

Carlyle House DOCENT DISPATCH

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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

Mr. Booth Revealed: The Story of George William's Education

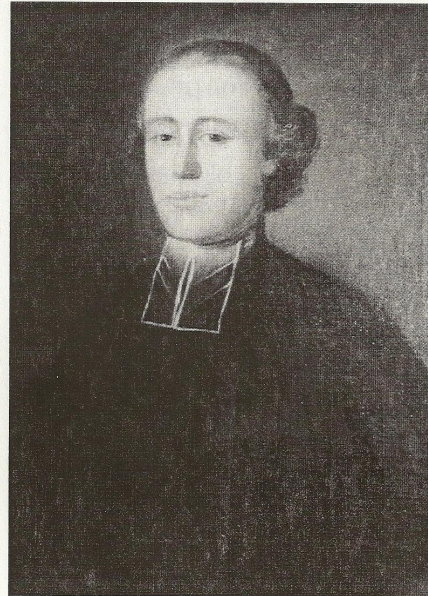
by Sarah Coster

Bartholomew Booth was born in 1732 to a schoolmaster in the village of Mellor, eight miles south of Manchester. Wishing to follow in his father's footsteps, Booth decided to follow a typical path for that profession and seek ordination. In 1754 he went to Oxford to begin his studies at Brasenose College. After graduating, Booth held positions as schoolmaster and priest in Disley and Marple.

Booth may have continued down this path and been content to be a small village schoolmaster and curate, but for a strange family problem that would guide his actions for the rest of his life. Booth had married young and in 1760, his wife, Mary Chatterton, began to show signs of mental illness. Choosing to leave his wife and their youngest son, John, Booth made his way to Liverpool with his sons William and Robert (ages 7 and 4).

Once in Liverpool, Booth obtained a room in the Old Church Yard adjoining the church of Saint Nicholas for his classroom. The room was located in the middle of the mercantile quarter, convenient for the middle class that Booth was targeting for his students. On January 7, 1765, Booth placed the following ad in the *Williamson's Advertiser*:

"On Monday, 7th, inst., at a large and convenient room near the Old Church Liverpool will be opened an Academy for the Instruction of Youth in the following useful and polite branches of learning



Reverend Bartholomew Booth
(1732-1785), ca. 1760

viz. of the English Grammar, the Latin, Greek, French & German Languages, Writing in all the different hands, Geometry, Navigation, the Italian Method of Bookkeeping, Drawing & Music in the Spring, Summer & Autumn Quarters. The Art of Fencing between the hours of twelve and one (during which time the Gentlemen will not be permitted to stay in the Rooms). Ladies may be taught Drawing, Writing, Arithmetic & Geography. Rev. Mr. Booth"

Booth soon began to meet the Liverpool elite, including parishioners Joseph Valens and his daughters, Anne Bardsley, a 33 year old widow, and her sister Mary Valens, age 24. The two women offered to help run the school without pay. This partnership would be a lifelong endeavor.

Soon, the classroom in Liverpool became too small, and the school moved to Woolton Hall, a large estate five miles from Liverpool. In order to fill this new school, Booth cast a wider net, placing an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1766, the same year that George William was born.

CARLYLE HOUSE
Jim Bartlinski, Director
Sarah Coster, Curator
Heather Dunn, Curator of Education



Booth is clearly targeting elite merchants like John Carlyle by adding surveying and accounts to the curriculum. Booth's "modern" education style emphasized mathematics and technical-vocational subjects, something which must have appealed to many of the self-made merchants and planters in the colonies.

Despite his success, Booth's family problems continued to haunt him. Writing to a friend, Ralph Peters, Booth ponders the advantages of emigrating to the colonies, admitting that "the greatest of all Inducements which I have to leave this Kingdom is my unhappy marriage. 'Tis True I have not been shocked with a Sight of the imprudent cause of all my Misfortunes for these ten Years past, yet still I am troubled and frequently hurt with Accounts of her Behaviour which is blameable in the highest Degree." Booth writes that he has provided provisions for her and is free to leave.

In 1773, Booth, his two sons and the Valens sisters, arrived in Georgetown, Maryland. Immediately, Booth began corresponding with Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates, who had come to North America in 1772 with his wife and son. Gates urged Booth to consider purchasing land in Berkeley County, Virginia, where Carlyle's plantation Limekilns was located. Instead, Booth, with the help of his patrons, Anne and Mary,

settled on land in Frederick County, purchasing 841 acres of land in April of 1774, including the "Forest of Needwood" from which the academy would eventually take its name. On this property Booth built a large two story home, sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, with cellars and a full attic.

Booth quickly joined in revolutionary activities and was present at a meeting in January 1775 for the inhabitants of Frederick. He had his name added to a list of men to form a local committee of observations as well as on a list of the "Association of Freemen of Maryland" who approved using arms to repel British troops. Despite his clear steps toward identifying himself as a patriot, he was still attacked as a suspected loyalist. On Saturday night August 17, 1776, a mob entered the Forest of Needwood and raided one of the peach orchards.

Perhaps to prove his good name, or perhaps out of a desire to continue in his chosen profession, Booth decided to "do something for the publick" and accept a small number of boarders at his home, using the ground floor for two classrooms. Aiming for the children of the social elite, Booth quickly enrolled the sons of Dr. James Craik of Port Tobacco, Maryland and Dr. William Shippen of Philadelphia. Craik writes Booth a revealing letter that most likely echoes what John Carlyle felt at having the opportunity for his son to have an English-style education in the colonies:

"The Education of my Children is what I have always had greatly at heart, and I have never wished so much for any thing in this world as to have it in my power to Educate them well. I must own I never expected in the Country so favorable an opportunity of a good Education as my son has a prospect of at present under you." (Dr. James Craik to Bartholomew Booth, May 20, 1777).

Craik reveals himself to be a more enlightened and progressive parent than one might expect for the period,



Old Needwood, Frederick County, Maryland
Built by Bartholomew Booth about 1776 and known as The Forest of Needwood in the eighteenth century



telling Booth that he wishes his son to be brought up in the law, but only if his own inclination and "Genius" incline him toward it. "I must beg therefore of you," Craik writes "to be Candid with me in regard to his improvement, for very often Parents are partial to their children and apt to be led away with too good an Opinion of their abilities, and frequently put them to a Profession which they can make no figure in, and which is quite contrary to their natural Genius."

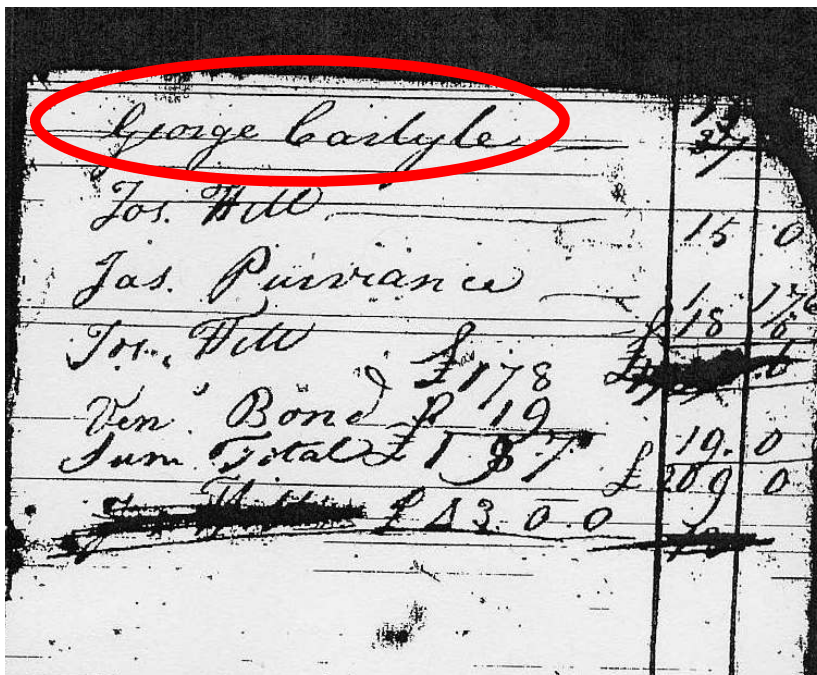
The first students arrived at the school early in the spring of 1777. Was George William Carlyle among those first pupils? While no evidence has been located to indicate when George William arrived at the school, he would have just turned 11 years old that spring, a very typical age for boys to start at boarding school.

While at Needwood, George William would have enjoyed the thorough curriculum that Booth provided. Classic subjects like English, Latin, Greek, Writing, Arithmetic, and Geography were provided, as well as more practical learning, including Merchants Accounts, Navigation,

Astronomy and Surveying. To ensure their place in an elite society, the boys also learned the polite arts of music, drawing, and dancing. Booth also continued to teach fencing at Needwood. In 1777, John Luckett, the brother of a pupil, wrote to Booth that he was marching to join the Virginia militia, and had to ask to borrow two swords, as they were impossible to find. He promised to return them or, if he was killed or captured, that they would be paid for.

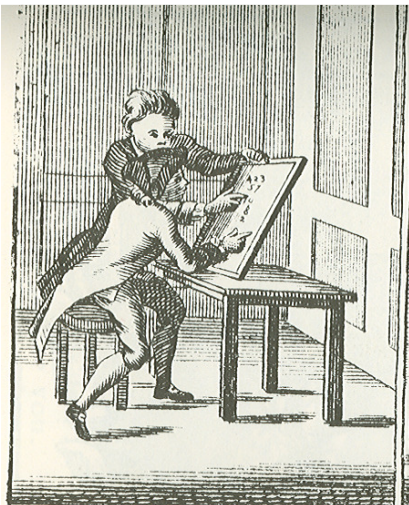
The request for swords further indicates Booth's support of the Revolutionary War, which by this time was in full swing. The inflation and scarcity of supplies associated with it may have been one reason Booth doubled the tuition after the first year. The tuition increase didn't deter potential pupils, however, and the school at Needwood began to be a magnet for the sons of elite Revolutionaries, including Robert Morris' two sons.

One reason the school attracted so many prominent families may have been its location. Needwood was geographically central to Philadelphia, Annapolis, Baltimore and Alexandria, and yet it was also isolated. In 1778, Col. Samuel Washington writes to Booth that his son was currently with a "Gentleman in Fredericksburg where he has continued ever since; and although I have the highest Opinion of that Gentleman's Abilities, yet I have Capital Objection to his living in a Town where vice and immorality every hour stare him in the face." Parents sought the rural and pastoral versus the corrupt urban setting for their son's education.



"Account of Travelling Expenses as from Philadelphia to Needwood", Dr. William Shippen, Shippen Family Papers, LOC. Notice George Carlyle's name, which appears twice on the 1780 document.

The school soon reached its capacity of 30 boys. With the boys, came their things. Existing records give us a glimpse of what these boarding school students took with them. School supplies one student brought included 6 Quires (or stack of 25 sheets) of Paper, 2 Slates, 5 slate Pencils and 2 Papers of Ink Powder. Clothing and personal goods were essential, such as combs, shoe buckles, stockings, and sticks of blacking (shoe polish). They also supplied their own blankets, sheets



“Arithmetick”

and even their own beds.

Only a year after the school opened, however, Booth was forced to close it temporarily. On February 5, 1777, the Maryland Assembly enacted a law compelling every free male over 18, every

civil servant, etc. to take and sign an oath of allegiance and fidelity to the State and the cause of freedom. Under the existing Maryland law, this would mean Booth was no longer permitted to “teach or preach the Gospel” or to teach in a public or private school. Likewise, if he failed to take the oath the same consequence would occur. Booth decided to close the school and make a special appeal to the assembly for the removal of the anomaly in the law.

Richard Henry Lee wrote to Booth to express his concern at the school’s closure. He viewed it as a public misfortune, as “few things contribute so much to the happiness and security of every Country as the wide and judicious instruction of the rising generation.” Lee had personal reasons to want Needwood to remain open; he was looking to place his two young nephews there.

Finally, on March 25, 1779, the Maryland Assembly passed a law “that the reverend Bartholomew Booth, of Frederick County, may be permitted to teach and preach the Gospel, and also to teach and educate youth in any public or private school...” Booth was the first minister to be granted such an exception.

When the school reopened shortly afterwards, a notable last name was among the students enrolled; Arnold. Having recently married the 19 year-old Peggy Shippen and taken the post of military commander in Philadelphia, Gen. Benedict Arnold

wanted his sons to be at a school closer than the one in Connecticut they had previously attended.

Reveling himself as a true pragmatist, Arnold asks Booth that their education “be useful rather than learned. He goes on:

“Life is too Short and Uncertain to throw away in Speculation on Subjects that perhaps only one Man in Then thousand has a Genius to make a figure in. You will pardon my dictation to you, Sir, but as the Fortunes of every man in this country are uncertain, I wish my Sons to be Educated in such a manner that with prudence and Industry they may acquire a Fortune...”

Only a year and a half later, in the autumn of 1780, news arrives of Arnold’s treason and the boys, Benedict Jr. and his brother Richard, were quickly withdrawn from the school by their stepmother Peggy, shortly before her own exile. Benedict, Jr. was only two years younger than George William. Could they have been friends? How did the students at Needwood react to the news of their classmates’ father’s betrayal?

Politics and loyalties aside, the war affected the school in more tangible ways as well, not the least of which was the ongoing lack of books. Booth continually pleas to parents, “If you have any School Books pray bring them.” The search for books seems to have been constant. Andrew Wilcocks writes, “I have made Enquiry for the Books mentioned in your Memorandum and find they are very scarce and extremely dear, such as I have met with, are second hand and some of them a good deal worn.” (Alexander Wilcocks to John Galloway, May 24, 1780). He manages to acquire Home’s Grammar, Erasmus, and Ovid among others. Even the well-connected Robert Morris, finds the search difficult, telling Booth “we are at a loss for school books, as none are now in the shops for sale. I shall write to Europe for some, as soon as possible.” (Robert Morris to Bartholomew Booth, November 25, 1777).

Most of the time, however, the war must have seemed distant in the isolated quiet of the Forest of



Needwood. With Mary Valens and Anne Bardsley running the domestic side of things, the boys were ensured a home-like environment. Booth calms the family of John Galloway, writing that “Mrs. Bardsley desires me to assure your Sister of her particular Attention to her Sons. She will supply, to the utmost of her power, the Absence of a good Mother.”

In 1780, the older students of the “upper school”, perhaps George William among them, repaired an unoccupied building on Booth’s property, making it “extremely neat and comfortable.” Thomas Lee Shippen informs his father that:

“Here we mean to pass our Evenings, and as we are more retired, of consequence more capable of improving our minds, and of augmenting our knowledge of men and things, for I assure you that last winter, we were so surrounded by boys that I could not read a line scarcely of History, whereas I now read a great deal every Evening. I wish you were here to see how comfortably we live. Mr. Booth and Ladies frequently visit us. We call our habitation Social Hall.” (Thomas Lee Shippen to Dr. and Mrs. William Shippen, October 17, 1780).

The day Thomas Shippen wrote that letter, October 17, 1780, George William’s brother-in-law, William Herbert, presented John Carlyle’s will to the Fairfax County Court. While we still do not have the exact date John Carlyle died, we speculate it was around this time. The inventory of Carlyle’s property was taken on November 13th of that year.

Three months later, on February 24, 1781, George William Carlyle appears on the officers mess list of the Fairfax Militia. Did he leave Needwood upon news of his father’s death, never to return again? And if so, why did the executors of the will, his own brother-in-law among them, fail to adhere to John Carlyle’s request that “particular attention be paid to the Education of my Son” and that he “be kept with Mr. Booth or at the best place for Education that can be got...”?

Regardless, Needwood and Booth continued on

without George William, but a major blow came in the spring of 1781, from which Booth would never full recover.

The first was the sudden death of Theoderick Banister, the son of John Banister, a member of the cavalry in the Virginia line and a delegate to the Continental Congress. Days later, Anne Bardsley, who had been his patron and de-facto family member for 16 years, died. The domestic affairs of the academy collapsed. “Mr. Booth’s housekeeper and sine qua non is dead, his school in great disorder – all the Boys gone or going home...” (William Shippen to Richard Henry Lee, May 25, 1781).

Parents quickly blamed the overcrowding of the school and pointed to the lack of personal attention their sons had received as a result. Many, including Robert Morris, withdrew their sons. Morris sent his to Europe, letting Benjamin Franklin know that “The Interruption given to the Progress of Learning, the Distress which the several Seminaries in this Country have undergone, the various lucrative Employments to which Masters, and Tutors, have been invited in the Progress of the present War, are circumstances which operate powerfully to the Disadvantage of the present race of American Youth...” October 14, 1781.

Booth began making preparations to move the academy to land which Anne Bardsley had conveyed to him, called Delamer. In August 1783, Booth sold Needwood to Governor Thomas Sim Lee and moved to the site where he opened his final school. Booth died at Delamer on or about September 10, 1785. He was buried in the grounds there. Six days later his obituary appeared in the Maryland Journal, calling him “a Gentleman who had spent Thirty years of his Life in the most honourable and useful Profession, the Education of Youth. Mr. Booth was really an



Booth’s Bridge, Antietam Creek, Maryland.



accomplished Scholar, well versed in the several Branches of polite Literature, and many Pupils both in England and America are living Instances of his Usefulness and great Abilities.”

Will of the Reverend Bartholomew Booth, 1785, Washington County Wills, Maryland Hall of Records.

Transcription of “Account of Travelling Expenses as from Philadelphia to Needwood, Dr. William Shippen, Shippen Family Papers, Library of Congress, Container 15, Reel 10, frames 10485/10486.



Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates

Booth’s lifelong companion, Mary Valens, married their mutual friend, Horatio Gates on July 31, 1786. Quite a wealthy landowner, Mary Valens Gates is often mistaken in history books as a “widow” though she never married prior to Gates. Her unusual relationship with

Booth, whose Will left her the majority of his possessions, including his portrait, is a mystery.

After their father’s death, Booth’s sons, William and Robert, left for England to settle thing with their estranged mother and younger brother. Tragically, their ship was lost at sea on the journey. Booth’s legacy lived on, however, in the memory of his students. In one of his last letters, Booth wrote to John Ridout of Maryland about how his son Horace Ridout was like family to him. Horace treasured the letter and as an adult inscribed it with the following; “The Rev. Mr. Booth kept an Academy first at Needwood in Frederick County and afterwards in Washington County. I think he was a great Man.”

Sources

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