

It was for a tour of Terrace Hill, the National Historic Landmark housing Iowa's first family, that I came south from the University of Minnesota over Spring Break 2004 - straight into a blizzard that was engulfing most of the Des Moines area, with Terrace Hill smack dab in the middle of it.

The 20-room Second Empire style house has become a site for numerous programs, including a lecture series the second Tuesday of every month, "Scare Us" Hill weeklong program of nighttime tours and storytelling for Halloween, Holly and Ivy home tours during the holiday season, Jazz in July, Spring Fling, many literary events in keeping with First Lady Christie Vilsack's focus, and the First Lady Teas which are held the third Monday of each month.

I had decided to attend one of Ms. Vilsack's Teas the day before my tour, but because of the weather, that Monday's program presenter had canceled and the few hearty souls remaining for tea at the Second Empire Mansion were joined midway by a groundskeeper as he took a break from shoveling snow to warm up.

The first two floors of Terrace Hill, called the "museum floors", are maintained as it would have been from 1869, when it was built by B.F. Allen, to 1910, 26 years after it had been sold to F.M. Hubbell. When Allen had to declare bankruptcy, he was able to retain his unmortgaged house on Des Moines' highest point and sell it, along with the 8 acres it now stands on, to Hubbell for \$55,000 in 1884. The timeframe of 1869 to 1910 is called the "period of significance" on the National Historic Landmark Nomination and was chosen so that both the influences of B.F. Allen and F.M. Hubbell on the house could be displayed.

In order to make up for the lack of a lecturer that Monday, the First Lady gave us a tour of her and the Governor's private apartment on the third floor. In 1976, Gov. Robert Ray was the first governor to move into Terrace Hill. In the process of converting Terrace Hill from a private home to a public museum that would also serve as the Governor's Residence, the state has found ingenious ways to update Terrace Hill while maintaining the house's historic character. The Hubbell family lived in Terrace Hill for 72 years, adding chandeliers and stained glass windows shortly after they moved in. When Grover Hubbell and his family moved into the house in 1924 to help care for the aging F.M., the

music room was converted to an elevator shaft and bathroom. In all, \$56,000 was spent on the 1924 renovations, which included repairs, remodelings, and strengthening the structure. After Terrace Hill was given to the state of Iowa in 1971, the music room was returned to its former glory, but other Hubbell additions, like electricity, were retained.

The original one-man lift outside of the music room has been removed and the empty shaft has been reused as a chase for electrical and piping systems. An entrance was added to the west side of Terrace Hill to provide private access for the First Family. From the Governor's entrance, which has been constructed so as to look original, they can get directly to servants' stairs, which have become their private stairs, and the modern elevator, which replaced the dumbwaiter. The First Family's foyer opens off the elevator and stairs

Heating and cooling systems for the basement and first floor were placed between the floors, causing the basement's ceiling to be lowered. The third story's floor was raised to accommodate the systems for it and the second story. The only part of the third story's floor that is not raised is the tower room, which Rosie, the Governor's dog, has made her home, a few steps down from the floor the rest of the Governor's family walks on. During the tour of the apartment given by Ms. Vilsack, the visitors were allowed to climb to the top of the tower to look out across the snow-covered grounds. This is a view of Terrace Hill few will see, and as beautiful as Terrace Hill is in the summertime, it's even more beautiful surrounded by a spring snowfall.

The apartment's windows peak out of the mansard roof. "I like to use this apartment as a chance to display contemporary art," said Ms. Christie Vilsack. "Only period art can be displayed on the museum floors of the house." In addition to art, the apartment is amply furnished with books. The walls of the living room and the master bedroom are lined with bookshelves - quite befitting for the First Lady, a former Journalism teacher.

Ms. Vilsack explained that her two grown sons rarely live at the mansion now. The longest stretch of time that both sons have been in the Governor's quarters was earlier this year, when Douglas, the younger son, stayed at Terrace Hill while planning "...to paddle down the Mississippi over the summer"

as the First Lady described it. That trip turned out to be Paddle 4 President, Doug's non-partisan attempt to register young voters in the swing states from Lake Itasca to New Orleans ([paddle4president.org](http://paddle4president.org)). Just another example of the family business of public service to be seen at Terrace Hill.

My second day was spent with Dave Cordes, Terrace Hill's Administrator.

Terrace Hill is owned by the state of Iowa, but receives additional support from a few related groups. The Terrace Hill Foundation was started in the 70's and raises funds for the house separate from what it receives from the State. The Terrace Hill Society is a friends group charged with protecting all of the objects in Terrace Hill. The Terrace Hill Commission is appointed by the State to oversee the house. It presently includes the First Lady and other individuals with expertise in business management or historic preservation. A few of the Commissioners also serve on the Foundation or Society boards.

Visitors approach the front of the house from the West corner nearest the visitors' center. From this view, as pointed out by Cordes, the careful observer can notice a subtle change in brick color and quality from the more public front of the house to the private side of the house no one was supposed to see, something most modern visitors overlook. From the Eastern viewpoint, where visitors historically approached the house, both sides of the front facade adjoining the central tower appear symmetrical when in reality the facade to the west side of the tower is much wider than to the east.

On the Museum Floors, the reception room contains Gibb windows, which by definition contain panes that can be pushed all the way up to create a passage to that room's private balcony. The library is opposite the drawing room, a set-up quite common in the 1800's, when those of different genders would retire to separate gathering spaces after dinner. The main balcony on the east side of the house opens off the library and sitting room where the men gathered. The Allen furnishings that still remain in the house are the pier mirror and over-mantel mirror in the parlor, and the coat rack in the hall. The Hubbells moved the parlor chandelier to the music room and then to the dining room. In 1913, they layered elaborate decorative painting on top of 1885 stenciling.

The grounds are maintained as they were from 1869 to 1928, two years before Hubbell's death in 1930. After F.M. Hubbell's son, Grover, died in 1956, a family trust maintained the house, paying for a caretaker to stay in the basement. The trust also decided to sandblast Terrace Hill and its carriage house. By 1997, the stone, cast stone, and pre-cast concrete surrounding the windows on Terrace Hill and most of the softer stone on the carriage house had significantly deteriorated as a result of the '50s sandblasting, with spalling where stone was flaking away. In 1998 it was estimated that 4 million dollars of work would be needed to correct the front (north) door steps and the back (south) railings, replace the slate roof and gutters, restore the east porch, replace the air conditioning system, update the fire alarm system, and add a sprinkler system. After these latest repairs were completed, Terrace Hill has returned to a condition of which the state can be proud.

Terrace Hill qualified for National Historic Landmark designation because it is an outstanding example of the Second Empire Style of architecture - but as you can see, there are plenty of features in the house and how it's being maintained that make it more than just type - it is unique, like the current family living in it, in often surprising ways.

More information on Terrace Hill can be found by visiting [www.terracehill.org](http://www.terracehill.org).