

Benjamin Freeman

*People of London Town, Maryland**

The story of Benjamin Freeman is one of rotten luck. He first appears in the historical record on January 6, 1717 as a young man when he married the seventeen-year-old Mary Macklefish, daughter of the prominent London Town resident David Macklefish.¹ In March, he appears as a witness against his neighbor Stephen West, who had been maintaining an illegal tavern in London Town.² A few months later, Freeman secured his own license to “keep ordinary at London Town” with the support of prominent local Thomas Gassaway.³ Perhaps his support of the case against West helped endear him to the court and secured him that license.

The day after Christmas that same year, Freeman drew the ire of Thomas MacNemara, a notoriously ill-tempered and troubled lawyer.⁴ Though it is unclear what provoked MacNemara, the subsequent indictment against him stated that he used “Swords, Horse-whips, Fists and staves” to “beat, wound, and evilly entreat, so that [Freeman’s] life was dispaired.”⁵ Despite this violence, Freeman continued to operate his tavern, and his license renewed in 1718.⁶

In November, his mother in law, Alice Macklefish Dixon, gained Freeman’s support in obtaining her own tavern license. He went even further by vowing to take over the South River ferry on her behalf “providing...two good boats well mannered.”⁷

The following year, Benjamin and Mary sold off two lots in London Town to the local merchant Samuel Peele.⁸ It is possible that the pair were looking to move away from London Town. Freeman no longer applied for tavern or ferry licenses, and indeed disappears from the historical record for eleven years.

When Benjamin Freeman returns, he is in dire straits. In 1730, the Maryland General Assembly passed “An Act for the Relief” of Freeman and others in Anne Arundel, Prince George’s, and Talbot County jails. Along with the fourteen other men, Freeman had been imprisoned for failing to pay his debts.⁹ The legislators had mercy on the poor men, and Freeman was released from prison with protection from further imprisonment for debt for seven years.

¹ This is per multiple genealogical websites, but I have found no primary source yet. Further research is needed.

² Maryland State Archives, Anne Arundel County Court Judgement Record, March Court, 1717, Liber VD1, folio 492.

³ Court Judgement Record, November Court 1717, folio 85.

⁴ For more on Thomas MacNemara, read C. Ashley Ellefson’s *Fortune’s Orphan: The Troubled Career of Thomas Macnemara of Maryland, 1703-1729*, Maryland State Archives: 2012, <<http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000847/html/index.html>>.

⁵ Maryland State Archives, *Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, 1727-1729 With Appendix of Statutes, 1714-1726*, page 534.

⁶ Court Judgement Record, August Court 1718, folio 250.

⁷ Ibid, November Court 1718, folios 261, 265.

⁸ Anne Arundel County Court (Land Records) Samuel Peele, 1719, [Liber CW 1, folio 71, MSA C97-11, MdHR 4777](#); [Liber CW 1, folio 75, MSA C97-11, MdHR 4777](#).

⁹ Maryland State Archives, *Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly, May, 1730-August, 1732*, volume 37, page 158. <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000037/html/am37--158.html>>.

What ultimately becomes of Freeman is unclear. It appears that he may still be alive in 1755, when Jonathan Sellman placed an advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* calling for the return of a twenty-five-year-old indentured servant named William Freeman, “the son of Benjamin Freeman.” Notably, Jonathan Sellman states that William ran away “from the Subscriber, living near *South River*.”¹⁰ It is unclear at this point if this is the same Benjamin Freeman.

* 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.

¹⁰ *Maryland Gazette*, June 5, 1755, page 3.