



Carlyle House

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Richard Arell and John Carlyle: Parallel Lives in Early Alexandria By Rosemary Maloney

Although the name Richard Arell is not known to many in Alexandria today, Arell probably was well known to the city's residents in the late 1700s. When he is remembered today it is for owning Arell's Tavern on the Market Square site and for donating property for the Presbyterian Meeting House burial ground and Meeting House. Another reminder of Richard Arell is the street sign "Arell Court" at the entrance to a residential development near the intersection of Duke Street and North Quaker Lane. The Office of Historic Alexandria confirms that Arell Court was named for "the prominent 18th century Alexandria family." Arell's commercial ventures and civic involvement in the late 18th century connected him to such notable Alexandrians as John Carlyle, George Washington, George Mason, and William Ramsay.

Richard Arell, believed to have been born in 1719, came to Alexandria from Pennsylvania with his wife, Eleanor, and their five children some time prior to 1762. One of Arell's main activities in Alexandria was the purchase of all or parts of at least ten of the half-acre lots in the new city. He often subdivided and rented out parts of these lots. His purchase of Lot 53 from the original owner, George Mason, in July 1762, is among early documented evidence of Arell's business in Alexandria. In that deed, Arell was listed as "merchant." Another Arell property was Lot 70, purchased in March 1775; his house was built on the southwest corner of the lot.

In 1835, Arell's extensive land holdings became part

of a court case in a suit brought on behalf of his infant great-grandchildren. Court documents state that "...Richard Arell, late of the town of Alexandria, hath departed this life intestate, leaving a considerable real estate, consisting of lots, lands, and groundrents, in and about the town of Alexandria, and in the state of Virginia...".

Lot 48: Arell's Tavern

Arell's Tavern, on part of Lot 48, is probably the most important of his commercial ventures, and one of historical significance. Lot 48 and Lot 49, next to it, occupied the entire south part of Market Square. Fairfax Street, site of the properties of John Carlyle and William Ramsay, bordered Lot 48 on the east. George Washington mentions at least 16 times in his diaries that he either dined or supped at Arell's. The tavern is sometimes identified as the site where the Fairfax Resolves were written in July 1774. These documents, written by George Mason and signed by John Carlyle, George Washington, and others, were the origins of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

It is unclear when Arell purchased Lot 48, but by 1771 he was leasing out part of the property.

CARLYLE HOUSE

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Between 1768 and 1774 Arell was granted licenses to “keep an ordinary.” In a number of deeds Arell is referred to as “inn holder.” Modern excavations uncovered a creamware punch bowl in a brick-lined shaft associated with Arell’s Tavern; the bowl is now in the collection of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum.

Lots 90 and 91: Presbyterian Meeting House and Burial Ground

Arell also is noted for deeding parts of Lots 90 and 91 on July 12, 1773, to the young Reverend William Thom for the purpose of building a permanent Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria. That deed was witnessed by John Carlyle and William Ramsay. Arell had earlier represented the Alexandria Presbyterians in Pennsylvania when William Thom was ordained. Information is lacking as to when Arell acquired these lots, but prior to 1773 they had served as a Presbyterian burial ground. Arell asked only one shilling Sterling for the property, in effect donating the land to Alexandria’s Presbyterian community.

The Arell Portraits

Remarkably, portraits of Richard and Eleanor Arell have survived the years. These portraits were displayed in April and May of 1956, in a Gadsby’s Tavern exhibit sponsored by The Alexandria Association, a member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. At that time the portraits were in the possession of Arell’s descendants. The catalog for the exhibit attributed these portraits to the English painter John Wollaston and dated them “before 1775.” John Wollaston first came to America in 1749, and painted in Virginia until around 1758; he then left the area and eventually returned to England, where he was last seen in London in 1775. In contrast, a 2012 Smithsonian Institution catalog of portraits attributes the Arell portraits to the American-born

John Hesselius (1728 – 1778) and dates them from c.1758. That date fits well with the period of Hesselius’ activity in Virginia, where he began painting around 1751. His portrait of John Carlyle was painted in 1765. Arell’s portrait is in the hand-in-vest pose, a hallmark of Hesselius’ work.

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Arell’s support for America’s freedom from Britain is evidenced by his signature as one of the self-styled “Friends to Liberty” in their letter to the printer of the *Norfolk Intelligencer*. Perhaps to ensure that the letter would be made public, the Friends to Liberty sent the letter to the *Virginia Gazette* to be published there. Dated October 14, 1774, the letter was printed in the *Virginia Gazette* on November 10, 1774:

YOUR Papers, in general, being calculated to divide and weaken the Friends of American Freedom, have become highly obnoxious to us. That one dated September 22, 1774, containing a Performance entitled “a Discourse between three of the Members of the Congress,” attempting to ridicule that august Body, is particularly offensive; and lest a Continuation of our Subscriptions may be construed into a tacit Approbation of your Proceedings, we thus publicly desire that our Names may be henceforth erased from the List of your Subscribers, being determined not to afford the smallest Support to any Person who is inimical to the Interest of this Country. We are ready to pay for your Paper agreeable to our Subscription (one Year) when demanded by yourself, or to your



Order.

The thirty Friends to Liberty who signed the letter included Richard Arell, William Ramsay, Robert Adam, and William Herbert (John Carlyle's future son-in-law).

Member of the Sun Fire Company

Property owners in Alexandria were aware of the dangers of fire and organized various fire companies to protect their property. The Sun Fire Company was organized prior to March 1775, with John Carlyle as a founding member. Members would take turns serving as the clerk and recording the minutes. In an entry in the Sun Fire Company Minute Book for April 24, 1775, Richard Arell, as clerk, dutifully reported "that such of the members who have their Buckets and Bag provided have them hung up in good order but many of them are not yet finished." John Carlyle's inventory taken in November 1780 includes "4 fire Buckets 1 Baskett & 2 Bags." More information on the Sun Fire Company appears in the Docent Dispatch of February 2011.

Arell's Last Years

In October 1795, when Arell was 76 years old, he leased a part of Lot 70 to a tenant; this implies that he was still conducting business. The next date associated with Arell is a death notice of July 28, 1796, in the church records of the Presbyterian Meeting House. However, the death notice identifies the deceased as "H. Arell," a mistake that may have occurred when the original church records were recopied at a later time. It is unclear when Eleanor Arell died, but both husband and wife are believed to have been buried in the Meeting House burial ground. Born a year before John Carlyle, Arell had outlived Carlyle by almost twenty years.

Richard Arell was not a founder or trustee of the City of Alexandria; nevertheless he was intimately involved in the early growth of the city. Like John Carlyle

he took part in its commercial, civic, and religious activities, and lent his support to the independence of the new country. For all these contributions it is appropriate that Arell be remembered today.