

Docent Dispatch

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George Washington and the Carlyles: 1770-1775

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The next article in our series will cover the relationship between George Washington and John Carlyle from 1770 through 1775. We will cover their evolving business relationship, their continued social relationship, their political affiliation as the American colonies inch their way towards rebellion, and finally, the newly important relationship between John Carlyle and William Herbert. There are 65 entries in this period containing a wealth of knowledge on these topics.

As businessmen of the day, Carlyle and Washington continue to go through an ever-evolving series of contracts, partnerships, and occasional court cases. In 1770, George Washington is still attempting to gain possession of land in the Ohio country promised by Governor Dinwiddie for veterans of the French and Indian War. John Carlyle believes he is entitled to a share of this land, and so helps George Washington with a series of tasks related to its settlement, such as surveying. Though George Washington now has Robert Adam handling his entire wheat and flour business, Carlyle & Dalton are still a regular customer of George Washington's fisheries. Carlyle also acts as an intermediary for George Washington on financial transactions. This is an important role, as Washington seems to suffer from some cash flow problems as well as constantly traveling. While traveling, George Washington gladly returns the favor by carrying money owed to Carlyle back to Alexandria. George Washington also finds himself torn between business interests, as he is charged by George William Fairfax to sell off chunks of his estates in Vir-

ginia, including the land with an iron bloomery John Carlyle was invested in. John Carlyle also finally settles the Lawrence Washington estate, of which he was a trustee, after it had been open for twenty years.

Of especial import and interest is a joint venture among George Washington, John Carlyle, Robert Adam, and Daniel Jenifer Adams to sell cured fish and flour to the West Indies. This venture does not go smoothly. First, Daniel Jenifer Adams sends differing reports to Carlyle and Washington. Then, Daniel Jenifer Adams appears to have tried to abscond with the brig and the profits, leading George Washington to send an agent with Power of Attorney down to the Caribbean. Eventually, George Washington receives the ship on impound and sells it at auction. John Carlyle asks George Washington for half of the proceeds. This whole venture not only led to severe financial stress for George Washington, but also shook his trust in and opinion of John Carlyle.

Socially, it appears that family visits are still a regular occurrence, more so for John Carlyle's daughters than for John himself. George Washington makes sure that the Carlyle girls are mixing with the right company. He and Mrs. Washington take Nancy Carlyle with them to Christ Church or "the new church", and continue to host Sally Carlyle for many dinners, including at least one with her future husband, William Herbert. John and George attend the sale of George William Fairfax's possessions at Belvoir together, and they collaborate with Robert Adam for

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the funeral of a mutual friend. John Carlyle is even convinced to spend his own money on Christ Church for reasons of social obligation, though he does not even attend it!

Politically, John Carlyle is becoming more active and joining ranks with George Washington, even as their friendship appears to be strained by the West Indies venture. John Carlyle joins a group of Alexandria merchants in lobbying George Washington and other burgesses to amend the port rules for Alexandria. John Carlyle also joins his fellow merchants in lobbying for town expansion, against the wishes of other close friends. Additionally, John joins George Washington in signing the Fairfax Resolves.

Finally, this segment of time sees the introduction of another important character to Alexandria's civic life: William Herbert. He is first mentioned by George Washington within months of arriving in the city. The two become fast friends, with Herbert dining often at Mount Vernon. They also form a business relationship. By September 1773, William Herbert pays George Washington 21 pounds for fishing rights along the Potomac from Washington's land. Mr. Herbert's business savvy is keen enough that by 1774, he is able to purchase property in the heart of Alexandria at the corner of Princess and Water streets. William Herbert becomes one of Washington's many business associates, providing market intelligence about Washington's main crops. Their relationship is valuable enough that William Herbert is one of the last people Washington sees in May of 1775 before heading towards Philadelphia for the Continental Congress.

After May 1 1775, there are no references to John Carlyle and his extended family in Washington's letters. By the end of the year, Washington has been presiding over the siege of Boston for more than five months, has dispatched Benedict Arnold for an assault on Quebec, and has his hands more than full with the army of the "United Colonies", as he prefers to term it. News from Alexandria occasionally trickles in from Lund Washington, William Ramsey, George Mason, and Richard Henry Lee. None of them have mentioned Carlyle or Herbert since Washington

has reached Boston.

The next installment of this research will cover 1776 through 1780, to the point of Carlyle's death. We shall see if George Washington's association with Carlyle re-emerges as the war moves south and George Washington can command from close to home.

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