



The little yellow house . . .

a remnant of the past



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Sitting like an oasis in a bustling city campus, the little yellow house at 700 N. 16th St. is the oldest structure at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The house was erected in 1877 for the Rev. Elisha M. Lewis, a "home missionary" of the Presbyterian Church. For nearly 60 years it was owned by the family of Constance Syford until it was willed to the Nebraska State Historical Society upon her death in 1965.

The house currently is inhabited by two Historical Society caretakers to decrease the possibility of vandalism, but eventually, the house will be restored as a public museum exhibiting life in the 1880s.

According to Marvin Kivitt, Historical Society director, most of the exterior restoration has been completed.

"The entire tinned roof had to be replaced," he said, "and believe me, it costs more than it looks." The difficulty

was in finding a craftsman who could reconstruct the decorative French Second Empire style roof. An elderly craftsman in Lincoln finally was found to complete the work.

Technological changes have added plumbing, electricity and heating, but the house has retained remnants of the past, like the old gas jets still on the walls.

A barn with a hayloft and manger still stands behind the house. But the original doors were destroyed to accommodate cars and still need to be restored. At one time the family cow was kept there.

Outside the back door is a small woodshed common to houses of the period. Handily near the kitchen, the shed stored fuel necessary for cooking and heating.

The house represents the home of an average income family of the 1880s. "Generally only elegant homes are preserved for public display," Kivitt said, "so we believe it has historical value in this respect."



The old barn door, top left, is much narrower than most modern doors. Sandoz Hall looms in the background. Top center, some of the original furniture of the house, like this piano, mixes with newer appliances of its caretaker tenants. Top right, indoor plumbing was not included when the house was built, and facilities still are not new. The little yellow house, above, stands as a remnant of French Second Empire style architecture. In the barn, left, there's a stark contrast between the motorcycle owned by one of the house's current inhabitants and a carriage stored there by the Historical Society.