

Carlyle House Docent Dispatch

May 2002

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

“The Grandest Congress Ever Known...”

The following article about General Braddock’s expedition to the colonies in 1755 was prepared by Ross Netherton. Mr. Netherton compiled this information for the Carlyle House research files in 1998.

In schoolbook memories of American Indian wars, the name of Edward Braddock comes to mind along with that of Custer. The story of Braddock’s march against Fort Duquesne in 1755, and his loss of an army in a forest battle with the French and Indians is a familiar one.

What is not as well known, however, is the story of a second objective Braddock had in America. This was a political and diplomatic mission, which eventually unfolded in the Carlyle House in Alexandria.

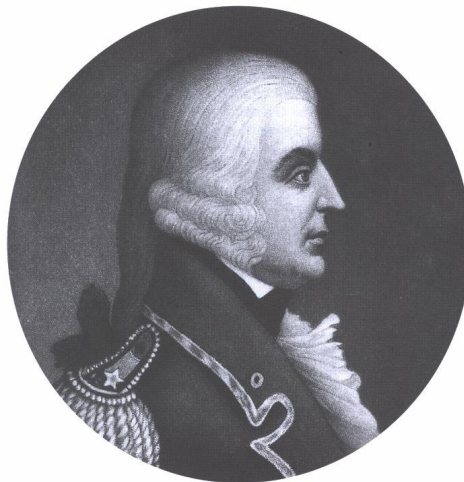
Major General Edward Braddock came to America as commander of all British and colonial troops, with the aim of driving the French from their fortified posts on the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley, and ending the terror which was spreading through the Virginia piedmont by the marauding Indian allies of the French. England’s grand strategy in 1755 called for colonial armies to march against the French in Montreal and Fort Niagara, while Braddock with 1,200 regular and 900 colonial militia crossed the Appalachian Mountains to take Fort Duquesne at the head of the Ohio River. His

planned route followed the trail Washington had used the year before when he delivered Virginia Governor Dinwiddie’s formal demand for the French to evacuate the Ohio Valley, which was claimed by England and contemplated longingly by land-hungry Virginia planters.

Most of Braddock’s instruction dealt with details of his campaign plan; but one item directed him to assist the colonial Governors in “*prevailing upon ye Assemblies of their respective Provinces to raise forthwith as large a sum as can be afforded as their contribution to a Common Fund, to be employed provisionally for ye general Service in North America.*”

This proposition was not entirely new. In the summer of 1754, when delegates of seven colonies met in Albany to consider the French and Indian danger, Benjamin Franklin had unsuccessfully suggested a plan of union for defense which had called for a common defense fund. Yet, in the spring of 1755, events forced this idea from the realm of theory into the world of practical politics. A British army now was in America, sent to defend the colonies at their request; and money to pay for it had to be found.

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Carlyle House

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“The Grandest Congress Ever Known...” (con’t)



Promptly after arriving in Alexandria, Braddock made his headquarters in the house of Col. John Carlyle, and prepared to meet with the governors of those colonies in which military operations were planned. Earlier he had sent letters from Williamsburg requesting these governors to meet him in Annapolis early in April; but the inability of all to attend led to rescheduling the meeting to April 14th at Carlyle’s House in Alexandria.

Never before had such excitement taken over the town. On its outskirts was camped the mightiest military force ever assembled on the North American continent; at its waterfront a squadron of ships disgorged all manner of supplies, while quartermasters busily sorted and distributed them to the troops; at the Carlyle House a special detachment of soldiers mounted guard for the General’s headquarters with ceremony and a flourish of drums. For the moment, at least, every kind of business boomed and each night candles burned brightly as Alexandrians entertained the visitors from Britain and the neighboring colonies.

The council, held on April 14th, was attended by some of the colonies’ most important people: Major General Braddock; Commodore Keppel, commander

of British naval forces in North America; and Governors William Shirley of Massachusetts; Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia; James DeLancey of New York; Horatio Sharpe of Maryland, and Robert Morris of Pennsylvania. William Shirley, son of Massachusetts governor, served as secretary of the conference.

After reviewing campaign plans, Braddock opened the subject of the common defense, but the governors unanimously advised that such a fund could not be created without the aid of Parliament. Having found it “impractical” to obtain funds from their own legislatures to help pay for the expedition, they were of the opinion that: *“it should be proposed to his Majesty’s Ministers to find some method of compelling them to do it...”*

On April 19th, Braddock wrote to the Ministry in London, reporting on the Council, and giving his conclusion that the colonial legislatures never would voluntarily raise the needed funds by their own taxes. In closing, he declared: *“I cannot but take the liberty to represent to you the necessity of laying a tax upon all his Majesty’s dominions in America, agreeably to the result of the Council, for reimbursing the great sums that must be advanced for the service and interest of the colonies in this important crisis.”*

Whether this was the first step toward the politics of taxation without representation which twenty

years later led the colonies to break with England is a matter for conjecture. For Braddock, however, the next steps were clear. By a set of private instructions from George II, he was authorized to draw funds from the king’s paymaster in North America if the colonial governments did not contribute sufficiently to pay their shares, and it was “absolutely necessary and unavoidable” for the success of the campaign. Falling back on this authority, Braddock abandoned further efforts to persuade the colonies to pay a greater share of the costs of the campaign, and concentrated all efforts on getting ready to march against the French.

Braddock never returned to Alexandria after his army’s defeat. On the road back from the battle, he died of his wounds, and was buried in the middle of the road he had built. What was left of his army marched over his grave to conceal it from roving bands of Indians. As years passed he was portrayed as a stubborn soldier who insisted on using European parade ground tactics in the frontier forest. When seen in the full view of history, however, he won a much greater battle by breaching the mountain barrier that had barred the way of the colonists to the west for over a century, and, in the years that followed thousands of settlers poured into the Ohio Valley over Braddock’s Road.