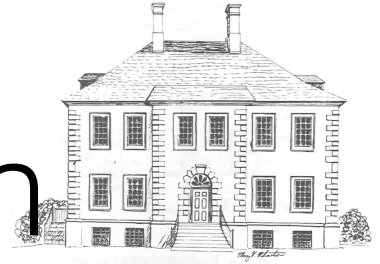


# Carlyle Connection

“It’s a fine beginning.”



## *The Architectural Context of Carlyle House*

*By Susan Hellman*

You all probably learned at some point that Carlyle House stands out as Alexandria’s only Georgian-Palladian mansion, but what exactly does that mean? Where did this architectural design originate? How did we get from basic temporary shelter to stone mansions? Completed in 1753, Carlyle House embodies the Georgian style of architecture in the United States, which gained ascendancy in Virginia circa 1700. By most measures, Georgian is the first European “style” of architecture popularized in Virginia. Pre-Georgian structures tend to be vernacular, although there are a handful of extant seventeenth-century examples of Gothic design (1). In Virginia, Georgian was a natural outgrowth of the existing vernacular, yet it also represented something more. Those who built in the Georgian style proclaimed their elite status. They were not backwards colonists; they were just as refined and cultured as those they left behind in Europe, especially England.

Georgian architecture did not appear in Virginia overnight. The majority of Virginia’s earliest European immigrants built crude and simple earthfast dwellings (2), usually one-room affairs, often with dirt floors, mud walls, thatched roofs, and “catted” chimneys made of tiny logs. Construction materials varied according to means and availability. The vast stands of timber in Virginia and the Chesapeake made timber-framed dwellings the least expensive and most easily-constructed houses. Brick came along later, and required more expertise than frame (3). Most individuals of middling means constructed frame dwellings clad in weatherboard or clapboard(4). Builders used stone based on its availability and proximity to the building site. Most considered stone a very high-quality and high-status building material. Stone was so desirable that many early Americans with wood frame houses scored the wood boards to look like stone blocks, and

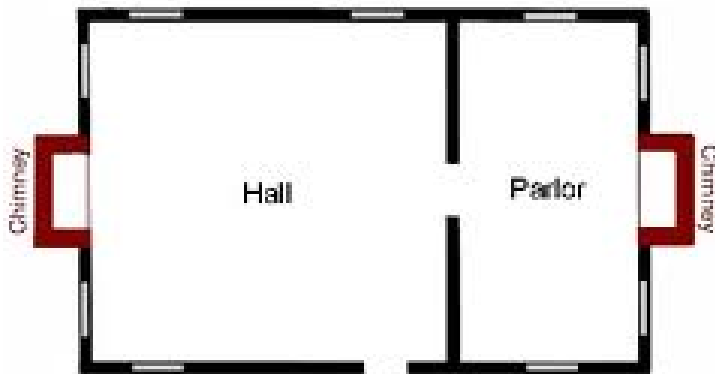


*Doesn't the gazebo look lovely in the snow?*

added sand to the exterior paint to mimic the textured appearance of stone. George Washington did this at Mount Vernon (5). By building Carlyle House in stone, John Carlyle proclaimed his wealth and social status to all. Stucco served as weatherproofing, adding a layer of protection from the elements.

By the early eighteenth century, settlers began constructing dwellings more expansive than a single room, many based on the British hall-parlor plan, which came to dominate Virginia domestic construction for centuries. A hall-parlor plan consists of two rooms, placed side by side, under a continuous roofline, with a fireplace at either or





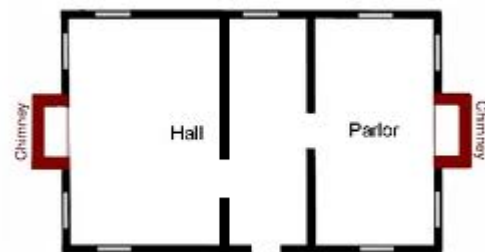
*Hall-Parlor plan with chimneys at both ends.*

both ends (6). In this type of arrangement, the main room, known as the hall, was the more public of the two rooms. The hall normally contained the primary entrance, the principal fireplace, and the stair or ladder to the upper floor, if there was one. This room often had a second smaller entrance. The hall had higher-quality embellishment than the inner chamber, or parlor. The parlor, generally used as a sleeping chamber or private sitting area, had a smaller fireplace, although it was not unusual for a parlor to be unheated in Virginia, Maryland, and parts of Delaware. The parlor had no exterior entrance, and was accessed from the hall by a door in the dividing wall. Now you know why we use the term “passage” instead of “hall” in Carlyle House tours. Hall had a specific connotation in John Carlyle’s time, very different from today’s use of the term.

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, even the wealthiest families resided in hall-parlor dwellings, with their slaves and indentured servants housed separately. By mid-century, prosperous gentry expanded the hall-parlor plan, adding rooms and features to accommodate their changing needs and to proclaim their prestige (7). Around 1720, the passage came into general usage, providing circulation and entertainment space between the hall and the parlor. The passage served as the primary entrance, often with a door at each end. It provided flexible entertainment space, especially during the hot summer months when both doors could be open to catch breezes. The introduction of the passage created a higher level of privacy for the hall and the parlor, allowing for a new

hierarchy of space. The passage became the public space; most visitors who came to the door could enter. Only those of sufficient status were permitted into the hall, and only family or very close friends were admitted to the parlor, now usually a bedchamber.

The addition of a passage between the hall and the parlor created the “I-house,” which ultimately became the most common floor plan in the country. This simple, one-room-deep, layout pervades time and place. In eighteenth-century Virginia, most I-houses had exterior end chimneys and a high cellar. The I-house represented the earliest form in this country of the Georgian plan house, and was often referred to as the “poor man’s Georgian.” The American Georgian plan derived directly from the English Georgian plan, which looked to the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods for inspiration. In general, seventeenth century Virginians did not pay much attention to architectural style. By the eighteenth century, however, the Virginia gentry had achieved a comfortable level of status and wealth. They began to heed architectural rules and conventions as one way to demonstrate social equality with their English counterparts.



*I-house plan with center passage.*

John Carlyle built his Alexandria house at the height of Georgian popularity. The Georgian period in Virginia began around 1700 with the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary, and ended circa 1780, when Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia State Capitol ushered in the Federal period. The Wren Building was the first structure in this country to employ sash windows instead of casements. More importantly, the Wren Building, attributed to Sir Christopher Wren or one of his apprentices, introduced Wren’s design style to the American colonies. After the 1666 Great Fire of London, Wren rebuilt fifty-two churches in the city over the next forty-five years. Wren looked to

the Italian Baroque period for inspiration, and his churches put an end to medieval-style architecture, setting a new architectural precedent in England and the American colonies. After the construction of the Wren Building, wealthy colonists rejected medieval and vernacular design in favor of this newer style, the basis for American Georgian design.

Carlyle House has a typical full Georgian domestic floor plan, as it is two rooms deep, not one like the I-house, and is two stories tall with stairs in the center passage. Most Georgian dwellings have five to seven bays, or openings, across the front elevation on each floor. Carlyle House does not exactly fit this criterion, as it is five-bay on the first floor and six-bay on the second, although the center two windows on the upper floor are centered on the door below. This is not particularly unusual, as American builders rarely got English architectural details perfectly correct. Carlyle House has several other imperfections in its design (8). Other typical Georgian characteristics include rigid exterior symmetry, river and land entrances with the passage running the full depth of the house, stone quoins (9) and lintels, painted pine paneling in important public rooms, interior broken pediments to display oriental vases, simple fireplaces without a mantel shelf, a space above the fireplace for a landscape painting, and detached outbuildings. In more elaborate dwellings, hyphens (10) sometimes connected the main house with wings and/or outbuildings.

The addition of hyphens and wings was more common in rural areas, which had fewer site constraints than urban areas. Mount Vernon follows this trend, with colonnaded hyphens connecting the mansion to the outbuildings. In many instances, hyphens are enclosed, creating additional interior space. As you know, John Carlyle did not add hyphens and wings to his city house. Instead, his outbuildings stood apart from the house. Although a great deal of archaeological evidence was lost during the 1970s restoration of the site, we know that Carlyle House originally had several outbuildings, including an office and a kitchen. Carlyle House has a fireplace in the cellar, but the room did not serve as a kitchen, and the fireplace may not be original (11). Although early Virginians cooked meals in their dwellings, by the end of the seventeenth century the kitchen was generally housed in a separate outbuilding. In addition to creating a fire hazard and being extremely hot in the summer, an in-house kitchen created

unwanted racial integration. As white indentured servants were replaced by enslaved workers from Africa, Virginia gentry desired to keep family members separate from slaves. Hence, many household functions were relegated to outbuildings (12). A number of outbuildings also decreed the wealth and social authority of the owner. Gentry deliberately placed outbuildings on their land in a way to impress the visitor (13).

John Carlyle built his dwelling to impress, following the socially acceptable and elite architectural norms of his time. His house and his entire property in Alexandria served to place him on level with his English peers. But where exactly did Carlyle find inspiration for the design of his house? And with all this talk of Georgian, where does Palladian fit in? Teaser: I don't really think it does. I'll explain why next time. Tune in to the spring issue for the conclusion of this tale!

Endnotes:

1. Two examples include Saint Luke's Church in Isle of Wight County, which is the only surviving Gothic building in the United States, and Bacon's Castle in Surry County.
2. You will note that I do not use the term "home" in this article. That word did not exist in John Carlyle's day. It came into common usage after the Civil War, and should not be used in reference to houses built prior to ca. 1865.
3. The best source for information on early Virginia architecture is Cary Carson & Carl L. Lounsbury, eds., The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Best book ever.
4. Yes, there is a difference between the two. Weatherboarding is a more generic term for any exterior board covering, including long sawn boards. Clapboarding is riven (split), not sawn, is thinner than weatherboarding, and is nailed to either the inside or outside of a structure. Clapboard is generally cheaper and flimsier than weatherboard. See Carl R. Lounsbury, editor, An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 81.
5. Speaking of Mount Vernon, several people claim that Washington wanted a house like Carlyle House, and tried to remake Mount Vernon in Carlyle House's image. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support that claim.

6. See Gabrielle M. Lanier and Bernard L. Herman, Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 16-21 for an excellent description of the hall-parlor plan and its characteristics.

7. See Dell Upton “Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia” in Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds., Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986) 315 – 335 for a fascinating discussion on the evolution of architectural forms in Virginia.

8. Fauber Garbee, Inc., Architects, “The John Carlyle House, Alexandria, Virginia: Restoration Report for the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority” (unpublished manuscript, July 1980). This is now available online on the City of Alexandria website. It goes into fascinating detail on the extant structure of the house.

9. A quoin is the external angle of a wall, especially the stones or bricks that form the corner of the wall. Decorative quoining sometimes employed raised or rusticated quoins, whereby bricks or stones projected beyond the surface of a wall and generally had beveled edges. See Lounsbury, op.cit.

10. An architectural hyphen serves the same purpose as a grammatical hyphen. Just as a grammatical hyphen links words, an architectural hyphen links building parts, generally the main block of a house and its wings.

11. The Fauber Garbee report notes that the fireplace is original, but gives no evidence for that conclusion. Based on several factors it is unlikely, but not impossible, that this fireplace is original. More research is needed.

12. See Lounsbury, op.cit., page 201 for more details.

13. Vlach, John Michael, Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Vlach’s book mostly focuses on rural plantations, but is a fascinating study in the use of architecture and site planning as a means to display wealth and power. Slave dwellings in particular impressed the visitor, as they not-so-subtly reminded the visitor of the number of slaves on that estate.

## News from the Educator

Great things continue to transpire in the education department at Carlyle House. More school programs, group tours, and scout program requests are coming in for the spring, so we will have plenty of visitors to the site when the weather warms up. Registrations for Camp Carlyle have been coming in steadily, but there are still plenty of spaces available in each session. This year’s sessions will take place July 7-11, July 21-25, and August 18-22 from 9am-3pm. Like last year, campers will participate in activities that teach them about life at Carlyle House while exploring Alexandria as an 18<sup>th</sup> century city. My intern Ashley and I continue to plan and coordinate activities to make the camp a memorable one. A special treat for this year’s camp will be a day trip to **George Washington’s Mount Vernon**! Campers will spend the day walking the grounds, touring the mansion and museums, and interacting with characters from George Washington’s world. We are very excited for this opportunity and to be able to share it with our campers! We are offering Friends of Carlyle House 10% off the camp registration fee. If you are interested in registering a child ages 7-12 please contact me at [vherndon@nvrpa.org](mailto:vherndon@nvrpa.org) or 703-549-2997. In other museum news, Helen and I completed two successful trainings this winter, one for new docents and a refresher training for veteran docents. Both received great feedback. We look forward to doing more training sessions in the future.

-Vanessa Herndon



## Collections Update

### Archaeology Collection Rehousing Project

Since the last update on the archaeology collection rehousing project in the November newsletter, all of the artifacts from the first two features, designated AX3A and AX3B, have been rehoused in compliance with professional standards. The old, deteriorating materials have been removed and thrown away, and replaced with new, archival materials. We have already seen a dramatic increase in space efficiency simply by implementing the rehousing techniques developed by the National Park Service Northeast Museum Services Center in Charlestown, Massachusetts. By packing the storage boxes properly and inserting the labeled artifact bags into two trays within each box, the total box count has

been reduced by approximately fifty percent. Fewer boxes take up less space in collections storage, which makes curatorial staff universally happy! To ease access to the artifacts, while reducing their physical handling, a list of every object housed in a given box



has been inserted on the underside of each box lid. A digital itemized, descriptive catalog has been created using Microsoft Excel, which also includes the new location of each rehoused artifact inside a specific bag, tray, and box. While the physical rehousing of AX3A and AX3B is complete, I am currently working on finishing up the data entry for these artifacts. To date, over 1,600 individual catalog numbers have been assigned to over 2,000 artifacts. (And there are many more still to come as rehousing continues with the artifacts from features AX3C and AX3D.) The curation activities involved with rehousing the collection have included re-establishing the archaeological context, and reaffirming the value and importance of the collection for research on John Carlyle's occupation as well as the development of urban Alexandria.

-Casey Pecoraro

## News from the Curator

It has been a busy winter at Carlyle House! All the snow that we have had for the past few months didn't slow down the pace of the museum! Our annual "Soldiers Christmas" event after the Scottish Walk on December 7 drew many crowds to our outdoor programming and attracted some new visitors to come inside and learn about the history of John Carlyle. We partnered with the 1st Virginia Regiment once again and were very happy with the cooking demonstrations, drills that the soldiers ran and many young historians in training who were present! Another annual program, "Historic Alexandria Candlelight Tours," done in partnership with the Office of Historic Alexandria and Lee-Fendall House Museum, was themed as "Home for the Holidays." 2013 was the "Year of the Historic Home," an initiative that was declared by the Governor and First Lady of Virginia to raise awareness of the many beautiful and historically meaningful properties to be found in the Commonwealth.



*The evening of December 15, 2013*

Although a snowstorm appeared on the evening of the Friends' Holiday Party, a few of our local members who are neighbors braved the elements and saw the new dessert table on display in the Dining Room. The staff and Friends are delighted with our new faux food and the beautiful

display that it created. We have kept the two mahogany tables set-up with different mealtime scenarios and this will change at the end of the month when General Braddock and his officers arrive!



*The dessert table*

At our last Friends' Board of Directors meeting in January, we had a very productive conversation about the results of our 2013 Annual Appeal and moving forward with conserving specially selected objects in the collection. I have been working closely with them to determine the best conservator for the job and updating our environmental monitoring system to ensure we do the best job we can to preserve the collection for years to come.

Huge progress is also being made on re-housing our archeology collection in the classroom of the Bank Building. Collections Manager Casey Pecoraro has done a wonderful job using her expertise and has simultaneously juggled processing the collection with the difficulties of maintenance work being done in the same space as this project. Repair work on the roof of the classroom has been taking place concurrently this winter. So we thank you Casey for your flexibility and dedication!

~Helen Wirka



## Carlyle House Upcoming Events

### Braddock Day

**Saturday, April 5th, 2014; 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm**

Spring, 1755: Major General Edward Braddock, Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Forces in North America, convened a meeting of five colonial governors at John Carlyle's Alexandria mansion. Carlyle called this gathering "the Grandest Congress ... ever known on the Continent." Join us to visit this historic moment and interact with costumed interpreters. The day will feature the dedication of a marker commemorating the starting point of the Historic Braddock Road.

### Friends of Carlyle House Garden Day Herb Sale

**Saturday, April 26, 2014; 8:00am to 4:00pm**

Special preview/advance purchase day Friday, April 25  
The sale features herbs and perennials from Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens. Master Gardeners will answer your horticultural questions. Vendors with items ranging from jewelry to home accessories will be selling their wares on the property. Don't miss the bake sale or the book sale! If you have a Garden Day ticket, your tour of Alexandria's most historic dwelling is free! Regular admission is charged for the house tour if you don't have a Garden Day ticket.

### Attics and Alleys Tours

**Saturdays in May (3, 10, 17, 24, 31) – 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.**

What mysteries lie in the attics of the city's historic sites? Discover this and much more in May. Explore spaces not normally open to the public at Carlyle House, Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Lee-Fendall House, and the Apothecary Museum. Tour highlights include the attics of each site, historic graffiti, and the alleys that connect the city. Tours start at 9 a.m. at Lee-Fendall.

### Mother's Day Tea

**Sunday, May 11. Seatings at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.**

Treat that special woman in your life to an elegant tea at Carlyle House. Listen to harp music and learn the "Language of the Fan" while enjoying delicious treats on the Magnolia Terrace.

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



## News from the Site Director

Is it springtime yet? Can we be done with this winter? This one was for the record books. Over the winter months, we lost power to the mansion for two days and the heat went out for a week, but our fantastic staff, docents, and maintenance crew handled everything with their usual good cheer. Thanks to all for taking the craziness in stride.



Speaking of craziness, it turns out that we had a live bullet cartridge in our archaeological collection. Due to its poor condition, it was previously identified as an “unknown cylindrical object.” Casey (see page 5) recognized it as a bullet that could possibly contain live powder. Munitions experts determined that the gunpowder may have degraded into nitroglycerine, and recommended disposal. After consultation with the munitions experts, the Army, the Marines, and the Fire Marshal, the State Police Bomb Squad came by and handled the issue for us. Never a dull moment at Carlyle House!

Site staff got out of the office every now and again to attend educational programs that will keep our skills current. Here we are at the Octagon House in Washington on February 27. From left to right: Helen Wirka, Ashley Lorenzen, Vanessa Herndon, Susan Hellman, Casey Pecoraro. Ashley came on board as an intern in January and is a huge help to Vanessa. Casey began working on rehousing the archaeological collection in August and is just about finished. Unfortunately, she will be leaving us next month, but she has the collection in perfect order.

With spring around the corner, we are looking forward to the Friends Annual Garden Day Herb and Craft Sale. This year it falls on Saturday, April 26 and will run from 8am to 4pm. Come out and get gardening tips from our Master Gardeners, buy some Mount Vernon-raised plants for your garden, and find that perfect little something from one of the talented vendors. We will also have a gently-used book sale and a bake sale. This is the Friends’ biggest fundraiser of the year. If you would like to help out, please contact volunteer coordinator Brenda Hall at [bhall10124@aol.com](mailto:bhall10124@aol.com). We have vendor space available. If you know anyone who might be interested, please tell them to contact either Rosalind Bovey at [boveyoffice@verizon.net](mailto:boveyoffice@verizon.net) or Lindsay Borst at [Lindsay.Borst@gmail.com](mailto:Lindsay.Borst@gmail.com). We hope to see you there!

~Susan Hellman

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# Carlyle House Historic Park

*A property of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority*

121 North Fairfax Street ~ Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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