

Alexander Ferguson (b. ? - d. 1770)

MSA SC 3520-15895

Property Owner, London Town, Maryland

Biography:

Alexander Ferguson was a tailor who lived in London Town from the 1740s until his death in 1770.¹ He might have been Scottish due to the Scots origin of the surname "Ferguson."²

In addition to his tailoring business, Ferguson and his wife, Elizabeth, ran an ordinary, for which they first obtained a license in 1756. It is believed that the ordinary was located on lot 91 in London Town because lot 91 was the only lot Ferguson owned when he first acquired the license. The ordinary was operated by the Ferguson family from 1756 until 1773.³

A notice advertising Ferguson's establishment of a stay-making business in conjunction with his tailoring business appeared on August 6, 1767 in the *Maryland Gazette*.⁴ After Ferguson's death, his wife continued to run the ordinary and the stay-making business, but not the tailoring business. This might indicate that Elizabeth Ferguson was the one in charge of the stay-making business.⁵

In his inventory, the mention of items, such as thirteen types of fabric, whalebone (for stays), two spinning wheels, yarn, flax at different stages of processing, and binding for buttonholes, indicates that Ferguson ran a well-stocked tailor shop. He was also well equipped to run an ordinary, as evidenced by the mention of items such as 129 pieces of dishware made of six types of material, decanters, cruets, 1670 gallons of cider, 207 pounds of bacon, and a backgammon table. There is also a possibility that Ferguson did more than run a tailor shop and an ordinary, as he also owned items not associated with either profession, such as 1185 pounds of tobacco, two plows, 18 farm animals, 2841 feet of wood planking, a rope walk wheel, a set of brick molds, and 100 pounds of rope.⁶

The Fergusons had seven children: Mary (b. November 13, 1749),⁷ Alexander Jr. (b. February 9, 1750-1),⁸ David (b. December 6, 1752),⁹ Andrew (b. June 30, 1755),¹⁰ Ann (b. March 24, 1758),¹¹ Isabella (b. October 28, 1760),¹² and Elizabeth (b. December 12, 1764).¹³ David and Andrew Ferguson both served in the Maryland Line during the Revolutionary War.¹⁴ Isabella Ferguson married Joseph Clarke, architect of the Maryland State House dome, on November 7, 1777.¹⁵ Ann Ferguson married David Avis on October 21, 1779.¹⁶ Alexander Ferguson also had a illegitimate granddaughter, Elizabeth Ferguson Ijams, born to Margaret Ijams.¹⁷

Alexander Ferguson bought lot 91 in London Town in 1748 from merchant William Peele.¹⁸ He purchased lots 66, 49, and 53 in 1757 from William Chapman.¹⁹ He then acquired lots 51, 33, and 57 in 1765 from Ann Chapman, widow of William Chapman.²⁰ Two years later, in 1767, Ferguson sold lot 51 to his third son, Andrew. His son, Andrew, was 12 years old at the time and his godfather, Andrew Buchanan, paid 35 pounds in his

name.²¹ This land transaction was unusual and there are multiple theories as to why it occurred. Perhaps, this was a way for Ferguson to ensure that Andrew Ferguson would inherit the lot after Ferguson's death, even if his wife, Elizabeth, were to remarry. On the other hand, Andrew Ferguson could have been apprenticed to Buchanan and the land was included as part of the apprenticeship agreement. However, there is no concrete explanation as to why the land transaction occurred in the way that it did.

At the time of his death in 1770, Ferguson owned six lots in London Town and a few lots and parcels of land in Annapolis, which he acquired from Allen Quynn, David Stewart, Robert Bryce, and Robert Ruth.²²

It is known that Ferguson had a couple of servants because their runaway advertisements appeared in the *Maryland Gazette*. Peter Bond ran away from Ferguson in October 1755. He was a "Taylor by Trade, of a low Stature, is pitted with the Small-Pox, and has grey Eyes."²³ Ferguson offered to pay forty shillings to whomever brought him home.²⁴ A runaway advertisement for William Cooke appeared in the *Maryland Gazette* on December 10, 1767. He was "born in Staffordshire, in England, and has been in most Part of Ireland, is about 5 Feet 6 Inches high, has a small lump in his Forehead, a Mole on his left Cheek, thin Vissag'd, and dark Eyes... He has been in the East-Indies, on board a Man of War, and boasts much of it, when drunk, in which he will not fail, if he can get Liquor."²⁵ Ferguson offered thirty shillings, if found within ten miles of Annapolis, and three pounds, if found farther, to whomever brought him home.²⁶ Another runaway advertisement for William Cooke appeared in the *Maryland Gazette* less than two years later on January 5, 1769. It seems to be his second time running away because he supposedly left with his wife in 1769, whereas in 1767, he was alone. He was also wearing different clothes according to his description in the two advertisements.²⁷ In addition to Bond and Cooke, Abigail Howsted was bound to Ferguson for a year because she had an illegitimate child in June of 1766.²⁸ Ferguson was also named as the former owner of Edward Amies when Amies was petitioning for his freedom in August 1767.²⁹ Moses Jacobs, age thirteen, was indentured to Ferguson in March of 1755³⁰ and Sarah Jones, just five years old, was bound to Ferguson in November 1757.³¹

According to the inventory taken of Ferguson's estate in 1770, he owned four slaves: Abram, a 20 year old man, Pomfry, a 3 year old boy, Beck(y), a 22 year old woman, and her child.³² Upon her husband's death, Elizabeth Ferguson inherited Beck(y) and, as stated by Ferguson's will, Beck(y)'s children were to be divided among the Ferguson children as Elizabeth Ferguson saw fit.³³ Beck(y) stayed with Elizabeth Ferguson until her death around 1799.³⁴

Alexander Ferguson died in 1770.³⁵

1. Mechelle L. Kerns, *London Town: The Life of a Colonial Town*, (University of Maryland Baltimore County: Masters of Arts Thesis, 1999), 103.

2. Carville V. Earle, *The Evolution of Tidewater Settlement System: All Hallows Parish Maryland, 1650-1783*, (Chicago: The Department of Geography, University of Chicago, 1975), 58.

3. Kerns, 103.

4. ["Stay-Making Business," *Maryland Gazette*, August 6, 1767.](#)
5. ["Stay-Making Business," *Maryland Gazette*, November 15, 1770.](#)
6. PREROGATIVE COURT (Accounts) Alexander Ferguson, 1771, Liber 65, folio 328, MSA S531-65, MdHR 1087.
7. F. Edward Wright, *Anne Arundel Church Records of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, (Westminster, MD: Family Line Publishing), 53.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 54.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 55.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 57.
14. Kerns, 103.
15. Bill and Martha Reamy., *Records of St. Paul's [Prot. Ep.] Parish*, Vol 1, page 132.
16. Wright, 178.
17. *Ibid.*, 61
18. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1748, Liber RB3, folio 100, MSA C97-21, MdHR 4787-1.](#)
19. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1757, Liber BB2, folio 69, MSA C97-24, MdHR 4789-1.](#)
20. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1765, Liber BB3, folio 219, MSA C97-26, MdHR 4790-1.](#)
21. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1767, Liber BB3, folio 666, MSA C97-27, MdHR 4790-2.](#)
22. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1761, Liber BB2, folio 547, MSA C97-25, MdHR 4789-2.](#)
- [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1765, Liber BB3, folio 549, MSA C97-27, MdHR 4790-2.](#)
- [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1770, Liber IBBJ 1, folio 542, MSA C97-28, MdHR 4791.](#)
- [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1767, Liber BB3, folio 668, MSA C97-27, MdHR 4790-2.](#)
- [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT \(Land Records\) Alexander Ferguson, 1768, Liber IBBJ 1, folio 210, MSA C97-28, MdHR 4791.](#)
23. ["Ran away," *Maryland Gazette*, October 16, 1755.](#)
24. *Ibid.*
25. ["Ran away," *Maryland Gazette*, December 10, 1767.](#)
26. *Ibid.*
27. ["Ran away," *Maryland Gazette*, January 5, 1769.](#)
28. ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT (Judgment Record) Abigail Howsted, June 1766, Liber IMB2, folio 94, MSA C91-29, MdHR 887.
29. ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT (Judgment Record) Edward Amies, August 1767, Liber IMB2, folio 3, MSA C91-30, MdHR 888.
30. ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT (Judgment Record) Moses Jacobs, March 1755, Liber ISB3, folio 337, MSA C91-22, MdHR 881.
31. ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY COURT (Judgment Record) Sarah Jones, November 1757, Liber ISB3, folio 163, MSA C91-22, MdHR 881.
32. [PREROGATIVE COURT \(Inventories\) Alexander Ferguson, 1770, Liber 106, folio 274, MSA S534-107, MdHR 1213.](#)
33. [PREROGATIVE COURT \(Wills\) Alexander Ferguson, 1770, Liber WD3, folio 36, MSA S538-54, MdHR 1318.](#)
34. [ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY REGISTER OF WILLS \(Inventories\), Elizabeth Ferguson, 1799, Liber JG5, folio 538, MSA C88-8, MdHR 4818-1.](#)
35. ["Alexander Ferguson," *Maryland Gazette*, July 5, 1770.](#)

Biography written by 2012 summer intern Sarah Hartge.

<http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/015800/015895/html/msa15895.htm>

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