



SEWALL-BELMONT HOUSE
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The Sewall-Belmont House stands on Jenkins Hill (now called Capitol Hill), which was part of the land granted to the Second Lord Baltimore by King Charles in 1632. Over the years the land changed hands until, in 1799, Daniel Carroll sold it to Robert Sewall. Sewall built a house on the property in 1800, incorporating an already existing structure into the main building. This earlier structure was thought to have been erected in the late 1600's or the early part of 1700, thus giving the Sewall-Belmont House claim to being one of the oldest houses on Capitol Hill.

Preferring to live at Poplar Hill, which he had inherited, Sewall rented his house in 1801 to Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury to Presidents Jefferson and Madison. Gallatin was unique among Cabinet officers in dwelling in the environs of the Capitol rather than the executive neighborhood near the White House. It is thought that Gallatin worked out the financial matters dealing with the Louisiana Purchase in this house. In 1813, Gallatin vacated the building and the following August the house was partially destroyed when it was set afire by British troops. Accounts at the time indicate that the British soldiers retaliated after having been fired upon by someone in or behind the Sewall residence. Historical accounts differ as to the circumstances surrounding this episode.

The house remained in the Sewall family for 123 years. When Sewall's granddaughter married John Strode Barbour, railroad executive and Senator from Virginia, the house was said to be one of the social centers in Washington. In 1922, Senator Porter Dale of Vermont purchased the property and restored the house and gardens. In 1929, the property was sold to the National Woman's Party and was renamed the Alva Belmont House in honor of the Party's chief benefactress.

Architecturally, the house is a combination of Federal and Queen Anne styles. Over the years, it has been added to and altered so very much that it represents no pure style of architecture or period. Mr. L. Morris Leisening, F.A.T.A., once commented that the house is an "interesting example of the development of architecture in the District of Columbia...from the primitive type of colonial farm house through the Georgian, the Early American, the Federal, Classic Revival, Victorian and French Mansard periods." Still others have noted that the architectural integrity of the house was destroyed by the numerous changes it has undergone.

It should, therefore, be emphasized that its significance does not lie in its architecture but in its historical associations, especially its association with Alice Paul, founder of the National Woman's Party, whose militancy was indispensable to the passage of suffrage for women, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution.

The Sewall-Belmont House is a living monument to Alice Paul, author of the Equal Rights Amendment. From this house she led the fight for its passage in Congress. It was her leadership in suffrage and equal rights activities that culminated in the designation of this house as a National Historic Landmark on December 5, 1972, as it was the only house left standing in the United States from which the contemporary women's movement went forward. In commemoration of her activities, Alice Paul was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, in October 1979.

In 1974 Congress passed a bill to restore the Sewall-Belmont House declaring it a National Historic Site and authorized a Cooperative Agreement between the National Woman's Party and the Secretary of the Interior for restoration, maintenance and interpretation by the National Park Service of this museum.

The Sewall-Belmont House is a national museum where people can come and identify with heroines of the women's rights movement, view the memorabilia of the Suffrage and Equal Rights Campaigns and learn of the history of women's fight for equality.