

The Other Arlington House

By **Ciro R. Taddeo**

When mentioning “Arlington House,” those from Northern Virginia and the DC area naturally think of the George Washington Parke Custis home overlooking the capital city from the heights of Arlington National Cemetery. An image of the home was, after all, on the county seal in one form or another for many years. Our local Arlington House was named after the Custis family land near Capeville, Virginia. That spot, in turn, was probably named after the village in England where the Custis family originated. However, there used to be another Arlington House in Great Britain. The home of Henry Bennet, the first Earl of Arlington, it received its name through an entirely different path although it dates from the same period as the original Custis home on Virginia’s Eastern Shore. Nonetheless there is a tie between the two: our local Arlington House sits on land on which the first Earl of Arlington had a claim granted by the English King. Here

then is the story of the first Earl of Arlington and the intertwining names of different Arlington Houses.

Fig. 1: Henry Bennet First Earl of Arlington, print on parchment, ca. 1745.



Courtesy of AHS.

Henry Bennet (1618–85) First Earl of Arlington was a prominent political leader during the restoration period in England of King Charles II (1660–85). A Cavalier commander who fought for the Royalist cause during the English Civil War, Bennet joined other supporters on the King’s exile to France in 1651. During this exile, King Charles

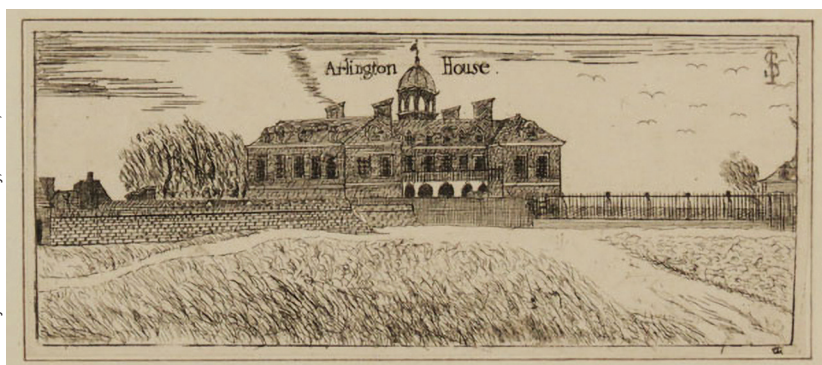
appointed Bennet agent to Spain to gain support for the Royalist cause. In 1659, with the collapse of the English Commonwealth, King Charles returned to England, whereupon he rewarded Bennet for his loyalty by bestowing upon him the title First Earl of Arlington in 1665 (Fig. 1).¹

A skilled diplomat and astute politician, Bennet rapidly rose to prominence becoming Keeper of The Privy Purse (The King's personal wealth), Postmasters-General, and Lord Chamberlain and was a long-serving Secretary of State engaged in domestic, foreign, and colonial affairs. A prominent figure during his tenure, he witnessed the rebuilding of London after the plague and fire of 1665–66. As a major patron of the arts in England he contributed to the arts and cultural tastes of the period.²

As Secretary of State, Bennet played a significant role in the affairs of the British colonies, including Virginia.³ In 1673 King Charles awarded a Virginia land grant to Lord Arlington.⁴ Royal patrons given such grants were not expected to move to the New World but could use their new vast tracts of land to sell or to use to reward their own supporters. In 1680 Thomas Culpepper, Lord Fairfax, bought Bennet's option and purchased additional land from the Royal government.⁵ Bennet retired from government service in 1681.

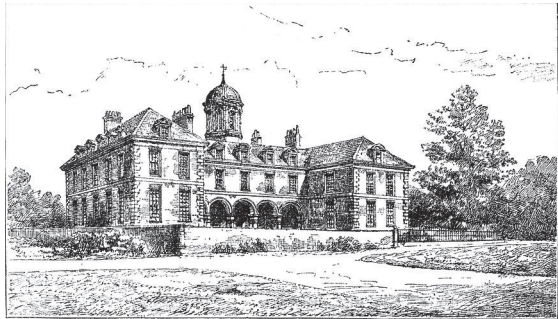
Originally called Goring House, Arlington House was Bennet's residence once he had been raised to the peerage (Fig. 2 & 3). During Bennet's lifetime it was a well-known venue for meetings, receptions, and concerts. Writing of the Arlington House, British author John

Fig. 2: Arlington House, 17th century copy, not dated. "IS" monogram upper right.



Courtesy of Guildhall Library, London, UK.

Timbs stated, “The Earl of Arlington, whose name is or ought to be, indissolubly linked with it, on one account at all events, for in the year of the great plague his lordship brought hither from Holland the first pound of tea



From *The Graphic*, 1887.

*Fig. 3: Illustration of William Grainger's
Arlington House, 1680.*

which was imported into England, and which cost him sixty shillings; so that in all probability the first cup of tea made in England was drank there.”⁶ Bennet later sold his Arlington House and retired to his country estate. The house was demolished in 1703 and John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, built his new home, Buckingham House, on the site.⁷ King George III bought the house for his new wife, Queen Charlotte, for whom Charlottesville, Virginia, is named. It became the official royal palace in 1837 under Queen Victoria. In the end, the site of the Arlington House in Britain became the home of the family of the British King rejected by the American revolutionaries, while our local Arlington House became the home of the step-grandson of one of that revolution’s most important leaders, George Washington, and was used as a shrine to the American general. In the end the fates of the two Arlington Houses diverged, the older, grander one being demolished and forgotten, the smaller, newer one remaining as a national monument.

About the Author

Ciro R. Taddeo is long-time volunteer docent of the Society. He retired from Georgetown University Hospital as laboratory manager. He’s a graduate of The City University of New York and Long Island University. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia. He has contributed previous articles on The Little Tea House and Suffragist leader Gertrude Lynde Crocker. He has gifted artifacts to both the AHS museum and to the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

Endnotes

1. Henry Bennet 1st Earl of Arlington, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/henry_1st_earl_of_Arlington.
2. Helen Jacobson, "Luxury Consumption, Cultural Politics and the Career of the Earl of Arlington 1660–1685," *The Historical Journal*, 52, no. 2 (June 2009): 295–317, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40264172>.
3. Donald A. Wise, "Early Land Grants in Arlington County, Virginia," *The Arlington Historical Magazine*, 5, no. 1 (October 1973): 23–33; *Northern Neck Grants, Thomas Culpepper and Henry Bennet*, <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~kell/genealogy/dad/hooe/Early%20Land%20in%20Arlington%20County%20Virginia.htm>.
4. "Land Grants to Sir Thomas Culpepper and Sir Henry Bennet for the collection of revenues," *The Fairfax Grant*, 4–5, www.virginiaplaces.org/settledland/fairfaxgrant.html.
5. W. Stitt Robinson Jr., *The Project Gutenberg Book of Mother Earth. Earth-Land Grants in Virginia 1607–1699, Chapter V. The Northern Neck*, 51–52, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/28499/28499-h/htm>. James Madison cites this grant in a letter concerning land boundary disputes in 1782. "James Madison's letter Edmund Burke," April 9, 1782; *Citing Fairfax/Arlington land grants in the "Northern Neck" of Virginia*, 3, <https://foundersarchives.gov/documents/Madison/01-04-02-0066>.
6. *BHO British History Online*, Westminster: Buckingham Palace, Chapter VI., 7. Excerpted from: Edward Walford, *Old and New London Illustrated*, Vol. IV (London, Paris, and New York: Cassell, Petter, & Galpin, Publishers, 1878), 61–74, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/old-new-london/vol14pp61-74>; Tibbs (1801–74) wrote historical guidebooks and commentaries.
7. Ibid.