



# Carlyle House

## DOCENT DISPATCH

March 2015

### *Prologue to the “Grandest Congress” and Braddock’s Ill-Fated Expedition”*

*By Mark Hill*

*This article originally appeared in the April 2005 Docent Dispatch. It is being reprinted in anticipation of our annual Braddock Day event. Enjoy!*

*John Carlyle tendered his resignation from the Ohio Company in 1749 – two years after it was formed in 1747 in order to secure substantial land holdings in the Ohio Valley area for its investors. No reason was provided for his departure from this venture, but perhaps he had the foresight, as a prudent businessman, that his Ohio Valley investment would prove to be too risky given the competing French, Indian and British designs on this region. Such confrontation provided a spark for the start of the “first” World War—a war that spanned over three continents and seven years.*

#### **Clash in the Ohio Valley**

While French and British mutual ill-will had been spilling over into North America since the 1600s and sparked a series of conflicts such as Queen Anne’s War (1702-1713) and King George’s War (1745-1748), the more immediate cause of the outbreak of hostilities between France and Britain during the French and Indian War can be attributed in large part to the French starting to build a string of forts throughout the Ohio Valley in 1753. In December 1753, Virginia’s Lt. Governor Dinwiddie, viewing such construction as an encroachment on lands of Virginia and



*E. Braddock*

the Ohio Company (in which Dinwiddie was an investor), deployed George Washington as a messenger to the commander of Ft. LeBoeuf requesting the French to vacate the premises. France would not budge. In April 1754, at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers the French forced a party of American colonists to quit a recently started fort/trading post of the Ohio Company; the French finished its construction and named it “Fort Duquesne” (after the governor of New France—the French North American colony). A few months later, Dinwiddie sent Washington to confront the French in the Ohio Valley. In late May 1754, Washington and about 70 men ambushed 30 or so French soldiers, killing several, wounding and capturing the remainder. In response, the French commander of Ft. Duquesne dispatched a much larger force, of about 700, to chase down and surround Washington and his reinforced men, now numbering about 400, at Ft. Necessity. The vast number of French troops, along with Indian assistance, forced Washington to surrender and march back to Virginia.

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## **British Plan Military Intervention in North America**

While Washington led expeditions into the Ohio Valley, Lt. Gov Dinwiddie wrote and sent several letters to high-ranking British government ministers in London to implore the Crown to send troops to push the French and their Indian allies out of the Ohio Valley. Recipients of such letters included the Duke of Newcastle, Britain's Prime Minister; Sir Thomas Robinson, Secretary of State; the Duke of Cumberland, Leader of the British Army and 2nd son of King George II; the Earl of Halifax, Board of Trade President; Henry Fox, Secretary of War and the Earl of Albemarle; Ambassador to France and titular Governor of Virginia, i.e., Dinwiddie's superior. William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland and others in London anticipated a fight with the French to occur soon as the French appeared to be challenging British dominion in America as well as in India and central Europe. Cumberland influenced the thinking of several ministers within the British Cabinet (such as Halifax, Fox, and Robinson) to send British Army units to quell French aggression in the Ohio Valley. But not all of the powerful British politicians were rattling their swords. In the summer/fall of 1754, the British Prime Minister, was in the throes of negotiations with France over the situation in the Ohio Valley, hoping for a bloodless settlement. In September 1754, the Earl of Albemarle provided Paris with the formal request to withdraw France's troops from south of Lake Erie in response, French officials stated that France was not guilty of either "invasions or usurpations" in this region and refused to withdraw. Prime Minister Newcastle offered a compromise, Britain would confine itself to the eastern half of the Ohio Valley. France rejected this overture outright. Consequently, Newcastle finally relented in his pursuit toward achieving a negotiated settlement with France and requested military advice from the Duke of Cumberland. It was most likely Cumberland that recommended (1) the Crown send two Regiments to the Colonies and (2) the selection of Edward Braddock, recently promoted to Major General (April 1754), as not only the leader of these two regiments but also the "General and Commander" of all British Forces in North America. As any military expedition requires substantial

funding, Cumberland's agenda received financial assistance from John Hanbury, a London-based partner of the Ohio Company, who had been keeping in constant communication with Dinwiddie and advanced £10,000, backed by Whitehall, to Virginia's Lt. Governor to apply toward expenses to be incurred on Braddock's Ohio Valley military expedition.

## **Selection of Braddock as Leader of All North American Troops**

It is not clear why General Braddock was selected to command the entire contingent of North American based British and Colonial troops against the French and Indians. Throughout his 44-year military career, Braddock had never fought, much less led troops, in a battle. Notwithstanding his lack of combat experience one possible reason for his selection could be his past ties with the Duke of Cumberland. During Braddock's

long stint with the Coldstream Guards regiment (1710-1753), he was a subordinate of Cumberland on several occasions. The Duke briefly commanded the Coldstream Guards (1740-1741); against "Bonny Prince Charlie" in 1745, he led troops of which Braddock's brigade was a part; in 1748, Cumberland also commanded Braddock's battalion during a campaign against the French in Holland. General Braddock was likely considered to be very loyal to the Crown, very disciplined in following orders and a strong administrator and logistician. It was an officer of this ilk that Cumberland would have perceived as very useful in overseeing the various planned expeditions against the French and Indians throughout the American Colonies.

## **Britain's Grand Strategy for North America**

In November 1754, King George II issued written orders to Braddock, which included comprehensive instructions on military engagement of the French in North America. Braddock's Expedition to Ft. Duquesne was one of four major operations planned by the British Cabinet. The other three operations were to (1) attack Fort St. Frederic, (2) attack Ft. Niagara and (3) reinforce Ft. Oswego (located on Lake Ontario's southeast coast). It was made clear in the Crown's instructions to Braddock to seize Ft. Duquesne first. As it was Virginia's Dinwiddie that



petitioned for London's help and his military point man, George Washington, having already blazed a path from Virginia to the Ohio Valley, the most natural start point for Braddock's forces would be Virginia. This Colony also provided the climate conducive for starting the Ft. Duquesne expedition earlier than if commenced in other northern Colonies.

### **Arrival of Braddock in Virginia**

Braddock's voyage from Great Britain to Virginia took him about 2 months, landing at Hampton Roads on February 19, 1755. A few days later, Naval Commander (and son of the Earl of Albemarle) Augustus Keppel arrived, and the two commanders then traveled to Williamsburg to meet with Lt. Gov Dinwiddie. From Williamsburg, Braddock wrote Governors William Shirley (Mass.), James DeLancey (N.Y.), Robert Morris (Pa.) and Horatio Sharpe (Md.) urging them all to meet with Braddock, Keppel and Dinwiddie in Annapolis early in April to discuss the campaign strategy against the French and Indians in North America. Braddock's regiments from Ireland, the 44th and 48th Foot, all arrived at Hampton Roads by mid-March. Soon thereafter, Braddock, Dinwiddie and Keppel, along with these troops made their way to Alexandria to set up camp before the long march out to the Ohio Valley a month later. Note: these Regiments had about 1,200-1,300 British Regulars combined; it is estimated that about 800 men were recruited (mostly Virginians, including some Alexandrians) to complement these Regulars. For the next month, Alexandria's very successful merchant and loyal citizen of the Crown, John Carlyle, provided the General with what had to be considered by Braddock as very satisfactory headquarters.

### **The "Grandest Congress": Springboard for Launching Expeditions Against the French and Indians**

In April 1755, Braddock assembled all the Governors at John Carlyle's house (meeting referred to as the "Grandest Congress" by then-Major Carlyle). In addition to selecting the merchant's illustrious home as the location for such a major strategy session, General Braddock appointed Maj. Carlyle "Storekeeper of all the Provisions, Arms, Ammunition . . . [etc.] in Alexandria". The "Grandest

Congress" took place on April 14 and 15, during which Braddock set forth several key points of the campaign strategy issued by King George II. These discussions included a common defense fund (i.e., funding being provided by the American Colonies), allying with the Six Nations (i.e., Indian tribes) and proposed expeditions against several French forts (as stated above). [*See the April 1998 Docent Dispatch for a more in-depth treatment of the "Grandest Congress"*.] As the Crown had established the campaign strategy against the French and Indians, there was little room for the Governors to debate the efficacy of this strategic path with General Braddock. But the Governors did make inputs, and agreements were reached with Braddock, as to who would lead what forces when against the French and Indians. Within days of the Congress, Braddock and his 2,000-plus expeditionary force embarked on a long, arduous journey for the next 2½ months to Ft. Duquesne.

### **Observation**

The significance of the Braddock and colonial Governors meeting is succinctly encapsulated in one phrase John Carlyle wrote to his brother, George, in August 1755: "there was the Grandest Congress held at My home ever known on This Continent". While the Braddock Expedition would end in one of the worst military disasters ever (in terms of the proportion of troops killed or wounded) and wherein Braddock himself was mortally wounded, this outcome should not diminish the importance of the "Grandest Congress". *This meeting brought together the leadership of the American Colonies to ensure that the Governors were aware of the overarching British military strategy and provided them guidance in executing their respective tasks.* Within a few years after the Ft. Duquesne debacle, the British/American colonists did capture Forts Duquesne, Niagara, Oswego and St. Frederic and ultimately defeated the French and their Indian allies.



## CHAD EVENTS

**Monday, March 30**

**CHAD Book Club:**

*Paul Revere's Ride*

by David Hackett Fischer

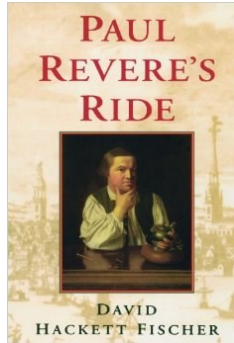
12pm

Cookies, coffee and tea provided.

All are welcome! Please RSVP to

Jamie Harding at

[jamieh3@verizon.net](mailto:jamieh3@verizon.net).



### *Prime Minister of Ireland Visits Carlyle House*

On March 18 a surprise guest visited the Carlyle House. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny and his wife, Fionnuala O'Kelly stopped by and took a tour of our grand home. Their visit was perfect timing since the staff just finished mulching the garden which was admired by the couple and their Secret Service detail.

**Saturday, April 11**

**Mary McLeod Bethune Council House**

12PM

Join us as we tour the home of Mary McLeod Bethune, who was an educator, women's rights advocate, president of the National Association of Colored Women, and founder of the National Council of Negro Women.



Carlyle House staff and docent Mark Hill with Prime Minister Kenny.

**Monday, May 18**

**Spring Potluck on the Terrace**

10:30AM

Join Susan, Helen, and Vanessa on the terrace for breakfast! Catch up with on our current projects and other happenings at Carlyle House. We ask that everyone attending bring a dish to pass, staff will provide the coffee. Please sign up in the docent lounge and put down what dish you will be bringing.



Historic Site Specialist Helen Wirka with Fionnuala O'Kelly, wife of the Prime Minister.





**CALENDAR**

**March 28, Saturday**  
**Braddock Day,**  
**10AM-4PM**  
**Docents Needed for 10-1 and 1-4 shifts**

**\*NEW EVENT\***

**March 29, Sunday**  
**A Symposium on General Braddock and the French and Indian War**  
**10AM-4PM**  
Join history-lovers and scholars for an afternoon symposium at The Lyceum, 201 S. Washington Street in Alexandria. The day will include presentations on General Edward Braddock and the French and Indian War (1755-1763). Check our website ([www.carlylehouse.org](http://www.carlylehouse.org)) for more details soon! Free Admission to the Encampment; Symposium Cost \$10 per person.

**April 17, Friday**  
**Garden Day Pre-sale**  
**11AM-3PM**

**April 18, Saturday**  
**Garden Day**  
**8AM-4PM**  
**Docents Needed**

**May 2 Friday**  
**Hands on History Tent**  
**Docents Needed**  
**Details TBD**

**May 10, Sunday**  
**Mother's Day Tea**  
**Seating's at 11AM and 2PM**

**June 4 and 18, Thursday**  
**Carlyle House Summer Concert**  
**Details TBD**

***Happy Hours***

Every 3rd Thursday of the month we will meet at a different location for a chance to catch up and share good company! Vanessa will be present to validate parking for happy hours that take place in Old Town. Check your email the day of the happy hour for more details. If you have a great idea for happy hour please feel free to share!



**April 16**  
**\*Charthouse**  
**4pm-6:30pm**  
1 Cameron St.,  
Alexandria, VA

**May 21**  
**La Tasca**  
**4pm-7pm**  
607 King St.,  
Alexandria, VA

**June 18**  
**Carlyle House Summer Concert**  
**6PM**

**July 16**  
**Bilbo Baggins**  
208 Queen St.,  
Alexandria, VA

**August 20**  
**Columbia Firehouse**  
109 South Saint Asaph St.,  
Alexandria, VA

\*changed location