

Ferguson 'dream' house gives glimpse of plush past

By Micki Haller
Senior Editor

SPACIOUS! 4 BR, 3 bath, full basement with rec room, four fireplaces, mahogany trim on first floor, ballroom and servants' quarters on third. Near Capitol and UNL campus.

This dream home at 700 S. 16 St. is not for sale. Instead, the Ferguson House

is owned by the state and administered by the State Historical Society.

The house, a beautiful example of the Second Renaissance Revival style, can be toured. Built from 1909 to 1911, the house is made of concrete and steel and is sturdy, said Dave Zephier, the house's supervisor.

The house is loaded with carved

wooden trim, marble windowsills, stained-glass windows and other architectural frills of the era. It boasts all the modern conveniences: electricity, plumbing, an intercom system, a central vacuum cleaning system and even a gas-lighting backup in case the electricity goes out.

The decor is simply sensuous. The silk damask wallpaper in the dining room is original. The house

has smoothly polished wood floors, plush carpets, della Robbia molding on the ceiling and ornate furniture from the 1920s.

The furniture is not original. It came from the historical society's collections department.

Included in the furniture is a stunning reproduction of a Louis XVI desk. The brass-trimmed table is a work of art.

The tour shows guests through

the living room, dining room and library of the first floor and then up to the second-floor bedrooms and bathrooms.

The master bedroom is connected to a summer sleeping porch and two bathrooms. It has a marble fireplace. One of the bathrooms is huge. Filled with white porcelain, it contains an intercom phone to call

See **HOUSE** on 11

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Kennard house recreates Nebraska in the 1870s

By Jim Hanna
Staff Reporter

"If you ask me, this old stuff is pretty neat." — Anonymous observer

On my trip to the Nebraska Statehood Memorial, the Thomas P. Kennard House, I ran into the above anonymous observer who offered his insight as to what makes the old house interesting.

And he was right. It was pretty neat.

The Kennard House, 1627 H St., is believed to be the oldest structure in the Lincoln area. It was built in 1869 by Kennard, Nebraska's secretary of state at the time.

It still stands today, as a monument to Lincoln's founding fathers, David Butler, John Gillespie and Kennard.

Though all the furniture and fixtures in the house are replicas (save a lone portrait of Kennard), the house captures the feeling of the late 1800s.

The house was remodeled during the 1960s, and great effort was made to recreate the home of a moderately well-to-do family of the late 1870s. The restoration, however, was not designed as a memorial to any specific city, family or individual but rather to Nebraska's statehood. Also, attempts were made to use furniture and other items which formerly belonged to early Nebraska statesmen or have other early Nebraska associations.

The house is rather small. It contains a front parlor, dining room, kitchen and library on the first floor and two bedrooms, a museum display room and a curator's office upstairs.

The kitchen, dining room and some of the bedrooms have been relocated to different rooms, primarily because one wing of the house was removed in 1923. But the mood of

these rooms has been effectively recreated.

Perhaps the most interesting room is the library. In its day, the library was a man's room. There were no women or children allowed. The library was for the man of the house to unwind and relax after a grueling day. It is furnished with, among other things, a desk of former Gov. David Butler, a bookcase from former Gov. James W. Dawes' family and the fireplace from the razed home of former Gov. Arthur J. Weaver. The fireplace is cast iron painted to resemble marble. An exotic spittoon with a porcelain interior is a nice touch that I found particularly thrilling.

I was also fascinated by the lighting fixtures. All light was originally produced by kerosene. The lights were attached to springs that allowed them to be pulled down for maintenance. The original light fixtures remain, though they are now lit by electricity. The light produced is an approximation of how much would have been produced by kerosene. Unfortunately, some of the lights have those tacky bulbs shaped like flames, and I found them a distraction from my escapade into the past.

Overall, I found the Kennard House extremely interesting and an effective reflection of early Nebraska.

I was also impressed with the two guides who showed me around the house. Bill Hansen and Julie Flott were remarkably knowledgeable about the house's history, and they were a pleasure to talk with. A beautiful house like this would not be as interesting without intelligent guides like Bill and Julie to augment the visit.

The house is open for tours Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4:30 p.m. and Sundays from 1:30 to 5 p.m. Admission is \$1 for adults, 25 cents for children.

