

234 ISABELL, WILLIAM

Bookseller

Alexandria

Bookseller in Alexandria (1816) with Richard Horwell (226) and Robert Gray Jr. (191).

Isabell was a tailor and retail clothing merchant in Alexandria from the late 1790s onward. He briefly became part of the Virginia print trade in 1815-16, when he invested in a bookstore operated by Robert Gray Jr., along with Richard Horwell, a suspender and corset manufacturer there; Gray apparently also invested in a "ready-made clothes" factory with Horwell and Isabell at that same time. This unusual affiliation was terminated in May 1816, with Gray continuing the bookstore alone and with Horwell and Isabel continuing in the clothing business together. A year later that firm was also dissolved with each partner turning back to their business roots. Isabell continued his retail clothing store until January 1827, when his home and business on Prince Street were consumed in the Great Alexandria Fire. Isabell was evidently undone by that event as he died just seven weeks later. It was an ironic end for someone who had long served in the town's Star Fire Company.

A lengthy memorial poem was published in the *Alexandria Gazette* of Samuel Snowden (393) two weeks later, reporting that "Books, papers, were his treasures more than gold," suggesting that Isabell's interests had been the impetus for the arrangement with Gray a decade earlier, and he brought fellow English tailor-émigré Horwell with him. That poem also indicates, as suggested by the 1820 federal census, that Isabell died without a wife or children to mourn him, only by his friends "paying grief's last homage to the dead."

Personal Data

Born: before 1775 in England

Died: Mar. 18 1827 Alexandria, Virginia (then District of Columbia).

No record of spouse or offspring yet discovered.

Sources: *Artisans & Merchants*; Federal Decennial Census, 1820; advertising notices in Alexandria papers, 1798-1827; memorial poem in *Alexandria Gazette*, Mar. 28, 1827.