

Juneteenth and Its Meaning for DACOR Bacon House

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Although the emancipation of the District of Columbia's remaining enslaved population occurred on April 16, 1862, Juneteenth, celebrating the proclamation of emancipation in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865, is now being marked as the end of two hundred and forty-six years of slavery in the United States. It provides an occasion to reflect on the role played by many enslaved people in the building and life of DACOR Bacon house in its first thirty-seven years, between 1825 and 1862, when the last six of its enslaved workers were given their freedom.

DACOR Bacon House was constructed in 1825, thanks to a loan of \$6,000 provided by Tench Ringgold's daughter, Sarah Brook Lee Ringgold, and the manpower provided by Tench's enslaved labor force then numbering about twenty men, women and children. Some of the men may have been remnants of the enslaved agricultural force he used to farm his estate in western Maryland in prior years. Others may have come from workers at his brickyard, located around 25th Street in the District, where they had been trained as brick molders, wheelers and temperers or from among the workers trained as rope-makers at the ropewalk he owned earlier that had been burned down during the British occupation of Washington in August 1814. Still others might have been workers in his tannery near Bladensburg, or blacksmiths and carpenters he acquired in 1818 when he bought enslaved workers belonging to Mrs. Frances Lee, his debt-stricken new mother-in-law living in Loudoun County. None of their names is known at this time.

But we know the names of a few of his enslaved workers. Tench's first wife died in November, 1813, and her lingering illness may have been the reason why **Monica Brown**, one of the enslaved women brought from western Maryland, was manumitted three months later. Monica was freed with conditions, namely that she had to serve an additional three years before finally being free. It seems plausible that Monica looked after Mrs. Ringgold in those last trying months and was rewarded with freedom. No other enslaved worker in the Ringgold household was freed until 1862.

The names of several other Ringgold enslaved women are also known. **Monica** was 30 when she was manumitted, but **Betsy**, once enslaved in the household of former governor Thomas Sim Lee, Tench Ringgold's father-in-law and given to the Ringgolds in 1806, never was. When the house was built, Betsy had become the mother of a three-year-old enslaved girl named **Louisa**, born in 1822. It's likely that Betsy and Louisa were working in the house when Chief Justice John Marshall and four other justices boarded in the house during the 1832 and 1833 Court sessions, seeing that they were fed, their clothes washed, and their rooms kept warm and clean.

Louisa passed into the ownership of Tench Ringgold's spinster daughter, Mary Digges Galloway Ringgold, sometime before or after Tench's death in 1844. Two years earlier, Louisa had a daughter of her own who was named **Elizabeth**, and both she and her mother were rented out by Miss Ringgold to work as "ladies' maids" for others. This was customary among many Washington female slaveowners and provided Tench's daughter with much needed financial

support. When both were emancipated by law in 1862, Louisa was earning \$8 a month and Elizabeth \$6 a month, which went to Mary Ringgold's pocket, not theirs.

The last of the Ringgold's enslaved women we know about is **Susan**, whose family name is unknown. In 1836, she enlisted the help of Washington lawyer Francis Scott Key to help secure freedom for herself and her four children: daughters **Kitty, Maria, and Mary** and son **Thomas**. By this date, Tench had been forced to repay the mortgage he took out from his daughter Sarah by selling his home at F Street and moving across the river to what was then known as Alexandria County (now Arlington). We believe the law suit went unchallenged and that Susan and her four children were freed. When the 1840 census was taken, the enslaved laborers working his farm and tending his needs were five, none of them children.

Unmentioned above are men and perhaps women who attempted to or succeeded in escaping enslavement at the Ringgold home. One was named **Ben Dorsey**, who fled the new house on F Street in 1825, the year it was built. Tench offered a reward of \$100 for his capture, describing him as having a "very black" complexion, an "open countenance," someone who often "smiled when spoken to" and who possessed "remarkably small and white teeth." Ben was dressed in a form-fitting blue coat, a white waistcoat, coarse linen pantaloons and a black wool hat – in other words, clothed for household work or for work as a coachman or waiter where clothes were important. Tench maintained a coach for his work as U. S. marshal for the District of Columbia and often traveled on business. It is not known if Ben was ever captured and forced to return to servitude.¹

The Carroll family moved to 1801 F Street in 1835, arriving with three small children. William worked as clerk of the U.S. Supreme Court and Sally was the daughter of former Maryland governor Samuel Sprigg who actually owned the house and bought it as a gift for her. They had been living on Capitol Hill where they were served by a staff of eight enslaved workers. In 1840, the staff had increased to nine (five men, four women, including four boys and girls) plus three "colored" women who, presumably, were free. Chief among the enslaved women was an older woman who if she had a documented name might have been called "**Mrs. Warren**" who had been purchased by William Carroll soon after he was hired as clerk in 1828. She may have been their cook. She had at least three children, **Ellen, Henry, and Henrietta**, all bearing the last name Warren, and who were eventually emancipated in 1862 – which is why we know something about them and their mother's last name. All three had been born in the house. Ellen and Henrietta were trained as "ladies' maids." According to the compensation papers filed by William Carroll with the government in 1862, **Ellen** (also called Nelly) was trained as a "chamber" and "dressing" servant, meaning she emptied out the chamber pots each day and helped the Carrolls' daughters get dressed, but **Henrietta, probably called Hennie**, had also been trained as a child's nursemaid. Given the number of young children in the Carroll household in the 1840s and 1850s – one of whom suffered from tuberculosis and another who died young – she would have been much needed. When the Carrolls' eldest daughter, Violetta, was married in 1856, **Henrietta Warren** was passed on as a wedding gift. Six years later she was freed and seems to have made a living being a nurse and nanny in other wealthy households after the Civil War.

Fannie Lee, born in Virginia in 1806, had been bought by the Carrolls sometime in the 1840s for her skills as a “first-rate pastry and French cook.” The Carrolls often entertained and were known as genial hosts, and **Fannie’s** skills must have been much needed. However, she may have been too old for the demands put on her, since the Carrolls sold her in 1856 for \$40 to an African American woman named Amelia Tilghman who hired her out to cook for well-known families in the city. She was emancipated at the age of 56 in 1862, along with three thousand other Blacks still enslaved in the city.

Soon after William married Sally Sprigg, her father gave them one of the enslaved workers from his plantation in Prince George’s County, a man named **John Brooks**. **John** was born in 1821, so he would have been a boy when he first came to the Carroll household. He was trained by them to be a waiter, and by the time he was emancipated in 1862, William Carroll called him “the very best waiter and dining room servant I ever saw” and valued him highly. **John** seems to have married one of the free colored women working for the Carrolls, a woman named **Mary**, and they were allowed to live outside the household in a place they shared with another free African American couple named George and Louisa Burrell. Like **John**, George also worked as a waiter, one of the few jobs open to free African American men at the time. John may also have helped to train **Henry Warren**, who was born into the household in 1839. Henry never reached the stature of John Brooks. When he was emancipated in 1862, Carroll described his skills as a “very good waiter house servant and market man” but worth, in his estimation, \$750, whereas John was worth \$2,000. The difference in age and experience may have mattered in this calculation.

In the late 1840s and throughout the 1850s, the Carrolls relied less on an enslaved staff and hired Irish women to work in the house. But throughout Mrs. Carroll’s long life – she was widowed in 1863 and died in the house in 1895 – she continued to be helped by a mixed band of African American and Irish servants. Her will stipulated that “**Jimmy Jackson**, a forty-year-old African American perhaps born into slavery but freed in 1862 or 1865, and Delia Noonan, a forty-five-year-old Irish American woman, be given \$300 each upon her death. Though he was never enslaved in the house, Jimmy represented the remnant of a large group of African Americans who once served as forced laborers in DACOR Bacon House during its formative years when it was known as “Ringgold House” and “Carroll House.”

Juneteenth is a day to celebrate the release from servitude of John and Mary Brooks, Henry and Ellen Warren and their sister Hennie, of Betsy, her daughter Louisa and granddaughter Elizabeth, second and third generation slaves of the Ringgolds. Though without choice, under duress, and without pay or any reward, they contributed as best they knew how or were trained to do for the comfort and happiness of their owners.

But Juneteenth should also make us wonder what happened to John Brooks and his wife, Henry and Henrietta Warren, Louisa and Elizabeth in the days after Emancipation. Were the Brooks able to have a family of their own? Did they stay in Washington and see to the education of their children as so many Black Americans did in the initial heady days of Reconstruction? What happened to them once the optimism faded and segregationist laws were implemented? Did they maintain contact with their own masters or cut their ancient ties and move on to new places? Juneteenth is, for sure, a day of remembrance.

¹ An earlier version of the enslaved household of Tench Ringgold was published on the website of the White House Historical Association: <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/the-enslaved-household-of-tench-ringgold>.