GOVERNOR'S MANSION
STATE HISTORIC PARK

Rehabilitation Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Open to the public as a historic house museum since 1967, the Governor's Mansion became a State Historic Park under California State Parks the same year that its last residents, the Reagans, moved out. Today, visitors to the mansion examine the tangible spaces, personal family relationships and social lives of the 13 governors and two private families who lived in the mansion. The historical pageant that played out in this house over the years involved a fascinating and significant part of the history of California, the nation and the world.

Built in 1877 for a prosperous Sacramento family, Albert and Clemenza Gallatin's mansion was every bit the status symbol they intended it to be. The Second Empire Italianate designed by Nathaniel Goodell was the epitome of high style Victorian-era architecture. For a quarter century it provided the Gallatins, and later the family of Joseph and Louisa Steffens, with a spacious and elegant home. In 1903, after several failed attempts to provide an executive residence, the State acquired the property to serve as the first official home for California's governors and their families.

What's been happening to the exterior of the Governor's Mansion State Historic Park?

For more than a year, the stately Governor's Mansion was covered with scaffolding and a shroud. A $1.2 million Deferred Maintenance Project funded by California State Parks is nearing completion. Work focused on the exterior of the mansion since many decorative elements were extremely deteriorated. A crew of skilled restoration specialists substituted newly milled old growth redwood components. A team of project managers, curators, historians, restoration specialists, maintenance experts, historic architects and interpreters guided every decision along the way. Meticulous records and copious photographs are archived in a detailed project file in an effort to inform and guide future generations of State Park employees who will be charged with the mansion's continuing care and preservation.

Has any work been done on the interior of the mansion?

Some deferred maintenance work was completed on the 3rd floor of the mansion to stabilize walls and ceilings and repair cracking. Now that the exterior "envelope" of the mansion is stabilized, the rest of the interior walls, ceilings and floors need attention. With the causes of some of the inside deterioration stopped from the outside, the cracked plaster, delaminating paint layers and overall wear that is evident must now be addressed.

The L-shaped ballroom with its intricate pattern of inlaid wood on the floor revealed a series of hand-painted trompe l'oeil (fool the eye) wall panels complete with naturalistic shading. In this same room, the ceiling contained a whimsical hand painted composition of two crossed billiard cues tied up with a shiny violet ribbon. Even a postcard-sized piece of the original black, gold, green and red paisley carpet from the 1877 time period was found under a floorboard.

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A study that identifies all the paint colors and patterns for the entire third floor has been completed. And a supplier for a custom colored historically-accurate carpet has been located. A portion of the original wall decorations will be left uncovered, and most of the paint scheme will be reproduced while preserving the real thing underneath its subsequent layers of paint. An 1870s era billiard table is being restored to place in the original billiard room. And, the staff is in the process of completing both a furnishings and an interpretive plan to guide future activity in the space.

Will the 3rd floor of the mansion be open for public tours?

Many years ago, the mansion's 3rd floor was open to public tours. However, fire safety required that those tours be ceased. Since that time, the 3rd floor was used for storage, and the spaces deteriorated. As described above, significant effort has been made to stabilize the walls and ceilings, and many discoveries were made in the process. As we now have significant evidence to support restoring the 3rd floor to its 1877 appearance, the restoration plan will proceed down that path. A comprehensive public tour program to be reintroduced to the 3rd floor is under development, and will be implemented following the restoration of the space, fire safety upgrades and ADA accessibility issues addressed.

What is happening with the landscaping and Carriage House?

A historic landscape architect has been engaged to prepare planting recommendations as well as a historic landscape report which will document the landscape treatment over time. Work is scheduled soon to repair the Brown-era swimming pool and replace broken pool equipment for its upkeep. In the carriage house, the interior space will be remodeled this winter. Because the Carriage House is also an important component of the historic resources on the site, all care will be taken to preserve the structure, while at the same time allowing for a remodeled museum store and visitor center space where a variety of multimedia programs will be featured. A new exhibit will also be added in this area to explore the recent preservation efforts at the Historic Governor's Mansion while a new permanent exhibit is developed.

How can I help?

The new California Historic Governor's Mansion Foundation has been formed to assist in the effort. Memberships will be available to individuals interested in assisting in the preservation of this important icon of California history. Corporate donations and sponsorships will also be available. It is expected that a formal fundraising program will be needed soon to augment the State Parks investment in preserving and interpreting the mansion, and in restoring the 3rd floor to make it accessible to the people of California once again.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS SINCE 1864

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