

The Carroll Family and the Civil War, Part 1

April 12, 1861

When the Civil War began in April 1861, William T. Carroll, the *pater familias* of the Carroll family living at 174 F Street in Washington – renumbered 1801 F in 1871 – must have wondered how the conflict would affect his work at the Supreme Court and the impact it would have on his immediate and extended family. Both he and his wife came from old Maryland families that were rooted in Southern traditions and slave-owning. Though life-long Democrats, both remained committed to the Union, unlike many in the District who were Confederate sympathizers. William may not have voted for Abraham Lincoln for president, but he welcomed the new president to Washington and provided him with the Bible on which he was sworn to office on March 4, 1861 when Lincoln's family Bible hadn't yet arrived from Springfield.¹

At home on April 12, the day the war started, the Carroll family mourned the death of its newest addition, a baby boy, William Cuyler Carroll, who died that day. He had been born six months and fifteen days earlier, but he was probably sickly most of his short life. The Carrolls laid him to rest shortly thereafter in the fifth vault of the Carroll mausoleum in Oak Hill Cemetery.² Clustered about them were their three unmarried daughters – Sally, Carrie and Alida – and the second of their two surviving sons, Charlie, aged twenty-three. Their elder son Samuel Sprigg Carroll (called Sprigg by the family) was now stationed as quartermaster at West Point Academy, which he graduated from in 1856. He had married the year he graduated, and he and his wife Helen had a young daughter, Katie, who was four when the war broke out.

The year before, Sally Carroll took her three daughters to visit Sprigg at West Point while William went off to St. Catherines, Ontario, to take the waters in hope of abating his “attacks.”³



View of West Point, United States Military Academy, 1857,
by L. Behrens and Fritz Meyer, courtesy Knowol.com.

At West Point, the girls found no trouble attracting young men, and it may have been there that Sally, then, twenty-four, started a romance with Lt. Charles Griffin, then an assistant instructor of artillery at the academy. One mutual interest would have been their fondness of horses and riding; Lt. Griffin brought his favorite horse, “Kitty,” with him when he returned to West Point, and Sally had learned to ride in Washington. Carrie was courted by a young man in the artillery class named John Garnet,⁴ and though she didn’t care about him, she nonetheless mentioned him in her letter to “Papa” at St. Catherines, breezily adding, “I like him real much but the idea of falling in love with a cadet strikes me as being preposterous.”⁵ Carrie was then twenty. Alida, the youngest, was seventeen, and only just finding her feet in the world of male friendships.

The following January, as war clouds gathered, the Carrolls kept up their renown entertaining, offering punch parties during the holidays and post-holiday gatherings. At one party on January 3rd, a precious blue enamel bracelet set with pearls was lost, and William Carroll posted a notice in the *Evening Star* offering a suitable reward for its return.⁶ Later that month, Lt. Griffin was transferred with his artillery unit, to Washington, D.C. as part of Gen. Winfield Scott’s efforts to safeguard the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. Griffin and his unit



Lincoln’s first inauguration, March 4, 1861. The crowd around the president would have included William Carroll, Clerk of the Supreme Court, as well as the chief justice and associate justices. Carroll provided the Bible on which he was sworn in. This photograph was recently attributed to John Wood: Adrienne Lundgren, Library of Congress: <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2019/11/the-mystery-of-lincolns-first-inauguration-photograph/>.

attracted attention in the local papers in the following months, with parades and attendance at the funerals of important military figures.⁷ The battery was mostly stationed near the Court house on Judiciary Square during their stay in the District.⁸ Griffin was transferred into the Fifth Artillery Regiment in May and promoted to Captain.⁹ There is little doubt that he would have called on the Carrolls during his off-duty hours and continued his courtship with Sally.

Sprigg, meanwhile, was posted to the Ohio 8th Regiment, with which he maintained a war-long association, much admired by members of the regiment. When he was at West Point, he lived in the barrack quarters next door to Oliver O. Howard,¹⁰ and they became lifelong friends. Howard was transferred to Washington in the summer of 1861, and while at one of the camps, came down with an illness “like cholera.” When she heard of his illness, Sally Carroll sent her carriage for him and brought him back to F Street to look after him. He wrote in his memoir many years later, “Her gentle nursing gave me just those things which would nourish and strengthen, and soon restored me to the field and to duty. Her generous husband and herself always made their house a home to me.”¹¹

Griffin’s dashing appearance in the Carroll household may have provided the inspiration for young Charlie Carroll to join the Fifth Artillery regiment, which he did in early July. He was confirmed in the position shortly thereafter and attached to Company A stationed at Washington Barracks.¹² His family may have initially intervened to keep him close to home, but eventually Charlie was transferred into other companies in the regiment that participated in some of the most brutal campaigns of the war.

Soon battle was enjoined between the two sides. Lincoln pushed Gen. McDowell to march on Richmond, but the Confederates stopped the Union army at the first Battle of Bull Run. Griffin and his unit played a part in the battle that erupted on July 21. The Union forces were overwhelmed and forced to retreat, but Griffin’s unit, though it lost most of its guns, fought with distinction and Griffin was later noted in reports for his bravery. After the battle, the battery was stationed in Fairfax County, across the river from Washington. Griffin was able to get leave, and he and Sally were married at the Carroll house on December 10. President and Mrs. Lincoln attended the wedding, as did Generals Meade and McClellan, and other ranking officers of the military. It was even rumored in the papers that the Philippe d’Orleans, the Comte de Paris, then seconded to McClellan’s staff, attended. The wedding was considered one of the great social events of the Washington season.

The day following the wedding, Capt. Griffin and his bride rode out to his camp which they entered under arches of evergreens and where they were toasted by Gen. Butterfield with a review of troops, with trumpets, in their honor.¹³ Later that month, the brigade hosted a “matinee dansante” in the couple’s honor, to which 200 invitations were sent out to leading citizens and high ranking officers.¹⁴ It signaled the beginning of Sally Carroll Griffin’s new life as a military wife.

The presence of Lincoln at Griffin’s marriage was an indication of the regard the president had for him and his wife’s family. Sally Griffin and her sister, probably Carrie, were invited to the ball that Mary Todd Lincoln held in early February, marking the completion of new

decorations in the public rooms of the White House. It was a lavish affair. Kate Chase was the belle of the ball, according to an account in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*,¹⁵ but Mrs. Griffin also was noted. "Mrs. Griffin was simply but tastefully attired in a corn-colored silk; headdress of bright crimson flowers. She was the observed of all, as she leaned on the arm of the President;" and then about the other sister, 'Miss Carroll, a charming blond of the purest type, wore a dress of white illusion, with a succession of puffs almost reaching to the waist. The effect was very fine, and harmonized admirably with her delicate, aerial style of beauty."



SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL COSTUMES WORN AT THE GRAND FERTILIZATION PARTY AT THE WHITE HOUSE, WEDNESDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 5.

Sally Carroll Griffin is pictured at far right.

For the Lincolns, that glittering night was tinged with anxiety, as their son Willie lay desperately sick in his bed upstairs. He took a turn for the worse in the ensuing ten days and died on February 20. The Lincolns were distraught and left arrangements for the funeral in the hands of the newly appointed senator from Illinois, their old friend Orville Browning – who knew the Carrolls through William (as Clerk of the Supreme Court), and had been a guest at Sally Carroll's wedding in December. Carroll may have shared with him his personal news about the death of his own small son in April 1861 and of how he was interred in the family mausoleum. An invitation was extended offering a place in the mausoleum for Willie, if the Lincolns desired. After Willie's funeral at the White House on February 24th, the body was taken in a cortege followed by a vast crowd of mourners to the Carroll mausoleum where the casket enclosing his embalmed body was interred. It remained there until April 20th, 1865, when it was removed to be moved with his father's body to Springfield, Illinois.

Sally Griffin gave birth to her first son on September 10, 1862, exactly nine months after her marriage. He was named Charles Carroll Griffin.

The Carroll daughters' good looks and style and Sally's good marriage to Capt. Griffin were appreciated by the Lincolns, who invited them from time to time to join the presidential entourages that visited the troops on war fronts. In March 1863 they were at Stoneman's Station,

where Gen. and Mrs. Griffin provided a collation for the visitors.¹⁶ Then a month later, Sally was invited by the Lincolns with her mother and two sisters to join the entourage at Falmouth, Virginia. The Griffins provided a dinner for some of the guests, including Gen. Meade.¹⁷

In the summer of 1863, the Carrolls decided to go north to Sharon Springs, New York to avoid the Washington heat and possibly to improve the health of Charles Griffin, who had taken a leave from the army for health reasons,¹⁸ and their son, Charles, who was ill. The resort was famous for its waters, and William would have benefited from a stay, but he stayed back in Washington. In late June, as the Union and Confederate armies were gathering for battle at Gettysburg, Gen. Griffin, his health improved, returned to Washington, ready to return to the battlefield.¹⁹ His arrival at the battlefield, sort after the end, was cheered by his troops.²⁰ Sprigg had fought with his regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg and had won accolades for his steadfastness and bravery.²¹ Charlie Griffin was there, fighting with one of the companies of the Fifth Artillery.

By the middle of the month, William fell ill, and though tended by three doctors, he suddenly died,²² and the family rushed back from Sharon Springs for his funeral. Both sons and Gen. Griffin returned to Washington for his funeral.²³ The house was cast into deep mourning.

¹ See the posting https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Mr._Carroll_and_His_Bibles.pdf.

² Oak Hill Cemetery Office, Cemetery files, "Carroll," "Record of Interments, William T. Carroll (Vault), no. 292."

³ He may have suffered from rheumatoid arthritis, but the exact nature of his ailment is unknown.

⁴ Possibly John J. "Jack" Garnett from Virginia, a handsome cadet who was in the debating society and got into a sword fight with a northerner as part of the fun remembered by Morris Schaff in an article "Old Spirit of West Point" published in the *Atlantic Magazine* 1907, p. 149). He was head of Garnett's Battalion at Gettysburg, and survived the war by several years. See also <https://www.geni.com/people/Lt-Colonel-John-J-Garnett-CSA/6000000017428510384>.

⁵ Carrie Carroll to William Thomas Carroll, dated August 21, 1860, postmarked September 6, 1861, Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 18A, Folder 2, "Carroll Family, Anna Ella Carroll."

⁶ Evening Star, January 6, 1861, p. 2.

⁷ A march of all troops in Washington, including Lt. Griffin's artillery unit from West Point, was reported on February: Daily National Republican, February 25, 1861, p. 4.

⁸ <http://www.firstbullrun.co.uk/NEV/Second%20Divison/company-d-5th-united-states-artillery.html>.

⁹ <https://civilwarintheeast.com/people/charles-griffin/>.

¹⁰ Gen. Howard would later become head of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865.

¹¹ *The Autobiography of General Oliver Otis Howard* (New York: Baker and Taylor) 1907), 2 vols., 1:137.

¹² See my posting, https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Charles_H._Carroll_-_A_Wounded_Life.pdf.

¹³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 12, 1861, p.2; *Daily Missouri Republican*, December 17, 1861, p. 3.

¹⁴ *New York Herald*, December 20, 1861, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 22, 1862, p. 7.

¹⁶ NY World, March 30, 1863, p. 1. Stoneman's Station was near the Rappahannock.

¹⁷ *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade: Major-general United States Army* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), I: 364.

¹⁸ He was on sick leave, May 12-July 2, 1863: <https://civilwarintheeast.com/people/charles-griffin/>.

¹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 1, 1863, p. 3.

²⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 5, 1863, p. 1; see also: <https://www.thoughtco.com/charles-griffin-4046958>.

²¹ See the posting https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Old_Brick_Top.pdf.

²² *Daily National Republican*, July 15, 1863, p. 4. Attended by Drs. Miller, Hagner and Johnson.

²³ *Evening Star*, Wednesday, July 15, 1863, page: 4.