

Carlyle

Connection

"It's a fine beginning"



Aquia Sandstone in Carlyle House and Nearby Colonial Virginia

By Rosemary Maloney

John Carlyle wanted to build an imposing home, and he wanted to build it of stone, like the great stone houses of England and Scotland. But comparable stone was not available in the Atlantic coastal plain of Virginia. For Carlyle, the only convenient local source of stone hard enough for building was the sandstone (or freestone as it was known in colonial times) from the area around Aquia Creek in Stafford County, Virginia, about 35 miles south of Alexandria. The name Aquia is believed to be a corruption of the original Algonquin word "Quiyough," meaning gulls.

The source of this tan to light-gray sandstone was familiar to the early settlers of Virginia. A quarry was created there as early as 1650. Today, there are still ledges exposed on both sides of Interstate 95 near Stafford and along Aquia Creek. This stone is suitable for building purposes because of the cementation by silica of its components: quartz, sand, and pebbles. But Aquia sandstone has its flaws. It tends to weather unevenly, and therefore is more suitable for interior than exterior construction.

Construction of Carlyle House

In a letter dated November 12, 1752, to his brother George in England, John Carlyle remarks on the difficulty of building his house in Alexandria. But his frustration is blended with optimism as he writes:

"...the Violent Rains we have had this Fall, has hurt the Stone Walls that We Was obliged to Take down A part After it Was nigh its Height, which has been A Loss & great disappointment (sp) To me, however Time & patience Will over come all (I am In hopes)..."



Carlyle House before the restoration. Notice the state of the sandstone quoins.

Apart from this single mention of stone walls, nowhere in the letters to George does John mention Aquia sandstone, or how it was quarried and transported.

The walls of Carlyle House are constructed of sandstone. The interior surfaces are uncut and unevenly coursed stone, as is evident in the Architecture Room. The west façade, which faces Fairfax Street, consisted of smoothly dressed stone set in a coursed ashlar pattern, or thin rectangles of sandstone. When reconstruction of Carlyle House was undertaken prior to the Bicentennial in 1976, it was discovered that the west elevation revealed extreme irregularity in the stone dimensions, both horizontally and vertically. As a result of this irregularity no corner quoins aligned and, in fact, each corner had a different number of quoins. During the reconstruction the sandstone's lack of resistance to wind and water also became apparent. As a result, the west façade was



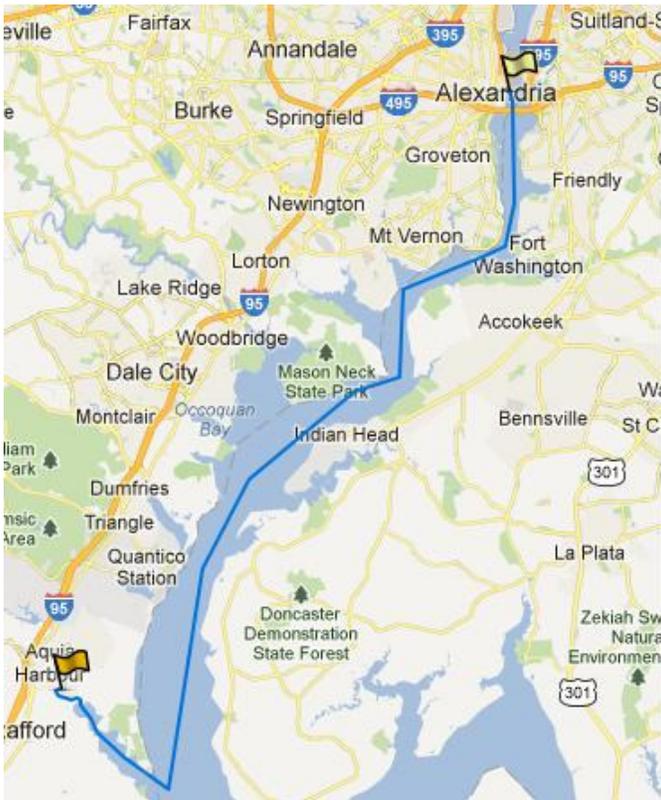
replaced with more durable Indiana limestone.

Cutting and Transporting the Stone

In the colonial period, slave labor was used to cut the heavy stone, transport it to a riverbank and load it on barges. This is a simple description of a labor-intensive and complex process of moving tons of rock upstream on the Potomac River. Information from a later period suggests how this may have been done in colonial times. In 1791, in anticipation of constructing buildings of stone for the new Federal City, Major

stone was loaded onto scows and was then transported downstream to deeper, more navigable waters...There stone was transferred onto larger sailing vessels called schooners or sloops, carried down Aquia Creek, and shipped up the Potomac River to Washington, D.C.”

After 1791, Aquia sandstone was used in many of the most famous buildings of our nation’s capital. It is also the sandstone used in the boundary stones that mark the original ten-mile-square area of the District of Columbia.



Aquia Sandstone in Nearby Colonial Buildings

Although John Carlyle built his entire house of Aquia sandstone, the material was used more as decorative elements in other colonial buildings. Aquia Church in Stafford County is located about four miles from the quarry. Construction was completed in 1757. This building, in the form of a Greek cross, is constructed of brick laid in the Flemish bond pattern, a decorative form of bricklaying, created by alternate laying of headers and stretchers, favored in colonial architecture. Aquia sandstone is used in the quoins, the door lintels and the keystones above the window arches. Over the years, dates and initials have been carved in the soft sandstone.

Farther north, in Fairfax County, is Pohick Church, so

A map showing the water route John Carlyle’s “freestone” would have taken to reach Alexandria. Aquia is marked by the yellow flag in the lower corner, Alexandria by the flag in the upper right.

Pierre L’Enfant, on behalf of the Federal government, purchased an island in Aquia Creek for a quarry site. Known as Government Island today, the site is part of the Stafford County park system and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic markers tell the story of quarrying on Government Island; one marker labeled “Transporting the Stone” reads:

“A historic route...was created by skids of ‘stone boats’ that were loaded with stone and dragged by oxen to the wharf...At the wharf



The eastern aspect of Christ Church, which Carlyle undertook to complete. The quoins, at the corners of the building, are painted a glossy white.

named because of its proximity to Pohick Creek. The original Pohick Church was established some time prior to 1724. In 1767, vestrymen George Washington, George Mason and George William Fairfax (brother-in-law of John Carlyle) supervised the rebuilding of the church in brick. Construction was completed in 1774. Aquia sandstone was used in the quoins, door frames and steps. Here, too, the sandstone bears carvings of initials and dates. The church is located across the road from a boundary of present-day Fort Belvoir, once part of the estate and home of William Fairfax, John Carlyle's father-in-law.

Gunston Hall, the home of George Mason, is not far from Pohick Church. It was constructed about 1755 to 1760. This fine example of Georgian architecture, built in brick in the Flemish bond design, has quoins of Aquia sandstone.



The front façade of the Carlyle House. During the restoration, the house was refaced with Indiana limestone, which wears better than the local sandstone. Upon close inspection, you can see the original stone in the cornice.

Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens, home of George Washington, is also in Fairfax County.

According to Dennis J. Pogue, Mount Vernon's

Vice President for Preservation, the steps of the Mansion, the stones around the piazza, and the keystone of the greenhouse were of Aquia sandstone. However, Mr. Pogue notes that "most of it probably came from Mount Vernon itself, as a vein of the stone is known to have been exposed here in the 18th century and was quarried for local use."

Here in the City of Alexandria, Christ Church is

located off North Washington Street. The church uses Aquia sandstone in the quoins, but today these are painted glossy white. In 1772 John Carlyle, as an "undertaker," or contractor, was requested by the vestry to take over completion of Christ Church. Carlyle bought a pew in this new Anglican church, but with his Presbyterian upbringing he chose to be buried on the grounds of the nearby Presbyterian Meeting House, another building project in which he was involved.

A Lasting Effect

When John Carlyle built his house of Aquia sandstone, he intended to stay in the colonies only temporarily and to return to England after he made his fortune. However, as the years passed and events shaped his life and changed his outlook, John Carlyle no longer thought of going home. Eventually he became as American as the stone he had chosen for his splendid home, Carlyle House.

Sources:

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Munson, James P., *Col. John Carlyle, Gent. A True and Just Account of the Man and His House.* The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, 1986.

"The Personal and Family Correspondence of Col. John Carlyle of Alexandria, Virginia." www.nvrpa.org.

A full list of sources is available in the web version of the article.

Thank you to Rosemary Maloney for your excellent research on Aquia Sandstone and for allowing us to reprint your article for the Friends newsletter.

Two Great Events– One Fun June Friends' Annual Meeting and Little Theatre Fundraiser



Outgoing Board President Rosalind Bovey poses with Carlyle House staff members.



Volunteer and Friend Linda Greenberg chats with new board member Ben Fiore-Walker.



Newly elected Board President Deborah Rudolph addresses members of the Friends of Carlyle House.



Board members pose with our Elvis impersonator.



The curtain is up at "All the King's Women" for a nearly sold-out Carlyle House crowd!

Traveling Trunk to Debut This School Year, and Summer Camps Arrive Next Summer

We are excited to report that Lacey Villiva, our Education and Outreach Assistant, has been making great progress on our “Traveling Trunk” school outreach program. This trunk will allow our popular school program, “Discovery Through Trash” to travel to the classroom for schools that can’t make it to Carlyle House. The kit will be shipped to schools that sign up for it and will come equipped with lesson plans, handouts, and interactive activities, including “fake” archaeological artifacts that the students can work with to discover what the trash of the past can tell us about how people lived!

We are also excited to report that funding from Doug Thurman’s generous bequest to the Friends of Carlyle House will be used toward a Carlyle House Summer Camp to debut next year. We are very excited about this chance to provide further enrichment to the children of Alexandria and the Northern Virginia community. Stay tuned for more details!



From the Desk of the Curator

Following on the heels of an excellent article in the Friends' newsletter about gardens and the 18th century, here is a brief excerpt from my lecture on slavery about the possible identity of John Carlyle's "gardner":

It is probable that Carlyle’s gardener was a slave, since he is never referred to by name. Carlyle would have required that this enslaved worker have the same skills that both Charles Carroll and George



Washington sought in indentured servant gardeners. Carroll wrote to his English agent in 1768 that *“I am in want of a Gardiner that understands a Kitchen Garden well and Grafting, Budding, Inoculating and the managem^t of an orchard and Fruit Trees Pretty well.”* Washington requested that Robert Adam procure him a gardener while in England, specifying: *“I do not want one of y^r fine fellows; a Man that can lay of a Garden, and will Work hard in it afterw^{ds}, and who knows how to sow Seeds in their proper seasons s all that I desire. In short a good Kitchen Gardner is what I want. If he unders^d something of Fruit Trees and could Graft and Innoculate so much the better.”* Indeed, it is highly likely that Carlyle’s gardener divided his time between the town property and the plantations, serving as the kitchen gardener and the overseer of the town property’s formal gardens.



Carlyle House Historic Park Presents:

Cauldron Tea

Sunday, October 21st – 2 pm

“Double, double toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble.” What is brewing in your pot? Come to the Carlyle House terrace for a spooky afternoon tea, then tour the museum and learn about 18th century funeral and mourning practices. Costumes welcome.

Reservations and Prepayment Required; Admission: \$27/ adults, \$15/children 5-12



Call 703-549-2997 or e-mail carlyle@nvrpa.org to register. Visit www.carlylehouse.org for more information.



Upcoming Events Carlyle House

**Thursday, September 6: 6-10 pm
Fashion’s Night Out**

Come to Carlyle House on Thursday, September 6th during Fashion’s Night Out in Alexandria. Enjoy 20% off everything in the museum shop, taste 18th-century style hot chocolate, and enjoy free self-guided tours of the museum. A recreation of Sarah Fairfax Carlyle’s blue silk wedding gown will be on display, as well as some of the original 1740 era silk fragments. *Free!*

**Saturday, September 15: 10:30 am - noon
Historic Fashion Show**

Enjoy a morning of high fashion—through the ages. The Carlyle House Magnolia Terrace will be transformed into a runway as fashion historians and living history interpreters describe the various styles and types of clothing our models are wearing.

\$10 for adults, \$5 for children; Friends receive 10% off

**Saturday, September 29: 8-10 pm
An Evening of 18th Century Games and Diversions**

Join us for an evening of 18th century gaming on our Magnolia Terrace. Learn from historical experts about diversions that John Carlyle and his friends and family such as Lord Fairfax and George Washington played. Light hors d’oeuvres and two drinks are included in the event ticket.

\$50; Friends receive 10% off

**Sunday, October 21: 2 pm
Cauldron Tea**

Come to the Carlyle House terrace for a spooky afternoon tea that will be sure to cast a spell on your Halloween celebrations. After the tea, guests are invited to tour the museum and learn about 18th century funeral and mourning practices in Virginia. Costumes welcome.

\$27/adults, \$15/children; Friends receive 10% off



Historic Fashion Show Saturday, September 15 10:30 am– noon

Enjoy a morning of high fashion...through the ages!

\$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 5-12. Friends of Carlyle House get 10% off!



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*Carlyle House Historic Park is accredited by
the American Association of Museums*



News from the Site Director

Welcome to Our New Board Officers

This summer's Annual Meeting of the Friends of Carlyle House was a wonderful chance to catch up with Friends old and new and to be able to honor the remarkable service of outgoing Board President Rosalind Bovey.

Serving as President since 2003, Rosalind has been an Officer of the Friends of Carlyle House Board of Directors for 21 years and a board member for much longer. Under Rosalind's leadership, the Friends' annual fundraiser, the Herb and Wildflower Sale, has become enormously successful and is now a staple of Virginia Garden Week. Rosalind also oversaw the growth of the museum's collections and interpretation during her tenure. In 2010, Rosalind was given an "Alexandria Living Legend" award, and that is truly what she is.

Personally, I've admired Rosalind's passion and dedication to Carlyle House. An unstoppable advocate for this museum, Rosalind is always out in the community promoting Carlyle House. She is also a wonderful helper- continually looking for ways to help our small staff get things done. We are so fortunate she is willing to stay on the board and look forward to all the great things to come.

Stepping into those big shoes, we welcome Deborah Rudolph, a longtime Board Member and past Vice-President for the Friends. Debbie brings with her some wonderful new ideas to help energize our fundraising efforts, including the successful Little Theatre fundraiser. We are excited to find out what Debbie's tenure has in store!

Many board members have stepped up to fill vacant officer positions and we are thrilled to have them in these leadership roles. We also welcomed a new board member, Ben Fiore-Walker, best known in Old Town for filling the position of Town Crier. We look forward to working with him as a Friend of Carlyle House.

New Fundraiser at the Little Theatre of Alexandria is a Huge Success

The Friends of Carlyle House held their first ever fundraiser at the Little Theatre of Alexandria. The "Partners in Art" night featured a private performance of *All the King's Women*. Guests were entertained over cocktail hour by our very own Elvis impersonator. A large crowd and a lively silent auction made for a very successful evening. Overall, the Friends raised \$6,000 towards museum collection purchases and educational programs. Thank you to everyone who attended, bid on Silent Auction items and donated. Particularly a big thank you to Debby Christie for donating not one but two weeks at her house in Cape Cod.

Sincerely,

Sarah Coster

Carlyle House Historic Park

A property of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

121 North Fairfax Street ~ Alexandria, Virginia 22314

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