

The Governor's Mansion

History
and
Description

The Governor's Mansion, at the southwest corner of
and H Streets in Sacramento, was designed and built
by Nathaniel D. Goodell, architect, in 1877-78 for Mr. Albert
Gallatin, prosperous hardware merchant who is said to have
invested some \$60,000 in its construction.

Sacramento at that time was still a gold-rush city.
In addition to gold mining which employed thousands of men in
the nearby Mother Lode country, it was the western terminus of
the Union Pacific Railway which had been completed in 1869,
only a few years before. It was also the head of year around
navigation on the Sacramento River, which carried the
agricultural produce of the Sacramento Valley to San Francisco
for trans-shipment.

All this must have spelled great prosperity for
Gallatin. But it seems quite likely that he also prospered
handsomely out of the building of the State Capitol.

Although the Capitol building was started in 1860,
it was not completed until 1874; very possibly because of
shortages of material, hardware and workmen. It was not until
the completion of the railroad, in May, 1869, that the great
quantities of building hardware, nails and structural iron
could be had to satisfy the expanding needs of the growing
West. Thus, it is wholly conceivable that Gallatin made a tidy
profit out of the completion of the Capitol, some of which
entered into the construction of his palatial home, now the
Governor's Mansion.

In 1887, Mr. Gallatin sold the house to Mr. Joseph
Steffens, prosperous dry goods merchant, and father of
Lincoln Steffens, the famous writer and newspaper correspondent
of the "Muckraker" days, who died only a few years ago. This
was the Steffens home during Lincoln's later college years.

Lincoln Steffens' sister Lottie became the wife of
Mr. J. James Hollister, the present State Senator from Santa
Barbara County. Their marriage ceremony was performed in the
northeast parlor, now occupied by the Governor as his office
and study.

The State bought the home in 1903 for a Governor's
residence, for \$32,500.

This house is one of the outstanding remaining examples of the ungainly frame architecture of the effulgent '70s and '80s; great three and four-story piles of lumber, some of them positively ugly, covered from top to bottom with scrollwork and "gingerbread". It is the thought of many that when the State builds a new Governor's Mansion, this one should be carefully preserved as a monument to its period and as a museum of the lusty times that produced it.

As for the outside of the house, your special attention is invited to its awkward proportions, to the carved horse's head over the stable door, to the wooden gingerbread decorations, to the wroughtiron fence, and to the beautiful trees and shrubbery.

The exterior of the house is no hint of the generous spaciousness and comfort of the interior. It would be admirably suited for social functions and official receptions, but is rather little used for such purposes, principally because of inadequate appropriations for its upkeep.

Your special attention is invited to the high ceilings and large closets; to the chandeliers; the many fireplaces with their beautiful Italian marble mantles, each different from the others; the large mirrors, and their frames, mounted on the mantles; the old-fashioned, cast-metal hardware; to the "staff work" on the ceilings; to the quantity and variety of carved ornamentation on the doors and doorframes; to the carved fruits, vegetables and game in the wainscot panels in the dining room; and to the many very good Persian rugs.

California needs, and there is a growing demand for a new Governor's Mansion. Most who have given thought to the subject believe that it should be well removed from the center of the city, set in spacious surroundings, quiet, and safe from the encroachments of commerce.

The Governor's Mansion should comport in size and arrangement with the duties of official reception and entertainment that properly fall upon the Governor of California; duties which are now but little observed for lack of adequate provision.