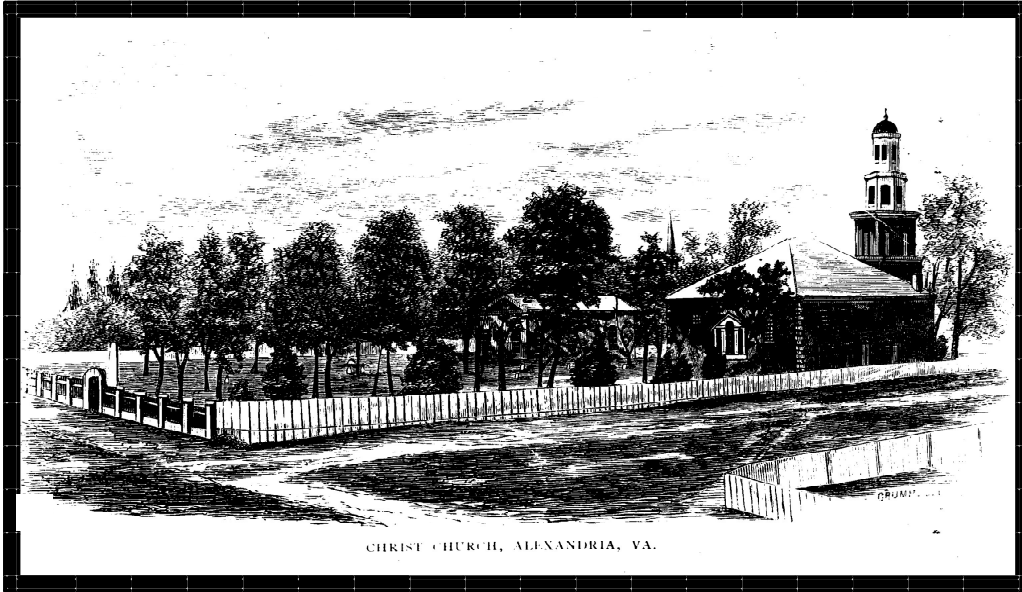


January 2004

Carlyle House *Docent Dispatch*

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority



CHRIST CHURCH, ALEXANDRIA, VA.

*Christ Church
Alexandria, Virginia*

1906

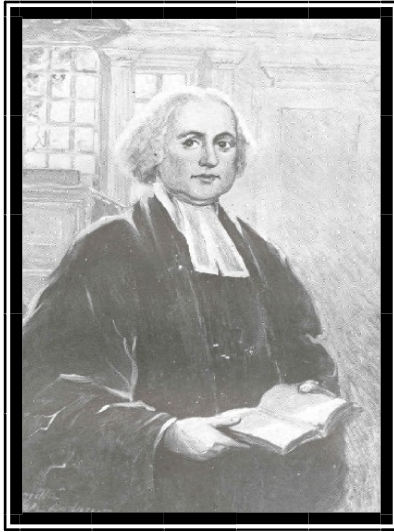
*Courtesy of the
Virginia State Library.*

John Carlyle and Christ Church by Bob Madison

Although John Carlyle was a Presbyterian, he and his extended family had a major influence on Christ Church. John Carlyle was responsible for completing the building of Christ Church; and both of his wives had brothers who were Rectors of the church.

When Alexandria was founded in 1749, it was part of Truro Parish, and the family of John Carlyle's second wife, Sybil West Carlyle, carried great weight in church matters. Sybil's father, Hugh West (1705-1754), served on the Truro Parish Vestry from 1744 until he died in 1754. Sybil's great uncle, Col. John West (c1716-1777) also served on the Truro Parish Vestry from 1750 to 1765. The 1753 Truro Parish Vestry minutes read, "On the petition of Capt. John West ordered that the Rev. Mr. Charles Green do preach every third Sunday at the Town of Alexandria." While there was no formal church in Alexandria then, it is believed that the "Chapel-of-Ease" was on land owned by Hugh West near what is now the intersection of Pitt and Princess Streets.

Like John Carlyle, Hugh West was one of the founding trustees of Alexandria. Sybil West Carlyle's brother, John West, Jr., as Deputy Surveyor of Fairfax County, did the original survey of Alexandria. Her father, Hugh West, also, was one of Fairfax County's two delegates to the House of Burgesses from 1752 to 1754. After Hugh's death, Col. John West was a delegate from 1755 to 1774. In 1761, he began a campaign to have the northern part of Fairfax County split off from Truro Parish; and the House of Burgesses eventually approved this change in the spring of 1765. On March 28, 1765, Col. John West was elected to the new Fairfax Parish Vestry along with John Carlyle's partner, John Dalton. Another one of the original twelve Vestrymen of Fairfax Parish was George Washington [George Washington and Col. John West were the two Fairfax County delegates to the House of Burgesses from 1765 to 1774]. However, it was discovered that the new Fairfax Parish had a significantly larger number of "tithables" [taxable residents] than the remaining Truro Parish. Col. John



Bryan, 8th Lord Fairfax
Rector 1790 to 1792

West then introduced a motion in the House of Burgesses to move the boundary line between the two parishes north, and it was passed in May 1765. This put Washington outside the boundary of Fairfax Parish, but Col. John West and John Dalton were still included on the Vestry when another election was held on July 25, 1765. West served on the Christ Church Vestry from 1765 until 1773 and again in 1776. He was also Church Warden in 1766 and from 1770 to 1772. Sybil West Carlyle's brother, John West, Jr., would be on the Vestry from 1772 to 1776; and his son John would serve on the Vestry from 1785 to 1787 and in 1790.

Plans were made to build a church in Alexandria by 1767. In 1768, Col John West was placed in charge of purchasing land for the church and inspecting progress on the building. After a number of delays and problems with church builders, John Carlyle agreed to complete the church; and work was completed in 1773. The Vestry, which included both John West, Jr. and his uncle Col. John West, decided to auction ten pews in order to pay some of the construction costs. John Carlyle purchased pew #19 for 30 pounds; his brother-in-law, John West, Jr., purchased pew #29 for 33 pounds; and George Washington purchased pew #5 for 36 pounds, 10 shillings.

When the first Rector of Christ Church resigned in 1778, the Vestry asked Sybil West Carlyle's brother, the Rev. William West, to take the position. He accepted the job, but stayed only about a year. In 1779, he moved on to a larger church in Baltimore. In 1790,

he was elected president of the Maryland Episcopal Convention. He probably would have been selected the first Episcopal Bishop of Maryland if he had lived longer. He died in 1791.

A decade after John Carlyle's death in 1780, Sarah Fairfax Carlyle's younger brother, Bryan Fairfax (1736-1802), was appointed Rector of Christ Church in 1790. Thus, both of John Carlyle's wives had brothers who were Rectors of Christ Church. Bryan Fairfax was Rector from 1790 to 1792. In 1793, when the seventh Lord Fairfax died, Bryan Fairfax traveled to England to claim the title, and it was officially conferred on him in 1800. John Carlyle's granddaughter, Margaret Herbert, married Bryan Fairfax's son, Thomas, the ninth Lord Fairfax.

Before the AMC Hoffman Center 22 screen movie theater was built in the Eisenhower valley of Alexandria, an archaeological dig was done on the site. The archaeologists found a brick burial vault containing seven remains and seven adjacent graves. Two of the people in the vault probably were Sybil West Carlyle's brother, George West, and her mother, Sybil Harrison West, since *Alexandria Gazette* obituaries indicate that they were buried in the family vault in 1785 and 1787. It is also likely that her father, Hugh West, was in the vault since the property was once the West country home. We do not know where Sybil West Carlyle herself was buried, but it is quite possible that she is one of the others. West family descendants wanted the remains to be buried at Christ Church because of the important role the West's played in establishing the church. However, they were unable to accomplish this, and the remains now lay at Pohick Church where a memorial service was held in October 2003.

Sources Consulted: This article is based heavily on two unpublished papers in the Carlyle House files: "The Importance of the West Family in the Founding and Establishment of Alexandria's Christ Church" by James D. Bish, and "Rev. William West, Second Rector of Christ Church, 1778-1779" by Edith Estes Bradbury. Other sources included telephone conversations with Mr. Bish and Ms. Bradbury, my *Walking with Washington*, and the July 2000 Carlyle House *Docent Dispatch*.

Thanks to Bob Madison for writing this fine article. Bob supports the Carlyle House in so many ways—we truly appreciate all Bob does for our museum. MRC