

Sarah Virginia Carroll, Countess Esterhazy

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Part 2 Countess Esterhazy



Sarah, Countess Esterhazy in her heyday in Washington, DC.
Photo undated, ca. 1890s¹

Following the death in 1867 of her husband, Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin, Sally went into mourning for at least a year. With the election of Gen. Grant as president, and thanks to her friendship with Julia Grant during the Civil War, Sally re-emerged into society and was invited to events that the Grants held before and after his inauguration in March 1869.² She started seeing other friends and acquaintances. In March 1870 it was rumored that she was being romanced by Count Maxmillian Esterhazy of the Austro-Hungarian embassy,³ which they both flatly denied.⁴ But in June 5, 1870, she was married at home to the count in the presence of President and Mrs. Grant, Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, the French and Spanish ambassadors and many other members of the diplomatic corps.⁵ Because Max was Catholic, they were married by Rev. H. B. Coskery, vicar general and administrator of the archbishopric of Baltimore, who was well-known to the Catholic Carroll families.⁶ It is unclear whether Sally converted to Catholicism on his

account, because she seemed to have continued to attend St. John's Church when she returned to Washington after the count's death. On the other hand, she requested a requiem mass at the Catholic cathedral in London when she died.⁷

The new Countess Esterhazy and her husband may have begun their married life in the Carroll mansion. When she and the Count decided to travel to Europe, he kept an "official" residence at the Carroll house for at least a year.⁸ At some point, he must have resigned his position in the diplomatic service, and he and Sally moved permanently to Europe. They resided in an 800-acre farm on or close to the Esterhazy estate at Tata (western Hungary, not far from the Danube) that was called Remetésey, though that may be the name of the village close by. They may also have often spent time traveling in England and France. Periodically, they may have returned to the United States to see her mother and family, as they were rumored to have done in 1872.⁹

Count Maximilian (or Miksa, as was his given name in Hungarian) was born in Vienna in 1837, the second son of Count Miklos Ferenc Esterhazy. He joined the foreign service of the newly created Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy (1867), first posted to Berlin and then to Washington. His spotty biography indicates that he established the first sporting club in Budapest and was also known for breeding dogs.¹⁰ A remarkable letter he wrote from Hungary to his mother-in-law is found in the John Marshall Brown Papers in Portland was obviously treasured by Mrs. Carroll and kept safely with her until she died.¹¹ It describes in detail the visit of Emperor Franz Joseph to Tata, which had been selected as the site for practice military maneuvers of the Austro-Hungarian army.



Count Miksa Ernő Esterhazy de Galantha (1837-1883),
aka Max Esterhazy.

Dated September 7, 1874 and written from "The Pavilion" in Tovaros, the village attached to Tata palace, and conveys the excitement they felt upon receiving news in England in August while staying in Tunbridge Wells of the emperor's approaching visit and his subsequent stay at the Esterhazy palace at Tata. They immediately set out for the family estate – in western

Hungary – stopping in Paris and Vienna along the way, reaching Tata in time for the emperor’s visit from August 25th through the 5th of September. The emperor and his encourage had been invited to occupy the palace, naturally necessitating Max’s father, Count Miklos Ferenc Esterhazy, to vacate and take up quarters in the family-owned “pavilion” in Tovaros. When Max and Sally arrived at the pavilion, they discovered they were housed in close quarters – barely room for the three of them plus servants.

The estate and manor house were crowded with officers and military attachés from all the countries that had full ties with the empire. Max included in his letter a list of all the officers, including the number of horses that they brought, all of which had to be cared for by the



Sally, Countess Esterhazy as depicted on the frontispiece of “The Esterhazy Ripple.”

It may have been taken from a sketch of her that appeared in an earlier foreign magazine when she was living in Hungary.

Esterhazy estate. The emperor alone brought thirty-five horses; and his imperial staff brought another 135, all of which had to be quartered in Tata or at neighboring chateaux and manor houses. The much-loved empress Elizabeth was not present, and in fact there were no women accompanying the exercise. Sally, as Max explained, was graciously excused from dining with the emperor for this reason. In fact, she was not personally introduced to him, but she was invited to be part of a crowd of people allowed near him, and therefore seen by him and all others. As Max commented in his letter to Sally Carroll, “Everybody was most polite and attentive to Sally, and she really has had in a few days capital opportunities and seeing knowing and getting acquainted with a most distinguished set of men.”

What Sally’s days were like during her years with Count Esterhazy are not completely blank, thanks to a letter from her also found in the John Marshall Brown Papers that was written from “Remetésej,” and dated July 9th, but without a year. From references to events in the letter,

it appears to have been written in 1879¹² in response to a long letter from her sister Alida describing her life at Thornhurst, the farm in Falmouth outside Portland, Maine, that she and John Marshall Brown had built in their later life.

Their farm included a manor house and stables, and a barracks or living quarters for the “bailiff” (overseer), farm hands, their wives and children, and the domestic servants of the manor house and their families. Sally mentions some three men who worked in the house alongside six women; there were two coachmen as well, one for the count and countess, and another who worked with the farmhands. The total number of farmhands is unmentioned, but they would have also included stable boys, at least one of whom was liveried, a wheelwright or blacksmith, and a head gardener and his assistant.



Tata Palace today. It was recently restored and reopened as a tourist destination.¹³ This may not have been the manor house in which Sally and Max lived, but rather where his father and elder brother would have lived, both of whom died only in 1881.

Wheat, barley and maize were grown on the land. Wheat and barley may have been commercial crops, the maize cultivated for the livestock, which consisted of sixteen oxen, nine milk cows, an unknown number of heifers and calves, and 400 sheep. In the stables, nine horses and a pair of donkeys were kept. The Esterhazy estate would also have included forested areas. Sally mentioned in another part of the letter that guests were expected for the hunting season, if the count, then ailing from a feverish condition, recovered sufficiently to hunt with them.

Sally spelled out the duties of each of the domestic workers, the food they were served every day, and the salaries they received. According to her, they were well fed, with a “hot meat soup” every day, plus meat and two vegetables and “a pint of vin ordinaire” with their main meals. One gathers that she and the count lived on the second floor of the manor, where they ate and slept and had living rooms, and the servants kept to the ground floor, where they ate and worked. The arrangement must have resembled the household arrangement of their parents on F Street, where the workspace was on the ground level, and the drawing rooms, dining room were

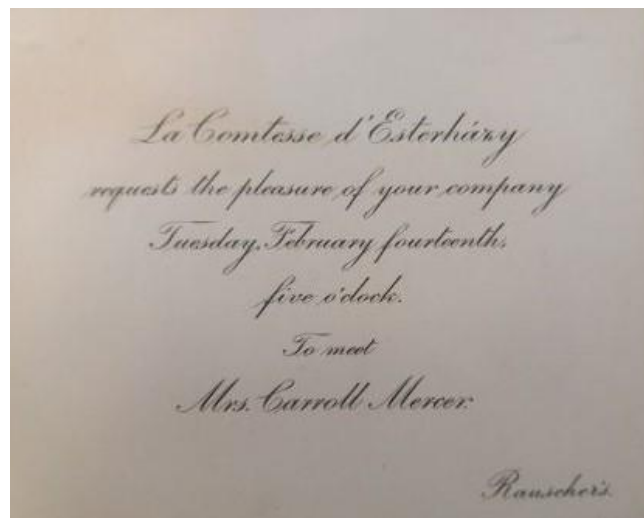
on the second, and bedrooms on the upper floors. She concluded this part of the letter saying that while they had more servants than the Browns, there was plenty for them to do.

Sally mentions that she spoke English only with her husband, while with visitors and servants her language was either French or German. Apparently, she did not understand or learn Hungarian. She felt comfortable in French, but wrote she needed more work on her German.¹⁴ The letter to Alida is sprinkled with French phrases, and she admits that so unused to using the language she had to stretch her mind to remember a correct English word. In fact, her writing is full of awkward wording. Sally would have been married some nine or ten years when this letter was written, and of her past life in Washington, not an allusion is made. She is clearly leading a full and comfortable life in Hungary, but she does not mention a single individual in the house by name, including her father-in-law and the older and younger brothers of her husband.¹⁵ Of the farm hands and domestic servants, she describes them as “wretches” – which, charitably, might be a reflection of her view of their humble abodes and clothing.

From this letter and the single letter that has survived from Count Esterhazy – and there must have been many from him and from Sally to her mother – we can gather they were genuinely fond of each other. In one letter to Alida Brown written at a later date, Sally mentioned her loneliness and fear of old age, adding “I long to join Max.”¹⁶

Max died in 1883 when he was only forty-six. The estate at Tata would have passed to Max’s younger brother, Miklós Pal Esterhazy de Galantha, since his father and eldest brother died two years earlier.¹⁷ Sally took a year to finalize financial and other arrangements with the family, and in December 1884, she was back at 1801 F Street, having decided to return to live with her mother. Newspapers in Washington were predicting that she would arrive home in time for Christmas, a favorite season for Mrs. Carroll.¹⁸

Washington had dramatically changed in the fourteen years she had been away. The population had grown hugely as a result of the Civil War and Reconstruction days. It had also entered the gilded age. Newly rich people from all over the country spent “the season” in Washington during the winter and often erected European-style palazzos to house



Invitation that Sally issued for a gathering at the fashionable Rauscher’s Restaurant to meet her nephew’s wife, Minnie Mercer in 1898. Note the use of her title in French. She was then living at 1730 H Street.¹⁹

themselves during their few months in the capital. Women with titles, such as Sally, were vaunted in society – being that special breed of American girl who had married into European nobility. Frederick Cunliffe-Owen and his wife put together the first edition in 1890 of *Titled Americans*, and “Countess Maximilian Esterhazy-Galantha” makes her first appearance in it.²⁰ Her letters to Alida during this period show that she received each week a dozen or so invitations to social gatherings, mostly teas and receptions, but also dinners and balls. Her appearance at them was dutifully noted in the newspapers, which also noted what she was wearing and somewhat what jewels she was sporting. Like her mother and sister Carrie, she was a parishioner at St. John’s Church; another member of the church was a Washington composer named Mrs.

The “Esterhazy Ripple.”

It is not often that one finds so many charming features blended as appear in the “Esterhazy Ripple,” a musical composition of which Mrs. Alice C. Hill, of Washington, is the author. The Countess Esterhazy’s picture makes a lovely frontispiece, and the fact that the music is dedicated to the Rt. Hon. W. A. Leonard, Bishop of Ohio, late of Washington, adds to its attractions. Professor Sousa, leader of the Marine Band, is having a score made of it, and it will no doubt be heard on Wednesday evening when the Potomac Relief Corps, auxiliary to the G. A. R., give their anniversary banquet at Willard’s Hotel.

Sunday Herald and Weekly National Intelligencer, November 15, 1891, p. 7.
The frontispiece portrait of the countess appears at the top of this chapter.

Alice Hill, who was enthralled by both the countess’s presence and the rector of the Parish, Leonard Hall, who in 1891 left to become the Episcopal Bishop of Ohio. That year she wrote a waltz in his honor which she called “The Esterhazy Ripple,” and it was shown to John Philip Sousa, director of the U.S. Marine Band, who adopted it for the band and performed on February 18, 1892, in the Masonic Hall. The performance was attended by some 600 people. Mrs. Hill had previously arranged a number of pieces performed by the Marine Band.²¹ The newspaper coverage indicates that Sally was not in the audience.

From the time of her return to Washington until her departure in 1904, Sally spent the hot and humid summer months away from Washington, often at Deer Park, a fashionable new resort linked by rail to Washington. In addition to the main hotel, wealthy patrons also built “cottages” nearby. Sally usually went with her mother, while she was alive, and/or her sister, Carrie, when she was staying with them. Their party would include her own maid and Delia Noonan, the Irish

woman who took care of her mother and lived in the house. The train trip from Washington took less than five hours. The mountain air – Deer Park is about 2,300 feet in



Deer Park Hotel, Main House, 1892, a favorite resort of Washingtonians and Baltimoreans in the latter part of the 19th century. Grover Cleveland spent his honeymoon there. Image: Wikipedia.

elevation – was always refreshing. Sally would book five rooms for the duration of their stay, usually July and August, in the old hotel to accommodate her party and the servants. As her mother became increasingly frail, Sally had to take extraordinary measures to get her out of the F Street house and up into the mountains. During a trip in 1894, as she related the tale to Alida Brown, Mrs. Carroll had to be lifted out of the railway carriage and into a horse-drawn carriage to get her to the Deer Park Hotel. Meals were brought to her in her room so she didn't have to go downstairs to the dining room, and since Mrs. Carroll's rooms were located in the old part of the hotel, she could hear from the "piazza" the music played by the hotel band in the bandshell in the park below.²² Sally Esterhazy meanwhile maintained a full social calendar at the resort, describing in letters to Alida whom she was meeting and having dinner with.²³

Sally Carroll's health continued a downward path, and in early February 1895, Alida Carroll Brown was summoned from Portland to Washington to be at her bedside. She died on the morning of the 11th, with Alida holding her hand, and Sally, Carrie, Delia Noonan and a nurse named Annie nearby. A note written by Sally before her death, "Not to be opened until arrangements for my funeral." In it she expressed the hope that the funeral would be quiet and inexpensive and where her body was to be placed in the family mausoleum (next to her husband). The daughters thought otherwise and arranged to have the funeral at St. John's Church, and invited six honorary pallbearers to attend, including three justices of the Supreme Court. The three surviving children of Sally were left bequests under the terms of her will: \$10,000 each for Sally and her war-disabled son Charles (then living in Baltimore), and \$15,000 for Carrie, since she was the least well-off of the children.²⁴

Her mother's death meant an end to the routine life she and her sister had lived in Washington for so many years. Neither was interested or could afford to keep up the house. The terms of her mother's will made it clear they would need to sell it and the furniture and set up quarters elsewhere in the city. Sally, the wealthier of the two, decided to take rooms in

residential hotels in the neighborhood. She liked the Everett on H Street²⁵ and then later the fashionable Richmond Hotel on H and 17thth Street. Carrie, who had troubled relations with both her sisters, often shared rooming arrangements with her, whether at the Everett or the Richmond.

Sally Esterhazy had sufficient funds to continue spending her summers in fashionable resorts through the east coast. The newspaper regularly reported where she was – at Pequot Island, Connecticut, at the Thousand Islands, near Canada; at Atlantic City; or Deer Park. She was often invited to spend time with Alida in Portland, but she usually declined on the grounds of unexpected health issues or unforeseen invitations elsewhere.

Sally took an active interest in the newly formed National Society of the Colonial Dames America, an organization founded in 1891 – around the time of the Daughters of the American Revolution – but for women whose ancestors made contributions to colonial America before 1776. In 1894 she orchestrated as president of the District to Columbia chapter of the Dames a reception in the White House for Frances Cleveland to meet with the leaders of the national society.²⁶ For a number of years, she continued to work with the organization, meeting with its leading members, including Mrs. Britannia Kennan of Tudor Place, during their closed-door meetings in Washington.²⁷ In 1928, long past Sally's death, the society acquired "Bellevue," the Georgetown house once owned by her grandfather, Charles Carroll, which was subsequently renamed Dumbarton House and remains the headquarters of the national organization.

Back at the Everett in 1903, Sally, then aged sixty-six – no doubt in an effort to overcome her professed feeling of loneliness – carried on a flirtation during 1903-1904 with a handsome, much younger married man named Martin de Lang, the husband of Louise Moore McDowell, daughter of a former governor of the Washington territory and a resident of Warrenton, Virginia. The gossip about the countess in Washington's rarified social circles reached even the ears of Henry Adams, who wrote cattily about it to his confidante Elizabeth Cameron. "Queer little odds and ends fall in one's way at Mrs. Hay's tea table," he wrote on April 3, 1903. "Yesterday Mrs. Audenreid bustled in, and rattled away very amusingly about the 'countess' who still meditates re-matrimony with every adventurer on the horizon..."²⁸

Six months after Mr. de Lang moved into Washington in mid-1903, taking rooms at the Metropolitan Club, Mrs. de Lang tired of finding her husband spending time away from her and with the countess. She sued the countess for \$100,000 for the "alienation of [her husband's] affections," serving a subpoena on her at her residence at the Everett. The news was sensational, reaching New York and all across the country, given the countess' background, her title and age.²⁹ Sally contacted her lawyers and made a countersuit, but when her efforts to squash the subpoena failed in May and that she might face a trial or have to pay damages, she realized her social position in Washington was forever compromised. Even within her family, her position was ridiculed. A year later, her ne're-do-well nephew in Montana, Jack Mercer, wrote to Alida Brown sarcastically about "Aunt Sally's kinder-garten affair."³⁰

On the middle of May, she sailed for Europe on the SS Minnehaha and arrived in England on the 24th. She eventually took a serviced apartment at Belgrave Mansions in the fashionable Belgravia area of London. Letters to Alida may have been scarce during the final decade of Sally's life, and little of it was reported in American newspapers.³¹ After World War I broke out, her finances were jeopardized. Installments of funds from the Esterhazys in Hungary may have dried up or been halted as a result of the war. In 1915 she wrote her nephew Carroll Brown in Portland – now an investment banker – asking for advice.³²



Belgrave Mansions, later known as Grosvenor Gardens Hotel, where the countess had a “serviced apartment” during her years in London. Image: Wikipedia.

Sally also mentioned in the letter that she was in poor health. However, she renewed her American passport in 1916 and may have planned a trip to the United States.³³ She died in London the following year, aged 80, having made arrangements for a requiem mass to be said in her (Esterhazy?) name at Westminster Cathedral³⁴ and a burial at Mortlake Cemetery in Kew – not in the Carroll family mausoleum at Oak Hill. Several relatives and fashionable people attended the mass and the burial – including “Martin Lang.”³⁵

Laudatory obituaries appeared in newspapers in the United States, fabulating that she was a favorite of King Edward VII and Emperor Franz Joseph and even saying that her first marriage certificate to Maj. Charles Griffin had been signed by President Lincoln.³⁶ Her relations in the States were waiting with bated breath for her passing assuming they would be receiving bequests from her, but in fact she only left a small amount to Carroll Mercer’s wife, Minnie, and a larger sum to the son and daughter of her brother Gen. Sprigg Carroll.³⁷ The largest bequest in her will, which was made in 1916, went to a “Mr. Martin Land of Zurich.”³⁸ This very likely was Martin de Lang, her admirer in Washington from a decade earlier, who may well have connected up with her in exile in London after she had left.³⁹ The Countess may well have found someone to comfort her in her old age.

¹ John Marshall Brown Papers, Photo Albums, Box 56, Folder 11.

² *Evening Star*, Feb 1, 1869, p. 1; Mrs. Griffin attends the first reception held by the Grants at the White House: *Daily National Republican*, April 7, 1869, 2.

³ “Candidates for Matrimony” included Mrs. Gen. Griffin and Rosa Steele of Georgetown who was set to marry the Comte de Turenne: *Daily Morning Chronicle*, March 5, 1870, p. 4.

⁴ Among several newspapers, *Flake’s Bulletin* (Galveston, TX) March 02, 1870, p. 3.

⁵ *Daily Critic*, WDC June 6, 1870, p. 4

⁶ Mrs. Sally Carroll was a staunch Episcopalian.

⁷ See below.

⁸ As indicated in Washington gazetteers: *Gazetteer of the District of Columbia for 1871-2* (Washington, DC: Morris & Drysdale, 1871).

⁹ *Capital* (Washington, DC), September 21, 1872, p. 3.

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[http://de.esterhazy.net/index.php/Graf_Miksa_Ern%C3%B6_Esterh%C3%A1zy_de_Gal%C3%A1nta_\(1837_-_1883\)](http://de.esterhazy.net/index.php/Graf_Miksa_Ern%C3%B6_Esterh%C3%A1zy_de_Gal%C3%A1nta_(1837_-_1883))

¹¹ Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers,

¹² Maine Historical Society, John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 26A Folder 5 (Correspondence to ACB from Countess Esterhazy). Internal evidence for dating the letter to ca 1879 include a reference to Ava Kingsbury and Mr. van den Nest who married in Paris in 1879; to Mrs. Nathaniel Michler angling to get a job in the State Department for her husband, Gen. Michler, who died in 1881; and to her sister’s marital situation having been deserted by her second husband, William Haggard, from whom she filed for divorce in Washington, DC, in 1879.

¹³ On the history of the palace and the restoration, <https://tataikastely.hu/en/the-history-of-the-palace/>.

¹⁴ In fact, Sally advised Alida that she should “pass over Latin and Botany” lessons for her daughters since they won’t become lawyers or statesmen, and instead have them learn French and German, but especially music, “if they have a voice, by all means have it highly cultivated.”

¹⁵ Suggesting that they were not living in Tata palace.

¹⁶ *Evening Star* August 26, 1819, p. 20 Brown, April 12th, from 1801 F Street (year not specified, probably 1892-93).

¹⁷ He, too, was a sportsman (jockey) but also a politician, a member of the new Chamber of Magnates that was created in 1867.

¹⁸ *Evening Star*, December 22, 1884, p 2.

¹⁹ John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 43, folder 1.

²⁰ Published and updated for 25 years; recently reissued in 2013 by Old House Books, with reference to *Downton Abbey*.

²¹ *Evening Star*, February 19, 1892. p. 8.

²² John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 26A, Folder 5, Sarah Esterhazy to Alida Brown, August 1892.

²³ John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 28A (Correspondence to ACB 1890s), Folder 5, letter dated Deer Park, August 27th: Back from dinner with Mrs. Beale; attended the Devonne christening (Countess Divonne, daughter of Mrs. Audenreid); lunch with Mrs. MacLean.

²⁴ Sally’s death is recorded in a letter from Alida to her husband: John Marshall Brown Papers, Source: John Marshall Brown Papers, Box 15, folder 64 (Correspondence to JMB 1895), Alida C. Brown to John M. Brown, letter undated; Sally Carroll’s will was mentioned in detail in *Washington Times*, May 12, 1895, p. 6; Carrie’s last and deceased husband was a lieutenant in the navy and she may have received only a widow’s pension from him. On Charles, see my article on this website, “Charles H. Carroll – A Wounded Life.”

²⁵ She is living there in the 1900 census.

²⁶ *New York Tribune*, April 15, 1894, p. 13.

²⁷ *New York Herald*, April 6, 1894, p. 8; *Evening Star*, April 25, 1900, p. 10.

²⁸ J.C. Iverson, Ernest Samuels, Charles Vandersee, Viola Hopkins Winner, eds., *The Letters of Henry Adams*, vol. 5, 1899-1905 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p., 481. Mrs. Audenreid was the widow of Col. Joseph Audenreid who often socialized with Sally at Deer Park and in Washington.

²⁹ Los Angeles Herald, January 3, 1904; New York Times, January 23, 1904. Both the *Washington Post* and the *Evening Star* followed this story with relish.

³⁰ Letter of Jack Mercer to John M. Brown, Melrose, Montana, August 25, 1905.

³¹ An item can be found in 1914 of her presence of Paris.

³² A synopsis of the letter appears in World Catalog, <https://search.worldcat.org/title/1034712515>. The original is in the John Marshall Brown Papers, but I did not find it during my stay in the Library.

³³ Ancestry.com: Passport Applications 1916-1917 - Roll 0328 - Certificates: 36901-37400, 16 Oct 1916-20 Oct 1916

³⁴ The main Catholic cathedral of London.

³⁵ Obituary posted on the Griffin family tree on Ancestry.com

³⁶ *Evening Star*, December 9, 1917; *Washington Herald*, December 9, 1917, p. 7; *Shasta Courier*, December 17, 1917, p. 1. Her marriage certificate was included in her application for a widow's pension after the death of Gen. Griffin: it does not bear the signature of Lincoln.

³⁷ Sprigg Carroll Jr. and Katherine Carroll Beale, to whom she left her jewelry. The children of Alida Brown, who died in 1911, were well taken care of; Carrie Bolles, who died in 1914, was childless. Carroll Mercer hoped for a bequest but never received a dime, while his estranged wife Minnie's lawyer managed to get £1,000 from her estate: Joseph E. Persico, *Franklin and Lucy* (New York: Random House, 2008). 117, 136.

³⁸ *Evening Star* August 26, 1918, p. 20. Her estate was considerable: \$220,000; \$60,000 was left to Mr. Land.

³⁹ The 1911 British census shows a "Martin de Lang" of Swiss nationality living at the Charing Cross Hotel in London, run by a Swiss manager.