

Sallie Sprigg Carroll: DACOR Bacon House First Grande Dame

Terence Walz

Chapter 3

On Her Own

Life's Vagaries: Sallie's Finances

When William died in 1863, an inventory was made of his “goods, chattels, and personal estate,” namely the furnishings in every room of the house, including the servant’s quarters and the stable.¹ They did not include family portraits or any other artwork, books, personal jewelry and items of clothing, or the watch on which Sallie was paying a yearly tax.² The total amount of household furnishing was valued at \$6,683.35, to which was added another \$8,350, mostly in railroad stock. The inventory included two horses and a carriage worth \$450 but excluded several thousand acres of land that William owned in Midwestern states (Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin), as well as land in Prince George’s County, Maryland and in the northwest corner of the District of Columbia that he had inherited from his father’s estate. William had not received a salary, but his income was based on fees collected as Clerk of the Court.

Upon his death, that yearly income ceased, and with no pension available, Sallie may have thought the best way to safeguard her immediate financial future was by selling the two

By Jas. C. McGuire & Co., Auctioneers.
VERY VALUABLE FARM LANDS NEAR WASHINGTON at Public Auction.—On **TUESDAY**, November 10th, at 12 o'clock M., at the Auction Rooms of James C. McGuire, corner of 10th and D streets, Washington city, I shall sell a Valuable Farm fronting on the Seventh Street and Rockville Turnpike, and adjoining the country seat of George W. Riggs, Esq., and opposite to Silver Springs, the residence of F. P. Blair, Esq. This tract has on it one of the best sites for a country residence within the vicinity of the city, and contains about two hundred acres. If desired, this tract will be sold in lots of from 10 to 40 acres, to suit purchasers.
ALSO—
That fine body of land known as the “Dobbie Farm,” lying on both sides of Rock Creek, adjoining the residences of Judge Dunlop and the late Darius Clagett, containing four hundred and forty-seven acres. This farm also has an abundance of wood, and will be subdivided into convenient sized tracts.
A plat of both farms, with the proposed subdivisions, will be on exhibition at the counting rooms of the Auctioneers.
Terms at sale.
SALLIE CARROLL,
Executrix of W. F. Carroll, deceased.
JAS. C. MCGUIRE & CO.
Oct 20—eod (Chron.) Auctioneers.

Daily National Intelligencer, October 30, 1863, p. 1

properties William had inherited in Maryland, bordering on or stretched along upper Rock Creek. In September and October 1863, she placed advertisements in the local papers, offering the two tracts for sale, one known as Sligo Mill (414 acres) and the other as “Dobbin Farm” (447 acres). She also offered to divide the properties into lots as wished by prospective buyers. The auctioneers, MacGuire & Co., handled the sale.

If she received offers, they were not acceptable, because the major part of the two parcels remained in her hands until the 1870s. However, in 1865, she decided to accept an offer for a portion of the Sligo Mill property, agreeing to the price of \$105 an acre for a 200-acre slice of the property. She would have netted \$21,000 on the sale – a substantial amount – less whatever fees and taxes she would have been required to pay.³ One possible reason why the Sligo Mill property and the other portion of the Dobbin Farm property didn’t sell was that during 1862 and 1863 the government had requisitioned timber and wood from her land that was used for the construction of Ft. Slocum.⁴ That may have marred the beauty if not the value of the land, and later it provoked her to seek compensation from the government for the loss.⁵

Sallie’s mother’s health deteriorated in the late 1850s,⁶ and she sold her Northampton farm in Prince George’s County in March 1865 to Dr. John Contee Fairfax (later 11th Lord Fairfax).⁷ Violetta Sprigg died the following month, leaving a will that divided the estate equally between Sallie and the family and children of her deceased brother Osborn.⁸ The estate auction, carried out in Baltimore in May 1865, shows that there were many prized pieces not brought to Washington – mahogany dining and card tables, dressing bureaus with marble tops, a rosewood wardrobe with



A porcelain punch bowl made for Samuel Sprigg, now in the Maryland Center for History and Culture. The bowl was inherited by Mary Bowie Sprigg Anderson (Mrs. James W. Anderson), a daughter of Osborn Sprigg, Sallie’s brother.⁹

French plate mirror, French China gold band dinner set, and a second-hand piano.¹⁰ If the famous Peale portraits of the Sprigg family were not brought to 1801 F Street before, it may well have been in 1865 that Sallie took possession of them – as well as other Sprigg family portraits.¹¹ As Mrs. Gouverneur recalled, “In her drawing-room hung many portraits of family ancestors arrayed in the antique dress of olden times.”¹²

Sallie, who had remained close to her parents, had her mother interred in the Carroll mausoleum in Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, and her father’s body removed from the graveyard at St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Prince George’s County and interred next to her. After Lincoln’s assassination in April 1865, Wille Lincoln’s casket would have been removed from the mausoleum, where it had been resting for three years, and sent to Illinois with his father’s remains

Perhaps feeling flush with an infusion of possessions and cash, Sallie took the advice of her son-in-law, Dr. Mercer, and invested \$10,000 in the Standing Stone Oil Company in West Virginia; she may also have lent him \$10,000 to purchase another 200 shares in his own name.¹³ The excitement about newly discovered oil deposits in West Virginia and Pennsylvania reached a fevered pitch in Washington and elsewhere in early 1865. Charles Mason, the former Commissioner of Patents, wrote in his diary in January 1865, “There is a great furor in favor of oil enterprises. A company is now forming here to go on and work an oil well after boring it. I am solicited to unite in the undertaking. It is like a lottery but I am almost disposed to invest \$500 in the enterprise.”¹⁴ That oil company was Standing Stone Oil, and he himself helped to sell shares. George Riggs, who had a share in the recent purchase of Northampton farm, was another shareholder in the corporation.¹⁵ But this particular company never had the success its investors hoped for. A year later, Mason confided in his diary, “Attended a meeting of the directors of the Standing Stone Company. We have now about six thousand dollars remaining. All that I have placed in that company is probably a dead loss.”¹⁶ We may assume that Sallie and Dr. Mercer would have also lost their considerable personal investment.

The collapse of this venture must have sobered Sallie who now sought the advice of another son-in-law, John Marshall Brown in Portland, who had married her youngest daughter in December 1866. In December the following year, she wrote what may have been the first in or else part of a longer series of letters seeking counsel on how to bolster her financial situation,

admitting in this letter that it was the first time since her husband's death four years earlier that she was thinking seriously about her finances. "Have you time today for a little business chat with me," she began the letter with a question.¹⁷

Surveying her assets, she notes that the parcel of the Sligo Mills property she had sold in November 1865 was now going for \$300 an acre, and that she had heard that by holding on to it she might fetch double that price. As for the thousands of acres she held in the Midwest, she opined land was selling slowly, and in any event, taxes in Michigan and Wisconsin, where some of her holdings were located, were high. "Ditch taxes" on land she owned in Ohio were \$1500 this year, she wrote. But how to sell the land to give her income she needed now? She believed it would be more profitable for her to sell the land nearer at hand – she still had 715 acres in two tracts along the upper reaches of Rock Creek on the border between the District of Columbia and Maryland. The "Sligo" tract (now reduced to 265 acres) could be expected to sell for \$300 an acre, and even higher once the railroad was completed – allowing easy access to the city. She had that tract "fenced" in before she left Washington for the summer, while the other larger tract of 450 acres had rolling hills, a spring, and was altogether desirable. Moreover, the Sligo tract was near the house Mr. Blair had built¹⁸ and abutted land where G. W. Rigg had built a new summer home.

Meanwhile, her children's lives were consuming her attention.

Life's Vagaries - Children

During the five years after the Civil War, her children's lives dramatically changed, each altering Sallie's life at home. Daughter Sally's husband, Gen. Griffin, was given command of the "Department of the East" with headquarters in Portland, Maine. They left Washington in July or August 1865 and settled into a hotel in Portland.¹⁹ His work there was of short duration, and he was mustered out of the volunteer army at the end of 1865, returning with his family to Washington, awaiting a further military appointment in the regular army. He was appointed colonel of the 35th infantry regiment that was then occupying Texas, and while there, was reassigned in November 1866 to head the military district and Freedmen's Bureau in Texas. He, Sally and their young son Charles moved to military quarters in Galveston.²⁰



Galveston in 1866: Theodore Davis for *Harper's Magazine*, October 27, 1866

Griffin tackled the implementation of the 13th and 14th amendments with his usual force and occasional lack of tact, and he strenuously ordered the registration of voting rights for newly enfranchised Blacks in the state. Public transportation was also integrated, causing much fury among white citizens in Texas and among Texas politicians. He worked to have the governor removed for not implementing the Reconstruction amendments with necessary force. He was not averse to ordering federal troops to enforce the rights of Blacks, and soon his presence in Texas was much resented.²¹

He retained the full support of General Sheridan and at the end of August 1867, he was appointed the new commander of the Military District of Louisiana and Texas, with headquarters in New Orleans. It is said that when an outbreak of yellow fever broke out in the city in late July 1867, he was asked to leave the state, but he refused and stayed on in Galveston to attend his duties.²² In September, young Charles died of yellow fever, and Griffin shortly thereafter succumbed. Sally, devastated by the loss of her husband and son, left Galveston almost immediately for New York²³ and joined her mother in Newport, Rhode Island, where Sallie had rented one of Mrs. Deblois's cottages on Catherine Street.²⁴ In December, Griffin's body was shipped from Galveston to New York and then by train to Washington. He was given a grand military funeral, with several thousand troops lining Pennsylvania Avenue as the two caissons bearing his casket and the casket of his son were solemnly drawn down through the streets from the special catafalque erected for the bodies near the train station to St. John's Church, and then

to Oak Hill cemetery for private ceremonies. General Grant and Sherman were among the mourners.²⁵

Sallie's third daughter, Carrie, had met a dashing and handsome former military officer of distinguished background named Nathaniel Cogswell Kinney, who had retired from military duty in the West in 1867²⁶ and was contemplating a life in business with his brothers. His mother Mary Cogswell Kinney had befriended Mary Lincoln during her time in the White House and had been summoned with her sister Elizabeth Dixon to comfort Mary the night of President Lincoln's assassination. Mrs. Dixon was a friend of the Carroll family and had attended one of their soirees some years earlier. In December 1868, Carrie and Nathaniel were married in a big society wedding at Sallie's home, with Gen. Grant and many distinguished guests in attendance. They departed soon after for a European honeymoon.²⁷ After they returned, they continued to live in Carroll home (they were enumerated there in the 1870 census). It remains unclear how of



Carrie Carroll's first husband, Nathaniel C. Kinney, 18th Infantry and 27th Infantry.
Collection of James and Jean Mountain.²⁸

often Nathaniel stayed with his wife. The marriage faltered, and after several efforts to find common ground, they called it quits, and Carrie filed for divorce in 1874 on the grounds of desertion.

Sallie's eldest son, Major Gen. S. Sprigg Carroll, now retired from the army, had spent much of 1864 and 1865 recuperating in his mother's home from his grievous injury.²⁹ He decided to remain in Washington. Sallie gave him the Sligo Mill property in the edge of the city,

and he built a home there which he called “Belle Vue,” in honor of the old estate of Charles Carroll, his grandfather. It bordered on the area near the District line that later became incorporated as Takoma Park. By this time, he and his wife had two daughters, and then welcomed a third child in 1875 who was named after him, “Sam S. Carroll.” In the 1870 census, they are living in their home in Maryland with a gardener and three servants.

After resigning his position in the army in 1865, Sallie’s younger son, Charles, moved to Philadelphia, and began a life of wandering. He had endured a number of injuries during his four years in the army and also suffered from rheumatic attacks, which left him debilitated. Somewhere during his travels, he met a young woman from Minnesota named Anna Lufkin whom he married in January 1867.³⁰ This might have been a hasty decision, because soon after he was divorced. He re-entered the army in the 5th U.S. cavalry in 1869, participating in the wars in the West against American native nations, deserted in 1871, surrendered himself back in a month later and was finally discharged with disabilities in July 1871.³¹ With only a small military pension from the government, he inevitably called on his mother to help him out. By 1875 she was supporting him with a monthly subvention of \$50 on which he managed to survive for the following twenty years until her death.³²

Sally Griffin, now widowed, stayed in Washington with her mother. After a year of mourning, she rejoined society. President Grant and his wife were helpful in bringing her out of seclusion and included her in several of their social gatherings, especially after he was elected president in 1868.³³ In her social rounds, she was introduced to an attaché at the Austro-Hungarian legation, Max Esterhazy of the nobility of Hungary. In 1870 they were married in



Count Miksa Erno Esterhazy, known as Max, Sally Griffin’s new husband.

Sallie's home, with President and Mrs. Grant again in attendance, along with the Secretary of State and other dignitaries. Sally Esterhazy and her new husband then went to Europe and eventually took up residence at the Esterhazy palace in Tati. She would stay abroad for the next fourteen years.

¹ National Archives and Records Administration, Estate of William T. Carroll, Probates and Wills, District of Columbia, Box 74. Conducted on 25 July 1863, two weeks after William's death.

² In 1865, she was paying a yearly tax of \$2 on her watch, \$2 for the Chickering piano, and \$6 for the carriage.

³ The sale is mentioned in the letter she wrote to John Marshall Brown in December 1867 (see below).

⁴ Off Kansas Avenue, near the District line with Maryland.

⁵ The (Baltimore) *Sun*, February 16, 1883. Senator William P. Frye of Maine introduced legislation in the Senate in 1883 to compensate Mrs. Carroll for her loss at the price of \$20,000.

⁶ She placed ads in the local papers wishing to settle any outstanding debts of her deceased husband, announcing she was "in infirm health": *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 25, 1859.

⁷ Susan Pearl, "Samuel Sprigg," p. 7:

<https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001400/001448/html/spriggspeech.htm>; and Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, *African American Historic and Cultural Sources in Prince George's County, Maryland* (2012), p. 261.

⁸ Brown Papers, Box 18A, folder 12, dated 1859.

⁹ <https://www.mdhistory.org/resources/bowl-punch/>.

¹⁰ *Baltimore American*, May 6, 1865, p. 3.

¹¹ Notably the portrait of Thomas Sprigg, founder of the family line, now in the collection of the Maryland Center for Culture and History. See my article, The Carroll Portraits, to be posted on the DACOR Bacon House History website.

¹² Gouverneur, *As I Remember*, 215.

¹³ *Acts of the Legislature of West Virginia* (Charleston, WVA: John F. McDermot, public printer, 1866), 161-62.

¹⁴ <https://ipmall.law.unh.edu/content/patent-history-materials-index-extracts-diaries-commissioner-charles-mason>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* The largest investor (1,000 shares at \$50/share) was Aaron Van Camp, who had been jailed as a Confederate spy in 1861 but who from someone in Confederate territories was keen to make a killing on this market.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, entry for July 21, 1866.

¹⁷ Brown Papers, Box 15, folder 2 (Correspondence to JMB regarding Washington lands, 1867-1881), SSC (Sallie Sprigg Carroll) to John (Marshall Brown), December (?), 1867.

¹⁸ This may be a reference to the "Jesup Blair" House. The earlier houses owned by Montgomery Blair ("Falkland" and "Silver Spring") had been burned to the ground by Confederates in 1864.

¹⁹ Gen. Griffin and his family settled in the U. S Hotel in Portland in August 1865: *Eastern Daily Argus*, August 14, 1865.

²⁰ B. Kevin Bennett, "Major General Charles Griffin: Granville's Forgotten Hero," *Newsletter of the Granville, Ohio Historical Society* 12:1 (Winter 1998), 7-9.

²¹ On this part of his life, Texas State Historical Association, "Union General and Reconstruction Leader," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/griffin-charles>.

²² Repeated in Joshua Chamberlain, *The Passing of Armies* (New York: G. P.O. Putnam's, 1915), 1915, 107.

²³ *New York Evening Post*, September 19, 1867, p. 4.

²⁴ See my posting, https://www.dacorbacoon.org/docs/Summer_Resorts_in_the_19th_Century.pdf.

²⁵ For further details on their lives together,

https://www.dacorbacoon.org/docs/Sarah_Virginia_Carroll_Countess_Esterhazy_pt_1.pdf.

²⁶ He had been asked to establish the C. F. Smith Fort on the Bozeman Trail in Montana and was instrumental in keeping the Crow nation at bay. A year after he retired, the fort was abandoned by the army.

²⁷ *Evening Star*, December 24, 1868, p. 2; Violet Blair used the occasion as her formal coming out: Virginia Jeans Laas, *Love and Power in the Nineteenth Century: The Marriage of Violet Blair* (University of Arkansas Press, 1998), p. 20.

²⁸ https://www.jamesmountainantiques.com/c790f697-9274-4bf1-a1d4-9d3dbef61838_1_105_c/.

²⁹ Boyd's Washington Directory for 1865 lists his mother's address as his residence.

³⁰ Oak Hill Cemetery Office, Carroll file, copy of page from Carroll Family Bible.

³¹ I am grateful to Gordon Thorsby, who is writing a history of the 5th Artillery, for this information.

³² Brown Papers, Box 25A, Folder 4, Charles H. Carroll to Alida Carroll, March 4, 1895.

³³ https://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Sally_Countess_Esterhazy_Part_2.pdf.