

**Alice Copley Thaw,
formerly Countess of Yarmouth, later Mrs. Geoffrey Whitney:
Fourth Owner of DACOR Bacon House, 1911-1925**

Terence Walz

Alice Copley Thaw purchased 1801 F Street from the executors of the estate of Chief Justice Melville Fuller and asked the well-known architect Henri Jules de Sibour to make changes. She lived in the house a little more than a year and then decided to remarry. Her second husband Geoffrey Whitney worked in Boston, and they moved to Milton, Massachusetts following their marriage. For twelve years she rented 1801 F Street out to various parties before deciding to sell it to the last renters, Congressman Robert L. and Mrs. Bacon in 1925.

Part 2: Alice in Washington and Second Marriage

Following renovations on the house, the press reported that Alice would be taking up quarters in the house in December, but in fact she spent the holidays elsewhere and came to settle in Washington in January 1912, when the renovations were completed.¹

Some of the changes she and de Sibour made can be described here. Electricity was installed in the house, and several new bathrooms were added on various floors. The ceilings in the dining room and the garden room were replaced; in the dining room an elaborate new ceiling was installed, coved with modillions and recessed lighting. The walls were replastered there and in the garden room, and picture moldings and chair railings were affixed. The gas chandelier that Sally Carroll had installed in the dining room was moved elsewhere in the house, though the two chandeliers in the other second-floor rooms were kept. The doors between all the rooms were enlarged, and the doors between the north drawing room and the dining room were replaced by sliding panels. New black fireplace mantels were placed in all three second-story rooms. In the north drawing room, an elaborate Rococo revival mantel mirror, said to be by the master craftsman Thomas Johnson ca. 1760, was installed. It had been purchased by Alice in London in 1906. Interestingly, these types of mantel settings had been popular in the great homes of England, which Alice was familiar with. There was one in the Drawing Room at Ragley Hall, the home of her in-laws, the Seymours. De Sibour also added windows on both the east and west



The mantel mirror in the North Drawing Room, said to have been made by Thomas Johnson ca. 1760 and installed by Alice Copley Thaw in 1911. DACOR Bacon House Collection.



This photograph of the Marquess of Hertford and his wife in the drawing room of Ragley Hall in the 1950s shows a similar mirror in the drawing room, though not over the mantel.²

sides of the house. Shutters were replaced, and the exterior lintels were painted. In all, the renovations to the house itself cost \$6,209.



The house photographed ca 1912, after the alterations made by Alice and de Sibour (most notably the addition of the windows). DC History Center.

In a separate permit issued in August, an additional \$5,000 was needed to make significant changes to the stables and building appendages. A second-story wood floor was replaced by a concrete one, enhancing the living quarters for staff, probably a chauffeur. In April 1912, Alice purchased a Peerless “38” six-seater automobile from the Zell Motor Car Company of Baltimore making it the first likely automobile to be sheltered in the Carriage House.³ The various models cost between \$4,300 and \$7,200.



Advertisement for the Peerless 38-6. Image:⁴



The 1913 model Peerless 38-6-seater.

Image: <http://antique.vccc.com/gallery/july2007/1913%20Peerless.html>.

Alice, or de Sibour, had also told the newspapers (see the quote above) that, as someone interested in gardening, she hoped to raise rare plants and to make the garden “one of the most noted in Washington.”⁵ It would seem never to have happened, but years later, when she was living in Woods Hole, MA, she and her husband proved to be avid horticulturalists. She was known to have imported many plantings for an English-style wall garden. She had English hollies planted on the estate, a grapevine grown from a slip brought back from the Cape Verde

Islands, and some perennials she brought from her grandfather's home in southern Ohio.⁶ She was also responsible for planting Cedars of Lebanon that later provided magnificent shade for Church Street in Woods Hole where her house was located.⁷ One wonders what indeed she could have done with the garden attached to the house on F Street.

Sadly, we know nothing about the staff that Alice employed in Washington. She did not reside long enough to be counted in a census. In the 1920 census, when she was living as the wife of Geoffrey Whitney in Milton, MA, she employed eight servants, all but one of whom were women, mostly of them born in Europe. The solitary man was an Englishman named Stanley Rushton, who may have been the chauffeur or butler. Had any of these people worked for Alice in Washington? Boyd's *Directory of the District of Columbia* for 1913 shows Alice's name but none of the names of servants who would have lived in the house.

Alice began her new life in Washington by appearing at social gatherings, acting as a patroness of the Southern Relief Fund ball, the Lenten "musical teas," and the Day Nursery and Dispensary.⁸ She seems to have enjoyed tennis and ice skating – which had become popular among fashionable women in the early part of the twentieth century⁹ – and was active in both activities. She began participating in skating parties at the end of February.¹⁰ At the beginning of March, she held a "small dinner dance" for Elinor Williams, her old friend from Milton who was visiting her for a week, and at the end of the month, gave a small dinner party for Katherine McClinton and her cousin Oliver Ricketson, Jr. The latter two were young friends with Pittsburgh connections.¹¹

In an early outing in her new car, Alice picked up a friend at Union Station and drove to an engagement on New Hampshire Avenue near R Street. This was in the neighborhood of the newly built mansion of Perry Belmont, the wealthy son of August Belmont and a former diplomat. During the outing, she lost a brooch worth \$800 and notified the police, and the news of it soon reached the papers.¹² Had she been attending a party at the Belmont mansion?

She enjoyed music, although we don't know if she played an instrument. She also attended musical recitals that spring – a song recital by Flora Wilson, daughter of the secretary of agriculture, a song recital by the New Orleans baritone Henri Varillat, and a piano recital by Estella Neuhaus – often in the company of Washington society matrons.¹³

But by June, Alice shut up the house on F Street and went to White Plains, New York, where her mother had rented a mansion for a legal hearing her lawyers had requested for the

release of Harry Thaw from the asylum. Both Alice and her sister Margaret Carnegie accompanied their mother to this new trial. Harry was not granted a release by the judge who kept him in jail, where Mrs. Thaw and her two daughters subsequently visited him at length. Harry was eventually returned to Matteawan.

Alice returned to Washington toward the end of the year. Her engagement to Geoffrey Whitney was announced in December and made news all over the country. She shut herself up in the house and let it be known she would not receive anyone, not wanting perhaps to cope with unwanted publicity.¹⁴ Her sister Margaret may have joined her for the Christmas holiday, and Geoffrey came to visit her in Washington in early January 1913. On the 15th, Alice gave a large

Mrs. Copley Thaw gave a charming dance last night at her F street home. Her house guests at present are Mrs. Edward Cary Williams of Boston and Mr. Andrew Gray of Wilmington, Del. Mrs. Carnegie, sister of the hostess, who has been staying with her, was obliged to hurry her departure for the south and was not present in consequence. Among the guests were Miss Helen Taft, Miss Esther Cleveland, Miss Bigelow of Boston, Miss Lippitt, Miss Sturgis of Boston, Miss Hinckley, Miss Sullivan of Philadelphia, Pa., Miss Ingalls, Miss Caroline Ogden Jones, Miss Wilmer, Miss Perin, Miss Symons, Miss Britton, Miss McCluskey, Mme. Riano, Dr. and Mrs. Haniel, Mr. and Mrs. Kienlin, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Francis, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Roosevelt, Mrs. Samuel Emmons, Mr. and Mrs. Eldridge Jordan, Mr. and Mrs. George Howard, Mr. and Mrs. Ormsby McCallum, Mr. and Mrs. Horace Westcott, Mr. and Mrs. Garrison McClintock, Dr. and Mrs. Cary Langhorne, Dr. and Mrs. James Mitchell, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Mitchell, Naval Constructor and Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Corbin, the Misses Patten, Mr. John Barrett, the Portugese minister, Maj. Winship, Col. John Bidle, Mr. M. A. Jordan, Mr. William B. Clark, Mr. Stanley Clark, Capt. Little, Mr. F. M. Schmoick, Mr. Algara, Count d'Adheniar, Baron Lersner, Mr. Diedrich, Mr. Symons, Mr. Loring Christie, Mr. Lee Jones, Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Remey, Mr. Hoes, Mr. Adams, Mr. Cotton Smith, Mr. Taylor and several of the officers of the Mayflower.

Evening Star, January 16, 1913. The only large party Alice gave while living at 1801 F Street.

dinner dance for him, her old friend Elinor Wilson, who was visiting her again, a friend of hers, Andrew Gray, the attorney general for Delaware, and her new Washington friends and

acquaintances. The dance party included the daughters of the out-going president (Taft) and president-elect (Wilson), society matrons, daughters of well-to-do businessmen, friends from the Skating Club, friends from the Chevy Chase Country Club (which she may or may not have belonged to), and family friends and acquaintances from the Pittsburgh area. She also included Jane Fuller Francis and her husband Nathaniel, who often wintered in Washington. Jane was a daughter of Chief Justice Melville Fuller and had lived in the house before her marriage and was a frequent visitor to the house in her father's old age.

She had also become acquainted with some foreign diplomats, and had also invited various secretaries, military attachés (German, Netherlands, Mexican, Spanish legations). There were no ranking members of the diplomatic corps, such as the British and French ambassadors. Given her divorce from the earl, she may have wished to avoid the British contingent. There were no cabinet ministers or high-ranking government officials. For extra men, she invited a group who seem to have attended all the embassy and social gatherings during the "season," as well as officers from the "Mayflower," the presidential yacht, many of whom she probably met at the Skating Club.

After the dance, Geoffrey returned to Milton to work in Boston as a stockbroker in the firm he had established with his brother Charles Whitney. While he was in Washington, his upcoming marriage to Alice in April was no doubt discussed and planned.¹⁵

Although Alice was by now well known to the press, her activities during the rest of her time in Washington were rarely mentioned in the papers. She attended a benefit performance of "The Brigand" at the Belasco Theatre for the benefit of the Homeopathic Hospital,¹⁶ a cause her mother embraced (she was president of a local branch in Pittsburgh),¹⁷ but otherwise kept a low profile.

However, in March Alice entertained a friend of hers from England named Patience Verney, daughter of Lord Willoughby de Broke, a neighbor of her divorced husband's family in Warwickshire. Patience had married Basil Hanbury, the brother of her sister-in-law, the current Lady Willoughby de Broke, and was known as "the Hon. Mrs. Hanbury" in newspaper accounts.¹⁸ She had come from England to attend the month-long events planned by the suffragists in Washington, starting, on March 3, with a "March for Woman's Suffrage" down



"Crowd br[e]aking parade up at 9th St, March 3, 1913."¹⁹ Image: see footnote 59.

Pennsylvania Avenue. It was carefully planned to take place on the eve of Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Whether Patience arrived in time to attend the procession (there was no delegation from Great Britain, since women's suffrage had not yet been granted) is not known. She arrived in New York via the "Celtic," on March 2, and may not have been able to catch the train from New York to Washington on time.

Though she had no specific role to play in the celebrated parade of March 3, Mrs. Hanbury nonetheless arranged several speaking engagements in Washington during her stay. Alice threw a small dinner dance for her on March 9, inviting many of the people who had

Mrs. Copley Thaw was hostess at a dinner on Saturday evening, when her guests were Mrs. Hambury, of England, her house guest; Mrs. Walker, of Richmond, Va.; Miss Hayes, Miss Symonds, Miss Catherine Britton, Miss Biddle, Commander Burstyn, of the Austrian Embassy; Commander Boy-Ed, of the German Embassy; Count Carlo Montagnini, of the Italian Embassy; Mr. F. M. Schmolck, of the Netherlands Legation; Count d'Adhemar, Maj. Winship, and Mr. W. Bowie Clark. After dinner there was informal dancing.

Washington Herald, March 10, 1913, p. 6.

attended her January 15th dance. Few if any of the guests had a connection to the suffrage movement, and Alice seems to have invited them for their amusement value.²⁰

On the 12th, the papers began to announce Mrs. Hanbury's upcoming engagements, the first of which was at the home of Mrs. Charles Boughton Wood, aunt of the former governor of Pennsylvania, Gifford Pinchot, a wealthy socialite who gave generously to the suffrage movement. Later in the month, she appeared with Mary Ritter Beard, the noted suffragist from New York, a historian who collaborated with her husband Charles Beard on several histories of the United States.²¹ The two women spoke in the afternoon of March 26th at Rauscher's restaurant, which had a large salon for receptions and speakers. Patience's talk provided an update on the suffrage movement in England which had received, thanks to the exploits of the radical wing led by Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, a lot of hostile press in the United States. She made an effort to distance herself from the radical wing, explaining that she was a *suffragist*, not a *suffragette*, but at the same time acknowledging the important role of Mrs. Pankhurst in keeping the woman's movement in the forefront of the news.

Throughout Patience's stay in the house, Alice steadfastly maintained she was not a suffragist nor had any interest in the movement.²²

Patience remained as Alice's guest through March and into April and was invited to join her wedding party to Cumberland Island, Georgia, where she would be married on April 22. Various members of the entourage met her in Washington and then took a private car on a train to Georgia. The small party attending the wedding included her sister and brother-in-law, Margaret and George Carnegie, Mrs. Hanbury, Elinor Williams, Susanne Riddel [or Riddle] of Pittsburgh, Mrs. [Enid] Hunt Slater of Washington,²³ Robert Christie of Pittsburgh,²⁴ and Robert Pierce of Boston, who acted as best man. The headline for one report on the marriage was as expected: "Harry Thaw's Sister is Married Again." News of the wedding was reported in papers throughout the country.



Alice and her new husband Geoffrey Whitney on their wedding day. She was 33; he was 31. Photo from *Spiritsail*.²⁵

The Whitneys stayed some days in Georgia after the wedding and then returned briefly to Washington and held an “at home” on May 8. They left shortly thereafter and headed for

Mrs. Geoffrey Gordon Whitney, formerly Mrs. Alice Copley Thaw, was at home in her charming old house in F Street yesterday afternoon from 5 to 7. Mr. and Mrs. Whitney were recently married at the Thaw estate in Georgia and have just returned here for a short spring visit.

Washington Herald, May 9, 1913, p. 13.

Milton, MA,²⁶ where they lived initially with Geoffrey’s mother.²⁷ They then set out for Europe on a honeymoon. After returning, they rented the “Howland Russell” estate, one of the finest in Milton.²⁸ That same month, they rented out the F Street house in Washington to Adolph Miller, the assistant secretary of the interior.²⁹ Alice never returned to live in the house while she owned

it. In 1925 she sold it to the last renters, Congressman Robert L. Bacon and his wife, Virginia Murray Bacon.

In 1917 Alice and her husband bought and extensively remodeled Little Harbor Farm, a large estate in Woods Hole, MA, overlooking the harbor, and they spent every subsequent summer there. She and Geoffrey had two sons, Geoffrey Jr. and William. Geoffrey became a noted authority on rose culture and developed roses for Jackson and Perkins. He died in 1953 and she two years later, both in Woods Hole, where they are buried.³⁰

¹ Beyer, Blinder, Belle, *DACOR Bacon House, Historic Structural Report*, 68.

² https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/catalogue_wow/ragley-hall-interior-of-drawing-roomsaloon.

³ *Evening Star*, April 21, 1912, p. 23.

⁴ <https://www.periodpaper.com/products/1913-ad-peerless-motor-cars-48-six-vehicle-for-women-original-advertising-059730-cl4-925>.

⁵ *Washington Herald*, September 11, 1911, p. 11.

⁶ Both of Alice's grandparents were born and raised in Pennsylvania.

⁷ Susan Fletcher Witzell, "Gardeners and Caretakers of Woods Hole," *Spiritsail* 19: 2 (2005), p. 12.

⁸ The Southern Relief Fund of the District of Columbia supported destitute men and women in the South, including Confederate army veterans; the Lenten musical teas sponsored a series of musical events; on the Day Nursery movement, which aided poor working mothers: Anne Durst, "'Of Women, by Women, and for Women': The Day Nursery Movement in the Progressive-Era United States," *Journal of Social History* 39: 1 (2005), 141–159.

⁹ "Skating Parties Prove Popular," *Washington Times*, March 14, 1912, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Washington Times*, Feb 18, 1912, p. 11; *Washington Times*, April 02, 1912, p. 11.

¹¹ *Washington Times*, March 5, 1912, p. 9; *Evening Star*, March 30, 1912, p. 7: Katherine was the daughter of Abram Garretson McClintock, clerk in the Senate; his father was in the carpet business in Pittsburgh; Oliver was the son of Oliver Ricketson Sr., whose wife was a niece of Andrew Carnegie. Oliver, Jr. was a student at Harvard in 1912.

¹² *Washington Times*, April 22, 1912, p. 7. Mrs. Wood had a mansion at 1617 New Hampshire Avenue.

¹³ *Washington Times*, January 28, 1913, p. 9; *Washington Herald*, March 5, 1912, p. 6; *Washington Times*, March 12, 1912, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Washington Times*, December 19, 1912, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Boston Herald*, January 19, 1913.

¹⁶ This was located on F Street between 12th and 13th Streets: "Historical Medical Sites in Downtown DC": <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/historic-medical-sites/downtown-sites.html>.

¹⁷ See the inscription of her photo at the top of this article.

¹⁸ But often misspelled "Hambury."

¹⁹ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/03/03/this-day-history-1913-womens-suffrage-parade>.

²⁰ *Washington Herald*, March 10, 1913, p. 6.

²¹ *American Citizenship*, the first of their collaborations, was published in 1914.

²² *Washington Times*, March 13, 1913, p. 11.

²³ Enid Hunt Slater was the daughter of the painter William Morris Hunt. She married a wealthy textile manufacturer Samuel Slater in Boston. They were divorced in 1899. Geoffrey and Alice had lunch with them during his visit to Washington in January.

²⁴ Possibly Robert Dobie Christie or his son Robert Christie. Robert Sr. emigrated from Scotland and settled in Ohio, trained at Princeton and became a Presbyterian pastor who eventually taught at the Western

Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh where he died. Robert, Jr. also attended Princeton, class of 1908. Alice's father was a leading member of the Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh.

²⁵ Witzell, "Gardeners and Caretakers of Woods Hole," *Spiritsail* 19: 2 (2005), p. 13.

²⁶ *Washington Times*, May 12, 1913, p. 9.

²⁷ *Evening Star*, May 20, 1913, p. 8: Report details various social engagements in Milton.

²⁸ *Evening Star*, November 10, 1913, p. 3.

²⁹ *Evening Star*, November 5, 1913, p. 8.

³⁰ *New York Times*, July 26, 1953, p. 69; *Boston Globe*, May 10, 1955, p. 23;

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/179160415/alice-cornelia-whitney>.