

ALCOVA HOUSE

William Berryman built a small, two-room, side-passage farmhouse on a 34-acre parcel near the intersection of Columbia Pike and present-day

South Glebe Road around 1848. The house later was enlarged and became part of an estate called “Alcova.” Berryman sold the property to Philo and Julia Baldwin, who moved from New York in 1853. The couple had a small farm that included at least two pigs, two horses, and four cows. Shortly after Julia Baldwin died in 1860, local residents threatened Philo’s life on account of his abolitionist principles, and he fled north. Joshua Gibson, a Washington restaurant owner who lived on Columbia Pike, purchased the Baldwin property in 1861, but died several months later and likely never lived in the house. In 1868, John M. Young, a prominent Washington coachmaker, acquired the site and incorporated it into his adjacent property “Spring Hill Farm.”

Former Virginia State Senator Joseph Cloyd Byars purchased the Alcova house in 1915 from Young’s descendants. In 1923, Byars hired Washington architect Edward St. Cyr Barrington to renovate and expand the dwelling. Most importantly, he reorientated the entrance from Columbia Pike toward South Glebe Road and designed the distinctive two-story portico. Byars named the house Alcova for Alexandria County, Va., the name of Arlington County until 1920, when it was renamed. He sold the surrounding land to the Alcova Improvement Company, which established the Alcova Heights subdivision in 1921.

The Alcova house has a literary claim to fame. Popular authors Douglass Wallop and Lucille Fletcher owned this house in the 1950s. Wallop wrote *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, the book that inspired the 1955 musical *Damn Yankees* and launched his career. Fletcher wrote stories for radio programs, including the suspense drama *Sorry, Wrong Number*, which became a major motion picture in 1948.

Arlington County designated the Alcova house as a local historic district in 1978.



Center for Local History, Arlington Public Library

SMITHSONIAN GATES

Iron gates salvaged from the Smithsonian Arts and Industries Building graced Alcova’s entrance in the early 1900s. This picture, taken from Columbia Pike, shows the gates with the house in the distance. In 1979, the Smithsonian reacquired, replicated, and remounted the gates on the Arts & Industries Building.

FARMHOUSE TO ESTATE

The landscape surrounding the Alcova house originally was a series of loosely connected farmsteads along the Columbia Turnpike. As Alexandria County experienced major growth in the early 1900s, developers such as the Columbia Land Company purchased large areas of land that could be subdivided into lots of similar size. The expansion of the Alcova house coincided with the subdivision of the surrounding farmland that became Alcova Heights.



Library of Congress

This 1865 map shows the Alcova house (circled) as owned by Joshua Gibson. During the Civil War, Union troops built fortifications around Washington, D.C. as shown here.



Center for Local History, Arlington Public Library

Joseph Byars purchased this simple farmhouse. Shown here is the east side of the house before the 1923 renovation.



Center for Local History, Arlington Public Library

The Alcova house with its new east entrance and portico, enlarged northern wing, and southern porch in the mid-twentieth century.