In 1852 President Tappan moved into the west Professors’ House on South University, thus making it the President’s House.

In 1864 the Havens added the one-story kitchen (left).

In 1891 the Angells added the library (left) and side porch (right).

In the 1920s the Burtons added the sun parlor and sleeping porch on the east side, and enclosed the back porch. A garage with bedrooms above was added behind the kitchen.

In the 1940s the Ruthvens added the President’s Study on the northeast corner of the house and a plant room between the sun parlor and the President’s Study.
The first buildings appearing on the University of Michigan campus in 1840 were four “Professors' Houses,” designed to provide living quarters for the faculty. Over the next several decades, each of these houses would be modified many times to meet various needs, including space for the first University Hospital, the School of Dentistry and the Homeopathic Medical College, and the College of Engineering. However, the house to the west on South University was offered to Michigan's first president, Henry Tappan, as a residence for him and his family, after which it became the President's House. This house has served over a century and a half as the President's House of the University.

Over these years the house has evolved quite considerably to accommodate the various Michigan presidents and their families, and to meet the needs of the times. This section provides a chronological history of the President’s House and the families who have lived in it.

Henry Philip Tappan 1852-1863

Henry and Julia Tappan arrived in Ann Arbor with their two children, John (21) and Rebecca “Barbie” (16). Tappan was the visionary president who set the University’s course as a great research university. He had very sophisticated tastes for frontier culture of 1850s Michigan. He enjoyed wine with his meals and was frequently seen striding across the campus with his large German mastiffs dogs, Leo and Buff. One local newspaper characterized him as “the most completely foreignized specimen of an abnormal Yankee we have ever seen.”

These photographs are of the west Professors’ House on North University. The house that the Tappans moved into on South University was identical.
The Tappans lived in what would become the President’s House, furnishing it to their own tastes and adding the third floor to the structure. Although greatly admired by students and later by history, Tappan earned numerous enemies with his European mannerisms and his sometimes abrasive nature. He was fired by the Regents in 1863 who then named Erastus Haven as his successor. (See page 18)

There was a great uproar in the community, with petitions and resolutions to have Tappan reinstated. This continued for several months. The Tappans left for Europe expecting to be called back. Erastus Haven arrived in Ann Arbor and chaired the August Regents’ meeting. The new Board of Regents took office on January 1, 1864. They felt it ill advised to overturn a decision made by the previous board. Tappan was not reinstated.

On Tuesday, September 26, 1863, a public auction was held at the President’s House to sell the Tappans’ possessions. The auction flyer (now in the Bentley Library) for the sale of the Tappans’ household lists each room with its contents. Items on the third floor are included.

Erastus Otis Haven 1863-1869

Following his selection as Tappan’s successor, Haven returned to the campus with his wife, Mary Francis, to serve as Michigan’s president for the next six years. Although he returned to a campus and community that was greatly upset over the removal of Tappan he was able to win their support. During his tenure, a kitchen was added to the west side of the President’s House.

Henry Simmons Frieze 1869-1871

Henry Frieze, a professor of Latin Language and Literature, served as President pro tempore during the two years while the Regents searched for a new President. Frieze had recommended James Angell for the position. During the long negotiations with Angell, Frieze was asked to accept the presidency but declined. Frieze did not live in the President’s House, preferring to emphasize the temporary nature of his position by remaining in his own home next door. Henry Frieze was the last professor to live in the east Professors’ House on South University.
James Angell was courted for the Michigan presidency for two years, and he accepted the position the third time it was offered. The renovation of the President’s House was a key factor in his decision. Many letters on this topic went back and forth to the Regents and Henry Frieze.

“It has occurred to me that I ought to ask you a little more definitely what you think could be done to the house. It seems to me to need absolutely, paper and paint, bath room with hot and cold water, and some arrangement for a dining room closet, and a furnace. My family has never lived in a house without the above named conveniences, which the house lacks, and composed as it is of persons from very advanced age to infancy. I should not feel willing to ask them to dispense with them, unless there were an absolute necessity. I am well aware that such a change would entail a pretty heavy outlay at first, but once done it would be done for all the future. The attic would hold a tank which could be filled from the roof.” Shirley Smith (From Vermont to Michigan, p. 133)

During Angell’s 38-year tenure, the President’s House was referred to as the “Angell House” and was altered quite considerably. In 1891 a west wing was added to give Angell a semi-circular library and more bedrooms. Also, two large rooms were made from the original pair of rooms on either side of the ground floor hallway. A porch was added to the east side of the house. Technology also was upgraded, when the house was wired for electricity. However, the barn, orchard, and vegetable garden remained at the rear of the house.
Mrs. Angell died on December 17, 1903. In 1909 the Regents accepted President Angell’s resignation at the age of 80. President Angell continued living in his home until he died at the age of 88. He was cared for by Sam Baylis and Kate Martin during his last years in the President’s House.

Harry Burns Hutchins 1910-1920

Angell was succeeded by Harry Burns Hutchins, dean of the Law School since 1895 and long-time friend of Angell. Hutchins remained in his own home on Monroe Street. He was the only Michigan president not to live in the President’s House.

The President’s House remained vacant after Angell’s death, unused except as a Red Cross headquarters during World War I and as temporary housing for Professor Hugh Cabot of the Medical School.

James Angell died on April 1, 1916. Private services were held in the President’s House. At the end of the service, the Glee Club, standing in the front yard, sang “Laudes Atque Carmina.” Students lined the streets to pay their last respects to their beloved “Prexy.”

Dr. Victor Vaughan recalls fondly that “The center of intellectual and social life in Ann Arbor was in the home of President and Mrs. Angell. The Faculty was one large family group, the members mingling with no stressed formality. We entered the President’s residence by the back door on the Campus. The front door was only for strangers or when receptions were being given. Not infrequently the bell brought the President himself to the door in his slippers and with a gracious welcome on his face.” Victor Vaughan [Michigan Alumnus, December 4, 1926, p. 196]
Marion Leroy Burton succeeded Hutchins in 1920. Burton served as President of Smith College from 1910 to 1917, and the University of Minnesota from 1917 until 1920. After the war the University badly needed more buildings and faculty. Burton stated: “A state university must accept happily the conclusion that it is destined to be large. I insist that excellence does not inhere in size.”

During Burton’s brief tenure, the President’s House was thoroughly renovated at his request. A sun parlor with a sleeping porch above was added to the east side. The back porch was enclosed, and a garage with bedrooms overhead was added to the northwest side. Burton’s tenure was cut short by his death in 1925 after a year-long illness.

Clarence Cook Little came from the University of Maine where he had served as president for three years. He paid little attention to the President’s House during his four-year tenure. Embroiled in almost continual controversy, Little resigned in 1929. His domestic life was also in shambles. In 1929 he divorced his wife on grounds of 12 years’ desertion. He had lived alone in the President’s House.

Alexander Grant Ruthven came to Michigan in 1903 as a graduate student. He was a professor of zoology and director of the museum. Florence Ruthven was also a graduate. The Ruthvens displayed a sense of nostalgia in restoring some of the original furnishings to the President’s House and filled the public rooms with many items from their own collections. Many of these antiquities are now housed in the Kelsey Museum.

The Ruthvens were well known for their student teas. The house was filled with antiquities, and tours were given during the teas. The pictures (above) show them greeting guests. Eleanor (their dog) is in attendance.

A private study was added in the northeast corner for the president, and a plant room between the sun parlor and the President’s Study for Mrs. Ruthven.
In 1951, after a twenty-two year tenure, Ruthven retired and was succeeded by Harlan Hatcher. Hatcher came from Ohio State where he had received all of his degrees. He was a professor of English and served as dean and vice president for faculty and curriculum.

Shortly before the Hatcher family arrived, the Inglis House estate had been given to the University to be used as a President’s house, and the Hatchers were invited to live there. However, they chose to live in the President’s House on campus.

The twenty-two-room President’s House was sufficient for the Hatcher’s needs, and they asked only that a glassed-in dining porch and stone terrace be added at the rear of the house. The interior of the house was extensively refurbished.
Robben and Sally Fleming came to Michigan from the University of Wisconsin where he had served as chancellor.

As Sally noted in her oral history: “When we first came to see the house, it was quite an experience, because the place was much larger than anything either of us had ever lived in and we were wondering how in the world we were ever going to make this huge place into a home.”

But the Flemings were able to make the house their home by creating small conversation areas in each room to make the house seem cozier.

The multi-story Graduate Library was constructed directly behind the President's House during the Fleming's tenure. About ten feet of the back yard was taken up for about three years while the large structural pieces were erected and the building took shape.

Harold Tafler Shapiro 1980-1987

Harold and Vivian Shapiro had been on the faculty and members of the Ann Arbor community for 15 years when he was named president in 1980. They were accompanied by their four daughters. The Shapiros added a personal touch with paintings and other decorative items from their own collection.

With the help of Virginia Denham, the University interior designer, all of the Shapiro's furniture was brought in to furnish the upstairs and to fill in the downstairs. The house was left essentially intact. The carpets and drapes remained. The only changes were to replace the wallpaper in the dining room and hall and re-upholster the dining room chairs.

Vivian recalls in her oral history: “The children were not very happy about the move, and they simply did not want to deal with it, so I packed up their stuff from our private home and each of their bedrooms got the boxes of their things.”

As Sally noted in her oral history: “When we first came to see the house, it was quite an experience, because the place was much larger than anything either of us had ever lived in and we were wondering how in the world we were ever going to make this huge place into a home.”

But the Flemings were able to make the house their home by creating small conversation areas in each room to make the house seem cozier.

The multi-story Graduate Library was constructed directly behind the President's House during the Fleming's tenure. About ten feet of the back yard was taken up for about three years while the large structural pieces were erected and the building took shape.

Harold Tafler Shapiro 1980-1987

Harold and Vivian Shapiro had been on the faculty and members of the Ann Arbor community for 15 years when he was named president in 1980. They were accompanied by their four daughters. The Shapiros added a personal touch with paintings and other decorative items from their own collection.

With the help of Virginia Denham, the University interior designer, all of the Shapiro's furniture was brought in to furnish the upstairs and to fill in the downstairs. The house was left essentially intact. The carpets and drapes remained. The only changes were to replace the wallpaper in the dining room and hall and re-upholster the dining room chairs.

Vivian recalls in her oral history: “The children were not very happy about the move, and they simply did not want to deal with it, so I packed up their stuff from our private home and each of their bedrooms got the boxes of their things.”
The Duderstadts were able to leverage the small budget ($70,000) for carpet replacement into a major renovation of the house, restoring many features such as its hardwood floors. Donations from Michigan furniture manufacturers provided new furnishings for many of the rooms. A talented group of young gardeners, including several students, restored the gardens and grounds of the President’s House.

Like the Shapiros, Jim and Anne Duderstadt had been members of the University faculty and Ann Arbor community for almost 20 years when he was appointed president in 1988. Following the Shapiro presidency, the University had launched a major renovation of the President’s House between presidents to install a new heating/air conditioning system, fire protection systems, and handicap access.
Because of Lee Bollinger’s relatively short tenure, he and his wife Jean made only modest changes to the President’s House. They carpeted the upper floors and furnished their personal living quarters with contemporary furniture.

Once again, the University launched a major renovation project during the transition to the presidency of Mary Sue Coleman. Over $1 million was spent to update extensive mechanical systems and replace the traditional family kitchen with a catering kitchen.
In the 2000 renovation of the President’s House, the windows were replaced to recreate the twelve-divided-light windows of the original Professors’ House.

The two photos above show the original Professors’ House with the twelve-divided-light windows.

Two-divided-light windows replaced the originals in 1891, when the Angells added the library and the porch (below).

The President’s House is the only surviving building from the 1840 campus, although very little remains of that original house. The history of the President’s House, therefore, is in the alterations and changes that were made by each President as they transformed the house to make it their home.