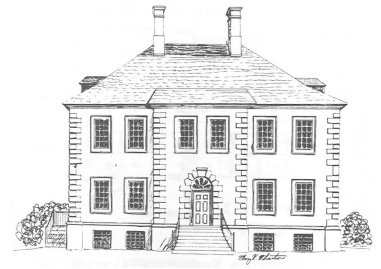


Carlyle Connection

“It’s a fine beginning.”



Commodore Keppel and “the Grandest Congress”

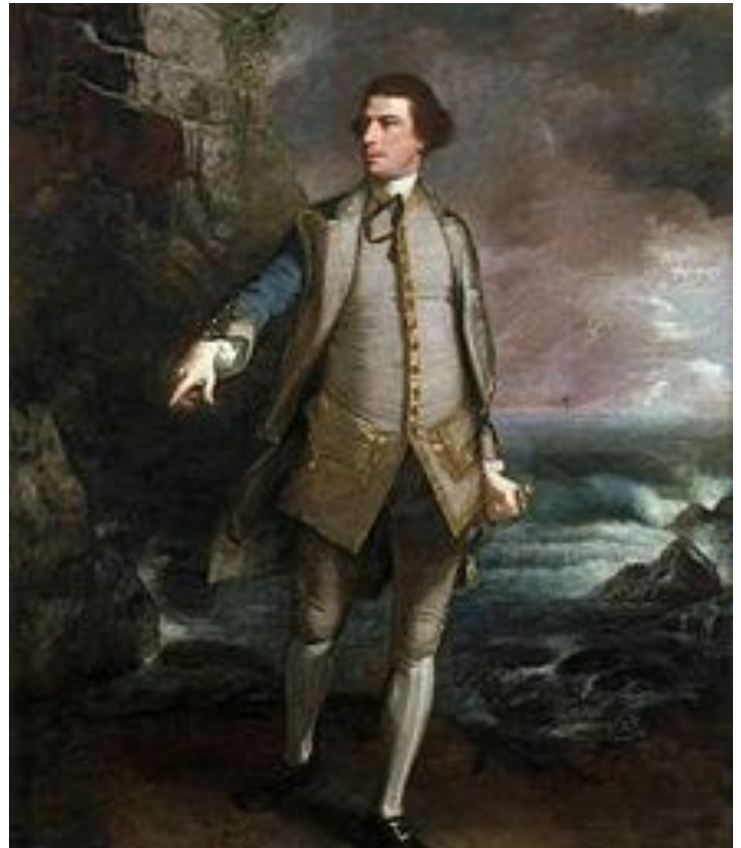
By Kyle Dalton

At the opening of the French and Indian War in 1755, John Carlyle’s grand stone manor in Alexandria, Virginia played host to an unprecedented event. General Edward Braddock, commanding a massive army intended to snuff out the French Fort Duquesne, called together the governors of Virginia, Maryland, New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. They would be joined by Braddock’s own military aides and the eminent Superintendent of Indian Affairs William Johnson. Today this meeting is known as “the Grandest Congress.” The phrase originates with John Carlyle himself. In writing to his brother later that year, Carlyle wrote “...their was the Grandest Congress held at My home ever known on this Continent.” In that same sentence, Carlyle listed the various political and military luminaries in attendance, including five colonial governors, Braddock himself, and “Comadore Kepple.” (1)

Despite being one of the youngest men present at a mere thirty years old, Commodore Augustus Keppel played an indispensable part in the discussions as commander of the Royal Navy squadron at anchor in the Potomac. It was Commodore Keppel who led the warships and transports that ferried hundreds of redcoats to Virginia’s shores, and he would be the Admiralty’s representative at a meeting of immense importance.

The importance of the Royal Navy at this meeting is self-evident. Britain wanted to launch a huge

campaign stretching the length of the continent, and to conduct it largely with British troops. This would require supplies and transit across thousands of miles of ocean. The Admiralty intended this to be a “conjunct expedition,” or as it is referred to today: a combined operation. These were campaigns during



Commodore Augustus Keppel, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1752 (photo from Wikipedia)

which the Royal Navy and the British army cooperated. As David Preston states in Braddock's Defeat: "between 1603 and 1758, England had conducted sixty-eight different amphibious operations. Of the twenty-seven 'Great Expeditions' of more than 4,000 troops, only seven had been victorious. But 'Small Expeditions,' like that of Braddock, had succeeded in twenty-three cases and only failed in eleven cases." (2)

Unlike other expeditions, which had been doomed by a failure to cooperate and coordinate between the commanders of the navy and army, Braddock and Keppel got along famously. Braddock declared Keppel "an officer of infinite merit." (3) Braddock's aide Captain Robert Orme wrote in his journal "never, I believe, [have] two men placed at the head of different Commands co-operated with more spirit, integrity and harmony for the publick spirit." (4)

Braddock and Keppel stayed close during the Atlantic crossing. More telling perhaps is that after the long journey confined together in the tight spaces of a warship, they continued to spend their time together traveling up and down the Chesapeake collecting governors and pushing for cooperation in the war to come. Traveling from Alexandria to Williamsburg to Annapolis and back again, Braddock and Keppel made a fine showing.

Braddock was known for hard partying (which John Carlyle found rude and distasteful in his home). Keppel liked to show off. He had at least three fine portraits painted before the Grandest Congress, two of which were by the master Joshua Reynolds. Keppel's closet was full of fine uniforms, and behind him stretched a retinue of no less than twenty men on his voyage to America, including four bargemen and a personal secretary. (5)

Despite his flashy appearance and personality, Keppel brought solid credentials to the table. As a teenager, Keppel served as a midshipman for a phenomenal three-year voyage around the world under

Commodore George Anson aboard the 60-gun *Centurion*. During the expedition Keppel lost all his hair and most of his teeth but gained a fortune in prize money and shot through the ranks from midshipman to post captain, an almost unprecedented rise. (6) Admiral Edward Boscawen later praised him, saying there was "no better seaman than Keppel, few so good, and not a better officer." (7)

It was this maritime skill and knowledge that earned Keppel a place in the Grandest Congress. When discussing Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne, Keppel expressed "very strong doubts" about the train of artillery, writing "that they will prove so heavy that they will meet with great, and perhaps, insurmountable difficulties in getting them over the Mountains." Even so, Keppel was confident that they would "have the hop'd for Success." (8) To assist in this gargantuan task, Keppel assigned a thirty-five-man Royal Navy detachment to accompany the expedition. This far exceeded his orders from the Admiralty, which had ordered him only to send a single officer "to assist in making Floats for their passing the Rivers, Drafts of the Country through which they pass, and on other such services as you shall find necessary." (9) Keppel saw much further than the Admiralty, and knew the immediate needs of Braddock's force would require more from the navy than merely making maps. His orders to the officer leading the naval detachment Keppel stated "the intent of these Men [is] to facilitate as much as possible the getting the Cannon & Train over the Mountains, [...] they are likewise to perform all other Services that shall be thought expedient by General Braddock" including "assisting them in the Navigating Floats and other Contrivances across Rivers." (10)

Despite his forethought and substantial efforts, Keppel and Braddock both shared a fatal flaw in their strategy: failing to understand the size of the continent. They both imagined that the push against Fort Duquesne (modern day Pittsburgh) could link up with a separate campaign against Fort Niagara on



*HMS Centurion, battling the Covadonga in June, 1743.
Keppel was on board. Painting by Samuel Scott.*

Lake Ontario. (11) Given the difficulties Braddock would face in reaching Fort Duquesne through harsh terrain with little logistical support, the idea that they could double that distance and successfully join forces with another army is incredible.

While Braddock marched to his doom, Keppel continued to travel the Chesapeake and push for support in the new war before returning to England. Braddock met his death on the retreat from the disastrous Battle on the Monongahela. Keppel had most of his life still to live and would go on to monumental victories over the French at sea and even became First Lord of the Admiralty during the closing year of the American Revolutionary War.

John Carlyle's halls were host to great political and military minds for a moment in history. For a few days governors, army officers, and diplomats joined a legendary naval hero in forging the future of America.

End Notes:

- (1) John Carlyle letter to George Carlyle, Alexandria, August 15, 1755, "The Personal and Family Correspondence of Col. John Carlyle of Alexandria, Virginia," annotated by J. F. Carlyle, NOVA Parks, page 50-52, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.novaparks.com/sites/default/files/John%20Carlyle%201720-1780%20Annotated%20Correspondence_0.pdf> .

- (2) Preston, *Braddock's Defeat*, page 65.
- (3) Preston, *Braddock's Defeat*, page 89.
- (4) Orme, Robert, Journal, in Sargent, Winthrop, *The History of an Expedition Against Fort Du Quesne, in 1755; Under Major-General Edward Braddock*, Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1856, pages 289-290.
- (5) ADM 36/5151, muster book of the *Centurion*, October 1754-September 1755, f.99.
- (6) Winfield, Rif, *British Warships in the Age of Sail 1714-1792: Design, Construction, Careers and Fates*, Seaforth: Minnesota, 2007, page 300.
- (7) Catalog entry, portrait of Admiral Augustus Keppel by Joshua Reynolds, 1779, Royal Museums of Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, accessed March 16, 2018, <<http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/14295.html>>.
- (8) Keppel to Cleveland, March 14, 1755, ADM 1/480, ff. 523-524.
- (9) ADM 1/480, Augustus Keppel letter dated March 14, 1755, f.524.
- (10) Keppel orders to Spindelowe, quoted in Yagi, George, *The Struggle for North America, 1754-1758: Britannia's Tarnished Laurels*, eBook: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- (11) ADM 1/480, Augustus Keppel letter dated March 14, 1755, f.524.



Kyle Dalton, "Braddock's Tars" March 2018

News from the Educator

Since August we have hosted 1 girl scout troupe, 1 group tour, and 250 students on school programs.

Unfortunately we had to cancel our Crafts at Carlyle Program childrens program this summer due to weather issues (as that's when the hurricane was supposed to roll through), but we plan on bringing it back next year. We're moving our Hands on History Tent event to June next year, so that we can cover both the Civil War and Juneteenth, which we're pretty excited about.

Our Halloween events were incredibly successful this year, even with our Friday night event being in the rain. We've received quite a lot of positive feedback and are still expecting to hear from a few more of the participants. Next year, we are considering included a more family-friendly event time where things aren't quite as scary and the children can solve some puzzles as well. Once again our trick-or-treating event was a huge success. We had over 200 people show up to participate in the games and crafts we had set up on the back terrace. Depending on the weather next year, we may try to move this event to the front yard next year and add a bit more to it.

~Allie Kelley



News from the Site Specialist

Summer has come and gone and the fall programming that Allie and I did is now over. Trivia Nights at Historic Sites with Lee-Fendall House was a smashing success! Every single evening was sold out. We raised \$1,510.80 which we split between the two sites. We will be doing this event again next summer so mark your calendars for May 17, 2019 for the next series of Trivia Nights.

September was a busy month with two programs. The Outlandish Fashion Show and Tea was on September 9th. Despite the cold and rainy weather, all participants showed up and had a fantastic time. The Royal Scottish Country Dance Group started off the tea by performing some 18th century dances that John Carlyle may have done while he was alive. The Appins Regiment then did an informative Fashion Show of 18th Century Scottish clothes. Calling Card Events, as always, provided us with delicious food and tea. Our other September event was our annual Mansion House Whiskey Tasting. We offered a Young Professionals price this year which proved to be very popular. Thank you to board member Katie Monroe for volunteering to work the event and thank you to board member Bill Dickinson for attending. Of course we couldn't have run the program without the support of our sponsors: Oxford Finance and Visit Alexandria. The weather was perfect for a wonderful night of stories by Rich Gillespie, whiskey by Great Blue Heron, and delicious food by Society Fair. We look forward to continuing these relationships in the coming years.

November will be a quiet month as we prepare for the Holiday season. We have two programs in December. First is our annual Scottish Walk Open House from 12pm-4pm. We hold this in conjunction with the Scottish Walk Parade here in Alexandria. We plan to have reenactors throughout the house along with docents. Our other big holiday program is Candlelight Tours which we participate in alongside of Gadsby's Tavern, Lee-Fendall House and a guest site. This year's guest site is Black History Museum. Tickets for Candlelight Tours can be purchased through the Office of Historic Alexandria's Website. If you are able to help out with either of these events please let us know, we will need people to help in the house for both programs!

~Kerry Mitchell



Whiskey Tasting 9/29/18



Trivia Night in the Lee-Fendall garden



Trick or Treat on the Magnolia Terrace

Upcoming Events



Scottish Walk Open House

Saturday, December 1; 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Don't miss our annual open house celebrating the Scottish Heritage of Alexandria and John Carlyle. Free.

Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours

Saturday, December 8; 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm

This year's tour includes Carlyle House, Gadsby's Tavern, Lee-Fendall House, and, guest site Alexandria Black History Museum. In addition to the historic buildings decorated and open for the festivities, the guest site features "Our Alexandria," The Sharon J. Frazier and Linwood M. Smith Dollhouse Collection. These beautiful miniatures tell the story of African American life in Alexandria and Virginia. Fee.

Friends of Carlyle House Burns Night Party

Friday, January 25, 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm

Join fellow Friends of Carlyle House at Gadsby's Tavern Museum's Ballroom for an evening commemorating the life of Robert Burns and his contributions to Scottish culture. Free.

John Carlyle's 299th Birthday Celebration

Saturday, February 2; 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Come wish a very happy 299th birthday to John Carlyle! Enjoy a special birthday treat and visit with the Carlyle family and friends. Free.

Saint Patrick's Day Parade Open House

Saturday, March 2; 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Watch the parade from the best vantage point in town! Visit the Herbert family, who will be receiving guests in their home this afternoon. Free.

See our website for more details.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram!

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



News from the Site Manager

Wow, it's already November! How did that happen? It must be November because we had some amazingly excellent and popular Halloween programs. A huge thanks to FOCH Board member Katie Monroe, who worked hard and played a major role for our "Escape the Sanderson Witches" event. We greatly appreciate her time and effort on Carlyle House's behalf.



Sanderson Sisters and Billy Butcherson (Katie Monroe, Board member on R.)

I'm sure you enjoyed our cover article by Kyle Dalton, an expert on the soldiers and sailors who took part in the Braddock expedition. Kyle spoke at a standing-room-only event at The Lyceum for us in March, and we're hoping that he will publish his research in book form some day. If so, we will definitely host a book signing.

If you've been in the garden lately, you've surely noticed that the unstable areas in the brick walkway have been repaired. Many thanks to the 2017 FOCH Annual Appeal, which raised just under \$8000 for this project. We funded the remainder of the cost with the money we raised in Alexandria's 2018 Spring2ACTION fundraiser. We even have a little bit left over for some general garden improvements.

We hope you will join us in the Gadsby's Tavern ballroom the evening of January 25 for an FOCH Burns Night celebration. Stay tuned for more details and an invitation.

Please let us know if you'd like to help with our Scottish Walk open house on December 1 and Candlelight Tours on December 8. These are very well-attended programs and we can always use extra help.

Finally, after all these years, we have membership online. You may continue to renew your membership via the U.S. Mail, but you may also do so online. Go to our website: <https://www.novaparks.com/parks/carlyle-house-historic-park> and scroll down to the Friends section. Click on the appropriate button to choose your level of membership, and off you go. We loaded profiles for everyone who was a member as of June, so check for your name when you renew.

Thank you all for everything you do to support Carlyle House!
~Susan Hellman