

The Carroll Portraits

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Sally Carroll was intensely proud of her heritage, but she was old-school and appears not to have joined the new and popular organizations emphasizing family connections to historical eras – such as the Daughters of the American Revolution or the Colonial Dames – both of which started in 1890. Rather, she expressed her interest by treasuring family portraits, and she collected as many of them as she could. She also knew where others were to be found and relayed some of her knowledge in a reminiscence she shared with her daughter and son-in-law, Alida and John M. Brown, in 1883.¹

In describing Mrs. Carroll and the house she lived in, Marian C. Gouverneur wrote in her memoir of old society in New York and Washington, “In her drawing-room hung many portraits of family ancestors arrayed in the antique dress of olden times.”² Thanks to a document discovered in the Maine Historical Society research library and to a newspaper report of 1896 we can now identify many of those portraits.

Mrs. Carroll’s notable ancestry, her love of portrait painting, and other inherited belongings may have been the reason why Caroline Harrison, wife of President Benjamin Harrison, was anxious to have lunch in her house on the corner of F and 18th Streets in 1891. She herself took great interest in American history and in the establishment of organizations such as the DAR.³

Both Alida and John M. Brown also took a great interest in their respective genealogies – Alida, having been taught to appreciate the heritage of the Carrolls and Spriggs (her mother’s family), early settlers in Maryland in the seventeenth century and members of the plantocracy of that state, and John being descended from less early settlers in New England. John belonged to several genealogical and historical societies in Maine and elsewhere, and the research library at the Maine Historical Society bears both their names in recognition of their contributions and interests. Alida had grown up in the house on F Street, and after she married Gen. Brown in 1866, she and her mother often traded visits until Sally’s age prevented it. Alida then traveled south to see her mother, sometimes bringing her husband and one or several of their children. Gen. Brown was one of the executors of Sally’s will, made in 1894, and took charge of her estate after she died. He oversaw the sale of the house to Mary Ellen Fuller, wife of Chief Justice Melville Fuller, in 1896.

None of Sally’s surviving children – Sally Esterhazy, Carrie Bolles, Charles Carroll or Alida – wanted to or could afford to keep the house – and the two elder daughters, Sally and Carrie, who were living in the house until their mother died, moved out during 1895 or early 1896, taking rooms in apartment buildings nearby. Alida’s home was in Portland, where she and her husband had an estate outside Portland, and Charles lived a nomadic life in hotels away from

Washington, D.C. In 1895, he was a resident in the Academy Hotel in Baltimore.⁴ Between early 1896 and the summer of that year, the house on F Street lay empty.

John, as estate executor, asked J. D. McKenney, a Washington lawyer, to handle the sale of the house and to show it to prospective buyers. He visited the house with clients on February 12, 1896, and then again on April 24. During that visit, he noticed, with alarm no doubt, that the portraits of the Carroll and Sprigg families that had been hanging on the walls of the parlor and dining room were gone. Several days later, the police were notified, and the newspapers got whiff of the theft. It made for a sensational story for three days by the new short-lived local paper called *The Morning Times*, then specializing in local features about society and crime.⁵

Sally must have turned over in her vault at the Carroll Mausoleum in Oak Hill Cemetery.



Two days after the paintings were reported stolen, three and then later most of them were recovered. Police assigned to the case received a tip from a man named Harry Powell, a clerk at the Navy Department – only a short distance from the Carroll mansion – who had been offered the paintings and arranged to have the paintings left for him at a store. The thieves, two stable hands, young Black men, were said not to know what to do with them.⁶ Having read about the theft in the papers, Powell alerted the police, and the two young men were apprehended. The recovery of the paintings was also reported in the Washington *Evening Star* and the *Post*⁷ which provided perhaps the more complete account of the episode.

The *Morning News* identified some of the portraits: “Charles Carroll and his wife, Mrs. Sprigg, Miss Carroll, William Carroll in an oval frame... and Howard Carroll as a boy.” The *Post* account also mentions the theft of several busts. Five portraits were recovered, according to

that newspaper, and of the three that remained missing, one was of Mrs. Carroll as a young girl, wearing, as the *Morning Times* described it, "short socks and a white dress."

In the following months, the house was perhaps more closely guarded and the furnishing in the house that the heirs did not take were sold at auction.⁸ The house was sold to Mrs. Fuller in May for \$50,000, and shortly thereafter she asked the architectural firm of Hornblower and Marshall to modernize the house, install electricity, make an additions on the west side of the house, allowing for the creation of several modern bedrooms on the upper floors, and enclosing the veranda with glass, thereby converting it into an "conservatory." The Fullers moved into the house in December – in time to welcome several of the many Fuller daughters home for Christmas.⁹

CARROLL PICTURES RECOVERED.

The Mystery of Their Disappearance Only Partially Solved.

Jeffrey Jefferson and William Thompson, both colored, were arrested yesterday by Detectives Horne and Weedon, charged with stealing five pictures from the Carroll mansion, at the corner of Eighteenth and F streets northwest. Five of the pictures were recovered. The action of Mr. McKenney, in asking further official investigation to be stopped, did not exactly suit J. Marshall Brown, of Portland, Me., who is executor for the Carroll estate. He asked that a search warrant be issued, which was done, and placed in the hands of the detectives. They recovered five of the pictures. Mr. McKenney then swore out warrants for the arrest of the two colored men. Jefferson says he and Thompson went into the old house and saw the old pictures, and thinking they had no value, he appropriated three of them. They went back in the evening and got two more, taking them over to the stable in rear of 1801 F street northwest, where Jefferson was working. Jefferson afterward left four of them at a store for Harry Powell, a clerk in the Navy Department, and it was Mr. Powell that read the story of the taking of pictures and busts from the Carroll mansion, and informed Mr. McKenney that a man had given him some pictures, which he believed to be a part of the Carroll collection. Thompson denies going with Jefferson, and discredits the story told by Jefferson so far as he is said to be concerned. Jefferson was arrested at the stable in rear of 1801 F street northwest. Jefferson gave bonds in the sum of \$500 for his appearance.

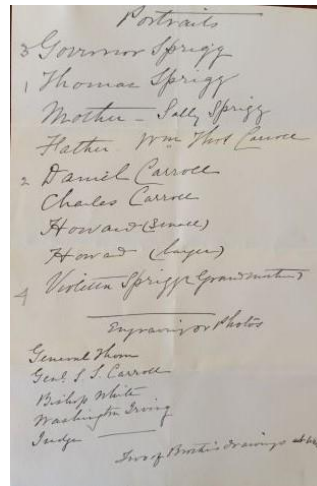
There are three other pictures and some busts yet to be accounted for, one of the pictures being a painting of Mrs. Carroll's little girl. The detectives have as yet obtained no trace of the rest of the stolen property.

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Washington Post, April 3, 1896.

Four months later, the attorney McKenney set a date for the distribution of the ancestral portraits among the Carroll heirs. Alida came down from Portland, lodging at the Arlington Hotel, the most fashionable in town, and Sally offered her apartment as the place for the distribution. McKenney asked each of the heirs to write on pieces of paper the portraits that they wished. The pieces would be put in a hat and drawn. Alida made a list of the entire collection and numbered the ones she and her husband wanted.

This list gives a much more accurate account of the portraits that Sally had amassed during her lifetime, and a better idea of what Mrs. Gouverneur saw on the walls of her home. It suggests that by the time the distribution was made in May 1897, all of the paintings had been recovered. What remains unclear is whether the “busts” that had adorned the Carroll house were destroyed, remained missing, or were unwanted and sold. It also makes clear that Sally Carroll had treasured photographs and drawings of cherished friends or made by her children –



List of portraits to be distributed among Carroll heirs,
written in Alida Brown's handwriting.

John and Alida Brown ranked the ones they wanted.
Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers,
Box 11 (Estates), folder 15 (Estate of Mrs. Sally Carroll)

her son, Samuel Sprigg Carroll, who was clearly favored among her children.

Whether she was lucky in the drawing or the recipient of later bequest, Alida and John ended up with the lion's share of the paintings. These included the Raphaele Peale portraits of Governor Samuel Sprigg and his wife, Violetta, now in the collection of the Washington County



Governor Samuel Sprigg by Raphaele Peale, 1820.
This was at the top of Alida Brown's wish list.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, MD.



Violetta Sprigg by Raphaele Peale, 1820.
Washington County Museum of Fine Arts,
gift of Violetta Lansdale Otis, a descendant of Alida Brown.

Museum of Fine Arts (Hagerstown, Maryland). They had also wanted the painting of Sally Sprigg, which is probably the one mentioned in the newspapers, of a young girl in "short socks and a white dress." It, too, was painted by Raphaele Peale at the same time as her parents and

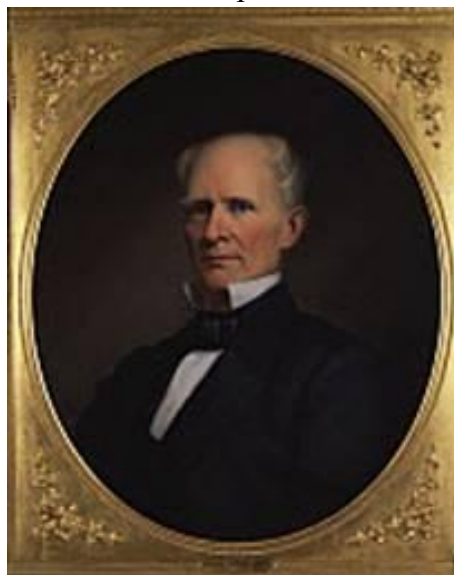
her brother, Osborn.¹⁰ If so, it remains in private hands of descendants of the Brown family. They also wanted the painting of Thomas Sprigg, the founder of the family in Maryland, but this



Colonel Thomas Sprigg, Sr. (c.1630-1704), founder of the Sprigg family in Maryland. This painting was near the top of Alida Brown's wish list. Maryland Center for History and Culture, Acc. No 2020.36-1, gift of Brent R. Snow, a descendant of Alida Brown.

seems to have first gone to Carrie Bolles, and then after her death to the Brown family.¹¹ It was recently donated to the Maryland Center for History and Culture by a descendant of the Brown family.

The portrait of William Thomas Carroll "in an oval frame" is no doubt a copy of the portrait of Carroll now in the collection of the Supreme Court. It was painted posthumously by



Posthumous portrait of William T. Carroll by Rufus Wright. Collection of the Supreme Court.

Rufus Wright and based on the photograph of Carroll by Mathew Brady done ca. 1861. The copy was given to the Carroll family.¹² Its whereabouts today is unknown.

The portrait of Daniel Carroll remains problematic, but the portrait of Charles Carroll is not. Daniel Carroll was William's uncle and an important personage in the District of Columbia.



A portrait of Daniel Carroll of Duddington (d. 1849), the uncle of William Carroll, who lived in his house during his school years at Georgetown College. This portrait is said to be in private hands in Baltimore. (Source: Wikidata.)

He owned large parts of the city around the Capitol, including his estate called Duddington. William Carroll is said to have lived in his home while at school at Georgetown College.

There were many Charles Carrolls, including one who was William and Sally's son, but the Charles Carroll who might best have been in their collection of family portraits would be Charles Carroll of Belle Vue, William's father, and a founder of Rochester, New York. He was married to Ann Sprigg, the half-sister of Samuel Sprigg, Sally's father. The location of the original of his portrait remains unclear, but a copy made by Charles Peale Polk now hangs in Dumbarton House, Georgetown. The other Charles Carroll was Daniel and Charles Carroll's father, Charles Carroll of Duddington (and Carrollton, 1729-1773), the grandfather of William T. Carroll. This painting, according to the authoritative provenance research provided by Morphy Auctions,¹³ was passed first to Charles Carroll of Bellevue, then to his son, William T. Carroll, to Mrs. Carroll, and then to Katherine Carroll Beale, the daughter of Gen. S. Sprigg Carroll. She sold it to the Milwaukee Art Museum. Therefore, we know that the "Charles Carroll" portrait once adorned the walls of 1801 F Street.



Portrait of Charles Carroll of Duddington,
attributed to John Wollaston, ca. 1767-70.

It was inherited by Katherine Carroll Beale, granddaughter of Sally Carroll.

Image: Wikipedia.

Howard Carroll was Sally's fourth son, born in 1852, who lived only five years. His death followed closely upon the death of his twenty-four-year-old brother, William Thomas Carroll, Jr. (Willie) in January and February 1857. Their double deaths prompted the family to purchase a mausoleum at the newly opened Oak Hill Cemetery in Georgetown, and their bodies were the first to be interred in its vaults. Nothing is known of either of the portraits done of him. The fact that two of the boy once existed underlines how cherished he was by his parents.

Alida's list of portraits and photographs and other artwork of non-family members includes an American churchman (Bishop White),¹⁴ a Civil War engineer (Gen. George Thom),¹⁵ the writer Washington Irving, a photograph of their son Gen. Samuel Sprigg Carroll, and two sketches Carroll did of West Point. These non-family members were clearly special to the family in ways we currently do not know.

¹ See my posting, https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Sally_Carrolls_Reminiscences_in_1883-2.pdf.

² As *I Remember* (New York: Appleton, 1911), 215.

³ See my posting, https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/The_Presidents_Wife_Comes_to_Lunch_1891.pdf; and <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/bios/caroline-harrison>.

⁴ Daily rates were \$1.50 to \$2 (weekly rates available): Charles H. Carroll to Alida Brown, March 4, 1895: Maine Historical Society Library, Portland, John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 25A, Folder 4.

⁵ <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84024442/>.

⁶ Much is made in several accounts that they took the painting, which were of personal value only, while not taking the gas fixtures, which they could have easily sold.

⁷ *Washington Post*, April 4, 1896, p. 2; *Evening Star*, April 3, 1896, p. 3.

⁸ The sale netted \$1,710, according to a note in the Brown Papers.

⁹ *Evening Times*, December 21, 1896, p. 6.

¹⁰ The portrait of Osborn as a boy is in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society.

¹¹ A paper plaque in the files of Nancy “Lee” Snow, the mother of Brent Snow, given to the author, indicates it had been once exhibited. It states: “Col. Thomas Michael Sprigg, of Prince George’s County, Md, by Jacob Huysman (formerly attributed to Sir Godfrey Kneller). Loaned by Mrs. C. C. Bolles.”

¹² Matthew Hofstedt, curator of the Supreme Court, in conversation with the author, August 27, 2021.

¹³ <https://auctions.morphyauctions.com/lot-479928.aspx>. It was sold in 2020 for \$8,610 (including buyer’s premium) to Kennedy Galleries and Joe Kindig Antiques.

¹⁴ Possibly Bishop William White, an Episcopalian prelate. A memorial service was held for him at St. John’s Church in Washington in 1836: *The Globe*, July 20, 1836, p. 3.

¹⁵ From his obituary, he may have been friends with both Gen. Carroll and Gen. Brown during their wartime careers: *National Tribune*, July 2, 1891, p. 6. John Marshall Brown was one of his pallbearers at his funeral in Portland in 1891.