

Alida Carroll and her Volume of Sheet Music
Terence Walz

On October 5, 2025, a program of music was presented in the drawing rooms of DACOR Bacon House by the Washington Revels Heritage Voices, a professional musical group based in the District of Columbia which specializes in the performance of traditional music. The program included songs, waltzes, and tunes, some of which were drawn from a volume of Alida Carroll's sheet music and others from well-known nineteenth-century song collections. The singers also sang some African Americans melodies in remembrance of people who were enslaved in the house between 1825, when it was built, and 1862 when they were freed. The program also included a waltz or "ripple" written to honor Sally Countess Esterhazy, Alida's older sister, which was debuted in 1891 in Washington and not performed in the city since 1892. The program was part of the bicentennial celebration of the house and its occupants



The Washington Revels Heritage Voices, performing at DACOR Bacon House at a bicentennial program.
From left to right: Harold L. Blackford, Jim Lazar, Christina Bussie, and Jennifer Weyman.

The inspiration for this program came from a collection of piano and vocal music collected by Alida C. Carroll (1844-1911), a former resident of this historic house. Alida was the daughter of William Thomas Carroll, U.S. Supreme Court Clerk, and his wife Sally (Sprigg) Carroll, a socially well-connected couple in the region. Her mother was the daughter of former Maryland governor Samuel Sprigg, and Carroll was a member of the prestigious Carroll family of Maryland. Alida married John Marshall Brown, a resident of Portland, Maine. The couple met while Brown was recuperating after being wounded before the Battle of Petersburg during the Civil War. Brown returned to Maine about a year before the couple married. The two engaged in a long-distance courtship prior to their marriage in 1866. The Brown Research Library of the Maine Historical Society was rededicated in 2009 to honor Alida Carroll and John Marshall Brown.



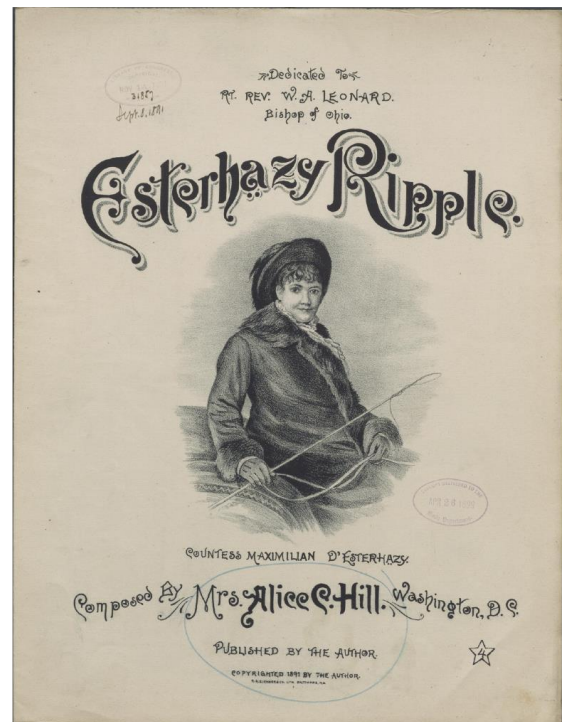
Alida Carroll Brown, ca. 1870. Maine Historical Society

In 1866, a few months before she was due to be married to Gen. John Marshall Brown of Portland, Maine, Alida Carroll had her sheet music for the piano bound in half black morocco with grey marbled boards and embossed on the front cover in gilt letters, “Alida C. Carroll” and on the spine, “MUSIC.” The catalog entry for the volume in the Harvard University Houghton Library Collection of Theatre Music is titled, “Alida C. Carroll volume of music for the piano, 1835-1866.” The collection includes ballads and some glees for men’s voices, and a large number of settings for arias of popular operas and many waltzes. The Carroll family occupied the house as owners between 1835 and 1895, and according to an inventory of the house made in 1863, owned a Chickering piano. This sat in the south parlor of today’s house and was probably a square model popular in the day. It was also the most costly single item in the house, valued at \$300.

All the Carroll daughters may have been instructed in music and dance, but the volume suggests that Alida was the daughter who most enjoyed playing the piano. She may have played as a soloist or been accompanied by family members or friends, of which the family had many. The Carrolls were invited to the White House often, especially in the early 1850s by the Millard Fillmores, whose daughter Mary was also musically gifted. We know from one account of an evening there that music was performed when the Carrolls were in attendance. Parlor music at this time was the most popular form of home entertainment.

Music was a feature in the lives of many owners of the house, including the Carrolls and the Melville Fullers, and in more recent decades by Mrs. Robert L. Bacon, a great aficionado, who purchased the Steinway now being played in 1928. In later years, her friendship with Artur Rubinstein resulted in his numerous stays in the house and his playing the piano on many occasions.

The second half of the program was begun by a performance of the “**Esterhazy Ripple**” by the Washington Revel’s pianist, Francine Krasowska. In 1891, Mrs. Alice C. Hill, a new Washingtonian and a member of St. John’s Church on Lafayette Square, wrote this waltz or “ripple” – similar to a *mazurka* or *redowa* – in honor of a fellow congregationalist, Countess Sally Esterhazy, who had returned from Europe to live with her mother at 1801 F Street after her second husband, Count Maxmillian Esterhazy, died in 1883. Sally was the elder sister of Alida Carroll Brown. The music was dedicated to the recently named Episcopal Bishop of Ohio, Rev. W. A. Leonard, who had formerly been the rector at St. John’s Church and been a frequent comforter of Mrs. Sally Carroll during her life of multiple woes. In Washington during the Gilded Age, titled women were all the rage, and Countess Esterhazy enjoyed wide social renown. The “ripple” was shown to John Philip Sousa, director of the Marine Band, and he was much taken with it and adapted it for the band. It was performed in Washington on various occasions, including at the Willard Hotel on November 18; also, in 1892 at the masonic hall on 16th Street. The Sousa score has been lost, but a piano score survived, thanks to it being sent to the copyright office at the Library of Congress. This performance of the score marks the first time it has heard in Washington since 1892.



Frontispiece of the original score as presented to the Copyright Office, Washington, DC in 1891.

The performers for the concert were Christine Bussie and Jennie Weyman, sopranos; Jim Lazar, tenor; and Harold L. Blackford, bass. The musical directors of the Washington Revels Heritage Voices were Andrea Jones Blackford and Elizabeth Anne Fulford. The program was supported by the funds set aside by Cloyce K. Huston and Harry Hemmerer.