



# The Amazing and Versatile Barneys of Washington

**By Caitlin Shayda Jones**

Published: May 10, 2012 | Last modified: 6 January, 2021

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/05/10/the-amazing-and-versatile-barneys-of-washington/>

THERE ARE THREE TOPICS you ought not bring up at the dinner table: religion, politics, and Washington's Barney family. But according to an article that appeared in a Sunday edition of the New York Times in 1910, if your party of "smart set gatherers" starts to die down, dropping the Barney bombshell into the conversation might not be such a bad idea.

Everybody has an opinion on the oddball Barneys, and especially of Alice Pike Barney, the wealthy American artist who recently returned from living in Paris, where she was a student of James McNeill Whistler.

"They are poseurs," somebody will say, "learned only in the stale devices of studied eccentricity!" Others laud the Barneys' tendency to reject the mainstream: "It is genius scorning the narrow conventionalities of society."

Everybody has an opinion on the oddball Barneys, and especially of Alice Pike Barney, the wealthy American artist who recently returned from living in Paris, where she was a student of James McNeill Whistler.

"They are poseurs," somebody will say, "learned only in the stale devices of studied eccentricity!" Others laud the Barneys' tendency to reject the mainstream: "It is genius scorning the narrow conventionalities of society."

Alice Barney has committed herself to the arts, and is known as a painter, writer, theatre director, and philanthropist. When she was seventeen the explorer Henry Morton Stanley proposed marriage to her, but then he went off to Africa to find Dr. Livingstone ("Dr. Livingstone, I presume?") and Alice decided to marry Albert Clifford Barney instead, a wealthy banker and manufacturer of railway cars from Dayton, Ohio. But he died of a heart attack in 1902, leaving Alice and her two daughters free to pursue their artistic interests unencumbered.

Two years back, the Barney women attracted national press attention after they placed a nude statue shipped from Paris in front of their house in Sheridan Circle. Washington's chief of police eventually ordered it covered with a sheet.

On ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s second day in Washington he spoke to a group of children who visit Alice’s “Studio House” every weekend for Sunday classes. She had designed it years before, to showcase artifacts she had collected during her travels. Its Spanish Mission façade jumps out, in true Barney fashion, from the Beaux Arts style of the surrounding buildings. Tiger and bear pelts, mouths agape, are spread on the tiled floor. The columns in the first floor reception room bear bunches of carved grapes; the textures and colors of the fabrics are a feast for little hands and eyes. But perhaps the most surprising detail is what the house lacks: neither a bed nor a closet can be found in it.

But although the press knows Mrs. Barney primarily for her bizarre tastes, the Times also writes about her “deep sympathy with human kind.” The Studio House is not the only building in which Mrs. Barney has crystallized her ideals. Today, on May 10, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will visit a settlement house that she established in 1901. The settlement movement in America aimed to improve the lives of the urban poor. It is here that Alice Barney applies her many talents, teaching sculpture, theatre, painting, and other arts to assist Washington’s less fortunate.

*A century later, the Barney Settlement House still serves the citizens of DC:  
[www.barneynh.org](http://www.barneynh.org).*

## How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “Last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

### **FOOTNOTE/ENDNOTE:**

Caitlin Shayda Jones, “The Amazing and Versatile Barneys of Washington,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, May 10, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/05/10/the-amazing-and-versatile-barneys-of-washington/>.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Jones, Caitlin Shayda. “The Amazing and Versatile Barneys of Washington.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. May 10, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/05/10/the-amazing-and-versatile-barneys-of-washington/>.

### **HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

## Terms of Use

**239 Days in America**™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at [editor@239Days.com](mailto:editor@239Days.com). Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.