

"The Death of Colonel Joshua Gist"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

During the early nineteenth century, newspapers usually printed only a brief notice of someone's death. The passing of a Revolutionary War or War of 1812 veteran was an exception, however, and the editor usually printed an article about the "Patriot" or "Old Defender" respectively. When Colonel Joshua Gist of Westminster died on November 16, 1839, Colonel John Longwell, editor of the Westminster Carrolltonian newspaper, wrote a lengthy article about Gist. The article appeared under the headline of "Another Patriot of '76—Gone" in the November 27th issue of the paper:

"The duty devolves upon us of announcing the death of one of the oldest and most respectable citizens of Maryland – the venerable Col. JOSHUA GIST – who died at his residence near Westminster, on Sunday evening last, in the 94th year of his age. On Wednesday afternoon his remains were interred, after the usual funeral rites, in his family burial ground, attended by a very large assemblage of his friends and neighbours, and by several military companies from Taney-Town, New-Windsor and Westminster, who united in burying him with military honors.

Possessed of a constitution of unusual vigour, which had been strengthened by temperance and active exercise, his very protracted life had been exempt, in a great degree, from the infirmities attendant upon old age. It was only within a year or two past that his physical energies began materially to decline, since which period they have slowly yielded to the power of time, rather than of disease, like the sear leaf of autumn, that, by almost imperceptible degrees, obeys the influence of the changing season, till, its vitality at last extinct, it silently falls to the ground.

For upwards of seventy years Col. Gist has resided on the patrimonial estate where he first established himself at the period of manhood, and where in his ever open mansion, during that long series of years, he has dispensed his generous hospitality, while at the same time, he discharged the various other duties of a good citizen. Through how eventful a period has his life extended!

Like his distinguished brother, the gallant Gen. MORDECAI GIST of the Maryland line, he was an ardent and zealous patriot throughout the revolutionary contest, and rendered important services in suppressing the efforts of the disaffected, whose schemes he watched and thwarted with unceasing vigilance and activity. Aware of his dissolution at no distant period he long since made all his arrangements to that event, with singular exactness, extending them even to matters that are usually left to surviving friends—and then, patiently awaiting its approach, he observed with Christian and philosophic calmness the precept of the Roman poet."

It is interesting to note that Col. Gist made extensive arrangements for his death, funeral and the settlement of his sizable estate. In doing so he fulfilled the final duties of a gentleman in his time.



Revolutionary War veteran Colonel Joshua Gist (1747-1839) of Westminster sat for this miniature watercolor portrait in the early nineteenth century. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection, gift of Betty Smith Yingling, 1992.