

# Silver Spring, Founded by Francis Blair a Century Ago, Has Grown Rapidly



"Silver Spring" built at Silver Spring, Md., in 1842 by Francis Preston Blair, whose grandson, former Senator Blair Lee, now occupies it.

## Ante-Bellum Setting Was Impressive

Old Blair Mansion Occupied Place In History

By John Clagett Proctor.

As the writer has probably said before, there are few places in or around Washington that will not, upon investigation, disclose some worth-while historic information. And so we find such familiar places as Rockville, Tenleytown, Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Alexandria, Hyattsville, Bladensburg, Silver Spring and a number of other well-known nearby localities just teeming with items of unusual interest.

Silver Spring, the last-mentioned town, located right at our District-Maryland line and extending along both sides of Georgia avenue in Montgomery County, is, by name at least, about 100 years old, since it was in 1842 that Francis Preston Blair built his home in this neighborhood, and gave it this name, having previously bought a large area of ground in this vicinity, which he added to from time to time, until it reached about 1,000 acres.

The pioneer Mr. Blair came to Washington in 1830 at the invitation of President Jackson, who was strongly opposed to disunion. The President wanted Mr. Blair to come here and help him establish a newspaper to defend and explain the policies of his administration. The result was the starting of the *Globe*, which became a power in politics and made a fortune for its early owners and editors. At first (1830-1834), it was published by F. P. Blair; later (1834-1849), it was published by Blair and John C. Rives. The latter purchased the former's interest in 1849, and with the assistance of his sons, continued to publish and edit it until 1873. In connection with this paper, there was also published the *Congressional Globe*, begun during the 1833-34 session of Congress and superseded by the *Congressional Record* in 1873.

**Story of Silver Spring.**  
The founding of Silver Spring by the senior Blair is interestingly told by Maj. Gist Blair in the *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, where he says:

"My grandfather, who had been brought from Kentucky by Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, soon after his election, rode into its delightful wilds on his horse Selim and discovered the beautiful, sparkling spring from which its name is derived. . . . He had purchased this saddle horse from Gen. William Langan Galtier, from whose family the prosperous town of Galtiersburg, in Montgomery County, takes its name, then a representative man, and while he was riding Selim one day outside the boundary of the District of Columbia his horse became frightened and threw his rider and ran away among the thick growth of pines in the valley to the west of the road which is now known as Georgia avenue, in the District of Columbia, formerly Seventh street road, in the county.

"He followed his horse into the woods and found him snared by the reins to a bush which had caught the reins dangling, and near the place was a beautiful spring full of white sand and mica, which the gush of the water from the earth forced into a small column, sparkling as it rose and fell like silver. He was charmed with the spot and purchased the property. It was not dear, and I have a parchment certificate showing that some of the land was bought direct from the State."

The wife of the pioneer Mr. Blair, who was Violet Gist, was as fond of horseback riding as was her husband, but there were only a few roads around Silver Spring when they moved there, and so in order to provide a good bridle path for his wife, Editor Blair had laid out "that winding roadway which follows Sligo branch, now where the Seventh Day Adventists have a great sanitarium." The bridle path extended about seven miles, almost entirely on the Silver Spring property.

Though the old home of Francis Preston Blair was built nearly a century ago, care and attention give it the appearance of a more recently constructed building, and, certainly, few would ever imagine its great historic importance.

Former Senator Blair Lee of



The Fenwick-Lambert home, 7713 Thirteenth street N.W.

Maryland is the owner of this beautiful old home, having inherited it from his mother, Elizabeth (Blair) Lee, wife of Admiral S. P. Lee, and third child of F. P. Blair, the other children being: Montgomery Blair, Juliet, James and Francis Preston Blair.

**In Famous Cases.**  
Juliet, the second child of F. P. Blair, died when quite young. Montgomery, the older of the sons, became an able lawyer and is known to have secured a defense for John Brown of Harper's Ferry notoriety, and to have defended Dred Scott before the Supreme Court of the United States. He was named Montgomery after Gen. Richard Montgomery of Revolutionary fame, for whom Montgomery County also was named. As a politician, he stood foremost with his father and a few others in forming the Republican party, and was President Lincoln's first Postmaster General.

Prior to the Civil War, he erected a country home at Silver Spring, close to his father's residence, which he called Falkland. This dwelling, at the time of the Confederate raid on Washington in 1864, became the headquarters of Gen. Jubal A. Early, and was burned when being vacated by the latter's soldiers. It was later rebuilt and is now standing.

James Blair, second son of Francis P. Blair, had a colorful life, especially during the gold-rush period of California. He married Mary Serena Eliza Jessup, daughter of Sydney Jessup. He died in 1852 and was buried at Silver Spring, where he also owned property at the District line on the east side of Georgia avenue. In recent years his daughter, Mrs. Violet Blair Janin, gave this property to Montgomery County for a park, as a memorial to her brother, Jessup Blair.

**Entered Politics.**  
Francis Preston Blair, Jr., like his brother, Montgomery, was a West Pointer. But the irresistible lure of politics seems to have run in his blood, and after having his share of military service, particularly in the Civil War, in which he was finally commissioned a major general, he returned to his first love and to Congress as a Senator from Missouri, having upon several occasions previously served in the House of Representatives from his native State.

But to return to the old home of Francis Preston Blair, Sr., and to Silver Spring, and, of course, to former Senator Blair Lee and his delightful daughter-in-law and grandson, whom the writer met upon his very recent visit to their hospitable home: The age of the Senator is public property, for the *Congressional Directory* tells us he was born August 9, 1857, which, of course, makes him a little over 82 years of age. But he certainly does not look it, nor act it. He is a gentleman of the old school—dignified, polite, courteous, and with a Southern polish that even time has failed to rub off, but if anything, made even brighter. His biography says he graduated in 1880 from Princeton University and in 1882 from the law department of George Washington University, where his classmates were Gist Blair, Henry Calver, Matthew G. Emery, Jr., Oscar Nauck, Theodore W. Noyes, Henry K. Willard and a number of others. He was born in politics in the house in which he still lives, and knows all its good points and its bad points, its glories and its heartaches. In the very room in which we sat the other day, talking over old times, the idea of forming the Republican party was crystallized by his grandfather and his uncle, Montgomery Blair, when he was but 3 or 4 years of age. But he is a Democrat, and



BLAIR LEE, Former member of the Senate, who was born in the Blair Mansion and still resides there. —Star Staff Photos.

as such served in the Senate from January, 1914, to March, 1917.

The Senator said that many prominent persons visited this historic home prior to the Civil War, including Jefferson Davis and his wife, and during the war the Great Emancipator, Lincoln. Pictures of noted men of the past hang on the walls of this old residence, and a large engraving of Gen. Jackson has a particularly prominent setting.

**Raid on Washington.**  
Naturally, the raid on Washington by Gen. Early, in July, 1864, was an important part of Senator Lee's talk. Gen. John C. Breckenridge, who was second in command of the Confederate forces at that time, was a cousin to the elder Francis P. Blair. Like him, he was a Kentuckian, and before the war he had visited Silver Spring upon many occasions, when it was the country home of the distinguished editor of the *Globe*.

Indeed, it was in the library room of this picturesque mansion that his grandfather had argued and pleaded with Gen. Breckenridge, then serving in Congress, not to vote for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which, in his estimation, if accomplished would mean a declaration of war against the Union by the Southern leaders. But Breckenridge did not heed the advice, and upon the breaking out of hostilities joined the Confederacy, and before the war was over he was again a visitor to Silver Spring—not as a friend, but as an enemy.

As the war situation was still a critical one, Gen. Early knew what the capture and burning of Washington would mean toward helping the Southern cause—more financial assistance and more men flocking to the support of the Stars and Bars and more discouragement to the North, then almost at the breaking point. Early was eager; Lee was cautious and not so optimistic and only consented to permit the attempt to be made should it be found perfectly feasible, which did not prove to be the case when the final test came. But there are still many people living who recall just how frightened everybody in Washington was at the time and how every bit of news of the approaching army was read the minute it came off the press.

Early undoubtedly had Washington as his objective from the start of his campaign in the Valley, and the military authorities and high officials at the Capital were, no doubt, aware of his intentions. Especially was this true after his successes in Western Maryland, where he exacted a tribute of \$20,000 from Hagerstown and 10 times as much from Frederick, and, all things considered, why should not the attempt be made?

Early's legions were naturally intoxicated with the results already achieved, and they did not hesitate to push on toward Washington. But this was not the only thing, we are told, that intoxicated Early's soldiers, for upon their arrival at the Blair home they found in the cellar a barrel of bourbon whisky, which all hands proceeded to partake of freely. The women's dresses they found in the house they dressed up in and amused themselves dancing and drinking, and instead of attacking Fort Stevens that afternoon, when few if any soldiers were on guard, they remained at Silver Spring until morning. The 6th Massachusetts Regiment arrived the following day, and Washington was saved.

**Great Development.**

To many the development of Silver Spring seems almost marvelous. A few years ago there was practically nothing hereabout; today it is a good-sized town. Here is what Maj. Gist Blair says it was 43 years ago:

"When I returned from St. Louis to settle in Maryland in 1897 Sil-

ver Spring was a cross-roads without inhabitants. A tollgate existed about half a mile north of the station on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, charging tolls to those who lived south of it for obtaining their mail. Rural free delivery did not then exist, so I calculated a petition for a post office for the district south of the tollgate, and the office of Silver Spring was named and established near the station on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. I was made postmaster May 5, 1899.

"The office was kept in existence only by constant fighting, because it interfered seriously with Sligo, a quarter of a mile away and just north of the tollgate, the receipts for that office then depending on the number of letters mailed and canceled there. In 1900 the postmaster at Sligo succeeded in having the Silver Spring office discontinued, but I secured a further hearing and had the order discontinuing it rescinded. I remained postmaster until February 21, 1906, and established the money order system and the rural free delivery system with three carriers. The office requiring more time than I could give it, I resigned, and Frank L. Hewitt, my assistant, succeeded me and remained postmaster until removed by a Democratic administration."

A plat of Silver Spring of 1878 shows the station of the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and south of this, on the east side of Georgia avenue, early known as the Brookville pike, was the home of Perry Collins and Washington Bonifant, and nearer the District line on the same side of the road was Mrs. Mary Blair's place and residences of Thomas Jones and Samuel Jones. To the west of the avenue was the larger part of the Blair estate.

The post office was centrally located on the west side of Georgia avenue in what is now the business section of the town. It combined with it a store, and nearby was the Eagle Inn, probably conducted by J. L. Dorsey. It was in this vicinity also that Maj. Gist Blair erected, subsequent to 1897, a frame building of Colonial architecture, occupied at one time by the Hewitt family. It was removed about 1932.

Above this and a little south of the Colesville pike was the tollgate. Going north, lived S. C. Cissell, N. H. Holcomb and then came a store and shoeshop. Farther north was Mrs. M. Fidler's place, the home of Joseph S. Childs and the parsonage of the Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. J. P. Averill. Back farther from the road lived Thomas B. Cissell, S. Lytton and a family named Wyn-gate.



Old drawing of Confederate officers indulging in revelry on the Blair estate, thus delaying their attack on Fort Stevens.

Center, above: Famous spring house on the Blair property, which suggested the name, "Silver Spring."



Old residence in Jessup Blair Park, Blair road and Georgia avenue, Silver Spring.

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**Old Residences.**

North of the B. & O. station, to the right, lived William Talbott, and a little house nearby was owned by Montgomery Blair. Farther north was the residence of Benjamin Schneider, a house owned by E. P. Blair, residences of N. Tyler, Hy Norton, Charles Stewart, William Thompson and not far from Georgia avenue on the Colesville pike was the schoolhouse, and a little farther north, on the Baltimore pike, was the Sligo Methodist Episcopal Church, and north of this was Grace Episcopal Church, on the site of which there has been a church since 1858. It is at Woodside, about one mile beyond the District line. This area was probably once looked upon as a part of Silver Spring, from which the church got the larger part of its congregation.

Surrounding this early church is a graveyard in which are interred some of the Confederate soldiers killed in the Battle of Fort Stevens. Others buried here included Eleanor Windham, who died at the age of 56, and Elizabeth Windham, aged 37. The earliest burial, as taken from the gravestones, is that of Sarah B. Wilson, whose death occurred December 3, 1861, when she was 65. Her husband, Thomas N. Wilson, died September 18, 1862.

Other early burials here were those of Charlotte Grace Cousins, who was born in London, England, April 11, 1797, and died in Montgomery County, Md., February 14, 1871; Adolph Martik Wilhelm Birgfeld, born July 10, 1848, died Jan-

uary 30, 1871, at Independence, Montgomery County; John Gott Fidler, born in Slesing, Prussia, April 23, 1823, "fell asleep" March 1, 1874.

Mr. Fidler was the village blacksmith and a reliable, quiet man. However, he had the reputation of settling all the contentions in and about his neighborhood in a decisive and stern way; in other words, he was the judge and jury to all the people thereabout, and all accepted his decisions.

Edward Pilling, who is interred nearby, died May 20, 1868; his record states that he was born at Huddersfield, England. A very old stone just says: "Ida Plater" and another, "Nancy Jones, died 1873."

**Church Members.**

Senator Blair, in speaking regarding this Episcopal Church, of which he has been a vestryman for 58 years, recalled as early members of the congregation his grandparents, Francis P. Blair, Sr., and Mrs. Blair; Montgomery Blair, his uncle, who was a lay reader in the church, and, as many will recall, was Postmaster General in President Lincoln's cabinet; Rear Admiral and Mrs. S. P. Lee, parents of Senator Blair Lee; Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Harding, members of the family of Crosby S. Noyes, when the family was living at Alton Farm; the family of Col. Charles Newbold, when living at Sligo; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bachelor and Gen. and Mrs. Getty. It was Gen. Getty who led the troops that drove Early north on the Seventh street pike, and he liked the neighborhood so well that he returned after the war and bought a farm two miles north of the church, where he made his home.

## Pioneer Blair Brought Here By Jackson

Discovery of Fine Spring Gave Rise To Community

Mr. and Mrs. Smith Thompson were members of the church, as were Mrs. William Thompson, the Clagett family, early landowners of this vicinity; Greenbury Walking, who owned a large section of land now a part of Chevy Chase; Richard and Alfred Ray, Maj. Lawrence and several members of the Jones family.

**Changes in Estate.**

The Blair estate in recent years seems to have been greatly reduced, though it once extended over into the District of Columbia, and when Rock Creek Park was laid out, in 1891, among the parcels of land acquired by the Government for the northern part of the park was one section bought of Montgomery Blair containing about 18 acres; another, obtained from S. P. Lee, contained about 18 acres. Alexander R. Shepherd parted with about 86 acres.

In this transaction the names of some other early landowners of this section of the District appear, namely, the Van Riswick family, the Clagetts, the Fenwicks and others. The last-named family was one of the earliest owners of property in the northern part of the District.

There was a relationship between the Carrolls and the Fenwicks, Capt. Ignatius Fenwick having married the widow of Charles Carroll of Carrollburg. Boschke's map of the District of Columbia, completed in 1859, shows a large area of land in the northern part of the District, bordering Rock Creek on the west, as listed in the name of the Carroll heirs, and the property to the north is in the name of P. Fenwick.

Senator Blair Lee tells the writer that the old residence at 7713 Thirteenth street N.W. was once the home of the Fenwick family and that Kalmia road was probably called Fenwicks lane in the early days. (There are still on that street, east of Sixteenth street, a line of old cedar trees that suggests the thoroughfare to be an old one.)

Talmadge A. Lambert moved to this residence about 1883. In 1870 he married Averilla van Riswick, second daughter of John and Mary (Fenwick) van Riswick, which shows the connection between these three families—Lambert, Fenwick and Van Riswick.