the battle of Crysler's Farm, New York, Covington died not long after on November 13, 1813. See Maryland State Archives online biography:

<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/html/msa01877.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Prince George's County Court, Land Records, Deed, Thomas Letchworth and Roger Boyce to Levin Covington, Liber E, p. 168 [MSA CE65-4]. All land records available online via <http://mdlandrec.net>.

<sup>3</sup> Prerogative Court, Wills, Nehemiah Covington, 1713, liber 13, p. 549 [MSA S538-20]. Online via <http://guide.mdsa.net/series.cfm?action=viewDetails&ID=S538-20>. All records cited are held at the Maryland State Archives unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> For the early background of the Covington family, see Shirley Baltz, "A Prince George's Hero Recalled." Online via [http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/pdf/baltz\\_covington.pdf](http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/pdf/baltz_covington.pdf). For the Covington relationships, see for example the biographies of Edward Lloyd II, <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/000800/000809/html/msa00809.html> and James Hollyday, in Edward C. Papanfuse, et al., eds, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789*, online via <http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000426/html/am426--450.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Prerogative Court, Wills, Levin Covington, 1725, liber 18, p. 448 [MSA S538-26]. Online via <http://guide.mdsa.net/series.cfm?action=viewDetails&ID=S538-26>. The gravestone of Leonard I gives his date of death March 19, 1742, "in the 30th year of his life"; see photographs of grave site below.

<sup>6</sup> Land Office, Certificates, Patented, Prince George's County, Covingtons Farms, 1769, Patented Certificate no. 574 [MSA S1203-645], Maryland State Archives. Online via <http://guide.mdsa.net/series.cfm?action=viewDetails&ID=S1203-645>. Gen. Covington sold 35 acres in 1803 [Prince George's County Court, Land Records, Liber JRM 10, p. 183, MSA CE65-30] and 20 acres in 1809 [Liber JRM 13, p. 488, MSA CE65-42]. Much, if not all, of his other land in Prince George's County was located adjacent to Covingtons Farm.

<sup>7</sup> Prince George's County Court, Land Records, Deed, Levin Covington, Benjamin L.C. Wailes and Rebecca Wailes, and Edmund H. Covington to Joshua Estep, 1830, Liber AB 6, 230-234 [MSA CE65-53].

<sup>8</sup> St. Mary's County Register of Wills, Inventories, Joshua Estep, 1832, Liber EIM 2, p. 517 [MSA C1611-10]. St. Mary's County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, Division of Joshua Estep's estate, 1856, case no. 381, MdHR 19,731-438-1/2 [MSA C1592-27]. Online via

[http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/pdf/mdsa\\_c1592\\_27-0001.pdf](http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/pdf/mdsa_c1592_27-0001.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Prerogative Court, Inventories, Levin Covington, 1726, Liber 11, p. 623-633 [MSA S534-11], online via [http://mdhistory.net/msaref10/msa\\_te\\_1\\_014/html/msa\\_te\\_1\\_014-0541.html](http://mdhistory.net/msaref10/msa_te_1_014/html/msa_te_1_014-0541.html); B.L.C. Wailes, *Memoir of Leonard Covington*, 1861; reprint 1928, 7. Written by Gen. Covington's son-in-law, Wailes' account serves as a record of Covington family tradition. Online via

<http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001800/001877/pdf/memoir.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> 1798 Federal Direct Tax, Prince George's County, Prince Frederick Hundred. Particular list of dwelling houses, p. 1. *Archives of Maryland Online*, vol. 729, p. 2201; Particular list of all lands, p. 1, *Archives of Maryland Online*, vol. 729, p. 2215. Online via <http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000729/html/>.

<sup>11</sup> 1798 Federal Direct Tax, houses.

<sup>12</sup> Assessed property value did not typically reflect actual value, but the Covington Farm improvements were valued at less than many other nearby properties. See Prince George's County Commissioners of the Tax Assessment Record, Real property, 1807, Mattapony, Washington and Prince Frederick Hundred, p. 4 [MSA C1162-33]; Real property, 1819, Mattapony, Washington and Prince Frederick Hundred, p. 4 [MSA C1162-63].



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<sup>13</sup> Prince George's County Register of Wills, Estate Papers, Leonard Covington, MdHR 50,822 [MSA C2119-23]. Note that this report gives a somewhat different measurement of the house, probably as a result of imprecise measuring; despite the discrepancy, it is the same building.

<sup>14</sup> Wailes, 9, 12, 14-19. Wailes is vague about whether Gen. Covington stopped at his home briefly in transit from New Orleans to New York in the summer of 1813. There do not appear to be any significant collections of Gen. Covington's correspondence, which would give more information about where he was living.

<sup>15</sup> Wailes, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Wailes, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Prince George's County Court, Land Records, Deed, Levin Covington, Benjamin L.C. Wailes and Rebecca Wailes, and Edmund H. Covington to Joshua Estep, 1830, Liber AB 6, 230-234 [MSA CE65-53]; see p. 231 for cemetery site.

<sup>18</sup> James C. Wilfong, "Historically Speaking...Covington Farm." Undated newspaper clipping, probably from the *Washington Star*, late 1970s-early 1980s.