

Claude B. Forrest (1883 – 1908)

Next to the monument of Thomas J.C. Forrest family is that of his nephew **Claude B. Forrest**, who died at the age of 25 (Aug 12, 1883 – July 21, 1908).

Claude was the oldest child of George H. Forrest (Thomas's brother, 1856 – 1928), who is buried at Park Heights Cemetery in Brunswick. George was married twice and had 12 children altogether. In 1900, the family was living in Brunswick, and Claude, age 17, was neither in school nor employed at that time. Eventually, he became employed by the B&O Railroad and was working out of South Cumberland (MD) as a brakeman (although another source says he was a fireman) at the time of his death.

The next record we have of Claude is in the Frederick News, 23 July 1908: “Claude Forrest died as a result of two gunshot wounds suffered during a domestic altercation at a home in Knoxville, MD. AUTOPSY ON FORREST'S BODY: The body of Claude Forrest, who was shot by Hilda Grobe, and who died at the Maryland University Hospital, Baltimore, was shipped to Brunswick yesterday and an autopsy was performed last night by Drs. Levin West and Howell Willard. Dr. West stated today that death was due to peritonitis, caused by inflammation of the stomach, due to the bullet. Forrest was a son of Mr. George Forrest of Brunswick, and leaves several brothers and sisters. His body was buried in Brunswick this afternoon.”

But there was more to the story. Further details came out two months later when Hilda Grobe was tried on charges of homicide, as reported in The Washington Herald, The (Washington) Evening Star, The Frederick News, and The Baltimore Sun. Here a summary of those reports:

Hilda Grobe was living in Washington, D.C. She had been separated from her husband, an “occulist” in that city, for 6 months, and occasionally paid visits to the home of her sister Mollie (Mrs. John) Winks (on Mountain Road, according to census records) in Knoxville. She was on one of those visits when this event occurred, and had been there for about two weeks.

Apparently, there were several people in the Winks home for dinner on the evening of July 14, 1908, including Hilda and Claude (whom she said she had never met before). After dinner, Hilda and a Mr. Amos Cooper went outside and sat in a hammock. They were followed by John Winks, who laid down on the hillside nearby and went to sleep. Hilda's sisters Mrs. Jennie Lawson and Miss Emma Sears went upstairs and engaged Hilda in a conversation through the window, reportedly teasing her for not joining them.

When it got dark, Hilda came inside, grabbed the valuables from her handbag, including a handgun which had been given to her by a friend a year earlier “for self-defense,” and went upstairs. The newspaper reports that she testified that “on her way, she passed the open door leading to the room of her two sisters. ‘To get back at them for teasing me,’ she said, ‘I pointed the revolver in the room and blazed away twice at the floor.’ Almost instantly, she heard young Forrest exclaim that he was shot and without entering the room she ran downstairs and told [Amos Cooper] to send for a physician.”

Dr. Levin West and Dr. Howell Willard soon arrived, followed shortly by Claude's father George H. Forrest. Seeing the gravity of the situation, Dr. West ordered that Claude be transported to the University Hospital in Baltimore, and he was transported there on the next

train. He underwent surgery to remove the bullet from his abdomen. (The second bullet that entered his chest had exited through his back.) Unfortunately, peritonitis set in, and Claude died on July 21. He was brought back to Brunswick for burial in the Old Berlin Cemetery.

The day following the incident, Hilda was jailed on charges of homicide, but was released on \$1,500 bond two weeks later. Her trial took place in Frederick on Sept. 28 and 29. After nearly 3 hours of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of “not guilty.” The newspaper reports that “Instantly the large crowd in the courtroom burst into applause. ‘Order! Order!’ shouted Court Crier Schroeder in stentorian tones, but the applause continued for quite a while.” I can’t imagine how the Forrest family felt.

So, who was Hilda Grobe, and what became of her after the incident of 1908?

Hilda was “of Washington, D.C.,” but probably born in Virginia in 1879. Her maiden name was Hilda Berry Corder. Her father either died or divorced, as her mother remarried to a man by the name of Sears, who became her step-father.

In 1907, she was living in Washington, D.C. Also living in that city was a young man from South Carolina by the name of Eugene D. Grobe, who was working as a clerk. (In 1912, he was an optician; later occupations included engineer, motorman for Capital Traction, and – at age 64 – clerk in a bowling alley.) Hilda and Eugene were married in D.C. on Nov. 7, 1907. As noted above, they separated just a few months later.

Apparently, Hilda was well-to-do financially. During her visit to her sister in 1908, she carried with her \$1,000 worth of diamonds, plus \$335 cash. During the trial, she stated that she had helped her sister financially on several occasions. And she offered to pay for Claude’s hospital and funeral expenses.

After the shooting:

The marriage didn’t last long. Hilda and Eugene were divorced on April 7, 1909, at which time she took back her maiden name. He was living in Philadelphia at the time, and she was living in Alexandria.

The 1910 census found Hilda (30 y.o.) and her niece Mildred E. Corder (5 y.o.) living in D.C. Mildred was the daughter of Hilda’s deceased sister. At some point thereafter, she moved to Baltimore and was apparently involved in real estate because there are several property transactions published in the newspaper, stating that she is acting on behalf of a client.

In 1920, Hilda and Mildred were living at 1135 Lombard St. in Baltimore. Hilda owned her own home, free of mortgage. No occupation was listed.

On March 11, 1921, Hilda died in Baltimore, age 40. No details of her death are given. She was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in that City. She willed her home on W. Pratt Street and furnishings to her niece. [Note the discrepancy: Pratt St. and Lombard St. are parallel and one block apart from each other.]

Eight months later, on Nov. 6, 1921, Hilda’s niece Mildred, age 16, married Louis A. Hood, a 21-year old farmer from Dorsey, Anne Arundel County, MD. This was another short relationship, as he sued her for divorce 12 months later, claiming she had committed adultery. She had subsequently moved to Pennsylvania, and we do not know what became of her.

In May 1922 there was a public sale of Hilda’s household goods. Hilda’s sisters Millie and Jenny [who, coincidentally, were now living in Anne Arundel County] contested her will in February 1923. They were, however, unsuccessful in this attempt.



CLAUD E.
Son of
G.H. S.C.
Forrest
Born
Aug 12, 1889
Died
July 21, 1908

FORREST