

Docent Dispatch EXTRA EDITION!

2010 February Extra

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

Did He or Didn't He? by Frank Conrad

After a few years of docenting at Carlyle House and continuing to acquire knowledge of the 18th Century, I was reading Willard Stearns Randall's George Washington – A Life (1997). I was in the middle of page 166, when history came close to home and my research project was born.

That page stated “In Alexandria, he (Washington) went to the home of his friend John Carlyle and his wife, Sally Fairfax’s sister Sarah. They nursed him while he waited for the return of Dr. Charles Green, his Mount Vernon physician, who was visiting patients on the Eastern Shore. He was also Anglican pastor of Washington’s parish (Truro Parish Church).”

I had never heard or read anything like this in our Carlyle teaching and neither had our staff.

So, I started my research:

The year was 1757 and the month of November. George Washington (GW) was 25 and Sarah Fairfax Carlyle was 27. John and Sarah had their fifth child (Sarah) on January 4, 1757, so the baby was 10 months old at the time being discussed. Hannah, the sixth child, was born August 12, 1759, so Sarah was presumably not pregnant in November, 1757. This is another reason that she would have been able to tender hospitality and care to GW.

GW was at Fort Loudoun and suffering from pleurisy and dysentery, “the bloody flux.” He thought the pleurisy might be tuberculosis. His half-brother Lawrence had died from this in 1752. In November, “his disorders greatly increased attended with bad



Charles Wilson Peale's iconic portrait of George Washington

fevers. The day before yesterday he was seized with stitches and violent pleuritic pains upon which the doctor bled him.”

GW was told to leave Fort Loudoun by the doctor but he did not want to until he received permission from Governor Dinwiddie to be relieved from command. The doctor convinced him that waiting for permission might be too late and GW finally acquiesced.

GW left Fort Loudoun (Winchester) probably on Wednesday, November 9th. The

time of day may have been early morning (logical if one wanted to get home as soon as possible). Most soldiers are used to early rising and duties. He may have traveled by horse with an aide or two. Remember, he was called the best horseman in Virginia and, as such, may have ridden - particularly since he wanted to be treated as soon as possible by his doctor and friends.

There were two active routes to Alexandria from Winchester. The northern route crossed the Shenandoah and the mountains at Key’s Gap and then followed the Shenando Road to Goose Creek and then onto Old Potomac Ridge Road/Potomac Path over

Difficult Run at the Fairfax County line and then on to

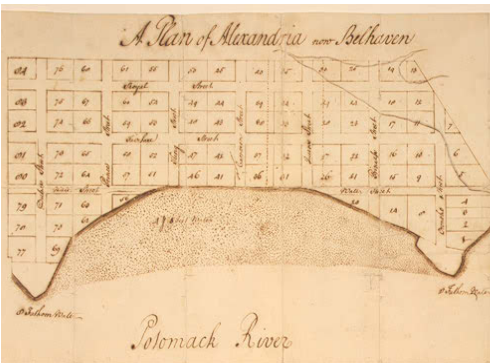
<p align="center">CARLYLE HOUSE</p> <p align="center"><i>Jim Bartlinski, Director</i> <i>Sarah Coster, Curator</i> <i>Heather Dunn, Curator of Education</i></p>



Alexandria. There was an ordinary near Waterford known as Awbrey's and then another near Goose Creek and Ox Road, known as Awbrey-Jenkins and another at Sugarland Run called Coleman's Ordinary where stops would have been appropriate. There were other taverns, ordinaries or even private homes that do not show on maps.

The southern route crossed the Shenandoah and the mountains at Ashby's Gap and then on the Mountain Road to West's Ordinary (later Lacey's). (All of this fine information is contained on a Loudoun County map, Circa 1757, composed and drawn by John T. Phillips II and Wade C. Snyder.) I talked by phone with John Phillips, who is a well known historian in Loudoun County, and he believes that GW may have used the northern route. Remember, he knew this area well because of his travels and campaign with General Braddock in 1755.

Using either route, the distance to Alexandria was about 65 miles. With appropriate stops, he might have arrived in Alexandria late in the evening of Thursday, November 10th and gone to Carlyle House. Why not somewhere else?



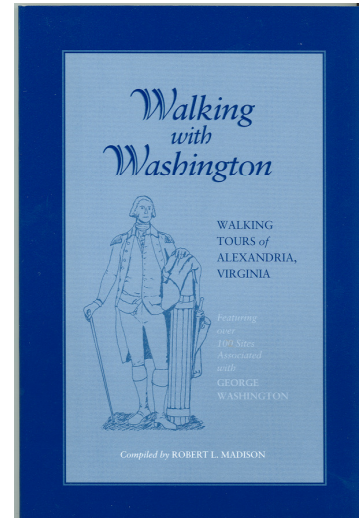
The townhome of William Fairfax at 207 Prince Street (built in 1752) was empty but for a few servants. William Fairfax had

died in September, 1757, and we know from GW letters that Sally was alone at Belvoir on November 15th and that George William Fairfax, her husband, was in England at the time. GW had other close friends in Alexandria, among them John Kirkpatrick and William Ramsey, who could have taken him in, although, Carlyle seems the most likely. A tavern would be the less preferable choice if you had a friend in the area. Mount Vernon, at this time, was empty, except for servants. Brother Jack and his wife were away.

Sarah Carlyle and GW had grown up together. Historian

Willard Stearns Randall stated in a letter to me "Not only was Carlyle handling much of GW's business while he was on the frontier but GW was an intimate of the family GW had passed much time with them when Braddock frequented the house and GW was his aide. It is only natural for an ailing GW to go to the house of such close friends."

Bob Madison in his book Walking with Washington states the following "While Washington was on military campaigns from 1756 to 1758, John Carlyle bought slaves for him, arranged for the sale and shipment of his tobacco, forwarded mail to him and supervised the roofing of his plantation buildings. He ordered goods from London for Washington and stored them in the Carlyle & Dalton warehouse."



On February 15, 1760, GW "went to a Ball in Alexandria and lodged at Colo. Carlyles." Further letters indicated that GW dined with the Carlyles many times. After John Carlyle died in 1780, letters indicate he continued to dine at the Herberts.

All of this indicates a pattern of very close friendship and business relationships which certainly makes it more feasible that GW would stay at the Carlyles in November, 1757, particularly since he was 25, lonely, and not feeling well.

Even if we allow three days to travel the approximate 65 miles from Fort Loudoun to Alexandria, he would have arrived sometime during the day Friday, November 11th. It is probable the Carlyles took care of GW either from November 10th to 13th (3 nights and almost 3 full days) or from November 11th to 13th (2 nights and 2 days).

The key to this research is a letter from GW to Charles Green. The heading of the letter is "Alexandria Novr 13th 1757." This is a Sunday and the letter states:



“Reverend Sir
 Necessity (and that I hope will apologize for the trouble I must give you --) obliges me to ask the favour of a visit – that I may have an opportunity of consulting you on a disorder which I have lingered under for three months past – It is painful to me to write – Mr. Carlyle will say the rest – I shall only add, that I am with very great esteem
 Yr most Obedt Hble Servt
 Go: Washington”



into the docent material. It will further strengthen the JC-GW ties already pointed out in my book – and make their

relationship even more natural. Nice job of research; wish I had spotted it!!”

All of this information was submitted to Mr. Frank Grizzard, Jr., Associate Editor of The Papers of George Washington, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. The research was reviewed by Beverly Runge, retired Associate Editor, who worked with Bill Abbot on all the Colonial Series volumes. After a thorough review, Beverly Runge stated: “I don’t think we can prove GW stayed at the Carlyle’s house, but it seems probable.”

Mr. Grizzard in his summary letter stated: “Beverly Runge has gone over Frank Conrad’s research notes. It is her conclusion that Mr. Conrad’s conjecture that GW stayed at Carlyle’s home in November 1757 while waiting for Dr. Green to call is reasonable, and probably is correct, but that it cannot be proven from the evidence thus far presented. In your tours it would make sense to say GW ‘may have’ stayed at the house while en route to Mount Vernon in November 1757.”

DID HE OR DIDN’T HE?

Frank Conrad

January 18, 2010

Curator’s Note: We love when our docents jump into research and find out these wonderful details about the history of Carlyle House. Frank’s thorough research is top-notch and we invite you to incorporate this and the other known times that Washington stayed and/or dined with his friends the Carlyles. What makes this story special is the connectedness we feel to the ill George Washington making his way home and stopping to stay with dear friends.



Charles Green (1710-1765) age 47 at this time was rector of Truro Parish and also practiced medicine.

If GW had gone to Mount Vernon and then written Dr. Green, it does not seem plausible that John Carlyle would be hand delivering this letter. More likely, some overseer or trusted servant would be up to the task. Note also that this letter is headed “Alexandria” not “Mount Vernon” as his November 15th letter to Sally Cary is headed. GW was meticulous in heading his letters where they were written – On Sunday, November 13th he was writing from Alexandria.

GW’s next letter was dated on Tuesday, November 15, 1757 to Sarah (Sally) Cary Fairfax. This letter is headed “Mount Vernon 15th Novr 1757” as stated above. Without quoting, it states that GW arrived at Mount Vernon on Sunday, November 13th, and on Monday, Dr. Green visited and prescribed. It was informing Sally that he was now home and really needed some items that the Dr. had prescribed and if she could provide them, he would be forever grateful. It is a fairly long, detailed letter. He seemed to have recovered his ability to write in two days.

Historian Willard Stearns Randall verified his sources from Volume Five of The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series, footnote1 on page 47, appended to a letter from Major Robert Stewart to Gov. Dinwiddie, that the editors of The Washington Papers say, “GW was in Alexandria by 13 November, 1757, when he wrote to the Reverend Green.”

Historian Dr. James Munson e-mailed with reference to W.S. Randall and me in which he states: “You both weigh in with a case which to me is excellent. Anyone’s doubts or disagreements must be backed up by similar textual references. I hope that Carlyle House will fold it