



Carlyle House DOCENT DISPATCH

December 2013

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

John Carlyle's Library

By Steve Kimbel

The books in John Carlyle's library are much like his letters. They provide some tantalizing insights into his character but in the end the picture of who he is remains incomplete. By merely counting the contents of his library as recorded in the 1780 inventory taken by his executor and son-in-law William Herbert we can learn that he owned 235 volumes. Unfortunately, their titles and the names of their authors are mostly missing. However, some of those that are identified are impressive.



For instance, John Carlyle owned a considerable collection of the writings of Voltaire, the French philosopher whose ideas are credited with inspiring both the American and the French Revolutions. In his inventory Herbert lists "23 Vols. *Voltares*

(sic) Works" valued at 3 pounds, 9 shillings. If only we knew which volumes. François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), better known by his nom de plume "Voltaire," wrote more than 2,000 books and pamphlets. John's library also contained the most popular history of England published in the early 18th Century. Herbert records in his inventory "5 Vols. *Rapines (sic) History of England*" worth 5 pounds. Paul de Rapin (1661-1725) published his history of England shortly before his death. It contained the history of the island nation in seven volumes, 18 books, from ancient times to the end of the reign of Charles I.

The French edition of "*L'Histoire*

d'Angleterre" was printed at The Hague in 1724 and was dedicated to Rapin's patron George I, the reigning British monarch. The first English edition was published the next year in Britain. It was considerably longer and larger than the French version. It ran to 14 volumes, nine more volumes than John possessed when he died in 1780. The British publisher added volumes and expanded the text to cover The Commonwealth and the monarchs from James I through George I. Carlyle's library includes two other histories. "*Salmons History*" is a bit of a mystery. Herbert values its three volumes at 2 pounds 5 shillings, half the price he places on the five-volumes of Rapin's history of England.

Unfortunately, the author of this article can find no ready reference to a "Salmons History." The name Salmon, however, does have a connection to John Carlyle. It is an Anglo-Saxon surname with ancient ties to Cumberland, John's home county. Could "Salmons History" be a genealogy? John did take more than a casual interest in his own ancestry.

Also among John's histories is one Herbert identifies with only the word "Naval." He puts the value of this single volume at one pound so it was a book of some worth. It would be interesting to discover what naval history John Carlyle would keep in his library? John's library included two dictionaries. One is merely identified in Herbert's inventory as a "Dictionary" but the other is listed as "*Chambers Dictionary*." There is a "Chambers Dictionary" printed today in Britain by the firm of William and Robert Chambers. The Chambers brothers grew up in the same

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“Borders” area as John. But, the date of the first edition presents a bit of a mystery since the first printing of “*Chambers Dictionary*” wasn’t until 1872.

The 21st century edition of “*Chambers Dictionary*” is prized by those addicted to crossword puzzles and word games like “SCRABBLE®.” The only other book in the inventory of John’s library that can be identified is a lone volume Herbert describes only by its subject matter: “Heraldry.” It’s clear from his personal possessions that Carlyle had a keen interest in this topic. Two objects on display in the house bear the Carlyle coat of arms. The solid silver wine tankard, thought to be a gift to the young couple on their wedding day in 1747, is engraved with the Carlyle coat of arms on the right, the male side in heraldry, and Sarah’s Fairfax coat of arms on the left, the distaff or female side in heraldry. The silver cover to Carlyle’s snuffbox also bears the family crest.

Herbert’s inventory of Carlyle’s library also includes magazines and pamphlets; unfortunately none are identified by title or subject. However, their estimated value in the case of the magazines indicates they were of worth to persons interested in their subject matter. The magazines are listed in the inventory as: “16 Vols. Magazines 4. 0. 0.” Herbert’s valuation could be off the mark, but if it is accurate then John Carlyle’s magazine collection was worth nearly as much as his 23 volumes of Voltaire.

Here we have another puzzle. Did Herbert overvalue the magazines or undervalue Voltaire? The 18th century magazine was a new media. They provided practical information on a wide variety of topics, including one Carlyle took a great interest in, horse breeding and racing. There were also fashionable general interest magazines such as “The Gentlemen” first published in 1731 and considered to be the first of its kind. By the time Carlyle was subscribing to them magazines were the fashionable way to stay informed.

What magazines might Carlyle and the members of his family have read? Besides magazines there are also pamphlets among Carlyle’s possessions. Herbert lists “*A parcel magazines & Pamphlets 2. 0. 0.*” The pamphlet was the preferred

form in which to publish the most inflammatory writings of the American Revolution. Mindful that Carlyle was a very active patriot who died in the autumn of 1780, within less than a year of final victory at Yorktown, it would be intriguing to discover what pamphlets were in that parcel. The remainder of the books Herbert inventories by merely giving their number and sizes, and in one case a very cursory description. Here are the entries:

- 30 Vols. large Octavo (sic) 6. 0. 0
- 5 Vols. ditto 1. 0. 0
- 90 Vols. Small Octavo (sic) 9. 0. 0
- 16 Vols. Sundry Books 3. 0. 0
- 43 Vols. do. Small 4. 6. 0

“Octavo” is a printing term describing a book or pamphlet made by printing 16 pages on a single piece of paper and then folded each three times to produce eight leaves. These leaves are gathered and bound together to create a book or pamphlet of any number of pages. The term is also used to indicate the size of a book. This is likely how Herbert is using “*Octavo (sic)*” in the inventory.



The size of an “Octavo” depends on when and where it is printed. An “Octavo” size book printed during the 16th century in Italy or France would be the equivalent of a modern paperback. If printed during the 18th century in England it would be the size of a modern hardcover.

When Herbert records 35 “large Octavo” he is probably counting hardback books. He values them at seven pounds. But when he counts 90 “Small Octavo” valued at a mere nine pounds it is tempting to ask: “Could Herbert have made an error. Might



these be antique books published in Italy or France two hundred years before John Carlyle's death? If only we knew their titles and who wrote them.

When Herbert records 16 "Sundry Books" worth three pounds he is saying they are of very little value. There are 20 shillings to the pound so each of the 16 books is worth less than four shillings. Likewise the 43 "Small" volumes Herbert also describes as "sundry books" and prices them at a mere four pounds six shillings for the lot, or just two shillings for each volume. These too are publications of negligible value. Nevertheless one has to wonder why Carlyle kept so many books of little value in his library.

This article is intended to be the first in a series to explore John Carlyle's library. In future articles we will attempt to answer some of the questions raised here and others that will surely arise as we explore the books, magazines and pamphlets among the volumes on the bookshelves in John Carlyle's imposing home on Fairfax Street.

... To Be Continued

A Festive Table for the Holiday Season

By Carole Smith

John Carlyle's 1780 inventory lists many items that would have been used either in preparation for or presentation of a dessert course. The most prominent feature on the table is the glass pyramid with jelly glasses



1 glass small broken stand with sweet meat glasses
1 glass large broken stand with sweet meat glasses

The stands are 18th century, the glasses are not. It is likely that jelly and sweet meat glasses have been

grouped together on the inventory. The table also has 2 other pyramids, one on each end to give balance to the presentation. The pyramids are stacked



ginger cakes. Completing the table are a plum pudding and sauce, a seed cake, 2 bowls of fruit, and the two small shell dishes with candied ginger and orange peel, and dried apricots. The table is set with a "Queens China" dessert service.

- 5 Queens China dishes defferent Scize 2. 0. 0*
- 11 do do plates . 4. 6*
- 3 do fruit dishes ditto .10. 0*
- 1 do do Basket with a dish . 5. 0*
- 1 do Small Turene . 1. 0*
- 1 do Sweet meat dish . 1. 6*
- 2 water Bottles . 2. 6*
- 2 Queens China Cream Jugs . 2. 0*
- 5 do do plates . 2. 3*
- 1 do do broken Tureen . 2. 0*

The "Queens China" refers to cream colored earthenware or cream ware developed by Wedgwood in the late 1760's. It became very fashionable after Queen Charlotte purchased a set. There will be more information about the desserts, Queensware, and Christmas in the 18th C. Virginia in the docents lounge and a table plan in the dining room. If you have time take a look upstairs before you do your tour.

Save the Date: Candlelight Tours, December 14th and 15th

Tour Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Carlyle House, Lee-Fendall House and Lloyd House by candlelight and enjoy seasonal decorations, entertainment and light refreshments. We need eight to ten volunteers on Saturday the 14th from 6 to 9pm, and Sunday the 15th from 3 to 6pm.



Stump the Staff

Question: *What is the square footage of Carlyle House?*

Answer: The total square footage of Carlyle House is 3,266 feet

Question: *Are the Venetian blinds on the 2nd floor something that they would have had in the 18th century?*

Answer: Yes, Venetian blinds were around during the 18th century. Their history actually precedes John Carlyle's time with their early popularity in Paris where they are known as "Les Persiennes," paying homage to their Persian, not Venetian, roots. The evidence that Venetian blinds were used in the 18th century comes from probate inventories. For example, the inventory of Lord Botetourt, Governor of the Colony of Virginia from 1768-1770, list among its items "1 blue venetian blind."

Question: *How come the embroidery hanging in the girls chamber is missing some letters in the alphabet*

Answer: (From a previous Docent Dispatch) Before the seventeenth century and the Great Vowel Shift, 'I' and 'J' were interchangeable letters. Traditionally, a small tail was added on to create 'J' only when there was a series of 'I's in a word; the tailed 'J' signified the end of the series of 'I's. By around 1650, 'I' separated so that 'I' stood for the vowel sound and 'J' for the consonant sound. For example, what we know as the word 'justice' tended to be written as 'ivstice,' as in the Roman alphabet, there was not 'U' or 'J', so their places were filled by 'V' and 'I'. It was not until the mid-18th century that 'I' and 'J' became two distinct letters. This implies that our sampler in the Girls' Chamber is a replica of a mid-century sampler, as there is no 'J'.

Question: *What was the actual cost of renovations in the 1970's?*

The source of funding for the restoration project, this information can be found in the Restoration Report in the Curatorial files: "The funding for The Carlyle House Historic Park came primarily from the Park Authority's annual capital budget, with a limited amount of additional funds from the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Over six years, the project costs totaled 2.5 million dollars. This figure represents the costs of acquisition, demolition of the hotel, landscaping the gardens, the research and architectural fees as well as actual restoration cost. The physical restoration of the Carlyle House cost just over one million dollars." The actual figure was \$1,430,143.





CALENDAR

December 7, Saturday
A Soldiers Christmas
12-4PM, *Docents Needed*

December 14, Saturday
Candlelight Tours 6-9PM
Docents Needed

December 15, Sunday
Candlelight Tours 3-6PM
Docents Needed

January 6, Monday
CHAD Event: George Washington Masonic National Memorial
Details TBD

January 13, Monday
Book Club: Biographies of Nathaniel Green
email Jamie Harding for details
12PM

February 3, Monday
CHAD Event: Lecture on Enslaved African Americans
12PM, 7PM

February 8, Saturday
Black History Month Event at Carlyle House
Details TBD

April 6, Saturday
Braddock Day
12-4pm—*Docents Needed*

April 26, Saturday
Garden Day Open House
10am-4pm—*Docents Needed*

CHAD EVENTS

Monday, January 6
George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria, VA
Details TBD

Join us as we learn more about George Washington, the Mason. This tour will discuss the history of Freemasonry, its strong presence in Alexandria, and original artifacts belonging to George Washington. It will conclude on the top floor of the tower which has one of the best views of the area!



Sign up in the office, call 703-549-2997, or email Vanessa at vherndon@nvrpa.org

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

All of us here at Carlyle House would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season! We are grateful for all that you do and look forward to another year with you!



Susan, Helen and Vanessa