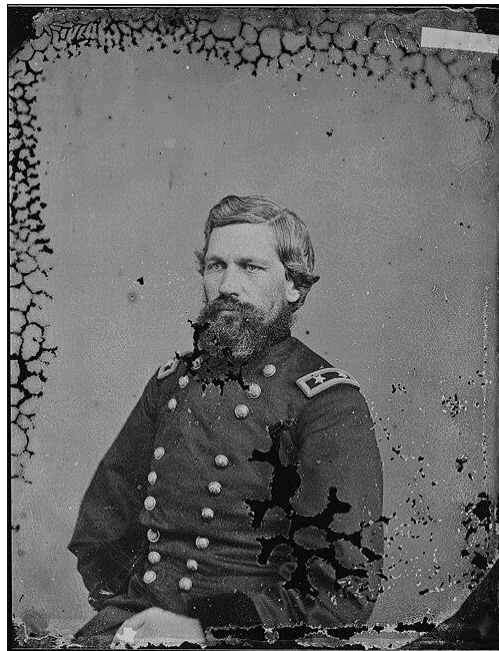


The Friendship between the Carroll Family and Oliver Otis Howard, Civil War General and Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, 1865-1874

Terence Walz

General Oliver Otis Howard, Commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau and namesake of Howard University, had a decade's long friendship with the Carroll family that began when he and his young family shared a cottage at West Point with Lt. S. Sprigg Carroll and his wife and daughter during 1860-1861.¹ Howard was then teaching mathematics at West Point and Carroll was one of the academy's quartermasters. Howard's young son, Guy, was two years older than Sprigg's daughter, Katey, who had been born in 1857, and they became playmates.²

In the summer of 1860, before the outbreak of war, Mrs. Carroll and her daughters visited Sprigg at West Point, and it must have been there that she and the Howard family became friends since they would have been neighbors. After the Civil War broke out, Howard was posted to Washington in the summer of 1861 and soon fell desperately sick from an illness that resembled cholera. When Sally Carroll heard of his illness, she sent her carriage to bring him to convalesce at her home on F Street. As Howard later wrote in his *Autobiography*, "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."³



Gen. O. O. Howard, ca. 1862-64. Source: Wikipedia.

Both Howard and Sprigg Carroll played a role in the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. When Howard's force had been in danger of being outflanked, Col. Carroll, who now commanded a

brigade of the 3rd Army Corps, rushed in to provide support that saved the day. Howard described his action in his *Autobiography*,⁴

Colonel Carroll was at that time a young man of great quickness and dash. His brigade was already deployed in the darkness at right angles to the general front, and swept along northward to the right of Krzyzanowski, past the cemetery fence and batteries, and on with marvelous rapidity, sweeping everything before it, till by his energetic help the entire broken front was completely reestablished.

Two weeks after the battle had ended and Lee had retreated to Virginia, William Carroll suddenly died. Howard wrote in a letter to his wife,⁵

I noticed today for the first time a reference to the death of Mr. Carroll, Sprigg's father. I am feeling very sad about this news, for Mr. Carroll was one of my most worthy friends in Washington. He ever gave me a warm welcome & took pleasure & pains to do me a kindness. How Mrs. Carroll & the girls will feel his death. Sprigg is their only dependence – no, I mustn't forget the Dr. & Gen. Griffin. I don't suppose the family will ever suffer for want of food, but it will be a sad loss for he was a kind husband & an affectionate father. Has Guy forgotten Mrs. Carroll?

As a matter of fact, times were tough for Mrs. Carroll after the death of her husband. William received no pension from the government, and his income relied heavily on the fees he



William and Sally Sprigg Carroll, ca. 1860⁶

collected as Clerk. He had purchased stock in railroads before he died and tracts of lands in territories that constitute the Midwest today, but the yield from these properties could hardly maintain Mrs. Carroll's lifestyle nor the expense of maintaining her unmarried children and the married children and grandchildren who lived with her. But both William and Sally had inherited land parcels on the outskirts of Washington City, and for decades after the death of her husband, Mrs. Carroll plotted ways to sell those tracts.

Sprigg and Mrs. Carroll and the Howards kept in touch. He had been appointed commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau (more properly, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands), responsible for finding employment for hundreds of thousands of formerly enslaved black men and women and providing them with education, health and legal assistance. Mrs. Carroll had met a German emigrant veteran, possibly through her children's acquaintances, a young man named Fred Von Schirach, and she wrote Gen. Howard asking if he could find some work for him. The general's Christian religious fervor and his loss of an arm at the battle of Fair Oaks in 1862 were then well known, and Mrs. Carroll shrewdly alluded to both in her letter to him. "I can recommend him to you as a good religious young gentleman, and believe he will give you much comfort if you will take him. He lost a leg at the second Bull Run, and has suffered a great deal since. He has the highest recommendation from Hon. Simon Cowen, who takes the greatest interest in him."⁷ By 1868 he was offered an appointment to work in the claims department of the Bureau in Baltimore, and the following year was reported to have been assigned to work directly with Gen. Howard.⁸

BREVET CAPTAIN F. O. VON SCHIRACH, U. S. A., has been assigned to duty in the Freedmen's Bureau, and ordered to report to General Howard.

Evening Star, August 6, 1869

Sally Carroll, ever concerned about her household finances after her husband's death, sought to interest the general in purchasing land she owned along Rock Creek just beyond the District line. In a letter written at the end of July 1868, Sally regretted that she couldn't describe her property personally, as she and the general rarely met, but she resorted to the following words in an effort to make them attractive:

"I have between seven to eight hundred acres of land in the immediate vicinity of this city which is beautifully located with reference to sites for houses.

"There is nothing comparable to it on the market that I know of – a "plank road" is being constructed to the Point of Rocks⁹ which seems within a few hundred yards of one of my farms containing 260 acres and land and laying near the Soldier's Home."

She concluded by wondering if he had a "trust or other funds" that he could use to purchase the property and she offered the services of her son-in-law, Dr. Thomas S. Mercer, as a

Thereafter, their correspondence ended. But not the memories that originally drew them together. When Gen. Carroll died in 1893, Howard wrote a letter of condolence to Sally, reminiscing of the old days and of his memories of the general:¹³

Yesterday I heard of the death of the General your son. He looked so well when I saw him at his home that I didn't dream of him preceding me to the grave. His gallant conduct in battle, his generous hospitality, his rallying expressions of cheer in dark days and all the wideness of a noble nature and warm heart keep coming before me. As I think of our mutual past. I hope indeed that his angel mother was with him in those last days.

Remembering the good things you, your husband, and the General have always done for me, I wish I could at least impact to you a little of increased hope and trust and consolation during your hours of grieving.

Sally Carroll by then – aged 81 – was too feeble to attend her son's deathbed, and she rarely left the house in the 1890s. Indeed, her daughters sought to shield her from the news of Sprigg's death.¹⁴ She died two years later, and the general in 1909.

¹ *The Autobiography of General Oliver Otis Howard*, 2 vols. (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1907), 1: 101-02

² During the Civil War, Susan Key, a childhood friend of Guy's, stayed with the Carrolls during a visit to Washington, and in a letter to his family, wrote "You wanted to know where Katey Carroll is now. She is in a place called Cumberland and her Papa is somewhere near there dont exactly know where as he is moved very often." This is a reference to Cumberland, Maryland where she and her mother stayed during part of young Carroll's military career. – he was then campaigning with the Union army in the Shenandoah Valley. Bowdoin College, Rare Books Collections, Oliver Otis Howard Papers (hereafter O.O. Howard Papers), Civil War Correspondence, Susan Key to Guy Howard, May 4, 1862, postmarked Washington, DC, care of W. T. Carroll, Esq, Clerk of the Supreme Court: https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91b02f041_transcripts.pdf.

³ *Autobiography*, 1:137

⁴ *Autobiography*, 1: 430.

⁵ O. O. Howard Papers, O. O. Howard to Lizzie Howard, July 31, 1863:

https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91b02f057_transcripts.pdf.

⁶ Photograph of Sally Sprigg Carroll portrait, courtesy Cummings-Bacigulapo Family Collection; posthumous painting of William T. Carroll by Rufus King, based on Mathew Brady's photograph taken ca. 1862, courtesy Supreme Court Collection.

⁷ O. O. Howard Papers, Mrs. Sally Sprigg Carroll to Oliver Otis Howard, May 23, 1866, Correspondence Freedmen's Bureau years, https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91b04f018_transcripts.pdf. Simon Cowen is not yet identified.

⁸ Dozens of payments are authorized by him during 1868-1869, as revealed in the Freedmen's Bureau records on Ancestry.com; *Evening Star*, August 6, 1869, p. 2. Von Schirach married that year and returned to Germany in 1871.

⁹ Unidentified reference point in Rock Creek Park today.

¹⁰ O. O. Howard Papers, Incoming Correspondence, Mrs. S. S. Carroll to Gen. Howard, July 29, 1868:

<https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91b07f021.pdf>.

¹¹ O. O. Howard Papers, Outgoing Correspondence, O. O. Howard to [Mrs.] W. T. Carroll, July 28, 1868:

<https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91-07v12#page=45>.

¹² O. O. Howard Papers, Incoming Correspondence, Mrs. S. S. Carroll to Gen. Howard, June 1, 1869:
<https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91b08f028#page=13>.

¹³ O. O. Howard Papers, Outgoing Correspondence, O.O. Howard to [Mrs.] W. T. Carroll, January 31, 1893:
<https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/ooh-pdf/M91-07v49#page=368>.

¹⁴ See my article on Gen. Carroll, https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Old_Brick_Top.pdf.