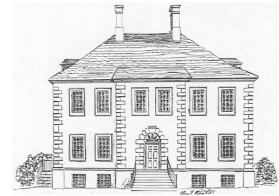




# Carlyle House Docent Dispatch



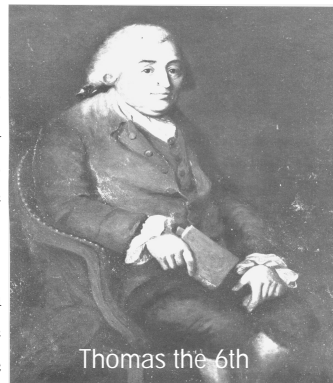
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Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

## John Carlyle and the Lords Fairfax

by Bob Madison

Thomas, the Sixth Lord Fairfax (1693-1781), Baron of Cameron and Lord Proprietor of the Northern Neck in Virginia, controlled 5,282,000 acres between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers. The Proprietary had been given to his ancestors by King Charles II in appreciation of their service to the crown during the Cromwell era. Thomas succeeded to the title when he was sixteen and gained full control of the Proprietary when his mother died in 1719. However, he left management of the Proprietary to agents like Robert “King” Carter during his early life. When Carter died, Lord Fairfax had his cousin, William Fairfax (1691-1757), transferred in 1733 from being Collector of Customs for Salem, Massachusetts, to being Collector of Customs for the South Potomac. At the same time, Lord Fairfax appointed William Fairfax his agent for the Northern Neck Proprietary of Virginia.



Thomas the 6th

Lord Fairfax first visited Virginia in 1735, but he returned to England in 1737, staying for ten years to defend his interests in Virginia before the King’s Privy Council. By 1741, William Fairfax had moved to his newly completed mansion at Belvoir. In 1747, Lord Fairfax moved permanently to Virginia, staying initially with his cousin and agent, William Fairfax, at Belvoir. Thus, Lord Fairfax was present at the wedding and was John Carlyle’s “Second” [best man] when he married William Fairfax’s daughter Sarah on December 31, 1747.

When Alexandria was founded in 1749, five of the original trustees were members of Lord Fairfax’s family by birth or marriage: Lord Fairfax himself; his cousin, William Fairfax; William Fairfax’s son, George

William Fairfax (1725-1787); and William Fairfax’s sons-in-law, Lawrence Washington (1718-1752) and John Carlyle.

In 1761, Lord Fairfax moved both his home and the Proprietary land office to Greenway Court in the Shenandoah Valley. He had built a log cabin there in 1748 and a house in 1752. During the American Revolution, Lord Fairfax maintained a policy of strict neutrality, and it appears

that he was treated with respect. In a series of acts from 1777 through 1796, the Virginia Assembly effectively dissolved the Northern Neck Proprietary.

Thomas, the Sixth Lord Fairfax, died in 1781 at the age of 88. He had never married, and the title passed to his younger brother, Robert Fairfax. Because of acts passed by the Virginia Assembly, Robert Fairfax was unable to claim his Virginia inheritance. In 1792, an act of Parliament for the relief of American loyalists awarded him 13,758 pounds. The Seventh Lord Fairfax died in 1793.

The title then passed to Bryan Fairfax (1736-1802), John Carlyle’s brother-in-law. Bryan Fairfax served under George Washington early in the French and Indian War. However, when he was rejected by a young lady in 1757, he resigned his commission and headed north to start a new life. His brother-in-law, John Carlyle, caught up with him in Annapolis and brought him back to Belvoir. When the Fairfax

### CARLYLE HOUSE

Mary Ruth Coleman, Director  
Jim Bartlinski, Curator  
Cindy Major, Curator of Education



Resolves (John Carlyle signed them) were debated in 1774, Bryan Fairfax sent letters to George Washington, the chairman of the committee considering the Resolves, giving reasons why they should not be adopted; however, Washington did not read the letters to the assembled citizens.

Fairfax's feelings were torn between England and America during the Revolutionary War. On his own in 1777, he decided to be a mediator between the two sides. He was arrested in Lancaster, PA, for refusing to sign a loyalty oath. However, he wrote to his good friend, George Washington, who gave him a pass to travel between the lines. In New York, British officials also required a loyalty oath, which he refused to take. With his mediation attempts a failure, he returned to Virginia for the remainder of the war.

He had long considered a religious life, and he was ordained a Minister of the Episcopal Church in 1789, serving as rector of Christ Church from 1790 to 1792. George Washington's last meal away from Mount Vernon in 1799 was at Bryan Fairfax's home, Mount Eagle; and Bryan Fairfax was among the last guests at Mount Vernon before Washington died. He was one of the principal mourners at Washington's funeral, and Washington left him a bible in his will.

When the Seventh Lord Fairfax died in 1793, Bryan Fairfax initially ignored the title. However, while in England in 1798 on other business, he presented the necessary proofs to the House of Lords to claim the title. In 1800, after he had returned to Virginia, the peerage was adjudged, and he became the Eighth Lord Fairfax. Bryan Fairfax died in 1802. Mount Eagle was demolished in 1968, and the land is now used for the Montebello Condominiums and the Huntington Metro Station.

Bryan Fairfax's eldest son and John Carlyle's nephew, Thomas Fairfax (1762-1846), became the Ninth Lord Fairfax. He married John Carlyle's granddaughter, Margaret Herbert (his third wife and the mother of all of his children), in 1800. They leased 301 South St. Asaph Street (usually known as the Lafayette House because Lafayette stayed there during his visit to Alexandria in 1824) from 1828 to 1830. They purchased 607 Cameron Street (the Lord Fairfax House) in 1830, and they lived there until he died in 1846. She died in 1850. They lived primarily at their

country estates. Vaucluse, their last country house, was sited approximately east of where the Plaza Condominiums are on Howard Street near the Hospital. Vaucluse was destroyed in 1861 to build Civil War fortifications. An obelisk memorializing Bryan, Thomas, and their wives, is in Ivy Hill Cemetery.

Thomas Fairfax's eldest son, Albert, preceded him in death, and the title passed to his grandson, Charles Snowden Fairfax (1829-1869). Thus, the Tenth Lord Fairfax and all succeeding Lords Fairfax are descendants of John Carlyle. At the age of twenty, Charles Snowden Fairfax sailed from the James River to San Francisco Bay for the California Gold Rush. However, politics was more to his liking than mining, and he eventually became Speaker of the California Assembly, Clerk of the California Supreme Court, and Marin County Supervisor. He was Chairman of the California Delegation to the Democratic National Convention in New York in 1868, and he died while visiting in Baltimore in 1869. The town of Fairfax in Marin County, California, is named for him.

Since Charles Snowden Fairfax had no children, the title reverted to his brother, John Contee Fairfax (1830-1900), a doctor in Maryland. When John Contee Fairfax died, his eldest son, Albert Kirby Fairfax (1870-1839), became the Twelfth Lord Fairfax. Albert worked for a bank in New York, which transferred him to its London office. He became a British citizen, claimed the title, and his family remained in England. His son, Thomas Brian McKelvie Fairfax (1923-1964) became the Thirteenth Lord Fairfax. Nicholas John Albert Fairfax, the Fourteenth and current Lord Fairfax and Baron of Cameron, succeeded to the title in 1964 when he was eight. He lives north of London and has three sons (the oldest, Edward, born in 1984); so it appears the title will continue.

**Sources:**

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