

A Journey Through Time

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Columnist Linda Reno is a historian and genealogist specializing in Southern Maryland history. Mrs. Reno is a member of the St. Mary's County Historical Society, St. Mary's County Genealogical Society, Charles County Genealogical Society, Maryland Historical Society and the Maryland Genealogical Society. She has authored many books and articles on local history. We hope you will enjoy these articles and welcome your comments and suggestions for future subjects.

By Linda Reno
Contributing Writer

Uriah Forrest was born about 1746 in St. Mary's County and was the son of Thomas Forrest (1710-1782) and Henrietta Raley (1714-1791) who lived in the area now known as Loveville. Their home was known as "Forrest Hall."

Forrest entered the American army on January 2, 1776 as a First Lieutenant but he eventually attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. On October 4, 1777, at the battle of Battle of Germantown (Pennsylvania), he was shot in the thigh and lost a leg as a result. Regardless, he served another four years, not resigning until 1781.

On October 11, 1789, at the age of 43, Uriah Forrest married Rebecca Plater who was then about 25 at "Sotterley". Forrest did not come from the same social circles as the Platers, but he had undoubtedly come to know Rebecca's father during the course of the war and probably Mr. Plater was impressed with this young man who had acquitted himself very well and who was treated (and rightfully so) as a hero.

Rebecca Plater was the daughter of George Plater III and his second wife, Elizabeth Rousby of "Sotterley." George Plater III graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1752. He was a lawyer and served as a Justice of the Peace and was also Naval Officer of the Patuxent. He was a member of the convention to form the Maryland State Government, a delegate to the Continental Congress, and was President of the Maryland convention that ratified the U.S. Constitution. In 1791, he was elected the sixth Governor of Maryland.

By the time of the 1790 census, Uriah and his family were living in Montgomery County (actually they were living in Georgetown, a part of what would ultimately become the District of Columbia) next door to Benjamin Stoddert, a friend, business partner and fellow Southern Marylander. In 1798 Stoddert was appointed First Secretary of the Navy.

Uriah Forrest and Benjamin Stoddert were friends and confidantes of George Washington. When George Washington was assigned the responsibility of selecting a suitable site along the Potomac River for the new nation's capital, he turned to Stoddert and Forrest, asking them to purchase key parcels of land in the area before the formal decision was made by the Continental Congress, then meeting in Philadelphia. This

was done to preclude escalation of property prices once the site was announced. They would then transfer the parcels to the government. They agreed and President Washington's diary of March 29, 1791 noted that he had "dined at Col. Forrest's today with the Commissioner and others." The men moved quickly as construction of the White House began in 1792 followed by the Capitol building in 1793.

Uriah Forrest named his home "Rosedale", but today it's called the Forrest-Marbury house. According to several historians "this is the site of one of the United States' most significant historical events--the establishment of the federal city of Washington, D.C." On December 31, 1992, the house became the Embassy of the Ukraine.

Not only did Uriah Forrest and Benjamin Stoddert assist in securing the land for the new capital, they also loaned the government bond money to begin construction of the Capitol building. Another lender was Philip B. Key (son of Dr. John Key and wife, Cecelia Brown of St. Mary's County). Uriah Forrest is recognized as one of the founders of Washington, D.C., and rightfully so. Before all was said and done, his efforts on behalf of the new capital caused him to lose his personal wealth.

About 1796 Forrest had mortgaged "Rosedale" to obtain loans from the state of Maryland to bolster the new Federal City's economy. It didn't work and Forrest was forced into bankruptcy in 1802. He was only able to salvage "Rosedale" by having his brother-in-law, Philip Barton Key (husband of his wife's sister, Ann Plater) accept the mortgage. Key in turn, granted Forrest lifetime use of "Rosedale."

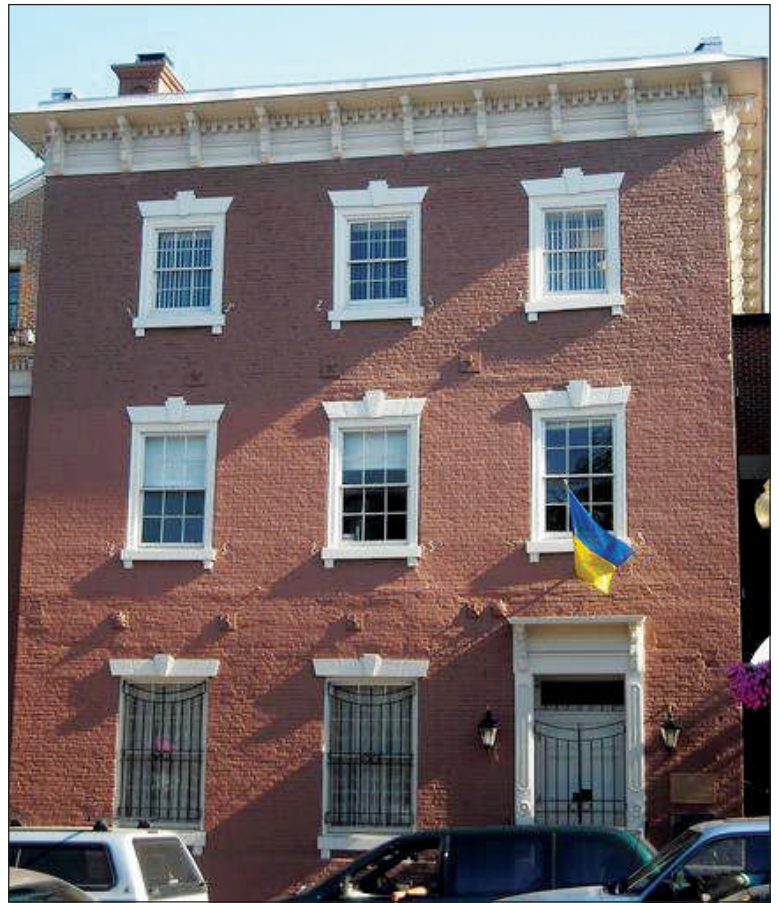
Uriah Forrest died July 6, 1805 still plagued with debt. After his death, the estate was almost lost again to debts and litigation. In 1815, Philip Barton Key died, and in a written statement forgave the mortgage and returned the property to Rebecca (Plater) Forrest outright.

Uriah Forrest was an influential man whose opinion was sought not only by George Washington but Thomas Jefferson who corresponded with him and exchanged views in a discussion about the Bill of Rights, but his philosophical loyalty was not with Jefferson and his "states rights" approach, but with John Adams' Federalist Party that favored a strong central government.

It was Forrest who apprised the recently inaugurated John Adams in 1797 that despite Vice-President Jefferson's protestations of support and friendship, that Jefferson was seeking to undermine Adams' power. It was also Forrest's blunt advice to the President in April 1799 that salvaged the Administration from the continuing machinations of the Hamiltonian faction.

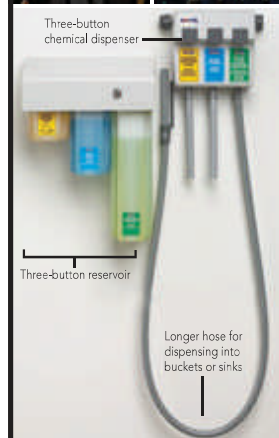
In addition to other service, Uriah Forrest was elected to the Maryland General Assembly for several terms; served in the U.S. Senate; and was Clerk of the Circuit Court of the District of Columbia until his death.

Rebecca (Plater) Forrest never remarried and died at "Rosedale" September 5, 1843.



Forrest-Marbury House, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

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