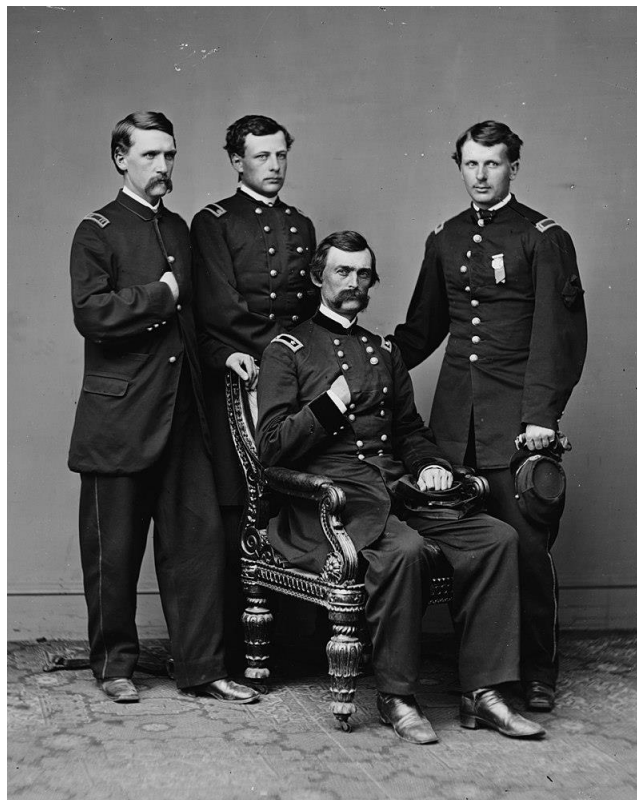


DACOR Bacon House and Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown

Terence Walz

I invite you to conjure up a scene that took place in this chapel on December 28, 1867, when Sally Carroll Griffin, the thirty-year-old daughter of William Thomas Carroll, erstwhile clerk of the Supreme Court, solemnly received on a chilly winter day the bodies of her husband, Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin, and her four-year-old son Charles Carroll Griffin, both of whom had died three months earlier in Galveston, Texas. Their bodies had been brought by train from New York, to which they had been transported from Texas, where Gen. Griffin was newly appointed commander of the Texas Military district and former overseer of the Freedman's Bureau, responsible for implementing Reconstruction laws in the rebellious state. Griffin had been one of Grant's right-hand men in the Army of the Potomac and was with him at Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865. The bodies were given full military honors in Washington. Two thousand troops and two hundred men on horseback had accompanied the two hearses, the general's drawn



Mathew Brady: Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin and his Staff, ca. 1864 during the Civil War.

Image: Library of Congress

by four white horses, his sword draped on the saddle, boots reversed on a riderless horse, from the train station at New Jersey Avenue down Pennsylvania Avenue to Oak Hill Cemetery. The marchers were accompanied by Gens. Grant, Sherman, and Comstock, the pall bearers being eight other generals, and viewed by dense crowds of Washingtonians, both Black and white, along the way.¹ Once the cortege arrived at Oak Hill, an Episcopal service was conducted by the rector of St John's Church; later, the family and friends of the general accompanied the two bodies to be interred in vaults in the mausoleum.



Maj. Gen. Griffin and his wife, Sally Carroll Griffin, in Petersburg, 1864, during one of her frequent trips to visit her husband on the battle front.



The Carroll Mausoleum, first used and possibly constructed in 1857.

The purchase or construction of the mausoleum by William and Sally Carroll was prompted in February 1857 by the deaths of two of their sons within a month of each other. Willie Thomas Carroll, not quite 24, had finally succumbed to tuberculosis after a long and painful illness; his much younger brother Howard, only five, died a month later. Four years later, another son, an infant six months old, was interred, shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War. The first bodies had been placed in the mausoleum in May 1857, according to the cemetery records.



A view of the Carroll family mausoleum vaults.

The mausoleum stands in Lot 292 of the cemetery, at the end of the path running on the far edge of the cemetery overlooking Rock Creek below. The design is modified neo-Classical, and it was constructed to hold twenty vaults. It is unknown if Carroll ordered the mausoleum from designs provided by a local monument maker, such as Henry Parry, who had an office near their residence at Pennsylvania Avenue between 18th and 19th streets and who offered ready-made mausoleums for sale at Oak Hill in the mid-1850s,² or whether it was designed by a local architect and constructed by a monument maker. The mausoleum resembles several others in the cemetery, such as the nearby Churchill-Baird Mausoleum (built for Gen. Sylvester Churchill, d. 1862), and the Marshall Brown Mausoleum (built for Marshall Brown, son of the proprietor of the Brown's Indian Queen Hotel, d. 1881).



Churchill-Baird Mausoleum, constructed ca 1862.



Marshall Brown Mausoleum, constructed ca 1881?

One of the great attractions of Oak Hill, aside from its rural setting, rolling hills, winding paths and lovely landscaped trees, was its view of Rock Creek below. The situation of the Carroll Mausoleum, directly overlooking the creek, must have enhanced its value.

In the course of the next half century, more than a dozen bodies were interred. The patriarch of the family, William Thomas Carroll, died in 1863 – unexpectedly – and the five-month-old second-born son of Gen. Griffin and Sally Griffin was interred the following year. When Sally Carroll’s mother died in Maryland in 1865, she, too, was placed in a vault. At this time, the body of her husband, former Maryland governor Samuel Sprigg, was transferred from his burial spot in Maryland and brought to Oak Hill. All of the Carroll’s children and some grandchildren had vaults available or waiting for them. There were three notable children missing from the mausoleum: Countess Sally Esterhazy, the widow of Charles Griffin and Sally’s best-known child, is buried in Mortlake Cemetery, London; her brother Charles H. Carroll, Sally’s estranged son, is buried in a veteran’s cemetery in Dayton, Ohio, and Alida Carroll Brown, perhaps Sally’s favorite child, is buried with her husband in a church they constructed in Falmouth, Maine. Both Sally Carroll and Alida Carroll Brown set aside money for the upkeep of the mausoleum, but costs for maintaining it have risen out of all expectation. The last interment took place in 2008 when Lucy Marbury Blundon, Sally’s great-great granddaughter, was laid to rest in one of the empty vaults.

But the Carroll Mausoleum’s fame today is not due to anything the Carrolls or their in-laws did, but to the fact that the family allowed it to be used to shelter the body of Abraham Lincoln’s beloved son Willie, who died of typhoid fever in 1862. He remained there until taken to Springfield with his father in April 1865. How did this come about? I believe that the newly appointed senator from Illinois, Orville Browning, who was close to the Lincolns, was the likely go-between. He was also friends with William Carroll, whose job as Clerk in the Supreme Court brought him into almost daily contact with the senator when they were in session. Browning, a lawyer, had previously known Carroll and sent him copies of briefs of cases he argued before the Supreme Court before he became senator. Thus, when the Lincoln’s young son Willie suddenly died in March 1862 and Browning was asked by the grief-stricken Lincolns to make the funeral arrangements, Browning may have known that the Carrolls had recently interred their deceased son in their mausoleum at Oak Hill, not far from the White House. The Lincolns knew the Carroll family – they had attended the wedding of Sally Carroll to the young Capt. Griffin in December 1861. So, with the Lincolns’ approval, Browning arranged for the body to be temporarily placed in the Carroll’s mausoleum until the appropriate time to move it to Springfield, Illinois. Willie’s embalmed body, placed in a coffin with a clear lid allowing for a

viewing, was interred on March 24, 1862, and Mrs. Lincoln sent fresh flowers twice a week, allowing the vault to be freshly scented.³ She never visited the mausoleum, but it was rumored President Lincoln did. This became the theme of a recent novel, *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders, which has resulted in waves of pilgrims to the spot and caused the cemetery to produce a small brochure that guides visitors to it.

The Carrolls were not the only residents or owners of DACOR Bacon House to have a connection with Oak Hill. Thomas Lee Ringgold, the son of Tench Ringgold, the first owner and resident, married into the Upshur family, wealthy planters from the eastern shore of Virginia; he is buried with them on a hill not far from the Carroll Mausoleum.⁴ A grandson of Tench Ringgold, the son of his daughter, Sidney Lee Ringgold White, is also buried in Oak Hill. He was Edward Douglass White, chief justice of the Supreme Court, 1910-1921.⁵ Thus, the cemetery is very much connected to the house's long and distinguished history.

¹ *Evening Star*, December 28, 1867, p. 4; *New York Evening Post*, December 28, 1867, p. 4. All the troops stationed in Washington were ordered to attend: *Daily National Republican*, December 28, 1867, p. 2. The funeral was noted in newspapers across the country.

² *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 9, 185, p. 1.

³ Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL, "Memoir of Mrs. Mary Miner Hill, written in 1923," p. 13, quoting letter from her father to her older sister, Katie.

⁴ North Hill, Lot 159.

⁵ Stewart, Lot 600 East.