
Lesson One: A Mansion Is A Home



Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Make observations from examining historic photographs
- Develop questions for historical inquiry
- Research answers to questions
- Observe and explain how clues help in identifying a room's purpose or use in a home

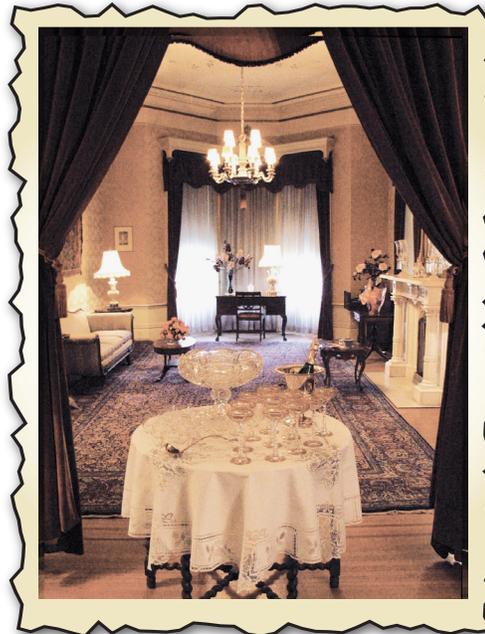
Brief History of the Governor's Mansion

California's executive mansion, popularly known as the Governor's Mansion, was built in 1877 for Albert and Clemenza Rhodes Gallatin. Albert made his fortune as a partner in the Sacramento hardware store of Huntington and Hopkins. The Gallatins hired architect Nathaniel Goodell to design the mansion. Uriah Reese built the house. Once it was completed, the newspapers claimed the mansion was "one of the most imposing and attractive residences in Sacramento."

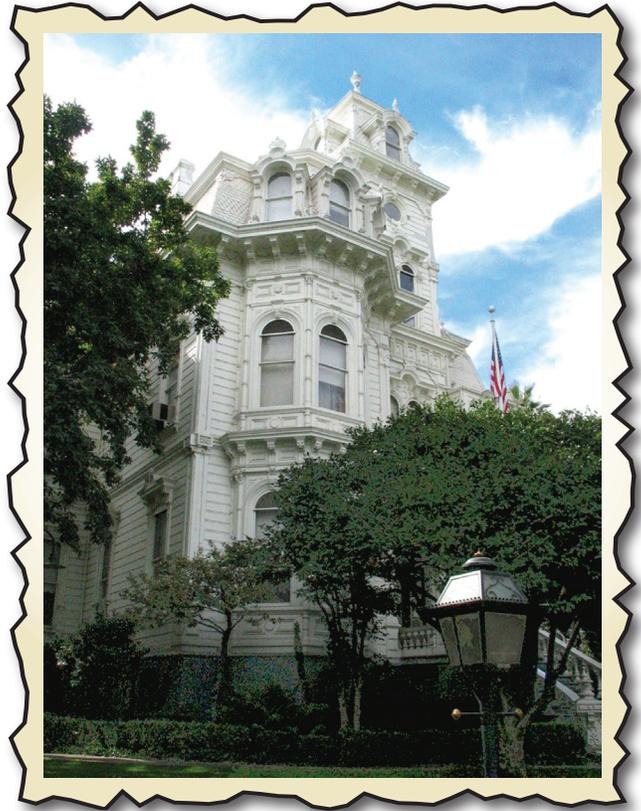
In 1887 the Gallatins sold the house to Joseph and Louisa Steffens who had four children: the famous journalist and author Lincoln Steffens, Lulu, Lottie, and Laura.

The State of California purchased the house for a governor's residence from Mr. and Mrs. Steffens in 1903 for \$32,000. Victorian architecture was then somewhat out of style, but the house was suitably impressive, conveniently located, and comfortable. A small wing was added to house the governor's office and the home was furnished, bringing the total price to \$56,000.

George Pardee, the twenty-first governor, his wife Helen, and their four girls, Florence, 15, Madeline, 14, Carol, 12, and Helen, 8, were the first residents of the "new" Governor's Mansion in 1903. During the next 64 years it was home to the families of 12 other governors, including Earl Warren, who later became Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, and Ronald Reagan, who later became President of the United States.



While the governors left their mark on the political history of the house it was usually their wives who made the decorating and furnishing decisions for the mansion. All the rooms are furnished with items purchased by the first families. These include the 1902 Steinway piano purchased by Helen Pardee, and the plum velvet sofa and chairs purchased by Minnie Johnson in 1911. Nina Warren added the hand-tied Persian carpets in 1943, and Virginia Knight selected the official state china in the late 1950s. Each family altered the furnishings or decoration of the mansion to meet its needs.



Outside the mansion is the original carriage house, used for horses and buggies, and later for automobiles. The swimming pool was built and presented to Governor Edmund G. Brown in 1959. Flowers, shrubs and trees complete the mansion's landscape. Some, like the camellia trees and the palm trees, date back to 1877.

In 1967 the Reagans, the last governor's family to live in the mansion, moved out due to the threat of fire. The Governor's Mansion was turned over to the California Department of Parks and Recreation and opened to the public as a museum that same year.

The mansion is unusual among museums in that it is not a replica or a restoration. It stands much as it did when vacated by the Reagans in 1967. In spite of the twentieth century furnishings, the mansion still reflects its Victorian origin with seven Italian marble fireplaces, five gold framed mirrors from France, and numerous exquisitely detailed brass hinges and doorknobs.

