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CARLYLE HOUSE

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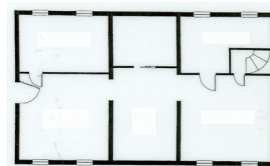
Carlyle House Architecture, Part 2

By Susan Hellman

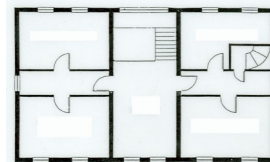
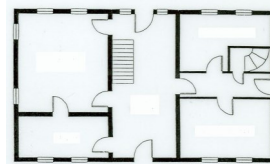
To continue last month's discussion, we will move to the interior of the mansion. Carlyle House has a typical full Georgian domestic floor plan, shown at the right, as it is double pile (two rooms deep), with stairs in the center passage. Notice that when you enter the house, your eye is immediately drawn to the impressive stair. That, of course, is on purpose. The guest would enter this fabulous space and wait to be announced to the Carlyle family. Houses at that time were divided into public and private space. Even middling families had this division of space.



Think of a two-room hall-parlor, depicted above. The hall was public; the parlor was private. At Carlyle House, the public center passage divides the public space to the left from the private space to the right. The passage itself is public, and just about everybody (white) could enter. The parlor and the dining room were also public spaces, but the visitor had to be announced and invited



into these spaces. The study and master chamber on the right side of the house were private. Only family members and very close friends were admitted into this side of the house.



We know that the left/north side of the house was the public side, as it is

highly embellished. The right/south side of the house was much plainer in design. In addition, the north chimneys are deeper and the fireboxes larger than those of the south chimneys, further evidence of a more public use for the north side.

This space served as the crossroads of the house. In summer months, the center passage was a lovely space to catch summer breezes, and it served as a sitting room for the family. It would have been used year-round as a kind of reception area, as well as a space to entertain guests.

When James Green purchased the house in 1848, he made several changes

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to modernize it. He replaced the Carlyle stair with an elliptical stair and added circular niches to the east wall. The southernmost niche is depicted above. NOVA Parks tore out the elliptical stair and replaced it with a 20th century replica of the original stair, based on ghost marks. A closet and a vestibule were located below the stair landing. There also was no wainscoting in the passage during the Carlyle period.

The 1970s restoration was a very heavy restoration. All 19th century changes were torn out and replaced with 20th century replicas of 18th century details. Much of what you see is completely rebuilt, based on ghost marks. Some examples:

- Green raised all of the interior doorways; NOVA Parks shortened them back to their original heights. In doing so, contractors built new

doors for the interiors. However, these doors are too light and delicate to represent 18th century work. Green had moved 6 doors from the lower levels of the house into the attic when he subdivided that space. In the 1970s restoration, NOVA Parks did not realize that these doors were original to the house, and did not re-use them or copy them. Instead, they stripped them and put them in storage. These doors display evidence of mortise hinges and mortice locks (set w/in the body of the door in a recess, not attached to the surface), indicating that the present hardware may be incorrect in some museum locations.

- Green replaced the original front door with a wider entry which was composed of a wider door flanked by sidelights. He replaced the Carlyle fanlight with the elliptical fanlight in the architecture room. At some point, Green also added a Doric portico, which was removed in the early 20th century.

- When Green replaced the original front door, architectural evidence indicates that he moved the front steps to the rear of the house. Those steps now lead from the vault area under the rear terrace into the kitchen.

- On the south side of the first floor, Green incorporated the side passage into the room we now interpret as the master chamber. He opened doorways from the center passage into both the chamber and the study. NOVA Parks reinstated the side passage we have today

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-Green added dormer windows to the east and west elevations; NOVA Parks removed them.

-He added a long porch/balcony on the second story of the east elevation.

-The rear/east elevation of the house, shown below during the restoration, had been so altered over time that the architects working on the renovation could not figure out its original construction. NOVA Parks therefore decided to add the Palladian window based on the Palladian window at Christ Church, the construction of which Carlyle had overseen. It is highly doubtful that there was a Palladian window in this house before the 1970s. This type of window shows up in Virginia stairwells circa 1750. While not impossible, it is doubtful that Carlyle was that cutting edge. On an interesting note, the floorboards in the central passage and the parlor were restored in 1987, with damaged boards removed and taken to the shop for splicing in repairs. The oldest



boards are quarter-sawn long leaf pine. In the 1970s restoration, they used flooring from the demolished Mansion House Hotel



The front elevation during the renovation. As you can see, wow, the house underwent a lot of work.

to patch the floors in the center passage.

Dining room:

This room and the adjoining parlor are the two most authentic rooms in the house, the only rooms in the house to retain their original architectural treatment. The carvings and woodwork are original, mainly due to the historic significance of the room. Nobody wanted to alter it. As you know, this room saved the house; it is the main reason that the house survives today. I won't insult your decent skills by repeating the Braddock story here!

The embellishment in this room indicates that it was the most important room in the house. The soffits (underside) of heavily modillioned cornice are embellished with carved rosettes and pine cones. Research indicates that the pine cone and the rose are both Masonic symbols. The doorways are topped with broken serpentine pediments; scrolls flank pine cones on pedestals.

The scrolls have carved roses. The overmantel features Doric pilasters, and the marble fireplace surround includes an egg-and-dart backband. The fascia of the chair rail displays Greek key fretwork. Pine paneling completely covers all walls. The total window assembly is also paneled, including the interior shutters. Notice that the window shutters fold completely into a wall recess. This was a fairly common feature in genteel dwellings. NOVA Parks replicated these shutters in the two rooms on the south/private side of the house.

The door to the left/east of the chimney was a blind door in Carlyle's period, not an actual door. Blind doors helped preserve symmetry in important rooms. There was no actual door here until James Green cut one through.

At one point, a wing connected Carlyle House to the Bank of Alexandria Building/hotel next door. The northwest window in the dining room was converted into a door which led into a wing of the hotel. After that wing was demolished, a later owner converted that door into a cupboard. NOVA Parks changed it back to a window. According to an architect who worked on the Carlyle House restoration, Green built this wing and Wagar demolished it sometime after he



purchased the site in 1906. Photos show that in 1896 the wing is there; it's not there 1920.

