

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Former Governors' Mansion State Historic Site



HISTORY

This house was built in 1884 as a private residence for Bismarck businessman Asa Fisher. In 1893 he sold the house for \$5,000 to the state for use as the executive mansion. Twenty governors occupied the house until 1960, when a new residence was built on the state capital grounds. The former residence served as office space for the State Health Department until 1975, when the State Historical Society of North Dakota was given the house as a historic house museum. After extensive research and restoration the exterior of the house has been returned to its 1893 appearance. The interior of the house was restored to show how the mansion changed over the years; and restoration features are highlighted, including samples of the more than seventy-five wallpapers that have been noted throughout the house.



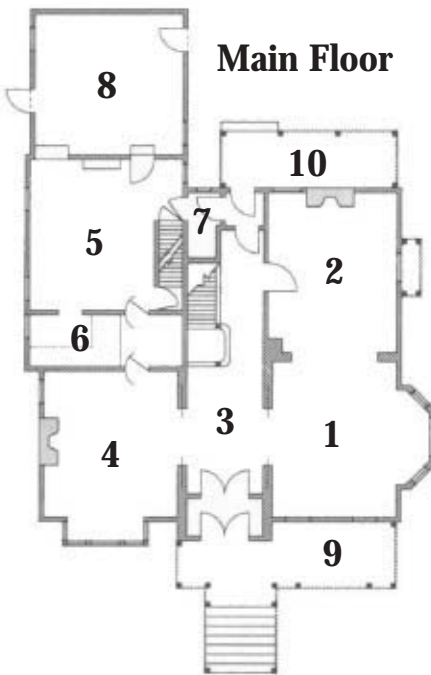
The house in 1884 after construction was completed.

SHSND2005-P-06-01



The house as it appears today.

The **south parlor (1)** was traditionally used as a formal space for visitors. During the John Burke administration (1907-1912) a Steinway grand piano was purchased. It stood for many years in the bay window. In 1928 Governor Sorlie died and his casket lay in this room. The 1910 Steinway grand piano now in the room was purchased during the second Langer administration (1937-1938).



The Briggs family in the north parlor, 1898.

SHSND0184



First Lady Luella Aandahl (1945-1950) with daughters Marilyn and Margaret, sitting at the grand piano.

SHSND 0071-019

The **north parlor (2)** was typically used as an informal gathering place for a governor's family. The spindled lattice hanging from the archway between the rooms is a reproduction of the original that was removed in the 1930s during the first Langer administration. During the John Burke administration, the east window was replaced with a larger leaded glass window to allow more light to come into the room. The fireplace originally had an over-mantel with a mirror.



Frank Fiske photograph of the dining room, possibly taken during the John Burke administration (1907-1913).

SHSND 1952-3944

During the Burke administration bookcases lined the east side of the **hallway (3)**. The space beneath the stairs was open and was used for hanging coats, with coat hooks mounted at the right height for children.

The **dining room (4)** was the setting for many meals, both formal and informal. Mrs. John Burke held numerous functions there for teachers, capitol employees, and county superintendents, as well as holiday gatherings. Other families limited their entertaining to family dinners and card parties with friends.

The **kitchen (5)** served a broad range of functions. During the Shafer administration (1929-1932), the family ate most of their meals here. When Mrs. William Langer needed to gain weight, her German maid prepared homemade beer, the smell of which filled the air. The green sink replaced one that stood on the west wall of the kitchen. That sink originally had a pump that drew water from the cistern under the dining room. An electric range was purchased during the Aandahl administration to replace a green-and-black gas range. During the Frank White administration (1905-1906) a built-in icebox was added to the kitchen; it was filled with ice from the adjoining shed. The icebox was electrified in the 1920s during the Shafer administration.



Eli C. D. Shortridge, third governor of North Dakota (1893-1895) and the first governor to live in the mansion.

The **pantries (6)** served to store the fine china and foods: cheeses, canned goods, and fruitcakes. The state had its own china; the pattern during the Burke administration was by Haviland. The silver service was Chantilly by Gorham with the state seal engraved on it. Mrs. Norman Brunsdale (1951-1956) purchased more silver and a set of Lenox china for the house. It was described as having a gold edge and a small flower border. The butler's pantry once contained a refrigerator. During the Langer administration (1933), a phone jack was installed so the governor could take calls during dinner. The phone number for many years was #39; later it became #1234.

The **main-floor bathroom (7)** was installed by the Langers. Prior to this, the space was a catchall for boots, school books, and coats.

The **back shed (8)** was used as storage space by many families. Mrs. Langer chose to store the majority of the state-owned furniture here and use her own in the house. Trustees from the penitentiary entered the house from the exterior door of this shed. This part of the house was difficult to heat, and Mrs. Brunsdale sometimes wore her overshoes in order to stay warm while working in this area and the kitchen.

The **front porch (9)** has been restored to its original appearance. In 1919 it was remodeled into a two-story, screened-in porch. During the dismantling of this addition, wooden panels with a floral design were discovered underneath. These have been reproduced and now appear around the base of the porch. Milk and groceries were often delivered to the **back porch (10)**.

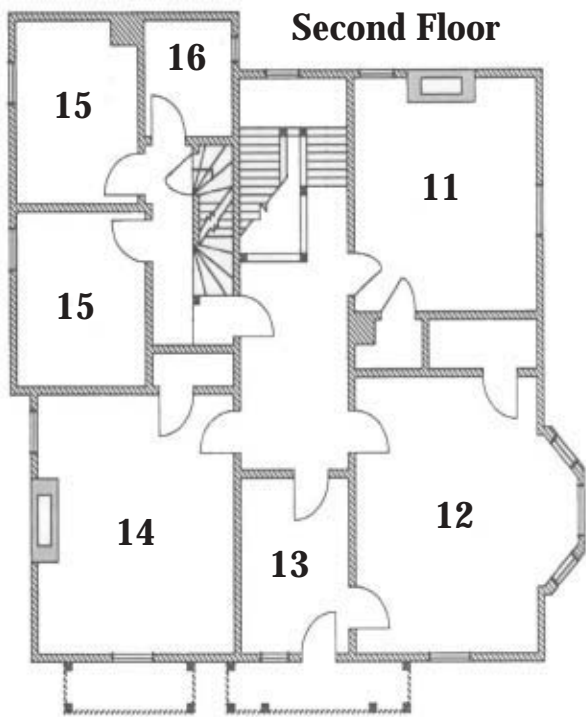


Detail of the floral design from the base of the front porch.



The house in 1940, showing the two-story porches added in 1919.

SHSND1587



The northeast bedroom (11) was traditionally used as a child's bedroom. Marion and Elizabeth Burke shared this room. During the Brunsdale administration, however, it served as the master bedroom. The fireplace in this room was sealed off sometime between 1912 and 1925.



The northeast bedroom, circa 1900, showing the fireplace mantel. It is not known who the woman and child are.

The southeast bedroom (12) was typically the master bedroom, although the Brunsdales used it as a guest room. A telephone was installed here during the Burke administration.



This photo of the southeast bedroom was taken during the second administration of William Langer (1937-1939).

The small room (13) adjoining the southeast bedroom was used as both a bedroom and study. The door leads to the outside porch that after its remodeling in 1919, was a favorite sleeping area in the summer months.

The southwest bedroom (14) was used frequently as a guest room. Mrs. Shafer's mother, who was ill, used it for an extensive period of time.



William Langer, the 17th and 21st governor of North Dakota. The only North Dakota governor to serve two non-consecutive terms.

The rear northwest bedrooms (15) were built for use by servants. Several servants did use these rooms, but they also served as storage areas. They were noted by the Burke's daughter Marion to be difficult to heat, with a single register over the kitchen range as the only source of heat.

When Governor George Shafer (1929-1933) came into office in 1929, the 1884 **upstairs bathroom (16)** was in a state of disrepair. The bathtub stood on only three legs, the floor had begun to give away, and the toilet was a very early version with a high flush box and a long pull chain. A new bathroom was installed during the Shafer administration.

The attic had a finished playroom built during the Burke administration and refinished during the Langer administration. Children enjoyed its seclusion, and some used it for climbing out onto the roof. The three Aandahl (1945-1951) daughters used the attic as a recreation room. Mrs. Aandahl, however, was concerned about young people going up to the attic to smoke, so she discouraged her daughters and their guests from going to the attic in favor of doing their entertaining downstairs.

The carriage house was built in 1903, and the exterior has been restored to that period. The paint scheme of yellow with red trim on the house reflects the color the building was painted in 1903. The governors' mansion was also painted this color time. Originally the upstairs was a hay-loft; in 1927 this space was converted into an apartment for the governors' chauffeur. The upstairs as been restored and is now used as office space. Horses were kept in stalls on the south side of the carriage house, and the north was storage for the governor's buggy. The first floor was later converted into a workroom for trustees from the state penitentiary, who did the maintenance work on the mansion.



The new carriage house from the east. The cupola on the roof vented the haymow. The cupola was replaced by a brick chimney when an apartment was installed on the second floor in 1927.

SHSND 113-Bk2-p23f



The carriage house shortly after exterior restoration was completed in the spring of 2003.

Flower gardens were kept on the grounds, and cuttings from the gardens were frequently used in the house. The flowers included geraniums, dahlias, gladiolus, zinnias, pansies, tulips, sweet peas, petunias, iris, daisies, peonies, asters, and ageratum. The flower beds on the grounds today are kept by the Bismarck-Mandan Garden Club and represent over 60 species of heritage plants that were grown in North Dakota in the 1890s.



Columbine on the west side of the Governors' Mansion.



The flower beds on the south side of the carriage house.