

Docent Dispatch

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George Washington Papers Research: The 1760s

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Hello all! I hope you enjoyed the first article from my research project concerning the relationship between John Carlyle and George Washington from 1754-1759, as well as finding the information contained therein useful. Today, we will discuss the evolution of that relationship from 1760-1769, and how this spread through their respective families.

From 1760-1769, there are only 60 letters or diary entries in which George Washington mentions John Carlyle. That is half of the references contained in 1754-1759. While on paper, quite literally, this might indicate a cooling of relations between the two men, the evidence in the text suggests otherwise.

Of the 60 entries concerning Carlyle, 28 of them are about visits to each other, or the women of the Carlyle family visiting Mount Vernon. While George Washington was fastidious in his record keeping, we also know that there were many of his letters and notes which were burned after his death or lost, so it is safe to assume that they saw each other much more regularly than a few times per year. This is a significant uptick in visitation from before, as George Washington is now a Burgess and living close to full time at Mount Vernon, rather than writing letters from

the front lines of a war.

It is worth specifically noting that, starting in 1768, Sally (Sarah) Carlyle makes a number of visits to George Washington's household. These visits become almost monthly in the good weather. It is more often than not noted that she was accompanied by other young women of status such as her sister Nancy (Ann) or Betsy (Elisabeth) Dalton, but there are also visits where no accompaniment is listed. For a young woman to be allowed to visit another's house unescorted is indicative of a close, trusting, and almost familial relationship between the two households. The purpose of these visits is never stated, and I am inclined to assume them to be social in nature.

Not only did the two deepen their social bonds through many visits, but their bond was strengthened through a large gathering of the Fairfax family at Belvoir in March of 1768. This gathering was attended by the full Carlyle family (including new wife, Sybil West) as well as the full Washington family. This time of family togetherness shortly precedes Sally's solo visits to Mount Vernon.

During this time, the two continued their business dealings. Most of their business was conducted through Carlyle & Adam, a grain-trading partnership which had the rights for sale of Washington's wheat. This

CARLYLE HOUSE

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initially cordial relationship turned quite rocky, apparently satisfying neither side and spawning a letter of complaint marked by the archivists as “his letter to Carlyle & Adam is one of the longest letters of his that has survived.” Nonetheless, George Washington never availed himself of the many opportunities to shift his business elsewhere, and Carlyle & Adam appear to have continued handling sale and shipping of his wheat through the rest of the decade.

Their collaboration was political in this period, as well. During the 1760s, John Carlyle twice voted for George Washington to be a Burgess for Fairfax County. John Carlyle even prefers George Washington to Colonel John West, a relative of his by marriage to Sybil, in the 1768 election. George Washington is successful in both of those elections and represents Fairfax County throughout most of the decade.

Finally, the two both appear in the Fairfax County courts during this decade, and not always on the same side. In 1761, George Mason threatens to sue George William Fairfax of Belvoir over land rights and quitrents. As proof, Mason presents a deed in John Carlyle’s hand. For the source of the land controversy, I have duplicated the explanatory endnote. George Washington also writes a scolding letter to Robert Cary & Co. about tobacco sales, only to be corrected by John Carlyle on price assertions, as Carlyle was acting attorney for George William Fairfax at the time. Later in the decade, you see Carlyle and Washington accompanying each other to court. Though the purpose is not stated, we do know that each served as Justice of the Peace at various times in their lives.

As I press into the 1770s, you can expect two articles on the horizon. One for 1770-1774, leading up the Revolution, and the other 1775-1780, covering the war years until John Carlyle’s death at the end of 1780.

Sources Consulted

1. 1760_02_03 Diary entry &c
2. 1768_10_03 Diary entry &c
3. 1768_09_27 Diary entry
4. 1768_12_12 Diary entry, 1768_12_18 Diary entry
5. 1768_03_17 Diary entry, 1768_03_18 Diary entry, 1768_03_20 Diary entry
6. 1765_03_09 From George Washington to Carlyle & Adam &c
7. *ibid*
8. 1767_02_15 From George Washington to Carlyle & Adam
9. 1765_07_16 Fairfax County Poll Sheet, 1768_12_01 Fairfax County Poll Sheet
10. 1768_12_01 Fairfax County Poll Sheet
11. 1761_04_15 To George Washington from George William Fairfax
12. 1761_04_15 To George Washington from George William Fairfax, “Fairfax may be referring to the 320 acres which Charles Green had sold William Fairfax in 1741 and which became part of the Belvoir estate. The land, originally part of a larger tract patented by William Green in 1669, was sold by William Green to Francis Ellis; George Mason (1660–1716), grandfather of George Mason of Gunston Hall, by virtue of a power of attorney sold the land to James Rankin from whom the land escheated and was regranted in 1741 to Charles Green who sold it a few months later to Fairfax ([Mitchell, *Beginning at a White Oak*](#), 57; *Northern Neck Grants, Book E [1736–42]*, 299). Since copies of this letter were evidently sent to both Charles Green and GW, Green may be the one Fairfax is addressing about this particular subject.”
13. 1761_07_14 From George Washington to Robert Cary
14. 1762_06_03 From George Washington to Robert Cary
15. 1768_03_21 Diary entry