

Sallie Sprigg Carroll: DACOR Bacon House First Grande Dame

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Chapter 4

Making Changes

In 1863, when newspaper columnists were discussing the high cost of rents of Washington homes during the Civil War, the Ringgold-Carroll house was still only two stories.¹ A full third story (i.e. fourth, including the ground level) was not yet added, although, considering the number of people living in the house, it might well have been contemplated. According to the 1870 census, the occupants included – in addition to Sallie Carroll – her daughter Violetta and her husband Dr. John S. Mercer, now working in the Patent Office, and their two sons, Carroll and John, aged twelve and eight; daughter Sally Griffin, now a widow; daughter Carrie and her husband, Nathaniel C. Kinney. Sallie at the time employed eight servants in the house: four young Irish women, three white and one Black man. The Black was Jimmy Jackson, then only fifteen, who would stay working for Sallie until she died in 1895. One of the white men may have been her coachman.

Then in 1871, Sallie was confronted by a major problem when the Washington Public Works department decided to level the streets in her neighborhood to a common grade and install a much-needed water and sewer system in the city. The result was a lowering of F and 18th streets by seven feet, leaving many of the private residences “hanging in the air.”² There was a *furore* among the residents, including Henry Randall, an old Washingtonian who lived across the street from Sallie at 1800 F Street and was a long-time friend of the family. He appeared before the committee investigating the decision and expense of lowering the streets in 1872 and explained in heated detail the enormous inconvenience it had caused.³

The exact timing of the renovations to the house remains unknown, but it seems likely they occurred in the period following the lowering of the street and rental of the entire house to the Russian Imperial Legation as a residence of the minister in 1875. According to the District of Columbia tax records in 1875, the value of the improvements of the house jumped from \$8,000 to \$16,000 – reflecting, surely, the conclusion of major alterations. These would not only have included adding a fourth floor, but also elongating the second-floor windows on the F Street



A new third floor was added, as well as floor-length windows on the second floor.
 Photo: House Structural Report, Beyer Blinder Belle (2020), p. 58



The new cast iron balconies:
 Photo: Beyer Linder Belle, Historic Structural Report (2021), p. 58.

side of the house so that they extended to the floor. Interior shutters were added to the chair rail height, and attractive and decorative cast-iron balconies were placed on the exterior of the second floor.

Sallie was required to build a retaining wall around the south and east sections of the house, and she also created a new entry way to the house by constructing a two-story projecting bay.⁴ To reach the new street level, she had built a staircase of Seneca sandstone, and



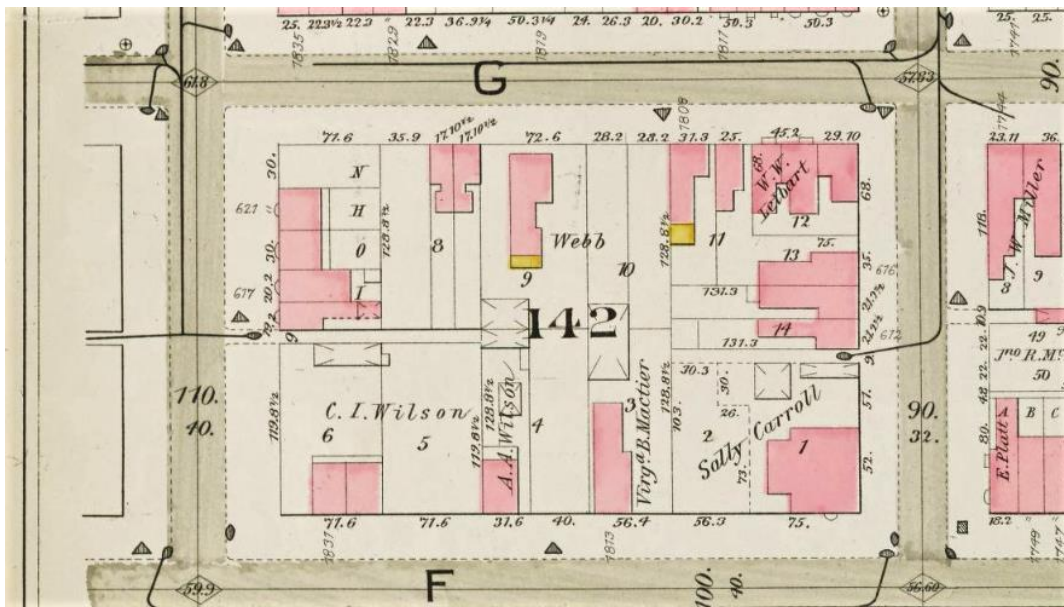
The portico added by Sallie Carroll in the 1870s (photo taken in 1895 before the house was sold). It was redesigned by Hornblower and Marshall Architects who were hired by Mary Ellen Fuller in 1896.

Courtesy, Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers.

embellished the sides with wrought iron railings and decorative lampposts. The staircase inside the house must also have been reconfigured at this time, allowing guests to move easily upstairs from the ground floor via a landing halfway up the stairs nestled in the new portico. The rear entry to the house had also to be adapted to the new lower level of the street, so a new driveway and staircase for the servant's entrance on the east side. In the interior of the house, gas-lit chandeliers may already have been installed in the two drawing rooms on the second floor. Sometime in the 1880s, Sallie added red-colored sheer fabric shades called "hollands" to the windows on the balcony, allowing a soft rosy glow from the afternoon sun to flood the rooms in the late daylight hours.⁵ The garden in the later part of the century was landscaped with gravel pathways, dotted with "inviting rustic seats," and planted with rose bushes. From the enclosed balcony, a wrought-iron staircase led down to the garden, often eliciting comment.⁶



The gas chandeliers that still adorn the north and south drawing rooms, first installed ca. 1871. Gas has been replaced by candles.



The Hopkins map of Square 142 dated 1887 shows the changes that Sallie made To Lots 2 and 3 (lower right) with the addition on the west and the north of porches, the elliptical entrance on the south, and an enlarged stable in Lot 15 and dependency behind the house that now probably included a laundry room.

Sally also had demolished the two dependencies in the rear of the house (on Lot 15) and had them replaced with new buildings. The carriage house was given a second story. The other

outbuilding was probably a storage area. Finally, sometime between 1887 and 1892, as shown in the Hopkins map of that year, a porch was added to the north side of the main house – now the enclosed Gallery.⁷ It allowed a further enlargement of the space for entertaining on the second floor. During her sixty years in the house, the steady number of structural changes reflected the care and interest Sallie Carroll took in the appearance and well-keeping of the house – at least until the last half decade of her life, when she rarely ventured out or entertained.

Who did Sallie rely on for these architectural changes? Did she have an architect help her with the implementation of the new features? Until 1874, the District did not require builders and architects to submit changes to houses to the local government, and thus the changes that were made to the structure of 1801 F Street are not mentioned in the records until those submitted by Hornblower and Marshall, acting on behalf of Mary Ellen Fuller, in 1896.

For these structural changes to the house, District of Columbia tax records show that only in 1875 were they reflected in the city's accounts. That year, Sally Carroll, not her father, Samuel Sprigg, was recognized as the taxpayer, and, as we have already pointed out, the improvements on the house doubled the property assessment.⁸

In the codicil to the will she made in 1894,⁹ Sallie identified a large number of household articles that she designated to her children and then to three of her granddaughters (Mary B. Brown and Sally Carroll Brown, daughter of Alida Carroll Brown, and Katie Dubois Carroll Beale, the daughter of Gen. Carroll. The special gifts that she bequeathed indicate that Sallie maintained an elegant table at her soirees – full sets (twelve) large and small spoons, forks, and knives, some of which were marked with her initials and may have been presented to her as a bride of sixteen in 1828. Alida Brown, who was wealthy, received none of the silverware, but she was bequeathed some favorite pieces of Sallie's – a sugar bowl and creamer, an silver epergne (a fruit or candy stand), the mantle clock with accompanying oil lamps and shades. Sally Esterhazy was given the family four-piece silver tea set. Sprigg's heirs – and most specifically Katie Beale, one of her favorites) were also given a special piece – a silver pitcher that had once belonged to Sallie's grandmother, Cornelia Van Horne Lansdale.¹⁰ For Carrie Bolles, Sallie provided a full silver setting for six (large and small forks and spoons), and a dozen of her silver teaspoons. Other items bequeathed in her will include waiters and wine decanters, plated oval serving dishes.¹¹

In a separate posting, we will discuss Sallie's greatest treasure, the "Carroll portraits" – the collection of Carroll and Sprigg family portraits that Sallie inherited and decorated her formal rooms with great pride – and which were distributed amongst her heirs after her death.

In the first five years of the 1870s, dramatic changes took place in 1801 F Street. Sallie's eldest daughter, Violetta died, and her husband remarried and moved out of the house. Their two sons were sent off to Dr. Griswold's School for Boys in Maryland, and Sallie Griffin, widowed since 1867, remarried in 1870 and left Washington to live with her husband, Count Esterhazy, at the Esterhazy estate in Hungary. With the house half empty, Sallie turned to renting out rooms, and possibly all of the house, for needed extra income.

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² *Times Picayune*, February 11, 1879, p. 6.

³ *Daily Morning Chronicle*, February 2, 1872, p. 4.

⁴ The changes in the house are drawn from Calderhead, 55; with corrections and additions suggested by Beyer, Blinder, Belle.

⁵ Mentioned in the coverage of the Marmion wedding reception in 1885: *Philadelphia Times*, as reprinted in the Charlestown WV *Virginia Free Press*, October 15, 1885, p. 4.

⁶ *Evening Star*, May 11, 1886, p. 2.

⁷ I am following the HSR by Beyer, Blinder Belle, 60.

⁸ National Archives and Records Administration, Corporation of Washington Tax Records, Vol. 142, p. 342

⁹ Added to her will on May 22, 1894 and appended to the probate of her will. A printed copy of the probate is found among the John Marshall Brown family papers in Portland, Maine:

¹⁰ She died in 1853; her portrait is found in the High Museum, Atlanta, a gift of a descendant of Sallie's cousin, Dr. John Moylan Thomas, son of Sally's aunt, Cornelia Van Horne Lansdale.

¹¹ The various items mentioned in this paragraph are found in the probate of Sallie Carroll's will, which was published by John Marshall Brown and filed with the District of Columbia Courts on June 16, 1896: Brown Papers, Copy in Box 11 (Estates), Folder 13 (Estate of Mrs. Sally Carroll).