FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Governors' Mansions of the Midwest
Ann Liberman, Alise O'Brien (photographer)
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Most early governors stayed in boarding houses or hotels, according to the author. In 1840, Illinois State Representative Abraham Lincoln introduced legislation to appropriate money for a residence for the governor, but the bill didn't pass. Of the twelve governors' mansions featured here, the Illinois residence, built in 1855, was the only one constructed before the Civil War.

Liberman's engaging text focuses on the mansions' architectural history, describing their construction, various alterations, and later renovations. The Illinois home, for example, cost $35,000 to build, but the cost of later renovation ran into the millions, including additions to the original twenty-eight-room structure, expanded over the years to ninety-nine rooms.

South Dakota's mansion, constructed in 1936 at a cost of $24,500, was a project of the WPA, one of President Roosevelt's relief agencies created during the Depression to provide jobs for unemployed men. The Nebraska residence, built in 1958 for $259,000 (including the furnishings), fueled a controversy that the press labeled a "war of taste." Supporters of the Colonial-style house considered the design to be "tried and true," while dissenters considered it "a stereotypical, copycat design that had no meaning for Nebraska."

The author has been researching governors' mansions since the early 1990s, when she was struck by the disparity among them. She has served on the National Council for the School of Architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. In this, her first book, she gives examples of Tudor, Georgian, and other styles in both the architecture and furniture. She discusses the buildings' furnishings and interiors, writes about the changes made by many of the governors' wives, and provides a history of the land. The territory that later became Minnesota, for example, was handed from country to country as spoils of war for almost 200 years.

Liberman also describes the mansions' landscaping. The formal gardens of the Indiana mansion memorialize thirty-six famous writers from that state, including James Whitcomb Riley, Theodore Dreiser, and Kurt Vonnegut. Quotations from their works are combined with thirty-six species of plants.

The book's superb photographs capture the mansions' beauty and elegance in images

such as water glasses on a dining room table or the fountains and statues in a formal garden. The award-winning photographer, who owns a photography firm in St. Louis, has provided architectural and interior photographs for major magazines and a book by a former Missouri first lady.

Liberman writes that she always feels a sense of awe upon entering these homes, “for each one was—and is—at the heart of its state’s history.”

George Cohen