

Ross Winans (1796-1877)

Nationality: American

Date of Birth: 17 October 1796

Place of Birth: Vernon, Sussex County, NJ

Date of Death: 11 April 1877

Place of Death: Baltimore, MD

Date of Burial: 12 April 1877

Place of Burial: Green Mount Cemetery, Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Ross Winans was the son of William and Mary Winans, who were cousins. He married twice: First to Julia de Kay (born 10 Aug 1800 – died 24 May 1850), daughter of Thomas de Kay, a wealthy landowner, and his wife Hannah Blain. He married Julia de Kay on 22 January 1820 and they had five children: Thomas de Kay (1820 - 1878); William Louis (1823 - 1897); Julia de Kay (1825 - 1875); DeWitt Clinton (1838 - 1892); Walter Scott (1840 - 1928). Second to Elizabeth K. West (born 31 July 1807 – died 29 Mar 1889) who he married on 04 Feb 1854 in Baltimore, Maryland.

Ross Winans was a strong individual, an inventor, mechanic, and builder of locomotives and railroad machinery, including wheels, axels, bearings trucks and carriages, who started life as a farmer in his native state of New Jersey. One of the first devices he invented as a young man was a new type of plough. He became one of America's first multi-millionaires and a pioneer of railroading technology and development. He was first associated with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1827 selling horses to the railroad. Upon moving his family to Baltimore from Vernon, New Jersey, their first residence was on west Fayette Street near Pine Street. One of Ross Winans first and more important tasks was to help Peter Cooper and Phineas Davis build the Tom Thumb steam locomotive, the first of its kind in America. In 1828 he developed a friction wheel with outside bearings which established a distinctive pattern for railroad wheels for the next one hundred years or so. From November 1828 to May 1829, Winans and several other engineers including Major George Washington Whistler and William Gibbs McNeill, were sent to England by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (B&O) to study the English railroad system and made observations that proved of great value to the company. He built the first successful locomotive used on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He was also the inventor of the eight-wheeled car system. By 1831 he was appointed assistant engineer of machinery on the B&O and soon became the B&O Railroad's main contractor for supplying the railroad's rolling stock. Also in this productive year, he built the "Columbus," his first double-truck car, which he immediately patented, even though he was not the first individual to build this type of car. In 1835 Winans went into partnership with George Gillingham and in 1836 they took over the 1834 lease of Phineas Davis & Israel Gardner of the B&O's Company shops at Mount Clare Station and continued to manufacture locomotives and railroad machinery.

Winans claim for royalty on all two-trucked passenger cars results in 25 years of litigation. Winans was credited publicly with the invention of the coned wheel, the chilled cast-iron wheel, the eight-wheel car, and the leading truck. He claimed that the designs of these devices were stolen and used by other companies without his consent. Hence between 1838 and the late 1850s he was involved in what came to be known as "The Twenty Years War against the Railroads" where he and his attorneys, including John H. B. Latrobe, sued many companies, unsuccessfully. According to historian John H. White, "Ross Winans cannot properly be given credit as the originator of these devices."

In 1842, at the request of the Russian government, Ross Winans built a Crab locomotive and traveled with it to St. Petersburg for tests. In 1843, Ross Winans was solicited through the agency of Major George Washington Whistler, who had been contracted by the Russian government to build a railroad between St. Petersburg and

Moscow, but declined to stay and instead sent for his two older sons, Thomas de Kay and William Louis. In 1844, his partner George Gillingham died leaving Ross to run the Baltimore railroad works by himself. "As far back perhaps as the year 1836, the firm of Gillingham and Winans, and, after the dissolution of that firm, I myself, down to 1841 or 1842, manufactured a Rail Road Wheel..." (letter #322). In about 1844, Winans began a career as an independent locomotive builder. By then he had established in Baltimore the largest railway machine-shops in the country and devoting the next twenty-five years to the improvement of railroad machinery. His sons were associated in the management and development of his railroad shop. (See Thomas de Kay Winans biography for more about the Russian adventure.)

Ross Winans first attempts at building coal-burning eight-wheel freight engines including the "Crab and the Monster" were not completely successful, but by 1848 he had perfected his ideas for the "Camel" locomotive, a powerful machine well suited to slow-speed coal service, which was the business focus of the B&O. He produced a total of about 300 locomotives. His refusal to adapt to the changing ideas of locomotive construction, which developed rapidly after 1850, caused his business to decline, and after the B&O's refusal to purchase more Camel locomotives, he decided to close his business in 1857. He was far from a ruined man; he lived comfortably, wrote religious tracts and joined his sons Thomas and William in the construction of the "cigar" boats.

Winans retired from the locomotive business by 1860. During the Civil War, he took an active part in politics and was chosen to represent Baltimore in the special session of the Maryland legislature held in 1861 to consider succession from the Union. On May 14, 1861, on his return from Frederick, Maryland, where the special session was held as it was a more neutral setting within Maryland than Annapolis, Winans and several other prominent Southern sympathizing Marylanders were arrested and imprisoned at Fort McHenry by Major General Benjamin Franklin Butler who also held all of Baltimore City hostage. With the aid of Reverdy Johnson, former U.S. Attorney General appointed by President Zachary Taylor, Winans quickly gained release and probation. Reverdy Johnson was a railroad attorney and had become acquainted with President Abraham Lincoln in the pursuit of his business as Lincoln also was a railroad attorney. Ross Winans got into trouble again briefly on September 11, 1861, when he was again arrested, but soon released. Winans family claim he had been commissioned by the State of Maryland to prepare munitions and iron clubs called "pikes" in case they were needed for local conflicts. Winans also repaired a unique centrifugal steam gun invented by Charles S. Dickinson of Cleveland, Ohio, which was being shipped out of state when Fort Sumter was fired upon April 13, 1860. In Maryland there were strong pro-Southern, anti-Northern sentiments among the populous including the Winans and Whistler families. Winans found himself having shipped armaments to possible "secessionists," but the issue was resolved without injury to the Winans reputation. Major General Butler had acted without orders in arresting Winans and other Marylanders (his military career would be characterized by his eagerness to assume authority in the absence of official instructions), which he said he did as an example to others arresting the rich man in Maryland, but Butler was soon dispatched to other responsibilities. Later he was elected Governor of Massachusetts, served in Congress and ran for President.

By 1852, the B&O Railroad yard at the Mount Clare Station employed 1,000 workers from the Barre Circle district. By mid-century there were about 200 rowhouses for blue-collar laborers. A peaceful strike had occurred there in 1839 when the company attempted to withhold back wages from employees who had been fired for dangerous negligence. The strike was broken, and its leaders were fired. The old railroad iron works was purchased by the Hayward-Bartlett Locomotive Works and this operation and the Winans Locomotive Works employed 350 people each. Barre Circle was unusual in that instead of having a mixed blue- and white-collar population, it was almost exclusively blue-collar. Nevertheless, class distinctions did manifest themselves in residential patterns: skilled craftsmen lived on the main streets while semi-

skilled workers and free African-Americans lived in cramped tenements on the smaller streets and alleys. By 1867 there were also two other furnaces and two wagon factories providing employment in the district. More housing was needed for the mostly Irish and German railroad workers, so Ross Winans constructed between 1871 to 1872 another 113 three-story houses designed with modern sanitation facilities, special bricks that did not absorb water, and arranged like apartments investing over \$400,000. Unfortunately, a national financial recession occurred at the same time and the project was a financial failure. The homes were also not appreciated by the worker's families as the apartment style of living was not something they had previously experienced and they desired to be under their own roof. Eventually, all of the houses were torn down starting in 1897 and the last one removed in 1902. In 1960, one building remained, but it is now gone as well, part of the new Camden Crossing redevelopment housing project on the former Winans Railroad Works property, then Hayward, Bartlett and Company, and later Koppers Company.

Mount Winans was once part of the expansive 2,368 acre tract originally called the "Georgia Plantation" and later called "Mount Clare." This area was deeded to Dr. Charles Carroll in 1732. It encompassed territory on either side of the Gwynns Falls. Dr. Carroll acquired this land for the expressed intention of mineral extraction. The following year a large portion of this huge tract was conveyed to the incipient Baltimore Iron Works Company to which he belonged. Other charter members of the Baltimore Company were Daniel Dulaney, Benjamin Tasker, and Charles and Daniel Carroll. The Baltimore Company thrived well into the 19th century. It engaged in the entrepreneurial activities of mining, smelting, and forging pig iron ore, and was the largest producer of pig iron at the time of the American Revolution. One of the first industries on site was a distillery on the edge of an ice pond along the Charles Run in part of Mount Winans. The distillery was supplanted in the 1880s by a white lead factory and then converted into an ice plant. It was overseen by T.J. Waxter, and was hence called Waxter's Ice Pond. It is much smaller today, because the B&O Company filled in one end of the pond for its Camden rail cut-off. The property including the pond was acquired by Ross Winans in the 1860s. Upon Winans arrival after he purchased this property, the hills and fields were barren as the trees had been removed to make coke for the Baltimore Company Iron Works. Winans proceeded to plant orchards and erect greenhouses as well as starting a small railroad shop and built a railroad station along the B&O line from Baltimore to Washington. He also built two cottages for his gardener and his caretaker situated on what is now Wicomico Street. By 1880, streets were in place and lots were being sold in Mt. Winans. On Monday, April 3, 1905, Baltimore was almost encircled by forest fires. Acres of timber were consumed by flames at Catonsville, Arbutus, Mount Winans, Landsdowns, along the Belair Road and at Canton, and for hours smoke from different fires was visible in this city. Fine groves on several valuable estates were burned over.

Ross Winans made numerous anthologies from the gleanings of the works of eminent writers, upon philosophical subjects, and was himself the author of various pamphlets on religious subjects including "One Religion, Many Creeds" (published in Baltimore in 1870). Ross Winans bust was sculptured by the famous Sarah Fisher Clampitt Ames (1817 - 1901). When Ross Winans died at home on Parkin and Hollins Streets near his son Thomas' estate of Alexandroffsky, Ross left his wife Elizabeth a small annuity of \$7,200 per year in monthly installments of \$600 and a small savings worth about ten thousand dollars as he had invested most of his earlier millions in the Winans Cove and the cigar boats, Mount Winans Railroad Works, and worker's housing along Winans Row.

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