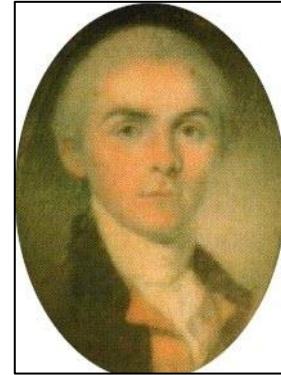


Georgia: Robert Forsyth

Born in Scotland in 1754, Robert Forsyth was one of the two original U.S. marshals not born in the future United States. After settling in New England when he was a teenager, Forsyth and his family moved to Fredericksburg, VA a year before the American Revolution began.¹⁷⁴ Like many young Virginians at the time, Forsyth began the early part of his career as a soldier in the Continental Army. On January 10, 1779, Forsyth received a captain's commission in "Light-Horse" Harry Lee's elite cavalry unit, but within the year he transferred positions and worked as an aide-de-camp to General Waightstill Avery.¹⁷⁵ As General Avery's aide, Forsyth was tasked with supplying the Continental Army in the Southern Theater of the war. As a result of his success in this role, Forsyth received a promotion to major, a rank he would maintain throughout the remainder of the conflict.¹⁷⁶



**Miniature Portrait of Robert Forsyth
1790s.**

*Courtesy of the National U.S. Marshals
Museum*

After the American Revolution concluded, Forsyth returned to his home in Virginia, where he remained for two years before moving to Georgia in 1785. Between 1785 and September 1789, Forsyth participated in local politics, while attending to growing his personal fortune.¹⁷⁷ In the fall of 1789, President Washington appointed him as the first U.S. marshal for Georgia—a decision that would prove fateful.

Forsyth quickly plunged into his duties, including overseeing the enumeration of Georgia. Unfortunately, Georgia's extant 1790 census records were among those destroyed by the British in during the War of 1812, so there is no direct record of the names of the heads of household or the deputy marshals. Over the years, researchers have been able to piece together some of this information from other records, but there will always be large gaps.

¹⁷⁴ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of Georgia: Robert Forsyth," U.S. Marshals Service, last estimated release October 28, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/forsyth.htm>. (Accessed October 28, 2019).

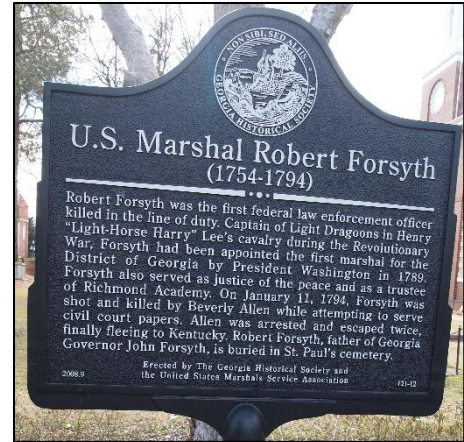
¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, Forsyth completed the enumeration of Georgia's population on June 25, 1791, thus meeting the original deadline that Congress established for completing the census.¹⁷⁸ His returns showed that Georgia had a total population of 82,548 people, making it the third smallest state in the nation.¹⁷⁹ After this, Forsyth continued to serve as Georgia's U.S. marshal for more than three years.¹⁸⁰

On January 11, 1794, Forsyth and his two deputies cornered Beverly Allen, a former minister, and his brother in the house of a local resident, with the intention of forcing them to comply with their summons to appear in court for a civil case.¹⁸¹ In an effort to detain the fugitives, Forsyth entered the house and proceeded to knock on the door to a room on the second floor.¹⁸² A fearful Beverly Allen shot through the door and killed Forsyth, making him the first federal law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty.¹⁸³ Forsyth's deputies arrested Allen, but he escaped from prison twice, finally fleeing to Kentucky, where he spent the remainder of his life.¹⁸⁴



Historical marker marking the burial place of Robert Forsyth

Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society

Forsyth's son, John, served as a U.S. Congressman and Senator, the Governor of Georgia, and the Secretary of State under Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren.

¹⁷⁸ "Georgia". *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 55. PDF. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/1793/dec/number-of-persons.htm>. (Accessed October 28, 2019). For Information about Georgia's Modern Population see "QuickFacts: Georgia," U.S. Census Bureau, last estimated release July 1, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/GA>. (Accessed October 28, 2019).

¹⁷⁹ "Georgia", *Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States: according to "An act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States," passed March the first, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one*, pg. 55.

¹⁸⁰ "History - The First Generation of United States Marshals/The First Marshal of Georgia: Robert Forsyth."

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Turk, David S., "Conclusion: Retired Deputy U.S. Marshal Follows the Trail of Robert Forsyth's Murderer," U.S. Marshals Service, last estimated release October 28, 2019, <https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/firstmarshals/forsyth.htm>. (Accessed October 28, 2019).