



Carlyle House

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Discovering Torthorwald, Bridekirk, and Lymekilns through John Carlyle's Inventory

by Amy Lewellen

Although Alexandria was John Carlyle's primary residence from 1753 until 1780, it was not the only property he owned. Carlyle acquired his first tract of land in America in 1743, composed of 121 acres along Little Hunting Creek. By 1748, Carlyle stated that "*I am at present Master of between Eight and Ten Thousand Acres of as Good Land As any in Cumberland.*" Much of this property was speculative reality, which Carlyle would buy and then rent or sell again. Yet by the time of his death, Carlyle owned three major plantations besides the lots in Alexandria which he called Torthorwald, Bridekirk, and Lymekilns after the estates of different branches of the Carlyle family in England. This designation practice was not uncommon among British colonists. For example, nearby George Mason also named his house, Gunston Hall, after an ancestral family estate in Staffordshire, England.

Of Bridekirk and Lymekilns, little is known beyond their general location. The former was located somewhere in Fairfax County, but Lymekilns was more distantly located in western Virginia's Berkley County (now West Virginia). Both plantations were dedicated to farming, probably the production of cash crops. This work would have been overseen by a hired farmer, as is evidenced by Carlyle's 1755 letter where he mentions that "*...Cap't Wilson has promised Me to Assist in Procureing A Good Farmer if Possible.*"

Torthorwald, on the other hand, was a much more extensive property. It was also the first of these three plantations for Carlyle to acquire, and was located near present-day Fairlington at Rte. 7 and I-395. Torthorwald was the seat of many of Carlyle's rural enterprises, including farming, horse breeding, and milling. The property is described in a rental advertisement from the *Alexandria Gazette* on October 18, 1787: "*THAT valuable FARM on Four-Mile-Run, known by the name of Colonel CARLYLE'S FARM ... One dwelling-house, with four rooms that has fire-places, calculated for a genteel family, a kitchen, meat-house, barn, stables, cow-houses, dairy, overseer's house, weaver's and smith's shops with*



20th-century photograph of Torthorwald. Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Carlyle Cochran.

Advertisement for the sale of Torthorwald. 1787. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

To be RENTED for the term of ten years commencing the 25th day of December next,
THAT valuable FARM on Four-Mile-Run, known by the name of Colonel CARLYLE'S FARM, with eight Negro hithabes that are now on the premises.—The improvements on that farm are now very considerable, viz. one dwelling-house, with four rooms that has fire-places, calculated for a genteel family, a kitchen, meat-house, barn, stables, cow-houses, dairy, overseer's house, weaver's and smith's shops with a good set of smith's tools, an orchard of excellent fruit trees, 250 acres of arable land cleared and under good fence, 80 acres of meadow reclaimed and now in timothy, clover and other grass, most of which may be watered at pleasure, being supplied with abundance of springs.—Adjoining land fronting a MECKLENBURG and GRIST MILL, which will be rented either for one year or a term of years, in which are worked one pair of bar and one pair of counter mill-stones, two bolting cloths, &c. &c.—There is now for sale on the said farm fifty tons of HAY, a part of this year's crop, on reasonable terms, for ready-money only.—Sixty bushels of wheat will be sowed on the premises by the 15th inst.—For further particulars and terms apply to WILLIAM HERBERT, in Alexandria, or CHARLES LITTLE, at Darby, Fairfax County.
 October 18, 1787.

a good set of smith's tools, an orchard of excellent fruit trees, 250 acres of arable land cleared and under good fence, 80 acres of meadow reclaimed and now in timothy, clover and other grass, most of which may be watered at pleasure, being supplied with abundance of springs." The advertisement goes on to mention the grist mill which adjoins the farm, and lists hay and wheat for sale as that year's crop.

Carlyle's inventory is also an invaluable resource

CARLYLE HOUSE

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



in determining the size, use, and production of the estates, since there are separate inventories listed for each the Alexandria estate, Bridekirk, and Torthorwald. The fact that there is no listing for Lymekilns may indicate that it had been sold prior to Carlyle's death, or that it was too small or too far away to be of much concern in the main inventory. Bridekirk, however, was apparently worthy of an inventory, although it is very short and is almost entirely composed of slaves, livestock, and some agricultural tools. Whereas Carlyle House contained 9 slaves, Bridekirk had 15, half of them listed as children. The fact that the inventory lists three ploughs, as well as traces for the half dozen horses and a pair of oxen, indicates the emphasis on farming. The 226 barrels of corn listed at the end of the inventory may have come from the farm itself, as well as being used to feed the livestock. Of the livestock, the 7 cows were the most valuable, but there were also 24 sheep and 42 shoats (young hogs). The large number of shoats, as well as the boar and five breeding sows, indicate that the raising of hogs was probably Bridekirk's other main 'crop.' The tending of livestock such as the hogs might also have been the task of the slave children unable to yet handle the heavy ploughs and oxen.

The inventory of Torthorwald is over three times as long as the one for Bridekirk, and shows the differences between the two estates. The fact that Torthorwald was manned by 43 slaves is the first indication of its relative size. The inventory also lists some house furnishings including a bedstead, two walnut armed chairs, a large walnut table, and two gilded framed portraits of the King and Queen, all of which would have furnished the "genteel" dwelling-house. Many of these items might have come from Carlyle House after they had become more worn or less fashionable. Torthorwald also contained an impressive array of tools, including carpenter's tools such as planes, saws, chisels, bevels, augers, and hammers. Slaves skilled in carpentry work would undoubtedly have been valuable in the building of Carlyle House as well as the other construction projects in which Carlyle was involved.

Although Torthorwald lists five ploughs and 473 barrels of corn, it is clear that the livestock may have been the major sources of production. First are the 28 horses listed at the very beginning of the inventory, which stand as testament to Carlyle's interest and involvement in horse racing and horse breeding. The two other industries seem to be wool and dairy. This is clear from both the livestock and the tools listed on the inventory. Besides 82 sheep, there were three sets of sheep sheers, two looms, and various other weaving equipment. At the same time there were "30 Milch

Cows, 17 heifers, 5 Steers, 1 Bull, [and] 16 Calves," as well as 60 tin milk pans, 2 churns, a cheese press, 3 butterpots, and 6 cheesehoopes. The combination of the horse breeding, wool and dairy production, and growing and milling of grain indicates the breadth and vitality of Carlyle's agricultural endeavors.

It is not surprising that Carlyle had many different estates. Nor is it unusual that he had both a town house and a country house. Unlike many of his contemporaries who owned houses in the city but lived in the country, John Carlyle owned houses in the country but lived in the city. This is made obvious in the description of Torthorwald. It is built for a "genteel family," but it is not on the same scale as Carlyle House in Alexandria. It was large enough, however, to serve as a rural retreat for Carlyle's family. Carlyle states in a 1770 letter to George William Fairfax that "*If the weather is good I wou'd... move up to my Country house.*" With Torthorwald being furnished with old pieces from Carlyle House, the family would have had a familiar sense of home around them in their country house.

Just as the main household inventory is important in our interpretation of Carlyle House, so too are the inventories for Torthorwald and Bridekirk. The furnishings at Torthorwald give us an indication of other household items that might have been found in Carlyle House prior to 1780. The many varied sources of production and profit testified in the inventories indicate the diverse enterprises in which Carlyle was involved beyond his mercantile endeavors. These enterprises also show different facets of John Carlyle. Breeding racehorses indicates Carlyle's status as a gentleman, farming cash crops shows his interests as a businessman. Managing several plantations demonstrates his skills as a farmer. And selling the produce involves his knowledge as a merchant. Thus by studying the inventories, we have gained a deeper understanding of not only the estates of Torthorwald and Bridekirk, but also the house in Alexandria and the man behind them all.

Sources:

Alexandria Gazette, October 18, 1787.

Carlyle House Interpretive Themes.

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