

Sallie Sprigg Carroll, DACOR Bacon House's First Grande Dame

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Chapter 2, part 2

The Carroll Family during the Later Civil War Period

William Carroll's death affected the family greatly. Elizabeth Blair Lee wrote "Phil" (her husband Samuel Philip Lee) that Alida was expected for a visit to the family's summer home in Silver Spring: "they are sadly broken down by the death of their father...."¹ Mrs. Fanny Eames, the wife of the lawyer Charles Eames who were both friendly with the Lincolns,² sent a letter to the president at the request of Brig. Gen. Griffin asking that he be given leave to visit the family. "As you know, she wrote, "Gen. Griffin's father-in-law Mr. Carroll died last week, and the family are in great distress and affliction." Her request was apparently turned down,³ and Charles remained at his post for another three months.

Did Sallie and the rest of the family go away for the summer? An extraordinary story circulated Washington that they had rented the F Street house at \$4,000 for a year, "the highest rent ever paid for a house in Washington, and this for a house of two stories, worth not more than \$10,000."⁴ It seems the story was probably a rumor, for the Carrolls were in and out of the city during the remainder of the year, but it is possible that Sallie decided to leave Washington for a spell to grieve the loss of her husband at Berkeley Springs or some other watering hole.⁵

In October 1863, Gen. Charles Griffin was granted a second sick leave and returned to Washington to be nursed and cared for. The War Department decided to assign him to "court martial duty," which he did until April 1864, when he returned to active duty as commander of the first vision of the Fifth Corps.⁶ In February 1864, Sally Griffin gave birth to a second son who was named William Carroll Griffin, honoring her much lamented father.

As the war wore relentlessly on, it took a terrible toll on families both North and South and in the nation's capital. On the Virginia front in the spring of 1864, Col. Sprigg Carroll and his brigade took part in the frightful and deadly battles of Spotsylvania and the Wilderness, in which thousands of Union soldiers died. He himself was seriously wounded at the Wilderness and was treated in camp hospitals before being sent home to Washington. He was carried into his



Brig. Gen. Charles Griffin, ca. 1862
Addis Gallery, 308 Pennsylvania Ave, Washington, DC
P B Marvin, Photographer

mother's house on F Street to be cared for and was bedridden for three months.⁷ Of this episode in the family's life, Governor William McKinley, who had been a member of his staff, told this story to a large and cheering crowd in 1894 of veterans of the 8th Ohio Volunteers, which Carroll had commanded:⁸

I remember to have heard from his dear old mother, a noble woman, tell the story of how he received his commission of brigadier general. She was living in Washington. Twice had Carroll been wounded, but he was not in favor with the authorities at the War Department. One day he was brought home on a stretcher sorely wounded. As he was being carried by the war office⁹ to his old mother, a clerk looking out the window saw him. Here is poor Colonel Carroll being taken home. Secretary Stanton went to the window, looked upon the wounded man and turning to the Commission Clerk said, "Issue a Commission of Brigadier-General for Colonel Carroll." It was taken to his mother, and going to the bedside of her son, said, "Sprague, the Secretary of War has sent you a commission of Brigadier General." He asked her to repeat it, and after he had done so, Colonel Carroll said, "Mother, they don't believe I'll live, but I'll disappoint them,

and I'll live." And he did, to gain greater glory on the field of battle (prolonged applause). I was always glad to take my hat off to him, for no braver man, no more loyal man ever lived.

As the story related, Sprigg was promoted to brigadier general in June 1864 and mustered out of service in 1866. Through his injuries, from which he never fully recovered, he never returned to active duty. Fort Carroll, one of the defensive batteries surrounding Washington, was named in his honor.¹⁰

A month later, Sally Griffin – leaving her baby and two-year-old son Charles C. Griffin in the care of household servants – was invited in March to join the official party from Washington to tour the battlefields around City Point, Virginia, on the James River not far from Richmond, where her husband was now stationed with the Army of the Potomac. Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant were assigned to one carriage, and Sally was asked to join President Lincoln in another carriage. When Mrs. Lincoln was informed about this situation by Gen. Grant's staff member, Adam Badeau, she flew into a rage. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?"

Badeau's account continues:

I tried to pacify her and to palliate my remark, but she was fairly boiling over with rage. "That's a very equivocal smile, sir," she exclaimed: "Let me out of this carriage at once. I will ask the President if he saw that woman alone." Mrs. Griffin, afterward the Countess Esterhazy, was one of the best known and most elegant women in Washington, a Carroll, and a personal acquaintance of Mrs. Grant, who strove to mollify the excited spouse, but all in vain. Mrs. Lincoln again bade me stop the driver, and when I hesitated to obey, she thrust her arms past me to the front of the carriage and held the driver fast. But Mrs. Grant finally prevailed upon her to wait till the whole party alighted, and then General Meade came up to pay his respects to the wife of the President. I had intended to offer Mrs. Lincoln my arm, and endeavor to prevent a scene, but Meade, of course, as my superior, had the right to escort her, and I had no chance to warn him. I saw them go off together, and remained in fear and trembling for what might occur in the presence of the foreign minister and other important strangers. But General Meade was very adroit, and when they returned Mrs. Lincoln looked at me significantly and said: "General Meade is a gentleman, sir. He says it was not the President who gave Mrs. Griffin the permit, but the Secretary of War." Meade was the son of a diplomatist, and had evidently inherited some of his father's skill.¹¹

Sally returned to Washington and in August, little William Carroll Griffin died, only five months old. He was laid to rest in the Carroll vault. Sally felt well enough four months later to visit her husband at the front in Petersburg, where a photograph of them in front of his headquarters at the Cummings House was taken on November 2, 1864.



Photograph of Union officers in front of the Cummings House, Petersburg, Va. It was originally identified as "Frederick Augustus Schermerhorn: Headquarters of the 1st division, 5th cavalry at the Cummings House, Petersburg, Virginia". It has now been re-identified as Headquarters of the 1st Division, 5th Corps (Gen. Griffin's command) deployed at the Cummings House, November 2, 1864, which helps date the photograph. It is assumed that Sally Griffin is the seated lady. Gen. Griffin is the man standing to the right of Sally with beard. The correct annotation was located in the National Archives.

(Source: <http://www.petersburgproject.org/blog-and-updates/newly-identified-photograph-of-gen-charles-griffin-and-staff-at-petersburg>).



With the center cropped and enlarged: Gen. and Mrs. Griffin.
This is one of the few extant photographic images of Sally as a young woman.

Gen. Griffin, now appointed and confirmed by the Senate as brevet major general, replaced Gen. Warren as commander of the 5th Corps in April 1865 and was in hot pursuit of Lee's Army following the fall of Richmond. He was instrumental in the entrapment of Lee near Appomattox. Although he is included in some of the sketches made of Lee's surrender, he was not actually in the room for that momentous occasion, but rather a member of the commission organizing the surrender of arms by Lee's army. The commissioners met at the McLean House in Appomattox the day after the Grant-Lee meeting to hammer out details of the implementation.¹²



Gen. Griffin, in this rendition of Lee's surrender, sits behind Gen. Grant in the McLean House at Appomattox, 1865. However, the artist is incorrect in including him.

Lee's surrender provoked enormous excitement in Washington as it became clear that the long and agonizing war was over. Jubilant crowds gathered in and about the city, and especially in the area around the White House where President Lincoln was required to come to the window and greet the crowd.¹³ On the night of April 11th, an enormous crowd flocked to the White House to hear the president's speech. The Treasury, the War Office, the State Department, and other government buildings were illuminated with candles, and fireworks broke out in various parts of the city. Citizens joined in the excitement, and a number of private homes were also illuminated. The *Evening Star* reported the following day:¹⁴

The private residence of Mrs. Carroll (mother of General Carroll and mother-in-law of General Griffin, of the 5th corps), on F Street near 18th, was brilliantly illuminated, and generally admired for the tasteful manner in which it was decorated. The 5th corps badge and floral baskets were suspended from the windows, while the outside of the house was festooned with large flags and evergreens. A transparency, which was encircled with evergreens, occupied a prominent position on the portico, and bore the inscription "Griffin."

One imagines that the excitement in the Carroll household was palpable. That excitement, however, turned to grief when it became known that Lincoln had been assassinated while attending a performance at Ford's Theater on the evening of April 14.

With the end of the war and the assassination of President Lincoln, the house under Sallie Carroll entered a new phase, now bereft of her husband. Her home was now full of her grown children. Sally and her husband, Major Gen. Griffin, and their three-year-old son Charles, Gen. Sprigg Carroll, his wife, seven-year-old daughter Katie, Violetta and her husband Dr. Mercer and their two boys, Carroll and John, Carrie, now twenty-four years old, Alida, who was twenty-one, and Charles H. Carroll, their surviving other son who had spent four years in the army and returned with multiple health issues. Charles was a restless soul and spent much of his time staying in other cities and towns while seeing his mother in Washington for only short periods of time.

Alida, Sally's youngest daughter, had flirted with a number of eligible young officers during the war years – the handsome Lt. Edward Holden Martindale, for example, the son of General Martindale, the military governor of the District, had “danced in attendance” in 1862 according to Elizabeth Blair¹⁵ – but he was not to her liking. In due course she met a high-ranking officer, Gen. John Marshall Brown, from Portland, Maine, while he was recuperating in a Washington hospital from wounds suffered during the fighting at Petersburg. He had fought in several of the major battles, including Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. It is now believed that he was introduced to Alida by Supreme Court justice Nathan Clifford whose



Carte de visite of Alida Carroll Brown,
ca. 1870, courtesy Maine Historical Society

daughter had married into the Brown family.¹⁶ They engaged in a year-long long-distance romance before deciding to marry in Sallie's home. During the summer of 1866, Alida went to Portland to attend the wedding of another of the Brown sons and to meet her future in-laws.¹⁷ The wedding took place on December 16, 1866 and was considered another major Washington



Gen. John Marshall Brown in uniform.

Source: *Thirty-Second Maine Regiment*, opposite p. 52.¹⁸

His regimental uniform was preserved by the family and can be seen at the Maine Historical Society, Portland.

social event. It also marked the debut of young Violet Blair, the niece of both Elizabeth Blair Lee and Postmaster General Montgomery Blair during the Lincoln years and a leading member of the Washington social elite. After a honeymoon traveling in Europe, Alida and John settled into a new house that Brown had built for them on Vaughan Street in Portland.¹⁹ Their first child, named Sally Carroll Brown, was born in October 1867. All but one of their subsequent children were given Carroll family names, once again showing the importance attached by the Carroll family to its name, lineage and history. Alida and her husband John provided much needed support and ballast to Sallie as she faced many years as a mother and widowed woman.

¹ Letter from Elizabeth Blair Lee dated August 24, 1863: *Wartime Washington*, 301.

² During 1862, both the Eames and the Browning family went to visit with the Lincolns at the Soldier's Home: Mathew Pinsker, *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldier's Home* (New York: Oxford, 2003), 48-49.

³ Sally Griffin may also have asked her friend Elizabeth Blair Lee to ask her father Francis Blair, to pressure Lincoln to grant his sick leave but Blair refused, as he no longer wanted to "dance attendance at the

Presidential anti-chamber any longer” : letter to “Phil,” dated July 29, 1863,” in Laas, ed., *Wartime Washington: Civil War Letter of Elizabeth Blair Lee*, 291.

⁴ “Rents in Washington,” Correspondent of the *New York Express*, November 9, 1863, in *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 12, 1863, 2.

⁵ Calderhead in his *DACOR Bacon House* states that they often went to the Maryland Eastern Shore where they had family property: this was based on his interviews with Alexander L. Stevas, retired Clerk of the Supreme Court, who mentions the Carrolls used to summer on the shore: 54. I have not found newspaper reports to corroborate this testimony.

⁶ <https://civilwarintheeast.com/people/charles-griffin/>.

⁷ His wounds are described in detail in: *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion. (1861-65)*, Part 2, Volume 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1876), 848. His condition is presented as a case study in severe injuries to the elbow.

⁸ John Marshall Brown Papers, Newspaper clipping, Box 18A, folder 3. The paper may be the (Sandusky) *Register*. The meeting of the veterans was held in Margareta, Ohio, which is near Sandusky.

⁹ Situated on 17th Street, a block from the Carroll mansion.

¹⁰ Ft. Carroll is the name given to one of the fortified batteries in the southwest of the District:

<https://www.nps.gov/places/fort-greble-and-fort-carroll.htm>.

¹¹ Adam Badeau, *Grant in Peace: From Appomattox to Mount McGregor. A Personal Memoir* (Hartford: Scranton, 1887), 357. The incident appears often in accounts of Lincoln and his wife:

<https://www.pillartopost.org/2016/03/retro-files-lincoln-endures-uncivil-wars.html> (accessed 05/15/20).

¹² <https://www.nps.gov/apco/learn/historyculture/the-commissioners-meeting.htm>.

¹³ Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington* (New York: Harper’s and Bros., 1941), 381-384.

¹⁴ *Evening Star*, April 12, 1865, p. 2.

¹⁵ Laas, *Wartime Washington*, 207

¹⁶ As put forward by Jamie Kingman Rice, Deputy Director of Collections & Program at the Maine Historical Society, and archivist for the organization’s Brown family papers.

¹⁷ A letter for her was left at the Portland post office in August: *The Portland Daily Press*, August 21, 1866, p. 2.

¹⁸ Henry Clarence Houston, *The Thirty-Second Maine Regiment of Infantry Volunteers: An Historical Sketch* (Portland, Southworth Bros., 1903).

¹⁹ *Portland Daily Press*, December 22 1866, p. 2; for the house and its date:

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=me_collection.