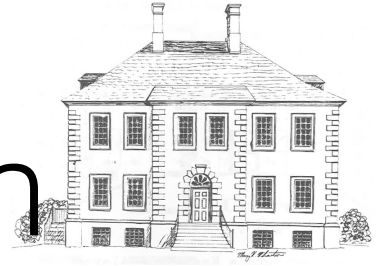


# Carlyle Connection

"It's a fine beginning."



## ***The Carlyle House Archaeological Collection Re-housing Project***

*By Casey Pecoraro*

The summer of 2013 marked the renewal of an active approach to managing the archaeological collections at Carlyle House Historic Park. Restoration activities in the early 1970s, including the excavation of multiple features located on site, generated thousands of artifacts composing the Carlyle House archaeological collections. These artifacts were processed and catalogued in the late 1970s, and stored in the attic at Carlyle House. Since that time, the archaeological artifacts unearthed on the grounds of the Carlyle House have been largely forgotten.

This type of curatorial problem- the long-term storage and curation needs of archaeological materials at a historic site without the benefit of staff trained in archaeological collections management- is not uncommon. Despite the negative effects of time and neglect on the artifacts, the good news is that archaeological collections can be brought back up to professional standards through comprehensive re-housing projects. Even collections that have long been overlooked can still have much research potential to offer archaeologists and other scholars.

In order to properly assess the archaeological collection, some basic information was needed, such as what materials the collection included, where the collection was located, and the condition of the collection. The original associated documentation was no longer stored with the artifacts, which led to additional work searching through archival materials at Carlyle House, Alexandria Archaeology, and the Alexandria Public Library Local History/Special Collections, as well as inquiries with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in Richmond.

Initial inspection of the collection revealed that earlier efforts to re-house the collection, begun in 2011 and 2012, had unfortunately created significant (and time-



*Our archaeology collection has some beautiful artifacts!*

consuming) problems that would need to be corrected as part of any re-housing effort. Over 40 boxes of re-housed artifacts have already been generated, not following professional archaeological collections management standards. Among other problems, the artifacts were not re-housed according to provenience. Provenience, or the specific geographic or spatial location where an object was found, is crucial to understanding the relationship between archaeological objects and features on a site. Archaeological collections should be grouped by provenience, or location within a site. Proper re-housing of the collection will enable researchers to easily find specific artifacts or proveniences and correlate the





*Here's our staging area..*

materials with the archaeological record.

The first step in the re-housing project was to conduct a preliminary inventory of the collection. This involved a systematic survey of the contents of each box housed in the attic storage facility, and the creation of a box list for each box of artifacts, detailing the provenience information and the individual object numbers. After determining what object numbers were contained in each box, it was possible to arrange the boxes roughly in sequential order, and by provenience.

While sorting through the boxes of materials and inventorying their contents, it quickly became apparent that the entire collection was no longer intact and stored as a whole in the attic. At various times in the past, object removal tags, some of which had deteriorated or been damaged by insects to the extent that they were no longer legible, indicated that objects had been removed for exhibit or educational purposes. Some artifacts belonging to the archaeological collections were found in the general collections storage room, along with objects belonging to the permanent museum collection, and others were found amongst educational program materials. The status of the latter group was most concerning.

The artifacts discovered amongst the educational program materials that have been used as part of a program titled "Discovery Through Trash" include: a ceramic saucer; a wine bottle neck, base, and fragments; a toothbrush; a

domino; a pharmaceutical bottle; and fragments of a chamber pot. These artifacts all come from known proveniences within the Carlyle House archaeological site. Educational programs do not generally use archaeological artifacts with known provenience information, due to the threats from excessive handling, loss or theft. As part of the re-housing project, it is appropriate to return these artifacts to the rest of the collection, and to replace them with reproduction pieces more appropriate for routine handling by students and staff.

Conducting a preliminary inventory of the collection made it possible to evaluate the overall condition of the assemblage. Among the issues to be corrected are inappropriate packing materials, lack of space and crowding of objects, and poor housekeeping. The boxes and bags used to house the collection date to the late 1970s when the objects were initially processed and catalogued. The boxes and bags no longer safely protect their contents. The attic storage facility itself has contributed to the poor condition of the collection; the boxes are stored beneath the eaves of the roof and subject to dust and dirt. Poor housekeeping, combined with the deterioration of the packing materials, has left the artifacts without protection from dust, dirt and insects. The entire attic is not climate controlled, and many of the artifacts have been exposed to unstable temperature and relative humidity levels. The attic storage facility also suffers from inadequate security. The collections area should have limited access, which is controlled and enforced.

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends Board members, the necessary archival storage materials and other supplies for the re-housing project have been ordered (and already arrived at Carlyle House!). The implementation of these supplies will enable the re-housing process to bring the archaeological collection up to best-practice standards, as defined by the National Park Service, at the federal level, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, at the state level. Re-housing the collection will achieve other results for Carlyle House, aside from meeting best-practice standards. By packing the boxes properly and implementing a tray system, according to the procedures used by the National Park Service, we can expect to reduce the total box count by approximately 40 percent, depending on the number of oversized objects. This means that the collection, once re-housed to best-practices standards, should take up less shelf space in storage than it did before.

A significant component of the re-housing project will be creating a digital database for the archaeological collection. PastPerfect has been used as the primary means for cataloging the Carlyle House permanent museum collection and is the only digital database currently in use. The usage of PastPerfect as the digital database presents another challenge to the rehousing project, in that it is not typically used for archaeological collections management. Most archaeological collections are catalogued using proprietary Microsoft Office Access databases, such as ANCS+ and Re:Discovery. When dealing with archaeological collections, it is best to have a relational database, in order to perform a broad-based search with multiple components.

The current archaeological collections rehousing project provides an opportunity for Carlyle House to reconsider its archaeological collections and their management. It is worth noting that the curation of archaeological collections is an ongoing “crisis” in archaeology, and that the challenges faced by Carlyle House are shared by many other museums and repositories. Carlyle House is not alone in facing a backlog of archaeological collections in need of re-housing to meet best practices. The Carlyle House collection is fortunate in that the Friends have willingly used funds to purchase the archival storage materials that will make the re-housing project possible. By putting the re-housing project into action, the Carlyle House staff are familiarizing themselves with the archaeological collection. The Carlyle House archaeological collection has excellent research potential for the study of 18th and 19th century urban life in Virginia and the Chesapeake, a geographical region which is underrepresented in urban historical archaeology. The completion of the archaeological collections rehousing project will ultimately enable the Carlyle House to better function as a repository that is more accessible to researchers. This could lead to evaluation of current exhibits and education programs, with new interest in the archaeological materials and their potential to help interpret the Carlyle House site. This project has already produced increased communication between staff at Carlyle House and colleagues at Alexandria Archaeology and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. It is exciting to begin the actual re-housing project, and to see where it might lead.

## ***Please help with our Friends Annual Appeal.***

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends, Carlyle House has a world-class museum collection. Ongoing attention is needed to maintain the beauty and integrity of these pieces. Your donations will enable us to restore some of these important pieces back to their original glory after up to 200 years of wear and tear. Certain items such as the clocks and spinet require cyclical maintenance. Some objects that need restoration include the seats of the Chippendale dining chairs, the spinet case, the secretary in the study, and a wine table. We hope to conserve these wonderful objects so that they may be preserved, displayed and viewed by visitors for generations to come. Please make your tax-deductible donation now by mailing us a check made payable to “Friends of Carlyle House Historic Park.” Please write “Annual Appeal” on the memo line. You may also call with a credit card number. Thank you for your support!



*A broken railing on the wine table needs some professional attention.*

## ***News from the Curator***

This past fall has been a busy one with many activities and preparations taking place in the curatorial department. Staff assessed and sought estimates from conservators in the area in order to prepare for the upcoming Annual Appeal. Several objects are in need of conservation work and, thanks to the mission of the Friends, it is possible to maintain our beautiful collection and repair the furnishings that need it.

(continued on next page)

## ***News from the Curator continued***

Additionally, work continues on preparing for the War of 1812 commemoration next summer. The front lines of the war came to the Chesapeake region in 1814, so area museums across Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia are commemorating this bicentennial with a wide variety of events in 2014. Carlyle House once again hosted its annual War of 1812 event this past August in the Bank of Alexandria building lobby with two lecturers in addition to myself. Carlyle House's War of 1812 exhibit will open in 2014.

The staff and volunteers are very excited that this year our interpretation of the holidays at Carlyle House will bring the return of displaying a dessert course. Many thanks go to Friends' Board of Directors member Carole Smith, who spent countless hours researching desserts and working with our "faux food" designer from the company "History's Table." The Carlyle House Friends' Board of Directors approved the purchase of these items to create a beautiful interpretation of a holiday table in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the objects selected for our dessert course include apple and cherry tarts, ginger cake pyramids, creams, custards, and jellies. Information regarding these will be included on note cards in the Dining Room with the interpretation.

Our dessert course will be displayed on 18<sup>th</sup> century glass stands and authentic period cream ware or "Queen's China" from the 1700s, which we have in our collection. We hope that you will visit us in December to see it all in person!

~Helen Wirka



*Aerial view of a ginger  
cake pyramid*



## **Carlyle House Upcoming Events**

### ***A Soldier's Christmas*** **Saturday, December 7th, 2013** **12:00 noon to 4:00 pm**

Step back in time to enjoy colonial life in Alexandria during the holidays at the time of the American Revolution. The ***Soldiers' 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. The program takes place immediately following the annual Scottish Walk in Old Town Alexandria. ***A Soldiers' Christmas*** will be held on the grounds and inside the Carlyle House, located at 121 N. Fairfax St. in Alexandria. \$5

### ***Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours*** **Saturday, December 14: 6:00pm to 9:00 pm** **Sunday, December 15: 3:00pm to 6:00 pm**

Make Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours part of your 2013 holiday season celebration. To honor this year as the *Year of the Virginia Historic Home*, come **Home for the Holidays** with Historic Alexandria! Travel through time as you learn more about Alexandria's history and domestic life during the holiday season at Carlyle House, Gadsby's Tavern Museum and the Lee-Fendall House. Special guest site this year is Lloyd House on Washington Street. Enjoy each site by candlelight, hear live musical performances, smell seasonal greenery, and taste warm apple cider



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[www.nvrpa.org](http://www.nvrpa.org)

Carlyle House Historic  
Park is accredited by  
the American Alliance  
of Museums



## News from the Site Director

Carlyle House has been a whirlwind of activity since you last received the Carlyle Connection. The highlight of our fall season was the ever-popular Death Comes to Carlyle House exhibit, which culminates with the funeral of John Carlyle. Here we see the pallbearers maneuvering Colonel Carlyle's coffin out of the house on the way to the Colonel's final resting place. Photo credit goes to Louise Krafft, Staff Photographer of the Alexandria Gazette Packet.



I am also happy to report that a team of engineers who specialize in historic buildings visited Carlyle House in November to evaluate its structural integrity. There are some very minor issues, but overall the house is in great shape, considering its age. We look forward to the final report in December.

Over the winter, you will notice some work being done in our garden. NVRPA has agreed to fund an upgrade to the outdated and unreliable sprinkler system and pathway lighting. We will also relay the brick walkways, as tree roots have damaged and displaced many of the bricks. As part of the garden project, the Friends Board graciously agreed to pay for some much-needed pruning and general cleanup. We hope to complete the work in time for the ever-popular Garden Day in April 2014. Thank you all for your continued generous support. We look forward to a terrific 2014!

~Susan Hellman

## News from the Educator



This educator has been happily busy this fall! With the new school year up and running, teachers are beginning to schedule their classes for the great school programs Carlyle House offers. So far, 226 students have made a visit to Carlyle House. I have already scheduled several programs for the spring, so we are set to have another successful year. Our Scout programs are steadily picking up with new program requests coming in every day. I am excited to see that there is an increased interest in programs. In addition to School and Scout programs, I have already begun planning for next year. Camp Carlyle will return next summer with not one but FOUR sessions, two in July and two in August. With the expansion of the camp, I am working very diligently to develop new and exciting

activities. The Traveling Trunk program continues to be developed and will be ready for the 2014-2015 school year. Helen and I had a successful fall Docent training session and plan to have another in the spring.

~Vanessa Herndon

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# Carlyle House Historic Park

*A property of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority*

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[www.nvrpa.org](http://www.nvrpa.org)



Northern Virginia  
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