

William Brown, Sr.
People of London Town, Maryland*

William Brown was involved with London Town from at least the late 1740s through his death in the early 1790s.¹ During that time he was called carpenter, cabinet-maker, joiner, sawyer, undertaker, tavern keeper, and ferry keeper. He was influential enough to have large amounts of credit extended to him and respected to safeguard the provincial records at the beginning to the American Revolution. And he was unfortunate enough to eventually go bankrupt and die in Annapolis a very poor individual.

William Brown first appears in the records in 1746 due to his daughter's birth being recorded in the parish records. William, and his wife "Anne," (most likely a shortening of Susannah), appear three more times in the parish records because of additional children. In order of birth, they are: Jane Brown, born 19 January 1746; Elizabeth Brown, 21 April 1748; William Brown, October 1751; and Margaret Brown, 8 August 1759.² Additionally, a Willee Ann Brown, "daughter of William and Susanna Brown in London Town," is referenced in a 1778 record wherein Willee Ann received a "negro girl named Delilah" from William Ijams for "five shillings current money" paid by William Brown.³ These are the only five known children of William Brown. Unfortunately, there is no known record of William's and Susannah's marriage.

Brown's Occupations and Activities

As for the various activities William Brown was involved with, they can be grouped into two main categories: woodworking and hospitality. A pair of 1753 *Maryland Gazette* advertisements indicate that Brown's original occupation involved woodworking, or as he stated, "Joyner and Cabinet Maker."⁴ In the first advertisement, Brown, with James Disney (a local wood mill owner), announced that two of their servants ran away. The first, Philip Williams, is described as "a Cabinet and Chairmaker by Trade." The second, Henry Gibbons, is said to be a carpenter.⁵ Though the advertisement does not mention which servant belongs to whom, William Brown testified during the August 1756 session of the county court that "his servant Philip Williams" had ran away, was captured, and should serve extra time for his absence and the costs involved with reacquiring him. The court agreed with Brown and ordered Williams to serve an extra 57 weeks and six days for his absence.⁶ In the second advertisement, though Brown is primarily telling the local area that he is now operating a tavern and ferry in London Town, the end of the advertisement states: "He still continues his Business of a Joyner and Cabinet Maker...."⁷

¹ Though William Brown built the large brick building the London Town Foundation maintains and interprets, is mentioned in a number of historical documents, and has a smattering of archaeological evidence associated with him, a true synopsis of his life and involvement with London Town does not exist. And though this document outlines some of his better known accomplishments and failures, it does not pretend to be a comprehensive accounting of his life.

² F. Edward Wright, *Anne Arundel County Church Records of the 17th and 18th Centuries*.

³ Maryland State Archives (MSA), *Anne Arundel County Land Records (AACLR)*, Liber NH1, Folio 28-29.

⁴ *Maryland Gazette*, 14 June 1753, page 3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ MSA, *Anne Arundel County Court Judgment Record (AACCR)*, August Court 1756, Liber ISB3, Folio 705-706.

⁷ *Maryland Gazette*, 18 October 1753, page 2.

Though Brown never again advertises his services as a joiner and cabinet maker, the references to him in the historical records consistently describe him as either a joiner, carpenter, cabinet maker, or, as he is referenced in a 1789 land transaction, sawyer.⁸ These references indicate that he stayed connected to woodworking throughout the rest of his time at London Town. His (or his servants') woodworking skills would have served him well when he received 700 pounds of tobacco from the county court for probably making a coffin while he "kep[t] and bur[ie]d] Thomas Vinell" in 1756.⁹

London Town, June 14, 1753.
RAN away from the Subscribers, on Tuesday Morning last, the two following Servant Men, viz.
Philip Williams, an Indented Servant, a Cabinet and Chaismaker by Trade, about 5 Feet 5 Inches high; much pitted with the Small Pox, very dark Complexion, black Eyes, his under Lip on the left Side of his Mouth very thick, which somewhat hinders his Speech: He had on an old Hat and grey Wig, a *German Serge* Coat much spotted with Tar, a brown Linnen Jacket and Breeches, new Pumps, new Thread Stockings, and a very good white Shirt.
Henry Gibbons, a Carpenter, about the same Height with *Williams*, floops much forward in his Walking, looks mild, and seldom speaks without smiling; one Toe of his left Foot lies over the others: He had on a new *Onabrigs* Jacket, Shirt, and Trowsers (the Jacket without Buttons), a new Felt Hat, an old Silk Cap, and old Shoes.
 Whoever takes up the said Runaways, or either of them, and secures them so as their Masters may have them again, shall have a **PISTOLE** Reward for each, besides what the Law allows.
William Brown,
James Disney.
N. B. It is supposed they are gone towards the Eastern Shore, having taken a Schooner Boat, belonging to *William Chiffen*.

Maryland Gazette, 14 June 1753, page 3.

NOTICE is hereby given, That the Subscriber, now living in the House, at *London Town*, where *Mr. West*, deceased, formerly dwelt, has provided himself with good Boats and skilful Hands; as also with good Beds, Liquors, and Provender for Horses: All Gentlemen who shall think fit to favour him with their Custom, may depend on a quick Passage over the Ferry; good Entertainment, and civil Usage, from
Their humble Servant,
William Brown.
N. B. He still continues his Business of a Joynt and Cabinet Maker, and can furnish any Body with the nearest and newest fashion'd Chairs, Tables, &c. &c. &c. at the lowest Rates.

Maryland Gazette, 18 October 1753, page 2.

Related to his woodworking activities, Brown also seemed to be involved with building construction. During a 1796 Chancery Court case between Upton Scott and Robert Key, a reference to Upton Scott's house seems to indicate that it was built by William Brown. The evidence being presented in court are accounts relating to the building's construction.¹⁰ The connection between Brown's and Scott's house is not surprising because both were built around the same time and they look relatively similar. There is no evidence that Brown was experienced with making bricks or masonry, but his work as a joiner probably allowed him to act as a general contractor when building both his and Scott's dwellings.

The second grouping of activities Brown was involved with is, as mentioned, hospitality-related. The October 1753 newspaper item is fairly explicit about this. It mentions Brown's operation of a public house in London Town and a ferry across the South River. At this point Brown was renting the land and buildings and had not built the large brick building associated with him. Though Brown advertised his tavern-keeping enterprise in October 1753, because there was not a county court in session at the time, his first license was granted during the

⁸ MSA, AACLR, Liber NH4, Folio 314.

⁹ MSA, AACCR, Liber ISB3, Folio 798.

¹⁰ MSA, *Chancery Court Chancery Papers*, 1796, page 5.

November 1753 court.¹¹ And though Brown proclaimed that travelers could “depend on a quick Passage over the Ferry,” Brown was not the public ferry keeper for the South River at that time. He would not become involved with the public ferry until November 1757. During that county court session, Brown and Thomas Lusby received “sixty pounds a year each” to keep the ferry.¹²

In 1758, William Brown purchased the land and buildings he had been renting for the past few years from Stephen West, Jr. In that record Brown is referred to as an innholder. The purchase price for the land was 150 pounds current (Maryland) money. The description of the land includes a reference to “the Work Shop of the said William Brown.”¹³ A debt that is referenced in a March 1765 Provincial and General Court record indicates that Brown had convinced James Dick (a wealthy London Town merchant) to give Brown £537.13.00. This reference occurs because Brown is mortgaging his town land “on which the said William Brown hath built a large Brick house....”¹⁴ It is from these two records that we arrive at the c1760 date for the construction of the building now called the William Brown House. The architecture of the house, along with his activities, indicates that it was used as both his dwelling and as a tavern.

The records indicate that William Brown continued to be involved with tavern- and ferry-keeping (in addition to his previously mentioned woodworking activities) for at least the next 20 years. Around 1781 the records become quite confusing for the rest of his life.¹⁵ Because Brown had become indebted to James Dick for a large sum and never finished paying off the debt, when Dick died, Dick’s executors took Brown to court to recover the remaining money. A 3 July 1781 record indicates that Brown was forcibly removed from his house by the sheriff because Brown did not technically own it and the true owners (Dick’s executors) wanted him out.¹⁶ This incident is followed by a September 1781 *Maryland Gazette* advertisement wherein Brown says his London Town land is up for sale.¹⁷ In a May 1785 land record that details what Brown owes to Dick’s executors, Brown is mentioned as living in “the City of Annapolis....”¹⁸ And during these five years, William Brown does not appear to receive either the public ferry or a license to keep tavern.

However, in 1785, William Brown lines up another benefactor, Allen Quynn, and receives 750 pounds current money from Quynn.¹⁹ This amount seems to have been used to purchase back the brick house and accompanying land in London Town at a public auction after 5 September 1788.²⁰ In return for this line of credit, Brown offered the land and buildings as his security to Quynn. This timing works well because William Brown again became the public

¹¹ MSA, *AACCJR*, Liber ISB2, Folio 719.

¹² MSA, *AACCJR*, November Court, Liber ISB4, Folio 162.

¹³ MSA, *AACLR*, Liber BB2, Folio 215.

¹⁴ MSA, *Provincial and General Court Land Records (PGCLR)*, Liber DD3, Folio 527.

¹⁵ At the time of this report, the documents during that time have not been as analyzed as they could be. Information and conclusions may change upon further analysis.

¹⁶ MSA, *AACLR*, Liber NH1, Folio 293.

¹⁷ *Maryland Gazette*, 6 September 1781, page 2.

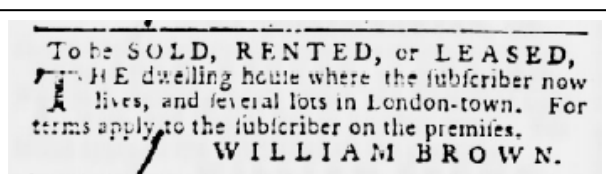
¹⁸ MSA, *PGCLR*, Liber TBH1, Folio 431.

¹⁹ MSA, *AACLR*, Liber NH4, Folio 346.

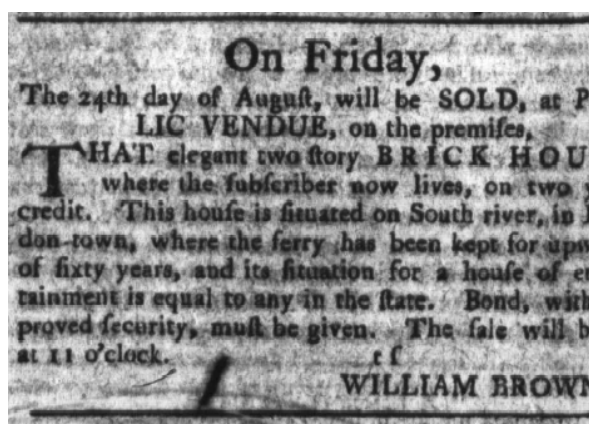
²⁰ MSA, *AACLR*, Liber NH6, Folio 667.

ferry keeper at the March 1789 county court session.²¹ And there is a reference to him receiving a license to keep an “inn or ordinary” during the August 1791 court session.²²

Unfortunately for Brown, his new-found financial fortune would not last. Within a few short years of Brown’s and Quynn’s agreement, James Dick’s executors revisit the debt issue.²³ It is unclear as to why this occurs, but for some reason the debt, in their minds, was not adequately paid. So in March 1789, William Brown and Allen Quynn agreed to sell the London Town land and buildings to John Hoskins Stone.²⁴ However, as the two court sessions mentioned above, and as the July 1792 *Maryland Gazette* advertisement indicates, Brown had an arrangement with one or both men that allowed him to stay for a few extra years at London Town. The 1792 newspaper advertisement mentions that Brown is living there “on two years’ credit.”²⁵ And the June 1793 land record that hints at the 1789 intention to sell to Stone indicates that that was not actually undertaken until that time.²⁶ There is no explanation as to why this was the case. But this was the last time that Brown would be involved with London Town because his will was created on 11 September 1793 and in March 1794 it was proved before the court. The will indicates he was living in Annapolis with his son-in-law, “John Steuart.”²⁷ There is no mention of his wife or biological children.



Maryland Gazette, 6 September 1781, page 2.



Maryland Gazette, 26 July 1792, page 2.

Brown’s Household

To return to Brown’s household and his labor force though, there are enough records to vaguely fill in some of the details. Like many Marylanders at that time, William Brown used convict servants, indentured servants, and enslaved Africans to meet the demands his various activities imposed upon him. The information on his convict and indentured servants exists because a few of them ran (or attempted to run) away and thus forced Brown to place advertisements in the paper. There are no known advertisements concerning Brown’s slaves. The information from them comes from a variety of land records.

Concerning his indentured servants, Phillip Williams was mentioned earlier in relation to William Brown’s woodworking activities. Brown had another indentured servant who ran away, William Gray. Gray’s existence is revealed in a November 1763 *Maryland Gazette* run-away

²¹ MSA, AACCR, March Court 1789, MdHR# 900, Folio 248-250.

²² MSA, AACCR, August Court 1791, MdHR# 903, Folio 295.

²³ MSA, AACLR, Liber NH4, Folio 346.

²⁴ MSA, AACLR, Liber NH6, Folio 669.

²⁵ *Maryland Gazette*, 26 July 1792, page 2.

²⁶ MSA, AACLR, Liber NH6, Folio 669-671.

²⁷ MSA, *Anne Arundel County Register of Wills*, original; MSA C155-2, Box B, Folder 84. A transcription of the will is at the end of this report.

advertisement wherein Brown says that on “October 25, 1763,” William Gray, “certain Mulatto Man... absented himself from my [Brown’s] service” which was “contrary to the Agreement” that had been agreed to “by an Instrument of Writing duly executed....”²⁸ Unlike Williams, there is no known court or other record that tells us whether or not Gray was ever captured and forced to serve extra time. A third servant, this time a convict, was Mary Jones. Her presence is known because at the November 1762 court session William Brown brought her before the court for having two illegitimate children while in his service.²⁹

William Brown also had problems with convict servants running away. Edward Merriott (Meritt) is mentioned two distinct times in the *Maryland Gazette* for running away. The first time is in November 1756 and the second time is in early March 1757.³⁰ Edward is described as being a joiner in both instances. This occupational description is further evidence that Brown continued his woodworking activities after starting his tavern and ferry-keeping enterprises. And the fact that Brown advertised for Merriott a second time, with a different clothing description in the second advertisement, means that Merriott was apprehended the first time. Though there is no evidence, one way or the other, telling us if Merriott was captured after he ran away in 1757, a 31 March 1757 advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* describing Merriott’s physical features and clothing indicates that Brown had decided Merriott needed to be searched for a little further afield.³¹ Ten years later, William Brown had another convict servant, this time “an Irish Convict Lad, named Michael Connoway” run away in June 1767. There is no occupation or trade described in this advertisement.³²

The historical references to William Brown’s slaves seem to exist only in a variety of land records wherein Brown uses them as security when lining up various amounts of credit. A June 1787 Chancery Court record indicates that Brown had used two men, Osborn and Sampson, one boy, Harry, and one girl, Sall, as a portion of his security to James Dick. Later in the document there is a reference to another man named Jem and yet another called Harry. There is also a boy called Jacob and a girl called Bett.³³ At this point it seems as if the two sets of slaves are used as security at different times. That could explain why in the first one there is a boy called Harry and in the second one a man called Harry. A more detailed examination of this record might help sort out this confusion. The only other slave that can be associated with the Brown household is Delilah. She was sold by William Ijams to Willee Ann Brown in November 1778.³⁴

With the above knowledge concerning the Brown household (both family and labor) it is possible to examine a few levy and census records to put names to numbers. The first time we have a number to attach to the household occurs in 1765 when William Brown is listed as having 7 “livies” for tax purposes. Four of them are at his quarter (he had acquired some land outside of town by this time) and three are presumably for London Town proper. The total tax assessment

²⁸ *Maryland Gazette*, 3 November 1763, page 3.

²⁹ MSA, AACJR, November Court 1762, Liber IMB1, Folio 603.

³⁰ *Maryland Gazette*, 4 November 1756, page 3 & 10 March 1757, page 3.

³¹ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 31 March 1757.

³² *Maryland Gazette*, Supplement, 25 June 1767, page 2.

³³ MSA, *Chancery Court, Chancery Record*, Liber 16, page 333. Out of all the names mentioned in this document, Sall is the one with the most known history. See the Sall biography for more information about her.

³⁴ MSA, AACLR, Liber NH1, Folio 28-29.

for these seven people was 320 pounds of tobacco.³⁵ That is only 20 pounds less than an assessment taken one year earlier. Unfortunately, the 1764 assessment is damaged where the particular number of levies is listed; only the final cost is legible.³⁶

Moving ahead about a decade, it is interesting to note that in the 1776 census, Brown still has only seven taxables. That number comes from 4 white males (taxable), 1 white female (nontaxable), 5 white children (not taxable), 2 black males (taxable), and 1 black female (taxable).³⁷ William Brown, Sr. is one of the white males. Because William Brown, Jr. was not yet 16, and since there are five white children listed, he is not one of the remaining three white males. Edward Merriott, if he was captured the second time, would have finished even a 14-year (plus punishment) service by this time. So unless he became an indentured servant, he could not be one of the three remaining white males either. Similar logic applies to Philip Williams, thus leaving him out of consideration. Michael Connaway, the Irish lad could definitely be one of the three. That then only leaves two unnamed white males in the Brown household. The white female should be Brown's wife, Susannah. And the five white children should all be his. When the Chancery Court record described above is linked to the census numbers, then it seems that Sall should be the black female and Osborn and Sampson should be the two black males. There are unfortunately no more census records that could allow us to figure out when and how Harry, Jem, Jacob, and Bett figure into the Brown household.

On a final note concerning William Brown, because he lived during the American Revolution, there are records showing on what side he believed in. When the governmental records were being removed from Annapolis for safe keeping, William Brown safeguarded them for a few days in his house at London Town. And on 1 March 1778, Brown took the oath of allegiance.³⁸ These records definitely indicate that he believed in the causes of the American Revolution.

³⁵ *Galloway, Maxcy, and Markoe Papers, St. Ann's Parish Tax List*, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Vol. II, page 71, 1765; also located in the Maryland State Archives on microfilm M 1171.

³⁶ *Ibid*, Vol. I, page 62, 1764.

³⁷ Bettie Stirling Carothers, *1776 Census of Maryland*, 1970.

³⁸ Henry C. Peden, Jr., *Revolutionary Patriots of Anne Arundel County Maryland*, 1992.

William Brown's Will

In the name of God Amen

I William Brown of

The City of Annapolis Being sick and weak in body but of sound mind, memory, and understanding do make and publish this my last will and testament in manner and form following – I do give and bequeath all my personal property to John Steuart [Stewart], my son in law for a debt due to him as well as debts which he has been answerable for me and likewise for the trouble and expence he has been at in supporting me. I do hereby nominate and appoint the said John Steuart Executor of my last will and testament hereby revoking all former will and wills by me heretofore made in witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this eleventh day of September seventeen hundred ninety & three.

William Brown [his seal]

Signed, sealed, published, and declared by the testator to be his last will and testament in the province of [?? ??] have hereunto subscribed our names as witness in the presence of that testators:

John Davidson
Samuel Green
Richard H. Harwood

[On the back of the will:

Thomas Gassaway, declares that on 31 March 1794, John Steuart appeared before him (Gassaway) to prove the will. Gassaway also declares that Davidson and Green also appeared before him to prove the will.]

[Also on the back of the will]:

“William Brown's Will
William Brown his Ex^d.
Will proved 31st day of March 1794 and recorded in Liber IG N^o. 1 folio 404 & 405.

Letter with [W A ?] granted to Allen Quyn.”

Anne Arundel County, Register of Wills; Wills, original;
MSA C155-2, Box B, Folder 84; Location-01/04/13/008

* 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.