

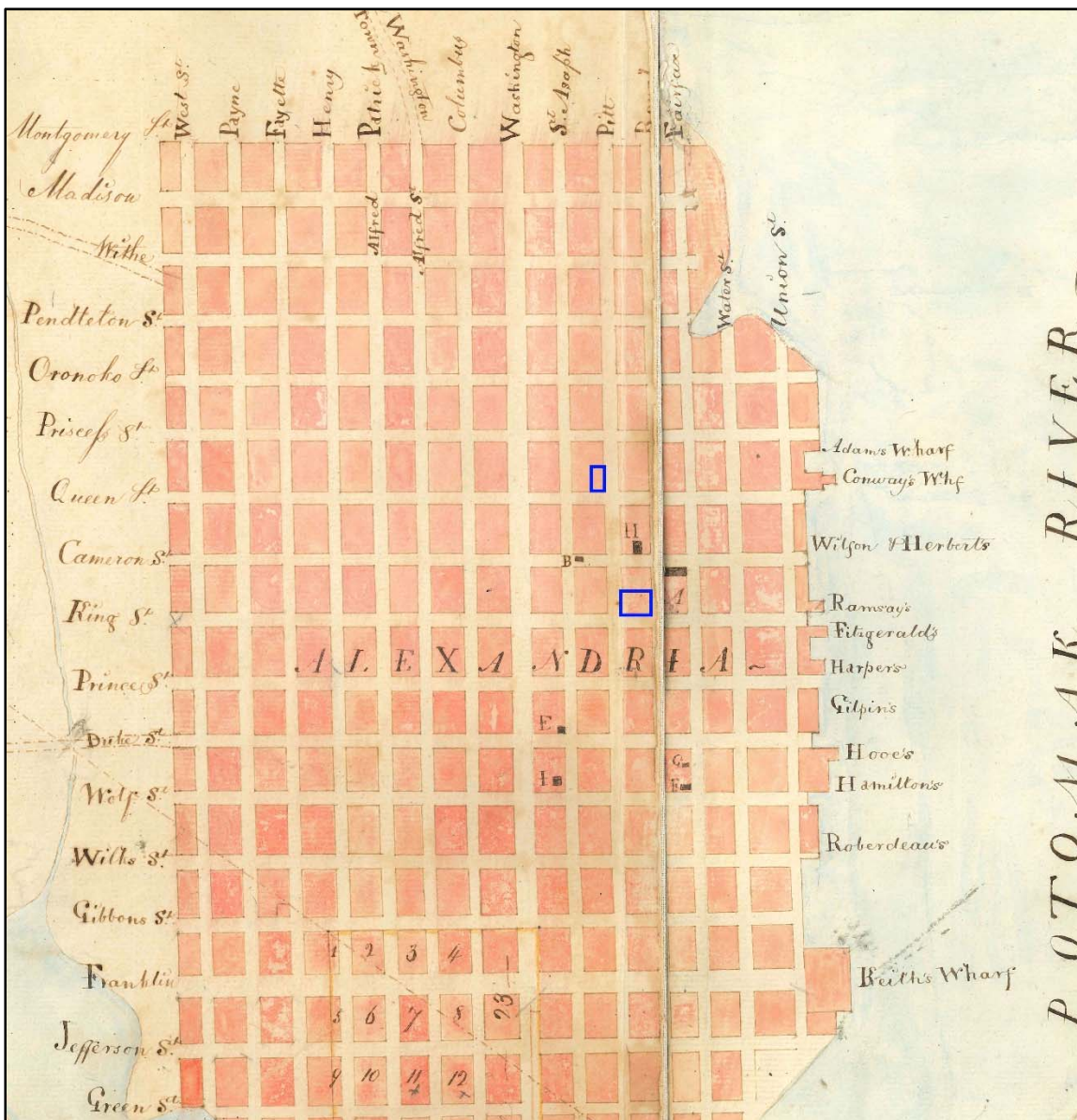
FOUND IN THE ARCHIVES, no. 56 – October 2019

An Alexandrian Family

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



In this month's Found in the Archives, we use our records to trace an extended Alexandrian family through time and space. The Gretter family lived through the exciting times of the late Colonial era, the Revolutionary and Federal periods, and were intimately involved in the municipal and merchant life of Alexandria; they were even tangentially connected to George Washington.

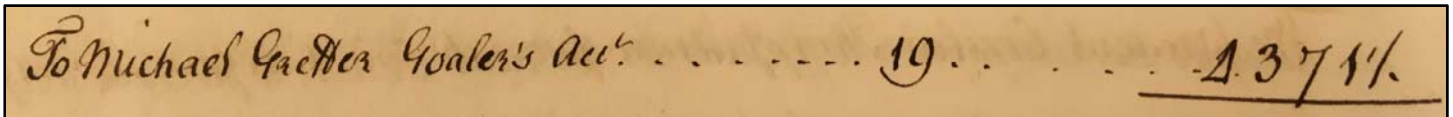


Michael Gretter emigrated from Germany in the latter half of the 18th century, and eventually settled in Alexandria. He purchased his first property, Lot 115 (pictured in the plat at left, in blue, off King and Pitt Streets) in 1763, directly from the Town Trustees. At some point he acquired Lot 50, next to Lot 115, and in 1784, Andrew and Rebecca Judge conveyed Lot 24

Fairfax Deed Book E-2, p. 269A, Plat of Alexandria, 1804

(also outlined on the plat) to him. Unfortunately, these deeds were recorded in our missing Deed Books, and we only have references to them in our Minute Books of that time, and in later deeds.

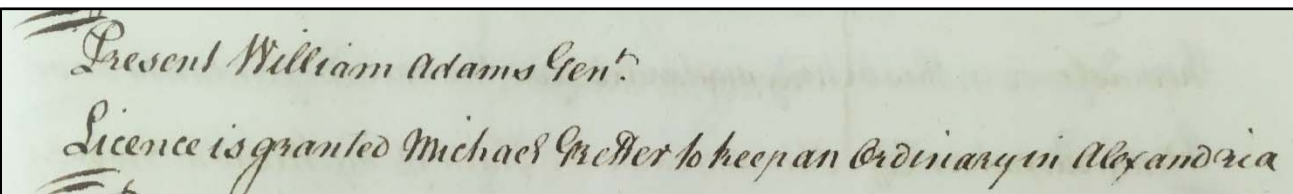
Michael and his wife, Elizabeth, lived on a portion of Lot 115, which was advantageously placed, being close to the marketplace and courthouse (marked A on the plat), and their local parish church, Christ Church (marked B). Michael and Elizabeth appear to have been active members of their congregation, both receiving payment from Christ Church for services rendered. In 1771, Michael was paid for burying a parishioner named Cope.



To Michael Gretter Jailer's Acc^t 19 437 1/2

Fairfax Court Order Book 1768, p. 68, November 23, 1768, Michael Gretter's Jailer's Account

Michael did not have far to walk to his other public service job, that of Jailer at the Fairfax County Courthouse. The first record we have of Michael being paid for keeping the jail is in our 1768 Court Order Book, shown above. Subsequent jailer's fees were paid to Michael in 1770, 1772, 1785, 1787 and 1789 through to 1791. He was paid extra in 1785 for keeping 'prisoners of war'. Apparently, the job stayed in the family, and Michael's son, John, received payment for guarding the jail overnight in 1783. When they were not overseeing the jail, Michael and John served the town of Alexandria as Sergeant and Constable respectively, Michael doing double duty as the 'enlister of tithables and taxable property'.



Present William Adams Gen^l
Licence is granted Michael Gretter to keep an Ordinary in Alexandria

Fairfax Court Order Book 1768, p. 65, November 23, 1768, Michael Gretter's Ordinary License

Michael held an ordinary license in Alexandria for a significant portion of his life, beginning in 1759. We can track his profession as a tavern keeper through recordings in our Minute and Court Order Books, such as the recording above, which dates to 1768. Alexandrian historians believe that Michael and Elizabeth ran their tavern out of a building on Lot 115, and they may have had help from an indentured servant, Anne Ferrel. An advertisement placed in the Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal in 1787, records that Anne, an 'Irish' servant, ran away from Michael and an Alexandrian merchant named John Sutton. The two may have held Anne in common for their various ventures.

Know all men by these presents that I Thomas Patterson of the County of Fairfax and State of Virginia for and in consideration of the sum of Two hundred and Fifteen pounds Current money of Virginia to be in the hand paid by Susannah Patterson of the County and State aforesaid before the sealing and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge have bargained and sold and by these presents do bargain and sell and absolutely for ever make over One negroman Called Jim now in the possession of Michael Gretter of Alex^a & one negro woman called Sarah

Fairfax Deed Book Q-1, p. 317, August 4, 1786, Bill of Sale from Thomas Patterson to Susanna Patterson

Our records tell us that Michael certainly used slave labor. The bill of sale pictured above, records that in 1786, 'One negro man called Jim [was] now in the possession of Michael Gretter of Alex.' It was not uncommon for people to hire slaves temporarily or long-term from their owners. Property tax records held by the Library of Virginia note that Michael paid taxes on as many as three slaves in the 1780s.

Rhodias Taylor. . . vs.
against
Mich^d Gretter & Elizabeth his wife, D^y } Fresh assault & Battery
The suit is agreed and ordered,
That each party pay their own costs

Fairfax Court Order Book 1770, p. 221, May 22, 1771, Michael & Elizabeth Gretter Charged with Assault & Battery

We have very little information about Elizabeth Gretter. She is mentioned in deeds recorded at the Alexandria Hustings Court, but in our records, she has scant mention. Elizabeth's name appears in a couple of debt cases, alongside her husband, and she also appears as co-defendant in two charges of assault and battery in 1761 and 1771. The first case was dismissed, the second case, as can be seen in the Court Order Book entry above, also came to nothing. As tavern keepers, the Gretters may have had to get tough with rowdy customers. Interestingly, Michael's later appointment as Town Sergeant meant that he would have been cracking down on unsavory behavior in the other taverns in town.

According to Christ Church records, a 'Mrs. Gretter' was buried in the churchyard in November 1796. We cannot definitively prove that this is Elizabeth, but it is likely.

Like many respectable men of his time, Michael was a Freemason, being elected as an officer at the newly-created Alexandria Lodge in 1783. In his capacity as a Freemason, Michael was part of the ceremony in which George Washington laid down the District of Columbia's first cornerstone in 1791. It may have been this connection that led to Michael and his daughter-in-law, Margaret, providing the burial shroud and pall for Washington's funeral in the last days of 1799. Accounts for these items are held at Mount Vernon.

Magorath 1775

This Indenture made this Thirteenth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy Five Between Michael Gretter of the Town of Alexandria of the one part, and Elizabeth Simpson Wife of William Simpson of the other part Witnesseth that the said Michael Gretter for and in consideration of the Natural Love and affection which the said Michael beareth unto the said Elizabeth his Daughter and the Sum of Fifty pounds to him in hand paid, the receipt whereof he Doth hereby acknowledge, Hath granted bargained and Sold, aliened, enfeoffed and confirmed, and by these presents Doth grant, bargain, and Sell, alien, enfeoff and confirm unto the said Elizabeth Simpson her Heirs and assigns for ever, all that part of Lot N^o 115 in the plat of the Town of Alexandria which is contained within the following Bounds Viz^t Beginning at a part of said Lot N^o 115 belonging to William Hepburn and conveyed to him by a Deed of Bargain and Sale from said Michael, on King Street, thence running eastwardly with King Street thirty Two feet two Inches, thence Northwardly and parallel with Pitt and Royall Streets One hundred feet, thence Westwardly, and parallel with King Street the Distance of the first Line to said William Hepburn's Land, and thence Southwardly with said Hepburn's Line to the Beginning with the Appurtenances, and

Fairfax Deed Book M-1, p. 136, February 13, 1775, Michael Gretter to Elizabeth Simpson

Michael conveyed a small part of Lot 115 to William Hepburn in 1774, and another piece to his daughter, Elizabeth Simpson, in 1775. As can be viewed in the deed above, Elizabeth married William Simpson. Her father also stood as security for William Simpson in obtaining an ordinary license for the West End. Michael evidently cared about the welfare of his children and their families, and in 1782, he gave a small piece of Lot 50 to John and Margaret, on the understanding that it would pass on to his grandchildren. Elizabeth and William Simpson sold their interest in Lot 115 to Michael's other daughter, Ann, and her husband, Lawrence Hooff.

		To " for a fire Bucket for Deetons House	20	50
12	To	" Paid James McGuire his $\frac{1}{2}$ for repairs of House in 1803	15	6

Fairfax Will Book J-1, p. 57, 1804 & 1805, John & Margaret Greter's Heirs' Guardian Account

John and Margaret Greter died in 1802. Their son, Michael, Jr., was under the age of 21 and was therefore considered an 'infant'. George Deneale was appointed as guardian to Michael, and the parts of the guardian account, which covers the years that Michael was still an infant, can be seen above. Evidently, John and Margaret left several houses to Michael, as the guardian account recalls repairs done to houses, a 'fire bucket [purchased] for Deeton's House', and Deeton's and other people's rent being collected. The houses may or may not have been the property left by Michael's grandfather.

<i>Dr. John & Margaret Greter's Heirs In of wth Geo. Deneale Guardian.</i>				
¹⁸⁰²	Mar 10	To Cash paid for Sundries for Sall	\$	1 50
	" 13	To " remitted Michael		5 "
	" 23	To " Sundries for Sall while Sick		1 50
	" 26	To " Passage of Michael Nancy to Balt ^o		15 "
	April 18	To " Remitted them		15 "
	May 14	To " Mr Summers for attending Sall		3 "

Fairfax Will Book J-1, p. 56 and 57, 1802 & 1804, John & Margaret Greter's

¹⁸⁰⁴	Oct 7	To Cash paid Mr Marshal on of Nancy's Board & entrance fee as a Meliner for 2 years		30
	" 13	To Cash remitted Michael at Battimore		20

Michael may have had a sister, Nancy. In March, 1802, both Michael and Nancy traveled to Baltimore. Their passage was paid through the guardian account. They stayed in Baltimore for several years, paying a 'Mrs. Marshal' two years board and tutelage for Nancy to learn the trade of a hat maker or milliner. Paid apprenticeships were not uncommon, and, without parents, Nancy needed a way to make a living. We do not know for sure that Nancy was Michael's sister, or another female relative, because she does not have a guardian recorded in our Will Books. However, such a large sum expended on her suggests that she must have been a very close relative. We also do not know who 'Sall' was that 'Mrs. Summers' attended in the early months of 1802. She may have been a sibling, she may also have been a slave, as the shortened version of 'Sally' would attest.

do Simpson, as follows (viz. to Ann Simpson widow of my son Francis Simp-
son I give and bequeath the sum of fifteen dollars to be paid her out of the
proceeds of the said estate. The whole of the ballance of the said landed estate, to
be equally divided between my son Lawrence Simpson and my daughter
Ann Zimmerman as follows, the one moiety to go to the exclusive use and ben-
efit of my son Lawrence Simpson, during his natural life, the proceeds of
the other moiety to be secured to the said Ann Zimmerman, to her exclusive
use and benefit, and provided she survives my said son Lawrence Simpson (he
leaving no lawful issue) in that case it is my will and desire also, that the
other moiety of the said estate shall be secured to her in the same manner for
her exclusive use and benefit. I also give and bequeath to her the one half
of my wearing apparel. To my grand daughter Elizabeth Simpson daugh-
ter of William Simpson, I give and bequeath my bed and furniture and the
other half of my wearing apparel, the ballance of my estate of any or every kind
and household and kitchen furniture after defraying my necessary funeral
expenses - (as I owe no debts) I leave to be equally divided amongst the rest of
my children and their representatives -
Signed, sealed & Delivered
Elizabeth Gooding

Fairfax Will Book N-1, p. 148, August 18, 1823, Elizabeth Gooding's Will

Elizabeth Simpson outlived her first husband, William, and her second, John Gooding. Elizabeth had no children by John Gooding, and, unfortunately, lost two of her sons, Thomas and Francis, prior to her own death. She left everything to her daughter, Ann Zimmerman, her daughter-in-law, also Ann, her son Lawrence, and her granddaughter, Elizabeth.

Today, the Gretter name survives in Gretter's Place, Alexandria, and the many descendants of Michael Gretter.

For more information on these and other records held at the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center, please call 703-246-4168 or email CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov.

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<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/historic-records-center>