



# Carlyle House

## DOCENT DISPATCH

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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

New Research Provides Additional Insight Into the Life of Doctor George Carlyle  
by Jim Bartlinski



*The Atrumanatomicum  
Leiden University*

It has been established that George Carlyle received his academic training as a physician at Leiden University, located in present day South Holland, The Netherlands. George was 21 years old at the time he received his medical “qualifications” in 1736. Assuming

William Carlyle planned his son’s future, the question arises regarding why he would choose to send George to the Netherlands to be trained as a physician when it had long been thought a high-quality medical education was available across the border in Scotland. The answer may be twofold. At the time George was preparing to attend medical school in the early 1730s, Leiden was recognized as Europe’s pre-eminent medical school, particularly amongst Englishmen, and had been since the 1580s.

In contrast to Leiden, the study of medicine at the universities at Glasgow and Edinburgh was relatively new. Although there had been medical training offered at Glasgow since the mid 17th-century, the modern medical school there did not come into being until 1751. This was the same year that George Carlyle’s younger brother in Alexandria, Virginia began building his Fairfax Street estate. Edinburgh would not become the leading medical school in the British Isles until the latter part of the 18th-century.

Undoubtedly a second motivation for William Carlyle to send his eldest son to the Netherlands for his

medical training was due to the religious discrimination of non-Anglican’s that barred him from attending a university in England. As a member of the Presbyterian Church, George Carlyle was considered a “Dissenter” or “Nonconformist.” The terms “Dissenter” and “Nonconformist” were used in Great Britain after the Act of Uniformity in 1662 to identify British subjects belonging to any non-Anglican church. The Act of Uniformity barred dissenters from attending English universities. Therefore, as a Presbyterian, George was excluded from attending the universities in England that offered medical training, such as Oxford and Cambridge.

In a 1736 Cumberland County court document (the same year George graduated from Leiden), William Carlyle identifies himself as a “Dissenter” of Carlisle. Despite the fact that William Carlyle was a dissenter, presumably with no university training, he had established himself as a well-to-do medical practitioner (believed to be a “surgeon–apothecary”) in his own right. As a result of the elder Carlyle’s affiliation with a nonconformist church, coupled with the possibility that he may not have been formally trained, William’s opportunities for social and professional advancement were limited. By prompting his eldest son to pursue university training as a physician, particularly at the distinguished Leiden University, George Carlyle had the credentials he needed to achieve the status in the medical profession that eluded his father.

### CARLYLE HOUSE

*Mary Ruth Coleman, Director  
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Possessing the qualifications of a university trained physician, George was entitled to be called "Doctor." Many English physicians of the time parlayed their formal medical education into lucrative practices, by moving from town to town where they were likely the only doctors treating a community. This may account for George Carlyle relocating his practice at least twice during his tenure as a physician. In 1744, eight years after his graduation from Leiden, George is listed as executor of his late father's estate and is referred to as a "Doctor" residing in Kendal. Kendal is a small market town approximately 40 miles south of Carlisle.

Based on this information it can be assumed that George began his career in medicine at Kendal and not Carlisle, but why? In all likelihood Carlisle already had an established physician or two, prompting George to look elsewhere to start his practice. However, within twelve-years of his father's death, Doctor Carlyle once again makes Carlisle, the county



An 18th-century view of Kendal, England

seat of Cumberland County his home. Evidence of this comes by way of an October 21, 1756 court document

stating that an "Alexander Cowen" had rented, as well as farmed a "tenement" belonging to a "Doctor Carlyle of Dadir [Durdar]" for 6 years. The village of Durdar is located 3 miles South of Carlisle and is considered a suburb of the county seat. Cowen is reported to have paid Carlyle £16 a year for the use of his land.

Doctor Carlyle may have moved his practice from Kendal to Durdar for a number of reasons, one of which may have been a desire to return home. Another possibility is that Carlisle was short a doctor, leaving an opening for a qualified hometown boy to fill. Or perhaps Carlisle being a much larger and prosperous town could support an additional doctor. It is also probable that the competition between physicians in the small town of Kendal became too fierce, forcing Doctor Carlyle to practice elsewhere. An indication of this possibility appears in a March

1747 letter George wrote to his brother John back in Virginia. Apparently there was a "young Dr. [Rotheram]" and his physician father taking, as George put it "a great Deal of Pains to push him [young Doctor Rotheram] forward but I hope all their Efforts for him will not hurt me much tho' considering the Professions of friendship I have had from the Famely and the Promise made me he had no intentions of fixing here I cannot under their present Conduct think myself very generously treated however it has yet had no Effect upon me for this Last year my Business has been above one half more than any former year since I came to Kendal." It is possible that the younger Doctor Rotheram reneged on his promise and stayed in Kendal to practice medicine with his father, which may have led to George's departure. But unless further evidence can be discovered indicating why Doctor Carlyle left Kendal, his motivation remains unclear.

In Doctor George Carlyle's time it was customary and in some cases an economic necessity for physicians to be engaged in several commercial pursuits. Besides renting his lands surrounding Carlisle to various tenant farmers such as "Alexander Cowen," there is evidence that Doctor Carlyle supplemented his income by operating his own apothecary shop. As the eldest son of a "surgeon-apothecary," and as a university trained physician who had studied botany under the celebrated Herman Boerhaave, George was likely a skilled medical-pharmaceutical practitioner. George Carlyle's operation of an apothecary shop was not unusual; doctors of the period often operated their own apothecaries offering for sale a wide range of medicinal herbs, remedies, surgical instruments, and sundries. In a letter dated August 10, 1744, from his brother John who had recently arrived from Virginia to help attend to their late father's estate, the younger Carlyle had made arrangements for "Mr. [James] Graham" an apothecary of Carlisle to "take medicins" out of Doctor Carlyle's shop, including "a great part of ... Drugs." In this same letter John Carlyle had prearranged for a "Mr. Wm. Pousonby" to purchase a "Lott of Material" from his older brother as well. Evidently, Doctor Carlyle's business plan was successful, for he had the means to send his son, Joseph Dacre Carlyle, to the distinguished and expensive University of Cambridge in 1775, whose student body (prior to the 1960s) tended to be largely from Great Britain's social elite.



George Carlyle's son, Joseph, not only attended Cambridge but also went on to be ordained an Anglican priest on June 8, 1782. The Reverend Carlyle also became a renowned "Arabic" scholar, travelling with Lord Elgin to Greece, who has the infamous distinction of commandeering marble frescos from the Parthenon, along with other antiquities of the Mediterranean. It is evident from Joseph Dacre Carlyle's ordination as a priest in the Church of England that he had turned away from his family's Presbyterian faith. It is more probable that his father had converted earlier to give himself and his family a better opportunity to move up England's social and economic ladder.

Their conversion to the Anglican Church is surely related to the various laws that excluded all nonconformists from holding civil or military office, as well as prevented non-Anglicans from being awarded degrees by the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. The fact that George Carlyle was able to send his son to Cambridge is an indication that he likely renounced the Presbyterian faith prior to Joseph's attendance at the ancient university. George may have been similar to his younger brother John in Virginia who, out of necessity, publicly supported the "Established Church" by purchasing a pew in Alexandria's Christ Church, a structure that he had helped construct, while privately maintaining his allegiance to the Presbyterian Church.

In 1750, John Carlyle's father-in-law, William Fairfax of Belvoir Plantation, made a trip to England, probably to place his younger son, William Henry (who would be killed at the Battle of Quebec in 1759), in Beverley Grammar School. While at York, William Fairfax wrote on August 1, 1750 to "Doctor Carlyle: Physician att[ending] Kendall" that he had "almost perfectly recovered from the Causes of Compliant and Fatigues of unaccustomed Riding, which I thankfully impute to your kind Direction and accordingly follow'd." Fairfax goes on to say that he desires "to get abt two Pounds of the Seneca Rattlesnake Root, also of Genseng – If I knew what would be acceptable, I should not return your Trunk [apothecary case] empty." It is clear from Fairfax's correspondence that he received both medical advice and a cure for his ills from his kinsman by marriage, George Carlyle. It is not clear whether Doctor Carlyle personally examined Fairfax, but it can be

assumed with some certainty that George prescribed and provided William Fairfax with the needed medication to relieve his "Compliant and Fatigues."

The Scottish physician John Tennent introduced "*Seneca Rattlesnake Root*" (milkwort) to the Western world of medicine in 1735. Seneca root, sometimes referred to as "*Virginian snakeroot*," is indigenous to central and western North America. Its name is derived from the Seneca tribe, who used it as a remedy for various ailments, such as rheumatism, colds, inflammation, and bleeding wounds. It is very likely that Doctor Carlyle's "*Seneca Rattlesnake Root*" and possibly the "*Genseng*" (the American variety) had been supplied to him by his younger brother in Virginia. Evidence that John Carlyle shipped medicinal herbs and remedies to his brother in England is alluded to in a number of their correspondences. In a letter dated February 20, 1746 John apologizes to George for not sending the "*flowers of Sassafras*" that had "*Spoiled*" before he could send it off. Sassafras has been used as a stimulant and diaphoretic (sweating agent) to treat gallstones and bladder pain, as well as a cure for syphilis and rheumatism.

In this same letter John Carlyle reports sending George "*a Stone that was taken out of the Gutts Called the Mangfold of a Dear.*" Also known as the "*Mad Stone*," this stony concretion was a remedy used for many sorts of wounds or infections, but particularly for rabies. A "*Mad Stone*" is a calcified hairball removed from the stomach of a large animal, such as a horse, cow, or deer. The "*stone*" is soaked in milk and then applied as a poultice to the affected area. These "*stones*" are described as round or oval in shape with a porous surface texture measuring about 3 to 4 inches in size and very light weight. They have a brownish-green color with a highly polished surface. It is difficult to prove by this terse reference, but could this be an indication that Doctor Carlyle employed American folk remedies to treat his patients?

Doctor George Carlyle died in his hometown of Carlisle, England in 1784, at the age of 69. George's younger brother John had died four years earlier in his adopted home of Alexandria, Virginia at age 60. Although the conventions of the time made it necessary for the Carlyle brothers to follow different



paths an ocean apart, they retained a close relationship and each achieved a degree of success in their own right.

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**C A L E N D A R**

**March 31, Monday**

*Volunteer Field Trip to Kenmore*

Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Carlyle House

Free, Sign-up in Office

**April 6, Sunday**

*Braddock Day*

12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

\$4 admission

**April 19, Saturday**

*Garden Day*

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Free, House Tour \$4 admission.