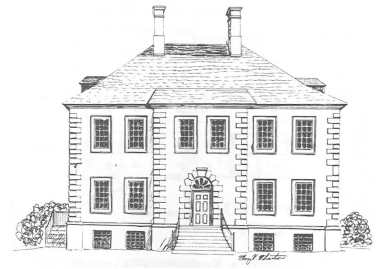


Carlyle Connection

“It’s a fine beginning.”



EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHESAPEAKE GENTRY PARLORS - Sofas, Settees, Couches and More By *Richard Klingenmaier*

“1 Large, neat, and easy Couch for the Passage”
George Washington to Robert Cary, London

“In The Parlour”

The study of surviving estate inventories, diaries and letters reveals that furniture in the parlors of eighteenth century houses did not vary that much between “middling” and “elite” (wealthiest) households. Nearly all parlors contained a standard set of mahogany or walnut furnishings, frequently a mix: half a dozen or more side chairs; a pair of card tables; one or two tables of different sizes; a tea table, rectangular or round; a large framed looking glass, mounted either above the fire place mantel or on the pier between the windows; a woven carpet; and a pair of andirons with tongs and shovel. The parlor could be enhanced further by ceramic images and/or other types of garniture on the mantel, sets of prints or maps on the walls, and occasionally a family portrait, depending upon the individual owner’s taste.



Wilton House parlor

The difference between middling and elite furnishings was not quantity or form but rather quality: mahogany vs walnut and cherry; carving vs plain; fabric vs leather upholstery. In reality, everyone sought the same generic forms. It was the owners’ ability to afford a certain level of quality in those forms that made the difference. Despite the frequent use of terms such as “neat” and “neat and plain” when ordering new furniture for their parlors, most elite owners favored furniture embellished with some carving and other decorative detailing for this most public space. At the same time, most elite inventories do not include any individual furniture forms in great depth with the possible exception of the “tea table.” This 18th century icon is found occasionally in both parlor and dining room spaces, as well as in bed chambers, illustrating the importance accorded to this most vital social ritual - the serving of tea to one’s guests and family. John Carlyle owned two tea tables: an “old carved mahogany tea Table...” and “1 painted Tea Table.” The mahogany version likely was in the parlor or dining room; the “painted” tea table, clearly not made of expensive mahogany, was probably in the master bed chamber. George Washington’s household inventory lists three tea tables: one each in the “Little Parlour;” the “Front Parlour;” and in the small “Dining Room.”

Many 18th century owners, including the elite, generally followed the prevailing practice of moving furniture from room to room as needed, as well as using certain pieces of furniture for more than one function. Card tables were utilized as pier tables and small tilt-top stands to hold lighting devices served as small tea tables.

Where the parlor was smaller than an adjoining, dining

room, one can easily envision the dining room also serving as a “parlor” when gaming or other social activities involved a large number of people who could not be accommodated in the smaller parlor. Elite inventories occasionally list tea tables and card tables in both of these public spaces simultaneously. In fact, both spaces were likely utilized for “parlor functions” more frequently than even the inventories might suggest. This utilization speaks to the multipurpose use of spaces in eighteenth century houses. While the impressive large dining room in Carlyle House is routinely identified today as a space for formal dining, John and Sarah Carlyle most likely utilized it as a “large parlor” when the occasion called for it. The presence of a game table in this space supports this use.

Among the Chesapeake elite households, furnishings in general were not necessarily of the same period or design, but rather most likely an accumulation of pieces over time. The Mason family of Virginia for example, according to researchers at Gunston Hall, chose not to have the newest styles or the most expensive furniture forms in terms of materials and upholstery, although they could well afford them.

While surviving inventories, in general, are not that specific when describing individual furniture forms [An exception being the “Windsor” chair usually found in the “Passage”], the inventories do frequently identify furniture pieces as “old,” “worn,” or “old fashion.” This suggests that furniture in elite households was not only purchased over a period of time, but was likely a mix of imported British and regionally-made pieces, to include furniture from Philadelphia, New York and Boston. George Washington purchased several pieces of furniture in Philadelphia during his Presidency that he subsequently brought back to Mount Vernon upon his retirement. This may have included the “Sopha” (Sp) valued at \$70.00 listed as being “In The Front Parlour” in his estate inventory.

While Virginia and Maryland gentry acquired most of their furniture through commercial sources, they were not above acquiring additional pieces through local estate auctions or “vendue sales.” In August 1774, Washington purchased second-hand furniture and decorative accessories from the Belvoir estate of George William Fairfax. Among his purchases were “a Bust of the Immortal Shakespeare,” “Two Candlesticks,” “12 Chairs,” “1 large carpet,” “1 Mahogy Side board,” “a Mahogy Card Table,”

“and “1 looking glass.” He, in fact, far out-spent his neighbors, ultimately paying the substantial sum of 169.12.6 [Pounds, shillings, pence]. Among his Alexandria friends, Colonel John Carlyle purchased “1 bedstead, Curtains, & window curtains,” paying 7.0.0 [Pounds]. This is the bedstead currently in the master bed chamber of the Carlyle House.

Chairs were numerically the most common seating furniture form in elite households in the Chesapeake region, frequently acquired over time in multiple sets of six or twelve. Parlors invariably displayed 6 to 12 chairs, sometimes one or two with arms. Their seats were usually upholstered in fabric or leather. Some household inventories list as many as 40 chairs throughout the house. The authors of Gunston Hall’s “Room Use Study” recommended that George Mason’s house, Gunston Hall, be furnished with 54-60 chairs.

The Sofa

Of all the furniture forms found in parlors during the last half of the eighteenth century, an upholstered sofa, when present, dominated the room. All other seating furniture was meant to support it, frequently upholstered in an identical manner. Because of their cost, sofas were found only in elite houses well into the first quarter of the 19th century. By 1830, they became more readily affordable for the middle class consumer. Interestingly, it appears that because of the “...softened comfort it provided or because women and textiles have long been affiliated, the sofa was something of a metaphor for the female sphere of influence...” and it was upon this prized seating form that the lady of the house chose to be portrayed in paintings. A gentleman in portraiture, on the other hand, rarely sits on a sofa unless accompanied by his wife. His preferred place was seated at his desk.

Sofas, couches, and settees were found in eighteenth century elite houses in the Chesapeake region, but in much smaller numbers than in the mid-Atlantic and New England regions. Local cabinet makers such as Francis Hepburn of Annapolis, Maryland, advertised in the Maryland Gazette on 13 July 1769, that he had for sale “in the most fashionable Mode Sofas, Couches, Settees...” These were by far the most expensive seating furniture forms, primarily because of their upholstery.

During their reinterpretation of the George Wythe House

parlor in the 1980s, curators at Colonial Williamsburg removed an upholstered sofa because they felt it was not appropriate. While acknowledging the sofa as an eighteenth century feature of many upper-class houses in the mid-Atlantic and New England regions, new research had determined that it was not common in most parlors in the Chesapeake region. Since no inventory existed for the Wythe house, it was decided not to include a sofa. The same was concluded by the authors of the Room Use Study at Gunston Hall where no extant inventory was found. Indeed, surviving household inventories of elite Chesapeake households support this sparse presence of sofas.

Of the 100 "Elite" inventories of houses in the Chesapeake region reviewed by the author, only 17 list a "sofa" or a "settee." Another similar seating form, a "Couch," is listed 16 times. The terms sofa, settee, and couch appear to have been used interchangeably by inventory takers in the eighteenth century to denote an elongated seat for sitting or reclining, with arms, and a back high enough to provide a back rest. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between them when they are listed in a non-room-by room inventory. However, where their location is identified and their upholstery described, one can draw significant clues.

Where "sofas" are listed and identified in the formal parlor, they are frequently described as being upholstered in expensive fabrics such as either red or green satin moreen and worsted damasks, frequently ensuite with upholstered side chairs. The estate inventory of John Morton Jordan of Annapolis, Maryland, lists in the "Large Wainscot Room 10 Mahogany Chairs - Crimson Sattin (Sp) & Worsted Damask bottoms ... with furniture Check Covers to each. 1 Sophia (Sp) with ditto," i.e., with matching crimson satin & worsted damask upholstery.

Where a "couch" is listed, invariably it is covered with leather and located in the passage. The key differences between a "sofa" and a "couch" in eighteenth century terms seems to have been their covering, i.e., fabric for a sofa, leather for a couch, and their respective locations. In August, 1759, George Washington received from Robert Cary & Company in London "A Neat Mahay [Mahogany]... Couch with a Roll head and Leather Casters to Ditto, stufft up in the best manner and Covd. with black Leathr., quilted, best princes Metal Nails, Bolster and 2 pillows, fittd wt Goose Feathers." When Washington initially

ordered this couch, he requested "1 Large, neat, and easy Couch for a Passage." The reference to a "Couch with a Roll head" would indicate the couch had a serpentine back, what is referred to today as a "camel back." The couch was likely early Chippendale (1754-60) in form with serpentine back, roll-over arms and straight, square legs. By the time of Washington's death in 1799, this couch had been relegated to the passage "In the Garret." This move from the lower, public passage to the garret suggests the likelihood of extensive wear on the leather covering.



Formal Settee

"Settees" are usually understood to have been a smaller version of the sofa, but with their mahogany backs and arms left un-upholstered. Like sofas, settees usually had upholstered, padded seats and were invariably located in parlors. George Washington's inventory lists "1 Settee in the Little Parlour." Among the numerous furnishings in John Randolph's Williamsburg, Virginia, "Drawing Room" (parlor) in 1775, there were "Ten handsome Mahogany Chairs," "Two Mahogany card tables," "two tea tables," and "two Mahogany settees. Clearly this pair of settees were considered an appropriate substitute for a sofa in Randolph's "best" room.

John Carlyle's Seating Furniture: Some Conclusions

John Carlyle's household inventory taken on 13 November 1780 shows his seating furniture consisted of: "1 Mahogany leather bottom armed Couch;" "12 Mahogany leather Bottom Chairs (1 armed);" "12 old leather Bottomed Chairs with Brass Nails;" "2 walnut ditto

Armed;" "6 old walnut chairs with damask bottoms;" "12 Armed Windsor Chairs (1 double armd ?);" and 11 other assorted chairs. Since these seating forms were not inventoried on a room-by-room basis, it is not absolutely clear where they were used. However, certain assumptions are possible.

The mahogany leather bottomed armed couch, valued at 3 pounds, may have been used in the lower passage. The couch's apparent good condition (not described as "old" or "worn"), however, may suggest use in the parlor rather than the passage where, presumably, it would have suffered from heavier use by both visitors and perhaps house servants. Its description as being "armed" indicates it was likely of Chippendale form. The absence of a more sophisticated "sofa" or "settee" in the Carlyles' parlor suggests the "couch" may have been considered an appropriate substitute. Personal taste may have simply dictated this preference, not affordability.*

The 12 mahogany leather-bottom chairs (one with arms) valued at 12 pounds appear to be the "best" chairs in the inventory and most likely were used in the dining room. The 12 "old leather bottomed chairs with brass nails" valued at only 3 pounds were likely at one point the best chairs in Carlyle's house and were probably used in the dining room as well. Their "old" designation suggests that they were subsequently relegated to secondary spaces - perhaps bed chambers and/or Carlyle's study - when the newer leather bottomed chairs were acquired.

Given the size constraints of the parlor, but nonetheless a room intended to impress guests with fine furnishings, the 6 "old" walnut chairs with their expensive damask bottoms would appear to have been in this important space, most likely well before Sybil Carlyle's death in 1769. Since John remained a widower in poor health until his passing in 1780, room furnishings probably did not change much, if at all, during that interval of time.

* The current placement of the spinet in the parlor would appear to preclude space for a couch as well. However, the spinet's presence there is conjecture, since it is not listed in the inventory. Sarah Carlyle most likely moved it to her own home at the time of her marriage in 1775. Prior to her marriage, it is possible that the spinet was in use elsewhere, perhaps in the large dining room or the upper or lower passages, as suggested by some inventories.

Sources Consulted:

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- Gunston Hall Room Use Study, On-line.
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- Dalzell, Robert F. and Dalzell, Lee Baldwin. George Washington's Mount Vernon. Oxford University Press. 1998.
- Miller Jr., Edgar G. American Antique Furniture. Dover Publications, Inc. New York. 1966.
- Goodwin, Mary. "The George Wythe House: Its Furniture and Furnishings". Colonial Williamsburg Digital Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. 1990.

News from the Educator



Three weeks of summer camp have concluded and it was another successful year for the program. We introduced a new session called Mini Camp Carlyle, a half-day session for rising K-2 graders. It was a small group of 5 campers but they enjoyed coming to camp every day. I plan to have another Mini Camp next summer.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our August session due to low numbers. Despite the cancellation we had 11 campers in one session and 16 in another, all who enjoyed the camp. This year's field trips again included Gadsby's Tavern, The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary, and Alexandria Archaeology. field trips this year included the Claude Moore Colonial Farm and a Potomac Riverboat cruise. Our minicamp had the opportunity to assist the Archaeology Museum campers with a dig at Fort Ward. All the children found artifacts that will help city archaeologist learn more about the African American community located there. Once again Camp Carlyle was a success with children expressing interest to return next year. Can't wait until next year! ~Vanessa Herndon

News from the Site Specialist

After a busy spring of public programming, we followed up with a busy summer! We held our third public tea of the year in June, this time with a Southern theme . Inspired by the popularity of the PBS series, "Mercy Street," we hosted a lovely and relaxing tea catered by Calling Card Events. WETA donated goody baskets for two special drawings including the Ken Burns documentary, "The Civil War," a book and DVD on the Roosevelts, as well as travel mugs. As an added bonus, our guests were treated to seeing a 1st edition of the hospital newspaper "The Cripple," published in October, 1864. Loaned to us by Chris and Marianne Foard from the Foard Collection of Civil War Nursing, the newspaper is very rare.

The Doug Thurman Concert Series kicked off on June 11th with the Farley Granger Band . Visitors cooled down with cold gelato served by our local gelato shop, Dolci Gelati. Dolci donates back 10% of the sales from gelato sold at their cart on our front lawn during each concert. Society Fair , our other big sponsor for this event, gives back 10% of all Carlyle-themed bento box sales during the concerts. Next up on the concert schedule is The Free Flowing Music Experience on August 13 and DuPont Brass on August 20.

Another fun event took place on Saturday, July 11th - the Carlyle House 40th Anniversary of opening as a museum! When we opened on January 18, 1976, the temperature was only 24 degrees! Therefore, we picked a sunny day which coincided with the Alexandria Birthday and USA Celebration at Oronoco Park to celebrate the historic event. Over 200 souls braved the heat for this anniversary event to visit our beloved museum before visiting the evening's festivities with fireworks that took place nearby.

This fall will be full of more great events, such as Scottish heritage-Outlander style programming (September 17-18), a first time ever bourbon tasting event (October 22), and the return of zombies in the garden (October 29)!

~Helen Wirka

Upcoming Events

Doug Thurman Summer Concert Series final concerts

Saturday, August 13; 7:00 p.m.

The Free Flowing Music Project concert rescheduled from July 23.

Saturday, August 20; 7:00 p.m.

Don't miss DuPont Brass for our final concert!

For both concerts, purchase a special Carlyle House picnic basket from Society Fair and join us on the lawn for an evening of music. Free.



Crafts and Games Day

Saturday, August 27; 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Join us for our a day of 18th century crafts and games! This event is designed for children ages 3-12, but all are welcome!

Scottish Heritage Outlander Weekend

Saturday and Sunday, September 17 and 18

Join us on Saturday for an open house focused on Scottish culture. Enjoy Scottish dance, music, and stories. Sunday we will host a tea on the Magnolia Terrace. Admission.

Mansion House Whiskey Tasting

Saturday, October 22

This whiskey tasting will harken back to the Civil War era and includes small bites and cheese pairings. Fee.

Walking Dead Footsteps Zombie evening

Saturday, October 29; 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Visitors will experience firsthand some encounters with 18th century zombies. A ghost tour of Alexandria is included in the admission. Reservations required. Fee.

Halloween Trick-or-Treating

Monday, October 31

Bring your little ghosts, goblins, princesses, and action heroes to trick or treat at Carlyle House.

The Architecture of Carlyle House: Behind the Scenes

Sunday, November 6; 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Join the Site Manager for a specialized tour highlighting the architectural history of Carlyle House. Fee

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



News from the Site Manager

Where has the summer gone? Time flies, and much has happened since the last Carlyle Connection. Helen and Vanessa have told you about some of the fun happenings at Carlyle House. I will fill you in on our more day-to-day activities.

In June, we replaced the aging UV-filtering window film on the museum windows. Over the years, the old film lost a high degree of its effectiveness and actually caused some of the window panes to crack. Since the replacement, you may have noticed a difference when looking at Carlyle House. In addition to its superior protective qualities, the new film provides better transparency. Where the old film was very shiny, reflective, and highly visible from the street, the new film is barely noticeable. We have a better view looking out, and the house looks better from the street. The best benefit is the superior protection to our valuable collection. Many thanks to Helen, who oversaw the project while I was out of town.

Speaking of thanks, I'd like to thank NOVA Parks for funding the UV film replacement, as well as a painting project coming up in mid-August. Tech Painting will paint the exterior trim and lampposts, the front door, the terrace balustrade, some interior trim, the stair risers, the masonry cellar walls, and the summerhouse. We are looking forward to seeing a refreshed and revitalized Carlyle House, ready for another forty years as a historic house museum. We will also purchase a new tent for the 2017 season. AND (there's more!) we got a new roof over our classroom space. Thanks, NOVA Parks!

Finally, I close on a sad note. Our longtime friend and volunteer, Dorothy Claypool, passed away last month. She volunteered here since at least 1986, beginning in the garden and moving on to several other tasks. In addition to giving tours and working in the garden, Dorothy researched the design for the summerhouse, pictured above, created an index for our newsletters, organized and cataloged our historic photograph collection, and handled a host of other duties. Whenever we needed help, Dorothy stepped in. We are working with her daughter Julia to think of an appropriate project or purchase to memorialize Dorothy. If you would like to contribute, please send a check to my attention made out to Carlyle House. We will all miss her greatly.

~Susan Hellman



The garden summerhouse, design researched by Dorothy Claypool