

THE GUNNELL FAMILY
AND
THEIR CORNERSTONE LAND IN ARLINGTON
BY
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The Cornerstone of the District of Columbia, set at Jones Point on the Potomac River at the mouth of Hunting Creek on April 15, 1792, marked the beginning point for the survey of the territory which was to become the Nation's Capital¹. The two Eastern corners of the area designated were set upon Maryland soil, while the Northwest corner was set at a point, then in Fairfax County, Virginia.

This last cornerstone, the fourth corner, was set upon lands of William Gunnell, son of William Gunnell, the original Grantee of lands at that point². The two lines of the angle forming this corner bisected the Gunnell land leaving the larger portion of his acreage, and probably the residence and plantation buildings, in Fairfax County. Much of the Gunnell land formed what is now the Eastern part of Falls Church, along the headwaters of Four Mile Run. It is probable that the original home was on higher ground, between what is now Lee Highway and Haycock Road. The original rolling road (The Falls Road) from Chain Bridge to the warehouse ran through the land. The Gunnell property remained under the jurisdiction of Fairfax County until 1801 when the Congress of the United States adopted legislation formally organizing the new Federal District, the District of Columbia³. By that time William² Gunnell had died, leaving his acreage whereon the Cornerstone was erected to be divided between his son, Allen, and his grandson, Presley.

WILLIAM¹ GUNNELL ca. 1680 – 1760⁴

Married ca. 1700 –

Issue:

1. William² Gunnell ca. 1702 – 1794
2. Henry² Gunnell ca. 1704 – 1792
3. Mary² Gunnell ca. 1706 –
4. Elizabeth² Gunnell ca. 1708 –
5. Sarah² Gunnell ca. 1710 –

The name of the wife of William¹ Gunnell, the first of that name in Fairfax County, is unknown. From records it may be conjectured that his children were born between 1702 and 1712, although the order of birth is unknown. They were grown and all were married prior to, or about the time they came with their father when he settled on the Four Mile Run tract.

William¹ Gunnell took up a total of 1,616 acres in the Northern Neck of Virginia. On January 15, 1729, he obtained a grant of 400 acres on the West side of Four Mile Run, near its head; at the same time he received a grant of 250 acres nearby, said to have been at Brandimore Castle.⁵ By these grants, William Gunnell "of Westmoreland County" obtained 650 acres "in Stafford County."⁶ One year later, on January 16, 1730, William Gunnell "of Stafford County" obtained a Grant of 966 acres on the branches of Difficult Run, in the area Northwest of present Vienna. His lands were in that part of Stafford County which, in 1730, became Prince William County. It seems evident that he immediately took up residence on the Four Mile Run tract, if indeed, he were not already living there in 1729.

It has been said that (about 1730) before the Falls Church was erected in 1733, "... the first services of Truro Parish were held ..." at the home of William Gunnell.⁸ This, only shortly after his first grant, became known as the Upper Church.

William¹ Gunnell and his sons, William² and Henry², voted in the 1741 Prince William County election for Burgesses. That his children were married prior to 1741 is indicated by his deeds, dated 1741, to William and Henry of 400 acres each, and to his grandson, William Darn, son of his daughter, Mary, of 166 acres — the total 966 acre Difficult Run tract; and to his daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah and their husbands, William Sanders and James Sanders, he gave 125 acres each, of the tract at Brandimore. These were among the first deeds recorded in 1742 in the newly-formed Fairfax County.⁹

William¹ and his two sons were each listed as tithables of the Upper Church by the Reverend Charles Green in his report of 1748.¹⁰

The name, Gunnell, again appears in the Fairfax records upon the death of William¹ Gunnell. Dated 8 March 1750, his will was presented for probate 19 December 1760.¹¹

William confirmed the deeds of 1741 to his children, stipulating that in the division of land at Difficult Run, "... the plantation and house, whereon my son Henry now lives is to be on the part or portion of the said Henry's land ...". In addition to his 400 acres at Difficult Run, William¹ gave, "... unto my son, William and his heirs forever all that tract of land where I now live in the County of Fairfax being granted to me by a Proprietors Deed for Four Hundred acres". To his daughter, Sarah Sanders, he gave, "... one hundred and twenty five acres of land at Brandimore in the County of Fairfax where she now lives ..." And to his daughter, Elizabeth

Sanders, "I give . . . one hundred and twenty five acres of land at Brandimore, where she lately did dwell . . ."

WILLIAM² GUNNELL (William¹) ca. 1702 – 1794

Married Margaret —

Issue:

1. William³ Gunnell ca. 1730 —
2. Allen³ Gunnell ca 1735 - 1822 (?)
3. Henry³ Gunnell ca 1738 — 1787
4. Elizabeth³ Gunnell ca 17— —

On April 18, 1743, William² and Henry² Gunnell, brothers, joined in a deed of 11¼ acres to Stephen Lewis in the area of the beginning point of the survey for the Grant of William¹ Gunnell on Difficult Run. At that time, their wives, Margaret and Catherine, were interrogated according to law, and acquiesced to the sale. This is the only known record of the name of the wife of William².¹²

William (presumably the son) and Henry² voted in the election for Burgesses in Fairfax County in 1744.

After 1760, when his father's will was presented for probate, it seems probable that William² moved to the old home which he inherited on Four Mile Run.

In a suit, "Gunnell v. Trammel", by a survey in 1769, and regrant of the Four Mile Run tract September 11, 1772¹³, it was then found to contain 320 acres.

William² seems to have taken little part in County or Church affairs. It has been said that he was a Trustee of Matildaville. This, however, is extremely unlikely in view of the fact that when the proposal was made in 1790 by George Washington and Harry Lee to establish the town of Matildaville, William² Gunnell was nearing the age of 90 years. The Trustees named appear to have been contemporaries of Washington and of a later generation than William².

Not only that, but two events seem to have occurred at that time to affect the life of William². His third son, Henry (called Henry, Jr. to distinguish him from his uncle), wrote his will in September 1786; it was presented for probate in February 1787. Real Estate and furniture were devised to his nephew, Presley. Henry's will ends with, ". . . and every other article mentioned after the death of my father and mother".

On January 12, 1787, one month prior to the recording of his son's will, William² Gunnell prepared his own will, in which no mention is made of his wife, although Henry had spoken of his mother. William² Gunnell devised

his property to his remaining children, William³, Allen³ and Elizabeth Wren; and to the children of William³, unnamed except for grandson, Presley, to whom he gave "...one feather bed and furniture that was called my son Henry Gunnell's". The wording of the two wills seems to indicate that William² lost both his son, Henry, and his wife in those cold winter months.

He gave to his son, Allen, "...two hundred acres of land whereon I now live to include the houses orchards and meadow...", and to his grandson, Presley Gunnell, "...the remainder of the tract of land whereon I live — 200 acres". To his son, William, he gave various slaves by name during his son, William's life, then to be divided equally between his son's children (unnamed, except Presley), "...to them and their heirs forever". To his grandson, Presley he gave five slaves and Henry's feather bed and furniture. All stock was to be divided between Allen and Presley. No mention is made of any real estate for William. Had he already given the Difficult Run tract to that son? The will was presented for probate May 19, 1794.¹⁴

WILLIAM³ GUNNELL (William², William¹) ca. 1730 —

Married prior to 1764, Jemima Neal, daughter of Presley and Margaret Neal of Fairfax.*

Issue:

1.)
2.) Number and names of children unknown, except
3.) that of Presley
4. Presley 1770 — 1806

*Presley Neal, a sub-sheriff of Fairfax County — Will 1749, Probate 1753 (Fairfax County Will Book A-294). Wife, Margaret, Children: Daniel, Elizabeth, Anne, Shapleigh, Richard and Jemima. Christopher Neal, brother of Presley, owned land across the Potomac, in Maryland on which, many years later, the White House of the Nation's Capital was erected.

In an expense account recorded in the estate of Elizabeth Spence, Jemima's sister, Daniel Neal reported 1764-68, an amount due to Jemima Gunnell for "making three suits of clothing for negroes of Elizabeth Spence". Shapleigh Neal — Will 1777 (Fairfax County Will Book D-36) left a slave to his sister, Jemima; this bequest was included the following year in the tax report of William Gunnell.

There is evidence that William³ Gunnell and his wife, Jemima Neal, had at least four or more children, although the name of only one (Presley) is identified from records.

It is considered probable that they also had William, Allen and Richard. All three are mentioned fleetingly in Fairfax County records, though their parentage has not been identified.

William³ and Jemima Gunnell lived in Fairfax County, and later in Loudoun County, where it is probable that they reared their family. There is some evidence that he may have been an Overseer for John Lewis of Shelburne Parish, and, later, for Bryan Fairfax on his Towlston lands.¹⁵

Jemima's brother, Daniel Neal, and relative, Demoville Talbot, and Richard Gunnell were in Scott County, Kentucky, in 1797, where Daniel obtained a grant of 1,000 acres. William³ and his brothers, Allen and Henry, Jr., acquired Kentucky lands in 1784-5, and it is possible that William's sons joined the westward trek before 1800. Presley, alone, remained in Fairfax or Alexandria County.

ALLEN³ GUNNELL (William², William¹) ca. 1735 — 1822 (?)

Married Elizabeth Turley, daughter of Sampson, and a granddaughter of Jane and John Turley

Issue:

1. Allen

The date of birth of Allen³ Gunnell is a matter of some doubt, said by some to have been prior to 1740. Allen³ Gunnell had evidently reached his majority when, in 1772, it was recorded in the Fairfax Minute Book for that year,¹⁶ (“ . . . It is ordered that . . .”) “Allen Gunnell, a blind man, be exempt from payment of levies during his infirmity.” Family tradition holds that Allen Gunnell was born blind. It is probable that he and Elizabeth lived with his parents on the Four Mile Run tract where they had at least one child, Allen.

Upon the death of his father, William², in 1794, Allen inherited the old home and plantation buildings where his father lived, and the 200 acres on which they stood. Allen's name appears for the first time on the 1800 Tax List of Fairfax County¹⁷. There, he is listed with the capital letters “L. F.”, after his name. It is presumed that “L. F.” may mean “Levy Free”, as he is there shown to be charged with, “O Tithables, 5 horses, 5 Slaves over 16, and 1 Slave between 12 and 16 years of age.”

In 1804 Allen and his wife, Elizabeth, exchanged deeds with Presley and his wife, Ann, involving 29½ acres on Four Mile Run.¹⁸ In 1810 William Gunnell, Jr., son of William (could this William Gunnell, Jr., have been his

brother?), sold to Allen a tract of land on which a survey and platte were made.¹⁹ In 1811 Joseph Thomas, an evangelist, recorded in his dairy²⁰ that he visited with Allen Gunnell, a blind man, near Falls Church, and that he had later enjoyed his hospitality on a return trip to lower Virginia. On September 15, 1813, Allen and his wife, Elizabeth, sold to Francis Fish 198 acres of land purchased of Presley Gunnell.²¹ The survey was delivered in 1820, and according to a platte filed in this connection, the "Road from the Falls Warehouse" to Wren's Tavern ran through this parcel. Records after 1813 for Allen³ have not been identified.

HENRY³ GUNNELL (William², William¹) ca. 1738 – 1787

Henry purchased a tract of land from a member of the Darn family, near his father's plantation on Four Mile Run. In 1785 he obtained a grant of 600 acres on Buffalo Creek, Jefferson County, Kentucky. Henry Gunnell, son of William², was apparently unmarried, but seems to have made his home near his father. He left a Will, dated September 15, 1786, Probate February 20, 1787²², in which he left his Kentucky lands to his nephew, Presley. He also left furniture and plantation stock and equipment to Presley, to be delivered "... after the death of my mother and father". As had been noted, his father's will was written one month before probate of Henry's will, and no mention is made therein of a wife, Henry's mother — which seems to indicate that she, too, died at this time.

ELIZABETH³ GUNNELL (William², William¹) 17 —

Married James Wren, son of Col. James Wren

Issue: Thomas, James, Robert, Allen, Margaret, Elizabeth.

It is of interest to note that Elizabeth named a son, Allen, and a daughter, Margaret (perhaps for her mother).

PRESLEY⁴ GUNNELL (William³, William², William¹) 1770 – 1806

Married ca. 1791 Ann Hunter (1772-1806), daughter of Col. John Hunter, of Alexandria and Ayr Hill, and granddaughter of Col. Charles Broadwater.

Issue:

1. Ira Gunnell ca. 1792
2. William Hunter Gunnell ca. 1793
3. Janet (Jeannette) Gunnell 1794-1870
4. Sarah (Sally) Gunnell ca. 1796

Presley Gunnell was probably the fourth child of his parents, William³ and Jemima Gunnell. It is possible that he was the infant of whom young Sally Fairfax wrote in her diary²³, who was brought to the “Ball” at Towlston, the home of her parents, Bryan and Elizabeth Fairfax, and that his uncle, Henry³, was the “young Harry Gunnell son of old William”, who was there.

On November 25, 1791, Presley Gunnell was appointed Third Inspector at the Warehouse (presumably at Falls Church). That he was also a Deputy Clerk for Fairfax County is indicated by the Will of Mary Magdalene Talbot, 17 February, 1791, which was “Examined by P. Gunnell” when presented for Probate on 19 September, 1791. This will also contains the name of Richard Gunnell as a Witness. This is the only known mention of Richard in Fairfax County, believed to have been a brother of Presley Gunnell. He is later found in Scott County, Kentucky, with Daniel Neal and Demoville Talbot, relatives of their branch of the Gunnell family.

Presley’s Will on February 24, 1806, Probate September 6, 1806²⁵, first freed four of his slaves, the rest to be divided among his four children. He then admonished his children to work for the principles of emancipation. All real and personal property was to be divided equally among his children. Executors were John Hunter and Ira Gunnell. In a codicil dated July 29, 1806, Presley remembers a debt due Thomas Pearson of Kentucky, and directs that his children be boarded out “with some decent persons or sent to a genteel school so that they might be improved”.

In 1816 Presley’s children were heirs in the estate of their grandfather, John Hunter, in Alexandria, of part of the Ayr Hill Tract on Wolf Trap, and the Mansion. In 1819 William H. Gunnell sold Lot 4 in the division of the estate of Presley Gunnell to John Crabb, said to have contained 160 acres²⁶.

IRA⁵ GUNNELL (Presley⁴, William³, William², William¹)

Married 1812 Margaret Vermillion

Lived first in Washington, then in Fairfax County

WILLIAM⁵ HUNTER GUNNELL (Presley⁴, William³, William², William¹)

Married, First, Sarah —

Second, Elizabeth Lanham

It is possible that this son is the William Gunnell who died in 1848 in Fairfax, leaving a wife, Elizabeth, and children: William H., James N., Horatio, John, Presley and Elisha (a girl).

**JANET⁵ (Jeannette) GUNNELL (Presley⁴, William³, William², William¹)
1794-1870**

Married 1813 John Haycock (1785-1850)

Janet and John Haycock, and their ten children, and various descendants, lived on land at Great Falls Street in Falls Church, between Lee Highway and Haycock Road, probably the area of the original Gunnell home. Their old home had been destroyed by fire when, after 1900, Haycock heirs sold the land — 148 acres.

Among their children, George⁶ Washington Haycock, had a grandson, Archer LeGrand Haycock, who married Bessie Rice Birch, a descendant of the well-known Birch family of Alexandria County.

SARAH⁵ (SALLY) GUNNELL (Presley⁴, William³, William², William¹)

Married 1813 James McEndree

Sarah and James McEndree moved to Green County, Kentucky.

It would appear from this study that Presley Gunnell and his sons were the last owners of the Gunnell name in Alexandria County of the remainder of the original grant of William Gunnell on Four Mile Run. Many descendants of the Grantee, William Gunnell, are today, to be found in the area, though most are of the line of his son, Henry², and the lines of his three daughters, Mary, Elizabeth and Sarah.

The old Cornerstone, though marked by the ravages of time, still keeps its lonely vigil, and is one of the few boundary stones remaining.

FOOTNOTES

¹Cornelia B. Rose, Jr., "The Boundaries of Arlington", *The Arlington Historical Magazine* (1957), p. 6-14.

²Donald A. Wise, "Some Eighteenth Century Profiles", Part II, *AHM*, (1978), p. 3-27.

³C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington County, Virginia, A History*, 1976, p. 63, 64.

⁴Wise, *AHM*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵Robert H. Moxham, "The Re-discovery of Brandymore Castle", *AHM* (1973), p. 3-10.

⁶Virginia Land Office, NN C-8, C-9.

Ibid., NN C-87.

⁸Rose, *Arlington County, Virginia, A History*, 1976, p. 35.

⁹Fairfax County, *Deed Book A-26*, 28.

¹⁰Melvin Lee Steadman, *By Fence and by Fireside*, 1964, p. 526-537.

¹¹Fairfax County, *Will Book B-218-222*.

¹²Fairfax County, *Deed Book A-160*.

¹³Virginia Land Office, NN I-216.

¹⁴Fairfax County, *Will Book F-339*.

¹⁵C. J. S. Durham, "Notes on Towlston Grange", in Kenton Kilmer and Donald Sweig, *The Fairfax Family in Fairfax County*, 1975, p. 114.

¹⁶*The Historical Society of Fairfax County, Virginia, Inc.*, Vol. 12, 1971-1973, p. 56.

¹⁷"Fairfax County 1800 Tax List", *The Virginia Genealogist*, Fred Dorman, Ed., Vol. 19, No. 4, p. 263.

¹⁸Fairfax County, *Deed Book E²-175*, 178.

¹⁹*Ibid.* L²-116, 383.

²⁰Steadman, *By Fence and by Fireside*, p. 331.

²¹Alexandria County, *Deed Book M²-372*.

²²Fairfax County, *Will Book E-190*.

²³Kenton Kilmer, Donald Sweig, *The Fairfax Family in Fairfax County*, p. 92.

²⁴Fairfax County, *Will Book F-22*.

²⁵Alexandria County, *Will Book 21-A*.

²⁶Alexandria County, *Deed Book U-M²-495*.

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