



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

## Article Title: Housing Nebraska's Governors, 1854-1980

Full Citation: Peg Poeschi, "Housing Nebraska's Governors, 1854-1980," *Nebraska History* 61 (1980): 267-279.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1980GovHouses.pdf>

Date: 1/16/2013

Article Summary: Nebraska has had two official governor's mansions, the first purchased in 1899, the second built in 1956. This article investigates the legislative history, architectural development and the events which occurred in the mansions and the experiences of the people who lived there. Appendix A lists the residents of the governors; Appendix B lists selected legislative appropriations for the Governor's Mansion

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Francis Burt, D E Thompson, Thomas Cumings, Mark W Izard, Robert W Furnas, John P Kennard, John M Thayer, William F Cody, James C Olson, William H. Poynter, Charles H. Dietrich, Samuel R. McKelvie, Victor E. Anderson, William J Bryan, George W Norris, George L Sheldon, Keith Neville, Mrs Fred W Sieman, John J Pershing, Val Peterson, Frank B Woods, Harry F Cunningham, Frank Latenser, Aileen Cochran, Patricia Exon, Victor E Anderson, Selmer Solheim, J. B. Peacock, J. G. Welding, Colonel Harry F. Cunningham, Keats W. Lorenz, Ralph G Brooks, John F. Kennedy, Hubert Humphrey, Chuck Connors, Frank B Morrison, Mrs Lyndon B Johnson

Keywords: "Red Cross Mary;" "Birthday Club;" W. J. Broer Construction Company; Wilhelm Company; modified Georgian Colonial; Goodhue and Associates; American Institute of Architects; governor's library; First Lady's Portrait Gallery; First Ladies' Doll Collection; Distaffs; Lutheran Medical Center

Photographs / Images: Nebraska's first governor's mansion, 1445 H; Nebraska's second governor's mansion, built in 1956; Dining room old mansion with alcove; Front parlor of old mansion; Oak foyer of the old mansion; Paneling from the old mansion (top photo) was used in the governor's library of new mansion (below); Empire style state drawing room in new mansion; a ballroom, occupying the entire third floor of the old mansion; the state dining room in the new mansion seats 24; the kitchen of the new mansion; Open house, March 15 and 16, 1958; the family room on the second floor of the new mansion



## HOUSING NEBRASKA'S GOVERNORS, 1854-1980

*By Peg Poeschl*

Nebraska Territory in 1854 was a virgin land, a pioneer society. Nebraska was then the edge of the American frontier; today it is the heartland of the nation. This change is reflected in the development of its institutions and traditions. One such institution is the governor's mansion, whose history is a microcosm of Nebraska's growth and change.<sup>1</sup>

Nebraska has had two official governor's Mansions, the first purchased in 1899, the second built in 1956. Narrating the history of a state institution, such as that which these two mansions represent, involves investigating its legislative history and architectural development. Yet one must further consider events which occurred in the mansions and the experiences of the people who lived there. Once blended, these four elements—legislation, architecture, events, and people—reveal a broad picture of the governors' homes. And once the character of a building is defined, it is no longer inanimate brick and wood, but rather a living symbol of the times through which it has passed.

The history of living quarters of Nebraska governors falls into three stages, which will be given the following titles:

- (1) "A Society of Equals, 1854-1899." (No mansion is provided).
- (2) "The Honor of Society, 1899-1956." (A mansion is purchased for the use of the governor.)
- (3) "Society Goes Modern, 1956-1980." (A mansion is built for the use of the governor.)

### *A Society Of Equals, 1854-1899*

According to an August 30, 1854, newspaper, Francis Burt, the newly appointed territorial governor of Nebraska

---

Frontispiece: Color rendering of second governor's Mansion by architect Selmer Solheim. Courtesy of Nebraska Department of Administrative Services.

will start [from South Carolina] for that territory about the first of next month. He will take a territorial library with him, and one household servant called a slave, an aged female domestic. . . . The Governor, and his followers will dwell in nomadic style, that is tents, until they can knock-up log houses in the wilderness.<sup>2</sup>

Although Governor Burt was never actually obliged to establish such primitive living quarters, the report is interesting in that its author believed that the highest appointed official of the United States territory might live in a tent. In 1854, when Nebraska was part of the American frontier, politicians, soldiers, and farmers all lived under difficult conditions. Even high government officials often led comparatively simple lives.

Of course as the years passed, Nebraska society became richer and more structured. Social and occupational classes became more sharply defined and were reflected in differing incomes, life styles, and living arrangements. Yet for 46 years, from 1854 to 1899, Nebraska's governor was not distinguished from any other citizen by a special residence. Governors found their own quarters. (See Appendix A.)

This situation slowly changed. As early as 1873 a bill to appropriate money for the purchase of a governor's mansion passed the state Senate.<sup>3</sup> The bill died in the House, probably a victim of the harsh times imposed by the economic panic, brought on in part by drought and grasshoppers of the early 1870s. Still, the idea of an official governor's mansion gained ground in 1889, when \$1,000 per year was appropriated to the governor for rent money. During the depression of the mid-1890s this sum was lowered to \$750 a year. (Governor Lorenzo Crouse, 1893-1895, refused to accept rent money.) Then in the brighter year of 1899 Nebraska's Legislature appropriated \$25,000 for the purchase of a governor's mansion.<sup>4</sup>

What of the spirit of the events and people in Nebraska's early series of unofficial "governors' mansions"? Few of these buildings remain, but numerous written accounts hint at what took place in them. The houses were scattered over southeast Nebraska—Bellevue, Omaha, Lincoln, Nebraska City—depending upon the location of the seat of government. The style in which early governors lived and entertained usually reflected their economic and social positions and was not greatly altered by ascendancy to the governorship. The social events held in the early residences are hard to separate into "official" and "private" functions. In those days Nebraska's population was

so small that official guests were often personal friends.

Governor Thomas Cuming's lodgings are a good example of the atmosphere of those times. During his term as acting governor, his rooms at the Douglas House, 13th and Harney Streets, Omaha, "were often filled with the elite of this young and growing city. Mrs. Cuming was very popular in the little gatherings which were frequently held."<sup>5</sup> During his elected term (1857-1858), the Cumingses lived at 18th and Douglas in a "gothic cottage" which had been moved up the Missouri River from St. Louis. Their house was used for Catholic Church services. Mrs. Cuming told of the Sunday when someone, not realizing this fact, saw a large crowd of worshipers heading towards the Cuming home and assuming the worst ran to Governor Cuming's office to report his house on fire.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the active social calendar that seems to have filled Governor Cuming's residence, from 1854 to 1899 much of a governor's entertaining was done either in hotels or in homes of other prominent citizens. For example, the first gubernatorial ball, for Mark W. Izard (1855-1857), was held at the New City Hotel in Omaha. Guests feasted on bacon sandwiches, dried-apple pie, and coffee with brown sugar.<sup>7</sup> In January, 1873, Governor Robert W. Furnas (1873-1875) was given a reception at the residence of Thomas P. Kennard in Lincoln, at which "through the whole evening fresh guests arrived, while others departed after having paid their respects to the Governor, who is especially popular with the ladies."<sup>8</sup> And in 1889 the inaugural reception for Governor John M. Thayer (1887-1891, 1891-1892) was held in the Capitol and attended by William F. (Buffalo Bill) Cody and his wife.<sup>9</sup>

The attendance at the reception by Cody, a frontier celebrity, can perhaps be interpreted as a symbolic last bow to Nebraska's "Society of Equals." In 1889 the Legislature began to appropriate rent money for the governor and by 1900 had provided him with an official mansion. As Nebraska entered a more mature era, the governor's need for an official residence was fully recognized.

### *The Honor of Society, 1899-1956*

By 1899 riches—even opulence—began to have an impact on Nebraska's social structure. In his *History of Nebraska* James

C. Olson, writing about the turn-of-the-century era, stated that most elements of society participated in some organized activity: "Lincoln's social life centered around its discussion clubs, literary societies and the opera house—proclaimed the most ornate Romanesque building west of Chicago—its 38 churches and 13 temperance societies."<sup>10</sup> The 1899 legislative provision for a governor's mansion was one more sign that Nebraska's pioneer phase was nearly over.

In 1899 the Legislature passed HB610 "to provide a Governor's Mansion, to purchase, pay for and furnish same and to appropriate the sum of \$25,000 or as much there-of as needed."<sup>11</sup> The house selected was a magnificent two-and-one-half story, gabled-roofed frame residence on the southwest corner of 15th and H Streets, immediately east of the present Mansion. This Neo-Classical Revival dwelling was gracefully adorned with a two-tiered, wrap-around veranda of Doric columns linked by balustrades.

The first floor consisted of a reception hall and stairway finished in oak, a front parlor and sitting room in maple, a sun-porch, a dining room, a small luncheon room, the kitchen, and the pantry. The second story contained four bedrooms, two with adjoining Mexican onyx bathrooms, a smoking-room, and servants' quarters. The entire third floor was given over to a ballroom and the basement contained a laundry, wine cellar, and manservant's quarters. The house, served by six fireplaces, was sold to the state with many of its late 19th-century furnishings intact, including most of the silverware, china, table linen, carpets, curtains, tapestries, rugs, and even a piano.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the newly designated Governor's Mansion almost did not survive its first two years. In 1899 the Legislature had not appropriated money for repair and maintenance. In 1901 the first two governors to occupy it (William H. Poynter, 1899-1901, and Charles H. Dietrich, 1901) both objected to its neglect.

In an address to the Senate, Governor Poynter stated: "I see no good reason can be given for requiring the Governor to maintain a Mansion which is very largely for public benefit at his own expense." Governor Dietrich added that "the Executive Mansion should either be sold or an appropriation made for its proper maintenance." In the light of these complaints a bill to sell the Mansion passed the Senate, but seems to have been dropped in the House. Instead the Legislature appropriated \$3,000 a year for repair, furnishing, and maintenance of the Mansion.<sup>13</sup>



*Nebraska's first governor's Mansion, 1445 H, was used from 1899 to 1956. It was built in 1899 by businessman D. E. Thompson, later US ambassador to Brazil and then to Mexico.*



*Nebraska's second governor's Mansion, built in 1956.*



*Dining room of old Mansion with alcove. The silver punch set (and matching bowl not pictured) were presented by the state to the battleship USS Nebraska in 1907 and are now in the new Mansion. The chandelier is owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society.*



*Front parlor of old Mansion. A piano was included with the Mansion purchased in 1899; in 1941 the Legislature appropriated \$500 to buy a new piano.*



*Oak foyer of the old Mansion.*



*Paneling from the old Mansion (top photo) was used in the governor's library of new Mansion (below).*

In the course of 57 years (1899-1956), the first Governor's Mansion would serve 17 of 19 governors. Samuel R. McKelvie (1919-1923) chose to live in his own house at 140 South 26th Street, and Victor E. Anderson (1955-1959) remained in his home at 1501 Havelock Street during construction of the present Mansion.

During these years the Legislature repeatedly allocated money for the Mansion's upkeep and improvement. Major amounts for renovation and refurnishing were appropriated in 1925 and 1926 (\$10,000), 1933 (\$10,000), and 1941 (\$8,500). In addition, lesser improvements were provided for in supplemental appropriations. For example, in 1905 a \$1,000 appropriation was made for painting the Mansion and buying a boiler.<sup>14</sup> (See Appendix B.)

Nebraska's first Governor's Mansion was the site of a multitude of events, local, national, and international in character. From 1900 through World War II, Lincoln, with the Capitol and Governor's Mansion at its center, was a hub of great social and political activity. This circumstance is hardly surprising. During the first 50 years of this century, Nebraska held not only a central geographical position in America's transportation network, but also held a unique position in this country's political scene. Two prominent Nebraska politicians of that era were William Jennings Bryan (Democratic nominee for President, 1896, 1902, and 1908) and George W. Norris (who served in Congress continuously for 40 years, 1902-1942). The tigers of Populism and Progressivism were shaking the country, and Nebraska was one of the states holding those tigers' tails.

Many people arriving in Nebraska for no specific political purpose were also received at the Mansion. The rights-of-way of two of this nation's main east-west travel routes, the Union Pacific and the Burlington railroads, bisect Nebraska. Travelers "just passing through" frequently chose Lincoln as a mid-route stopover.

Activities in the Mansion were official, private, and "somewhere-in-between" events. Some governors appear to have entertained more than others. As might be expected, war years seem to have been particularly busy while depression years were much less hurried. As early as 1907 Nebraska society had acquired an international complexion. Governor George L.

Sheldon (1907-1909) hosted dignitaries from India, Russia, France, Germany, and Mexico, as well as national figures. William Howard Taft interrupted his campaign for the presidency in 1908 to accept the hospitality of Governor Sheldon.<sup>15</sup>

Governor Keith Neville (1917-1919) gave a more personal touch to the Mansion. The Nevilles were the only occupants of the Mansion to become parents while living there. Their youngest daughter, Irene, was born in the Mansion on July 1, 1918.<sup>16</sup>

World War I influenced Mansion activities. Governor Neville's eldest daughter, now Mrs. Fred W. Sieman, recalls that during the war she and the other Neville children learned to knit with the Red Cross ladies who met at the Mansion. The Red Cross was also to have benefited from the sale of a lamb, named "Red Cross Mary," which the Neville children raised on the front lawn of the Mansion. But poor Mary died, perhaps [from] the fright, according to Mrs. Sieman, during the Armistice Day celebration which "spontaneously" burgeoned in the street in front of the Mansion on November 11, 1918. "People sang and danced all night and called for speeches from the Governor's family," she said.<sup>17</sup>

Although Governor Samuel R. McKelvie (1919-1923) did not live in the Mansion, it was kept open and used for official entertainment. That the McKelvies were grand hosts is evidenced by the following description of the governor's inaugural ball, held at the Mansion on February 14, 1919:

The Mansion from the lower rooms where the reception was held to the ballroom on the third floor was beautifully decorated for the occasion with southern smilax from Alabama, which festooned the chandeliers, fireplaces and the walls, ran up the staircase to the dressing-rooms on the second floor and on up to the ballroom, the walls of which were hung with it. . . arranged at intervals around the room were large golden spread American Eagles bearing flags. The ceiling was done in lattice work and from the central portion 100 doves of peace fluttered in the air. All the Nebraska colors, some of them but recently returned from the front, appeared on the walls.<sup>18</sup>

During Governor McKelvie's terms the Mansion was also used for more practical matters, as during General John J. Pershing's visit to Lincoln, December 29, 1919, through January 4, 1920. General Pershing, in the midst of a triumphal cross-country tour, stopped in Lincoln to spend part of the holiday season with his family. While here, members of his staff, orderlies, and field clerks lived at the Mansion.<sup>19</sup>

During another war-time administration, that of Dwight

Griswold (1941-1947), the Mansion was again a major center of social activity. Many World War II groups used the Mansion because it was centrally located, and travel was discouraged because of gasoline rationing. Food was also rationed, Mrs. Dwight Griswold-Bomgardner recounted how she saved food stamps to use for entertaining. She recalled one incident in particular: "Once we were called upon to entertain the Prince Regent of Iraq. It took just about all my stamps to provide a big beef roast for the guests, since we couldn't serve them pork."<sup>20</sup>

During Governor Griswold's terms there were frequent legislative lunches and dinners at the Mansion and teas for the visits by distinguished guests. Things did not always go smoothly, but sometimes humor seems to have saved the day.

When the Dwight Griswolds [Republicans] moved into the Governor's Mansion in 1941 they brought their Labrador hunting dog, Buster. Being a faithful watchdog, Buster "clamped-down" one eventful evening on the foot of former-Governor Charles Bryan, according to Erma Griswold-Bomgardner. "It didn't phase Mr. Bryan at all," said the former First Lady. "He just looked down and said, 'Must have known I was a Democrat!'"<sup>21</sup>

The whirl of social events at the Mansion continued through the next two administrations. During Governor Val Peterson's term (1947-1953), Mrs. Peterson showed that, although in many ways first ladies are unique women in unique positions, they also have much in common with the average citizen. When it came her turn to host her monthly bridge group, the "Birthday Club," the Mansion opened its doors wide, just as "any other house on the block" would!<sup>22</sup>

By 1953 the procession of bridge clubs, luncheons, balls, teas, and receptions in the first Mansion was drawing to an end as support for a new house grew. In the early 1930s thought had been given to replacing it with the European-style townhouse, which stands at 1801 C Street. The current owner of the house recalls:

It was once considered for the Nebraska Governor's Mansion. That was in the 1930s when it was sold for back taxes. . . . It sat empty for perhaps as long as five years, and during that time Governor Roy Cochran's wife decided it would be fine as a Governor's Mansion. Apparently she didn't have enough influence to get the job done.<sup>23</sup>

The old Mansion was beginning to show its age. In 1945 Mrs. Griswold commented that her feet would freeze at dinner because the windows were loose. None of the six fireplaces worked; the downstairs rooms were too small for large recep-

tions; and the four upstairs bedrooms did not provide enough accommodation for both guests and family members. Ten years later the mansion was termed a "rookery, drafty, uncomfortable and in dreadful disrepair." Mrs. Victor E. Anderson (1955-1957) noted that the ballroom, by then a "fire hazard," could not be used, and to get to the second-story veranda one had to climb through a window.<sup>24</sup> It seemed that time had come for a change.

The Unicameral Legislature responded. In 1945 a measure was introduced to appropriate \$100,000 with which to purchase a site and construct, equip, and furnish a new governor's mansion.<sup>25</sup> At that time the Legislative Council advised against such action because of World War II shortages of labor and building material. The council did not want the state to compete with private individuals attempting construction projects. But the seed of an idea had been planted. In 1952 an alternative to constructing a new governor's home was presented by the estate of Frank B. Woods of Lincoln, which offered to sell the state the 25-room house at 2501 Sheridan Drive.<sup>26</sup> But it was decided to construct a new mansion rather than to refurbish an older house. The idea for constructing a new mansion reappeared in 1955 when the Unicameral Legislature passed LB361 to provide \$200,000 from the State Industrial and Military Department Building Fund for planning, construction, landscaping, equipping, and furnishing a governor's Mansion.<sup>27</sup>

The old Mansion was demolished, but its salvageable material and some effects were used in building and furnishing the new Mansion. Paneling and one fireplace from the old Mansion were salvaged, as were bath and plumbing fixtures, kitchen cabinets, range tops, and lumber. At least one settee, two chairs, and a piano were transferred to the new Mansion.

The State Historical Society received a few items, and the rest of the old Mansion's furnishings were sold at auction on Thursday, August 9, 1956. Nearly 300 items were sold, including the governor's oak desk and chair, five of six fireplaces, all lighting fixtures and chandeliers (except one), settees and chairs, end tables, bookshelves, a bedroom set, pictures, carpeting, and drapes.<sup>28</sup> A citizen not able to attend the auction could write Governor Anderson for a memento—perhaps a piece of wallpaper or possibly a gavel carved from the wood of the old Mansion.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the first Governor's Mansion, purchased in 1888, passed into history. Nebraska and its executive Mansion were entering a new phase. The new home would be efficient and modern, yet in its own way elegant and beautiful.

*Society Goes Modern, 1956-1980*

For two decades following World War II America, including Nebraska, was indeed a land of modern plenty. Newer, bigger, richer, and better were the watchwords of the day. The 1955 legislative appropriation for a new Mansion symbolized the prosperity and progress which had spread across the country.

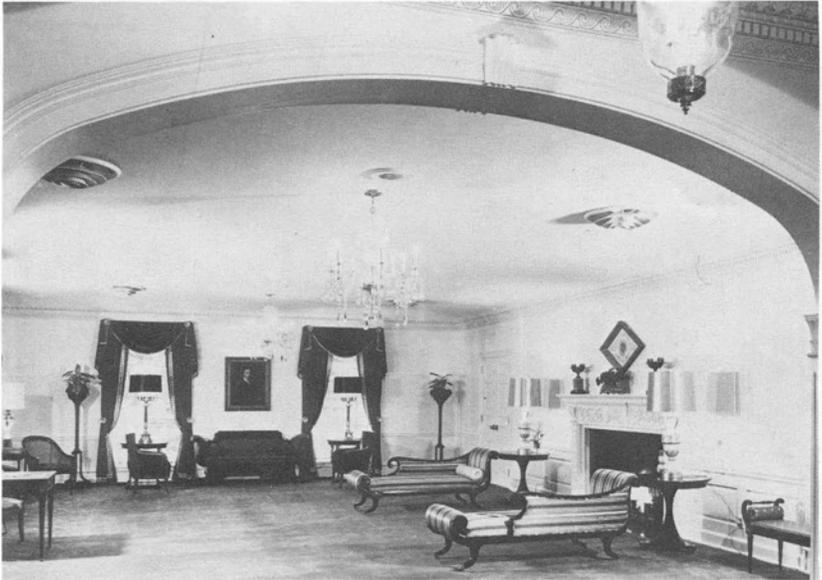
The new Governor's Mansion has favorably impressed those who have lived and visited there. One such visitor was former First Lady Aileen Cochran, who in a 1974 luncheon thank-you note to Patricia Exon, then first lady of the Mansion, wrote: "My memory of the old Mansion goes back many years before I lived there, and I can say this to you now—'as Chatelaine of the present Mansion you have come a long, long way.'"<sup>30</sup>

The Mansion's construction and decoration was supervised by Governor and Mrs. Victor E. Anderson (1955-1957). The architects were Selmer Solheim and Associates, Lincoln; the general contract went to the W. J. Broer Construction Company; Omahan J. B. Peacock of Orchard and Wilhelm Company was the interior decorator; and J. G. Welding was the landscape designer. The design, named modified Georgian Colonial by Solheim, was chosen from seven which had been presented to the State Building Commission. Solheim felt that his concept, based in American heritage, represented permanency and that a more contemporary building style would soon become dated.<sup>31</sup>

Not everyone was pleased with his plan, however. Colonel Harry F. Cunningham, one of the leading critics of Solheim's proposals, was a former member of Goodhue and Associates, the architectural firm which had designed the state Capitol. The *Lincoln Sunday Journal-Star* reported that Cunningham

was shocked and disappointed with the proposed design, which he said was inappropriate for the capital area. Cunningham said he suspected the design was dictated by the Governor rather than by the architect. Cunningham claims he has wide-spread support from Lincoln architects.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, Frank Latenser, president of the state chapter of the American Institute of Architects, declared that he was



*Empire style state drawing room in new Mansion. The settee at far end of the room is from the old Mansion. The hand carving on the fireplace, and all carving in the Mansion, is by Keats W. Lorenz of Lincoln.*



*A ballroom, occupying the entire third floor of the old Mansion, was frequently used in early days, and during World War II for dances for officers and enlisted men stationed at the Lincoln Air Base. Its condemnation as a fire hazard was one of many reasons for building a new mansion.*



*The state dining room in the new Mansion seats 24. The Czechoslovakian crystal chandelier purchased in 1956 was replaced in 1971 after it was broken during a periodic cleaning.*



*The kitchen of the new Mansion boasts four built-in electric ovens, eight service units, and three electric dishwashers. Many kitchen fixtures are from the old Mansion kitchen, modernized during the 1947-1953 term of Governor Val Peterson.*



*More than 18,000 people toured the new Mansion during the March 15 and 16, 1958, open house. Appropriately, the first visitors were those by and for whom it was built, the citizens of Nebraska.*



*The family room on the second floor of the new Mansion, along with a small snack kitchen (not pictured), gives the governor's family some privacy. Mrs. Fred Sieman, daughter of Governor Keith Neville (1917-1919) once said, "Living in the Mansion can often be like living in a fishbowl."*

“lined-up with those favoring the design. . . .An ‘intelligent committee’. . .and a ‘good architect’ had approved the design and he ‘would be willing to go along’ with them.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite this controversy Solheim’s proposal was retained. The Mansion’s exterior of smooth, pink, sandstone Norman brick, called “Old Virginian,” encloses 27 major rooms, 11 bathrooms, and a three-car garage. The interior of the Mansion is decorated in five complementary styles: French Provincial (1690-1792), Georgian (1715-1753), Louis XVI (1760-1790), Empire (1804-1815), and Regency (1800-1830). The furnishings in the first floor rooms of the Mansion are reproductions of original pieces from these eras, which reflect adaptations of motifs that appear in wall decoration and on furniture in Egyptian and Greco-Roman antiquity.

Off the Mansion’s main foyer are the principal rooms used for state functions: The state drawing room is decorated with Empire and Regency furnishings. The state dining room is reproduction Chippendale with Georgian architectural detail hand carved by Keats W. Lorenz of Lincoln. The governor’s private dining room is done in French Provincial. The first floor also houses the governor’s library and the service wing. An elliptical staircase rises from the foyer to the second floor, which comprises the governor’s apartments and three guest rooms, each with private bath. The basement includes a large meeting room and the staff quarters.

Three collections of note in the Mansion are the governor’s library, the First Lady’s Portrait Gallery, and the First Ladies’ Doll Collection. The library, containing works by Nebraska authors, Americana, and general reference books, was originally assembled by the Nebraska Committee for National Library Week in 1959.<sup>34</sup> The First Lady’s Portrait Gallery, displayed off the front foyer, was initiated by Mrs. Charles Bryan in 1932.<sup>35</sup> On display in a basement room is the First Ladies’ Doll Collection, containing dolls dressed in replicas of the first ladies’ inaugural gowns. This project was begun in 1964 by the Distaffs, an organization of doctors’ wives at the Lutheran Medical Center in Omaha.

Yet the new Mansion is much more than a showcase for mementos of the past. It plays an integral part in the functioning of Nebraska’s government and has seen interesting events

and people. The first governor to reside at the Mansion was Victor E. Anderson (1955-1957). While the Mansion was under construction, he lived in his home at 1501 Havelock Avenue, and during that time most official entertaining was done at private clubs. Once in the Mansion, the first lady spent many hours giving tours. Proof that typical family life continues even in the official residence is pointed up by an incident recalled by Mrs. Anderson:

After the Open Houses were over, Mrs. Anderson conducted many private tours. "I tried to arrange to conduct the tours myself, and my husband tried to be there too." . . . One afternoon Governor Anderson had 30 surprise guests to the Mansion for a tour, only to find his wife perched on a ladder, washing the crystal chandelier in the Drawing-Room. "I just got down from the ladder and gave them a tour," she said.<sup>36</sup>

One of the first acts of Governor Ralph G. Brooks (1956-1960) upon entering office was to appoint his wife as official Mansion receptionist. Her guest book shows a wide range of visitors, from Senators John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey to Chuck Connors, star of the TV show "The Rifleman." Senator Kennedy said that the Mansion and the Capitol were equal to any state government buildings he had seen. Connors announced, "This marks the first time I've been in a Governor's Mansion, but it's hard to believe that any state could top this one."<sup>37</sup>

Governor Frank B. Morrison's (1961-1967) years in the Mansion saw their complement of unusual events and visits. During the days of student activism in the 1960s, the Mansion was once filled with 600 students who had come to call on the governor in his office. He invited them to return later that evening, and talked to them until midnight.<sup>38</sup>

Another visitor during the Morrison administration was Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, in Nebraska for the first Nebraskaland Days in 1965. Mrs. Johnson, who

had never stayed overnight in any governor's home, hadn't expected to stay at the Mansion, Mrs. Morrison said, but Secret Servicemen asked her in the afternoon if she could keep the President's wife for the night. "I had sent the cook home on vacation so I cooked for her myself," the former Governor's wife said. "She was one of the most gracious guests I have ever had."<sup>39</sup>

A newly elected governor's wife can suffer identity problems Mrs. Morrison discovered the week after she had moved into the Mansion. She had walked downtown and taken a taxi back to the Mansion:

"I realized I had forgotten my keys so I had the cabbie take me to the back-door," she said. "He assumed I worked at the Mansion and I was so embarrassed about forgetting my key that I didn't tell him who I was." She said the driver asked her how she liked working at the Mansion and she said she loved it. A few weeks later she attended a formal tea and called a cab to take her. "I walked out the front door with my white gloves and fur cape and saw I had the cab driver who earlier had taken me as a staff member." Mrs. Morrison said he look a bit confused, and then asked, "Are you still liking the Mansion?"<sup>40</sup>

Cabbies and student radicals, senators and TV stars, Middle Eastern princes and presidents of the United States are all part of the history of Nebraska's governors' mansions. Prosperity and austerity, war and peace have shaped the character of Nebraska and the character of Nebraska in its turn shaped the character of the governors' residences.

## Appendix A

### RESIDENCES OF THE GOVERNORS

#### *Territorial*

Francis Burt, 1854—Presbyterian Mission House, Bellevue.  
 Thomas B. Cuming, 1854-1855—Douglas Boarding House, 13th and Harney, Omaha.  
 1857-1858—18th and Douglas, Omaha  
 Mark W. Izard, 1855-1857—Not Known.  
 William A. Richardson, 1858—Not Known.  
 J. Sterling Morton, 1858-1859, 1861—Nebraska City.  
 Samuel W. Black, 1859-1861—Not Known.  
 Algernon S. Paddock, 1861—Not Known.  
 Alvin Saunders, 1861-1867—18th and Farnam, Omaha.

#### *State*

David Butler, 1867-1871—7th between Washington and Garfield, Lincoln.  
 William H. James, 1871-1873—Northeast Corner, 17th and J, Lincoln.  
 Robert W. Furnas, 1873-1875—Tichenor House, Southwest Corner, 11th and K, Lincoln.  
 Silas Garber, 1875-1877—boarded at 14th and H, Lincoln. 1878-1879—Southwest Corner, 11th and H, Lincoln.  
 Albinus Nance, 1879—Tichenor House, 13th and K, Lincoln. 1880-1883—1041 H, Lincoln.  
 James W. Dawes, 1883-1887—1610 K, Lincoln.  
 John M. Thayer, 1887—Capital Hotel, 143 North 11th, Lincoln. 1889—Windsor Hotel, 228-234 North 11th, Lincoln. 1890-1892—1915 Prospect, Lincoln.  
 James E. Boyd, 1891, 1892-1893—Windsor Hotel, 147 North 9th, Lincoln.  
 Lorenzo Crouse, 1893-1895—Lincoln Hotel, 147 North 9th, Lincoln.  
 Silas A. Holcomb, 1895-1899—1745 A, Lincoln.  
 William A. Poynter, 1899-1901—Governor's Mansion, 1445 H, Lincoln.  
 Charles H. Dietrich, 1901—The Mansion.  
 Ezra P. Savage, 1901-1903—The Mansion.  
 John H. Mickey, 1903-1907—The Mansion.  
 George L. Sheldon, 1907-1909—The Mansion.

- Ashton C. Shallenberger, 1909-1911—The Mansion.  
 Chester H. Aldrich, 1911-1913—The Mansion.  
 John H. Morehead, 1913-1917—The Mansion.  
 Keith Neville, 1917-1919—The Mansion.  
 Samuel R. McKelvie, 1919-1923—140 South 26th, Lincoln.  
 Charles W. Bryan, 1923-1925, 1931-1935—The Mansion.  
 Adam McMullen, 1925-1929—The Mansion.  
 Arthur J. Weaver, 1929-1931—The Mansion.  
 Robert Leroy Cochran, 1935-1941—The Mansion.  
 Dwight Griswold, 1941-1947—The Mansion.  
 Val Peterson, 1947-1953—The Mansion.  
 Robert B. Crosby, 1953-1955—The Mansion.  
 Victor E. Anderson, 1955-1959—1501 Havelock, Lincoln. The New Mansion, 1425 H, Lincoln.  
 Ralph G. Brooks, 1959-1960—The New Mansion.  
 Dwight W. Burney, 1960-61—The New Mansion.  
 Frank B. Morrison, 1961-1967—The New Mansion.  
 Norbert T. Tiemann, 1967-1971—The New Mansion.  
 J. James Exon, 1971-1979—The New Mansion.  
 Charles Thone, 1979- —The New Mansion.

## Appendix B

### SELECTED LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION

- 1873—Bill for an act to provide for the purchase of a mansion. Dropped in the House.  
 1889—\$1,000 per year for rent.  
 1895—\$750 per year for rent.  
 1899—\$15,000 to buy or erect mansion. Indefinitely postponed. \$25,000 to provide for a mansion.  
 1901—To sell mansion. Dropped. \$3,000 per year for mansion repairs, furniture, and maintenance.  
 1905—\$2,500 per year, repair, furnish, and maintain. \$1,100 to paint and to buy new boiler.  
 1907—\$6,000 for furniture, maintenance, and servants.  
 1909—\$2,600 to purchase land for addition to Mansion grounds. \$5,000 for furniture, maintenance, and servants. \$70 per month for Mansion and office janitor.  
 1911—\$5,500 for furniture, maintenance, and servants.  
 1913—\$805.36 for paving 15th Street adjacent to Mansion.  
 1917—\$3,500 for repairs, renovations, and upkeep.  
 1925—\$10,000 for improvement and maintenance of Mansion and grounds.  
 1927—Same as 1925.  
 1929—\$5,000 improvement and maintenance of Mansion.  
 1931—\$5,000 improvement and maintenance of Mansion.  
 1933—\$2,500 improvement and maintenance of Mansion. \$10,000 repair and refurbishing.  
 1935—\$4,500 improvements. \$600 improvement and maintenance.  
 1937—\$4,500 maintenance. \$700 re-roofing.  
 1939—\$3,200 maintenance.  
 1941—\$3,000 furnishing. \$5,000 maintenance. \$500 piano.

1943—\$4,200 maintenance.

1945—\$4,000 maintenance. \$100,000 to purchase site, build, and furnish new Mansion—postponed.

1955—\$200,000 to purchase site, construct and equip new mansion.

1957—\$20,000 to purchase additional land and set Mansion farther back from street.

1974—\$5,000 to landscape and renovate Mansion grounds.

1979—\$8,000 to replace fabrics and carpet in Mansion.

Beginning in 1947 Mansion maintenance funds came out of a sum for the governor from the general fund, rather than being specifically appropriated as before.

## NOTES

1. The idea for this account of Nebraska's governors' Mansions came from current First Lady Ruth Thone. Upon moving into the Mansion, Mrs. Thone realized that not only was it the governor's home, it was also a public institution, a part of Nebraska. She said that "in order to enjoy it [the Mansion] properly one must have a knowledge of its roots."

This project was developed by staff members of the Nebraska State Historical Society. The project director was Wendell Frantz, with Anne Diffendal, Daniel Kidd, and Gail DeBuse Potter as consultants. The research and writing was done by Peg Poeschl, an intern from the University of Nebraska history department. This article is being published in *Nebraska History* and issued as a pamphlet to be distributed at the Mansion. The reprints are funded in part by a grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities.

Special thanks must be given to the following governors, first ladies, and governors' families who offered their reminiscences: Mrs. Fred Sieman, Mrs. Robert Cochran, Governor Val Peterson, Governor Robert Crosby, Governor Dwight Burney, Mrs. Frank Morrison, Mrs. Ralph Brooks, and Mrs. Charles Thone.

2. From an unidentified newspaper as cited in Albert Watkins (ed.), *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, XX (Lincoln, 1922), 257.

3. *Nebraska Senate Journal* (1873), 278.

4. *Laws of Nebraska* (1889), 598; (1895), 386; (1899), 318-320.

5. Mrs. Charles H. Fiseite, "Pioneer Women of Omaha," in Nebraska Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, *Collection of Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences* (Cedar Rapids, 1916), 91.

6. *Omaha Excelsior*, March 10, 1906.

7. Alfred Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha From Pioneer Days to the Present* (Omaha, 1923), 91.

8. *Lincoln Daily Nebraska State Journal*, January 15, 1873. This restored house is now known as the Nebraska Statehood Memorial and is administered by the Nebraska State Historical Society.

9. *Ibid.*, January 3, 1889.

10. James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1966), 257.

11. *Laws of Nebraska* (1899), 318-320.

12. *Lincoln Nebraska State Journal*, June 20, 1899.

13. *Nebraska Senate Journal* (1901), 111, 123, 550, 558.

14. *Laws of Nebraska* (1925), 94; (1933), 110; (1941), 716; (1905), 742.

15. *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, December 13, 1931.

16. Letter from Mrs. Keith Neville, 1974. First Ladies' Research File, Nebraska State Historical Society.

17. Questionnaire filled out by Mrs. Frank Sieman, April 1, 1980. Governor's Mansion Research File, Nebraska State Historical Society.

18. *Lincoln Nebraska State Journal*, February 15, 1919.
19. *Lincoln Daily Star*, December 24, 1919.
20. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 1, 1974.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, January 21, 1951.
23. *Omaha Sunday World-Herald*, March 2, 1980.
24. *Omaha World-Herald Magazine*, April 17, 1955.
25. *Nebraska Legislative Journal* (1945), 1452.
26. *Omaha World-Herald Magazine*, April 17, 1955.
27. *Laws of Nebraska* (1955), 883-884.
28. *Lincoln Star*, August 10, 1956. One chandelier is now a part of the Nebraska State Historical Society Museum collections.
29. Victor E. Anderson Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.
30. Letter from Mrs. Robert Cochran, 1974. First Ladies' Research File, Nebraska State Historical Society.
31. *Lincoln Journal*, August 20, 1956.
32. *Lincoln Star*, August 25, 1956.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Nebraska Committee for National Library Week, *Presented to the Governor's Mansion* (Lincoln, 1959). Governor's Mansion Research File, Nebraska State Historical Society.
35. *Omaha World-Herald*, January 30, 1957.
36. *Lincoln Star*, April 3, 1974.
37. *Lincoln Star*, October 20, 1959.
38. *Lincoln Star*, April 3, 1974.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*