

# Carlyle House

## DOCENT DISPATCH


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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

### *Sifting Through Slavery*

*by Heather Dunn*

In the past month Carlyle House has welcomed three new mannequins to its education collection. They are actively set up in the rooms to help interpret the whole story of the house. The objects, the furnishings, and the letters make it easy to interpret the Carlyle family; however nine other individuals called this house their home. The



**R**UN away from the subscriber in *Albemarle*, a Mulatto slave called *Sandy*, about 35 years of age, his stature is rather low, inclining to corpulence, and his complexion light; he is a shoemaker by trade, in which he uses his left hand principally, can do coarse carpenters work, and is something of a horse jockey; he is greatly addicted to drink, and when drunk is insolent and disorderly, in his conversation he swears much, and in his behaviour is artful and knavish. He took with him a white horse, much scarred with traces, of which it is expected he will endeavour to dispose; he also carried his shoemakers tools, and will probably endeavour to get employment that way. Whoever conveys the said slave to me, in *Albemarle*, shall have 40 s. reward, if taken up within the county, 4 l. if elsewhere within the colony, and 10 l. if in any other colony, from  
THOMAS JEFFERSON.

allowed to keep a portion, work extra hours at a craft to sell their own objects, raise crops or animals on their own. Many off season field hands were rented out in cities. This not only gave them more opportunities to make money but allowed them to interact with people off the plantation in ports like Alexandria.

mannequins are there to represent the story of the enslaved population. The February newsletter had an article consisting of the information we know about the specific individuals that lived at Carlyle House. In March I attended a conference, *Sifting Through Slavery: Archaeology and Interpretation of Agricultural and Industrial Slavery in the Mid-Atlantic* and learned more about what life was like in general for African Americans in the 18th Century.

The African Americans were given restrictions to earning their own money. For example they could not compete with the master's business. In the spring of 1798, Thomas Jefferson's son-in-law informed him that he stopped several slaves that had planted tobacco on his Albemarle County property without his permission. Jefferson responded "I thank you for putting an end to the cultivation of tobacco as the peculium of the negroes. I have ever found it necessary to confine them to such articles as are not raised on the farm. There is no other way of drawing a line between what is theirs & mine."

The experience of Africans arriving to the new world was different from that of European settlers. Colonists arriving from England were accustomed to populated and built up cities. Africans were suddenly forced into a world that not only looked different from their native home but they were forced into a society that physically controlled them. Other nationalities and cultures mixed in the new world and suddenly new societal rules needed to be established. Your family name and rank could no longer speak for your reputation and social stature. The colonist required some sort of other gauge for a persons place in society. Much is known and written about the white colonists' forms of "moveable wealth." They learned intricate manners and purchased huge amounts of expensive items to show off their wealth. These practices however, did not just apply to white society.

So what was the enslaved population doing with this very hard earned money? According to Dr. Jillian Galle and her archeological findings they were purchasing fashionable goods, similar to the goods purchased by the white population. She found evidence of slaves owning buttons, buckles, fashionable cloth, porcelain, sugar, and alcohol. Buttons were expensive and of little practical use. Metal buttons could not be produced at home but were highly visible fashion items for men.

Many slaves were able to earn some money of their own. They could be hired out by their master and

**CARLYLE HOUSE**  
*Jim Bartlinski, Director*  
*Sarah Coster, Curator*  
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It was technically illegal in the 18th century for there to be economic dealings between white and black. However there is evidence that this was often overlooked in the name of profit. Store owners have records of opening their shops late at night and on Sundays to allow the black population to shop on their own time. Unlike the white population however, slaves did have to pay in cash. The clothes described in the runaway slave ads are also proof that slaves were supplementing their master's clothes allotment. Purchasing your own clothes allowed you to have self expression, individuality, and show your status within your peer group in an otherwise very oppressive world.

Unfortunately information about African American life is not as easily accessible as the wealthy and well known men of the 18th century. However, more and more details about their lives are being discovered through archeology. Archeologist Dr. John Vlach excavated slave quarters from a variety of time periods including the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. During the early colonial period newly imported Africans were very accessible and fairly inexpensive. They were imported mainly for hard labor in the tobacco fields.



Slave quarters from this late 17th century and early 18th century were very crude cabins. They were made of wood with often just mud stuck

between the logs. The mud needed to be replied often as it fell off. These cabins offered little protection from the winter and the crowded conditions encouraged the spread of disease.

There is no evidence of slave dwellings at Carlyle House but we can learn about the greater African American experience by investigating other sites. As the 18th century progressed there is archeological evidence of the improvements of slave dwellings. This continued into the 19th century when the enslaved population began living in clap board and even brick structures.

In 1807 Great Britain passed the Slave Trade Act which outlawed the international slave trade. Suddenly prices went through the roof and this directly corresponds with the plantation owners providing improved living conditions. For example on Robert Bladen Tylar's 1793 inventory his 26 year old blacksmith, Antoney, was appraised at \$90. His 10 year old Sorrel Horse is appraised at \$17. Just sixteen years later, in 1809, two years after the ban on the international slave trade, Doctor John Dyson's inventory is taken. Michael, a 30 year old male, is valued at \$280. To make a fair comparison Dyson's 14 year old Sorrel Horse is marked as worth \$20. With the price of slaves nearly tripling in less than a generation it is possible to see how their housing and food allotment might have improved as masters had a different perspective on their financial worth.

A very popular question I receive from school children is, "Why didn't all the slaves just run away?" This does seem like the obvious solution to an elementary school student. As adults we know it was much more complicated than that. Some slaves however did try and succeeded at running away. Masters went to great lengths to eliminate these opportunities.

Dr. Jillian Galle found correlations between slaves that were able to successful runaway and those that were caught. The most successful runaways had a skill, had ventured off the plantation to a city and had knowledge of the outside world. They had made friends and connections off the plantation, learned the geography of the area, could earn money. Plantation owners knew that these were the keys to freedom and therefore took steps to prevent "contaminating" their slaves with such knowledge. For example, James Madison took his footman, Billey to Philadelphia for the Continental Congress in 1783. Philadelphia was a drastically different environment than the isolated Montpelier Plantation Madison was to return to. In Philadelphia Billey probably had much allowance to move about the city unaccompanied to complete Madison's errands and came in contact with many free blacks. Before returning home Madison made the decision to sell Billy writing to his father, "On a view of all circumstances I have judged it most prudent not to force Billey back to Va...I am persuaded his mind is to thoroughly tainted to be a fit companion for fellow slave in Virga..." Madison is afraid Billey will return to the isolated plantation with tales of the big city that



Built up off the earth with clap board siding, a shingled roof, a brick chimney and a window, this later slave cabin would provide much more substantial protection.

would taint the secluded Montpelier's slaves minds with ideas of freedom and possibly with plans to run away. Carlyle had three plantations outside the city of Alexandria and at least 67 slaves when he

died in 1780. We are unaware if he moved them around, but the slaves living here at Carlyle House in the port city of Alexandria would have had a very different idea of their situation and a much different experience than those living on the plantations.

### Three New Mannequins Bring the Story of Enslaved African-Americans to Life

The recent purchase of three new mannequins, graciously funded by the Friends of Carlyle House, will enable the museum to tell the stories of the often faceless and voiceless enslaved people who lived and worked here.

Mannequins were first introduced to the museum during the 1994 exhibit "Don't Get Weary." That exhibit was a groundbreaking exploration of urban slavery.



Penny mannequin from the 1994 exhibit.

Incorporating mannequins and audio clips, the exhibit used every room and floor of the house, at a time when many museums rarely used the word "slave" on tours. The central idea behind the exhibit was that, in history and museums, we find many examples, through letters, portraits, furniture, homes, etc. of the elite white world. By using mannequins, the

curators hoped to provide visibility to those whom the evidence of history often leaves invisible. The exhibit was praised by the museum field as "an excellent model for historic house museums and sites for it enables the telling of slave history without the need for additional space and even more importantly, brings home the point that black and white existences were intertwined and should be viewed as a single, interconnected story."



Our new Penny mannequin.



One of our new mannequins is an elderly male. While we know little about the slaves on Carlyle's inventory, two men, Jerry and Charles, were given low values, perhaps reflecting their age.

Sixteen years later, our mannequins were showing their age and the majority could no longer be displayed due to extensive damage of their plaster heads and hands. Our three new mannequins, built by Dorfman Museum Figures, are vastly superior to the former plaster mannequins and even better than our three existing vinyl mannequins. With the addition of the new mannequins, we now have six figures that are realistic museum forms, three with pose-able hands.

We have three female mannequins, young, middle-aged, and elderly, and three male mannequins, again, young, middle-aged and elderly. The enslaved workers that the mannequins will portray will change, depending on the interpretive scenarios of the museum.

A mannequin in the Dining Room is dressed in livery. Any of the men on the inventory, Jerry, Joe, Charles or Moses, may have served as Carlyle's manservant.

