

Thomas Plater (1769–1830)

Thomas Plater—militia officer, lawyer, Congressman and Christ Church founder—was, if nothing else, well-connected.

As a church founder, Plater subscribed to 20 shares, worth \$500, making him one of the largest contributors. In addition he was one of the 26 committed pew owners and served on the first Vestry.

Thomas Plater was the third son of Maryland Governor George Plater III, who had represented Maryland in the Second Continental Congress. Thomas Plater was born in Annapolis in 1769 and grew up on his father's plantation "Sotterly" on the lower Patuxent River in St. Mary's County, MD (it was named "Sotterly" after the Platers' ancestral home in Suffolk, England; it still stands and is open to the public). His mother was from the politically connected Rousby family of Calvert County. Thomas was the brother of Philip Barton Key's wife Anne Plater Key.

Because he was the third son and unlikely to inherit the family plantation, Plater attended William & Mary College in Williamsburg, VA and studied law. He was admitted to the bar and practiced, probably in Montgomery County, MD. In the early 1790s he lived at Poolesville, MD and built a house on land previously owned by Robert Peter, known as "Peter's Forest." It still stands today at the corner of Milford Mill Road and Beall Street in Poolesville.

In 1794 he was a Lieutenant on active duty in the Montgomery County militia during the Whisky Rebellion. He later came to be called "Colonel" Thomas Plater, although the title may have been a courtesy one. He held a number of local offices and was elected as a Federalist to the Seventh and Eight Congresses (1801–05) for Maryland's Third Congressional District (Montgomery Coun-

ty). Subsequently he resumed his law practice, presumably this time in Georgetown. In 1817, the year of Christ Church's founding, he was listed as a Director of the Bank of Columbia at what is now 3210 M Street.

Shortly after leaving Congress, in 1806 Plater purchased a 35 acre estate called "Greenwood" on the heights overlooking Georgetown. The house Plater built there, which no longer exists, is described as having stood in a forest of giant oaks, and it appears on maps as being near the present-day intersection of Edmunds and 36th Streets, NW. Its driveway came out at the bend in Wisconsin Avenue, north of Calvert Street—just south of the present-day Russian embassy. Consistent with his being well connected, Plater's "Greenwood" stood near his brother John Rousby Plater's "Mount Alban" and his sister Rebecca Plater Forrest's "Rosedale," which still stands. It also was near his sister Anne Plater Key's "Woodley," currently Maret School.

While living there, he was described by a neighbor who knew him as "handsome, stern, morose, and disagreeable on account of a gouty affection of his head."

He sold "Greenwood" in 1819 and moved to Poolesville, MD. In 1824 he also offered for sale or rent a town house he owned at what is now 2812 N Street, which he described in advertisements as "large, 5 rooms each floor, and basement story for servants." Evidently it did not sell, for "having retired to the country," he advertised it again in 1828 as his "late residence," noting that it was then occupied by "Mrs. Decatur" (the widow of Commodore Decatur, who maintained something of a fashionable salon at the house). This house was built in 1779 and was at one point the home of fellow Christ Church founder Judge James Sewell Morsell. It must have sold the



second time he advertised it, for in 1828 Mrs. Decatur converted to Catholicism and moved to a frame house near Georgetown University.

In terms of his personal life, Plater married Martha Lingan in 1790. She was the sister of General James Macubbin Lingan, a Revolutionary War hero, first Commissioner of Customs at Georgetown and owner of Prospect House (General Lingan owned extensive properties in Georgetown; while in the company of Revolutionary General "Light Horse" Harry Lee, father of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, he was murdered by a mob in Baltimore for his opposition to the War of 1812). Their children, one son and a number of daughters, were born circa 1791–1801.

Martha Lingan Plater died July 22, 1814. After his wife's death Thomas Plater took as his second wife Evelina Buchanan, and they lived near Poolesville, according to some sources at "Montevideo," a Peter family property modeled on Georgetown's Tudor Place. However, this assertion is uncertain because the current "Montevideo" was not built until 1828–30 (the house still stands and is now owned by the Kiplinger family).

Thomas Plater's daughter Ann married George Peter of Georgetown, the brother of Thomas Peter of Tudor Place who was the husband of Martha Washington's granddaughter Martha Parke Custis. Another daughter, Martha, died young:

Died on September 13 in her 23rd year, Miss Martha Plater, daughter of Thomas Plater of Georgetown, complaint seemed to be pulmonary, excruciating pain for two weeks. An aged parent bereaved of his child, a brother and sisters of their dearest companion. She received communion one short hour before she breathed her last. (*National Intelligencer*, September 15, 1824)

Her funeral was held at Christ Church.

Thomas Plater died near Poolesville, possibly at "Montevideo" but maybe elsewhere nearby, in 1830 at age 66. He apparently died deeply in debt. The Farmers and Mechanics Bank in Georgetown sued his heirs for \$7000. Those heirs included his widow Evelina Plater and their infant son, Thomas Plater the younger; Maria Stull (Mrs. John Stull); Rebecca Walford; Jane Williams (Mrs. Elisha Williams); and James L. Plater. Further, according to John Rousby Plater's will, Thomas died indebted to his brother.

There is a mystery that surrounds Thomas Plater's last resting place. Plater's name appears on a list of lot owners in Georgetown's Old Presbyterian burial ground, but there was also a family burial ground at "Greenwood." According to the *National Intelligencer* notice of his death, his funeral was to take place at "Greenwood," which by then was owned by a Mr. Schwartz. This appeared to have occurred, as there is no funeral record for him at Christ Church. But is a funeral synonymous with a burial? He is buried either near Poolesville or at "Greenwood" or in the Old Presbyterian burial ground. If either of the latter two, his grave probably lies under either residential properties just south of the Washington Cathedral or under Volta Park.

