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Carlyle House Docent Dispatch

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

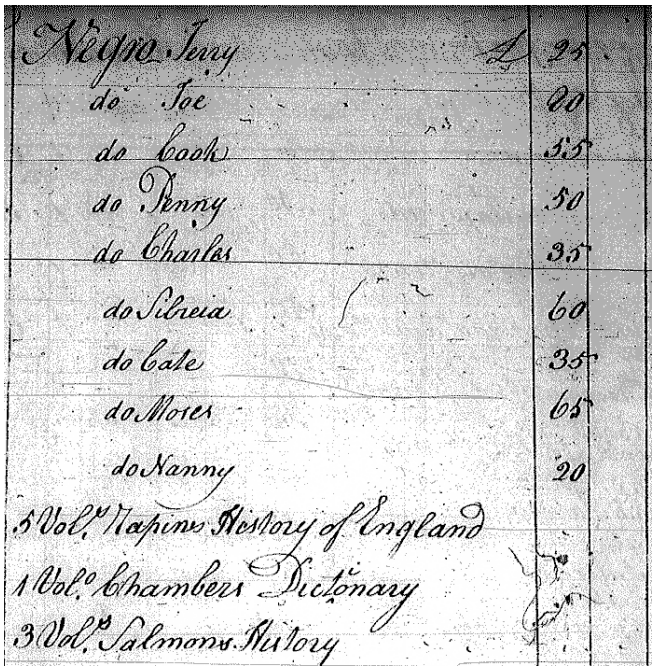
Interpreting Slavery at Carlyle House by Sarah Coster

February is Black History month and a chance to reflect on the African-Americans who lived and worked at Carlyle House. With so many stories, facts and objects that focus on the Carlyle family, it is easy to forget the more silent voices of those who lived and labored here. This is a good time to listen closely to those voices, reflect on them and think about how their voices could become a part of your tour.

The history of slavery is not always an easy one to discuss. It's important to remember that we are telling the story of America. Most Americans did not live like John Carlyle and his family, who represent the top 5% of society. Our visitors are longing to hear the story of not only John Carlyle, but the many others who lived and worked at Carlyle House.

Visitors want to know ***who*** these people were. What happened to them in their lives? Who were they? What is the actual story of actual people? Fortunately for us, we do know something about them. *The* best way to incorporate the history of enslaved persons on your tour is to use what we know and to tell specific stories and facts, instead of speaking in generalities.

A great place to start is by passing around the 1780 probate inventory of the deceased John Carlyle's property. The inventory lists the names of nine enslaved African-Americans; Joe, Cook, Penny, Nanny, Moses, Cate, Sibreia, Jerry and Charles. Before and after these names are common household goods; wheelbarrows, tools, beehives, hammers. And next to all the items, both names and goods alike, are numbers indicating the value of the property. Simply pointing this out to visitors in the


Negro Jerry £ 25
do Joe 20
do Cook 35
do Penny 50
do Charles 35
do Sibreia 60
do Cate 35
do Moses 65
do Nanny 20
5 Vol.s Napiers History of England
1 Vol.e Chambers Dictionary
3 Vol.s Salmons History

Servant's Passage can be a powerful illustration of how eighteenth-century owners viewed slaves as property.

Notice how some of the slaves are not even given names. Cook and Nanny are simply referred to by the tasks they perform in the household. Although we use an elderly female mannequin to portray Cook, she could have been a man or a woman. An all-day job, Cook most likely spent the majority of her time in Carlyle's separate kitchen building and slept in the loft space above it.

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

While it is difficult to define the servant spaces in colonial homes, some evidence points to these areas. A 1775 advertisement for the lease of Belvoir, the home of William Fairfax, Carlyle's father-in-law, described the house as having "*a servants hall and cellars below."* George Washington referred to a servant's hall at Mt. Vernon in a letter written in 1796. Apparently it was a separate outbuilding used, at least in part, as a servants' sleeping space. Washington wrote, *Let the Rooms in the Servants Hall, above and below, be well cleaned; and to have the Beds and bedsteads therein put in order."*

Although there is little direct evidence about servant-oriented spaces on Carlyle's property, he might have emulated the Fairfaxes. It is possible that the southwest cellar room at Carlyle House functioned as a servants hall. The presence of the fireplace in this room gives weight to this idea. Probably, the space served as a combined dining and work area by the servants and that most slept in spaces like a loft over the kitchen, the stables, or the attic, or even on mats in the hallway outside the bedchambers, as dictated by their duties and positions in the servant hierarchy.

Our interpretation of slavery at Carlyle House can be both visual and physical. Have visitors look around the small Servant's Passage and describe how it once featured a dirt floor and lacked glass window panes. Show the property map and explain that there were no slave quarters. Enslaved persons often slept where they worked and had little privacy. Ask visitors to try picking up the bucket of water and to imagine, as they walk up the winding servant's stairs, what it would be like to carry that bucket up and down the stairs several times a day.

The first reference to Carlyle's ownership of slaves comes in a letter, written shortly after his first marriage, when he notes that his *"Wife's fortune Consists of Lands & Sum Negro's."* Later, during the construction of his house, Carlyle wrote, *"it's a Pleasure to build in England but here where we are obligated To Doe Everything With one's own servants & thise Negros make it Require Constant Attendance & Care-& So much trouble that If I had Suspected it woud been What I have meet with, I believe I Shoud made Shift with a Very Small house."*

A great place to remind visitors of the hands that built Carlyle House is the Architecture Room. The chisel marks in the sandstone walls are a stark reminder of the enormous amount of physical labor that went into the construction of Carlyle House. The Roman numerals on the summer beam's dovetail joints are a reminder of the illiteracy of the slave population as well as much of the colonial population in general. As we look at the handmade nails, we can almost hear them being hammered into the walls.

Nails like these were probably made on Carlyle's property. "Joe," listed on the inventory, may have been the "Smith Jo" who ran errands to the Glassford store in town for Carlyle. Joe's high value--£80--indicates a skilled man in the prime of life. The skills of a blacksmith were essential to Carlyle not only as an undertaker and farmer, but as a merchant as well.

The enslaved workers at Carlyle House often ran errands around Alexandria for the family. Carlyle's mother-in-law, Sybil West, notes that *"Mr. Carlyle's mulatto Girl, Mr. Carlyle's Deliah, and Mr. Carlyle's Gardner"* all purchased items for her. Despite their relative freedom to come and go from the house as they pleased, we have no evidence that any of Carlyle's slaves ran away. Carlyle does place

two runaway ads, one in 1767 and one in 1772, both are for convict servants.

While Deliah, Sibreia, Cate and many of the other enslaved African-Americans remain a mystery to us, we do know much more about the woman named Penny.

In 1750, when he was 29, John Carlyle purchased a slave named Penelope from the estate sale of Fairfax County planter Richard Osborn. Osborn's probate inventory lists Penny at a value of £20, a high value that most likely indicated she was no longer a child. The sale of Richard Osborn's holdings was spread out over three days on April 23, 24 and 25, 1750. Noted on the ledger for the auction of Osborn's estate is the purchase by "*Mr. Carlyle*" of two enslaved persons, "*Forrester*" and "*Penelope*." Carlyle paid £81 for the lot. Was Forrester her kin? If not, was Penny forever separated from her family?

Thirty years later, Penny appeared in Carlyle's 1780 inventory and was valued at £50. In those thirty years, Penny stood witness to every significant event that occurred on Fairfax Street: from the first day the expectant parents moved into their new home in 1753 to the "*Grandest Congress*" in 1755 to the death of her master in 1780.

What did Penny's duties include? Was she a nurse to the children? A seamstress? We can only speculate. What is evident is that she remained with the family after Carlyle's death. In1804, when Penny took ill after being "almost killed by the doctors," Sarah Carlyle Herbert took "great care of her" and nursed her back to health.

Writing to her daughter Margaret Herbert Fairfax, Sarah mentions how she:

> "*Found Poor old Penny almost killed by the doctors when I return'd from Danby. It was the fashion last fall, if a person complain'd of being sick, to bleed, blister, & salivate – accordingly when the old women called a Doctor, tho'x she was upwards Sixty they bled, Blister'd, & put her in so severe a salivation, that when I came home she had* sca[ ]rcely *any pilse. I was obliged to give her a quantity of Maderia wine & take great care of her-."*

If Penny was, as Sarah claims, "upwards of Sixty" in 1804, then she would have been born in the late 1730s or early 1740s. This also substantiates the theory that she was a young teenager when she was purchased in 1750. If Penny's role was as a domestic servant in the house, Penny was possibly the only constant female presence in Sarah's life.*

It is easy to imagine these two women living alongside each other, but each in very different worlds. While in the girl's bedchamber, be sure to mention Penny and her life here at Carlyle House. The purchase of new mannequins for our exhibits will help bring her to life for the visiting public.

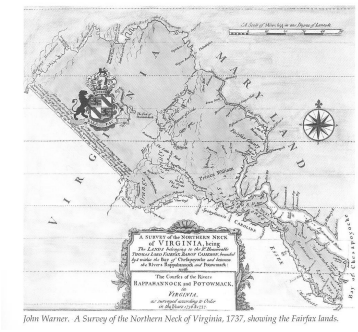
Little is known about Carlyle's attitude toward slavery, although his extensive ownership and of and dealing in slaves seems to indicate full participation in the system. Even if he had wanted to free his slaves upon his death, this was not a legal possibility in Virginia. The Virginia legislature did not pass a law allowing the private manumission of slaves until 1782.

As you can see, a frank discussion about the lives of the enslaved persons living at Carlyle House can enhance your tour. By examining the evidence we have and presenting it to the public, we bring into focus the rich history of Carlyle House's silent voices.

**(For a more detailed look at Penny's life, please see Jim Bartlinski's article in the March 2007 Docent Dispatch).*

Evidence Suggests Carlyle Owned John Warner's map: A SURVEY of the NORTHERN NECK of VIRGINIA

By Jim Bartlinski



John Warner. A Survey of the Northern Neck of Virginia, 1737, showing the Fairfax lands.

Located in the pier between the two windows of Colonel John Carlyle's study hangs a reproduction of the 1745 edition of cartographer John Warner's *A SURVEY of the NORTHERN NECK of VIRGINIA, being the LANDS belonging to the R^t. Honourable THOMAS LORD FAIRFAX BARON CAMERON, bounded by & within the Bay of Chesapoyocke and between the Rivers Rappahannock and Potowmack: With The Courses of the Rivers RAPPAHANNOCK and POTOWMACK, in VIRGINIA, as surveyed according to Order in the Years 1736 & 1737*. Warner had been commissioned by Thomas, the sixth Lord Fairfax, Carlyle's relation by marriage, to produce a map as testament to his rightful proprietorship of Virginia's Northern Neck. For more than forty years after the death of Lord Culpeper (the father of the fifth Lord Fairfax's wife Catherine) in 1689, there had been long and bitter litigation over whether the Fairfaxes held legitimate title to the five million plus acres that made up the Northern Neck. Their son, Thomas, the sixth Lord Fairfax, continued the fight and finally solidified his family's claim over their vast Virginia holdings in the mid 1730s. About 1735, his lordship made a visit to Virginia and contracted Warner to survey the Northern Neck and create a map of his proprietorship.

A look at primary source material suggests Colonel Carlyle owned a copy of John Warner's map of Lord Fairfax's Northern Neck domain. The November 13, 1780 probate inventory of Carlyle's Alexandria estate indicates that at the time of his death he was in possession of "*16 large & Small Maps*." Of these sixteen maps, Warner's survey of the Northern Neck was surely among those that Carlyle possessed. Evidence of this possibility exists in an August 15, 1755 letter that the thirty-five year old Carlyle wrote to his older brother Doctor George Carlyle in England. The letter recounts the details surrounding Major-General Edward Braddock's boorish behavior while at Carlyle's Alexandria home, the "*Grandest Congress*," and the General's disastrous defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela on July 9, 1755.

When writing of General Braddock's ill-fated campaign, Carlyle refers his brother to the "*Small map*" of Lord Fairfax's, "*Northern Neck.*" The younger Carlyle instructs his older sibling to locate on the map "*a place Called Shawnee* [Shanno] *Indian Fields Depicted In the Small map that you have of Lord Fairfax, Northern Neck) and near the head of the Potowmack & About 100 Miles from hence*." The "*Shanno*" Indian Fields, as the location is referred to on John Warner's Northern Neck survey, are located at the top northwest portion of the map near the Alleghany Mountains situated between the Potomac River and Wills Creek on Maryland's western frontier. The western most Shanno Indian Fields (there is another on the map but a little further east) is the location of Fort Cumberland, constructed on the site of a former Shawnee Indian settlement. Fort Cumberland began as a supply depot for the Ohio Company and was enlarged by Braddock in the spring of 1755 to be used as the final staging point for his assault on For Duquesne. In May 1755 an ambitious 23-year-old George Washington marched out from Fort Cumberland with Braddock on a forty-two day trek to Fort Duquesne where both men met their separate destinies at the Monongahela.

Warner's map serves not only as an interpretive tool that illustrates Carlyle's status as a landed and enlightened Virginia gentleman with marital ties to the influential Fairfax family, but also as a tangible link to Braddock's ill-fated campaign. Likewise, the map is an interpretive vehicle that connects two brothers separated by an ocean to historical events of global significance. Moreover, Carlyle telling his brother to reference Warner's map of the Northern Neck indicates that both brothers were familiar with the map and most likely owned it. This revelation puts the museum one step closer to accurately interpreting the furnishings and sundry other items owned by Colonel Carlyle during his life at his Alexandria estate.