

Carlyle House DOCENT DISPATCH

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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

John Carlyle: Patriot

by Sarah Coster

In 1764 the British Parliament, desiring revenue from its North American colonies and looking to recoup money spent on the French and Indian War, passed the Sugar Act. The law increased duties on non-British goods shipped to the colonies. The very next year Great Britain issued the Stamp Act, which taxed newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, broadsides, legal documents, dice, and playing cards. It was the first direct tax levied on the American colonies. In 1764, the Parliament also passed the Currency Act, which prohibited the colonies from issuing their own money. Then in 1765, they passed the Quartering Act, which required the colonists to provide barracks and supplies to British troops.

What did John Carlyle think of all this? He certainly had been no friend to General Braddock and the British troops back in 1755 when they quartered at his Alexandria home and he called their company “very disagreeable.”

We might have been able to answer this question if a letter John wrote to his brother prior to August 1766 had not been lost at sea before reaching its intended destination. John writes of the lost letter in his next missive. If George had received the lost letter, John wrote, he “would have had my sentiments as to the Gloomey Prospects we as Colonists had from the Laws our Mother Country had and were going to lay upon us” (1 August 1766).

Carlyle’s (presumably) unhappy feelings about the “laws” must have dissipated when Parliament



C. 1766-1770, this teapot is in the collection of the National Museum of American History. A similar teapot with red lettering is in the Colonial Williamsburg collection. Carlyle House has a reproduction of the Williamsburg version.

repealed the Stamp Act in early 1766. The repeal was considered a happy victory for the colonists and even inspired a commemorative teapot with the words “No Stamp Act” on one side and “America- Liberty Restored” on the reverse.

Perhaps John Carlyle himself celebrated by purchasing this teapot. Putting George at ease, John writes that the recent conflict between the colonies and Great Britain “is all dissipated and nothing appears but that our Mother Country intends well for us which we are obliged to her for...” (1 August 1766).

John Carlyle, however, continued to be uncertain about the motivations of Great Britain “We think her own interest, not our good, was the chief consideration.” This sentiment of distrust existed across the colonies as the citizens anxiously awaited Britain’s next move.

While drafting his reply letter, George Carlyle seems to agree with his brother’s concerns. He

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writes of a Country loaded with immense debts (presumably Great Britain) and that he doesn't "know how the contest will end," but "I expect in a future Struggle."

We don't know exactly what kind of struggle George Carlyle envisioned when he wrote his letter, but a struggle did come. Three years later, in 1769, John would once again write George about the growing conflict between Great Britain and her colonies. This time the topic of concern was the Virginia Resolutions that had passed that year. In it, the Virginia House of Burgesses passed resolutions condemning Britain's actions against Massachusetts, which included dissolving their legislature and sending in troops. The Virginia Resolutions stated that only Virginia's governor and legislature could tax its citizens. The members also drafted a formal letter of protest to the King, completing it just before the legislature was dissolved by Virginia's royal governor.

"I make no doubt but you have seen the Spirited Resolves of Our Assembly," writes John. "We make no doubt the Revenue Acts will be Repealed and then we shall be in our former State of Dutiful and Loyal Subjects, better is not in England then this Colony is in General, You need be under no Concern for Us. We act in such a manner that we cannot be reflected upon." (August 21, 1769).

John Carlyle, like many other colonists, felt their protests would be heard and acknowledged by King George. Carlyle had good reason to want a quick and peaceful end to the dispute. Just that May he had signed the Virginia Non-importation Association and Agreement. The signers agreed not to import (boycott was a term that hadn't been invented yet) a variety of British goods. The document stated that Virginia merchants should "avoid purchasing any commodity or article of goods whatsoever from any importer or seller of British merchandise or European goods, whom we may know or believe, in violation of the essential



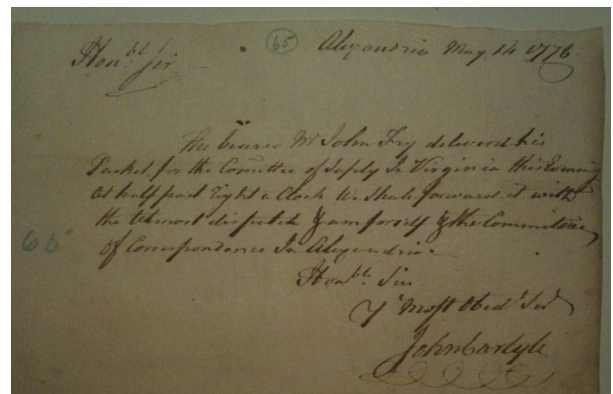
"The Alternative to Williams-Burg" mocked Virginia colonists for their harsh treatment of those who refused to sign the Association.

interests of the colony." The list of goods prohibited was extensive. In signing the agreement, Carlyle jeopardized his substantial business income.

Unfortunately, the last known letter between John and his brother is dated January 28th, 1770. We cannot quote Carlyle about his reactions to Lexington and Concord or understand his feelings about the Declaration of Independence. But, if actions speak louder than words, we know that John Carlyle was a true and loyal patriot.

John Carlyle was a member of the Committees of Correspondence and Safety. These committees formed during the Stamp Act Crisis and continued throughout the war to report on local activities and coordinate written communications. News during this time period was spread through hand-written letters that traveled via courier on horseback or ship. The committee members ensured the safety and accuracy of such communications. They provided a way for all the correspondents to communicate throughout the colonies with confidence that the information was accurate.

The Maryland State Archives houses two letters



Letter dated May 14, 1776 from John Carlyle reporting that John Fry delivered his packet for the Committee of Safety in Virginia and that it will be forwarded to Maryland with a dispatch from the Committee of Correspondence in Alexandria. (MDHR)



John Carlyle wrote to the governor of Maryland (dated 1776 and 1778 respectively). One discusses the theft of a horse in the area and the other simply reports on the safe arrival of John Fry's packet from Virginia to the Alexandria committee.

In addition to the danger involved with being a part of the Committees of Correspondence and Safety, John Carlyle put his name on one of the more radical resolves passed in the colonies. The Fairfax Resolves, adopted in Fairfax County on July 18, 1774, stated "That taxation and representation are in their nature inseparable; that the powers over the people of America now claimed by the British House of Commons...establish the most grievous and intollerable species of Tyranny and Oppression, that was ever Inflicted upon Mankind."

As you celebrate July 4th this year with fireworks, BBQs and concerts, don't forget about the many patriots who earned us our freedom. The names to celebrate on the 4th go beyond Washington, Jefferson and Adams. The names include *John Carlyle*.

"And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."

Carlyle Quotables

*I am obliged to write this almost in the dark. Mr. Dalton and I, having much to do and little time to do it in, therefore hope you'll excuse faults
3-20 February 1745*



***Look here for more Carlyle
Quotable quotes in
the future!***

