

# Carlyle

## Connection

*"It's a fine beginning"*



### *The Ties That Bind: How Influential Family Connections and Initiative Gave Rise to William Fairfax's Prominence in Virginia*

Jim Bartlinski

William Fairfax was born in Yorkshire's Newton Kyme Parish, on October 15, 1691. William was the third son of Anne Harrison and Henry Fairfax of Toulston (sometimes spelled Towlston), grandson of Henry Fairfax, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Fairfax of Cameron, and nephew to Thomas, 5<sup>th</sup> Lord Fairfax. William arrived in Virginia in 1733, coming from Massachusetts where he had served as Collector of Customs for the Crown.

Upon moving to Virginia, William again assumed the position of Collector of Customs, as well as land agent for his first cousin, Thomas, 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Fairfax, Baron of Cameron. Lord Fairfax was the proprietor of the immense Virginia domain, known as the "Northern Neck Grant,"

consisting of over five million acres. William and his family lived along the lower Potomac before taking up residence at Belvoir Manor in 1741, the same year his future son-in-law John Carlyle established himself in the colony. Belvoir was situated on the west bank of the upper Potomac River below Alexandria where Fort Belvoir is today.

In 1741, at 50 years of age, William was master of a considerable estate. His service to the Crown in Virginia included that of President of the Governor's Council in Williamsburg and membership in the House of Burgesses. Along with his son-in-law John Carlyle, William was a member of the Ohio Company and served as a representative for the colony at a conference with the Iroquois Indians held at

Winchester in September 1753. Fairfax also introduced the bill that created Fairfax County as a separate political jurisdiction in 1742, and subsequently served as presiding Justice of the County Court, as colonel of the militia, and as County Lieutenant, the county's chief law-enforcement officer. At the same time that William was acting as his cousin's agent and fulfilling his other obligations, he managed his own substantial

landholdings throughout Virginia until his death on September 3, 1757 at his plantation Belvoir. It would have been difficult for William to attain these posts or acquire his own vast Virginia holdings without initiative and the aid of influential relatives such as his cousin, Lord

Fairfax, and other well-placed kinsmen.

The value of an extended family and the value of family connections were more prevalent in 18<sup>th</sup>-century society than today. "Family" tended to be a broad term that included parents, their children, and an assortment of blood relations that encompassed grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as godparents and those related by marriage into one cohesive extended family unit. These familial connections, especially to kinsmen with influence, were essential to a young gentleman like William Fairfax, who aspired to lead a better life.

Years before his appointment as agent for his cousin Lord Fairfax, William received the benefit of a quality education through the patronage of another



*Belvoir Manor, 1741-1783*

relative, his uncle and godfather, Lord Lonsdale. William attended the Lowther Grammar School in Westmoreland County (adjacent to Cumberland County, the boyhood home of his son-in-law John Carlyle) which had been established in 1638 by Sir John Lowther and his uncle Richard Lowther to teach the children of the parish. Through the benefaction of another relation, William received an additional opportunity to improve his prospects through service in the Royal Navy during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713), known in the American colonies as "Queen Anne's War."



Rear-Admiral Robert Fairfax

Records indicate that in February 1705, at about the age of fourteen, William Fairfax entered into His Majesty's service as a midshipman aboard the newly overhauled third-rate, 80-gun man-of-war,

the H.M.S. *Torbay*. William's appointment or warrant as a midshipman was the result of the influence of his relation and godfather, Rear-Admiral Robert Fairfax. A letter from the period penned by Admiral Fairfax to his cousin (William's mother) Ann Fairfax, states that he would send for her son, William "... that he may lose no time for his advantage in the service of the Fleet I have been careful to obtain the letter, and I am glad to do him any service because he is a good boy ..." Admiral Fairfax had a distinguished naval career, served both in Parliament and as Lord Mayor of York, and was a member of the Freemasons (1713). The Admiral died in 1725. Rear-Admiral Robert Fairfax no doubt had both the military, political, and social connections to secure a warrant as a Royal Navy midshipman for his young godson. William's familial connection to Admiral Fairfax likely benefited the young man in his future endeavors as well.

In a letter dated December 12, 1712 from William to his mother Ann, he expressed his desire to leave the Royal Navy. Midshipman Fairfax reasoned that after the cessation of hostilities with Spain, Great Britain's downsized peace time Navy provided limited opportunity for professional growth. Through his own initiative William sought the aid of

another well connected relative and by 1716, at the age of twenty-five, he had found what he thought to be a more promising prospect in the service of George I, King of Great Britain and Ireland, in the British Army.

From 1716 to 1717, William was stationed at Saint Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean. As one of the most isolated islands in the world, Saint Helena was of vital strategic importance to British vessels sailing to and from Asia and South Africa. The island was also known to be a welcome port on the long journey home to England from the East Indies where fresh water and provisions could be purchased. It is unclear in what capacity the former midshipman served while at Saint Helena, though he may have been a secretary for one of the high-ranking officers or officials of the island, a post suitable for a young gentleman looking to advance his career. Nonetheless, it is almost certain that Fairfax's new position on Saint Helena was due to the influence of his second cousin and godfather, Rear-Admiral Fairfax, and even more so to his uncle and godfather, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Bladen. It was a common practice of the period to name two sets of godparents for your child. The role of a godparent was taken very seriously and a godchild could, for the most part, count on his/her godparents' patronage throughout a lifetime.

Lieutenant Colonel Bladen, a veteran of the recent war with Spain, had retired from the Army in 1710. After leaving the Army, Bladen served in Parliament and later held the following positions: Comptroller of the Royal Mint, Secretary to the Duke of Grafton, and Lord Justice of Ireland. Additionally, from 1717 until his death in February 1746, he served as one of the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, also known as the "Board of Trade."

Established in 1696 to replace the Lords of Trade (1675-96), the Board of Trade advised on and supervised the British Empire's colonial affairs. The Board of Trade examined colonial legislation to ensure maximum benefit to British trade policies, nominated colonial governors,



Martin Bladen, 1732  
The Birr Castle Collection

recommended laws affecting the colonies to Parliament, and heard complaints from the colonies about its administrators. It lacked executive or legislative powers, but it became the primary colonial policy-making body of the Crown. It was abolished in 1782.

Lieutenant Colonel Bladen's position on the Board of Trade would figure greatly in the future advancement of his nephew and godson, William Fairfax. In spite of his new appointment, the historic record indicates that William served for less than a year on Saint Helena before he found himself at sea again in the spring of 1718 aboard the *Delicia*, a 460 ton converted East Indiaman, now mounting 32-guns, and bound for the West Indies. However, this time Fairfax was not a midshipman in His Majesty's Royal Navy, but an official of the Crown.

The 27 year-old William had been sent to the Bahamas to help bring order to this rogue outpost of Great Britain's burgeoning empire. The West Indies, particularly the port of Nassau on New Providence Island, had become a haven for pirates and a base from which they could prey upon the Empire's West Indian and American trade. By 1700, Nassau had become a place for "lawless riot and drunken revelry." Edward Teach, the infamous "Blackbeard," called Nassau home. It was into this den of thieves and cutthroats that the Crown sent Fairfax to help bring order.

The *Delicia* sailed out of the Thames on April 11, 1718, accompanied by four men-of-war of His Majesty's Royal Navy, the frigates *Milford* and *Rose*, and the sloops *Buck* and *Shark*. On July 26, 1718, after more than three months at sea, the convoy, under the command of Woodes Rogers, the English privateer, arrived at New Providence. In 1717, a year before the *Delicia* dropped anchor in Nassau's harbor, "His Excel'cy., Woodes Rogers Esqr", had been appointed the., Captn. General and Governr. in Chief in and over the Bahama Islands Chancellor and V[ice] Admiral of the same" by the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations. Coincidentally, 1717 was also the year in which William Fairfax's uncle and godfather, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Bladen, was appointed to the Board of Trade. Although not as yet verified, it is likely that Bladen's appointment played a part in his nephew's placement in New Providence with Rogers. As in the case of his earlier

service, William's posting to the West Indies may also have been influenced by his second cousin and godfather, Rear-Admiral Robert Fairfax, or even his first cousin, Lord Fairfax.

As the Bahamas' first royal governor, Rogers along with his young protégé William Fairfax, was charged by the Board of Trade with the task of ridding the Caribbean of pirates. During Rogers' term as governor, he emerged as one of the leading figures in suppressing piracy against Great Britain's merchant fleet in the West Indies. In his October 1718 report to the Board of Trade, Rogers described his eventful arrival at New Providence:

"...Your Lordships, I arriv'd in this Port on the 26 July [1718] last in company with the Men of Warr ordered to assist me. I met with little opposition in coming in, but found a French ship (that was taken by the Pirates of 22 Guns) burning in the Harbour -- which we were told was set on Fire to drive out His Majestys Ship the *Rose* who got in too early the evening before me, and cut her cable and run out in the Night for fear of being burnt by one Charles Vane who command'd the Pirates and at our [approach] and His Majesty's Ship -- the *Milfords* near approach the next morning, they finding it impossible to escape us, he with about ninety men fled away in a Sloop wearing the black Flag and Fir'd guns of Defiance when they perciev'd their Sloop out Sayl'd the *Two* -- that I sent to chase them hence ..."

Once he set foot on land, Governor Rogers quickly consolidated his power on the island. He selected several honorable and trustworthy men of Nassau, including Fairfax's future father-in-law Thomas Walker, a long-time resident of New Providence who had not resorted to piracy as part of his governing council. Rogers balanced his government with an equal number of his own company, including William Fairfax. In Rogers' October 1718 report to the Board of Trade he explained his need for reliable men like Fairfax and fought to get them proper compensation for their efforts:

"I have occation to recommend in a particular manner Messrs. *Beauchamp* and *Fairfax* ... I have added in the Commission to be Assistant Justices *Wm. Fairfax* and *Thomas Walker Esqrs.* whom I beleive will do justice and act honourable. Mr. *Fairfax* is by Patent Judge of the Admiralty but without an annual salary, the office is but barely honble. for want of support, I did indeed receive an order from the Lords of the Treasury to appoint him Deputy to Mr. *Graves* Collector in case of that old man's inability to act."



As royal governor of the Bahamas, Rogers exercised much authority, not the least of which was the power of pardon. To help bring order to the island, Rogers offered the King's pardon to any pirate that would take it. All but ten of the most entrenched pirates based out of New Providence accepted. Those remaining ten, including the notorious "Blackbeard," were hunted down by Rogers' forces. On November 22, 1718, within five months of Rogers' and Fairfax's arrival in Nassau, Blackbeard was killed in a legendary sea battle off the coast of North Carolina. By December 1718, nine of the unrepentant pirates had been captured and put on trial. One of the accused pirates was acquitted, while the remaining eight were found guilty of piracy by a court headed by William Fairfax, "Judge of the Vice-Admiralty" and hanged. Rogers' slogan, "*Expulsis Piratis Restituta Commercium*" (Piracy Expelled, Commerce Restored), would remain the national motto of the Bahamas until independence in 1973.

Sometime after his arrival in New Providence in 1718, Fairfax's first wife, whose name thus far has been lost to history, died childless in England. On March 27, 1723, thirty-one-year-old William married his second wife Sarah Walker, age twenty-three. Sarah was born in the Bahamas about 1700 and reportedly was dark skinned. Some historical accounts state that Sarah Walker's mother was either a former enslaved person or a freeborn woman of color. These claims have not yet been substantiated. Sarah Walker and William Fairfax had four children: George William, Thomas, Anne, and Sarah, the future wife of John Carlyle.

Evidence of Colonel Martin Bladen's patronage of his nephew and godson while in the West Indies is found in the Journals of the Board of Trade and Plantations. It is recorded in the Journal for June 1723, that Colonel Bladen "*communicated to the Board*" a March 31, 1723 letter sent to him by then acting governor Captain George Phenny (1721-1728), recommending "*Mr. [William] Fairfax ... to be Secretary to the Bahamas*" and that "*their Lordships were pleased to order that a draught of a representation be prepared accordingly.*" The Journal for July 31, 1723

reports that a draft of a letter to Secretary to the Treasury, Horatio Walpole, a younger brother of Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole, "*recommending Mr. William Fairfax to be secretary to the Bahama Islands*" was signed by a Richard Plummer and Colonel Bladen. While in the Bahamas, William served as "*Judge of the Admiralty and President of the Court*" and later filled other positions, including that of acting governor, before moving on to New England. It can be assumed that William's uncle, Martin Bladen, played a role in securing these additional appointments for him as well.

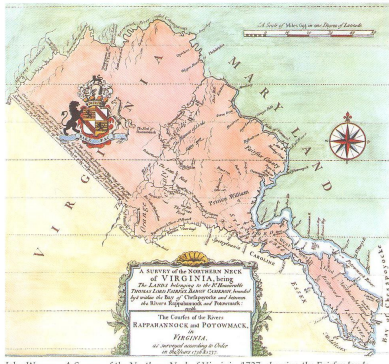
Sometime between June and November 1729, William and his family moved to Salem, Massachusetts. Some reports state that the Fairfaxes left the Bahamas for health reasons, but it is likely that William's new post may have been due to the influence of his uncle, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Bladen, who was on the Board of Trade. There is also another important connection that William had, which is revealed in a letter he wrote from Salem to Admiral Sir Charles Wager in London dated November 26, 1729. In this correspondence, William provides a short account of the establishment of Woodes Rogers' rule in the Bahamas. Admiral Wager was a very influential man and was likely acquainted with William's second cousin and godfather, the late Rear-Admiral Robert Fairfax. Wager was a member of The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty (Board of Admiralty) from 1718 to 1742, serving as First Lord of the Admiralty from 1733 to 1742. These familial connections may have influenced William's appointment as Collector of Customs for the Crown in Salem and Marblehead.

On January 18, 1731, within two years of the Fairfaxes' arrival in New England, Sarah Walker Fairfax died. Nine months after Sarah's death William would marry his third wife, Deborah Clarke of Salem, on October 28, 1731. William and Deborah had three children together: Bryan, William Henry and Hannah. It is recorded in some sources that William's marriage to Deborah was in compliance with his wife Sarah's dying wish that he marry her friend Deborah. The Clarkes of Massachusetts were a



Thomas, 6th Lord Fairfax

well connected family. They had ties to prominent families in New England, Virginia, and Yorkshire, the ancestral home of the Fairfaxes.



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

In 1732, Robert Carter, the land agent to William's first cousin Thomas, 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Fairfax, died. Carter's death necessitated Lord Fairfax to employ William as his agent, and in 1733 he moved his family to Virginia and aided in the settlement of the long dispute over his cousin's claim to his vast Northern Neck grant. William Fairfax not only served as his cousin's land agent, but he also resumed his position as Collector of Customs, as well as other posts in the service of the Crown. Through his relationship to Lord Fairfax and his own initiative, William emerged as a prominent citizen of Virginia, conscious of his civic duty. William was a political, social, economic, and religious leader of his immediate community and of the colony at large. It was through his service to the Crown and the influence of well connected extended family like Admiral Fairfax, Colonel Bladen, and later Lord Fairfax that William was able to secure a legacy for his children in America.

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## News From the Curator

### Sarah Coster

We are pleased to announce the recent acquisition of several items that help to fill gaps in John Carlyle's extensive inventory.

While visiting the Alexandria Antiques Show, staff spotted several pieces of the purple shell-edge Wedgwood Queensware of the type currently used for our dessert

service. These pieces were first collected based on research done on the "Queens China dishes" found in the



inventory. The term "Queens China" refers to cream-colored earthenware, which was developed by Josiah Wedgwood and marketed in the 1760s and 1770s in England. Thanks to the support of the Friends of Carlyle House, the museum has been able to purchase two more plates and a small tureen (pictured above).

Our recent search for a pair of sconces has ended successfully. On the news of Mary Ruth's retirement, the Friends of Carlyle House voted to search for and obtain these important items in honor of her time as director. We look forward to unveiling them at the Friends annual meeting on June 12th.

The pair of double-armed candle sconces can be dated c. 1745-1755, a perfect match for the time Carlyle was building his home here in Alexandria. They are most likely French, but made for the English market. They are plain and stately, reflective of the décor in the Carlyle House. They are in excellent condition and retain an early, and possibly



original, coat of varnish. Both sconces were modified for electrical use in the twentieth century.

We plan to hang the sconces in the Dining Room, on either side of the Pier Glass on the room's north wall. Sconces are listed