

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: District of Columbia	
COUNTY:	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:
Alva Belmont House

AND/OR HISTORIC:
Sewall-Belmont House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
144 Constitution Avenue NE

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE
District of Columbia

CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure 	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) Headquarters, National Woman's Party

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
National Woman's Party, c/o Elizabeth L. Chittick

STREET AND NUMBER:
144 Constitution Avenue NE

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE:
District of Columbia

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Recorder of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:
Sixth and D Streets NW

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE:
District of Columbia

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

DATE OF SURVEY: **11/30/72** Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
National Capital Planning Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
1325 G Street NW

CITY OR TOWN:
Washington

STATE:
District of Columbia

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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COUNTY:
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY



7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITIDN	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Belmont House was built on a tract of land originally granted to the second Lord Baltimore by King Charles of England. The property was divided several times, and it was Daniel Carroll who ultimately ceded much of the land to the United States as a site for the new capital. After Washington was laid out, Carroll bought back a small parcel of land, and later, in 1799, sold the property to Robert Sewell. Sewell built the main house, according to tax records, in 1800. He attached it to a small one-room farmhouse believed by some experts to date from 1750, "one of the oldest, if not the oldest house in the neighborhood of Capitol Hill."¹ Sewell converted this into a kitchen.

Tradition has it that, while marching into the Capital after the Battle of Bladensburg in 1814, British troops were fired upon from the house--the only effort to stem their invasion anywhere in the city. In retaliation, the British set fire to the house. The extent of the damage was not recorded, but it is known that Sewell rebuilt the house in 1820. It remained in the possession of his descendants until 1922, when it was purchased by Senator Porter H. Dale of Vermont. Seven years later, in 1929, Dale sold it to the National Woman's Party, which named it the "Alva Belmont House" in honor of the woman who had contributed toward the purchase of the party's previous headquarters (now demolished).

As it appears today, the main house is rectangular, two and one-half stories high on a raised basement, and is joined at the northeast corner to the kitchen (one and one-half stories) and the stable (one story). A single-story 20th-century addition with a terrace projects from the west side of the kitchen. Most of the details of the red brick home date from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and so the exterior now appears as a mixture of architectural elements. The principal facade, of Flemish bond, is three bays across with a central portal. The front door features both sidelights and a very fine peacock fanlight under a molded arch with keystone. Paired stairs lead up to the central entrance and flank a round-arched doorway which allows access to the basement. This elaborate approach, à la pedestals and urns, was probably added about 1900.

Large windows on the first two floors of the facade are divided into three panels, each separated by mullions. The windows feature stone lintels with a decorative circle motif at the corners. A mansard roof was added in the late 19th century, as were the three wooden dormers with triangular pediments. Both the first and second floors have a central hall plan with two rooms on either side, and there are four additional chambers on the third floor.

¹Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard, Historic Houses of George-Town and Washington City (Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1958), p. 425.

(Continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pra-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1929-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

Alice Paul, founder of the National Woman's Party (called the Congressional Union in its earliest years), was the most significant figure in the final phase of the struggle for a Constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote. Paul descended on Washington in 1913, when interest in the suffrage amendment was at its nadir, "determined to light in American hearts the same fire that burned so fiercely in England."¹ Her dramatic techniques immediately revived the movement: White House demonstrations, hunger strikes, and relentless political pressure culminated in victory just prior to the 1920 election. Having won that battle, Ms. Paul and the National Woman's Party took up arms for another amendment, one which would guarantee equal rights to women in every respect. The National Woman's Party works toward that goal today.

Perhaps because she was ever the activist and not a prolific writer, Alice Paul has been virtually ignored by historians. That she gave an indispensable impetus to the cause of woman suffrage in America cannot be doubted, for she "took up that issue when it was dead, and brought it very much to life."² The Alva Belmont House, an imposing red brick structure on Capitol Hill, stands as a memorial to the dedication of Alice Paul and her associates. It continues to serve as party headquarters, as it has ever since 1929.

History

Eleanor Flexner, in her classic history of the woman's rights movement, remarks that "the years from 1896 to 1910 were a period of unrelieved 'doldrums' as far as woman suffrage was concerned In point of

¹William L. O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p. 127.

²Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 270.

(Continued)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson and Hubbard, Cortlandt Van Dyke. Historic Houses of George-Town and Washington City. Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 1958.

Flexner, Eleanor. Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959.

Irwin, Inez Haynes. Angels and Amazons: A Hundred Years of American Women. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1933. (Cont'd)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		38 °	53 ' 32 "	77 ° 00 ' 15 "
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **less than 1 acre.**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Carol Ann Poh, Survey Historian

ORGANIZATION Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service DATE 8/23/73

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE District of Columbia CODE _____

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name _____

Title _____

Date _____

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date _____

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



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7. Description (page 1)

Sewell-Belmont House

The Belmont House is interesting as an example of sequential architectural development coincident with the growth and settlement of Washington, D.C.-- from the vernacular colonial farmhouse, built for function rather than style, through the Georgian, Federal, and Georgian revival periods. It does not faithfully represent any of these styles, however, and because of this is generally held in rather low regard by architectural historians. It should, therefore, be emphasized that its significance does not lie in its architecture, but in its historical associations, especially its association with the organization whose militancy was indispensable to passage of the 19th amendment.

Elizabeth L. Chittick, currently serving as National Chairman of the Woman's Party, is working to establish a fund to provide for a complete restoration of the house.

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8. Significance (page 1)

Sewell-Belmont House

fact, interest in the Federal woman-suffrage amendment was at an all-time low."³ This situation had not improved by 1912, when Mrs. William Kent, chairman of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (N.A.W.S.A.), was given all of \$10 for expenses incurred in connection with attending Congressional hearings on the suffrage bill. She returned change at the end of her year.

To a Pennsylvania Quaker named Alice Paul goes the credit for extricating the movement from its doldrums within the short space of a few months. Ms. Paul, born on January 11, 1885, was a social worker who had gone to England in 1907 to study and participate in militant suffrage activities there. She returned in 1910 and lectured to American suffrage groups on the progress of the British movement, while completing a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. Her next task was to rekindle enthusiasm for the Federal woman-suffrage amendment. Her qualifications for this were unique, since she "was probably the only charismatic figure generated by the feminist movement in its salad days. Other leaders were widely admired, even loved, but Miss Paul was the only one whose example led women of all ages and stations to risk jail and worse."⁴

First, Alice Paul asked the N.A.W.S.A. for authority to set up a headquarters in Washington. Accompanied by Lucy Burns and Crystal Eastman, she rented a basement room on F Street on January 2, 1913. Paul, a grand strategist with a keen flair for the dramatic, then organized a march down Pennsylvania Avenue, strategically timed to occur the night before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Some 5,000 women participated. As they neared the White House, a mob blocked their way. A riot ensued, and this melee later warranted a Senate inquiry into why the police failed to provide adequate protection for the demonstrators.

Ms. Paul and her little group in Washington almost immediately felt the need to have some sanction stronger than a local committee. In April, therefore, with the approval of Dr. Anna H. Shaw, then president of the N.A.W.S.A., they formed a national organization whose sole raison d'être was to work toward the amendment. They called it the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage; Alice Paul became chairman. Flexner notes that the N.A.W.S.A. leaders, from the start, had an uneasy feeling that they had unleashed a force that would be difficult to keep under control:

³ Ibid., p. 262.

⁴ O'Neill, p. 126.

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8. Significance (page 2)

Sewell-Belmont House

"The real difficulty arose from the rift growing between the parent body and the new organization, which had been inevitable from the time when Miss Paul first assumed leadership of the Congressional Committee, a rift between dynamic and static methods of work and aims"⁵

The most basic disagreement stemmed from the Congressional Union's decision to restrict its efforts solely to pressuring Congress and the President for a Federal amendment, while the N.A.W.S.A. opted to pour the bulk of its energies into State campaigns. Another point of contention was the Congressional Union's insistence on holding "the party in power" responsible for failure to pass the woman suffrage bill, a principle which had originated with the British militants. The Union declared that the Democratic majority and President Wilson must bear responsibility. N.A.W.S.A. adhered to a policy dating from its very beginning--never to endorse or condemn a political party per se. Beginning in 1914 the Union campaigned against Democratic Congressional candidates regardless of their attitude toward woman suffrage, and in February of that year it severed its relation with the N.A.W.S.A. Subsequently, the Congressional Union christened itself the National Woman's Party. As in Great Britain, suffragists were now divided into two factions, conservative and militant.

The National Woman's Party established a well-organized lobby to work on Congressmen, and kept constant pressure on the indifferent President Wilson. Ms. Paul and her cohorts patterned both strategy and tactics after those of the British feminist Emmeline Pankhurst, and risked even jail for their cause. They campaigned vigorously against the Democrats. They organized hunger strikes. They carried on "watch-fire" demonstrations outside the White House, keeping vigil over a flaming urn and burning any Wilson speech which made even passing reference to "liberty" or "democracy." Alice Paul herself often presided over the fire.

On June 4, 1919, the Senate at last passed the Susan B. Anthony Amendment guaranteeing equal suffrage. Now the States became the battleground, and Alice Paul and the Woman's Party immediately launched local ratification campaigns. They finally achieved their goal just prior to the election of 1920. After the 19th amendment became law, the N.A.W.S.A. transmuted itself into the League of Women Voters. But, for the militant members of the National Woman's Party, the struggle was not over. They conceived of the suffrage amendment not as an object in itself, but only

⁵p. 265.

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(Number all entries) 8. Significance (page 3)

Sewell-Belmont House

as a tool--a means of obtaining complete equality between the sexes both in law and custom. To this end, the party drafted the Lucretia Mott Amendment to the Constitution: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and in every place subject to its jurisdiction." Many organizations--the League of Women Voters, e.g.--firmly opposed the Mott Amendment on the grounds that it would render invalid all the protective State laws, especially those regarding labor, for which so many had worked so long. The Woman's Paty, however, well ahead of its time, insisted that much of the protective legislation worked in the end only to further discrimination.

Unfortunately, an America that had so readily embraced a "Return to Normalcy" was scarcely fertile ground for radical notions about sexual equality. Many of the pioneer activists contented themselves with having achieved the vote. The depression dried up much of the activity, as did the World War and the "feminine mystique" in subsequent years. The Woman's Party grew smaller, older, and poorer while the current of events moved ever more strongly against it. Yet it persevered, continuing to work, as it has worked since 1920, for the adoption of the equal rights amendment. Now, realization of its goal seems imminent.

The history of American reform abounds in nationally significant individuals and organizations that professional historians have virtually ignored. Alice Paul is such an individual, a woman who "took up [the suffrage] issue when it was dead, and brought it very much to life."⁶ The National Woman's Party is such an organization. Each of its early headquarters has been destroyed, but the house located at 144 Constitution Avenue NE--the Alva Belmont House--continues to serve as party headquarters, as it has ever since 1929.

Hindsight has made it easier to evaluate the efforts and achievements of the National Woman's Party. Even by 1933, however, Inez Irwin perceived that "Those who declare that the Woman's Party by its unpopular militant performances hurt rather than helped the cause, talk as wildly as those who declare that the Woman's Party won the battle all alone."⁷ Certainly any statement about the Party's success in the suffrage struggle must be tempered by our knowledge of membership figures: the N.A.W.S.A. had, by the climax of the fight, some two million members; its radical sister-organization never numbered more than 50,000. But as Irwin has suggested, "probably the National Association, had the Woman's Party stood aloof from the struggle, would have passed a woman suffrage amendment through Congress. But possibly not in 1919; conceivably not even yet."⁸

⁶Flexner, p. 270.

⁷Angels and Amazons: A Hundred Years of American Women (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1933), p. 392.

⁸Ibid.

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9. Bibliographical References (page 1) Sewell-Belmont House

O'Neill, William L. Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America.
Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971.

The Alva Belmont House

Alva Belmont House, Headquarters of the National Woman's Party, on Capitol Hill has its roots sunk deep in the history and development of these United States.

The house is built on land granted by the Crown of England to Cecilius Calvert, 2nd Lord Baltimore, but the 1st Lord Baltimore who became a part of the history of United States. Cecilius Calvert never came to the colonies but appointed his brother, Leonard Calvert, in 1634 as Deputy Governor of the grant "Maryland." This very large tract of land was later divided into "Pastures" - "Abbeys" - "Manors" - and leased out to landholders for sale; to colonists for homes; or to planters for cultivation.

The site of the Belmont House located on Jenkins Hill in the section known as Cerne Abbey came into the possession of Thomas Notley, a friend of Lord Baltimore, and who was one time Deputy Governor of Maryland. By will in 1697 the land came into the ownership of Notley Rosier, stepson of the 3rd Lord Baltimore and grandson of Lady Baltimore by a former marriage. So the land on which the Alva Belmont House was builded was a part of the history of the Eastern Colonies.

Definite dates and records of early building in Washington are not to be found. This is not altogether due to carelessness for this was before the fine fire protection and building codes we have in the 20th Century. Fire was the great hazard of the early colonies.

Another reason for lack of records - Virginia and Maryland gave land for the use of the National Capital and saw no reason why the records for this land should be cared for by them. Washington was too new and in too much turmoil to be overly concerned with the building records that went into the making of a new city.

Since there are so few records to be found many things must be taken into consideration when the date of a very early building is to be established. The building must be compared with other buildings of similar design and construction whose dates are known; information from charts, maps, historic facts and legends must be checked and re-checked and very often must be discarded. Sometimes laboratory analysis of the brick of the building will open a door to a new attack. This check may locate the place and the date of the brickmaking. The brick in this particular house has been measured and varies from $8\frac{1}{2}$ x $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 8 x 2 inches in different sections of the building. Also the pattern of bricklaying ranges from Flemish Bond and English Bond through American Bond and Modern bricklaying (which has no definite pattern). Also the texture and color of the clay from which the bricks are made will help those trained in brickmaking to decide the date of the construction. It is logical to think the brick was made in Maryland. There were many brick plants in this area that furnished brick for most of the early building of Virginia and Maryland.

Throughout Maryland and Virginia it seemed as though the little cottage homes of England had been brought over and set up in this country. The same type of little homes with their outbuildings scattered about helped to overcome the homesickness of the new settlers, and also proved to be the practical building for the life across the sea. To the tool sheds, spinning houses, barns and dovecotes were added tobacco sheds which were the only strange buildings. Many times the tobacco shed was larger and better built than the house in which the family lived - it was the greatest source of income for the family.

The little brick section which now serves as the kitchen of the Belmont House is the original unit of the much remodelled and enlarged house which now so many years later is the Headquarters for the National Woman's Party. At the time this little cottage was built it was considered a very large house, indeed a mansion, for it was a story and a half house.

The large room on the ground floor was the "hal" where the whole family lived, where they ate, where the food was cooked in the great open fireplace, and where the family gathered for entertainment and relaxation in the long winter evenings after the crops were stored and no work could be done out-of-doors.

The greatest innovation in the new home was the little boxed-in, steep, winding staircase which led from the "hal" to the bed chambers in the loft above. The winding staircase was at that time the most modern way of ascending to the floor above. The usual way was by ladder either inside the house or on the outside.

The bed chambers had little "lie-on-your-stomach" windows built close to the floor. Glass was so expensive and the tax on windows so high that only the tiniest of windows with the smallest panes of glass could be used. Often oiled paper or cloth must be used instead of glass. This little ultra-modern house was the home of the planter on the great estate of Notley Young long before the City of Washington was dreamed of.

In those days, when his family outgrew the home and finances permitted, a planter did not discard the old house for a new and larger one but built onto the one he already had. He added the needed space to the front, the rear, or the sides. Sometimes he added another story. By changing the roof line from a cat-slide roof to a gambrel roof he made space for extra rooms or attic rooms up under the roof.

This planter built onto the south side of the house. He built an addition of a cellar with two rooms; two rooms (a hall and a dining room) on the first or ground floor; two bed chambers on the second floor, while the gambrel roof gave room for two attic rooms. A double chimney with fireplaces back to back gave out heat to each room. The chimney extended from the cellar to the roof. Also an addition of a side

passage-way was built on the west side of the new part. This passage-way gave access to each room independently; this too was a very new and modern bit of domestic architecture.

When a house was built with a cellar it made history. This cellar was very important. It had thick heavy walls of brick and stone that reached far below the surface of the ground, for these walls must hold the walls and weight of a large house. This cellar must serve as the storage place for food and living supplies. The heavy walls reaching down far below the land surface helped to keep the storage space cool, for this was before the time of ice refrigeration. Also in one of the cellar rooms was housed a well of water, that most important of necessities. This well supplied the family and the house with its water and it must be kept clean and pure. Water was so important that a small house in this neighborhood was named "The House of Clean Drinking."

When the addition was built, the small room between the kitchen and the front part was added so the food could be taken directly, through what is now a closet, from the kitchen to the dining room instead of being carried from the kitchen out-of-doors to the entrance way into the rear of the side passage-way.

When our Founding Fathers decided to establish the permanent Capital of the new government on Jenkins Hill, great activity began. Boundaries were made and remade; farms were divided into squares, squares into lots; lots were surveyed, bought and sold and even exchanged by lottery. Streets and avenues were laid out and cut through on straight lines and diagonals. The ten-mile square was established. Regulations for building were enacted. It would have been difficult for Lord Baltimore himself to reconcile all this activity as belonging on the land that he, so many years before, had received from his King.

Robert Sewell belonged to an English family of long lineage and came to the new Colony to cast his fortunes with others of his station. He became very prominent in the affairs of Lord Baltimore and after a time he married into the Calvert Family. Sewell became the owner of a large manorial estate in Prince George County with the manor mansion near Marlborough (Marlboro), the county seat of Prince George County. The estate was known as "Poplar Hill," "The Addition," "His Lordship's Kindness" among other names. This estate was recently sold under the name of "His Lordship's Kindness."

When Jenkins Hill showed signs of becoming an important place to own real estate, Robert Sewell acquired by purchase, deed of gift, or maybe by chance the property on Jenkins Hill which included the planter's enlarged house.

This change of ownership from an unknown planter to Robert Sewell

is recorded in the Library of Congress as of 1799. One authority gives the date as 1792, but this has not as yet been verified. The house became known as "The Sewell House" and was listed as the Town House of Robert Sewell, while the mansion at Marlboro was listed as his Country Home.

Square now #725, the site of the Sewell House, shows on the map of Washington of 1801. The Ellicott map of Washington definitely shows two houses on this square, one directly on the corner of 2nd and B Streets and another on the lot next west. These two houses are also shown or noted in the survey of building in Washington of 1801. When the streets were laid out, Maryland Avenue, B Street and 2nd Street crossed this property.

Robert Sewell made many changes. He had the lots graded to meet the level of the new streets cut through. This grading brought the windows of the cellar entirely above the ground, and made the floor of the cellar on a level with B Street.

The next step was to make an entrance to the side passageway directly from the street (B Street). This allowed tradesmen and servants to enter the house without coming in contact with the family. The entrance, still in use, has a vaulted ceiling of brick not like the brick used in any other part of the house.

The house to the west became very much involved in the War of 1812, and consequently later became the subject of much discussion and difference of opinion. Was the house completely destroyed or was it very badly damaged when the British burned the Capital? There is, however, record in the Library of Congress of an assessment of \$4,000 for repairs on the house. This was a very large amount when we realize the labor was mostly done by slaves. Robert Sewell paid for the repairs after his petition for reimbursement had been disallowed by the Senate. *

In remodelling it was logical to treat the damaged house as a flounder house and incorporate it with the big house. By making the side passageway the center hall, building in the gracious Georgian stairway at the rear of the entrance hall, and by cutting in a few more doorways there appears a town house that would be a credit to any owner.

After all these structural changes had been made, the house continued through the years to change with the styles of modern building that have added to much to the comfort of the American home. The development of American building construction is reflected in the Belmont House. The few little "lie-on-your-stomach" windows gave way to many windows with large panes of glass that flood the rooms with light and sunshine. Fresh air sweeps through the windows with moving sash or the so-called "guillotine" windows, perhaps to keep in period

with the Mansard roof which had replaced the sloping roof with dormer windows of the front facade of the house.

The well was no longer needed to supply the house with water. It was filled up and covered with a cement floor. The District of Columbia water system furnished quantities of water.

The lighting of the house progressed from little grease lamps and candles through all the changes to the present electric lamps. The chandelier in the drawingroom is a specimen of the period of lighting by gas. Many wires outside the walls give proof that the solid walls of brick would not enclose and hide them so the change to electric lighting is unashamed of openly showing.

The great open fireplaces were closed and stoves were fitted into the chimneys. This way of heating in turn gave way to the central heating unit which has now made way for the oil-burning plant in the rear room of the original cellar. When the cheer and beauty of the open fire was felt to be wanting, the open fireplaces with their beautiful mantels were replaced.

Outside walls were covered with stucco - at that time the method of insulating against cold and heat. This drab covering has been removed and the pattern of bricklaying and the beautiful soft color of the brick has again come into its own.

After the property became the possession of Robert Sewell in 1799, it continued in the ownership of the Sewell Family until the last direct descendant, Ellen Daingerfield, named a member of the family, by marriage, to act as her executor in disposing of her estate. (Will of Ellen Daingerfield was probated in 1912, six years after the recorded date of her death.)

Ten years passed in litigation of the estate when Richard Thompson sold the property out of the family. This was at that time the only piece of property on Capitol Hill that belonged to the Sewell estate. More than one hundred years is a long time for a house to belong to one family. Richard Thompson sold the property to Senator and Mrs. Dale of Vermont.

One other sale completes the change of ownership up to this date. In 1929, The National Woman's Party chose the former Sewell House for its National Headquarters.

The Alva Belmont House is now on record in the Library of Congress, Division of Historic American Building Survey, as a carefully preserved club house. The rear wing is the original building.

The Alva Belmont House is indeed a Heritage House and does

not deserve the criticism that has been made that it is a very poor restoration of a historical house. It was not intended to be a restoration of a historical house. It is a house that has been lived in ever since it was built. Even though, it is said, sometimes the tenants have been ghosts and only memories. It has been called "The Haunted House on the Hill." Many people very important in the development of this Country have called this place "Home."

The House still clings to the tradition of American Life.

"Tradition is not a barren pride in a dead glory,
Tradition is something that provides refreshment of spirit."

Additional Notes

The following notes do not belong as a part of the history of the Alva Belmont House but they do carry some items of general interest in connection with the life of Early America and with the history of The Headquarters House.

Gallatin House

Alva Belmont House at one time was called The Gallatin House. When the Capital City was new the various departments of the Government were scattered about in different houses and buildings. Under the administration of Thomas Jefferson with Albert Gallatin Secretary of the Treasury, the Treasury was housed in the Sewell House.

The statement has been made that the Louisiana Purchase was signed in the drawing room of this house. When traced back it was found the Louisiana Purchase was not signed in this country but in Paris. One authority says - "Gallatin paid the bill but did not sign the treaty."

Senate Document - January 15, 1819 - Senate Library

Petition of Robert Sewell for destruction of house and furniture.

The house had been deserted by owner (inhabitants) - proprietor having several months before removed to his farm in Prince George County for the summer, and his son William Sewell in whose care the house had been left by his father was then employed in the Militia who had been called to service some time before when the enemy threatened the adjacent country.

A claim for remuneration was made to Congress under the Claims law.

Because the house was not occupied by order of the Commanding Officer the claim does not come under any power of awarding indemnity. Case not allowed.

The prayer of the petition ought not to be allowed.

Jan. 25, 1819

Records

The reasons for lack of records:- Destruction by fire the great hazard of early history; by time; by misplacement; perhaps one of the great causes - when Maryland and Virginia gave of their lands for the use of the Government the records were no longer preserved by them and the District was not equipped to care for them.

The Department of Survey stated -- When the Department was organized by the District and records were collected it was required that it

go back only fifty years.

The permit issued to the Woman's Party for the large window in the west wall of the drawing room is on record in the Department of Permits.

Another reason for the lack of early records of building. When a house was built there were not the many blue prints (one for each contractor) that are necessary today. Many of the plans for houses were taken from albums of building designs sent over from England and followed by the architect or master builder in this country. Sometimes the architect was brought over to carry out his own plans and when he returned home he took the plans and records with him.

"An attempt to verify dates of old buildings will confirm the cynic. Accepted information will prove to be legend."

Deering Davis

Hall - Hallen - House

In the seventeenth century Maryland a "hallen" was either a planter's house or a manorial mansion.

Cellars were sometimes slave cellars under the house. The cellar in this case may have been a space set apart for the house slaves or indentured workers from the work or field slaves. Sewell owned many slaves which were specified and parcelled out in his will.

Maps Consulted

Ellicott's map of Washington - 1792

Braist's Early Washington

Boschke, Early real estate Map of Washington (Archives)

L'Enfant's Plan of Washington

Maps shown in Sesquicentennial Exhibit in National Art Gallery and Department of Interior

Maps of Prince George County

Flounder House

A Flounder house was more than a lean-to. They were very often two stories high with a gable roof. Really half a house with half gable roof just as though a two-story gable house had been cut down the middle.

An early ordinance required that each lot in a new town be built on by the owner within a limited time to validate the deed. Often a structure was built so that it might later be incorporated in the "big

house." Sometimes the big house was never built. Flounder houses in Alexandria are pointed to with pride. Flounder houses were built with no windows in the inside wall.

Powder Closet

A space high up in the front wall of the fireplace where the gunpowder was stored so that it would always be dry (fire hazard?). There is one in the fireplace in the kitchen of Alva Belmont.

Construction of east and west side of basement

Floor of west room (file room) is 21 inches higher than the floor of the east side. Entrance is through a flat lintel topped door while the door to the east room is topped by a flattened arch which was usual in earlier building. Flat arch introduced in 1680 and followed through. Water table on east wall while there is none on west wall. Fireplaces are smaller and more shallow. General construction makes it seem probable that the west basement is a later construction.

Names of Plantations

The law required that each plantation or estate be given a name by the owner within a certain limit of time. These names belong to the plantation not to the mansion house. Some of the names are very fanciful and amusing.

"Onion Forest" -- "Looked many places None I liked"
"Happy be Lucky" -- "Peddycoats Wish" -- "Penny Come Quick"
"Snake in the grass" -- "Find me out if you can"
"Aha the Cow Pasture" -- "Hard Bargain" -- "Want Water"

The name most closely connected with this report is "His Lordship's Kindness" which was originally owned by Robert Sewell. It still keeps the name and is located at Marlboro, Maryland.

Hearing on bill to take square in which Alva Belmont House is located

Equal Rights of Feb. 7, 1931

Page 3

Members of the Committee congratulate Woman's National Party on the presentation of the case, and indicate that the organization need not worry.

Washington Post July 25, 1935

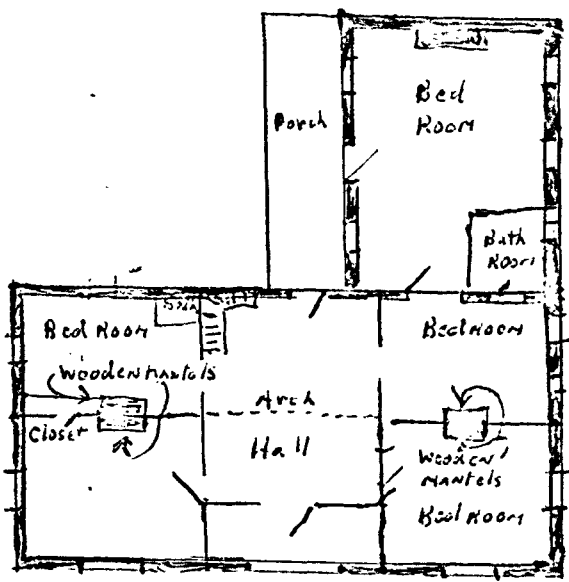
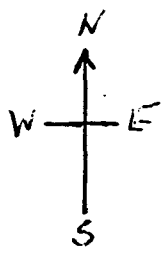
"Senate reversed action on taking over site of Belmont House."

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Stable (kitchen)

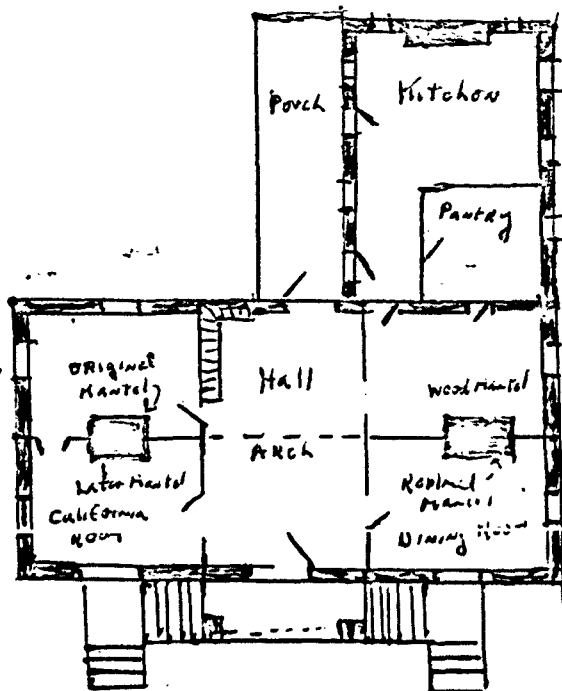


Second Floor Plan

4 Bedrooms on Third Floor

Rail St., N.E.

Garden



First Floor Plan

Constitution Ave.

Sketch Plan of Alva Belmont House, 144 Constitution Ave., N.E. Washington, D.C.