



Carlyle House

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The Travels of the Carlyle Portraits

By Dorothy Claypool



For centuries men and women have had their portraits painted, not only as a means of showing what they looked like, but since portraits were expensive, also showing their wealth and importance. The four portraits in the Carlyle House illustrate the wealth and social standing of the Carlyle family. These four

pictures have had numerous travels over the centuries before finally being reunited in the Carlyle House.

The Carlyle Portraits in Britain

Since they were an ocean apart and could not afford to have their portraits painted, John and George Carlyle exchanged pictures. In 1765, John selected John Hesselius to paint his portrait. Located in Annapolis, Hesselius was the important portraitist of the mid-Atlantic area during this period, having painted many of the well-known and wealthy residents including George and Anne Mason of Gunston Hall.

In a letter to George dated August 1, 1766, John wrote that he was pleased that his portrait arrived safely in England. He had feared that the ship might have had an accident. He further explained that he was satisfied with the likeness after returning it to Hesselius with instructions to add seven years so that the portrait be true to his appearance. He expressed his pleasure in receiving George's picture and hoped that George would continue to look like his picture.

How did the portrait of John travel through two hundred years between the home of George Carlyle in England and that of Sir Fitzroy Maclean in Strachur, Scotland where it is today? The Macleans became collateral descendants of George when George's

granddaughter Eleanor married Lt. Col. Henry Dundar Maclean in 1841. A century or so later, the wife of Sir Fitzroy, Lady Veronica Maclean, penned her autobiography, *Past Forgetting*, in which the Carlyle name appears. She writes that Fitz inherited from his Uncle Henry Maclean of Ardour "trunk-loads of Maclean and Carlyle papers, books, pictures, heirlooms and furniture." She continues that they gave his widow, Aunt Ros, one of the nicest houses on the Strachur estate. After Aunt Ros was settled in, the residue came to Fitz in the form of "20 murky family portraits of Fitzroy's ancestors which he took delight in labeling and hanging them." So John's portrait was now in Strachur, Scotland, the home of Sir Fitzroy Maclean; the portrait joined a portrait of John's brother, George that may have been a period copy of the painting George shipped to John in 1766.

Sir Fitzroy came to Alexandria in 1975 when he was authoring an article about his exploits during World War II for Time-Life Books. He heard, through friends, of the restoration of the Carlyle House. After mentioning to the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority staff that he had John's portrait and Carlyle papers, he offered to make them available to NVRPA researchers. The result is that Maclean loaned the portraits of John and George along with John Carlyle's letters to the house in 1976 when it opened to the public after restoration. The portraits were on loan throughout the Bicentennial year provided that the NVRPA

CARLYLE HOUSE

Susan Hellman, Site Administrator

Helen Wirka, Site Specialist

Vanessa Herndon, Education Assistant



have them repaired and cleaned.

On January 18, 1976, Sir Fitzroy returned for the opening of the Carlyle House and the honor of unveiling John's original restored portrait. Before the return of the two portraits to Scotland, NVRPA had copies made of George and John by the Kennedy Galleries in New York. Photographs with an overlay of paint, these copies then hung in the house for many years.



In 2004, John's portrait made its third trip across the Atlantic when Sir Charles, Sir Fitzroy's son, allowed the Carlyle House to have it copied a second time. This was done by the latest and most precise technique. The result, so like the original,

has pride of place in the house. The first copy now hangs next door in the Carlyle House spaces in the bank building.

We are indebted to the centuries of care that the Carlyle and Maclean families gave to their relative's portrait and papers. Without them, we would never read John's letters nor know what he looked like.

The Carlyle Portraits in America

John Carlyle's inventory lists "3 family picturs [sic]." Research has identified them to be of William and Rachel Murray Carlyle and George Carlyle. Whether John brought the portraits of William and Rachel with him when he came to Virginia as a factor for William Hicks or brought them back from one of his two visits home has not been documented to date. There is no doubt that George sent his portrait to John. In his letter to George of August 1, 1766, John wrote of his pleasure in receiving it.

All three portraits are unsigned, which was not unusual for 18th-century painters. In the case of Rachel's portrait, one art critic simply stated that it was painted circa 1720 by an unknown, probably Scottish or English artist. The artist of William's portrait was described much later by Sotheby's Auction House as a painter of "sophisticated quality

of draftsmanship and technical skill." Again described by Sotheby's, the artist of George's portrait was probably of the circle of William Hoare (ca. 1707 – Dec. 12. 1792). Hoare was the first and leading portraitist of Bath, England when Bath, in its heyday, was a center of cultural excellence second only to London.



Although it is not known exactly how the contents of the house were dispersed when John died, we know that Sarah and William Herbert auctioned John's possessions in 1782. Yet several of his possessions descended within the family, which indicates that the Herberts and Whitings must have kept those Carlyle belongings that had meaning for them. For example, Rachel's portrait descended through the Herberts to Thomas V. Brooke of Newcastle, Maine. Thomas' sister Anne Brooke in her 1989 note to the director of the Carlyle House told of seeing the portrait on the wall of her grandmother Herbert's house on Washington Street (the house was where Christ Church Parish House now stands). Through the years, a family member painted several copies of Rachel's portrait, one of which was donated to the Carlyle House on July 24, 1975 by Ware Adams. In January 1992, the original portrait was gifted to the house by T.V. Brooke and far out shines the copy. In the original, Rachel appears in her late teens or early 20s, the artist's style is more naïve and has more charm and innocence. It was quite fashionable for Rachel to be dressed for her portrait as she is in her red orange robe with white fichu. The portraits of William and George came to the Carlyle House by a more circuitous route. A descendant, William Herbert, inherited them. In the 1930s, according to Anne Brooke's note of 1989 "my impecunious Uncle William Herbert sold them to his wealthy cousin Herbert Boone."

In 1921, James R. Herbert Boone graduated from Johns Hopkins University in the Arts and Science department. He and his wife spent much



time in Europe amassing an art collection and having audiences with the Pope and English and Italian royalty. When he died in 1883, he left his home, Oak Hill House, and his art collection to Johns

copy of the portrait of their original owner, John Carlyle.

Hopkins to endow a chair in Humanities.

In 1988, Johns Hopkins sent the collection to Sotheby's Auction House in New York. The Carlyle House obtained a Sotheby's catalogue of the auction. The catalogue identified the portraits by their labels as John's uncle William Murray and William Carlyle. The staff went to New York to examine the portraits and became convinced of their authenticity by the style of hair and clothing. Both men were wearing a steinkirk, a cravat with long ends loosely twisted and looped together and worn especially in the 18th century by men and women. The condition and age of the canvas, the original and matching frames plus the family resemblance also supported their identification. The labels were later, but family ownership gave credence.

The staff left a written bid. When Sotheby's learned the bid was from a museum, they opened a phone line the day of the auction to bid by phone. Shortly after 10:30 am on Friday, September 16, 1988 the director's bid made the Carlyle House once again the owner of the portraits.

Then came the identification of the portrait labeled William Murray. Sotheby's in London had identified the painter as Hoare. By close examination, the Carlyle House staff compared it to their photocopy of George made in 1976 by the Kennedy Gallery. Its remarkable resemblance to George was evident. In her note of 1989, Anne Brooke further vouched for George's and William's portraits authenticity "when I was a child they hung on the walls of Grandmother Herbert's house along with one of Rachel."

Finally, by 1992, the original portraits of William, Rachel and George had returned to the Carlyle House where they belonged along with a