

## Mr. Carroll and His Bibles

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William Thomas Carroll was Clerk of the Supreme Court in March 1861 when newly elected President Abraham Lincoln was to be sworn in at the Capitol by Chief Justice Roger Taney. His arrival in Washington had been fraught with danger as he passed through unruly pro-Confederate crowds in Baltimore before arriving in Washington. In the drama and rush to his inauguration, it is not surprising that the “family Bible” on which he was to be sworn in as chief executive had not arrived from Springfield. Luckily, Mr. Carroll had a Bible in his office which was kept for oath-taking purposes in the Court, and it was brought out and used on March 4 – and known ever after as the “Lincoln Bible.”



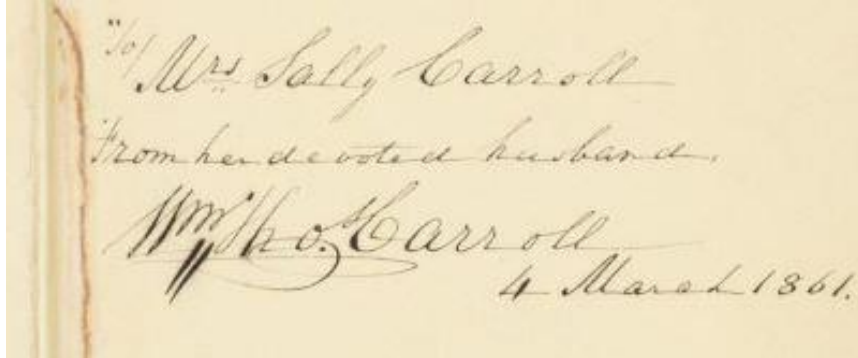
Early photograph of Lincoln's first inauguration. Mr. Carroll is probably somewhere in the dais of this crowd.

The use of Mr. Carroll's Bible at the Lincoln inauguration has often been told.<sup>1</sup> What is less known is that Mr. Carroll was also asked to produce a Bible for the swearing-in of President

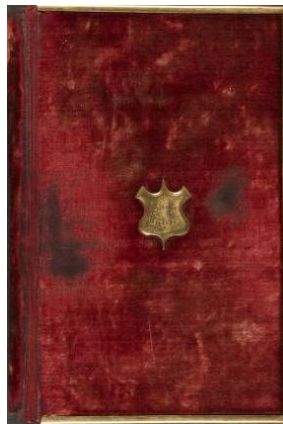


The Lincoln Bible opened to the last page on which the always-thorough William Carroll provided details of its use on this historic occasion, sealing it with the seal of the Supreme Court.

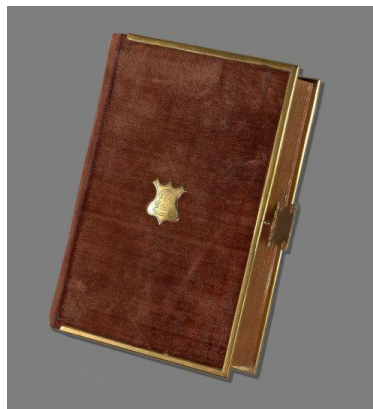
James Buchanan four years earlier. That Bible was the same edition but not the same Bible as the one used by Lincoln, but it, too, is dedicated to Sally Carroll, his wife.<sup>2</sup> The “Buchanan” Bible was presented to the Smithsonian by his niece, Harriet Lane Johnston in 1906.<sup>3</sup>



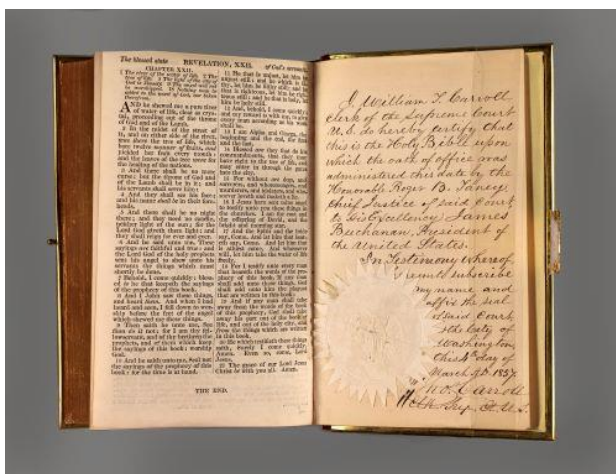
The “Lincoln” Bible is dedicated “To Mrs. Sally Carroll, from her devoted husband, Wm Thos. Carroll, 4 March 1861.” Image 5 of the Library of Congress series of book images. A similar dedication is also made in the “Buchanan Bible.”



The Lincoln Bible, used by Lincoln, Obama and Trump. Presented to the Library of Congress by Robert Lincoln.



The “Buchanan” Bible, presented to the Smithsonian by Buchanan’s niece, Harriet Lane Johnston, in 1906.



The Buchanan Bible was also dutifully inscribed and sealed by William T. Carroll and dated March 4, 1857. Image: Smithsonian Institution.

The Carrolls were known to both the Buchanan and Lincoln families, though in different ways. Sally and William attended a dinner party at the White House in June 1857, three months after Buchanan had been sworn in. A riot broke out in Washington that evening by the Know-Nothings, a group that was anti-Catholic and anti-Black. These political discontents were joined by a similar-thinking group from Baltimore called the “Plug-Uglies,” a name given to them because of the hats they wore.<sup>4</sup> Shops and shopkeepers were attacked, and the local police was brought in to restore order. Seven people were killed. Many years later, the riot was remembered when a quilt, made out of the dress that Sally Carroll wore that evening, was given to the Maine Historical Society by her descendants, and tagged: “Made from dress worn by Mrs. Sally Sprigg Carroll / at dinner at [at] President's House night of riot of / "Plug Uglies" / ABOVE WRITTEN ON A CARD ENCLOSED BY / Mrs. Herbert Payson.”<sup>5</sup>



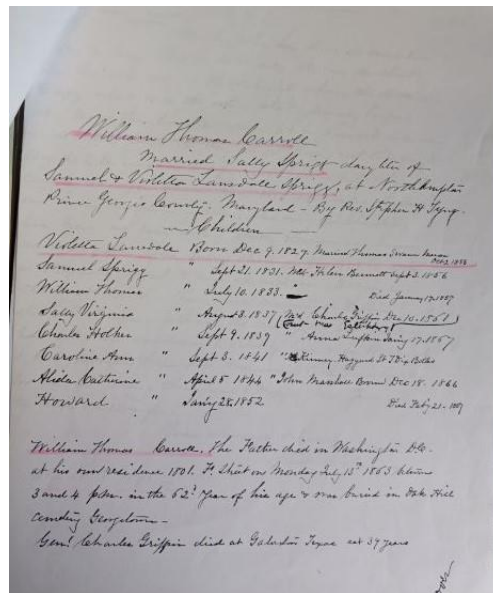
Quilt made by descendants of Sally Carroll of dress she wore to the White House in 1857. Image: Maine Historical Society.

The Carrolls’ acquaintance and friendship with the Lincolns is lengthy and richly complex. It deserves a separate posting. Suffice it to say that it began on March 4, 1861 and continued until the body of Willie Lincoln, the president’s young son who died in February 1862, was removed

from the Carroll family mausoleum in Oak Hill Cemetery, Georgetown, in April 1865 to join the body of his father on the long trip back to Springfield, Illinois, where they were both finally laid to rest.<sup>6</sup>

There is a third Carroll Bible that needs to be mentioned. This was the Carroll family Bible that was maintained by William and/or Sally for many years and is currently in the hands of a descendant family. Its existence is referenced in a letter written by Sally Carroll to President Millard Fillmore in 1852 regarding the application by her son, Samuel Sprigg Carroll (known as Spriggs to the family), to the president for admission to West Point Military Academy in 1851. In it, she wrote that by accident she came across the letter he had written and realized he had not stated his correct age. "The family Bible, in which the ages of all my children are recorded, Spriggs could not get access to at the time of writing his letter, and relying upon his own knowledge of himself, did not wait to see it."<sup>7</sup> In her letter to Fillmore, she corrected the age her son thought he was and hoped it would allow him to be admitted to the academy.<sup>8</sup>

Almost a hundred and fifty years later, the descendants of William and Sally Carroll applied to have the body of the deceased Lucy Mercer Marbury Blundon, who died in 2008,<sup>9</sup> interred in the Carroll Mausoleum. As proof of the family tie, they submitted a handwritten list of the birth dates of Sally's children, from her firstborn, Violetta (from whom Ms. Blundon was descended) to her son Howard. (Missing is her last child, William Cuyler Carroll who was born and died in 1861; he, too, is buried in the mausoleum.) The "Carroll family Bible" provided information about some of the Carroll children that is not known in any other family source.



Transcription of births and marriages of the Carroll children, from the Carroll family Bible, submitted to Oak Hill Cemetery as evidence of the descent of Lucy Mercer Blundon in 2009.

Image from the Carroll File, Oak Hill Cemetery Office.

Thus, William Carroll had many Bibles, not merely the copy he kept stocked in an office at the Supreme Court. Who would have thought that the one he inscribed for President Lincoln would be used three times in our recent history?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln\\_Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_Bible); <https://www.loc.gov/item/prn-08-236/>;  
<https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/god-and-country/2008/12/23/the-story-behind-the-lincoln-bible-at-obamas-inauguration>;

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/09012/obama.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/bible-upon-which-u-s-president-james-buchanan-took-oath-office-24476>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plug\\_Uglies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plug_Uglies).

<sup>5</sup> ] Plug Uglies Crazy Quilt, Collections of Maine Historical Society, Coll. 2145, 2005.278.022. See the Historical Society's social media posting on the quilt:

<https://x.com/mainehistory/status/1781322838307115213>. Mrs. Payson was Sally Carroll Brown, Sally Carroll's granddaughter.

<sup>6</sup> Today the Mausoleum is the most popular site visited by tourists.

<sup>7</sup> For this letter, see my posting, [http://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Old\\_Brick\\_Top.pdf](http://www.dacorbacon.org/docs/Old_Brick_Top.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> He was admitted in 1852, graduated in 1856, and went on to a decorated career in the Union army during the Civil War.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/27086406/lucy-mercier-blundon>.

<sup>10</sup> The Lincoln Bible was used by Obama and Trump in 2009 and 2017, and was at least held in the hands of Mrs. Trump in the 2025 inaugural ceremony.