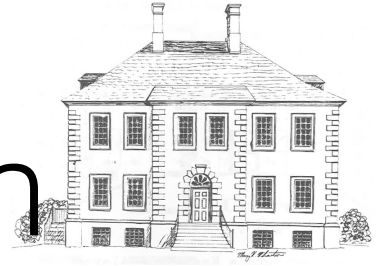


Carlyle Connection

"It's a fine begin-



The Invention of the American Christmas 1753-1861

Sarah Coster

In past Carlyle House holiday articles, we've focused on the Christmas of John Carlyle's time, or should I say, the lack thereof. We've attempted to convince our suspicious public that the Christmas they know and love did not exist in 1700s Virginia. Normally, this time of year, we decorate the house with subdued greenery, discuss the Puritan revolt against the excesses of Christmas and focus instead on the lavish entertaining that accompanied the holiday and subsequent New Year's celebrations.

This year, with the Civil War Sesquicentennial and its commemorations, our interpretation inside the museum will jump forward 100 years, to the Victorian era. Christmas in this period begins to look much more like we'd expect. There is a tree, presents and stockings. Even a Santa Claus. Yes, this is the Christmas we want to see when we visit historic houses during the holiday season.

But why the change? How did this more modern Christmas come to be? The Protestants of the Enlightenment wanted to do away with the medieval, Bacchanalian excesses of Christmas and were willing to nearly wipe it off the church calendar to do so. The generations that came after John Carlyle, however, wanted to celebrate Christmas, but one that was orderly and home-centered, even at the price of



Thomas Nast, Santa Claus, 1861

commercialism.

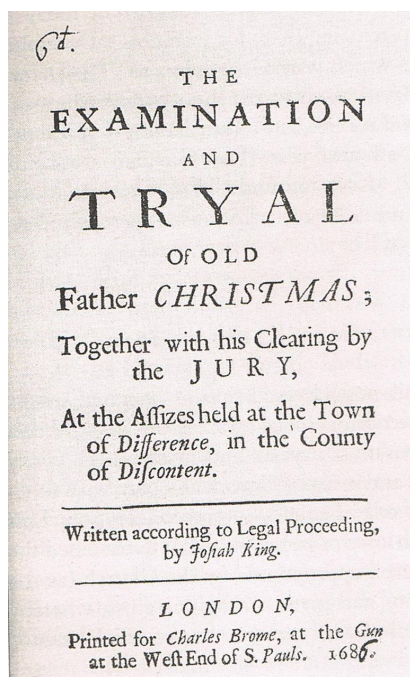
Winter has long been a time of feasting and celebrations. Due to short days and long nights, with little work, alcohol and merrymaking were seen in excess. Christmas was a time when the normal order of society was turned upside down. Poor peasants were made "king" and went wassailing at the homes of their rich lords, asking for, and receiving, the best food and wine the manor could offer.

As reform began to sweep Europe, Christmas and its excesses became a target. 16th century bishop Hugh Latimer noted that "men dishonour Christ more in the twelve days of

Christmas, than in all the twelve months besides." A published propaganda piece in 1678, titled the *Examination and Tryal of Old Father Christmas*, by Josiah King, portrayed Father Christmas as drawing people into drunkenness, gluttony, cursing and swearing.

The anti-Christmas sentiment crossed the Atlantic with the Protestant reformers who settled here. Presbyterian Samuel Davies, a minister in Hanover County, Virginia, noted in 1758 that Christmas had become a time of "sinning, sexuality, luxury, and various forms of extravagance, as though men were not celebrating the birth of the holy Jesus but of Venus, or Bacchus... I do not set apart this day for public worship, as though





“The Tryal of Father Christmas” 1686
1739 almanac, which noted “O blessed Season! lov’d by Saints and Sinners, / For long Devotions, or for longer Dinners.”

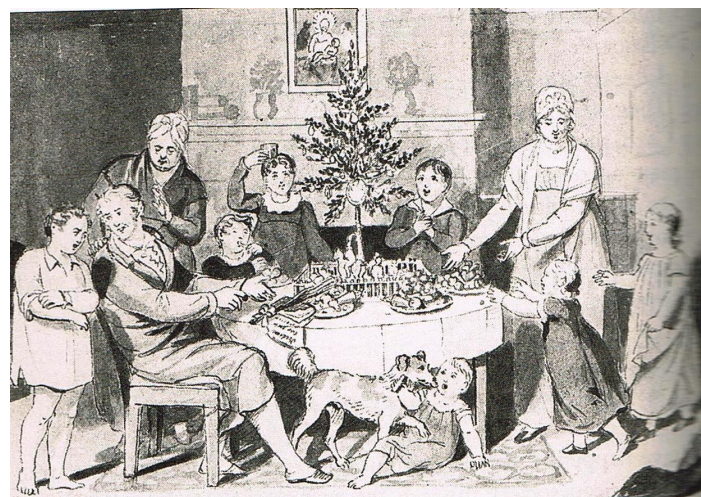
And so it continued. While more subdued, the Christmas of John Carlyle’s time retained its medieval roots of celebration and feasting. Additionally, the “upside-down” aspect of the holiday continued with the wealthy giving money, food and drink to their slaves and servants.

As America “modernized” in the early 19th century, however, a new type of Christmas began to emerge. Historian Stephen Nissenbaum theorizes in his book, *The Battle for Christmas*, the mixing of the rich and poor that the medieval carnival tradition allowed was becoming socially unacceptable. A new focus was found, and as Nissenbaum argues, Christmas began to focus more on children than adults. “Age had replaced social class as the axis along which gifts were given at Christmas.” Children became the object of charity and benevolence.

Even the early history of the Christmas tree in America reflects this focus on children and gift-giving. Christmas trees date back to the 1560s in Germany, though they were not widespread there until the 1800s.

it had any peculiar sanctity, or we were under any obligations to keep it religiously.”

Many religious leaders felt the same. In fact, none of the Congregationalist churches in Boston held Christmas services. Almanacs, the most important calendars of the day, often failed to even include Christmas or did so in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, such as in Ben Franklin’s



An Early American Christmas Tree sketched by John Lewis Krimmel either 1812 or 1819

In 1812 or 1819, John Lewis Krimmel, an artist traveling around Pennsylvania, sketched the earliest known American Christmas tree. In 1835, a gentleman named Charles Follen set up a Christmas tree for his son Charley. On Christmas Eve, he surprised his children with it. Follen placed the top portion of a fir on a table in the drawing room. As one witness noted, “a toy hung from every branch” while Follen and his wife lit candles on it. Toys were in fact the first Christmas decorations, and the tree was often simply a way of displaying and distributing these toys to children.

The Christmas tree was further popularized when Queen Victoria’s German husband, Prince Albert, introduced the tree to his family in the 1840s. The image of the Queen, Prince Albert, and their children gathered around the table top tree captured many imaginations and was reproduced



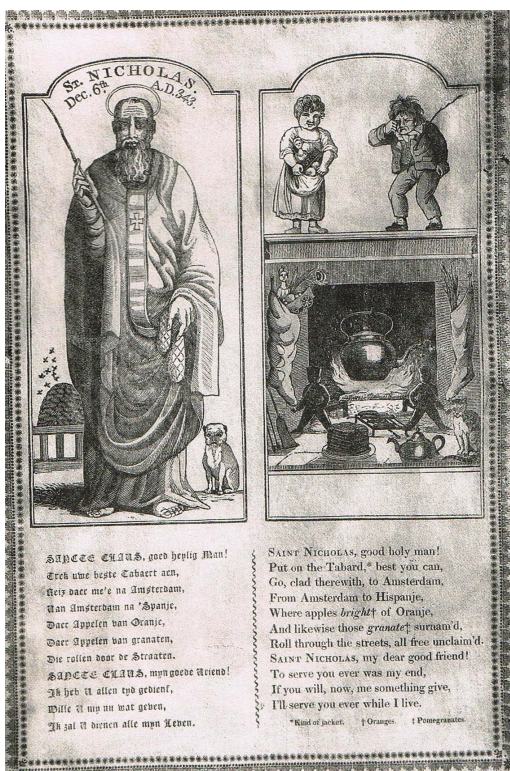
London Illustrated News, 1848

widely. *Godey's Lady Book* copied the image but altered it for its American audience, making the family an American one by removing the Prince's sash.

The introduction of Santa Claus, Nissenbaum explains, also came about as a way for Americans to modernize old traditions for their new American society. Saint Nicholas, historically, was an obscure Greek bishop. His feast day was December 6th, and many stories associated with him revolve around generosity, gift-giving and children. In the Netherlands, the tradition formed around Sinter Klaas, celebrated still on December 6th. In that tradition, Sinter Klaas, (who is a bishop and dresses like one) comes from Spain on a boat with Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) to deliver gifts or punishments to children.

What developed in America had less to do with Dutch traditions brought to the United States by immigrants, than it did with a group of New York City men who wanted to

popularize ideas about the past. John Pintard, in 1810, started an annual Saint Nicholas Day dinner for the New York Historical Society. In 1809 he made a toast "To the memory of Saint Nicholas. May the virtuous habits and simple manners of our Dutch ancestors be not lost in the luxuries and



1810 Saint Nicholas broadside commissioned by John Pintard at his own expense and illustrated by Alexander Anderson. Saint Nicholas is still very much the bishop in this image. Note the sad little boy who has been punished instead of given presents.



Santa Claus, *The New York Mirror*, January 2 1841. In 1841 a New York storekeeper created a life size Santa based on this illustration.

refinements of the present time." Pintard and the New York Historical Society were celebrating what they felt were simpler, better, times. Their Saint Nicholas was still a bishop, and a Goedheiligman or good Holy man. In fact, there is no evidence that Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam ever celebrated Saint Nicholas festivities. Most of them were members of the Dutch Reformed Church, which did not commemorate saints' days.

From Pintard, the story grew. Washington Irving referenced Saint Nicholas 25 times in his book, *Knickerbockers' History*, calling him "the titular saint of this excellent city (New York)." Irving's Saint Nicholas is often portrayed as a Dutch man, smoking a long pipe. In 1810, Pintard published a broadside portraying Saint Nicholas as benevolent, but also someone who punishes children's bad behavior.

While these examples lead the way, it is Clement Clarke Moore who gave us our Santa Claus. His 1823 poem, *A Visit From Saint Nicholas*, features a small, elf-like man, smoking a pipe and leaving nothing but presents. He has lost his bishop's garb, and, as Nissenbaum points out, his dignity. He has been "defrocked."

It was not long before tradesmen realized the commercial potential of Christmas trees, Santa Claus and presents and made the most of the growing trend. Christmas gifts were advertised in the early 1800s and

in 1841, a Philadelphia shopkeeper placed a life size model of Santa in his store window.

It will come as no surprise that the increase in Santa Claus' presence in store windows coincided with an increase in gift-giving. In John Carlyle's time and earlier there had been little attention given to gift giving at Christmas. When it occurred, it was really in the form of a "tip" of money to servants or a feast for friends and family. As consumerism in general increased in the 18th and 19th centuries, so did gift giving. The first advertisement for "Christmas Gifts" occurred in Salem in 1806. It was placed in the newspaper by a bookseller. Books were among the first and most popular gifts for Christmas.

Specific "gift books" were advertised at Christmas and could be inscribed on the cover page to commemorate the giver, the recipient and the occasion. The Bible was also a very popular Christmas gift and came in many sizes, types and colors. In the novel *Little Women*, set in Civil War New England, all of the March daughters received a different colored bible as a Christmas gift. Other popular Christmas gifts included toys, paint and pencils, pocket books and penknives. In the 1860s and 1870s, most gifts weren't wrapped in decorative paper; if they were wrapped at all it was in brown paper or white tissue.

By the time the Civil War arrived, these and other traditions and many others were firmly rooted in American culture. 100 years after Col. John Carlyle built his home, the doctors, nurses and soldiers, who lived there in December, 1861, celebrated a very different Christmas from that of the Carlyle family.



Santa Claus with the Troops, Harper's Weekly, January 3, 1863

How might it have looked?

Christmas tree: We know from period letters that soldiers often made a little tree for themselves and their fellow soldiers at their camps and hospitals. Private Alfred Bellard of the 5th New Jersey wrote in 1861 that "In order to make it look much like Christmas as possible, a small tree was stuck up in front of our tent, decked off with hard tack and pork, in lieu of cakes, oranges, etc." The trees of this period were typically table-top trees, so it is quite likely that one or several trees were set up throughout Carlyle House and the Mansion House Hospital.

Decorated with taper candles, toys and garlands, the tree may have been simpler than the doctors had at home, but it certainly would have brought cheer to the soldiers.

Christmas gifts: Food was scarce during the Civil War. Nurse Mary Phinney often wrote in her diary about the struggle to ensure that her patients were well fed. Families and friends at the home front sent care packages year-round with a dramatic increase at Christmas. The excitement in camp would have been palatable when the wagon arrived with Christmas boxes for the soldiers. Boxes would be brought to the camp and there would be great excitement to see who did or did not receive a box. Boxes were filled with food (noodles, chickens, sausage, pickles, jelly, preserves, cakes and pies) as well as stockings, shoes and needed clothing.

Christmas decorations: Decorating a home with

greenery during the winter is a very old tradition and one the Victorians embraced. The mantles, stairways and window seats would have been draped in greenery. The tradition of kissing under the mistletoe, an English development, had come to America, though



Children receiving stockings, Harper's Weekly, 1863

whether the nurses here allowed it is questionable. The doctors and nurses may also have placed their stockings at the chimney for Saint Nicholas.

Robert Gould Shaw wrote while performing guard duty in Frederick, Maryland, "It began to snow about midnight, and I suppose no one ever had a better chance of seeing 'Santa Claus'; but, as I had my stockings on, he probably thought it not worth his while to come down to the guard-tent. I didn't see any of the guard's stockings pinned up outside their tent, and indeed it is contrary to army regulations for them to divest themselves of any part of their clothing during the twenty-four hours (of guard duty)."

While Christmas away from home filled most of the Mansion House Hospital residents with sadness and feelings of deep homesickness, they did their best to stay cheerful. "Notwithstanding there is so much suffering here," nurse Anne Reading wrote, "the men in general are very cheerful and most of them very patient. When circumstances permit, we have plenty of singing, which enlivens us very much, for the boys are very fond of singing and music. At Christmas which is counted as a holiday even here, the Doctors made some very fine speeches." The Christmas at Carlyle House during the war may have been an

unfamiliar one, but John Carlyle certainly would have recognized the spirit of good cheer and hospitality.

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Nissenbaum, Stephen. *The Battle for Christmas*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

Rawlings, Kevin. *We Were Marching on Christmas Day: A History and Chronicle of Christmas During the Civil War*. Baltimore, Maryland: Toomey Press, 1996.



Illustration from the first book-length edition of "A Visit from St. Nicholas," published in 1848 under Moore's name and most likely with his approval.

Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours

December 10, 2011, 6 to 9 pm
&
December 12, 2011, 3 to 6 pm

Make Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours part of your family's 2011 holiday celebration. Take a break from the fast pace of the season and experience the unique charm and history of Old Town Alexandria. Tour Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Carlyle House, Lee-Fendall House and the Apothecary in any order. A complimentary shuttle runs on a continuous loop between the sites.

This year's special theme commemorates the Civil War in Alexandria. In 1861, the city that John Carlyle helped build was torn apart by civil war. In November, as battles raged around occupied Alexandria, the Union Army converted the property into a hospital. From 1861-1865 it was home to brave nurses, bold spies and battle-weary soldiers. Despite the hardships of war, many of the soldiers, doctors and nurses worked to create some holiday cheer far from home. Step into the Carlyle House as it might have been in 1861. On display will be a Victorian Christmas tree, decorated with presents and popcorn, stockings by the fire, mistletoe and holly. Enjoy period music and hot apple cider as you warm up your hearts with holiday cheer.



To purchase tickets, please call Gadsby's Tavern Museum at 703-746-4242.

Admission:
Adults \$20
Senior Citizens (65 years
and older) \$15
Children (ages 6-17) \$5

A Note from the Educator

Lacey Villiva

This fall we are proud to welcome a new class of Docents to the Carlyle House. We began our training on the 28th of September, with a class of fifteen. Over the next four weeks, they received a sample tour and background information on the Carlyle House. This included everything from John Carlyle's history and the history of the house, as well as a tour collections items in the house. To round out all the information they had a workshop on how to put everything together into a tour of the house.

Now, at the beginning of our winter season, nearly half of the new Docents have fully completed their training, which culminates in giving a practice tour through the house. Of the rest, most have only to give their practice tour. We look forward to having this great group of Docents giving tours here at Carlyle House!

If you missed this training session but would like to become a docent, give us a call! We are always recruiting and will be holding another training session in the spring. Also, please spread the word about the wonderful opportunities to volunteer here at Carlyle House.



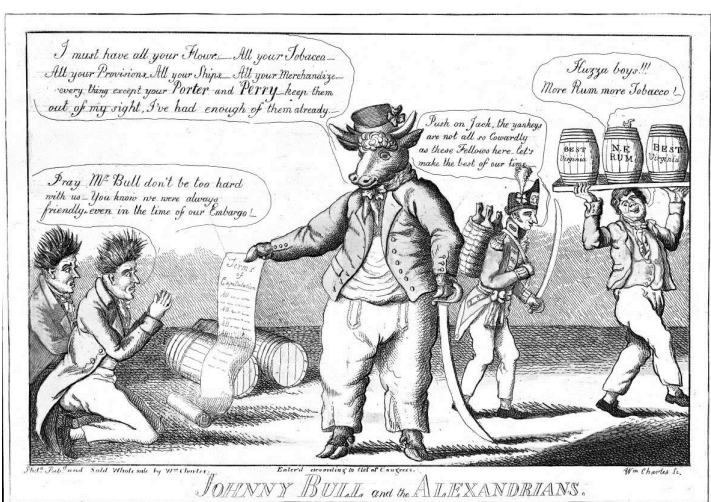
Docent Frank Conrad interprets the Architecture Room to a group of visitors.

News From the Curator

Helen Wirka

Commemorating the War of 1812

Over the next few years, the City of Alexandria will be partnering with regional sites, including the National Parks Service, to commemorate the War of 1812 and the surrender of Alexandria in 1814. During a seminar on Tuesday, November 1st, Carlyle House hosted a group of NPS staff, Alexandria citizens and other members of the public. Curator, Helen Wirka, and Educator, Lacey Villiva, provided participants with a specialized tour which centered on the relationship between Carlyle House and the events of



Johnny Bull and the Alexandrians by William Charles.

1814.

Over the subsequent three days, staff followed tours at various locations in Maryland and Washington, DC including: Bladensburg, MD; St. Leonard's Creek; Fort Washington (formerly the site of Fort Warburton); the Washington Navy Yard; the US Capitol building; the Smithsonian's Star Spangled Banner exhibit; the White House and Fort McHenry. Guides and historians created an educational forum for sharing ideas and building relationships in order to effectively interpret this time in history, which will

greatly benefit our museum.

Although our interpretive period will remain 1753-1780, more research is necessary to flesh out what is already known about this time in the history of the site (see below) and to be an active participant in the commemoration of the War of 1812. An exhibit on the Carlyle House and the Herbert family focusing on the events of 1814 will go on display in 2014.

What Do We Know about the Herberts and the Carlyle House During the War of 1812?

- Sarah and William Herbert were living in her father's house at the time of the War of 1812.
- William Herbert was one of the founders of the Bank of Alexandria and served as its president from 1796-1819; in July 1814, the Bank of Alexandria loaned the Federal Government \$10,000 to help fortify the defenses around Washington and Alexandria, specifically Fort Warburton, just six miles downriver from the city. The Potomac Bank loaned the Federal Government \$25,000. The defenses were not fortified before the British arrived in the area in August.
- William Herbert was the mayor of Alexandria until the eve of the War of 1812. Mayor Charles Simms was in office when the occupation of the city occurred.
- During the war, Thomas and William Herbert (brothers) served on the Committee of Vigilance and Alexandria's Common Council, which surrendered Alexandria to the British. Thomas Herbert was the president of the Common Council.
- John Carlyle Herbert was 36 years old in 1814 and was a Captain of the Bladensburg Troop of Horse (a cavalry unit such as his uncle had joined.)
- The grandson of John Carlyle was a Federalist and served first as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates and was later elected to Maryland's House of Representatives, serving in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Congresses
- He married Mary Snowden of Montpelier in 1805 and their estate was called "Walnut Grange."

New Acquisitions

Friends of Carlyle House Help Museum Acquire 18th Century Walnut Table



The museum recently acquired a new item for the collection. Discovered by Christopher H. Jones, local antiques dealer and long-time member of the Friends of Carlyle House, this charming, small round table was made around 1770 in the Chesapeake Bay area. It relates to a very similar table with a history in Middlesex County Virginia and another table with a history at Gunston

Hall. The table features multiple ball and ring turnings and pad feet.

The table is not only beautiful, but functional. The table has the ability to turn, allowing tea or beverages to be easily served to guests seated across from the host or hostess. Many American tea tables were designed to allow for a rotating top utilizing a pillared birdcage but were more expensive and gentile than the plain, tip top model. Tea tables in this neat and plain style were fashionable furnishings and commonly found on the estate inventories of the tidewater gentry. Such versatile small round tables were utilized for a variety of functions and moved frequently as needs dictated.

The two board top is approximately ½” less in diameter across the grain indicating shrinkage over its long life. The handmade iron spider appears to be original and retains its original rose head nails. The table survives in fine condition with elements of an early surface visible along the rim of the top.

We currently have the table on display in the Girl’s bed chamber. It is set for a simple breakfast tea for two. One can easily imagine the teenage Sarah and Nancy, rising from bed, wiping the sleep from their eyes and sitting down to tea. Penny, a slave who we believe was a personal servant to John Carlyle’s daughters, is heating up the water in the fireplace. The simplicity and elegance of the table helps to set this scene.



In addition to the support of all the Friends of Carlyle House, we would like to especially thank Joan and Jim Merow for their generous donation that made the purchase of this beautiful new table possible. Joan is a member of the Friends of Carlyle House Board of Directors. She and Jim have been extremely generous over the years and have funded many of the objects you see in the house, including our passage lantern and much more.

Acquisitions Wish List:

Carlyle House is currently seeking the following antiques as we continue to work towards furnishing the museum with items listed on John Carlyle’s 1780 probate inventory.

- Silver Tobacco Box
- Small Case Clock (Bracket Clock)
- Japanned Candlesticks
- Japanned Waiter (serving tray)
- Painted Tea Table

Carlyle House Seeks Funding for New Educational and Interpretive Offerings

In November, Friends of Carlyle House Historic Park will be receiving a letter asking for their help in supporting the following projects. The mission of the Carlyle House is to preserve and interpret the site, its history and collections, as an educational resource for people of all ages and backgrounds, to explore the life and times of the Carlyle family in Alexandria, Virginia. We believe each of these projects takes us one step further in fulfilling that mission to the “people of all ages and backgrounds” who come to the museum to get a glimpse of what life was like in the past.

New interpretive exhibit in our Architecture Room:

The forward thinking Architecture Room is the most popular room in the Carlyle House. Hand-made nails, chisel marks and hand-split lathes tell the story of how the home was built...and how it changed. Interpretive signs help explain the architecture, but they are outdated and underused. We will replace them with new graphic-filled panels and rails.



Old label in the Architecture Room.

Visually enticing and informative outdoor interpretive signage:

Interpretive signs are colorful and attention-getting. They communicate important themes and facts to visitors outside the house. Our current signs are 20 years old and badly in need of updating.



Our current 20 year old outdoor interpretive sign.

Often, this is the only way people learn about Carlyle House. We want to put our best foot forward and give a meaningful first impression for our visitors.

Carlyle House Smart Phone Application:



A Smart Phone application will connect visitors, near and far, to all that Carlyle House has to offer. From maps and parking information to educational interactive and collections information, this app will help enhance the visitor experience.

Educational Touch Objects for use in special tours:

A mantra of museums has long been “Please don’t touch.” Today, many museums use reproductions and education collections to finally say “Please touch!” From children to groups of all ages with special needs, touchable objects in museums can enhance and broaden the visitor experience. We already use a number of “touchable” objects and hope to continue to build our “touch basket” inventory.



Cell Phone Tours of the Gardens and Grounds:

One of Carlyle House’s greatest strengths is its breathtaking public garden. While we do not have the resources to offer guided tours of our gardens and grounds, most everyone carries a cell phone, and by simply dialing a number, they can enjoy the garden at their leisure while learning about the plantings and history of the site.



Children’s Traveling Trunk for Schools:

A traveling trunk will allow us to bring Carlyle House to the classroom. Filled with reproductions artifacts and modeled after our popular “Discovery through Trash” school program, the trunk will allow teachers to give their students the colonial history experience when they can’t come in person.



You're Invited

Please join the Friends of Carlyle House on Friday, December 16th at six o'clock in the evening for our annual Friends of Carlyle House Holiday Party.

Enjoy refreshments, period music performed by the Colonial Recorders, and an open house tour of the museum.

For the first time ever, the museum will be decorated in the Victorian style and will tell the stories of the doctors, nurses and soldiers who spent a



lonely Christmas away from home. Enjoy a period Christmas tree, greenery and decorations during your candlelight tour of the house.

Business Dress

**RSVP by December 9th to
703-549-2997 or carlyle@nvrpa.org**



Upcoming Events Carlyle House

Saturday, December 1: 12-4 pm

A Soldier's Christmas

Step back in time to enjoy colonial life in Alexandria during the holidays at the time of the American Revolution. The *Soldier's Christmas* program will feature re-enactors from the First Virginia Regiment. Take part in festive activities, including live music, demonstrations of military drill, fife and drum, gaming, and cooking. Sample historic beverages and meet the men and women of the American Revolution.

\$5 suggested donation.

Saturday, December 10: 6-9 pm

Sunday, December 11: 3-6 pm

Candlelight Tours

Make Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours part of your family's 2011 holiday celebration. Take a break from the fast pace of the season and experience the unique charm and history of Old Town Alexandria. Tour Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Carlyle House, Lee-Fendall House and the Apothecary in any order. A complimentary shuttle runs on a continuous loop between the sites.

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*Special Friends of Carlyle House Price:
\$20 for adults, \$10 for kids.*

Friday, December 16: 6-8 pm

Friends of Carlyle House Holiday Party

Join fellow Friends of Carlyle House for an evening of colonial music, candlelight tours and seasonal refreshments. Business dress. RSVP to 703-540-2997 or carlyle@nvrpa.org



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Historic Site Administrator
Helen Wirka
Historic Site Specialist
Lacey Villiva
Education and Outreach Assistant

Phone: 703-549-2997

www.nvrpa.org

*Carlyle House Historic Park is accredited by
the American Association of Museums*



News from the Site Director

This fall the staff members of Carlyle House have been working extremely hard to bring new and exciting programs to the museum. Several of our new programs have commemorated the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War. On September 10th, Carlyle House hosted a Civil War Fashion Show. The show featured fashions from both the North and the South and even gave guests a peek at Victorian undergarments!

Carlyle House hosted its first ever Afternoon Tea on the Terrace on October 1st. This event was open to the public and featured Civil War nurse Dorothea Dix as our special speaker. Despite the unseasonably cold weather, the event was a success. We hope to continue offering these teas and advertising for private tea rentals. Tea on the terrace is a great way to celebrate a bridal or baby shower, an engagement, a retirement and much more.

Staff members Sarah Coster and Helen Wirka assisted with the successful reenactment of the Battle of Balls' Bluff at our sister park, Balls Bluff Battlefield. Thousands of visitors were able to enjoy a truly unique experience by witnessing a reenactment performed on the actual battlefield where it occurred 150 years earlier.

Painting and roofing projects for our gazebo and smokehouse roofs were completed in November, just in time to impress our clients during the holiday engagement season. The money earned from rentals helps us to cover operating and maintenance costs for the house and grounds. If you know anyone looking for a place to hold that special event, please suggest the Carlyle House.

I hope everyone has taken some time to read about the special projects we are raising money for during this year's Annual Appeal to Members. While they may not seem as special as restoring the Bible, these projects will have a huge impact on how the public of all ages interacts with Carlyle House. Discussing these projects with our front-line staff and docents, I know we are filling a need for the museum due to the excitement and interest they are generating. A visitor looking at the chisel marks made in the stone in our Architecture room will be able to touch a chisel just like the one slaves used to shape the stone. Someone interested in a flower in the garden will get to discover facts about it just by dialing his phone. Children can begin to understand how the archeology of Carlyle House tells us about life in the past right from their own classroom. Please join us in making these goals a reality.

Sincerely,

Sarah Coster

Carlyle House Historic Park

A property of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

121 North Fairfax Street ~ Alexandria, Virginia 22314

www.nvrpa.org



Northern Virginia
Regional Park Authority