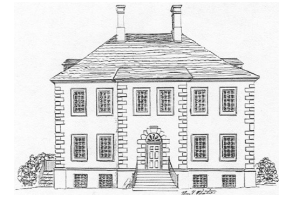




Carlyle House

Docent Dispatch



March 2005

Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

INTERPRETATION OF FORMAL DINING ROOM

By Jim Williams



Site of General Braddock's Council Meeting 1755

As we approach the anniversary of General Braddock's visit to the Carlyle House our guests will be increasingly interested in the events that took place in our formal dining room and those that immediately followed.

All of us have topics that we particularly enjoy interpreting. Jim Williams has an affinity for all things military and does a beautiful job in tying the events of the spring of 1755 in the City of Alexandria together and placing them in historical context. He was kind enough to transcribe his interpretation as he delivers it so that we could share it with all the docents.

Thank you, Jim.

This was John's formal dining room; here he entertained the gentry. It is certainly the most important room in this house; I think it is one of the most important rooms in this entire area.

It was here on 14 April 1755, that Major General Edward Braddock of the Coldstream Guards, who gives us to this day, Braddock Road and all the "Braddock" things scattered from here all the way to Pennsylvania, met 5 colonial governors and laid out the strategy for

CARLYLE HOUSE

Mary Ruth Coleman, Director
Jim Bartlinski, Curator
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the French and Indian War in which the French and Indians would fight the British for control of the Ohio Valley.

Also at that meeting were Commodore Kepple, who was in charge of the British navy in colonial waters, and Colonel William Johnson, the Indian agent from New York, who would become SIR William Johnson. They were all in this room at one time.

After they left, John wrote to his brother George, back in England, and said that: "There was the grandest Congress held at my home ever known on this continent." That's a big claim, but we must remember: the first Continental Congress was not held until 1774 up in Philadelphia. John may have been right; there may have been more really important men gathered together in one room at one time, than had ever been seen before on what they called the American continent.

The general had arrived with about 1,500 regulars. His job was to build that force up to between 2,200-2,400 men and march up to Ft. Duquesne, where the French had built a fort at the very strategic forks of the Ohio River, at a place we now call Pittsburgh--and throw the French out of that fort.

By that time, in addition to everything else, John had been named a military commissar by Governor Dinwiddie. Braddock named him Keeper of the King's sSorehouses in America. It was a wonderful commission but an awful job.

John helped the general in another way too. You can imagine a British general in Alexandria in 1755. He took one look around this tiny town and decided the only place for him and his entourage was the stone house, and here he established his HQs from the 26th of March to the 20th of April in 1755. He was not a good house guest. John was very glad to see him depart.

On the 9th of July, Braddock was about 7 miles southeast of Ft. Duquesne when he stumbled onto the French and Indians, who immediately went to ambush to fight while he stayed in the open. (If you have seen *The Last of the Mohicans*, you have some idea of how that battle was fought.) The general was completely routed, mortally wounded, and died 4 days later on the retreat. Contemporary opinion was that had the survivors not been allowed to escape, they would have been annihilated—and if that tiny band of men, in the middle of nowhere, had been annihilated, it would have changed WORLD history. (If it comes up: Braddock

had divided his forces. Only about 1,450 men were in the battle. Of those, more than 900 were casualties.)

One of Braddock's aides that day was a local boy named George Washington. That day George had 4 bullet holes in his coat and 2 horses were shot out from under him; the "Father of our Country" just wasn't meant to die that day. Among the others who survived was a young wagoneer sent up from North Carolina who cut his team loose and escaped: Daniel Boone. Another drover who survived was Dan Morgan, who would defeat "Bloody Tarleton" at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina, one of the greatest American victories in the entire Revolutionary War—a battle which some of our teenagers now believe was won by Mel Gibson.

Leading the van that day was (at that time) Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage, who would be in charge of all British forces during Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill. Behind him was Horatio Gates, who would take "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in 1777. In all, 6 of the men on that





expedition men would become generals in the Revolutionary War. And folks, that expedition did not start in Philadelphia, Boston, or New York; it was organized in THIS room—at the Carlyle House.

The general had something else to say to the governors during that meeting. He told them they should contribute to the “Common Defense Fund” to support the war. We all know how colonial assemblies felt about voting to spend money. The governors told the general their assemblies would not likely vote any money for the war without being compelled. Just before he left on the expedition the general wrote to the Ministry back in London saying that, “I cannot but represent to you the necessity of laying of a tax on all His Majesty’s dominions in America...,” to help pay for the war--the first official recommendation for direct taxation by the Crown. We all know how that turned out: to this day the license plates in D.C. say, “Taxation without Representation.”

There are scholars who will say the Revolutionary War started, albeit indirectly, in THIS room at the Carlyle House. That’s a matter for conjecture but one thing is sure: that meeting is the reason these rooms (parlor and formal dining room) were so carefully preserved. Folks always remembered the history that happened here. These rooms are virtually the same as they were in 1755, and now that we have the paint scheme right, we just don’t know what furniture John had in here.

How did John feel about the Revolutionary War when it did start? He risked everything he had—and by then John had a enormous amount to risk—to stand with the new nation. He was a true and thorough patriot.

Any questions about this fine, and famous, old room?

Jim was very generous to share this part of his tour with us and we hope that it will give you ideas on how to interpret General Braddock's visit to the

Second Annual

Carlyle House Letter Writing Contest

- If you know any 4th, 5th or 6th graders who
- might want to win a family pass for four to
- Cameron Run Great Waves Park,
- please pick up contest instructions in the office.