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May 15, 2013

THIS WEEK:

First Governor's Mansion



Executive Mansion—1027 Des Moines Street

The Des Moines Register

December 10, 1944

Recalls When Iowa Had Mansion for Governors

The only first lady in Iowa history who has lived in a state-owned governor's mansion believes the forthcoming legislature ought to procure such a home for future chief executives.

Mrs. William L. Harding, 65, widow of the Iowa World War I governor, recalled that the Harding family lived for more than three and a half years in the home now occupied by the state board of health on Des Moines street a block north of the golden dome.

"We were the only official family ever to live there," she said. "It was a grand old home. Gov. (N. E.) Kendall didn't want to live there after we left in 1921 and the health department took it over."

The problem of housing Iowa's incoming governor has taken on the aspect of a municipal crises in overcrowded Des Moines. Governor-elect Robert D. Blue house-hunted for weeks, like many another family head, and the spacious west end home he finally rented is available only until next spring.

Thirty-two states in the nation own governors' mansions, including all bordering on Iowa except Minnesota. Two pay the gubernatorial rent while 14, including Iowa, let the governors provide their own housing.

Bill for Home.

A bill to appropriate \$75,000 to build a governor's home on the state capitol grounds was introduced in the last session of the legislature but it didn't get anywhere. Reports say at least one such bill will be introduced in the assembly which convenes next month.



Mrs. William L. Harding

Mrs. Harding said the state had acquired the governor's home at the time the statehouse grounds were expanded under the capitol extension plan a few years before her husband took office. Governor Harding was elected in 1916 and re-elected in 1918.

Old Byers Home.

"It was the old John Byers home," she said. "We lived out on Waterbury circle at first and then in an apartment in the Hotel Brown the first summer. We moved into the home in about December, 1917.

"We enjoyed it a lot. It was close to the statehouse of course and it was nicer for



Iowa's First Family in 1917-21: Governor William L. Harding, Mrs. (Carrie) Harding, and daughter, Barbara

Barbara, our daughter, than an apartment. She was only about 3 years old then.

“The home was nice for ladies’ meetings and receptions. I think it would be a good idea for the state to obtain a mansion again. It would not have to be so very large—in fact that wouldn’t be advisable because nobody would want to take care of it.”

She expressed belief that Governor Kendall (1921-25) might not have wanted to live in the old mansion after the Hardings left “because it was not in first class condition.”

“We hadn’t asked that the woodwork be refinished,” she recalled. “I think we had the walls repapered and that was all. I didn’t want to go through a mess right then, with the session going on.”

She doesn’t believe a governor should live in a downtown hotel. “He gets no rest or quiet because a hotel is so handy, you know,” she commented.

The Des Moines Register

January 24, 1952

FIRST GOVERNOR’S HOME

Sale or Salvage



Iowa apparently soon will dispose of the state’s first governor’s home.

It hasn’t been used for that purpose since 1921, but many Des Moines residents remember when it was the location for governor’s official dinners and many private gubernatorial conferences.

The home is the big three-story white residence at 1027 Des Moines st. that has been the main office of the state department of health since 1921.

The only Iowa governor’s family to live in the home was that of William L. Harding, who served as governor from 1917 to 1921.

The state had acquired the home from Jackson Beyer, an early Des Moines lumber dealer, when the original statehouse grounds were extended.

Gov. N. E. Kendall, who followed Governor Harding in office, did not care to live in the home, however, and it never was used as a governor's home after the Hardings moved out.

Now the state health department is about to

move into the new state office building east of the statehouse.

Although no official decision has been made, members of the state executive council said Thursday the general plan is to sell the old governor's home for salvage and have it torn down.

Executive council members said Thursday reconditioning of the old home or mansion would be too expensive to make it profitable.

Des Moines Tribune

May 29, 1965



This frame house on Des Moines Street has been a private home, a governor's residence, headquarters for the State Department of Health and Vocational Education Training Center—its present role. Ramps and a fire escape chute on the left side of the building were installed because handicapped persons receive training there. The tip of the Capitol dome rises above the trees.