

Timeline of Sewall-Belmont House History

1793-1799 • Robert Sewall purchases lots from Daniel Carroll and the Federal Government to build a townhouse. At this time, Washington is a new city and Capitol Hill is known as Jenkins Hill. The Sewall family is one of Maryland's most prominent and influential early families.

1799-1800 • Construction of the House is completed.

1801-1813 • Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Jefferson and Madison, resides in the House. He is known for his work on the financing of the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the negotiation of the Treaty of Ghent (1814). He uses the House for entertaining prominent statesmen and friends, as well as for informal work gatherings of members of the government. In 1803, Robert Sewall inherits a plantation in Clinton, Maryland known as "His Lordship's Kindness" or Poplar Hill.

1814 • During the British invasion of Washington on August 24, while no one is living in the House, someone in or near it fires on the British Army as they march toward the Capitol. General Ross' horse and two soldiers are killed, other soldiers are injured; in retaliation, the House is set on fire. Mr. Sewall files a claim with the U.S. Government for compensation using the words "destroyed" and "destruction" suggesting the House was a total loss. (Despite of repeated petitions to Congress up until 1847, the Sewall family never receives any reimbursement.)

1814-1820 • Robert Sewall rebuilds the House, adds a carriage house to the original design, and moves in with his family in 1820. He dies shortly thereafter in December 1820. According to his will, the House is left to his wife and four daughters, Elizabeth, Ann, Susan, and Mary "as long as they choose to occupy it..." and as long as the daughters remain single. Sewall's sons, Robert, William, Henry, and Richard, inherit property in Maryland and in Washington, DC.

1822 • Mary Brent (Polly) Sewall dies in the House. In her will, she leaves all property to her daughters.

1822-1837 • Susan Sewall, married to Henry Daingerfield, retains ownership of the House. She is the last surviving daughter of Robert and Mary Sewall. After her death, she leaves the property to her brother, Robert Darnell Sewall.

1837-1853 • Robert Darnell Sewall owns the House and rents it to the Honorable Reverdy Johnson, Senator from Maryland and then Attorney General of the United States. Sewall dies and leaves the House to his nieces, Susan and Ellen Daingerfield.

1865-1893 • Susan and Ellen live in the House at some point during this period. Susan marries John Strobe Barbour in 1865. Elected to the US House of Representatives, where he served three terms, he is then elected to the Senate in 1889. During this time, he and his wife live in the House, then considered "one of the best liked and best known houses of Washington." Poplar Hill is used as their country house.

1886 • Susan Barbour dies as a result of a serious fall in the House. Ownership of the House passes to Ellen Daingerfield, in accordance with Susan Daingerfield Barbour's will. Ellen keeps house for John Strobe Barbour up until his death in 1892.

1892-1912 • Ellen Daingerfield lives here and at Poplar Hill until her death. She never marries and names no heirs to the House although she names three nephews as heirs to Poplar Hill. The House passes to an executor, Richard Thompson, nephew and personal secretary of John Barbour.

1912-1922 • By most accounts, the House is vacant.

1922 -1929 • Senator Porter Hinman Dale of Vermont, and his wife, purchase the House. In addition to making changes to both the exterior and interior of the House, they improve the gardens, reported to include 500 rose bushes.

1929- Present • The National Woman's Party (NWP) purchases the House and renames it the "Alva Belmont House" after their President and benefactor. Their previous headquarters was taken by eminent domain for the building of the Supreme Court and this location is important to their visibility on Capitol Hill. The NWP converts the home into a multi-purpose living and working space for their lobbying activities on behalf of women's rights. The House is the fifth headquarters of the political organization and becomes the part-time home of Alice Paul, the Party's founder, who was a leader in the woman's suffrage movement and author of the Equal Rights Amendment. The NWP use the House as the headquarters for its national and international work in support of equal rights for women for over fifty years.

In 1929, the NWP also purchases two adjacent lots fronting Second Street just north of the House. The two lots contain matching row houses with bay windows and mansard roofs which are taken by eminent domain for the building of the Hart Senate Office Building in the 1960s.

1935 • The Olde Coach House Tea Room is opened, designed and planned by Elise du Pont, an architect from Wilmington, Delaware. For a time the tea room is housed in what is now the library and on the inner terrace.

1939 • The House Committee of the NWP converts the main house from use as NWP headquarters into a Club House for the use of members and friends. NWP offices move to the ten-room row house at the rear of the garden. The rooms on the main floor of the House become social areas and the upstairs areas are reserved for sleeping quarters.

1972 • The House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1974 • The Sewall-Belmont House is designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior in June. In October, the US Congress designates the House a National Historic site, marking the beginning of a cooperative relationship between the National Park Service and the NWP.

Present • The NWP continues to use the Sewall-Belmont House as the headquarters for its activities as a museum and educational organization.