

William Cotter
People of London Town, Maryland¹

William Cotter was leading a peaceful and unremarkable life as a planter. In about 1693 he married Jane Gassaway, daughter of the prominent Captain Nicholas Gassaway, and inherited the Gresham Estate on his father-in-law's death. Renaming the plantation "Cotter's Desire," William planted tobacco and maintained the grounds.²

Cotter's life was turned upside down when, in 1698, his past was revealed to the world. Two years prior, the Lords Justices of England issued a proclamation for the capture of the famous pirate Henry Every. Many of Every's crew disappeared into the North American colonies, and in response the colonial governments swept through the provinces rounding up what pirates they could find.³ Cotter was caught in the dragnet by his neighbor Richard Beard, High Sheriff of Anne Arundel County. He and his friend John Blackamore confessed "they went out of Jamaica under the Command of one George Rainer in a private man of war Commissionated by the Lord Inchequin then Governor of Jamaica."⁴

Under Captain George Raynor, Cotter sailed the *Batchelor's Delight* from Jamaica to Madagascar, where he and his shipmates enjoyed the pirate haven of St. Mary's. Renaming their vessel the *Loyal Jamaica*, the buccaneers sailed the Red Sea where they raided Arab merchants and took in a massive haul. Each man took home around £1100 in stolen treasure.⁵ Cotter retired on his ill-gotten gains and settled down to the quiet life of a planter on the South River.

The council was lenient. Cotter and Blackamore paid a fine and were warned in the "meane time to be of good behav' as to any Acts of piracy."⁶ Both were reported to authorities in England, but nothing more came of the pirates' past lives.⁷ Cotter died peacefully in 1702.⁸

¹ As the research into colonial London Town's inhabitants is an ongoing process, the caveat is offered that additional information may be found at any time and that a correction of information might also occur at any time.

² "Gresham Residences," *Our Grisham Family*, accessed March 16, 2018, <<https://grisham.weebly.com/residences.html>>.

³ *A Complete History Of England: With The Lives Of All The Kings and Queens Thereof*, Volume III, London: 1706, page 723.

⁴ Archives of Maryland Online, *Proceedings of the Council of Maryland, 1696/7:1698*, Volume 23, page 473, accessed March 16, 2018, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000023/html/am23--473.html>>.

⁵ Jameson, John Franklin editor, *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents*, New York: MacMillan, 1923, pages 181-182, via Project Gutenberg, accessed March 16, 2018, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24882/24882-h/24882-h.htm>>.

⁶ Archives of Maryland Online, *Provincial Court Land Records, 1676-1700*, Volume 717, page 835, accessed March 16, 2018, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000717/html/am717--835.html>>.

⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 27 October, 1691 – 31 December, 1698*, edited by J.W. Fortescue, page 351

⁸ Papenfuse, Edward C., et. al., *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature 1635-1789*, Archives of Maryland Online, Volume 426, page 347, accessed March 16, 2018, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000426/html/am426--347.html>>.