

THE Lanier HOME

State Memorial



THE MEMORIAL

Commanding a panoramic view of the Ohio River and the Kentucky hills, the Lanier home in Madison, Indiana, is reminiscent of the cultured, leisurely and prosperous eighties and fifties.

The mansion is maintained today as an example of an outstanding Indiana home of its period and as a permanent memorial to James Lanier, a wealthy frontier banker whose loans to the faltering state government helped Indiana avert bankruptcy during the Civil War.

Designed by noted architect Francis Costigan, the home was considered one of the most imposing and palatial homes in Indiana when it was completed in 1844. The front of the home, with its two-story portico and wrought-iron work, is quite suggestive of southern mansions and is an excellent example of the "Greek Revival" style of architecture which had great influence in the Midwest prior to 1860.

Although Costigan often imitated classical Corinthian and Tuscan styles in designing the Lanier home, he was original in refining the home's cornices, columns, staircase and cupola. One of the structure's most interesting features is a three-story spiral staircase, unsupported except by its own thrust. Inserted in the newel posts are silver plates bearing Costigan's signature.

It took four years to build the Lanier mansion. All the work, from heavy construction to delicate stone masonry and wood carving, was done by hand.

The home is as alive today as when the Laniers occupied it more than 100 years ago. Many of the original furnishings still remain, and those items which did not belong to the Laniers accurately reflect the family's tastes and lifestyle.

The articles of beauty and cultural value which are found throughout the house are typical of nineteenth-century genteel society. Even the placement of bric-a-brac, pictures, books and furniture follows the precise mode of room arrangement popular during Lanier's lifetime. The atmosphere of the house is not that of a museum, but rather of a home still occupied by a wealthy and cultured nineteenth-century family.

Although James Lanier was able to enjoy his home in Madison for only a few years prior to moving to New York, the mansion remained in the Lanier family for four generations. In 1925 the State of Indiana acquired the property as a State Memorial.

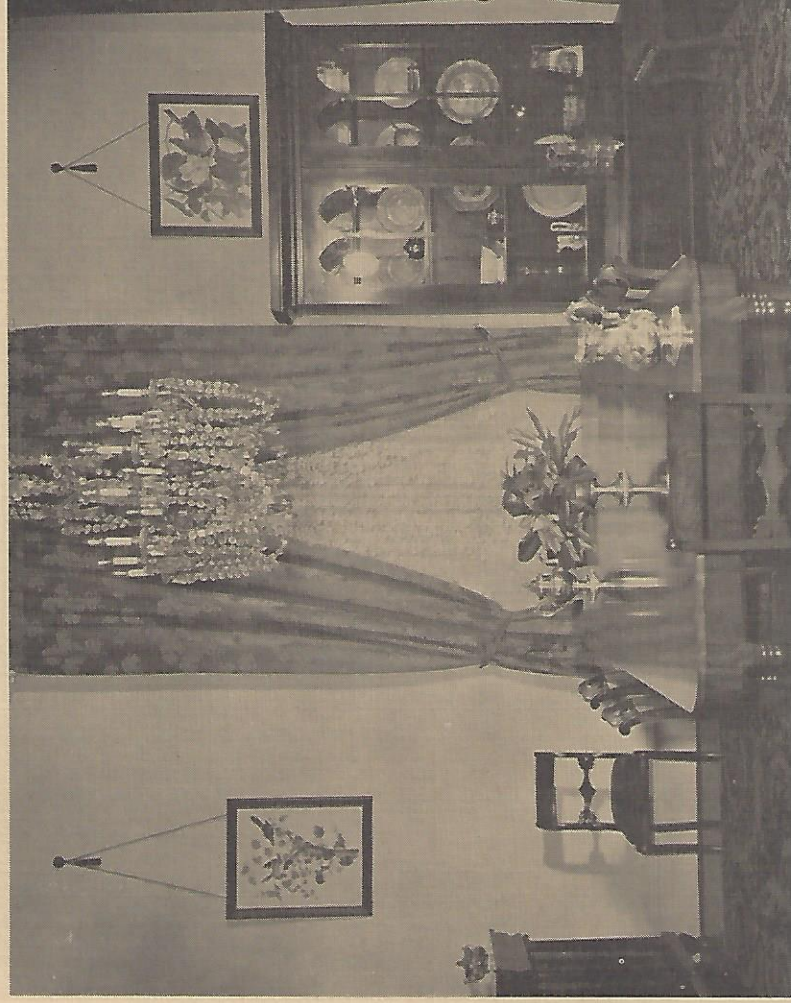
The Memorial is located at 511 West First Street in Madison. It is open year round, and there is a small admission charge.

THE MAN

James Franklin Doughty Lanier was born in 1800 at Washington, North Carolina, and moved to Madison, Indiana, in 1817. He set up a law practice in Madison at the age of 23 and the same year was named Assistant Clerk to the Indiana House of Representatives, then meeting at Corydon. The following year he helped move the capitol from Corydon to Indianapolis where he became Clerk of the House.

During his years as Clerk of the House, Lanier made substantial profits in various business ventures. When the Second State Bank of Indiana was organized in 1833, he was able to buy the largest single block of stock in the bank. From 1834 to 1842 he served as president of the Madison Branch and as a member of the Board of Control of the State Banking System in Indianapolis.

When the financial panic of 1837 swept the country, banks throughout the land faced financial ruin. Mr. Lanier traveled to Washington, convinced the Secretary of the Treasury that the Indiana bank was sound, and secured from the Secretary a pledge not to withdraw the substantial U.S. government funds on deposit in the Indiana bank. Largely as a result of Lanier's efforts, the Second State Bank of Indiana was the only bank in the West which did not fail during the panic.



In 1849 Lanier formed a partnership with his son-in-law Richard H. Winslow to deal in railway securities, and in 1851 these activities compelled him to move to New York City.

When the Civil War broke out, Indiana was ill-prepared to answer Lincoln's call for troops. She had no arms, munitions, or organized militia. The state had an empty treasury; was struggling under an enormous debt; and had no credit upon which to borrow.

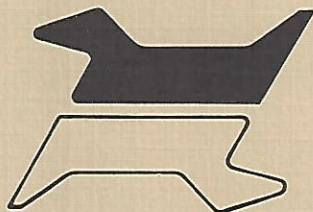
Less than ten days after the attack on Fort Sumter, Mr. Lanier sent word from his New York office that he would help finance the equipping of Indiana's regiments. Merely upon the strength of a note signed by Governor Oliver P. Morton, Mr. Lanier advanced the State of Indiana, from his own personal fortune, a sum of \$420,000.

Some two years later, another financial emergency faced the state. There was violent hostility between the governor and the legislature over the Union war effort. Anti-Morton, pro-south and anti-war segments of the legislature combined to prevent the passage of bills appropriating funds for the state's necessary operating expenses. With no public funds the state faced the ominous prospect of defaulting on the interest payments on its enormous long-standing debt.

Mr. Lanier was quick to recognize that Indiana's financial collapse would deal a crippling blow to the Union war effort. With no real assurance of being repaid, the firm of Winslow-Lanier agreed to assume the payment of interest on the state's debts.

All told, Mr. Lanier made at least \$1,040,000 in unsecured loans to the state. Although in the following years all of these loans were repaid, it is important to remember that at the time they were not ordinary, prudent business ventures, but were made in the face of imminent risk and the very real possibility of total loss.

After the war the President sent Mr. Lanier to Europe where he was most successful in helping re-establish American credit. Upon returning from Europe, Mr. Lanier continued to live and work in New York until his death there on August 29, 1881. James Lanier is honored today as one of the greatest financiers in the history of Indiana, and as one of its leading patriots.



Division of Museums & Memorials

Department of Natural Resources

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