

Management of the House at F n 18 w or 174 F Street N in the 19th Century

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“Behind the Scenes: Management of Great Houses in the 19th Century”

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DACOR Bacon House was built in 1825 and occupied for the rest of the century by two families, the Ringgolds (1825-1834) and the Carrolls (1835-1895). Until 1870, it was identified as the house at F n and 18 w or 174 F Street. Both families came from the old Maryland Plantocracy that was used to purchasing and selling people to work in their houses and on their lands. The house under the Ringgolds and the Carrolls was first entirely staffed by enslaved Blacks, and then, beginning in the late 1840s, by hired free help, both Black and non-Black who worked together for almost a decade and a half. In the 1860s, fully half of the staff consisted of Irish men and women, and steadily the ratio of Irish to Blacks increased until the end of the Carroll period in the house. When Chief Justice Melville Fuller moved into the house in 1896, his wife hired free Black help almost exclusively, and the Irish era came to a close.



The house at F n and 18 w or 174 F N as it may have looked when first built in 1825 and until the 1870s. From *DACOR Bacon House: Historic Structure Report*, Beyer Blinder Belle 2021

Who managed the house? Under the Ringgolds, it would appear it either Ringgold, or his eldest daughter, Mary Digges Galloway Ringgold, or a Black enslaved man or woman who directed the household staff. Both of Ringgold's wives suffered ill health during their lives and may have been unable to attend to daily matters. Ringgold was used to owning people: he bought, sold and put them up for mortgage throughout his life. Until he was appointed marshal in 1818, he was an entrepreneur, engaged in a variety of businesses, from warehousing, to ropewalks, to brick factories and finally tanneries. The men and women who worked for him required training in the particular skills they were asked to do. When they were sold, Ringgold listed the skills that they had acquired.

<i>Enslaved Household of Tench Ringgold (1825-1834)</i>					
Number in Household					
	Men	Women	Children	Total	
1820 census		4	7	7	18
1830 census		4	7	2	13
1840 census		2	3	0	5
Betsy					
Louisa (b. 1822) – daughter of Betsy					
Elizabeth (b. 1844) – daughter of Louisa					
Ben Dorsey – escaped 1825					
Susan – sued for freedom of her and her children 1837					
Kitty, Mary, Maria, and Thomas					
Unknown: 5-10 men, women and children					
37 enslaved at his estate in Washington County, Maryland (1804)					
18 mortgaged in 1807, including Monica Brown, freed in 1815, and Paul and Nelly and their kids					
18 purchased from his mother-in-law, Fanny Carter Lee in 1818 with brother-in-law William Brent and subsequently sold					
18 co-owned with J. Loockerman and sold for \$10,500 in 1817					

We know a few of their names. An important woman in the house may have been Betsy, who had been given to him by his father-in-law ca. 1807, and who became a mother and grandmother of enslaved household women. Families among enslaved people may have been encouraged; there were several among the scores of people that Ringgold owned. In one advertisement offering people for sale, he claimed he wished to sell families as a unit rather than split them up. We don't know how successful he was – or even honest about his wish – but he did keep Betsy and her daughter together. He also allowed another enslaved woman named Susan to keep her four children with her. But when he was forced to move out of the District in 1833 because of a debt he owed to his own daughter and sell the house, Susan proved unwilling to go, and sued him for her freedom and the freedom of her children. We believe she was successful and was able to stay in the city with her husband and children the rest of her life.

100 DOLLARS REWARD.
RAN AWAY from the subscriber, living in Wash-
ington, D. C on the 3d instant, a colored Man,
called **BEN DORSEY**. He is about twenty-four years
of age, five feet seven or eight inches high, very black,
and generally smiles when spoken to, remarkably small
and white teeth, and a very open countenance; had on
a black wool hat, blue cloth close bodied coat, white
waistcoat, and coarse linen pantalouns. I will give a
reward of Twenty Dollars for his recovery, if taken in
the District; and the above reward, if he is taken out
of the District and lodged in jail so that I get him again.
TENCH RINGGOLD,
June 10—3w , Marshal Dist. of Col.

In an advertisement in the *Daily National Intelligencer* June 10, 1825,
Ringgold offers a reward for the capture of Ben Dorsey,
who escaped enslavement at the Ringgold house in June 1825.

Another member of the Ringgold staff we know about is Ben Dorsey who escaped just about the time the house at 18th and F Streets was ready for occupation or had already been moved into. Ben had dressed in a blue coat, a white waistcoat, and pantaloons, which suggests he was either a coachman or waiter. He was not recaptured and may have found freedom up north.

The Carrolls and their Enslaved Staff

According to the 1830 census, Sally Carroll, then only 18 and mother of a daughter, managed a house on Capitol Hill with eight enslaved people, including two elderly men. Two of those were a woman her husband William had purchased in 1827 named Mariah Warren, and the other was

John Brooks who had been given to them by Sally’s father from among the 60 to 100 people working his 600-acre farm in Prince George’s County. If some of the workers were not sufficiently skilled at what they did, William would lease enslaved men from other houses; one was William Shorter who he contracted to pay \$10 a month for a period of three years; this sum was paid to the owner, not to William. But by and large, it seems it was Mrs. Carroll who managed the house herself.

<i>Enslaved Household of Sally and William Carroll (1835-1862)</i>				
	Men	Women	Children	Total
1830 census	4	3	1	8
1840 census	3	2	4	9
Colored (probably free)	3		(3)	
1850 census	3	2	1	6
(free)	0	(2)		(2)
1860 census	2	1		3
(free, Irish)	0	(4)		(4)
John Brooks (1828) (married to Mary Brooks)		freed 1862		
Mariah Warren (1827-1885)		sold 1855; freed 1862		
Nellie Warren Freeman (1834-1907)		freed 1862		
Henry Warren (1838- ?)		freed 1862		
Henrietta Warren (1840-1920)		given to Violetta Mercer, freed 1862		
Fanny Lee (1810)		sold 1856; freed 1862		
Unknown: 6 or more				

As the Carrolls began entertaining on a more lavish scale, they purchased specialty cooks, such as Fanny Lee, who was known as a quality pastry chef and French cook. (At this time, we are unsure what “French cook” meant.¹) She may not have been up to the task of entertaining at the level Mrs. Carroll liked, and so she was sold in 1856 to a free Black woman who hired her out as a cook until she was freed in 1862. Mrs. Carroll began advertising in the *Daily National Intelligencer* for cooks, beginning in 1855, and again in 1863. It is clear she used

newspapers to find cooks and seamstresses, both of which were in demand in her household which included four daughters in constant need of new dresses for their social rounds. Mrs. Carroll was also fond of clothing and at the end of her life, in 1895, some 70 of her dresses were donated by her granddaughter to the Home of the Incurables, a favorite charity.

In the 1850s, the enslaved staff was down to three or four people: John Brooks, the lead waiter who had been with the Carrolls since 1828, Mariah Warren and her three children: Nellie, Henry, and Henrietta. Mariah, who had been with them since 1827, was sold on Christmas Day to her husband for \$352, and she moved out of the house and in with her husband, a wagoner. John appears to have rented a place on 20th Street, between E and F – not far from the Carroll house – suggesting they hoped to stay close to the children. During or after the Civil War, they moved to a place on 16th Street. It appears that Nellie was assigned to look after Alida, the youngest daughter, and Henrietta may have been assigned to look after Violetta, the eldest. In any event, Henrietta was “given” to Violetta when she married in 1856, and after their first child was born in 1858, she too left the house to live with Violetta and her doctor husband in West River, Maryland. During the Civil War, they moved back into Washington. Henry and Nellie remained enslaved at the Carroll house until 1862, when all DC slaves were freed and their owners compensated. In William Carroll’s estimation in 1862, Henry was worth \$750 while John Brooks, his waiter, was valued at \$2,000. Whatever these estimations mean, they suggest Henry was assigned dogbody work at the house – running errands, stocking coal and wood, possibly serving as coachman, and helping at the table when needed.

The Warrens can be followed in the years after the Civil War ended when they were free. Briefly, Henrietta may have continued to work for the Mercers after the war – i.e. with the Carrolls, with whom the Mercers were living – but by 1880 she was employed as a servant, nurse, and later cook for the widow of Adm. Charles Wilkes and their daughter. Nellie may have continued working for the Carrolls, but she in 1868 she left after she married a leader of one of the Black masonic lodges who was also a clerk in the Treasury Department. They lived with their mother Mariah, now widowed, at 1204 16th Street, which became the family hearth until the end of the century. I believe Nellie was hired by Alida Carroll Brown to look at her newborn



Cropped photograph of “Mammy” who may be Nellie Warren Freeman, formerly enslaved in the Carroll household, working in post-Civil War period as a nanny in Maine for the Brown family.
Image: Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers.

children in Maine, and she divided her time between Washington and Portland until the 1880s when she returned permanently to Washington. She and Henrietta lived out their days on 16th Street and then later found a place on Pierce Place where both died, Nellie in 1907 and Henrietta in 1920.

Of their brother, Henry, little is found in the record. After he was freed in 1862, he boarded at his parent’s home on 20th Street. Then he left and disappears from the record in the District. A Henry Warren is found in the records of the Freedman’s Bureau, but is it he?

The Coming of the Irish

In the 1850s, Mrs. Carroll began to hire young Irish female servants to work alongside her enslaved Blacks. Typically, they appear to work for short periods of time (the names change almost every decade), and there was a tendency to hire sisters. Structural changes were made in the house during these years. Two bedrooms were carved up in the space on the ground floor, and a servant’s dining room was created. They were spartanly furnished. We know this from the inventory of the house that was made when William Carroll died in 1863, and the furnishing of

Free-born Workers in Carroll Household (1850 – 1895)

Mary Brooks (1850)	35	Penn.	Servant (Black), wife of John Brooks	
Mary Clay (1850)	40	England	governess?	
Mary Murphey (1860)	26	Ireland	cook	
Julia Murphey (1860)	23	Ireland	servant	
Mary Santry (1860)	23	Ireland	servant	
Sarah O'Neal (1860)	20	Ireland	seamstress	
Kate Mccorley (1870)	30	Ireland	servant	
Ellen Mccorley (1870)	28	Ireland	servant	
Annie O'Neal (1870)	30	Ireland	servant,	
Julia Welsh (1870)	23	Ireland	servant	
Warren Bell (1870)	23	Virginia	servant	White
David Reel (1870)	39	Ireland	coachman? gardener?	
James Jackson (1870)	15	Maryland	servant	Black
Richard Newton (1870)	21	DC	servant	Black
James Jackson (1880)	26	Maryland	servant	Black
Delia Noonan (1880)	30	(Ireland)	servant	died 1897
Julia Noonan (1880)	28	Ireland	cook	died 1892

each room is listed. We might guess that the bedrooms were constructed for the Irish servants; before that, the enslaved population would have slept on wooden floors in the ground level or dirt floors in the stables; or they would have been allowed to live outside the house as was common practice in the District.

When her son Gen. Carroll returned to live in Washington at the end of the Civil War, he hired John Flynn, an Ohio veteran, as a gardener. He subsequently was employed by Mrs. Carroll perhaps as a gardener but also as a coachman and started living in the house. There John met one of the Irish servants and they were married and began a life on their own. This was one of the time-honored ways that Irish women met potential husbands and started families of their own.

Later Days

In the mid-1860s, three names appear in the census and the Washington directories that remain until Mrs. Carroll died in 1895. They are Delia Noonan and her sister Julia, and Jimmy Jackson, a Maryland Black man. The Noonans – Julia, a cook, and Delia, a lady's maid, -- were members of the Irish community that lived in Foggy Bottom, and were parishioners at St.

Stephen's Church. According to church and newspaper records, they were the daughters of Bridget and David Noonan, who emigrated to the U.S. in the 1850s. They seem to have first worked for Richard Dominicus Cutts, the son of Dolley Madison's sister, and it may be that the link with Dolley's family would have provided the recommendation that Sally needed in order to hire them. They worked for her until Julia died in 1892. Delia was one of the people at Mrs. Carroll's deathbed in 1895.

As for Jimmy, more needs to be done on his life outside the Carroll house. He was ill in 1870, we know, and his father came to visit him, staying overnight. When he went out to the well in the courtyard behind the house for a drink in the middle of the night, he had a heart attack and died. So it was reported in the papers. When Mrs. Carroll died, she left Jimmy and Delia \$300 each, and so we know both were highly trusted and loved by her.

Marian Gouverneur, who wrote a great memoir of life in Washington in the 19th century, mentions the Carrolls at length, and believed that Mrs. Carroll loved entertaining so much she maintained two staffs. That is unlikely, considering her continual financial straits, but perhaps people thought Black and White servants represented different sets of workers. But we do know from newspaper accounts that Mrs. Carroll had her big parties catered, especially the weddings that she was fond of hosting. When her middle daughter Carrie was married a second time to a British diplomat, she asked the famous hotelier and restaurateur Wormley to cater the event for her. We can imagine that their famous terrapin stew might have been among the food items featured.

¹ One definition I've seen is someone skilled in using leftovers.