



# CarlyleHouse DOCENT DISPATCH

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority 

October 2006

## New Evidence Reveals Where George Carlyle Attended Medical School *by Jim Bartlinski*



George Carlyle. Artist Unknown.

It has been assumed that John's older brother George received his training as a physician in Scotland. Located within a 230 mile radius of George's home of Carlisle situated near the northwest border between England and Scotland, are the distinguished and ancient universities at Aberdeen, Glasgow, St. Andrews, and Edinburgh. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, Scotland had established a reputation for

possessing the finest medical schools in Great Britain, as well as on the Continent. Therefore, it had been accepted that George Carlyle traveled north to receive his medical education in Scotland, most likely at the prestigious University of Edinburgh, but the historic record indicates otherwise. New evidence reveals that George attended university in the city of Leiden, located in The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands in present day South Holland, The Netherlands, over 600 miles by carriage and sail from Carlisle.

In 1783, London physician Samuel Foart Simmons published the third edition of his *Medical Register*. Simmons' *Medical Register* is a list of qualified medical practitioners in England, her colonies, and most of Europe. The *Register* not only provides names of the various practicing surgeons, physicians, barbers, apothecaries, midwives, and "surgeon-apothecaries" in England and abroad, it also includes information concerning where they practiced medicine and where they received their medical training. A "George Carlyle"

is listed in Simmons' *Medical Register for the year 1783* as a physician of Carlisle in Cumberland County, England. The *Register* also states that he is a graduate of Leiden University, class of 1736. Additionally Simmons reports in his publication that as of 1783, there were only 10 practicing physicians in all of Cumberland County, George Carlyle among the ten. Based on this and other evidence presented in Simmons' *Medical Register*, the "George Carlyle" mentioned is undoubtedly John Carlyle's older brother, George.

George was 21 years-old at the time he received his medical "qualifications" from Leiden in 1736. Assuming William Carlyle planned his son's future, the question of why he would choose to send George to the Netherlands to be trained as a physician when a high-quality medical education was available across the border in Scotland arises. The answer may be that at the time George was preparing to attend medical school in the early 1730s, Leiden was already



Modern map of Leiden.

**CARLYLE HOUSE**  
*Mary Ruth Coleman, Director*  
*Jim Bartlinski, Curator*  
*Erin Adams, Curator of Education*



University of Leiden, today.

recognized as Europe's preeminent medical school, particularly amongst Englishmen. As the oldest university in the Netherlands, founded in 1575, Leiden became well-known as a leading institute for higher learning throughout Europe. Several leading scholars of the Enlightenment studied and

taught at Leiden University, including the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) and the world renowned Dutch physician, anatomist, botanist, chemist, and humanist, Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738). Although gaining respect with Great Britain's medical community, schools of medicine in Scotland would not achieve the same level of international acclaim as Leiden until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the fact that William had established himself as a well-to-do medical practitioner in his own right, he may not have been formally trained, which limited his opportunities for social and professional advancement. By prompting his eldest son to pursue university training as a physician, particularly at the distinguished Leiden University, George Carlyle had the opportunity to achieve the status in the medical profession that eluded his father. As a "surgeon-apothecary" of Carlisle, William was undoubtedly well aware of Leiden's stellar reputation in addition to the renown of the university's most famous son, Herman Boerhaave. By attending Leiden University, George had the opportunity to study under the celebrated Boerhaave. It was Boerhaave's stewardship that established Leiden as one of Europe's premier schools of medicine. His fame was enormous, extending far beyond Europe to China. One of the most influential clinicians and teachers of the 1700s, Boerhaave played a huge role in reviving the Hippocratic method of bedside instruction; he also insisted on post-mortem examination of patients whereby demonstrating the relationship between symptoms and lesions. Herman Boerhaave is also credited with instituting the first clinico-pathological conferences, providing physicians a forum in which to contribute to the



Herman Boerhaave, MD  
John Chapman, 1798.

growing body of knowledge concerning the symptoms, as well as pathology of disease, a method of learning still in use today. Boerhaave's work increased the prestige of the university, especially that of its medical school, to the degree that the princes of Europe sent their students to Leiden. Because of the university's popularity amongst Europe's aristocracy, it is said that only the wealthy could afford to send their sons to Leiden. It is also worthwhile to note that during Boerhaave's tenure at Leiden (1701-1738), 1,919 students enrolled in the medical school, and 690 of them came from English-speaking countries.



Dr. Boerhaave's  
Anatomical Theatre

George Carlyle concluded his medical education at Leiden University in 1736. Having the qualifications of a university trained physician, George was entitled to be called "Doctor" and was not fettered by the "manual" functions of the apothecary, midwife, and surgeon. Having been educated at the prestigious medical school at Leiden—coupled with the lack of qualified physicians in England in the 1700s—Doctor Carlyle had the credentials, the status, as well as the advantage of exclusivity to prescribe medical treatment (for a substantial fee) to the wealthiest of clientele. The average Briton of the period could not afford the services of a doctor and turned to the less expensive and more numerous surgeon-apothecaries, surgeons, apothecaries, or barbers to relieve their ills. In 1783, Simmons recorded in his *Register* that there were sixty surgeon-apothecaries practicing in Cumberland County, opposed to only ten active physicians.

Many English physicians of the time parlayed their "exclusivity" and training 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 Cumberland County 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 father William's estate and is referred to as a "Doctor" residing in Kendal. One can only speculate why George began his career in medicine in Kendal and not Carlisle. In all likelihood Carlisle already had an established physician promoting George to look elsewhere to start his practice.

It is not apparent why but by 1766, George is back practicing medicine in his boyhood home of Carlisle, the county seat of Cumberland County. Doctor Carlyle may



have moved his practice from Kendal to Carlisle for a number of reasons, one of which may have been a desire to return home. Another possibility is that the county seat was short a doctor, leaving an opening for a qualified hometown boy to fill. It could also have been that the population, as well as the economy of the border town was better-off than Kendal's and Carlisle could support an additional doctor. Unless further evidence can be found indicating why George left Kendal the record remains unclear.

By marketing his skills directly to towns like Kendal and Carlisle that boasted a number of affluent patrons amongst their populations, an entrepreneurial doctor like George Carlyle was able to maximize the profitability of his practice. Evidently Doctor Carlyle's business plan was successful, for he had the means to send his son, Joseph Dacre Carlyle (1758-1804) to the distinguished, albeit expensive, University of Cambridge in 1775, whose student body (prior to the 1960s) tended to be largely from Great Britain's social elite.

When the third edition of Samuel Foart Simmons' *Register* is published in 1783, Doctor George Carlyle is 68 years-old and still listed as a practicing physician, a typical profile for a doctor of the period. The data provided in the *Medical Register* puts forth the idea that the majority of physicians in Great Britain did not retire but rather practiced as long as they were able. The statistics compiled by Simmons also indicate that many surgeons, physicians, barbers, apothecaries, etc. were practicing medicine well into their seventies. By the 1780s, the medical schools of Scotland had become recognized as among the finest in all of Europe, and Simmons' *Medical Register* substantiates this shift. In 1783, the *Register* records that only 26 practicing physicians in England, including George, had studied at Leiden. Doctor George Carlyle died in his hometown of Carlisle, England in 1784, at the age of 69.

#### Sources

James Munson, *Col.<sup>o</sup> John Carlyle, Gent.* NVRPA, 1986.

*The shaping of Things to Come: Scottish Medical Education 1700–1939.* Christopher Lawrence, *Medical Education* vol. 40: pp. 212 – 218, March 2006

*The Medical Practitioners of Provincial England in 1783.* Joan Lane, *Medical History*, vol.28: pp. 353-371, 1984

### Question of the Month:

#### *What is a double-pile building?*

The pile of a building is determined by the number of rooms deep it is. A single-pile building is one room deep from the front to the back. The smokehouse adjacent to the garden is a single-pile building. A double-pile building, like Carlyle House, is two rooms in depth: the Parlor is in front of the Dining Room; the Architectural Room is in front of the Storage Room. The side passage connecting the Bedchamber with the Study is not considered a room, and therefore has no impact on the building's double-pile status.

In addition to the extra work involved in design and construction, double-pile buildings made a certain statement. The designs of Robert Adam sweeping England and Scotland in the early-to-mid 1700s required a double-pile layout to maintain the graceful balance and proportions inspired by Andrea Palladio. Vernacular architecture shows us that homes in colonial Virginia were two or three rooms large, virtually always in a single-pile layout. Knowing that John Carlyle closely retained his Scottish architectural customs and that he lived better than 95% of his fellow Virginians, we can conclude that the double-pile design of the Carlyle House added greatly to its beauty and prestige.

#### *Resources that may be of interest:*

“Robert Adam's Vision of Edinburgh”

<http://sites.scran.ac.uk/ada/ra.htm>

“Scottish History and Archaeology: Architecture—Robert Adam.” [http://www.ourpasthistory.com/architecture/architecture\\_robert\\_adam.htm](http://www.ourpasthistory.com/architecture/architecture_robert_adam.htm)

“House and Home: 400 Years of Domestic Architecture” at the National Building Museum, Washington, DC. Opening Spring 2008.

### *Walking With Washington*

A very special thank-you is due to **Bob Madison** for leading two groups of Carlyle House staff and docents on his *Walking With Washington* tour. Several of our folks and a few visitors enjoyed an engaging lecture from Bob, despite muggy sunshine one day and a threat of rain the other day.

