

# His Back Will Testify: A Slavery at London Town Fact Sheet

There have been 961 slaves identified through the history of London Town, but there are probably more out there. The Maryland State Archives has named 842 of them. Seven free blacks in the area through the entire history of London Town.

## From Africa

We know that slave ships bound to London Town sailed from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Benin, and Angola.

**Sierra Leone** is something of a typical experience for enslaved people coming to America. Ruled by kings, the people of Sierra Leone could be sentenced to slavery if they broke the law or went into debt. Prisoners of war taken from opposing nations and in tribal conflicts were also regularly enslaved. When enslaved, the people of this region were shackled and taken to Bunce Island. Here they were sold to British ships and sent overseas. Many African Americans can trace their lineage to this island, including hundreds that were carried here to London Town.

**Benin** is also fairly typical in that the slave trade became more and more important to local rulers. From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, slaves became the number one export in the region, supplanting cloth. Despite this importance, the rulers of Benin came to realize the damaging nature of the slave trade and instituted a ban on exporting male slaves during the eighteenth century. This means that more women and children were exported from Benin than other regions.

**Ghana** was also ruled by locals, who permitted the Europeans to establish castles along the coast from which they could purchase and export enslaved people. These castles were partially fortified against the locals in case the elite of Ghana turned on the Europeans, but also to defend the slavers from each other. The British castle from which slaves to London Town were most likely exported was Cape Coast Castle which still stands today.

**Angola** was an anomaly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century slave trade. Unlike other ports where European slavers had to work with local ruling powers, Angola was directly colonized by the Portuguese. This also meant that the usual methods of technically legal enslavement (criminal sentences, prisoners of war, debt) were not necessary. Instead, people were kidnapped and rounded up as the market demanded without the thin veil of supposed legitimacy.

## Slave Ships

Records of slave ships coming to London Town are difficult to parse out from other possible destinations in Anne Arundel County, and even in the colony as a whole. Still, there are six different slave ships that we can definitively say came to London Town on at least eight separate voyages. Four more are likely candidates

All told, from only the voyages we can prove came here, at least 1,241 Africans were sold as slaves in London Town. With an unknown number of other ships arriving in London Town, that number might be significantly higher.

## Life Under Slavery

In 1715 the Maryland Legislature passed "An Act Relating to Servants and Slaves." If a "free Negro" were to help a runaway, they were subject to steep fines. If those fines could not be paid, they could be sentenced to "Satisfaction by Servitude or otherwise." It placed restrictions on the abuse of servants, but did not specify treatment of slaves. Baptism and conversion were revoked as grounds for freedom. Further, it specified that all black people that were not already free would be slaves for the duration of their "natural lives." White women bearing the children of black men were automatically sentenced to seven years of servitude. Churches were forbidden from "solemnizing" black marriages.

The free black man named Mungo Roy conducted the sale of slaves in Annapolis and LT for the *Margaret* in 1718.

William Gray was a mulatto indentured servant in 1763 to William Brown.

Stephen West was punished for engaging in a financial transaction with Pompey, owned by Edward Rumney.

In 1754, the enslaved man George Cook kidnapped off a boat by pirates. One of the pirates was "mullato," but passed himself off as Portuguese.

A rediscovered burial under the carpenter shop dated to circa 1725-1750 indicates West African religious practices in London Town.

## Resistance

Grace and Jane burned down Joseph Galloway's tobacco barn in 1750. Both were hanged. Galloway was paid £100 by the colony for the execution of Grace and Jane, their estimated value.

In 1706, the servant woman Elizabeth Clouds took "the name of an Egyptian Woman" and having "coloured her Skin much like to a Molattoe" to marry an enslaved man named Dick at All Hollow's Parish.

Pompey, the enslaved man that got Stephen West in hot water for doing business with him, may have stolen the items in question, and sold them to West without Rumney's knowledge. This not only deprived his master of goods, but provided him with money he could have used toward purchasing his freedom, or giving him travel money that he could use to make an escape.

Stephen West also involved in 1716 court case for giving passage on the ferry to someone who should not have been permitted to go. It may have been a slave or servant.

A Few Runaways:

1. Lime-House-1745
2. Toby – 1745 and again in 1747
3. Adam-1749
4. Page-1749
5. Peter - 1756
6. Sam-1756 "a notorious Villain, as his Back will testify"