

BEKINS:
85 Years of Service

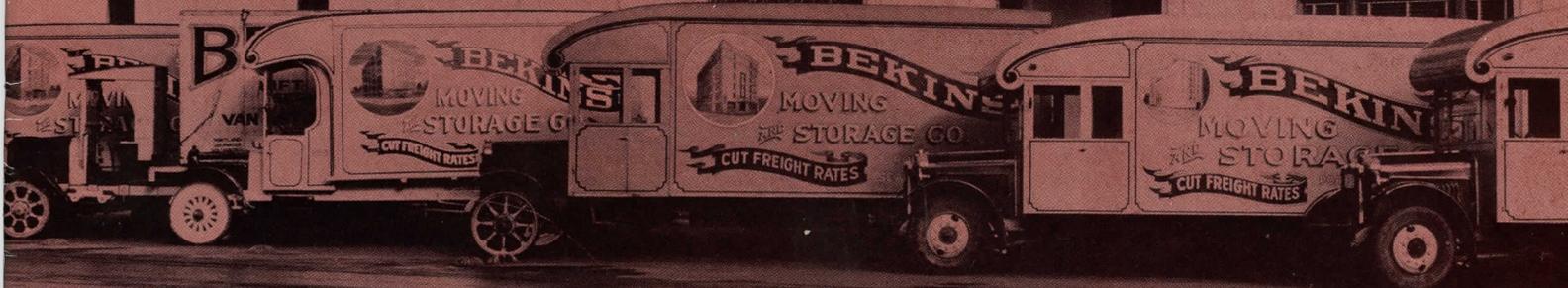
Volume 9, Number 3 / Fall-Winter 1988

Portage

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND INDUSTRY



Washington's "First" Home



Anatomy of an Exhibition ■ The Bekins Story ■ Moving an Exhibition

WASHINGTON'S "FIRST" HOME:



Bekins moves the Daniel Evans family into the Governor's Mansion, 1965. Photo courtesy of Bekins.

The Governor's Mansion

by Eleanor A. Boba

Washington's "First" Home stands on a rise adjacent to the Capitol Campus in Olympia. It is a red brick edifice with a white-columned portico built in Georgian style. The nineteen rooms include five public rooms decorated with period furniture, the achievement of a volunteer organization – the Governor's Mansion Foundation.

In 1908 the so-called "Executive Mansion" was a run-down clapboard house built by the first governor of Washington Territory, Isaac Stevens, in 1856. Later used as the home of Elisha Ferry, Washington's first state governor (1889-93), the structure retained the appellation until its demolition in 1929. The razing of the house to make room for the construction of the Capitol Campus came over the protests of many civic and historical groups for whom the Isaac Stevens home was a historical landmark. (See the Fall 1988 issue of *Columbia* magazine for further details about the controversy).



Governor Roland Hartley in front of the mansion, c. 1928. Photo courtesy of the Washington State Capital Museum.



Lizzie Hay, wife of Governor Marion Hay (1909-1913), purchased furniture for the Mansion at Frederick and Nelson in Seattle. She is pictured here in the mansion's drawing room. Photo courtesy of the Washington State Capital Museum.

The cornerstone of the present Governor's Mansion was laid in a Masonic ceremony on August 1, 1908. A large crowd watched as a time capsule containing copies of local newspapers of the day, a copy of the mansion appropriation bill, a roster of state officials, and an Olympia booster book was placed inside the cornerstone. The mansion was ready for occupation in five months, at a cost of \$35,000. The construction had been marred by one incident in which some curious children found a box of dynamite caps at the site and took them home to play with. Word of the potential danger did not spread fast enough to prevent one boy from blowing three fingers off his left hand.

Eighty years ago, in January, 1909, Washington's new executive mansion was readied to receive its first tenant – newly inaugurated governor Samuel Cosgrove. He never arrived. Washington's sixth governor fell ill shortly after being sworn in and was taken immediately to a spa in Paso Robles, California, where he died on March 28.

Despite this inauspicious beginning, the Georgian-style mansion has had a rich and colorful history. Twelve governors and their families have called it home, each bringing something different in the way of atmosphere, furnishings or life-style.

Lizzie Hay, the first "First Lady" of Washington to live in the mansion, purchased many of the original furnishings

from Frederick & Nelson of Seattle, it being her husband's wish to patronize Washington firms. The mahogany dining room set she selected remains in the mansion to this day.

Evelyn Langlie, the wife of Governor Arthur B. Langlie, planted a victory garden behind the mansion during World War II and also kept chickens. She complained about the lack of "good help" during the war years:

We couldn't compete with the wages offered by Fort Lewis and defense plants. The girls who weren't quitting to work at aircraft factories and shipyards were marrying servicemen at nearby military establishments. We really felt the pressure of being understaffed to run that large house. ("The Light in the Mansion," Mary Lou Hanify, unpublished MS.)

Mrs. Langlie was showing a new maid how to clean a razor clam when the earthquake of April 13, 1949 brought a chimney crashing through the kitchen skylight. Fortunately, no one at the mansion was hurt, although some serious structural damage was caused.

The wife of Governor Wallgren served her famous "mile-high" lemon pie to then-Vice President Harry Truman and his daughter at the mansion in 1945. Later that year Truman (now president), a fishing buddy of the governor, made a return visit during which he played a small upright piano and signed the guest

book – both still at the mansion.

Governor and Mrs. Rosellini entertained many dignitaries in the Northwest for the Seattle World's Fair of 1962. Daniel and Nancy Evans played hosts to President-elect and Mrs. Richard Nixon, Victor Borge, Pearl Bailey, and little Danny Evans' cub scout pack – although not all at the same time.

DECIDING THE FATE OF THE MANSION

Almost from the first, the mansion was plagued with structural and comfort problems. In fact in 1915 Governor Lister moved his family out of the home for a time, complaining of the lack of heat. Inadequate insulation, leaks, creaking floorboards, and a cumbersome intercom system were just a few of the problems a succession of first families found themselves grappling with. The problem came to a head under the Evans administration when architects and legislators openly discussed tearing down the mansion and replacing it with a new building. To arguments that the structure was not "historically ancient," the governor replied, "It's a lot more ancient than a new one would be."

It was the governor's wife, Nancy Evans, who launched a campaign to save the mansion and raise money for the structural renovation required. Her efforts and the pricetag of a new mansion persuaded the legislature to appropriate \$600,000 for a major remodeling effort in 1973. The work, completed in 1975, included additional private quarters for the first family as well as new guestrooms and a much-needed commercial sized kitchen – more than 4,000 additional square feet overall.

THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION FOUNDATION

In 1972 as a part of her efforts on behalf of the mansion, Nancy Evans established The Foundation for the Preservation of the Governor's Mansion (now The Governor's Mansion Founda-

Evelyn Langlie in a redecorated drawing room, 1951. Her husband, Arthur B. Langlie, was the first Washington governor to be elected to a third term; he served from 1941 to 1945 and again from 1949 to 1957. Photo courtesy of the Washington State Capital Museum.

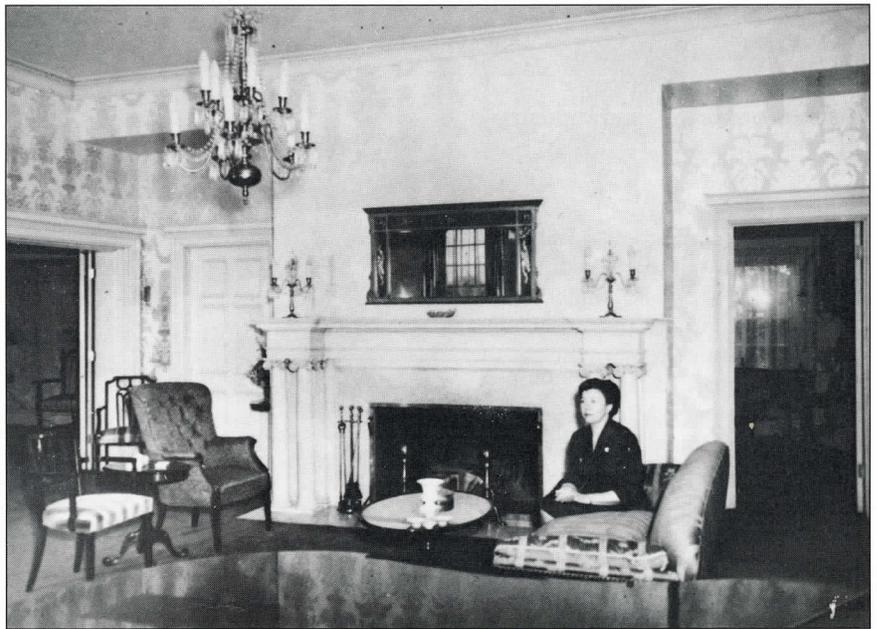
tion), made up largely of prominent women around the state. With the renovation of the structure assured, the stated purpose of the Foundation became "to furnish and decorate the public rooms of Washington's Executive Mansion in a handsome and historically significant manner." Fifty-two original trustees (the number is now 72) were given full discretion to accomplish their purpose.

The first task of the Foundation was to obtain appropriate furnishings for the public rooms. Although some permanent furniture – the result of Mrs. Hay's 1909 shopping spree – remained in the mansion, most furnishings changed with the administrations. No attempt at planned interior decoration had been made.

Interior designer Jean Jongeward of Seattle accepted the task of creating a master plan for the interior design of the mansion. Her recommendation was that American pieces of the late Federal period, in keeping with the style of the mansion, be obtained.

Moving into high gear, the Foundation trustees were able to solicit donations of furniture and funds with the result that the mansion was fully furnished by the time the renovation project was completed. The trustees were fortunate in obtaining many examples of American-made furniture including several pieces from the studio of Duncan Phyfe, the renowned New York cabinetmaker for whom the Phyfe Style is named. A black lacquer Sheraton drawing room set (sofa, chair and pedestal candlestand), a mahogany table from the workshop of Samuel McIntire of Salem, Massachusetts, and a mahogany and maple demilune server attributed to John Seymour of Boston are among the many other beautiful pieces of period furniture that now grace the mansion. New carpets and drapery in shades of green were designed by Jean Jongeward and produced especially for the mansion.

The Foundation's current focus is on acquiring artwork for the walls of the mansion. The goal in this regard is to obtain nineteenth-century paintings or



drawings by Northwest artists or artists whose work depicts the Northwest. Ann Barwick, chair of the Foundation's Art Committee, acknowledged that this ideal is proving difficult to attain. To date, the committee has been able to acquire the Thomas Hill painting "Salmon Festival" and several Audobon prints depicting Northwest birds. The trustees are especially proud of the 1874 Sanford Gifford painting "Mount Rainier from Tacoma Bay" on extended loan from RainierBank.

While the search for paintings goes on, the mansion has become a venue for changing exhibits. Mrs. Barwick and her committee are responsible for putting together the centennial exhibit currently on display in the public rooms of the mansion. "Fidelity to Nature: A Centennial Exhibition" includes eighteen paintings from the Regional Painters collection of the Museum of History and Industry, two from the Seattle Art Museum, two from the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, and two pen and ink drawings by Charles Russell from the Henry Art Gallery. These works will remain on display at the mansion until November, 1989.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

For the present, the Foundation's energies are addressed to the tasks of building the permanent art collection, while at the same time obtaining loaned

works for temporary display. In order to accomplish these goals and to insure the periodic refurbishing of the mansion, the trustees have decided to establish an endowment in 1989. Fundraising for the endowment will constitute the Foundation's Centennial project.

Money alone, however, can accomplish nothing. The spirit of voluntarism and cooperation has made the work of the Foundation possible. It is an organization which operates entirely on volunteer labor. Outside experts, including museum professionals, are called upon to give professional assistance where needed. Diana Neely, former chair of the Art Committee and now President of the Foundation, recalls the many hours given by the late Willis Woods, former director of the Seattle Art Museum.

Not least in importance is the personal interest and support given by First Lady Jean Gardner and her assistant, Mansion Administrator Linda Burgess, in furthering the goals of the Governor's Mansion Foundation. The combined efforts of all these individuals will insure the future of a valuable historic resource. ♦

The Governor's Mansion is open for tours by appointment on Wednesdays; other days by special arrangement. For tour information, call 1-586-8687. For more information on the Foundation, write:

*The Governor's Mansion Foundation
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