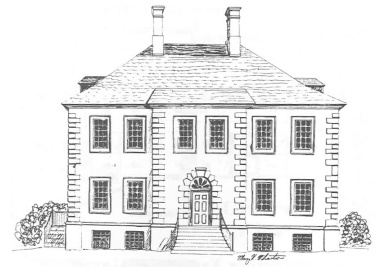


Carlyle Connection

“It’s a fine beginning.”



Who Actually Designed Carlyle House?

By Susan Hellman

“Perhaps the most ambitious and finest city house for its date in Virginia outside Williamsburg, this [house] would not be out of place in Salisbury Close in England.” So begins my favorite description of Carlyle House, found in *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont*. [1] Of course we all know that Carlyle House is THE finest city house, but I appreciate the fact that experts in the field of architectural history agree. But who actually designed and constructed this ambitious and fine city house? Although Carlyle briefly mentions the construction of his house in letters to his brother George, he never mentions any craftsmen by name. Who oversaw this ambitious venture?

Before discussing the who, I’d like to explore the when. I have always found the construction timeline of the house puzzling. According to gifted historian and author James Munson, John Carlyle purchased two half-acre lots in July of 1749, while residing on the thirty-acre property in Cameron that he leased from John West. Munson theorized that Carlyle began building a warehouse on his Alexandria lots shortly after the purchase, in order to fulfill the requirement that purchasers build within two years. Carlyle sailed for England with his father-in-law, William Fairfax, in the spring of 1750. Upon his return to Alexandria in May of 1751, Carlyle began construction of his Alexandria house, expecting it to be completed by the following year. [2] Yet sizable and well-appointed colonial dwellings normally took between four and six years to complete. [3] For example, construction of Gunston Hall began in 1755 and ended in 1759. The Tayloes built Mount Airy in Richmond County between 1758 and 1764. Did Carlyle really expect it would only take one year to build such a massive stone house? Even today, houses can take longer to build than a year. Did Carlyle’s familiarity with

building projects make him overconfident? Or did his experience as an undertaker perhaps introduce him to trusted workers who could oversee the construction process during his time in England? Perhaps Carlyle asked a trusted friend such as John Dalton, who had Carlyle’s power of attorney while Carlyle was in England, to supervise the project. [4] In November of 1752, Carlyle complained about associated costs and problems in a letter to his brother George:

I am now out of hopes of getting into my house This Winter, the Violent Rains we have had this Fall, has hurt the Stone Walls that We Was obliged to Take down A part After it Was nigh its Height, which has been A Loss & great disapointment To me, however Time & patience Will over come all (I am In hopes) its A Pleasure to build in England but here Where We are obliged To Doe Everything With one’s own Servants & thise Negros make it Require Constant Attendance & Care - & So much Trouble that If I had Suspected it woud been What I have meet with, I believe I Shoud made Shift With A Very Small house
-[5]

These construction delays made it impossible for the house to be completed in 1752, the date carved on the keystone. Unfortunately, no records exist that explain the construction timeline.

But the timeline question aside, who designed Carlyle House? J. Everette Fauber, Jr., author of the Carlyle House

restoration report, discussed evidence supporting builder and stonemason John Ariss as the undertaker of Carlyle House. Fauber did not baldly state that Ariss built the house. Instead, he noted, "Until further evidence comes to light, it will be impossible to conclusively tie Ariss to Carlyle House." [6] In the vein of six degrees of Kevin Bacon, Ariss was a Virginian, a distant relative of George Washington, and by 1773 lived in Berkeley County, where Carlyle owned his Lymekilns property. [7] Ariss advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* in May of 1751, upon his return from a trip to England, announcing his readiness to begin work on "Buildings of all Sorts and Dimensions...in the neatest Manner, (and at cheaper rates) either of the Ancient or Modern Order of Gibbs' Architect." [8] Did Carlyle and Ariss perhaps meet in England or even return to Virginia on the same vessel? Is this another Kevin Bacon coincidence? Would Ariss' lack of experience explain some of the unconventional elements of the house?

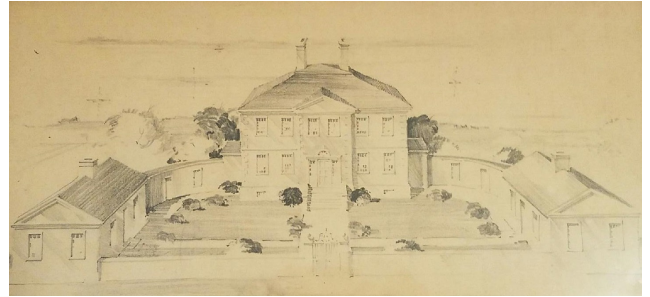
Fauber based his evidence for Ariss as the design source for Carlyle House on the seminal 1945 book *Mansions of Virginia* by Thomas Tileston Waterman. Waterman theorized that Ariss based the design of Carlyle House on Craigiehall, located outside of Edinburgh, Scotland. [9]



Craigiehall

But the changes to Craigiehall that make it similar to Carlyle House were made after 1755, far too late to have been a design inspiration for Carlyle. Additionally, Waterman partially based his claim on a conjectural drawing that he himself made of Carlyle House. He added features to the house that never existed, such as a central

pediment, a double hipped roof, and curving hyphens connecting the office and kitchen to the main block of the house. In so doing, he made Carlyle House look far more like Craigiehall than it actually does. [10]



Waterman's conjectural drawing of Carlyle House

Architectural historian Camille Wells points out that Waterman attributed fourteen houses to Ariss, which would have been impossible. Completing this many houses in the colonial period would have taken somewhere between fifty-six and one hundred years. [11] It appears unlikely, but not impossible, that Ariss played a role in the design of Carlyle House.

Another candidate who may have had a hand in the design of Carlyle House is William Waite, who arrived in northern Virginia by February of 1752, when he signed the petition to move the Fairfax County courthouse to Alexandria. Carlyle signed that same petition. [12] In June of that year, William Waite "joyner," witnessed Lawrence Washington's will. Mount Vernon records show that Waite did quite a bit of work at the estate between 1752 and 1760. [13] C. Allen Brown speculates that Waite began his Virginia career as a stonemason at Carlyle House. [14] Waite's career is not as well documented as Ariss' but we do know that he spent many years in the Alexandria area as a master carpenter and undertaker. Waite contracted to build the Quantico "stone church" in Dumfries in 1752, sadly, now demolished. [15] He married George Mason's cousin Jane Dinwiddie in 1753. [16] In August of 1754, Waite listed himself as a resident of Belhaven in Virginia when he advertised in the *Maryland Gazette*, seeking the return of three servants. [17] Fairfax County Court Minute Books include several references to Waite between 1752 and 1760. In one case, Carlyle's business partner John Dalton "undertook special bail for the defendant" when William Carr sued Waite. [18]



Mount Airy, Warsaw vicinity, Richmond County, VA. Photo by Frances Benjamin Johnson, ca. 1930-1939. Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division.

We know for a fact that Waite and Carlyle knew one another. Carlyle signed a note dated April 16, 1761, testifying to the truth of a ledger account of Thomas Widgeon to William Waite for the years 1753 - 1761. The document indicates that Waite had credit in "Mr. Carlyle's Store," that he plastered the courthouse in Alexandria in 1754, and worked on Quantico Church as well as another church. The account also includes an intriguing entry that appears to read "By Mr. Carlyle hous and Wm. Waite and Mr. (illegible) and Mr. Dalton." [19]

In 1760, Waite moved on to work on Mount Airy with William Buckland and other talented craftsmen. Many have noted similarities between Carlyle House and Mount Airy. Does that have any significance? Or are they simply typical 18th century Georgian houses? Or are both dwellings based on the same English pattern books? Or did Waite have a hand in designing both?

Back to my puzzling construction timeline, it appears that although both Arris and Waite had the skills and the opportunity to build Carlyle House, neither was in Virginia long enough to complete the construction of Carlyle House by 1752, when Carlyle assumed the house would be ready. However, either could have designed the house, overseen the beginning of construction, left instructions for workers, and moved on. This would explain many of the construction problems. Both men had little experience with construction projects at this point, and may not have left lucid instructions for workers to follow.

Finally, John Carlyle himself is a very strong candidate for overseeing the design and construction of Carlyle House.

He served in a similar capacity for at least twenty-one building projects in the City of Alexandria. He also managed construction projects at Mount Vernon for George Washington and at Belvoir for George William Fairfax. [20] Carlyle's 1780 probate inventories include a vast array of building equipment. As a gentleman of rank, Carlyle would have been familiar with popular pattern books such as *Palladio Londenensis* (1734) by William Salmon and *A Book of Architecture, Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments* (1728) by James Gibbs. Quite possibly, Carlyle referred to these pattern books, sought advice from Arris and/or Waite, and created his own design. This would also explain some of the construction oddities, as Carlyle House was built early in Carlyle's undertaking career. Carlyle apparently enjoyed construction projects, noting in a 1766 letter to his brother George, "If you has as great a Taist of building as I have had...." [21]

So who designed Carlyle House? Without further evidence, we may never know. I am putting my money on either Carlyle or Waite, or some kind of collaboration between the two.

Source Notes:

Richard Guy Wilson and contributors, *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), pg. 79. This book is part of a multi-volume series, *Buildings of the United States*, sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians and based on Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's famous *Buildings of England*.

2. James Munson, *Col. John Carlyle, Gent.: A True and Just Account of the Man and His House*, (Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1986), pp. 15, 33, 122-125.

3. Camille Wells, "The Multistoried House: Twentieth-Century Encounters with the Domestic Architecture of Colonial Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (Autumn, 1998), pg. 372.

4. Munson, pg. 35.

5. John Carlyle to George Carlyle, November 12, 1752.

6. <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/historic/info/archaeology/SiteReportFauber1980CarlyleHouseRestoration.pdf>, II-10.

7. https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Ariss_John_ca_1729-1799 (Note: I do not generally trust internet sources, but I know the author of this entry, and have found the Encyclopedia Virginia to be a reliable source).
8. Wells, pg. 372.
9. Fauber Garbee, II, 9-10.
10. Wells, pg. 371.
11. Ibid, pg. 372.
12. Munson, pp. 38-39.
13. Will of Lawrence Washington, 20 June 1752; Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 14 vols. (New York, 1889-1893), vol. 14, pp. 423-427. Washington Ledger A., p. 86. Cited in W.W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series* (Charlottesville: University Press of VA, 1990), vol. 7, pg. 235.
14. C. Allen Brown, January, 2015 Appendix to supplement "Cultural Landscapes of Menokin," November 2013, pg. 11.
15. Dettengen Parish Vestry Book, 1745 – 1802, pp. 36, 38.
16. George Harrison Sanford King, "Copies of Extant Wills from Counties Whose Records have been Destroyed," reprinted in vol. 4 of *Genealogies of Virginia Families From Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 1981, pp. 51-59.
17. *Maryland Gazette*, 29 August 1754, pg. 3. c. 2.
18. Fairfax County Minute Book 1756-1753, pg. 214.
19. Robert Fergusson Papers: Box 1, Folder 31, Thomas Widertgon to William Waite, 04/16/1761, Georgetown University Archives.
10. Munson, 122.
21. John Carlyle to George Carlyle, August 1766.

News from the Educator

Since the beginning of February we have hosted six group tours, a DAR Tea, and 162 students on school programs. Revamping of these programs is still in progress and the programs will continue to shift over time as we improve our offerings of school programs.

Planning for summer programs is officially underway. This summer we are hosting our reading program again with Alexandria Public Library, featuring four books with a historical focus to be paired with a craft. We've bumped the age range from 2-6 to 4-8 as these books are a bit harder for children to follow. We're in the process of creating new partnerships for this year's Hands on History Tent, which will focus on Colonial Plants and their various uses. We'll once again be hosting our Crafts at Carlyle program to coincide with the King Street Art Festival, where children can design and paint their very own floor cloth to take home.

~Allie Kelley



Two rogues at the 2017 Hands on History Tent

News from the Site Specialist

Spring has sprung and we're well into our spring programming. In March we hosted 232 people through the house for our St. Patrick's Day Parade Open House despite the parade being cancelled. People enjoyed visiting Mr. & Mrs. Herbert and learning more about the house's early 19th century history. At the end of March, Kyle Dalton gave a wonderful lecture on the Royal Navy sailors who were on Braddock's expedition.

Despite a chilly April day, Braddock Day saw 376 people through our gates. As always our living historians did a wonderful job.

This month our annual Mother's Day Tea is sold out. Saturday, May 5th we are hosting our first ever chocolate and wine tasting featuring locally made Potomac Chocolate. Thank you to our sponsors: Charles Aldrich, Mr. John Dumsick & Ms. Susannah Rast, Jack & Tanya Pitzer, Ken & Shelly Miller, and Mike & Linda Budinski.

~Kerry Mitchell



Kyle Dalton presenting "Braddock's Tars: Common Sailors and the Braddock Expedition" at The Lyceum on March 26

Upcoming Events



Friends of Carlyle House Annual Meeting

Friday, June 1, 6:00 pm on the

Join us on the Magnolia Terrace for refreshments followed by the annual business meeting. Please call the office or email carlyle@nvrpa.org to RSVP.

Attics & Alleys

Every Saturday morning in May

This walking tour explores rarely seen spaces in Lee-Fendall House, Gadsby's Tavern, the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum, and Carlyle House. Reservations are required. For information and tickets, please contact Gadsby's Tavern Museum at 703.746.4242. Fee.

Yoga on the Magnolia Terrace

Tuesdays, 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm; select Saturdays 10 am to 11 am through the fall

Join yoga instructor Barbara Douglass or Becky Super for an hour long Vinyasa Flow Yoga. See our website for details. Fee.

Perfectly Paired: Chocolate and Wine Tasting

Saturday, May 5; 6:30 pm

What goes better with wine than chocolate? Join Potomac Chocolate on the Magnolia Terrace for an evening of locally made chocolates paired with delicious wines. Fee.

Mother's Day Tea

Sunday, May 13; 2:30 pm

Treat that special woman in your life to an elegant afternoon tea on our Magnolia Terrace. Fee. (This event is already sold out).

Read, See, Do!

Mondays in July, 2:00 p.m.

Carlyle House and Alexandria Library are teaming up on a reading program paired with an activity. The books have a historic theme and can be tied in with Carlyle House.

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

If you recall, the 2014 Annual Appeal raised funds to create a replica of General Braddock's uniform and sash. Carol James wove the sash using the sprang technique, and delivered it to us last summer. Hopefully you caught her fascinating lecture at Mount Vernon

where she demonstrated using the sash to carry a wounded soldier off

the field. The photo above depicts Carol's sash on Braddock's uniform, created by Henry Cooke. The uniform isn't quite completed, but Henry wanted us to have it for Braddock Day. Most people, including me, can't tell that it isn't completed yet, but Henry will have it all done within the coming month. Many thanks for your generosity in funding this.



General Braddock alongside Sarah Carlyle's and Sarah Herbert's dresses

We had beautiful weather for Garden Day this year. Close to 1400 people strolled the grounds, shopped at our vendors' booths, and enjoyed our beautiful gardens. A fraction of those visitors toured the house as well, but it was so lovely outside, we can't blame them. Many thanks to those of you who worked so hard and put in so many long hours to make this happen. If you'd like to become a garden volunteer, please let me know.

Mark your calendars for the Friends of Carlyle House Annual Meeting on Friday, June 1 at 6:00 pm on our Magnolia Terrace. We'll have a short business meeting to elect new officers and board members, and of course we'll have delightful refreshments as well. If you'd like to serve on the board, please contact Suellen Savukas. You can email her at our carlyle@nvrpa.org account and I'll be sure she gets it.

Finally, we bid a fond farewell to Rosalind Bovey, who has faithfully served on the Friends of Carlyle House board since at least 1991, serving as President from 2003—2011. She and her husband Bob are moving closer to family, but have promised to come back and visit us. We will greatly miss her smile, her sparkling personality, and her stalwart help and support. We hope for frequent visits. In the next Carlyle Connection, you will see Rosalind's name in the emeritus column.

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