

**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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| 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 type="checkbox"/> Comments <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** CODE:

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** CODE:

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** CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:
COUNTY:
ENTRY NUMBER
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (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"/> Pre-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.

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 | 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



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

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

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.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

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:

³Ibid., p. 262.

⁴O'Neill, p. 126.

(Continued)

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number all entries)

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.

(Continued)



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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

(Number of 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 Party, 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.

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

(Continuation Sheet)

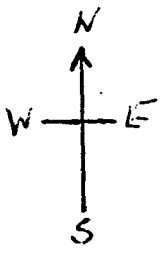
| | |
|-------------------------------|------|
| STATE District of Columbia | |
| COUNTY | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER | DATE |
| | |

(Number all entries)

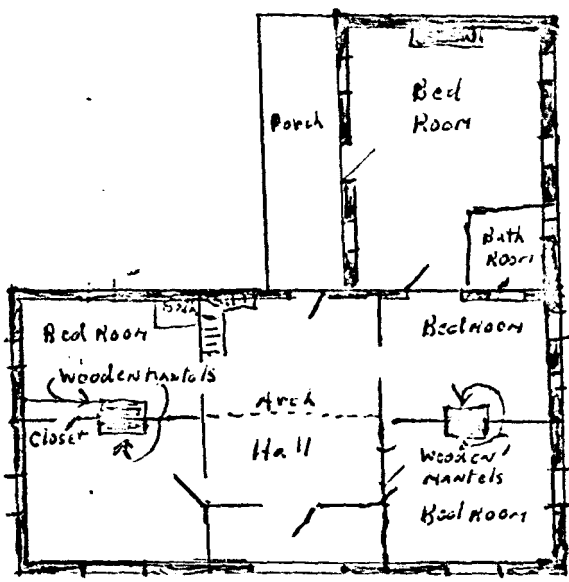
9. Bibliographical References (page 1) Sewell-Belmont House

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

Stable (Library)



Second Floor Plan



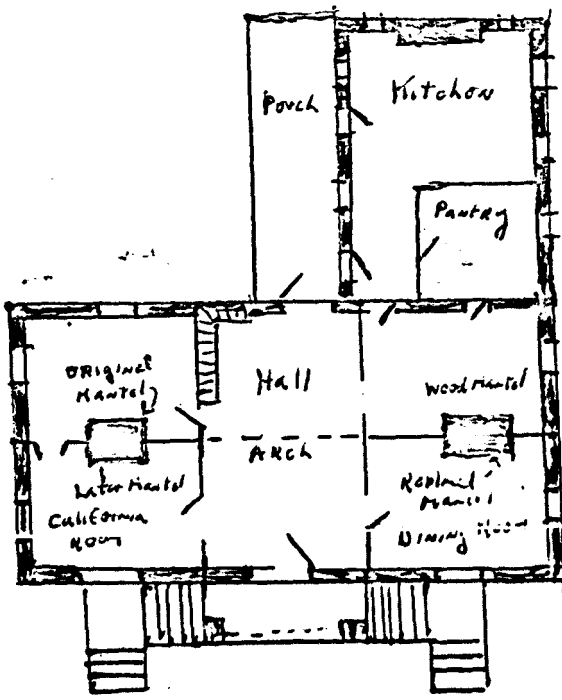
4 Bedrooms on Third Floor

2nd St, N.E.

Garden

First Floor Plan

Window-Door



Constitution Ave.

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