

John Craggs
*People of London Town, Maryland*ⁱ

John Craggs was born in the village of Sunderland Bridge, County Durham, England on May 23, 1736.¹ There is, as yet, no information about what brought Craggs to America, but he was certainly on the South River by 1775. It was on the 27th of July that year when he married Mary Burgess, doubtless a descendant of London Town's founder Col. William Burgess.²

On January 14, 1777, Mary and John welcomed the first of four boys into the world. John Jr. was joined on December 22, 1778 by James, then October 4, 1784 by George. John Jr. led a short life. One of his parents wrote solemnly into the family's *Book of Common Prayer*:

My Dearly Bloved Son John
Craggs Departed this Life
the 25th of March 1787 Aged
Ten years and Two months
fifteen Days³

His parents laid John to rest in All Hallows Parish under a stone that you can still see today.



Later that year, John and Mary gave birth to their last son, also named John.⁴

Craggs was certainly living in London Town in 1782, though it is possible he had lived there earlier.⁵ By 1780 he was advertising his trade: horses.

¹ Letter from John N Pierce, Director of Planning and Programs, James Monroe Museum and Memorial Library, to Michael J Mennard, Administrator, London Town Publik House and Gardens, August 23, 1991, relating to Craggs-Burgess-Stansbury-McElhiney *Book of Common Prayer*, printed by Alexander Kincaid, 1768. Inscriptions written by the Craggs family are transcribed in this letter. Date is marked "O.S." meaning Old Style, prior to the full acceptance of the Gregorian Calendar in the British empire, and so eleven days would be subtracted from his birth to come at the "true" date.

² Pierce letter.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "A List of Letters...," *Maryland Gazette*, October 10, 1782, page 2.

THE horse S WEEPER, which stood last year at Belair, in Prince-George's county, will be there again this season, from the 10th day of April till the 3d day of July, and will cover at two guineas each mare, and ten dollars continental currency to the groom; the money to be paid before the horse be led out of the stable, and if it should not suit all the persons who may bring mares to pay the guineas, as much continental currency as will at the time purchase them will be taken in lieu thereof. Sweeper is fifteen hands two inches and half high, was got by Dr. Hamilton's Figure; his dam was got by Othello, which was bred by Col. Tasker, his grand dam by Morton's Traveller, and his great grand dam was Colonel Tasker's Selima, got by the Godolphin Arabian.

There will be good pasturage (well fenced in) for mares, at six dollars a week, but I will not be answerable for any that may be lost.

it 6 JOHN CRAGGS.

Maryland Gazette, June 16, 1780, page 2

Through 1795, Craggs advertised imported, "well bred," "high bred," and "thorough bred" horses for covering and sale. He even informed the public that he would be traveling to England in 1792 to collect "horses for the turf, stud, saddle, or carriage." Craggs' horses had such fanciful names as Sweeper, High-Flyer, Venetian, and Northern Eclipse.⁶

John Craggs was a neighbor of William Brown. It is unclear precisely where he lived in relation to the brick manor house that William Brown built, lived in, and operated as a tavern. A newspaper advertisement placed for the sale of enslaved people gives some hint of their relation to each other.

Will be EXPOSED to PUBLIC SALE, on the 27th of April next, if fair, if not the first fair day, thereafter pursuant to a decree of the high court of chancery of this state, on the premises,

TWO lots of GROUND, opposite the garden of Mr. JAMES M'CUCCLOCH, whereon stands a small dwelling; also a lot of GROUND, opposite to Mr. JOHN CRAGGS, in London-town, three NEGROES, a man and two women, to satisfy a debt due by mortgage from WILLIAM BROWN, of Anne-Arundel county, to the executors of JAMES DICK. The terms of sale will be made known on the day of sale.

WILLIAM STEUART, Trustee.

Maryland Gazette, March 22, 1792, page 3

Within a year, William Brown was out of his home, which was purchased by Colonel John Hoskins Stone, former commander of the 1st Maryland Regiment in the Revolutionary War, politician,

⁶ *Maryland Gazette*, October 18, 1787, page 3; July 10, 1788, page 3; December 1, 1791, page 3; June 12, 1794, page 3; May 17, 1795, page 3.

and soon to be Governor of Maryland.⁷ Sometime shortly thereafter, the Craggs family moved into the William Brown House. Their son wrote in the family *Book of Common Prayer*:

George Craggs was
14 years of old in August
27th / 1798 Then he was a
living in John C Stone's
House London Town was
bilt by Mr William
Brown a large Bricke
house⁸

The reference to "John C Stone" appears to be an error on the part of the young man.

The family would not be living there for many more years. A notice in the *Maryland Gazette* of November 28th, 1805 mentioned the death on of John Craggs at Hammond's Ferry. Ten years later Mary died there as well, and George followed them at Hammond's Ferry in 1822, all of which suggests the family had moved there by 1805.⁹

ⁱ 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.

⁷ Mechelle Kerns, *London Town: The Life of a Colonial Town*, unpublished master's thesis, UMUC: 199, page 156; "John Hoskins Stone," Archives of Maryland Biographical Series, MSA SC 3520-1199, <<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001100/001199/html/msa01199.html>>.

⁸ Pierce letter.

⁹ *Maryland Gazette*, November 20, 1805, page 3; Pierce letter.