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The Blaine House: A Brief History and Guide

H. Draper Hunt

George K. Clancey

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The
BLAINE HOUSE



A BRIEF HISTORY
and
GUIDE

by
H. Draper Hunt
and
Gregory K. Clancey

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Governor Joseph F. Brennan.

Introduction

Maine can boast of many beautiful mansions and more than its share of fine museums and historic sites, but no building in Maine is all of these — and a living and warm home at the same time.

As the person who now enjoys the honor of calling the Blaine House home, I am well aware of the special affection and indeed mystique Maine people hold for the house. It may be my home, but it belongs to all the people of Maine. That's why I have enthusiastically continued the policy of many of my predecessors of opening up the Blaine House to the public as much as possible.

The responsibilities of office require a governor to meet the current public needs of the state and its people while also planning for the future. The Blaine House — with its antiques, its historical treasures, and the reminders of so many other, earlier residents — is a quiet reminder that there are also traditions, values, and history which any Maine governor must also respect.

But historic landmark or not, it is easy to come to think of the Blaine House as home. Long after I have moved out, I will still remember that it was here where my children, Joe and Tara, would grow into teen-agers, here where I entertained many national leaders, and, indeed, here where I planted my first vegetable garden. There is a personal feeling of pride when I show off President Lincoln's handwritten note in the Blaine Study or the silver bowl and dishes that were salvaged from the Battleship MAINE at the bottom of Havana harbor.

On one occasion, a former governor, his wife and their adult children accepted my invitation to stay at the Blaine House. They toured their old home and reminisced about a time when they were all much younger. It was a unique event in the life of that family, but the special warmth they

had for the Blaine House made me realize that living here is one of those ties that bind all governors, cutting across generations and political philosophies.

In time, my own lease will expire. I hope that the governors and their families to follow me will grow as fond of this special home as I have.

Joseph E. Brennan
Governor of Maine

A Brief History

James G. Blaine

Few executive mansions in the United States have such rich historical associations as the Blaine House, the official residence of Maine's governors. From 1862 until his death in 1893, it was home to James Gillespie Blaine and his family. Blaine bestrode the political world like a colossus in the post-Civil War "Gilded Age." Dazzling, charismatic, worshipped by his friends, loathed by his enemies, (contemporaries called him variously the "Plumed Knight of the Republican Party" and the "continental liar from the State of Maine"), he dominated the Maine Republican party for a generation, served brilliantly as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; United States Senator; trail-blazing Secretary of State for the two Presidents, and in 1884 came within a whisker of winning the Presidency of the United States himself.

The Blaine House before Blaine

The house sits on a plot once part of a choice "front lot" originally surveyed in 1761 and stretching back a mile from the Kennebec River. After a complex series of property transfers, a portion of this "front lot" passed into the hands of Captain James Hall of Bath in 1830. By 1833, Hall had completed a substantial square "mansion house" with hip-ped roof and tall chimneys on the corner of State and Capitol Streets, directly across the latter from the spanking new Bulfinch State House. A handsome colonnaded porch led into an entrance hall with a front and back parlor to the left and a sitting room and dining room to the right. A small kitchen and pantry on the first floor and four bedrooms upstairs completed the complement of rooms. Soon, however, Hall built an ell onto the house.



*James G. Blaine as the Republican Presidential Candidate in
1884.*

Captain Hall's sons inherited the house on his death, transferred it to their mother, Frances Ann Hall, in 1843 and, seven years later, she conveyed it to wealthy Augusta merchant Greenwood Child. On November 20, 1862, the heirs of Greenwood Child (who died in 1855) sold the house to Harriet Stanwood Blaine for \$5000, the money provided by her husband James as a birthday present.

Mr. Blaine's Home

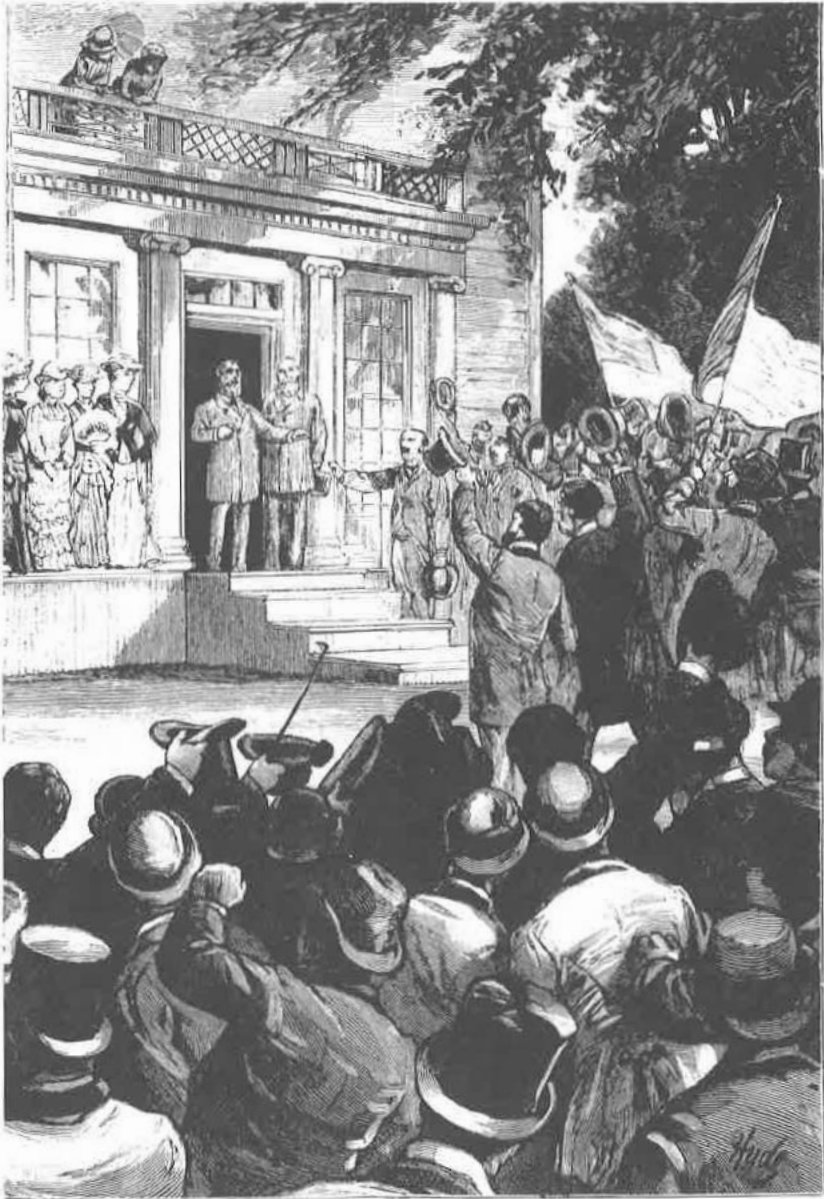
The Blaines had met as young teachers in Kentucky. Married in 1850, they settled in Philadelphia, where native-Pennsylvanian Blaine taught English and literature at the Pennsylvania Institute for the Education of the Blind. They often vacationed in Augusta, Maine, Harriet's home town, and there in 1854, James G. Blaine, a charming young man of sound Whig principles, became part owner and editor of the *Kennebec Journal*. The young journalist and his paper enlisted in the new Republican party, and, in 1858, tired of merely reporting political events from the sidelines, Blaine launched the brilliant political career that would nearly carry him into the White House. After serving as speaker of the Maine House of Representatives, Blaine won a congressional seat in 1862, the same year he gave Mrs. Blaine her memorable birthday present.

Over the next decade the Blaines enlarged the house to meet the needs of a growing family and indulge Blaine's love of building. On Captain Hall's ell they constructed a smaller replica of the front section of the house called the "new part." Here the master of the house had his small but handsome study and an octagonal billiard room. On the south or State House side of the original structure were the front and back parlor, on the north side a sitting room and behind it the dining room. Eventually Blaine threw the latter two rooms into one large dining room. Then he converted the parlors and the attached conservatory into a single large living room. The kitchen and service rooms stretched

along the north side of the ell and the new part. A small oblong porch afforded access to the hallway between the hall in the old part and the study and billiard room in the new. Later the area flanking the porch was filled in to create an open veranda, fronted by a balustrade. Six bedrooms filled the second story, and windowed cupolas topping the old and new parts of the mansion completed the impression of a house transformed.

Harriet Blaine was a remarkable woman, high spirited, highly intelligent, blessed with a keen sense of humor, politically shrewd although at times indiscreet, adoring, if at times exasperated by her shining, mercurial, hypochondriacal husband. She raised six children to adulthood and presided with aplomb over a combination gentleman's mansion and political clubhouse in Augusta. The Blaine home became the nerve-center of Maine's Republican party as Chairman Blaine planned strategy for the annual campaigns, raised money, and wooed such out-of-state speakers as the famed orator Robert Ingersoll, who pontificated on the merits of orange peel as a laxative as he passed out marshmallows to the Blaine children. "This is one of my tavern weeks," she wrote, "the board being spread for all who come." During the scary electoral crisis of 1879, Blaine's armed political opponents occupied the State House, and one nearly shot him from its cupola as Blaine strolled on his lawn. Worried Republicans trooped into the Blaine house day and night, and Mrs. Blaine told of her cook, Caroline, serving 250 chickens in a four-month period and then beginning on turkeys. "She was," her mistress chuckled, "more to be dreaded than the foxes." "I miss his unvarying attention and as constant neglect," she wrote with loving exasperation of her often-absent, frequently absent-minded husband, who misplaced salary checks and once locked the door and went to bed with his wife still out!

The Blaine mansion became the focus of national attention in 1884, when its master bore the Republican Presidential standard, and the exhausted couple returned home from



James G. Blaine addressing delegates to the Republican National Convention from the front steps of the Blaine House as pictured in the June 21, 1884 issue of Frunk Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.

a final campaign swing to learn that Grover Cleveland had narrowly won the prize.

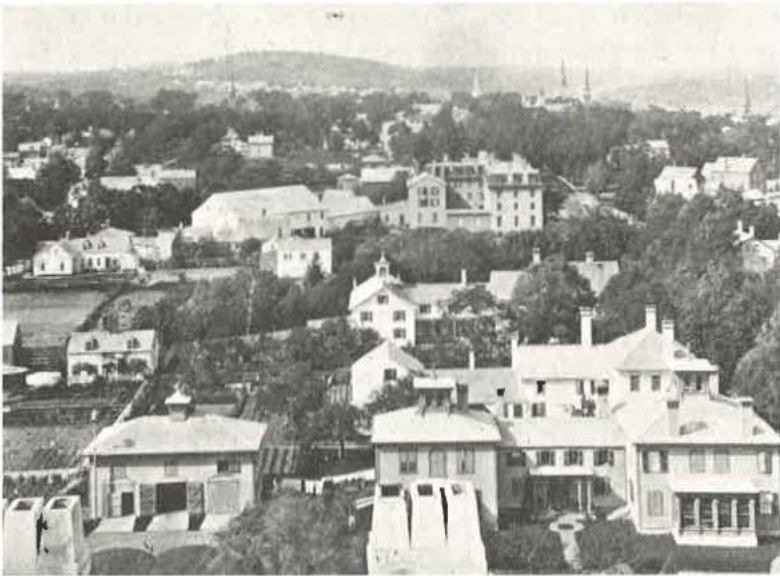
Blaine served brilliantly as Benjamin Harrison's Secretary of State, but resigned in June, 1892. By the time he died on January 15, 1893, his three oldest children had predeceased him, blows from which he and Mrs. Blaine never fully recovered. Fittingly, Harriet Blaine's death in 1903 occurred in the Augusta mansion she had always thought of as home. As her daughter wrote, "So much love and so much life do not often go together." She could have had no finer epitaph.

Transition

In the years following her death, Mrs. Blaine's children lived in the house intermittently, and from 1897 to 1902, Governor John F. Hill occupied it and entertained President Theodore Roosevelt there. During the 1905 legislative session, a group of wealthy young legislators rented the mansion "right on the riviera of the most fashionable thoroughfare of Augusta and within a stone's throw of the big building with the golden dome," several rich enough to "carpet the floor of the Blaine house with \$10 bills." Then on March 22, 1917, James G. Blaine's grandson Walker Blaine Beal received his birthplace as a twenty-first birthday present. Before he went off to fight in France, the Harvard College student turned the mansion over to Governor Carl Milliken to house the Maine Committee of Public Safety. The Blaine house became headquarters for the war effort in Maine. On March 11, 1919, Governor Milliken received a letter from Mrs. Truxtun Beale, who wrote, "I deliver to you for the State with this letter, the deed of trust of my father's home in memory of my son Walker Blaine Beale." She asked to be allowed to install a bronze tablet in the front hall, bearing the inscription:



*The Blaine House to the immediate right of the State House
in an 1836 painting by Charles Codman.*



*Looking north from the State House cupola showing Augusta
with the Blaine House in the foreground shortly after
Blaine's 1872 remodelling.*

This house and the land on which it stands was the home of James G. Blaine, and was given to the State of Maine in the name of his grandson Walter Blaine Beale, First Lieutenant 310th Infantry, 78th Division, who was born here March 22, 1896, and who fell in France in the St. Mihiel Drive, September 18, 1918.

LAETUS SORTE MEA

Mrs. Beale's "first and strongest desire" was to see the Blaine house "used and maintained as the official residence for the Governor of Maine...."

*The Blaine House: Home of Maine's Governors**

The Governor and Legislature of Maine gratefully accepted Mrs. Beale's splendid gift, and energetic Carl Milliken moved quickly to implement the Legislature's mandate that he and his Executive Council "make such alterations, improvements and repairs of the residence of the late James G. Blaine... as many appear... to be needed, and to furnish the house suitably, for the purpose of an executive mansion for the governor of the state while in office, and to acquire such contiguous property as may be desirable for said purpose." The State purchased sufficient bordering parcels to afford an unbroken sweep of property from State Street to Grove Street, and the removal of an adjacent house provided the Blaine House with increased lawn space to the north. The Governor and Council retained distinguished Portland architect John Calvin Stevens to convert the old house into a combination memorial-executive mansion. In January, 1920, the Millikens moved in and by the spring, the house was finished inside and out. The total cost to the State of Maine for "realty, moveable property, remodeling, labor, decorating, etc." was \$184,648. Stevens had striven successfully to recapture the original simplicity of the house. A passerby could see at once significant changes in the ex-

*For detailed description of each gubernatorial tenancy in the Blaine House, see H. Draper Hunt, *The Blaine House: Home of Maine's Governors* (Maine Historical Society/New Hampshire Publishing Co., 1974).



President Theodore Roosevelt coming out the front door of the Blaine House after visiting Governor John Hill in 1902.

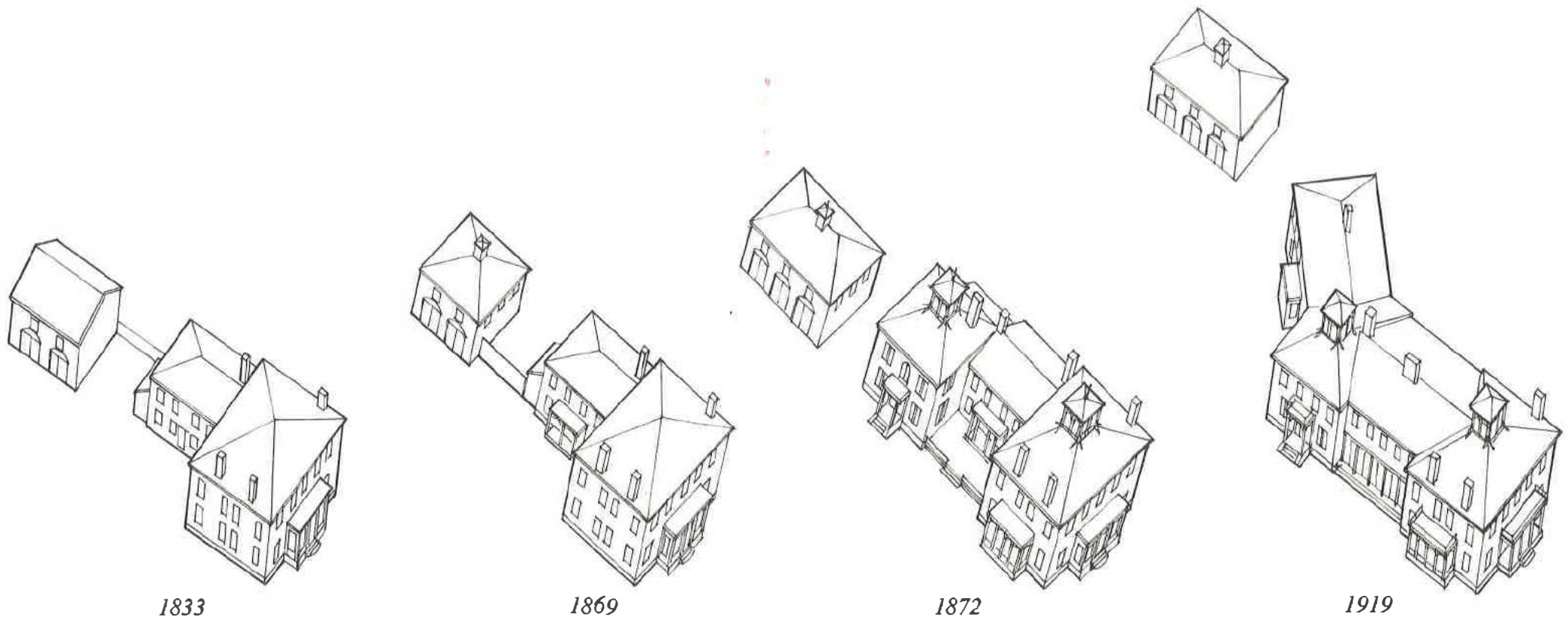
terior, with the old ell connecting the front and back sections raised to their level, making for easier access to the old and new parts. The drab brown paint had given way to gleaming white with green shutters. Finally a fine new wing attached to the rear of the house angled off to the northwest (to “keep the lines of the old house as before”) providing much-needed space for service functions and servants’ quarters.

Inside, the Blaine House glowed with blue and gold — the State colors — in the elegant Reception Room facing the State House, and contrasting shades of green and silver, symbolizing Maine’s trees, lakes and streams, in the State Dining Room. All the rooms had been completely done over, with a few original pieces of furniture mingling comfortably with handsome reproductions. Several rooms boasted superb French wallpaper made in an Alsatian factory dating from Louis XIV’s reign but destroyed in World War I. Fortunately enough of the paper had been found in America for Blaine House needs. A walk-in refrigerator with ice-manufacturing coil, a large new furnace for steam-heat, as well as two separate gas heating plants for hot water in the greatly enlarged cellar, and “Cabot’s quilt” insulation, allegedly rat-and mice-proof, helped make the Blaine House as functional as it was beautiful.

Each gubernatorial family has done some redecorating of the upstairs family quarters, but relatively few changes have been made in the first-floor public rooms. By Governor Edmund S. Muskie’s incumbency (1955-59), however, the need for major renovation and refurbishing had become painfully clear. A new roof solved the problem of water cascading into the house during rainstorms. Bulging walls and floors sanded almost to oblivion were repaired and the latter covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. The State undertook extensive redecoration upstairs and down. New plumbing fixtures replaced antiquated ones; a large shower room was constructed upstairs; new sinks and cabinets appeared in the kitchen, and a \$9,000 sprinkler system was installed.

The Blaine House has been "quite like a home" to Maine's governors and their families since 1919. Children have found it a delight, from four-year-old Edith Louise Milliken who surreptitiously collected coins from tourists in a jingling purse to Ellen ("Sissie") Muskie who carefully decorated a bust of James G. Blaine with black crayon until the statesman resembled a "drunken Picasso." Blaine House pets have included baby lambs kept cozy behind a bathroom radiator by the children of Governor William Tudor Gardiner; a brace of Gardiner alligators which lived (and alas died) in an upstairs bath tub; a squirrel named "Peanuts" who lived on the grounds and lunched each day with Governor Lewis O. Barrows; and a Boston terrier owned by Governor Louis Brann which had a presumably platonic affair with future U.S. Senator Margaret Chase Smith's Chichuhaua. Perhaps the most famous Blaine House pet was the magnificent Irish setter "Garry Owen", the pride and joy of bachelor Governor Percival P. Baxter, who provided him with a dog house painted in Blaine House colors and a pass on the Maine Central Railroad. When "Garry" died, his master outraged patriotic groups by ordering the State House flag flown at half-mast. Memorable Blaine House visitors have included General of the Armies John J. Pershing and Governor Calvin Coolidge of Massachusetts ("Silent Cal", a hay-fever sufferer, brusquely ordered a bouquet removed from his room) during the Milliken regime; heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey and aviatrix Amelia Earhart who visited the Louis Branns; Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri who lunched with Governor Sumner Sewall during World War II, and Senator John F. Kennedy who held a press conference in the Sun Room in 1959. Perhaps the most memorable event ever held at the Blaine House was a 1964 benefit given by Governor and Mrs. John H. Reed for the family of the slain Trooper Charles C. Black. Ten thousand guests overflowed the mansion and the grounds and produced, in addition to donations, \$5,000 from the sale of 4,500 chicken dinners for the Trooper Black Fund.

H. Draper Hunt



1833

1869

1872

1919

The Four Phases of Blaine House Development:

Captain Hall's House, 1833

Blaine's First Remodelling, 1869

Blaine's Second Remodelling, 1872

the State of Maine's Remodelling, 1919.

A Brief Architectural History

Although its clean lines, colonnades, and white paint give the Blaine House a pleasantly unified appearance, the building combines four distinct architectural styles and twice has been significantly changed by remodelings. Like many of Maine's historic homes, the Blaine House is a testament not to timelessness, but rather to the constant change that has characterized the state's architectural development since the early nineteenth century.

Captain James Hall built his house beside the new Capitol Building in 1833, during a transition period in both the economy and architectural style of the Kennebec Valley. Landowners and merchants were beginning to share wealth with a new class of entrepreneurs — the industrialists. Pre-industrial Maine had been characterized by Federal style architecture. The industrial age was accompanied by a new style, the Greek Revival, which was grandly indulged in by Kennebec Valley lumbermen and shipbuilders. Captain Hall met the wealthy style setters half way, building a house combining some of the most distinctive of Federal and Greek Revival elements.

Hall's house was typically Federal in having five windows across the facade, a hipped roof, and a centrally-placed door with louvred fan and sidelights. The rooms were arranged to either side of a central hall, with a kitchen extending from the back to form an ell. But Captain Hall's front porch was in the new Greek Revival style with Ionic columns and enclosed panels. Such porches were extremely rare in Maine before the 1830's. The facade was also matched-boarded to resemble stone. Heat was provided by wood fireplaces alone, and light by candles and whale oil lamps. Mrs. Hall was assisted in maintaining the house by two or three servants.

When the Blaines acquired the house in 1862, the Federal and Greek Revival styles were long outdated, and the building soon proved too confining for the family's highly social lifestyle. By 1872 the Blaines had extensively enlarged the house in the Italianate style. A conservatory projected from the south wall, and a finialed cupola was added to the roof, both lavishly decorated with applied millwork. A similarly decorated porch was added to the ell, and a new section mimicing the shape of the original house ("the new part" in Blaine family parlance) was attached to the ell. This new section, Italianate in configuration and with octagonal rooms and parquetry floors and wainscoting, was where Mr. Blaine's study and billiard room were located. The four first floor rooms in the old section became two large semi-public spaces, one for receiving and sitting and the other for dining. These, too, were completely remodeled with such features as new floors and ornate Corinthian columns. A two-toned exterior paint job completed the house's conversion to a Victorian mansion, while mechanical devices such as gas lamps, basement furnaces, and even a telephone in the early 1880's provided a degree of convenience unknown to Captain Hall. While such original features as the columns of Hall's portico were made by hand, most of Blaine's decorative additions were produced by machine.

The Blaines were affluent by local standards. They also enjoyed a mansion in Washington and a summer home at Bar Harbor. Six servants were required to run the Augusta residence after its 1872 enlargement.

When the State received the Blaine House as a gubernatorial mansion in 1919, its style was again considered out-of-date and its configuration cramped and unsuitable for a chief executive. John Calvin Stevens, a prominent Portland architect, was hired to remodel the house according to contemporary tastes, which deplored Victorian "excesses" and sought simplicity and purity in the style of Colonial America. Stevens did preserve the interior of the house, including the Victorian octagonal rooms in the new part, as a memorial



The south facade of the Blaine House.



The colonnade on the south facade designed by John Calvin Stevens in 1919.

to James G. Blaine. However, he enlarged the ell to include a sun room, loftier bedrooms, and a larger family dining room, and he added a two story service wing at the rear. An ardent Colonial Revivalist, Stevens' major alterations occurred on the exterior, where he sought to erase Victorian decoration and return the house as nearly as possible to its original Federal-Greek Revival appearance. The conservatory was stripped of its intricate millwork and given classical details, while the front porch panels were removed to show the Federal door surround. Stevens wanted to eliminate both cupolas, but compromised with those who did not by simply modifying their Victorian decoration. The windows in the ell and new part were remodelled and, in perhaps the happiest alteration, a recessed Ionic colonnade was added to the ell. Stevens replaced the old gas fixtures with electric lights and added such electrical conveniences as a refrigerator-freezer and a built-in vacuum cleaner.

The Blaine House has remained largely unchanged since 1919, although the grounds have been relandscaped and successive governors have changed interior furnishings and installed increasingly sophisticated mechanical devices. Other examples of changing times range from the basement bomb shelter of 1954 to Governor Brennan's restoration of the billiard room's Victorian features.

Gregory K. Clancey



The Entrance Hall.

A Guide To The House

The Entrance Hall

A long hallway, covered with Oriental rugs said to be good for 175 years of wear, runs the length of the house. Entering the front door into the spacious hallway one notes a bronze tablet denoting the gift of the mansion to the State of Maine as a memorial to Walker Blaine Beale, Blaine's grandson, yellow wallpaper with a Greek goddess motif and two Empire-style pier tables, an original and a copy, topped with New England slate. A handsome staircase carpeted with an Oriental Runner ascends to the second floor. Where it curves part way up, a white statue of the Roman goddess Minerva gazes down from a niche in the wall. One of the relatively few objects dating back to the Blaine occupancy, Minerva holds a torch light of more recent vintage. Also from Blaine's time is the bust of the English poet Lord Byron located in the arch over the doorway adjacent to the staircase.

Reception or State Drawing Room

In this room to the left of the hallway, soft blue wallpaper covers the walls, and Italian damask draperies of Florentine design flow to the floor from striking Greek key design cornices. Suspended from the cast-plaster ornamental ceiling, twin chandeliers of Czechoslovakian glass imported from Italy are reflected in a long gilded mirror hanging between the windows in the front wall. Over the two lovely black and gold fireplaces, fashioned of marble imported from Italy by James G. Blaine, hang ornate carved gilt mirrors, also Blaine heirlooms. Empire chairs upholstered in gold and white antique velvet and Martha Washington chairs in gold cotton brocade with green medallions vie for attention with the Sheraton-style sofa and two Williamsburg chairs set in the alcove facing the State House. Stately Corinthian columns testify to the fact that the Reception Room was once two rooms. On a marble-top table sits an 1825 gilded French



The Reception or State Drawing Room.



The State Dining Room.

clock of classical motif, which once belonged to the Harrison Gray Otis family of Boston.

State Dining Room

The twelve dining room chairs in the State Dining Room are original Duncan Phyfe and are among the most valuable pieces in the house. The simple fireplace design reflects the English influence, as do the Adam side table and the unusual wooden knife urns flanking the Sheraton serving table. The State Dining Room contains two large china cabinets, one a reproduction of a Sheraton piece, the other a reproduction of a Chippendale. The formal china, a Syracuse pattern in blue and gold, bears the State seal.

The MAINE Silver served aboard two battleships MAINE (1895-98, 1905-22), and had to be rescued from the bottom of Havana harbor after the first MAINE blew up in 1898. When the second MAINE was sold for scrap in 1922, the richly chased sterling vessels were sent to the Blaine House.

Customarily a State presented a punch bowl and matching cups to its namesake vessel, but teetotalling Maine opted for a soup tureen and two covered vegetable dishes.

Family Dining Room

Adjoining the State Dining Room, this room features French chinoiserie museum reproduction wallpaper with marching material for drapes. The simple Adam Hepplewhite table, chairs and sideboards provide a comfortable setting for family meals, working lunches and small social gatherings. The chairs are covered in wool Bargello needlework, handblocked in a flame pattern. Maroon carpeting, white wainscoting and woodwork complete the room.

The Sun Room

The newly redecorated Sun Room, adjoining the Reception Room, is the brightest and airiest room in the house. In Blaine's day, the room was an open porch. A small mother of pearl doorbell near the fireplace which still rings is a reminder of that earlier use of this area.

Large double windows facing the State House run the length of the Sun Room. The windows are hung with a glazed cotton print featuring small wildflowers in a host of colors. This "Edge of the Wood" print, made in England, is sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation.

The room is furnished with a mixture of antique and modern furniture. Of special interest are the granite fireplace, the massive antique brass woodbox and the antique sofa and end tables. A Steinway grand piano, purchased in 1962, dominates one wall.

Blaine Study

The Blaine Study was first restored when the house became the Governor's mansion, and again in 1962.

Blaine's presence is everywhere: in the handsome mahogany desk and chair he used as a member of the United States Senate; in the unusual striped wallpaper, a reproduction of that copied by Blaine from the paper in Abraham Lincoln's White House study; in the dark stone fireplace and the row upon row of the statesman's books reposing in high bookcases which fill one wall. A caned swivel chair stands at a second and larger desk, on which rests a massive inkwell surmounted by a seated statue of William Shakespeare. Two matching side chairs, their arms, backs and seats upholstered in light blue velvet, stand nearby. A black leather couch and a fire screen with an American eagle motif deserve mention.

Above the fireplace hangs a large engraving of Francis B. Carpenter's print depicting Lincoln reading the Eman-



The Blaine Study.



An historic photograph in the Blaine Study showing President Benjamin Harrison, third from left, visiting the Blaines at their Bar Harbor cottage in 1889. Blaine is second from the right and his wife is in the center.

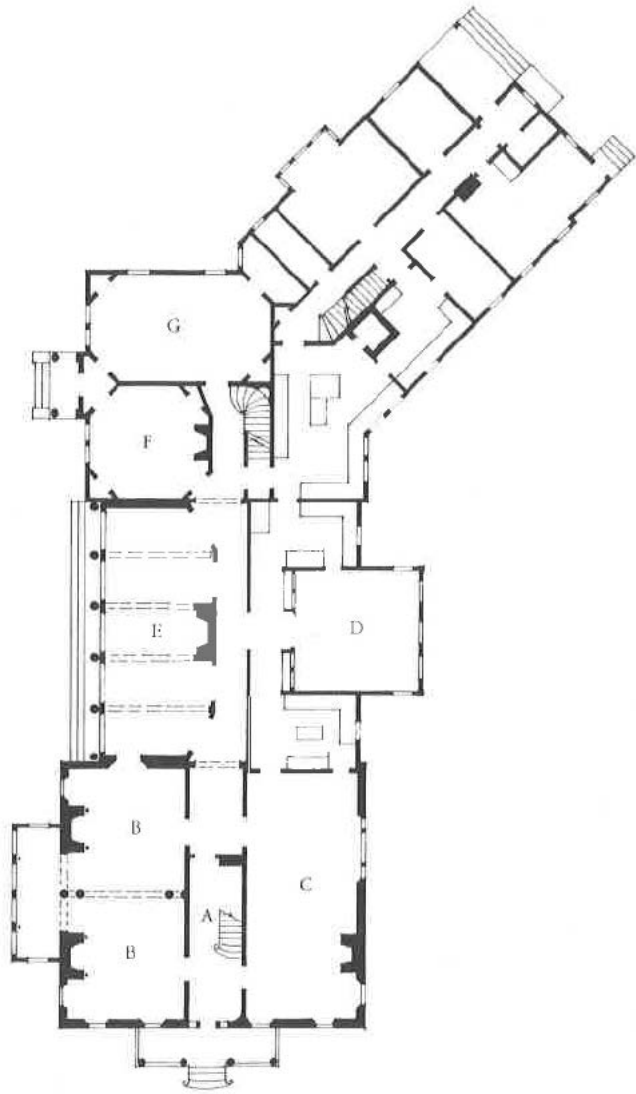
ipation Proclamation to his Cabinet. Encased in a glass frame attached to Blaine's Senatorial desk is a Blaine House treasure — a small card dated April 7, 1865, allowing "the bearer Mr. Blaine to pass from City Point to Richmond and return," signed A. Lincoln.

The Game Room

One of Blaine's favorite rooms, the Game Room was restored in 1979-80 under Governor Brennan's direction. The most striking change that resulted from the renovation was the restoration of the original two-tone mahogany and birch floor. The beautiful wooden floor had been hidden beneath tile and carpeting for many years and had been all but forgotten.

The room is dominated by a pool table of World War I vintage and well lit by two Tiffany-style hanging lamps. Wool felt walls in a burnt orange shade, drapes of English cotton with a pattern adapted from a Victorian print and late Victorian office armchairs compliment the lamps in establishing a period feeling in the room.

A versatile room — Blaine called it his "gymnasium" — it is popular among guests at the House. In 1920, the billiard table served as a make-shift bed for a young guest at a Halloween party given by the children of Governor Carl Milliken, the house's first official resident.



Floor Plan of the First Story of the Blaine House:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| <i>A. Entrance Hall.</i> | <i>E. Sun Room</i> |
| <i>B. Reception or State Drawing Room</i> | <i>F. Blaine Study.</i> |
| <i>C. State Dining Room.</i> | <i>G. Game Room.</i> |
| <i>D. Family Dining Room.</i> | |

The Blaine House
is open 2:00-4:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday
excluding holidays

Special group tours may
be arranged for other times
by contacting the
Maine State Museum
289-2301



This booklet was published by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission in 1983 in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Blaine House.

Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.
Director

Contemporary photographs of the Blaine House by Richard Cheek.
Photograph of Governor Brennan by Lawrence Spiegel.
Drawings of the Blaine House Development and the Floor Plan of
the First Story by Christopher Glass.

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Blaine's Residence
State Street - Augusta Maine