



Carlyle House

DOCENT DISPATCH

November 2014

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

Preserving the Carlyle House Archaeology Collection

By Kayla Marciniszyn

In the year 2014, Carlyle House Historic Park completed a rehousing project implemented to address important preservation issues regarding the Carlyle House archaeological collection.

Dr. William Kelso, in his capacity as commissioner of archaeology with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, initiated a limited excavation of the Carlyle House site in 1973. The “small quantity of artifacts” recovered during that survey were stored at the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission in Richmond, according to the 1980 Carlyle House Restoration Report by Fauber Garbee, Inc. Starting in 1974, Richard Muzzrole, rescue archaeologist for the City of Alexandria, carried out additional excavations. These materials represent the bulk of the artifacts held in the Carlyle House collection. In 1980, Sarah Tolson wrote the Carlyle House Archaeology Project Final Report, Draft 2, on file at Carlyle House Historic Park. This report and the Fauber Garbee report provide the only two sources of information on the archaeological excavations conducted at Carlyle House between 1973 and 1976.

The purpose of any archaeological excavation, even a salvage excavation, is to preserve and document the integrity of the site for future research and interpretation of the site’s use through time. Although the initial archaeological survey undertaken in 1973 did use scientific methods and proper archaeological procedures, Dr. Kelso deemed the site “compromised.” This was probably due in part to the number of construction projects that took place on site during the 19th century. The succeeding excavation was not excavated using stratigraphic methods, but was conducted as a salvage excavation during the restoration as a way to recover any remaining artifacts that might be destroyed during the restoration process. Stratigraphy refers to an excavation process following vertical soil layers that may have been deposited either through

cultural means or natural events such as a flood or backfilling a well. These strata, or layers, are what help archaeologists determine the time period of a site and/or how long an occupation may have occurred. This very reason is why it is extremely important to protect and preserve this particular archaeological collection. Even though the site was not dug using the proper stratigraphic method, there are still items within the collection that can be dated based on their typology in comparison to other historical archaeological collections. These items can be instrumental to the research of 18th and 19th century Northern Virginia. Some of the items in the collection can even be dated back to John Carlyle’s residency in the house.

The Carlyle House archaeological collection consists of four accession numbers from the excavations, each a designation for the four well features that were dug on site 44AX0003: AX3A, AX3B, AX3C, and AX3D. Prior to the rehousing, the collection was housed in the original boxes from 1978 in the attic of the main house. These boxes were found in various states of deterioration and had become contaminated with insects, dirt, and dust, posing a hazard to the preservation and integrity of the collection. The rehousing project of 2013-2014 has since removed the collection from the original boxes and bags and placed all artifacts into appropriate acid-free archival boxes and bags.

During the initial catalog process in 1978, some items in the collection were cataloged incorrectly,

CARLYLE HOUSE

Susan Hellman, Site Administrator

Helen Wirka, Site Specialist

Vanessa Herndon, Education Assistant



which is not unusual for that time. Our knowledge of diagnostic artifacts, particularly ceramic types, has developed greatly over the years. Ceramics are commonly used by archaeologists to date sites or soil layers during excavation because we know relative date ranges for when many ceramic types were manufactured based on popularity, new manufacturing techniques and /or decorative designs. Ceramics are generally divided into three basic categories based on the firing temperature: earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain. For our purposes here we will discuss earthenware, which has a low firing temperature. Most, but not all, earthenwares have a lead-oxide glaze and can range in body color from buff to red to white, and can be coarse or refined in texture. While the Carlyle collection contains all different types of earthenwares, we will be focusing on white refined earthenwares commonly found on American sites. White refined earthenwares can be further divided up into three main ware types: creamware, pearlware, and whiteware all of which have different production date ranges. Creamware was manufactured between 1740-1820; pearlware between 1780-1840; and whiteware from 1830 to present day. Keep in mind, these dates are approximate.

All wares were an attempt by British and American potters to mimic the beautiful white Chinese porcelain that was often too expensive for many consumers to obtain. Archaeologists are able to tell the difference between creamware, pearlware, and whiteware based on the body color and glaze color. All are made with a clear lead glaze but creamware has copper added to the glaze, giving it a cream-like hue; pearlware has cobalt added, giving it a blue hue; while whiteware is white due to the very white paste that is used with a clear lead-glaze.

Provided below are descriptions, dates, and images of some of the ceramics that were recovered during the salvage excavation. Keep in mind the dates mentioned above for each ware type when going over these descriptions.

Banded Annularware Mug

Annularware is a factory-made slipware that is manufactured using refined white earthenware with

an applied slip decoration. There are several different types of slip decorations found on annularware generally using earth tones or “burnt” colors. Annularware is found on creamware, pearlware, and whiteware and has a production range of 1767 into the 20th century. This particular decoration is referred to as “bandedware” and is decorated on pearlware, which we know went out of style around 1840 to make way for the more popular whitewares that were being produced.



Bandedware on pearlware, according to the Florida Museum of Natural History, was in production from 1790 until about 1820. This time range suggests that this vessel may have belonged to John Carlyle’s daughter, Sarah Carlyle Herbert.

Creamware Salt Shaker or Pepper Pot



Creamware, as mentioned above, was produced between 1740 and 1820. It is commonly found on early American sites and consisted of a few decorative techniques. Due to the metal-oxides within the glaze, colors that were used would often bleed or become clouded, which in itself became a popular decorative technique. Over-glaze decoration, particularly black transfer-print, was also popular. Here we have a plain creamware salt shaker or pepper pot. Since popularity for creamware began to die when pearlware was introduced and eventually died



off around the year 1820, we may assume that this piece belonged to either John Carlyle or his daughter, Sarah Carlyle Herbert. We do know that John Carlyle had “Queens China,” which was the name used for most creamware, in his probate upon his death. The collection has a number of other creamware pieces including chamber pots, lattice work baskets, and tableware.



Pearlware Personalized Mug



The mug pictured above was probably badly stained while in the ground or burnt. In cases like these, where the ware is difficult to determine, one should look at any edges or crevices where the glaze might pool. Creamware glaze pools a greenish/yellowish color while pearlware glaze pools a blue color. This mug does have blue pooling around the foot ring suggesting it is most likely pearlware. Since it is on pearlware, and we know pearlware production ends around 1840 and began around the time of Carlyle’s death, this may have been a mug for one of Sarah Carlyle Herbert’s daughters. The words on it are “For my dear Girl.”

Spode and had a peak production from then until about 1814, but the design is still popular today. Since this design is printed on pearlware we know the general production range is 1780 until about 1840 so it is possible that this also belonged to Sarah Carlyle Herbert.

Blue Transfer-printed Pearlware Plates



Blue Transfer-printed Pearlware Chamber Pot or Wash Basin



The decoration on the chamber pot above is known as the “willow pattern” and was decorated using a transfer

-print technique. These patterns were developed in an effort to mimic popular Chinese motifs. The “willow pattern” was introduced in 1790 by Josiah

Even though pottery wares are great for identifying time periods, there is still a generally large date range for each ware (creamware, pearlware, whiteware)



type. Archaeologists will look for “clues” or other indicators on each pottery sherd to see if those date ranges can be narrowed down even further. One such indicator is a Maker’s Mark. Some potters would stamp, impress, or paint their unique Maker’s Mark onto their finished products. These can be used to



identify exactly when the product was made based on how long that potter was in business. Archaeologists and historians have researched and documented thousands of potters' maker's marks. An excellent resource to use for identifying and dating maker's marks is "The Encyclopedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks" by Geoffrey A. Godden. A number of pieces in the Carlyle archaeology collection have Maker's Marks on them. An example of two pieces with a makers' mark from the collection is shown above. These two plates were made by the potters John and Richard Riley of Burslem, England. They were known for incorporating English themes, landscapes, and structures into their design. Both plates depict the King's Cottage at Windsor Park. The collection contains other Riley pottery suggesting there may have been an entire tableware set. John and Richard Riley produced earthenwares between 1802 and 1828. Considering that Carlyle House belonged to Sarah Carlyle Herbert during that time period, it is likely that the Riley pieces in this collection belonged to her and her family.

These artifacts may be all that is remaining to tell us more about the history of the Carlyle family, subsequent residents, and the site itself.

Creamware Lattice Basket



Pictured above is a creamware lattice basket; we know from John Carlyle's probate that he owned at least one "Queens China Basket with a dish." It is possible that this refers to a creamware lattice basket, a popular decorative item during the colonial period. According to "Wedgewood: The New Illustrated Dictionary" by Robin Reilly, baskets were some of Josiah Wedgewood's (a famous English potter) earliest pieces and came in several different designs. They were typically used to hold fruit during a dessert service. There are two lattice baskets in the AX3C accession.