

Historic Hotels!

XXXI: Berkeley's *Claremont Hotel & Resort*

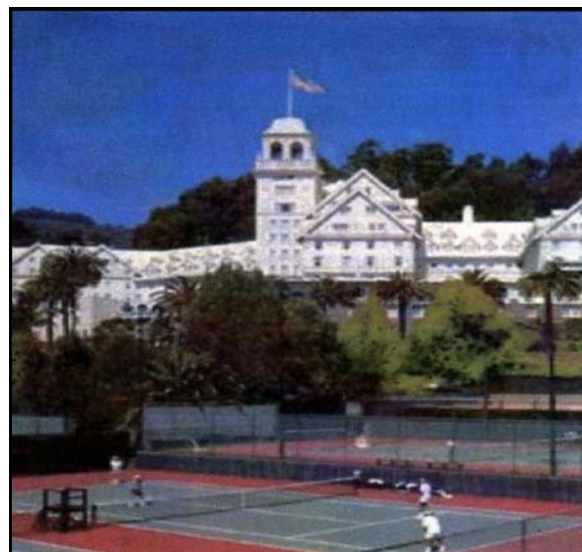
Frank Lloyd Wright called The Claremont, "...one of the few hotels in the world with warmth, character and charm." And the Claremont charmed thousands of others.

The history of The Claremont Resort dates back to the early days of the Gold Rush, when a Kansas farmer by the name of Bill Thornburg struck it rich. He came to California with his daughter and his wife, who dreamed of a home which would look like an English Castle. Thornburg purchased 13,000 acres (part of the old Peralta and Vicente Spanish grants) to fulfill his wife's dream and built the castle and several stables. He hired Cockney grooms to care for them, and raised English foxes for hunting parties. After Mrs. Thornburg died, he sold the "castle" to the Ballard family. On the dry and windy day of July 14, 1901, the castle burned to the ground.

The property then fell into the hands of Frank Havens and "Borax" Smith, a famous miner. They planned to erect a resort hotel on the property with trains running directly into the lobby. Unfortunately, these plans were abandoned. Havens finally one the property outright one night over a game of checkers. He began building in 1906, but the panic of that year interrupted construction. After trying again in 1910, Havens lost heart, and in 1914 allied himself with Eric Lindblom, who had struck it rich in the Klondike. The sprawling Mediterranean hostelry was completed in 1915, in time for the Panama-Pacific Exposition. In 1918, Lindblom took complete control of The Claremont until he sold it in 1937 to Mr. and Mrs. Claude Gillum, who virtually rebuilt it from the foundation up, and completely refurbished the interior. Mr. Gillum had started as Chief Clerk in 1926 at The Claremont. He was appointed Manager in 1929, and saved enough to purchase the property for \$250,000.



The grounds and natural settings gave The Claremont a picturesque quality found during the Age of Romanticism. At one time, the entire second floor was flanked by a large porch on which visitors would sit and take walks, admiring the surroundings. This was the day when lawn sports such as tennis, badminton and croquet gained their popularity, and when The Claremont built its first tennis courts and pool. Years later, when the porch lost its popularity and the resort needed more space, the porch was enclosed and turned into the offices and dining rooms. At about this time, (1940), The Claremont was painted entirely white, the



roof was fire-proofed, and the shingles were turned a whitish-silver color. In 1959, The Claremont had more convention and exhibit space than any hotel west of Chicago. By 1981, \$24 million in improvements had been made. By 1990, another \$15 million was spent. The Claremont Resort, with its spectacular view of the San Francisco Bay, is a landmark of the Bay Area, a wondrous garden of 22 beautifully landscaped acres.