AN embarrassing situation led Ohio’s General Assembly to secure a permanent executive residence. From 1803, when Ohio became a state, until 1920, governors were responsible for finding their own housing. Most stayed in hotels or rented houses while the General Assembly was in session. In December 1916, newly elected governor James M. Cox discovered that W. D. Fulton, the secretary of state—elect, had rented the house that Cox had planned to live in during his term in office. To avoid further such embarrassments, House Bill 559 was enacted on March 30, 1917. A board composed of past governors James E. Campbell, Myron T. Herrick, and Judson Harmon was authorized to purchase a suitable lot where the new governor’s mansion could be built. Although a tract of land on East Broad Street was purchased, the original legislation was amended to allow the state to purchase an existing structure.

Two years after the original bill was signed, the state purchased the Georgian-style brick house at 1234 East Broad Street that had been built in 1905 for Charles H. Lindenberg. The child of German immigrants, Lindenberg made his fortune as one of the founders of M. C. Lilley and Company, which manufactured fraternal regalia.
Noted Columbus architect Frank Packard designed the house. Alterations were made to the structure in the remaining months of that year. At the same time, inmates at the Ohio State Reformatory in Mansfield made furniture for the residence. In early 1920, Governor Cox moved into the Mansion with his family and became the first of ten governors to live there, followed by Harry L. Davis, A. Vic Donahey, Myers Y. Cooper, George White, Martin L. Davey, John W. Bricker, Frank Lausche, Thomas Herbert, and John W. Brown.

The Lindenberg house comfortably served Ohio’s first families until the mid-1950s. However, by then the area surrounding the mansion had become more commercial and the house needed major repairs that were not covered in the state budget. After the official residence of Ohio’s governors was relocated to Bexley, the Ohio Historical Society used the Broad Street building for the State Archives for a dozen years. Later, it served as a restaurant and office space before it was purchased as a home for the Columbus Foundation in 1987 and carefully restored.
A Generous Offer

The Bexley area was largely rural during the nineteenth century, but the area quickly developed into an exclusive residential community. Capital University moved to Bexley in 1876, and in 1898 sewer and water lines were put in for nearby Camp Bushnell, a camp used to muster in volunteers headed to Cuba during the Spanish American War. By 1921, the population of the village was 2,000, and this number more than tripled during the 1920s. One individual to take up residence in the 1920s was Malcolm Jeffrey, the youngest child of Joseph A. Jeffrey, founder of the Jeffrey Manufacturing Company, which made coal-mining equipment. Nicknamed “Captain Jack” in honor of the military rank he achieved during the First World War, Malcolm Jeffrey served as manager of the export division of his family’s company. In 1923, Jeffrey commissioned Robert Gilmore Hanford to design a house in the Jacobethan Revival style. Hanford, a Columbus architect, designed several buildings in central Ohio, including other houses in Bexley and the Rocky Fork Hunt and Country Club in Columbus. Jeffrey, his wife, the former Florence Rodgers, and their two small sons moved into the new house on North Parkview Avenue in 1925. Sadly, Malcolm Jeffrey lived only five years in his new home. He died in 1930 at the age of forty-six. His widow and sons remained in the house for six more years.

In 1936, Florence Jeffrey Carlile, Malcolm Jeffrey’s sister, and her husband, William Wilson Carlile, who served as chief counsel for the Jeffrey Manufacturing Company, purchased the home. They added a master suite on the second floor, enclosed the back patio to create both a large room overlooking the garden and a screened-in porch, and planted the first rose garden on the property. Following the death of Florence Jeffrey Carlile in 1954 (her husband had died in 1941), the house passed to the Very Reverend Charles U. Harris, husband of the Carliles’ daughter Janet. The Harrises, who lived in Evanston, Illinois, where Harris was an Episcopal clergyman and dean of the Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, decided to offer the house to the state for use as an executive residence in 1955. Governor Frank Lausche accepted the offer on behalf of the state of Ohio, on condition that the house would be used as a governor’s mansion for twenty-five years or ownership would revert to the Harrises.
Elected in 1956, C. William O’Neill was the last Ohio governor to serve a two-year term and the first to occupy the new Governor’s Mansion. His family, consisting of wife Betty and their two elementary school-aged children, did not move into the new mansion until March, after extensive redecorating. The main floor, which was open to visitors, featured a living room decorated with blue carpet and draperies. Off the living room was a music room and a large back room furnished with wrought-iron furniture covered with cheerful fabrics. The dining room contained an oriental rug and furniture given to the state by Mrs. Carlile’s heirs. The second floor contained the family’s bedrooms, offices for the governor and first lady, a private living room, and a small kitchen.

Newspaper reporters were invited to tour the newly furnished home and declared that it suitable for the first family. After seeing the bathtub and the eleven-headed shower in the bathroom used by the O’Neills’ son, a re-

A New Home for the Governor . . . and an Alligator: The O’Neill Administration, 1957–59
porter for the *Ohio State Journal* declared that C. William Jr. would be the “cleanest kid in town if he does not drown.” Memorable visitors included Cincinnati television personality Ruth Lyons of *The Fifty-Fifty Club*, who broadcast an episode of her show from the Mansion, and Dave Garroway, who taped an episode of *The Today Show* dealing with education. Since people from around the state wanted to see the new mansion, First Lady Betty O’Neill hosted countless groups who came to the Mansion for lunch-eons and teas.

With two young children in residence, the Governor’s Mansion was a lively place during the O’Neill administration. Betty O’Neill recalled that the children had a wide assortment of pets during their father’s term as governor: dogs, cats, rabbits, and canaries all shared the house with the family. Even an alligator, a gift from Congressman Chalmers Wylie, lived in one of the bathtubs for a short time. The children also had hamsters, which sometimes escaped from their cages and surprised guests at important meetings. Mrs. O’Neill recounted that after having been asked several times how her children liked living in the Mansion, she put the question to her young son, who replied, “Well, it’s a roof over our heads.”1
Family and Famous Folks:  
The DiSalle Administration, 1959–63

Michael DiSalle of Toledo, elected in 1958, noted that his wife, Myrtle, was not eager to move into the Mansion, which he described as being a “pile of mongrel architecture” and “hardly a cozy nest.” In spite of these shortcomings, the house offered plenty of space for the DiSalles’ five adult children and their rapidly growing families. Mrs. DiSalle converted both the offices used by Governor and Mrs. O’Neill and the second-floor sitting room into guest bedrooms.

Michael DiSalle was the oldest child of Italian immigrants. His six younger siblings and their families were frequent guests for family dinners in the spacious back room of the Mansion. Their brother’s election may have seemed the embodiment of the American dream. Family members marveled that the boy who could not speak English when he started school was now governor of Ohio. The DiSalles started a
tradition at the Mansion by holding wedding receptions for two of their daughters in the backyard.

The staff at the Residence consisted of inmates from the Ohio Penitentiary, most of whom were serving life sentences for murder. Initially, the DiSalles were uncomfortable with this arrangement, but in time they formed strong friendships with the men. DiSalle recalled his wife conducting daily inspections of the work of the houseman, lawn man, and chauffeurs that “would have done credit to the most hard-boiled top sergeant.” She also taught the men, who had no previous kitchen experience, how to cook such delicacies as *poulet Marengo* and *paella valenciana.* The men became great favorites of the DiSalle grandchildren and have been remembered by family members as gentle, affectionate baby sitters. The men were not above sneaking treats of ice cream to the children between meals against Mrs. DiSalle’s strict orders.2

Early in the campaign for the presidential election of 1961 some Ohio Democrats considered nominating DiSalle as the presidential candidate. John F. Kennedy recognized Ohio’s importance in gaining the nomination and visited DiSalle at the Mansion in 1959 for a steak dinner and a discussion of the upcoming election. DiSalle met the party on the front steps and first greeted Jack Kennedy. He then turned to Kennedy’s younger brother Ted and said, “Ed, I always keep hearing you are the bright member
of the family.” The meeting did not go as Kennedy had hoped, because he failed to secure DiSalle’s promise of Ohio’s support. However, by the time of the Democratic Convention, DiSalle led the Ohio Democratic Party in support of Kennedy.

Due to DiSalle’s national prominence, many other noted political leaders visited the Mansion, including Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. visited DiSalle in 1963. Boxer Rocky Marciano attended an event at the Mansion, delighting the staff. Advice columnist Ann Landers, a friend of the family, and her daughter were invited to attend the wedding of one of the DiSalle children. Unfortunately, Landers got the date wrong, and mother and daughter came the week before the wedding. Mrs. DiSalle invited them to dinner and to stay overnight. Landers’s daughter recalled being a nervous wreck on discovering that the members of the house staff were inmates serving life sentences.

Opening the People’s House: The Rhodes Administration, 1963–71

DiSalle lost his bid for reelection in 1962, and the next governor was James A. Rhodes. Born in Jackson County, Rhodes had a long association with Columbus politics, having been elected mayor of Columbus while still in his thirties. He served as auditor of state for a decade before his election as governor.

Rhodes and his wife, Helen, moved into the Mansion with their three teenaged daughters. Extensive redecorating took place to bring the décor up to the current fashion. The original slate and wood floors in the foyer, living room, dining room, and music room were covered with avocado green carpets. Years later, Mrs. Rhodes informed her successor, Dagmar Celeste, that the carpets were put down to ease her back pain from hours spent standing on the slate floors in receiving lines. Curtains and upholstery throughout

Governor DiSalle and Martin Luther King Jr. on the Residence grounds
Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society
P-90

Foyer—Taft administration
these rooms featured shades of green, white, and beige, reflecting popular styles of the 1960s. The floor of the large room at the rear of the house was covered with rust carpeting, and rust floral draperies hung at the windows. The major change made during the Rhodes administration, however, was the 1969 conversion of the screened-in porch to a sun room by replacing the screens with large windows. This room was decorated with a celery green carpet and draperies, and the wrought-iron furniture was covered with bright floral fabric.6

During their years at the Mansion, the family entertained the people of Ohio and celebrities alike. Monday through Thursday, Mrs. Rhodes hosted teas for groups of 250 to 300 women each day. Folding chairs were brought into the garden room for these events. Large formal dinners were held in the back room or under tents in the backyard. Up to two thousand people were welcomed for summer garden parties. During the Ohio State Fair, many of the fair entertainers were dinner guests at the Mansion. Bob Hope, Pat Boone, Art Linkletter, and Lionel Hampton were among the notable visitors during this period.

The Rhodeses had their share of family events at the Mansion. Both of the Rhodeses’ older daughters were married during their father’s term in office, and their wedding receptions were held in the Mansion and Gardens. Mrs. Rhodes loved the holidays. Every year, the Rhodeses hosted an Easter Egg Hunt for members of the media and their families. At Christmas, Mrs. Rhodes decorated a large Christmas
tree in the living room with ornaments she made during the year. Like the DiSalle family before them, the Rhodeses formed close attachments to the Ohio Penitentiary inmates who staffed the Mansion. The men were treated as members of the family and even referred to Helen Rhodes as “FL,” the nickname Governor Rhodes bestowed on his wife in honor of her position as first lady. Eleven trustees generally staffed the house and grounds, some of them living at the Mansion while the rest were transported each day from the prison.

Highlighting Ohio at Home: The Gilligan Administration, 1971–75

Following the eight years that the Rhodes family lived in the Mansion, John Gilligan and his family took up residence in 1971. Governor Gilligan and his wife, Mary Kathryn, known as Katie, were natives of Cincinnati. Their four children were young adults by the time their father became governor, and did not live at the Mansion. Mrs. Gilligan charted a new course for the state’s first ladies, moving the position away from a social role to an activist role. During her four years as first lady, she was an advocate for reform of Ohio’s mental health system, a role that brought her national recognition.

Because Governor Gilligan focused on refurbishing the Statehouse during his time in office, he and Mrs. Gilligan made no significant changes to the Mansion beyond basic maintenance. They ended the practice of having inmates live on the grounds and were the first to have full-time security on the property. Wishing to have significant pieces in the Mansion to highlight Ohio’s history, the Gilligans made arrangements with the Ohio Historical Society to have the silver service from the U.S.S. Ohio on display at the Mansion. The Ohio Arts Council arranged for artists from around the state to have month-long exhibitions of their works at the house. Mrs. Gilligan was an accomplished cook, who frequently took a turn cooking in the Mansion’s kitchen. She also supervised plantings on the house grounds, including a weeping cherry tree that still graces the front yard.
The Gilligans began to entertain members of the General Assembly and their wives in an effort to break the ice between the governor, a Democrat, and the Republican legislature. In 1973, George McGovern, the Democratic candidate for the presidency, was scheduled to speak to Democratic county chairmen at the Mansion. McGovern was delayed, and Gilligan attempted to keep his guests—most of whom would have preferred a different candidate—entertained. The candidate arrived about two hours late. While McGovern was speaking to the guests, Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota—whom McGovern had defeated in the Democratic primary for the nomination—phoned to say he was in town and asked if he could spend the night. Gilligan extended the invitation, and as a result, the two political rivals ended up spending the night under the roof of the Ohio Governor’s Mansion!

Carrying on the tradition, started by the DiSalles and continued by the Rhodeses, of celebrating family weddings at the Mansion, the Gilligans’ older son and older daughter were married there. Their daughter Kathleen, who married Gary Sebelius on New Year’s Eve of 1974, became a political figure in her own right and was elected governor of Kansas in 2002. Governor Gilligan and Governor Sebelius are the first father and daughter in the United States to both hold this position.

An Empty House:
The Rhodes Administration, 1975–83

In 1974 James A. Rhodes was elected to a third term as governor. Four years earlier, the Rhodeses had purchased a new home in Upper Arlington, a western suburb of Columbus. Comfortably established in their new quarters, the Rhodes family decided not to move back into the Mansion. In an article from January 9, 1975, the Columbus Dispatch cited myriad leaks and the difficulty of heating the Mansion as reasons that Rhodes and his family chose not to reoccupy the house.

Between 1975 and 1983 the Mansion was used for official entertainment and rented out to various groups for events ranging from business meetings to fashion shows. Very little was done to maintain the house during this period. A former convict who had been pardoned by Governor Rhodes served as a live-in caretaker but lacked the necessary resources to maintain or improve the property. Since the state still owned the old Governor’s Mansion on Broad Street, many questioned the wisdom of Ohio’s maintaining two executive residences, especially since both houses stood empty and the state was in a period of financial difficulty.

A March 15, 1979, article in the Dispatch announced that Governor Rhodes wished to sell the costly Governor’s Mansion to the city of Bexley. Rhodes suggested
that Bexley could use the property for a senior citizens center or that the state could sell the house and its surrounding acreage. There was some discussion about giving future governors a housing allowance instead of furnishing an executive mansion, but this proposal was never carried out.

New Life for an Old House: The Celeste Administration, 1983–91

The Celestes were the first to use the name Governor’s Residence, abandoning the more pretentious term “mansion.” The *Akron Beacon Journal* of November 5, 1982, reported that in spite of stained carpets, buckled linoleum, soiled upholstery, and several non-working appliances, Mrs. Celeste was excited by the prospect of her new home. “It’s better than what I live in now,” she told a reporter. As a mother of six children, she especially relished the fact that each bedroom had its own attached bath, which would eliminate typical morning arguments over which child got first chance at the shower.

Upon moving in, the family was overwhelmed by the condition of the house: the showers did not work; wiring in some parts of the house had melted and the rest could not bear the load of the rooms; much of the plumbing was no longer functional; very little usable furniture was left; and the mattresses that remained were badly mildewed. Worse, silverfish infested the bathrooms, and cockroaches and rodents had taken up residence in the kitchen. Unable to sleep on her first night at the Residence, Mrs. Celeste went to the kitchen for a cup of tea. When she turned on the light, the floor came to life: cockroaches scuttled into the woodwork, but a small rat remained, stunned by the bright light. On another occasion a bat was discovered in the private living quarters, and the governor was forced to dispatch it with a tennis racket. Before a luncheon meeting, the newly hired residence manager found water coming from the dining room chandelier. With Governor Celeste’s help she managed to get the water and electricity shut off, and then set up a table in another part of the house.
In March 1983 the Celeste administration established the Friends of the Residence, a nonprofit organization to restore and enhance the property. The friends included representatives from such organizations as the Ohioana Library, the Ohio Arts Council, the Architects Society of Ohio, the Ohio Historical Society, and the Bexley Historical Society. Although fundraising was the group’s primary purpose, it also worked to recognize the significance of the Residence and to ensure that Ohio arts, crafts, and literature were represented in the house.

For the first time in the history of the Residence, the staff was not composed primarily of inmates. Ten dedicated staff members worked to repair and refurbish the house. While the state paid for painting and wiring, many necessary repairs were not covered by the state budget. Generous donations to the Friends of the Residence from individuals and companies around the state made possible a complete overhaul of the house. Major projects included removing the existing carpeting; stripping,
refinishing, and sealing the wood floors; and sandblasting and sealing the slate floors in the foyer, great room, and garden room. The Friends also paid to replace the wood flooring in the dining room, which had become warped by years of leaks. Oriental rugs donated for use in the Statehouse during the Gilligan administration were laid over the refinished floors. The kitchen also required major renovations, as most of the appliances no longer worked and the old metal cabinets barely hung on the wall. An Amish craftsman installed capacious wooden cabinets, and professional-quality appliances were put in, transforming the kitchen into an inviting and efficient room.

Since much of the furniture was lost or destroyed during the eight years that the house stood empty, the Celestes had to start almost from scratch to decorate the house. The Friends of the Residence commissioned Cleveland-area architect Stephen Bucchieri to design pieces for the public rooms. Observing that executive residences in other states were furnished with expensive antiques that seldom had any connection to the state’s history, Dagmar Celeste wanted strong, sturdy pieces
that would withstand heavy daily use. Moreover, she wanted pieces designed by an Ohioan especially for the Residence and made by Ohio craftspeople. Bucchieri used the proportions of the grids of the windows and wood paneling as a historic reference in designing the simple contemporary pieces. In her book *We Can Do Together*, Dagmar Celeste describes the pieces as having been influenced by the work of Scottish architect Charles Mackintosh, a leader of the Art Nouveau movement. Some of these pieces are still used by the state in the offices of the Department of Administrative Services.

To further highlight the talents of Ohio artists, the Celestes worked with the Ohio Arts Council to arrange a yearly exhibit of works by artists from around the state. Ohio pieces acquired for the Residence’s permanent collection include a quilt by textile artist Nancy Crow, a native of Loudonville. An intricate design of contrasting colors, patterns, and textures in broken lines and broken circles makes the quilt’s title, *Contradictions*, especially appropriate. Mrs. Celeste experienced some trepidation when central Ohio artist Alfred Tibor offered her a sculpture for the Residence in honor of her work with peace education. Tibor, a native of Hungary who lost most of his family in the Holocaust, was known for serious works focusing on the suffering of Holocaust victims, and Mrs. Celeste did not know how the public would react to such a subject in the garden of the Governor’s Residence. However, she was delighted with the artist’s new work, and the statue *To Life* still stands in the garden today. Dedicated to the “memory of the children who died in the Holocaust so that all children will remember,” the piece depicts a family consisting of a mother, father, and three children. The statue is surrounded by crabapple trees, and when their flowers bloom in the spring, the inscription at the base of the work becomes especially evocative. Taken from the Book of Genesis, the passage reads, “I will make your descendants as many as the stars of Heaven.”

**Living room**

![Detail of *Contradictions* by Nancy Crow](image)

![Living room](image)
The grounds and gardens were bleak and barren after years of neglect: the grass was brown and the old rose garden was overgrown. Improvements to the grounds included planting six redbud trees around the house, one in honor of each of the Celeste children. Raised vegetable beds were installed at the rear of the property, and an herb garden with brick walls was built by artist John Spoofforth of Athens, Ohio. The president of the Rosarian Association approached Dagmar Celeste and offered his assistance with the Rose Garden. He carefully dug up each plant and washed its roots before replanting it in fresh soil and taught Mrs. Celeste how to care for the roses.

Beyond making physical alterations, Dick and Dagmar Celeste were the first to recognize the cultural potential of the house. They saw behind its flaws a place of beauty and significance, a place to bring people together, a place of which the people of Ohio could be proud. Recognizing the importance of the property, the Celestes had the house listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although previous first families had opened the house for teas and luncheons, the Celestes instituted the practice of conducting tours of the Residence and garden on Tuesday afternoons, welcoming bus-loads of people from around the state. They also opened the house for readings with poets and authors as well as monthly chamber music concerts.
The Celestes also used the Residence for official entertaining. International visitors included European ambassadors, Asian representatives, and other world leaders. The Oni of Ife, spiritual leader of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, made Governor and Mrs. Celeste Yoruba chiefs in 1988. American dignitaries were also entertained at the Residence. During the presidential campaign of 1984, Celeste hosted a pig roast for Walter Mondale, the Democratic candidate. The event drew nearly one thousand people. Other significant guests included the Reverend Jesse Jackson and former first lady Rosalynn Carter. Among the notable writers to visit the Residence were May Sarton, Maya Angelou, and Nikki Giovanni. Several entertainers visited during the Celeste administration, including Peter, Paul, and Mary, Arlo Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Ohioan Kaye Ballard. Comedienne Lily Tomlin was an especially memorable dinner guest. Initially feigning awe at being a guest of the governor, Tomlin surprised everyone at the table by hanging a spoon on her nose. When Governor Celeste asked her to show him how to do the trick, she obliged; but unbeknownst to him, she passed the spoon over a candle flame each time she presented him the dropped spoon. After multiple attempts, the governor’s face was covered with soot, sending the other guests into gales of laughter.

During the Celestes’ eight years at the Residence, most of their six children lived in the house at least part of the time. The Celestes celebrated their youngest child Stephen’s seventh birthday with an elaborate party and the gift of a tree house in the backyard. For years, the tree house served as the setting of many sleepovers for Stephen and his friends. Major family events held at the Residence included the wedding of the Celestes’ son Christopher in the garden in 1987 and a wedding reception for his brother Eric the following year.

Tree house given to the Celestes’ youngest child as a birthday present
Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society State Archives AV 4161
A Foundation for the Future:  
The Voinovich Administration, 1991–99

The next occupants were George and Janet Voinovich of Cleveland. Before his election as governor, Voinovich had served as mayor of Cleveland. Since the Friends of the Residence was terminated at the end of the Celeste administration, the Voinoviches established a nonprofit organization, called the Governor's Residence Foundation, to raise funds for enhancements to the property. Janet Voinovich turned her attention to refurnishing the Residence in keeping with the period in which it was built and the Jacobethan Revival style of the house’s original design. Guided by advice from William Seale, the former White House curator, who was serving as a consultant on the restoration of the Statehouse in the 1990s, and with the aid of staff from the Ohio Historical Society, the Voinoviches based many of their design decisions on photographs taken of the interior while the house was a private residence. They followed the intent of 1920s Revival homes, namely to suggest a well-maintained English manor house that utilized furniture and ornaments belonging to several generations. Under Seale’s direction, the “Buckeye Suite” was commissioned. Consisting of a settee, chairs, and stools, the pieces were made in the Jacobean tradition with representations of buckeye branches as part of the decoration.

With a sharp eye for bargains, the first lady haunted tag sales and antique shops searching for appropriate furniture. Pieces formerly used in the superintendent’s house
at the old Massillon Psychiatric Institution found a new home at the Residence, along with furniture made by inmates at the Mansfield Reformatory in the early twentieth century. Janet Harris, daughter of William Wilson and Florence Jeffrey Carlile, the last private owners of the property, generously donated several pieces she had inherited from her mother’s estate. The Voinoviches acquired several pieces of art pottery made in Ohio by the McCoy, Rookwood, and Roseville potteries for display in the governor’s study. Mrs. Voinovich discovered a painting by Morgan County native Howard Chandler Christy in a warehouse at the Ohio Historical Society. Entitled *The Summit*, the large canvas portrays Christy’s lover Elise Ford and the couple’s daughter Holly. The Governor’s Residence Foundation paid to have the painting restored, and it is now on permanent loan to the Residence.

When the house required a new roof, the state contributed the cost of regular asphalt shingles and the Foundation raised additional funds to obtain the slate roof, which was historically and architecturally more appropriate. In order to assure the long-term preservation of the house, the Voinoviches started the Governor’s Residence Advisory Commission. Composed of historians, architects and staff from the Ohio Department of Administrative Services, the Commission is charged with preserving the Jacobethan Revival character of the property. Any changes made to the property must be approved by the Governor’s Residence Advisory Commission.⁹
An avid gardener, Governor Voinovich called for the garden to be enlarged. The governor enjoyed working in the vegetable garden, tending tomatoes, lettuce, and zucchini. He invited children from a local elementary school to help plant and tend potatoes. At the end of the growing season, the children were rewarded with bags of potatoes to share with their families. A portion of the garden produce was given to a charity that provided fresh vegetables to needy families. The Voinoviches also planted several fruit trees and reseeded the lawn using an improved hybrid turf. Finally, the Voinoviches envisioned a greenhouse to allow the horticulturalist to nurture sickly plants and grow tender seedlings. The structure was built during the next administration, that of Governor Taft. Inmates from the Pickaway Correctional Institute began working in the garden as part of an apprenticeship program to gain certification in agriculture, a program that still thrives at the Residence.

The Voinoviches enjoyed their share of memorable events at the Residence. First Lady Barbara Bush visited Mrs. Voinovich for tea while in Columbus and also visited with the first lady's staff. The crew members of the space shuttle Discovery (STS-70), which went into space in July 1995, were also overnight guests at the Residence. Known as the “All-Ohio Crew,” four of the five members were native Ohioans, and Governor Voinovich made the fifth, a native of New York, an “honorary Ohio Citizen.” The next morning, they helped Governor Voinovich open the State Fair. Memorable family occasions included birthday celebrations for the governor’s mother each June. The Voinoviches’ eldest son was married at St. Joseph’s Cathedral in downtown Columbus, and the reception was held at the Residence. Later, Governor and Mrs. Voinovich enjoyed spending time with their first grandchild in the spacious backyard of the Residence.


George Voinovich was unable to complete his full second term as governor because he became a U.S. senator on December 31, 1998. Nancy Hollister, lieutenant governor in the Voinovich administration, served the remaining eleven days of his term. She and her family, including her husband, Jeff, five children, and small granddaughter, moved into the Residence for this short period primarily to allow security and communications to stay at the Residence. The Hollister family had a New Year’s Eve celebration and delighted in an unexpected snowfall.
Bob and Hope Taft moved into the Residence in 1999. Although Mrs. Taft initially described the Residence as a combination of museum, hotel, and assisted living facility, the Tafts eventually came to think of the Residence as home. They delighted in visits from their college-aged daughter Anna and family members from around the country. Like their predecessors, the Tafts entertained their share of notable guests. In 2000, then Governor George W. Bush of Texas was a guest while campaigning for the White House. Ohio-born opera singers Sylvia McNair and Kathleen Battle visited, as did Columbus native Jack Nicklaus.

Continuing the efforts of her predecessors, Mrs. Taft set about improving the property. Because her brother was confined to a wheelchair, Mrs. Taft was especially sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities. She made sure that one of the first major projects undertaken during the Taft administration was to make the property compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ramps were built by the front door and inside the house to provide wheelchair access. In the original design of the...
house, the living room doors had opened into the back garden, but this openness was lost when the back porch was added in the 1930s. To recapture this earlier feature, French doors were constructed in place of the bay window in the great room, once again opening the rear of the house to a raised stone patio and the garden beyond. Students from a preservation program stripped and refinished the walls of the dining room to restore their original appearance.

Hope Taft’s keen interest in Ohio’s environment led her to make significant changes to the grounds. She worked with landscape designers and plant experts to develop the Heritage Garden, a series of small gardens which represent the diverse regions of the state. In 2006 the Heritage Garden was awarded affiliate status with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Mrs. Taft also wished to call attention to the emergence of the green industry in Ohio. Green Energy Ohio installed an all-Ohio solar array on the roof of the carriage house, which provides backup power for the Residence security system. Surplus energy generated by the array is sold back to the power grid.

To display the state’s artistic heritage, Mrs. Taft instituted a loan program with museums around the state. Changing exhibits allowed visitors to the Residence to view works by Ohio artists Frank Duveneck, George Bellows, Robert Scott Duncanson, Clarence Holbrook Carter, and Henry Church, among others. Other acquisitions showcased Ohio industries, including lamps made in the late 1800s by the Fostoria
Glass Company and the donation of more pieces of Rookwood pottery. The Foundation also purchased a Baldwin piano made in Cincinnati for the Residence’s permanent collection to replace the pianos previously loaned to the Residence by local music stores.

Mrs. Taft had special needlepoint seats designed for the Buckeye stools. Each of the four stools has a different design incorporating architectural features of the house and Ohio state symbols. For instance, Mrs. Taft made the seat cover that shows the state seal, a depiction of the sun rising over Mt. Logan in Ross County, and the design of the decorative ceiling in the living room. To bring the spirit of the Heritage Garden inside the house, Mrs. Taft and some friends created needlepoint seat cushions depicting various species of birds and flowers native to Ohio.

Soon after moving into the Residence, Mrs. Taft became interested in the history of the property. She began collecting photographs of the house from the time it was a private home and through the previous administrations. She also interviewed representatives of each family that had lived in the house. This increased interest in the history of the house emphasized the need for a staff member to document the ongoing history of the Residence. A grant allowed the Governor’s Residence Foundation to engage a curator to catalog the furniture used in the house and to conduct further research on the history of the property. The curator developed a nonpartisan volunteer program for the Residence. Previous governors have had volunteers help
with events at the house, but the new program is designed to function independently of officeholder or political party. Docents attend a class about the Residence and Heritage Garden and must pass a test before they begin giving tours.

Like the Voinoviches, the Tafts continued the practice of relying on a private foundation to help with the upkeep and enhancement of the property, but because of Mrs. Taft’s interest in developing the garden it became clear that a second fundraising organization would be helpful. The new organization is called the Friends of the Ohio Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden, a name that hearkened back to the Celeste years. Unlike the Governor’s Residence Foundation, whose members are appointed by the governor, the Friends group is a nonpartisan membership-based organization that will provide continuity and support for the property.

New Directions: The Strickland Administration, 2007–

On moving into the Residence in January 2007, Ted and Frances Strickland, in recognition of the historic significance of the property, decided against having a partisan fundraising organization and strengthened the Friends of the Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden to serve as the sole support group for the property. Wishing to accord the house and the garden equal importance, they formed Residence and garden advisory committees. Frances Strickland supported Hope Taft’s vision for the garden and invited her to chair the garden committee to see her efforts come to fruition.

Like the Voinoviches, the Stricklands were struck by the beauty of the Residence’s English-inspired Jacobethan Revival architecture. They painted the foyer to emphasize the limestone doorways and the graceful curves of the ceilings in the front and rear entryways. Mrs. Strickland, an avid backpacker, selected the shamrock green color for the foyer, which, with the dark wood of the exposed beams, reminded her of the peacefulness of old-growth forests. Governor Strickland, having worked as a prison
psychologist before entering politics, enjoys pointing out the exquisite craftsmanship of the pieces made by inmates at the old Mansfield Reformatory around the beginning of the twentieth century that Mrs. Voinovich brought to the Residence in the 1990s. Frances Strickland’s love of music is reflected in the living room, where her guitar has found a home next to the Baldwin baby grand piano. Live music is now a part of all Residence events. Pianists volunteer their time to play at dinners and receptions, while larger events boast bands whose styles range from Celtic to country to jazz.

The Stricklands enjoy opening the Residence for both formal and informal entertaining and hosting events as diverse as cabinet meetings and author readings. They strive to make the Residence homelike and inviting, while maintaining the historic nature and the distinct Ohio flavor of the property. Like many of their predecessors, they work closely with the Ohio Arts Council to display works by historic and contemporary Ohio artists.

Upon moving into the Residence, the Stricklands were especially pleased with the solar panels on the carriage house roof and are constantly searching for other ways to make the house more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Fluorescent lightbulbs, which use less energy than standard bulbs, are now used at the Residence. All disposable cups and utensils are made from renewable resources and are compostable. Rainwater is collected to water the plants, and a porous driveway will allow the underlying soil to absorb rainwater to nourish surrounding trees and plants and reduce the amount of water that goes into the storm drain. A planned extension to the existing carriage house will provide space for exhibits and other educational material, work and volunteer areas, and a gift shop. Among the environmentally friendly technologies that may be employed in the building are a green roof, partly covered with vegetation, and geothermal power, which is cleaner than energy produced by traditional fossil fuels.

The Governor’s Residence has been home to nine first families, each of which has added its own layer of history to the property. Through their efforts, the property has developed into a place that is a showcase for Ohio, highlighting the state’s history, art, industry, and environmental resources. Thousands of visitors tour the house and grounds each year, and leaders from around the country and around the world are entertained here by the first family. The Ohio Governor’s Residence and Heritage Garden
Bluebells

is a representation of the state to these visitors: a place where schoolchildren learn about the natural diversity of their state and where visiting dignitaries can glimpse the proud heritage of the Buckeye State.

Notes

Much of the information in this chapter is drawn from interviews conducted with former occupants and staff members by Hope Taft in 2000 and by the author in 2006. Transcripts of these interviews are available in the Residence archives.


7. Celeste, We Can Do Together, 133.
