

BILTMORE HOUSE
XMAS TOUR 2009 MAIN STOPS

1 INTRODUCTION

[MUSIC: Grand, cheery Christmas music] [NOTE TO PRODUCER: WHEN POSSIBLE CHANGE EXISTING MUSIC TO CHRISTMAS-Y]

BILL CECIL—Welcome to Biltmore House, the country home of George Washington Vanderbilt. I'm Bill Cecil, Chief Executive Officer. George Vanderbilt was my great-grandfather.

NARRATOR: On his first visit to Asheville, George Vanderbilt was inspired by the mountain scenery to build a small getaway. As you can see, his idea got bigger.

Look around you. This is the Entrance Hall. In a family famous for its houses, George Vanderbilt's is the largest. In fact, it's the largest private home in the country, with 250 rooms. It measures a full four acres inside.

George Vanderbilt tried out several names for his new home. He settled on "Biltmore," a combination of "Bildt," for his Dutch ancestors' home, and "More," the old English word for open rolling land.

George chose Christmas Eve, 1895, to officially open his new home. Even before many of the rooms were finished, Mr. Vanderbilt welcomed his family for a grand holiday housewarming party.

On this tour, you'll get to experience the house through stories about the Vanderbilt family, their guests, and the house staff. If you have any additional questions as you tour the house, please ask our Hosts for more information.

NARRATOR—Your tour begins at the Winter Garden, number [2] on your map. If you need a reminder of how to use your player and map, press number [99]

###

SUBJECT STOP

 **99 Player Instructions**

2 WINTER GARDEN

NARRATOR: Biltmore's Winter Garden brought the outdoors in to the heart of the house. The centerpiece is the bronze fountain sculpture call

ed "Boy Stealing Geese" by artist Karl Bitter.

The fountain was put into place just weeks before George Vanderbilt welcomed his family and friends for Biltmore's opening on Christmas Eve, 1895. After six long years of construction, George was eager to show off his little mountain getaway.

*WILLIE FIELD VOICE: My dear Mamma. My mind is like a sponge that has absorbed all it can, and find still more.*¹

NARRATOR: George Vanderbilt's good friend Willie Field wrote a letter describing his first impressions.

*WILLIE FIELD VOICE: We arrived at Biltmore after dark ... and after gazing and gaping at the central place enclosed in glass and dressed in greens we went into the tapestry room ... to admire more and more. With the moon shining outside of the windows over the hills in the distance completed the intoxicating effects.*²

~~*[SFX: Sounds of laughter and music begin to fade up under the interview, creating an elegant, cheerful feeling...]*~~

¹ William B. Osgood Field to Augusta Currie Bradhurst Field, n.d. ; Field William B. Osgood Field Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

² **ibid**

NARRATOR: Our next stop is the Billiard Room, number [3] on your map.
Remember, if you ever need a reminder of how to use your map and player,
just press number [99]

#

3 BILLIARD ROOM

NARRATOR—The warm oak paneling, leather chairs and hunting prints make the this room the perfect place for George Vanderbilt and his guests to indulge in a game of Billiards. In front of you are two custom-made billiard tables. The table on the left is for pocket billiards, what we call “pool” today. The table on the right is for “carom” or “French Billiards.”

Find the open door to the right of to the fireplace. It looks into Biltmore’s Smoking Room. You’ll get a closer look at this room later on your tour.

George Vanderbilt decorated this house himself.

NARRATOR: Leslie Klingner is Biltmore’s Curator of Interpretation:

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:03:30 I think that makes Biltmore a really special place because what you are seeing is actually items that he chose and that he loved. ... 12/12/08 2/01:15:37 I imagine George taking his family, touring them through for the first time, and being so proud and so excited.

NARRATOR: When Biltmore opened in 1895, George Vanderbilt was thirty-three, a millionaire *and* unmarried.

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:07:17 He was the bachelor to get. ... 1/00:07:29 And the society columns talked about how he was forever going to be a bachelor, that no woman could woo him.

*NEWSPAPER VOICE: Would this great, lonely house stand between a man and all of womankind?*³

NARRATOR: You'll find out the answer later on your tour. When you're ready, continue into the Banquet Hall. It's room number [4] on your map.

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³ New York Journal, April, 1898

4 BANQUET HALL

[NOTE TO PRODUCER—PLEASE KEEP ALL ORIGINAL SOUND EFFECTS]

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NARRATOR—At eight o'clock every evening, guests would assemble here in the Banquet Hall for dinner. George Vanderbilt wanted his guests to feel like they were dining in the great hall of an English castle, complete with tapestries, armor, flags and thrones. Look up. * * The vast ceiling soars seven stories high above your head. The huge dining table expanded to forty feet. * *

The first grand party at Biltmore was held here in the Banquet Hall on Christmas Eve, 1895.

SOCIETY PAGE VOICE #1--*The hearth fires in Biltmore House ... cracked a cheery Christmas warming to members of George W. Vanderbilt's family who came from the North to honor the occasion.*⁴

NARRATOR--Newspapers from Asheville to New York City vied to report on Biltmore's housewarming party, *and* the Vanderbilts.

SOCIETY PAGE VOICE #2—*All of these persons have come here in their own private rail cars, and brought with them an army of servants.*⁵

NARRATOR: With a room this big, George Vanderbilt could indulge in a very big Christmas tree. It was *forty* feet high. That first tree glittered with hundreds

⁴ Asheville Citizen, December 25, 1895

⁵ New York Times, December 25, 1895

of electric lights—a new invention at the time. As you can see, we’ve kept the tradition—a forty-foot Frazier fir tree still towers over the Banquet Hall every year.

That first Christmas, George Vanderbilt started another tradition. He hosted a lavish party for all the Estate’s employees, complete with presents for all of their children.

DINI PICKERING: I think that was just such a wonderful statement of the warmth and the family atmosphere that they created back in their day.

NARRATOR: Dini Cecil Pickering is George Vanderbilt’s great-granddaughter:

DINI PICKERING: We still have the annual Christmas party in the house, and we still provide gifts for all of our employees’ children, and it’s just a wonderfully rich tradition that I hope we will always continue.

NARRATOR: The next stop is the Breakfast Room, number [5]

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

101 Banquet Hall Design

102 REVISED – Christmas at Biltmore

5 BREAKFAST ROOM

[NOTE: NO CHANGES]

NARRATOR—Biltmore’s Breakfast Room was where family and guests ate both breakfast and luncheon. Look carefully at the warm brown walls. They’re covered with hand-tooled Spanish leather. The richly decorated plaster ceiling includes a symbol of the Vanderbilt family. Look for a tiny acorn at the tip of each of the pendants. The acorn is a symbol of strength and growth.

Now, look at the wall to your right. Find the portrait of the man with white hair, above the wooden door. This is George’s grandfather Cornelius Vanderbilt, who founded the family empire.

Cornelius first made his money in shipping—which earned him his nickname, “The Commodore.” He later expanded the business to railroads. When he died in 1877, he left an unimaginable fortune of one hundred million dollars.

Now, look behind you, above the glass display case. The man with the mutton chop sideburns is William Henry Vanderbilt, George’s father. In only ten years, William Henry *doubled* the Vanderbilt fortune to *two* hundred million dollars. That’s almost four and a half *billion* of today’s dollars—*before* there was any income tax. Most of that money passed on to George’s two oldest brothers, who carried on the family business. George made do with an inheritance of ten million dollars.

When you’re ready, continue into the next room, number [6] on your map.

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IN-DEPTH STOPS

103 Renoirs

6 SALON

NARRATOR: Two portraits face each other across this room. These are the men who created Biltmore. On the left is Richard Morris Hunt, the most famous architect of the day. You're already familiar with at least one of his famous designs. Hunt designed the base of the Statue of Liberty.

On the right is Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed the Estate's landscape and gardens. George Vanderbilt hired the country's most famous portrait artist, John Singer Sargent, to come to Biltmore and paint them.

Ellen Rickman:

ELLEN RICKMAN: 00:16:13 Vanderbilt had a personal relationship with both of these men. ... They served as mentors to him. Richard Morris Hunt was almost a surrogate father to George Vanderbilt after his own father died.

NARRATOR: Hunt considered this house to be his masterpiece. You can see *Olmsted's* masterpiece by looking out the French doors behind you. Olmsted was famous for designing New York's Central Park. But George Vanderbilt's estate equaled 140 Central Parks put together.

When you're ready, the next stop is the Music Room, room number [7] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

 104 The Print Collection

7 MUSIC ROOM

NARRATOR—Today, this is Biltmore’s Music Room. But when the house first opened, this room was left unfinished. To this day we don’t know why, but it remained empty and closed off for over eighty years. It was completed in the 1970’s to look as it does today.

The next stop is the Tapestry Gallery, number [8] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

105 The Music Room Mystery

106 REVISED The Loggia

8 TAPESTRY GALLERY #1

NARRATOR: This is the Tapestry Gallery, where the Vanderbilts and their guests gathered to relax.

When Biltmore House opened, George Vanderbilt was still a bachelor. But not for long. On a voyage from New York to Paris, George ran into an acquaintance, 25-year-old Edith Stuyvesant Dresser.

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:10:59 She shared a love of the arts, ... definitely a love of travel, ... and really a sense of fun. ... She was warm person, really loved to entertain. ... That's the kind of hostess you'd want to have at Biltmore.

NARRATOR: They married in June, 1898 in Paris, and set off on a four-month honeymoon throughout Europe.

FROM STOP 13. George and Edith had a very happy marriage. On his 14th wedding anniversary, George wrote to a nephew who had just gotten engaged:

GEORGE VANDERBILT VOICE: The ... years seem all like a moment. A happy marriage is the true fruition of life and we both wish yours may be thus.⁶

⁶ George Vanderbilt to Vanderbilt Webb, June 1, 1912; Vanderbilt Webb Papers, Shelburne Farms Collection, Shelburne, VT

NARRATOR: You can see George's portrait above the next doorway. * * He was painted by John Singer Sargent in 1890. Sargent also painted the woman on the left, George's mother, Maria Louisa Kissam Vanderbilt. * And, on the right, is Edith, the woman that captured George's heart.* *

Your tour continues in the Library, up ahead. It's room number [9].

IN-DEPTH STOPS

 107 Edith Vanderbilt Portrait

9 LIBRARY

NARRATOR: One look at this room tells you all you need to know about George Vanderbilt's favorite passion.

Pauline Merrill was George's sister-in-law.

PAULINE MERRILL VOICE: Books, books, books! Books everywhere, up to the ... ceiling. ... and [a] comfortable chair in which to read them.⁷

[MUSIC: Christmas-y segue?]

NARRATOR: On long winter evenings, the Vanderbilt family and their guests would gather around the massive fireplace to read aloud.

GEO VANDERBILT VOICE: A merry Christmas, uncle! ... " cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew. ... "Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"⁸

NARRATOR: Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" was a favorite choice.

GEO VANDERBILT VOICE: Scrooge ... found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor. ... "Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?".... "I am!" ... "Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded. "I am the Ghost of Christmas Past!"⁹

⁷ **ibid**

⁸ *From A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, first published in 1843*

⁹ **ibid**

NARRATOR: Being a book collector, George, of course, had a valuable first edition copy.

GEO VANDERBILT VOICE: "I am not the man I was!"¹⁰... Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more;... And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. ... May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!¹¹

NARRATOR: When you're ready, the next stop is back in the Tapestry Gallery. Look for number [10] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

 **108 REVISED Library Ceiling Painting**

 **109 Napoleon's Chess Set**

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid

10 TAPESTRY GALLERY #2

NARRATOR:—Walk along the other side of the Tapestry Gallery. * * The new Mrs. Vanderbilt set up a special holiday budget called “The Christmas Tree Fund.” From this, she personally bought presents for every worker and child on the estate.

When autumn rolled around, Edith collected the names and ages of all of the staff children. She wanted to choose *just* the right Christmas present for each one. When the children arrived for the annual Christmas Party, the Vanderbilts greeted them at the door. Each child received special treats like candy and oranges.

Leslie Klinger:

LESLIE KLINGNER NEW 2009 INTV 00:04:27 Oranges were pretty rare for ... kids living up the mountains. They were pretty precious commodities. ... And it's also interesting to note that oranges happened to be Edith's favorite fruit as well.

NARRATOR: As you leave the Tapestry Gallery, turn to your right. Your tour continues one flight up, on the second floor. To get there, use the Grand Staircase up ahead. It's to the right of the Front Entrance. Please be careful as you climb the steps. When you reach the second floor, press number [11] to continue.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS



110 Tapestries

11 INTRO TO EXHIBITION “IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK”

NARRATOR: You should be at the top of the stairs, on the second floor. Continue to your right through our temporary exhibition called: “If These Walls Could Talk.” The original furnishings in the next two rooms are currently undergoing conservation.

After the exhibition, your tour continues in Mr. Vanderbilt’s bedroom, number [12] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

W 111 Going to the Opera

12 MR. V'S BEDROOM

NARRATOR— George Vanderbilt's bedroom makes a bold statement: Dark, twisting wood furniture contrasts with bright scarlet fabric. The walls are covered in linen, and gilded in 22-carat gold leaf.

Inside the open door to the left of the bed is his closet. When the door opened, a light automatically went on inside.

From this room, George had a panoramic view of the estate's forests and grounds. But there were two particular evergreen trees he was especially fond of: two rare blue spruces planted in Biltmore's formal gardens.

One Christmas, a cabinetmaker who lived on the estate—James Hamilton-- was too busy to cut his own family tree. So, he sent his twin sons out to find one. He had only one rule: Stay away from the formal gardens! The boys returned, happily carrying a perfect six-foot specimen. Of course, it was one of George Vanderbilt's prize pair of matching spruces!

When James came home and saw the tree he almost went into shock. He immediately marched the twins to Biltmore House to apologize. But George wasn't upset. He asked James not to punish his sons, and told them to go home and enjoy the tree!

NARRATOR: Your tour continues in the next room, number [13] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

112 Mr. Vanderbilt's Valet

13 OAK SITTING ROOM

NARRATOR—The private Oak Sitting Room connects George Vanderbilt's bedroom with his wife Edith's bedroom at the other end.

It was customary for wealthy couples in grand houses to have separate bedrooms. One reason was the household staff. It would have been improper for a female servant to enter a room where her male employer was getting dressed, and vice versa.

This is where George and Edith might have had breakfast together. After breakfast, Edith would meet with Biltmore's housekeeper, Mrs. King, to plan out the day. Creating the perfect country retreat took a *lot* of work.

Especially at Christmas. If you think *your* holiday gift list is long—consider Edith's. She bought hundreds of presents each year for the staff and all of their children. Most children were thrilled with her choices, with one exception.

Eugenia Halyburton was the daughter of a farm worker. One year, after opening her present and finding paper dolls, she handed them back to Mrs. Vanderbilt, saying, she didn't want them. When Edith asked her what she *did* want—Eugenia pointed to a glass ball on the Christmas Tree.

After that, every time Mrs. Vanderbilt went to Europe, she made sure she brought back a new glass Christmas ornament for Eugenia, until she had an incredible collection.

Until, one Christmas, Eugenia's cat knocked over her tree—

[SFX: thump of tree falling, cat screaming and glass crashing and breaking all at once!]

NARRATOR: —breaking all of the precious glass ornaments Edith had given her!¹²

NARRATOR: Your tour continues in the next room, number [14] on your map.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

113 Mr. Vanderbilt's Spirituality

114 Sargent Portraits

¹² Eugenia Halyburton Chandler, BSOHP, OH2-0010.

14 MRS. VANDERBILT'S BEDROOM

NARRATOR—This room, with its shimmering gold satin walls and luxurious hand cut velvet, is Edith Vanderbilt's bedroom.

Edith Stuyvesant Dresser had grown up in an important, well-to-do family in New York City and Newport, Rhode Island. She was extremely close to her three sisters.

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:18:50 They were a very adventuresome set of little girls, ... Edith particularly. She had nineteen turtles, and she kept them in the backyard.

00:16:40 Unfortunately, ... the family suffered a lot of tragedy. Both of Edith's parents died within a few months of each other from illness when she was only about 10 years old. ... 00:17:46 So the children were left, really, without parents.

NARRATOR: The children moved in with their grandparents. But before Edith was out of her teens, her grandparents died as well. Edith and her sisters eventually settled far away in Paris, under the watchful eye of their French governess, Madame Rambaud, who became more like a mother to them.

When you're ready, your tour continues through the next doorway, and up the stairs. On your way, don't miss the unique view of the Banquet Hall through the window. When you get to the top of the stairs, press number [15].

###

THIRD FLOOR

15 THIRD FLOOR LIVING HALL

NARRATOR—You should be upstairs, on the next level. Walk down the short flight of stairs on your left. Continue along the print-lined hallway. The room ahead is the Third Floor Living Hall.

NARRATOR: Guests staying in the nearby suites came to the Third Floor Living Hall to relax, listen to music, or unwind.

The Vanderbilt's guests were the movers and shakers of their day. Everyone from diplomats, politicians, and military leaders, to artists, writers and musicians. Guests stayed for several days to several weeks at a time.

NARRATOR: George and Edith and their guests saw in the New Year of 1902 in fine style.

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: The whole party sat up to greet the New Year and were very merry indeed.

NARRATOR: Joseph Hodges Choate was the ambassador to England:

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: There were games and dancing, hot punch served at the stroke of 12 --

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: --and quite a revel even after that.

NARRATOR—Your next stop is up the stairs, the South Tower Guest Bathroom. It's number [16] on your map.

#

IN-DEPTH STOP:

 115 The Book Collector

16 GUEST BATHROOM

NARRATOR—While most homes of the time didn't even have one indoor bathroom, Biltmore had 43!

I'm sure you've noticed the unusual chair placed over the toilet. It represents the transition from the traditional potty chair used with a chamber pot to the modern flush toilet.

Step through the doorway to your right, into the large bedroom. It's room number [17].

#

17 SOUTH TOWER ROOM

NARRATOR: The luxurious South Tower Room is one of thirty-three guest rooms here at Biltmore. Since Edith Vanderbilt bought so many Christmas presents for Biltmore's families each year, she needed a "staging area" to prepare for the big day. She used one of the bedrooms in this suite to store and wrap her ever-growing pile of gifts.

The buying began in October. Edith first scoured all the local shops for basic presents. But when it came to toys, there was only one place to go.

Cathy Barnhardt is the Floral Displays Manager at Biltmore.

CATHY BARNHARDT--One of the fun pieces of documentation we have is a list of toys purchased by Mrs. Vanderbilt from FAO Schwartz in New York City. And it included things like jumping jacks and rubber balls, ... dolls and doll carriages, popguns. ... And also she made sure that the children had an ample amount of candies to select from, and those were often hung on the Christmas trees as well, things like ribbon .. candy, and peppermint sticks and things like that.

NARRATOR: Before you move on, here's a question. Many of our guests debate whether Biltmore's beds are smaller than standard beds of today. What do *you* think? We'll share the answer later in the tour.

Continue to the next room, number [18]

###

18 RAPHAEL ROOM

NARRATOR: The engraved prints on the walls are after paintings by the Renaissance Master Raphael Sanzio, and give this room its name.

In an age before instant communication, guests spent a good amount of time writing and answering letters. Larz Anderson visited Biltmore at New Year's.

*LARZ ANDERSON VOICE: The rooms upstairs are, of course, most comfortable and well arranged, and an interesting feature all through are the engravings, of which [George] has been a great collector, and which are very beautiful.*¹³

NARRATOR: Leslie Klingner:

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:28:08 Because there was so much letter writing we really have the details of what happened, where email today is just lost.

*LARZ ANDERSON VOICE: The air is magnificent and yesterday I had a ten-mile climb over the mountains. ... With much love, I am your affectionate son, Larz.*¹⁴

NARRATOR: Continue to the next room, number [19]

###

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ ibid

19 EARLOM ROOM

NARRATOR: The Earlom Room is named after English painter and engraver Richard Earlom, whose work hangs on the walls.

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: My room in which I now am to get ready for dinner is a most spacious one, with a fine open fireplace.

NARRATOR: Ambassador Joseph Hodges Choate was also the Vanderbilt family lawyer. *Certain* members of the Vanderbilt family were his favorites.

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: The house ... is obviously the finest in America, but the dogs are truly magnificent! I wish you could see these great St. Bernards—five of them, father, mother and three children, all big and splendid.

NARRATOR: Continue to the next room, number [20]

###

20 NORTH TOWER ROOM

LESLIE KLINGNER: NEW 2009 INTV 00:18:54. When you came as a guest of the Vanderbilts for Christmas, you would have brought a host of trunks, ... containing everything from the gifts that you were going to exchange ... to a wardrobe for all the activities you were going to do. ...

00:19:51 It certainly wouldn't have been your job to unpack it. ... You would have arrived, the Vanderbilts would have greeted you at the door, probably led you into the Tapestry Gallery tea, depending on what time of day it was. ... But, meanwhile, your trunks would have been hustled up the back road and into the service elevator and up to your rooms.

And ... had you brought your maid with you ... she'd definitely be in charge of unpacking your trunks and putting everything away for you and getting everything ready and pressed, if need be. 00:20:19 ...And had you not brought a servant with you, the Vanderbilts would have provided one.

NARRATOR: Now, continue out the next doorway, and immediately turn left. We're going up the staircase to the next floor. Please be careful and take your time climbing the stairs; they're a bit narrow. Your next stop is upstairs, number [21] on your tour.

###

FOURTH FLOOR

21 SERVANTS' BEDROOMS O, P & Q

NARRATOR—You should be at the top of the stairs. Walk down the hallway and look into the bedrooms. Biltmore's housemaids, laundresses and other female domestic staff lived up here on the fourth floor.

One was Mary Curtis, a North Carolina native. Many of the women living here were used to having to share a bed in an unheated room. But George Vanderbilt offered his staff comfortable, heated, private rooms, with all-new, matching furniture.

Scottish parlor maid Sarah Auld worked at Biltmore House in 1900. Like other parlor maids, she cared for the public rooms. She dusted furniture and art objects, kept the floors and carpets clean and sometimes assisted with serving large formal dinners.

On her time off a maid was expected to mend her own uniforms or household items.

Darren Poupore:

DARREN POUPORE —Most servants, were allowed two hours off each day, but even in that time they were still on call. So ... they get two hours off in the afternoon, but within that time they were still expected to ... possibly bathe and ... change uniforms and be ready to start their rounds ... in late afternoon.

NARRATOR: Now, continue down the hallway. You'll see a short flight of stairs up ahead, on the left. Your tour continues down the stairs, at the table piled with linen. It's number [22] on your map.

#

22 SERVANT'S HALL

NARRATOR: This was the sound of Mrs. Emily King, Biltmore's head housekeeper. For nearly 20 years she was in charge of all the domestic staff.

MRS KING VOICE: Ladies!

SERVAL MAIDS VOICES TOGETHER: Yes ma'am.

LESLIE KLINGNER: 12/12/08 2/00:51:27 She would've made her rounds every day with this tremendous ring of keys that would've had the keys to all of the rooms and all of the cabinets, ... and she would have kept inventory for all of the linen.

MRS KING VOICE: Be sure to use the French linen with the whitework monograms, the laundry staff has just finished ironing it.

MAID #1 VOICE: Yes ma'am.

*DARREN POUPORE: 12/12/08 2/00:55:24 She knew exactly who was coming and going at all hours of the ... day and night. ... She planned all of the meals ... and the entertainment, she had to make sure that everything went off without a hitch. ... 00:52:17 She was ultimately responsible for making sure the entire household ran perfectly. * **

NARRATOR: Now, walk ahead to the group of furniture in front of the fireplace. Biltmore's maids gathered here in the servants' hall to sit and relax. Biltmore wasn't just their workplace, it was their home as well, where they hung their own Christmas decorations.

CATHY BARNHARDT: Things that were made out of paper or bits of tinsel, ... crocheted snowflakes.

NARRATOR: Cathy Barnhardt:

CATHY BARNHARDT: A lot of the servants inside Biltmore House were native to western North Carolina, and handcrafting clothing, quilting, ..., all of those things were very popular for the ladies to do in this area, so it certainly makes sense that ... the Christmas trees or other decorative elements would include things like that.

NARRATOR: Your next stop is through the doorway, room number [23].

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

☒ 116 Servant House Technology

23 MODEL ROOM

NARRATOR—In 1889, Architect Richard Morris Hunt presented the architectural model in this room to George Vanderbilt to show him what his new house would look like. The day the model arrived at Hunt’s New York office, it caused quite a stir that was reported in the papers:

[SFX: Manual typewriter typing]

NEWSPAPER VOICE—*The model ... was taken from a wagon. ... A hundred people at once gathered around ... and feasted their eyes on its towers and turrets, its suggestion of magnificent distances and imposing proportions. ... Mr. Vanderbilt is apparently to have plenty of room for himself and a caller or two should any friend pass his chateau.*

NARRATOR—After the house was finished, Mr. Vanderbilt dedicated this room to the model. Displayed on the tables nearby are copies of several original architectural plans. Prints of several French Chateaux that inspired the design of Biltmore house hang on the walls.

The next stop is through the doorway on the left, room number [24].

###

24 OBSERVATORY

NARRATOR--This two-story room is the Biltmore House Observatory, but it's not a place to view the stars. Look out one of the windows. The house was placed in the perfect spot to take advantage of the amazing views of the mountains and gardens around you.

George Vanderbilt and his guests could climb the wrought iron spiral staircase to the balcony above. There, doors lead to another balcony outside that wraps around the main entrance tower. At its height, Biltmore Estate stretched almost as far as guests could see—125 thousand acres in all.

Today, for safety reasons, guests can't visit the balcony unaccompanied. But you can visit the Observatory balcony on our guided Rooftop tour. Ask at the front desk for details.

Now, continue back into the architectural model room. As you re-enter, turn left. You'll find yourself at the top of the Grand Staircase. From here you can get a good view of the four-story electric chandelier. It's suspended from a single point in the dome above you.

Your tour continues one flight down, on the third floor. Please take care as you walk down the stairs. When you reach the next landing, press number [25]

###

25 WATSON ROOM

NARRATOR: You should be on the next landing down, on the third floor. Walk ahead through the entranceway with blue curtains. Please watch your step. You're back in the Third Floor Living Hall. Turn left as you enter. Step into the room to your left, with twin beds.

One of the guests at Biltmore's Christmas 1895 opening was George Vanderbilt's 20-year-old niece, Gertrude. She was not at *all* happy about coming here, but changed her mind.

She wrote a good friend:

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT VOICE: It has been so delightful down here—so, so much nicer than I thought it would be that I hate the idea of going home. ¹⁵

NARRATOR: One attraction was her handsome dinner companion, George Vanderbilt's good friend, Willie Field.

GERTRUDE VANDERBILT VOICE: We got on like a house afire and he really seemed disappointed when I told him I was going home the next evening. I tried to make the family leave me, but it was in vain. ¹⁶

NARRATOR: Willie *did* fall in love with and marry a Vanderbilt girl, but unfortunately for Gertrude, it was her cousin, Lila.

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¹⁵ B. H. Friedman, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney: A Biography (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1978), 107

¹⁶ *ibid*

26 VAN DYCK ROOM

LESLIE KLINGNER 12/12/08 2/00:38:29 Most of George's very best friends were either lovers of books and collectors of books, or authors of books.

NARRATOR: One was author Edith Wharton. Her novels documented the wealthy New York social scene of the day, and she had been a friend of Edith Vanderbilt since they were girls.

LESLIE KLINGNER 12/12/08 2/00:39:07 And she comes to visit them for Christmas in 1905.

EDITH WHARTON VOICE: Yesterday we had a big Christmas fête for the 350 people on the estate--a tree 30 ft. high, Punch & Judy, conjuror, presents & "refreshments."... It was done so well & sympathetically, each person's wants being thought of, from mother to last baby. ... In this matchless weather the walks through the park are a joy.

###

27 MORLAND ROOM

NARRATOR—The highlight of the Morland Room is the colorful canopy hanging over the bed. This type of canopy is called a “tester”—from an old French word for “headpiece.” Look closely at the fabric’s design. Hiding in its folds you’ll see exotic flowers, leaves and fantastic creatures.

When George Vanderbilt bought the original fabric for this tester, it was already almost a hundred years old. One hundred years *later* it was so fragile that Biltmore’s curators had it reproduced.

George and Edith first saw the fabric on their honeymoon in Stressa, Italy, where it decorated the dining room walls in their villa. The couple was so charmed by its whimsical design they brought it home with them.

Remember our question earlier: *Are the beds here standard size?* Yes, they are. All the beds in Biltmore are a full six feet or longer. They only look small because the rooms are so big.

###

28 MADONNA ROOM

NARRATOR: One of George Vanderbilt's closest friends was novelist and biographer Paul Leicester Ford.

Curator Darren Poupore:

DARREN POUPORE 12/12/08 2/00:39:38 He wrote historical novels, and his most famous novel was Janice Meredith, and that book we know was written ...while he stayed at Biltmore, and he dedicated the book to his good friend George Vanderbilt.

PAUL LEICESTER FORD VOICE: To George W. Vanderbilt. ... As I have read the proofs of this book I have found more than once that the pages have faded out of sight and in their stead I have seen Mount Pisgah, ... or the ramp and terrace of Biltmore House, just as I saw them when writing.¹⁷

NARRATOR: Now, continue through the next doorway. Turn right in the hallway outside. Continue ahead under the pointed archway. Walk down the short flight of stairs to the right. Look for the Damask Room, number [29]

###

¹⁷ Dedication, *Janice Meredith*, Paul Leicester Ford, The Burr Printing House, New York, 1899

29 DAMASK ROOM

NARRATOR: Welcome to the most recently restored rooms in Biltmore House.

DARREN POUPORE 12/12/08 2/01:05:27 These rooms are the most grand bedrooms in Biltmore House aside from Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt's room.

NARRATOR: It was Biltmore's own employees that turned back the clock, and restored these rooms to their original glory. It was a three-year job.

LESLIE KLINGNER 12/12/08 2/01:14:58 The conservators tackled this project to take off 100 years worth of dirt.

DARREN POUPORE 12/12/08 2/01:11:30 Everything from the rugs on the floor, to the furniture in the room, to decorative objects.

NARRATOR: The team had to be part scholar, part detective, investigating every nook and cranny for original paint or scraps of wallpaper. When original fabrics were too fragile to use they were reproduced on 100- year-old looms in France.

Continue to the next room, number [30]

###

30 CLAUDE ROOM

NARRATOR: The Claude Room was named after one of George Vanderbilt's favorite artists, the 17th-century French landscape painter Claude Lorrain. Prints of his paintings decorate the walls here.

Look closely at the brown velvet draperies. At certain angles they sparkle. That's because they were hand woven with threads of silk—and pure silver.

*WILLIE FIELD VOICE: My dear Mamma. ... We arrived yesterday afternoon two hours late. ... George & Mrs. V. met us at the house where tea was waiting.*¹⁸

NARRATOR: One of George Vanderbilt's best friends was Willie Field. Willie and George traveled all the way to India together, and Willie was the best man at George and Edith's wedding. On a visit here in 1900, Willie noticed something *different* about his friend's wife.

*WILLIE FIELD VOICE: "Dollars to doughnuts" there is something very much like the appearance of a woman in the family way. ... I don't know but I think and I am pretty sure.*¹⁹

NARRATOR: Given the etiquette of the day, Willie couldn't just come out and say it, but George and Edith were now expecting a baby.

###

¹⁸ William B. Osgood Field to Augusta Currie Bradhurst, 1900; Field William B. Osgood Field Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

¹⁹ *ibid*

31 TYROLEAN CHIMNEY ROOM

NARRATOR: The chimney over this room's fireplace is unlike any other in Biltmore. The flowered ceramic tile comes from a Tyrolean stove. A stove like this wasn't for cooking. It was a heater.

DARREN POUPORE 1:22:02 The tiles would heat up and it would radiate heat into the room, so it had a very practical purpose. ... 1:22:10 Tile stoves, which are called kachelöfen --which is always fun to say -- ... 01:21:48 were ... popular ... in the 17th and 18th Centuries in Europe, ... particularly in Switzerland, in Germany, and Austria.... 01:21:10 It's actually half of a tile stove.

NARRATOR: The bottom is missing. But George Vanderbilt liked it anyway and asked architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a room around it.

George had created this house as a bachelor. Very soon, Biltmore would be transformed into a family home.

Edith Vanderbilt wrote to a friend:

EDITH VANDERBILT VOICE: We are overjoyed at the prospect so soon to be realized. ... I am very well, and we are radiantly happy.²⁰

NARRATOR: Go up the stairs to the next room, number [32]

###

²⁰ Edith Stuyvesant Vanderbilt to Augusta Currie Bradhurst, 1900; Field William B. Osgood Field Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

32 LOUIS XV ROOM

NARRATOR: This elegant room is decorated in the style of French king Louis XV, with gilded sconces, fluid, curving lines and shimmering fabrics. It was the perfect place to welcome the newest member of the family.

NARRATOR: Edith chose this room to give birth to her daughter, Cornelia.

LESLIE KLINGNER 2/00:41:56 It was common in the 19th century to have a different space ... for birthing, ... I personally think that she picked this room because the morning light is so beautiful. ... And looking out over the esplanade, there's really nothing quite like it.

NARRATOR: Being a Vanderbilt, Cornelia's arrival made all the papers.

NEWSPAPER VOICE: August 23rd, 1900. A new star has appeared at famous Biltmore -- ... a tiny girl called Cornelia Stuyvesant Vanderbilt. ²¹

NARRATOR: Proud father George sent his personal announcement to his friend Willie Field:

GEORGE VANDERBILT VOICE: A fine healthy daughter put in an appearance last evening & received a hearty welcome. Mrs. V. is doing splendidly and I will be glad to see you any day now you can come. ... Yours faithfully, ...George. ²²

²¹ Spartanburg Journal August 23. 1900

²² George W. Vanderbilt to William B. Osgood Field, August 23, 1900; Field William B. Osgood Field Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

NARRATOR: Now, continue through the next door. Look for the table with photographs, just outside. This is stop [33]

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

117 It's a Boy

33 HALL OUTSIDE LOUIS XV ROOM

NARRATOR: The photographs on this table show Cornelia Vanderbilt as a little girl—Like her parents, Cornelia loved animals. She had had a pet donkey, a pony, parrots *and* a pet skunk.

LESLIE KLINGNER 1/00:46:38 This is a little girl who ... didn't lead an isolated life. She played with the children who lived on the estate, she went to school with the children who lived on the estate. ... 1/00:43:40 Cornelia would have always had nannies, and they really would have been overseeing her every move.

NARRATOR: Her Nanny *was* a little plump, though, which meant Cornelia could run away up the big hill in front of the house to her swing and not be caught.

Your tour continues down the short flight of steps. You can follow the hallway to the Grand Staircase. The next stop is at the bottom of the Grand Staircase, number [34] on your map.

#

IN-DEPTH STOPS

 118 Child's Play

34 GRAND STAIRCASE

NARRATOR: You should be at the foot of the Grand Staircase, on the first floor. Please find a place to stand near the wall under the curving stairs.

Biltmore's Grand Staircase is cantilevered, or counter-balanced. Looking up or down, there's no apparent means of support. Each step is a separate limestone slab stacked one on top of the other. The weight of the walls and the steps themselves holds the staircase together.

Every holiday season we transform the staircase into a spectacular four-story Christmas decoration. In fact, if you strung together all the fresh pine garlands hung throughout the house, they would measure over four *miles*.

CATHY BARNHARDT—We do have large numbers when it comes to decorating Biltmore House for Christmas.

NARRATOR-- Floral Displays Manager, Cathy Barnhardt

CATHY BARNHARDT—We usually have around 38 trees decorated inside Biltmore House. ... We have right around 500 wreathes at any given time ... about 1,500 poinsettias are used. ... People ask me, "How many ornaments?" That's the hardest question that I have to answer. ... Always I just say, zillions and zillions!

NARRATOR: Now, your tour continues one more flight down, in the basement. To get there, walk around to the back of the Grand Staircase.

You'll see a doorway leading to a smaller staircase. Walk down these steps to the bottom level. When you get there, your next stop is number [35].

###

BASEMENT

35 STONE HALLWAY

NARRATOR—You should now be in the basement level of the house. Walk ahead, and follow the stone hallway.

George and Edith's happy life together was far too short. In 1914, George died suddenly of complications following an appendectomy. His daughter Cornelia was only thirteen years old.

Edith wrote to George's sister Lila:

EDITH VANDERBILT VOICE: I cannot get used to the idea that George is not coming back. It seems to me that he must, and that all I am doing is preparatory to his arrival. Lila dear, we were so happy, and I miss him so dreadfully.

NARRATOR—George Vanderbilt was laid to rest in the family mausoleum on Staten Island in New York City.

With the sudden death of her husband, it was now Edith Vanderbilt's job to run all of Biltmore Estate.

LESLIE KLINGNER 00:50:56 I think she took the job very seriously, in knowing that they were the main means of support for so many families who lived on the estate. 00:51:35 She really came back to Biltmore and dedicated her life to making it work and following through with George's legacy.

NARRATOR: Your next stop is the brightly painted room up ahead, number [36] on your map.

#

36 HALLOWEEN ROOM:

NARRATOR: In 1924, Cornelia Vanderbilt married a British Diplomat, the Honorable John Francis Amherst Cecil.

NARRATOR: It was now the “Roaring Twenties” and *Cornelia* was Biltmore’s new hostess. The Halloween Room got its festive decorations at one of the couple’s parties.

James McClure was one of the guests.

JAMES MC CLURE VOICE: The house party ... spent three weeks before the dance painting the cellar of Biltmore House. They painted scenes of every description around the walls...and had all kinds of gypsy atmosphere such as cauldrons and pots and glowing fire.

NARRATOR: Biltmore House was notoriously cold in the wintertime. If you came to a party in January, you could expect a good time, but a *freezing* one. One year, some guests decided to plan ahead.

LESLIE KLINGNER 01:00:02 A few fine fellows decided that they would be quite bright and wear their wool bathing suits underneath ... their party clothes.

NARRATOR: But – the party turned out to be down here, in the Halloween Room.

LESLIE KLINGNER: Because of the enormous furnaces that heat Biltmore House, the basement is always warm. So they sweated and suffered all evening.

NARRATOR: When you're ready, your next stop is room number [37].

#

37 BOWLING ALLEY

NARRATOR: George Vanderbilt gave his guests a full menu of sports to choose from – even bowling!

NARRATOR: This is one of the first bowling alleys ever installed in a private home in the United States.

NARRATOR: The game was a little different in the 1890s. The balls came in a variety of sizes, and had only two holes. There were no automated pin-setters back then. Instead, servants would set the pins in place, and roll the balls back to the players on the wooden rail.

George Vanderbilt's young grandsons bowled here in the 1930s. One of them was Dini Cecil Pickering's father:

DINI PICKERING: 00:33:23 The person living ... behind the bowling area was the main chef in the kitchen, ... 00:34:41 and so he heard every time the ball hit the backstop.

DINI PICKERING 00:33:48 And so if they ever bowled, particularly late, and made all this ruckus and noise and kept up the chef, then they could expect a very poor breakfast the next morning. [laughs] ... 00:34:21 The chef would get even in the end.

NARRATOR: Your next stop is through the door to your right, in the hallway. It's number [38].

###

38 DRESSING ROOMS

NARRATOR—Walk down the row of doorways and peek in. These are private dressing rooms for female guests. On the other side of the wall there are dressing rooms for men.

DARREN POUPORE 2008 01:42:03 We tend to think of George Vanderbilt as the bookworm. But most people don't know that he was also an active person. ... He loved the outdoors. ... He loved to go hiking. ... He loved to go camping.

NARRATOR—If George Vanderbilt's guests wanted exercise, he gave them lots to choose from. There was tennis, golf, croquet, archery and even lawn bowling. Guests could even swim in the middle of winter.

But no Biltmore guest would ever think of walking through the house wearing exercise clothes. Even the many-layered wool bathing costumes of the day were considered immodest attire. Instead, Biltmore's servants carried each person's outfit from the bedrooms upstairs down here to a dressing room. Guests would arrive and find a bathing suit already waiting for them.

The next stop is up the short flight of stairs ahead. It's number [39].

###

39 SWIMMING POOL

NARRATOR—Biltmore had everything, including a heated indoor pool. The pool held seventy thousand gallons of water. In a day when practically no one had electric lights, Biltmore’s pool had them *underwater*.

Ambassador Joseph Hodges Choate wrote home, impressed.

JOSEPH HODGES CHOATE VOICE: The vast swimming tank under the main hall is a great resort for the young men after exercising—ten feet deep so that they can take a good dive. ²³

NARRATOR—Look on the wall near either of the doorways. Swimmers could push one of the call buttons to order a drink or snack, or to signal that they were ready to leave, and needed help changing.

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

119 Guastavino’s Tilework

²³ Joseph Hodges Choate and Edward Sandford Martin, *The Life of Joseph Hodges Choate: As Gathered Chiefly from His Letters* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920) 206-207.

40 GYMNASIUM

NARRATOR: Health and fitness were all the rage at the end of the 19th century. George Vanderbilt offered his guests a fully equipped gymnasium to keep in shape during their stay.

Guests could take a turn at the rowing machine; climb the rope ladder or practice gymnastics on the parallel bars. The striped wooden pins hanging on the back wall are Indian clubs.

You held one in each hand and swung them around in a graceful choreographed routine. It was a combination of weight-lifting and aerobics.

Guests also built muscles by tossing a medicine ball back and forth.

It might look like a basketball—

—but a medicine ball might weigh 10, or even 25 pounds! You can see one in the wooden cabinet.

After a workout came a hot shower in the “Needle Baths,” along the back wall. Water shot out sideways from the pipes, adding a full massage to soothe the day’s exertions.

Now, continue out into the hallway to the left. This long hallway marks your entrance into the working areas of Biltmore House—the domain of the domestic staff. Upstairs, meals appeared and rooms were cleaned as if by magic. The real work took place down here, unseen.

If you think you're smelling something good—it's not your imagination. Here's one of our secrets—we keep a pot of lemon and spices bubbling in the kitchen to fill the air with the aroma of Christmas.

At the end of this hallway, turn left. The next stop is room number [41], the Vegetable Pantry. It's on the left, just past the large double doors.

#

41 VEGETABLE PANTRY

NARRATOR: The room behind this screen door was reserved just for fresh fruit and vegetables. It took an enormous amount of food to keep Biltmore going. Even when there were no guests, or when the Vanderbilts were traveling, there were still thirty to thirty-five servants that needed to be fed three meals a day.

Much of what was served was grown or raised right here on the estate. We keep the tradition today with our “Field to Table” program. Vegetables at Estate restaurants are delivered fresh from our market garden. Visit our Kitchen Garden to learn more.

###

42 WALK-IN REFRIGERATORS

NARRATOR—When most homes made do with iceboxes and springhouses to keep food cold, Biltmore’s electrically-powered refrigeration system was a domestic wonder.

The large metal cans on the floor were filled with milk. All the milk served at Biltmore came from the estate’s own Dairy.

LESLIE KLINGNER 2/00:28:00 Biltmore's cows were known for not only creating an enormous amount of milk, but milk that had a very high butterfat content, and of course ... the fat's what makes it taste so good.

NARRATOR: It’s also what makes for really good *ice cream*.

You can still enjoy ice cream on the estate today, but the dairy has been transformed into Biltmore’s award-winning Winery.

Now, continue around the corner. As you walk down the hallway, take a look into the other pantries. You’re next stop is the group of rooms at the very end of the hallway. It’s stop number [43]

###

IN DEPTH STOP

 120 Dogs in the Kitchen

43 SERVANT'S BEDROOMS

NARRATOR—The kitchen maids' bedrooms were down here in the basement. One maid was Essie Smith Kuykendall. She was an orphan who came to work at Biltmore when she was only fourteen. She'd only been here a few days when she was told to assist in the Banquet Hall and –

NARRATOR: -- she dropped a heavy tray of food onto the floor in the middle of a formal meal. George Vanderbilt got up from his seat and helped her pick up the broken china.

ESSIE SMITH KUYKENDALL VOICE: He was a kind man.

NARRATOR: Essie told the story decades later.

ESSIE SMITH KUYKENDALL VOICE: He used to tease me because I was a little on the fat side, and I was little ... He'd tease me and call me "Fattybread." He'd say 'Hi, Fattybread!' And I'd say 'Hey.' I was bashful. ... And I used to tell him my mother and father was gone ... I always thought he was a little better to me than any of the rest because ... I think he sympathized with me.

NARRATOR—When you're ready, the next stop is back in the main hallway outside. Continue down the left side of the ropes. Stop at the glass door, room number [44]

###

44 PASTRY KITCHEN

NARRATOR—Biltmore's Pastry chef worked in here. The elaborate desserts of the day required a separate room to protect them from the heat of the main kitchen. The Pastry Chef must have been busy, since Edith and Cornelia Vanderbilt *loved* cake.

Follow the ropes to the next stop, the Rotisserie Kitchen. It's number [45]

###

45 ROTISSERIE KITCHEN

NARRATOR—This room was just for roasting meat, a greasy, smoky, messy process to do indoors, which is why it's separated from the main kitchen. Five spits could roast at the same time on the huge, state-of-the-art rotisserie.

Biltmore's lands were stocked with wild game. Dinner might have been a sizzling joint of venison or a roast wild boar shot by guests on a hunting party.

One item on the menu at least twice a week was roasted turkey, George Vanderbilt's favorite meal.

###

46 MAIN KITCHEN

[MUSIC: sweet gingerbread-y music!]

NARRATOR: How better to celebrate Christmas with the Vanderbilts, than with a magnificent Biltmore Gingerbread House! Each year, our pastry chefs outdo themselves to recreate Biltmore in gingerbread. The cookie construction takes at least two weeks to make. And the building materials? 30 pounds of flour, 40 pounds of sugar, 7 pounds of molasses, 6 pounds of butter, 3 dozen eggs and almost 30 pounds of cookies and candy!

[MUSIC: gingerbread music ends...segues into the regular kitchen stop and sound effects.]

NARRATOR: The Main Kitchen was bustling almost 24 hours a day. Biltmore's chef commanded a team of over a dozen kitchen workers.

Six AM. Time for the kitchen maids to light the fire in the huge coal-fired stove. Notice there aren't any knobs to regulate the heat. Cooks baked or roasted in a "slow" or "fast" oven, depending on the intensity of the fire.

Eight AM. Breakfast for the staff, followed by breakfast on trays for Vanderbilts and their guests. Mr. Vanderbilt's favorites were fried ham and eggs or shirred eggs and bacon.

Lunch began with a simple staff meal for thirty-five. It better be quick—the Vanderbilts expected a six-course lunch at one-thirty. Four-thirty. Afternoon Tea. Staff dinner came next, then it was dinner at eight for the Vanderbilts.

By the time dessert was served, the chef could relax, and head off to bed.

Then, the kitchen maids returned to wash up and polish the copper pots and pans. Late into the night, after a final sweep, they turned off the lights. The kitchen was quiet—until tomorrow when it started all over again.

When you're ready, continue into the next, small room, number [47]

###

IN-DEPTH STOPS

121 REVISED Menu Book

122 Birthday Cake

47 KITCHEN PANTRY

NARRATOR—The kitchen staff sent food upstairs with Biltmore's two dumbwaiters, on either side of you. One is electric and the other was pulled by hand.

You can learn more about technology at Biltmore House by taking our guided Behind the Scenes tour. Just ask at the front desk for details.

Your next stop is through the doorway and across the hallway, number [48] on your map.

###

48 SERVANT'S DINING ROOM

NARRATOR: The domestic staff at Biltmore ate in a dining room much like this one. Just like the family upstairs, the servants eating down here had someone to wait on them. It was the job of the Dining Hall Maid to set the table, serve the food and clean up for all three meals a day.

Your next stop is in the hallway just outside, room number [49]

###

49 THE SERVICE DOOR [OUTSIDE STAFF DINING ROOM]

IN-DEPTH TOUR NARRATOR: This was one of the busiest spots in the house.

LESLIE KLINGNER 00:23:17 Everything that it takes to run the house is coming in through this door.

NARRATOR: A parade of boxes was delivered to be unpacked in the rooms on either side. Crates of blue point oysters packed in seaweed –

LESLIE KLINGNER 00:24:54 – I think 30 dozen eggs a week –

NARRATOR: – All the guests' luggage arrived through here, plus the firewood for all the fireplaces –

LESLIE KLINGNER 00:24:27 – Mass amounts of soap, if you think of the soap that it takes for those 43 bathrooms! –

NARRATOR: —Maybe, even a Samurai suit of armor that traveled all the way from Japan.

Your tour continues around the corner to the left. Follow the hallway to number [50], the Floral Work Rooms.

###

50 FLORAL WORK ROOMS

NARRATOR— Peek in either of these two rooms, and you might see some of Biltmore’s floral staff in action. At Christmastime, it’s “all hands on deck” to decorate the house.

We don’t try to recreate a Vanderbilt Christmas, but instead, we want to evoke the opulence of the period. Since there are very few photographs of the house at Christmastime, the staff looks elsewhere for historic inspiration.

CATHY BARNHARDT: House & Garden magazine was being published at that time so we can look and see what was popular then. ...Looking at the old magazines from the turn of the century helps us to understand that a lot of what we’re doing today is not so new.

NARRATOR: Even before this years’ decorations come down, Cathy and her staff will walk through the house to discuss *next* year’s themes and ideas.

CATHY BARNHARDT: By the end of May, we have those plans pretty well set. ... and by the first of July the crew is preparing. They’re starting to make those artificial garlands and wreathes and table arrangements ... the things that they can do far ahead. So we live Christmas!

NARRATOR: Your next stop is number [51] on your map. It's the room with brown sinks.

###

51 BROWN LAUNDRY

NARRATOR—Biltmore's laundresses washed and ironed fine clothes and linen here. They bent over the deep sinks and scrubbed everything by hand.

NARRATOR—Look around the middle of the coal stove. There, irons heated up on ledges.

NARRATOR—The laundresses needed heavy pads to hold the irons that were too hot to pick up barehanded. Every frill, seam and collar had to be carefully starched and pressed. As soon as one iron cooled off, it was back to the rack for another, all day long.

###

52 MAIN LAUNDRY

NARRATOR—The laundry at Biltmore House was as large and busy as one in a large hotel. It had all the modern devices. The blue machine on your right is a barrel washer. Just like a modern washer, in went the water, soap and laundry. But *un*-like a modern washer it didn't spin dry. The sopping wet laundry had to be carried across the room to another machine. *It's* the round tub at the end of the row of sinks.

Next came the dryer. Look through the glassed doorway on the right. Damp laundry hung over the narrow racks and was dried by heating elements inside, much like a giant toaster.

The workday for Biltmore's laundresses began early, and might not end until eight or nine o'clock at night. In 1900, the woman in charge here was head laundress Inge Bohberg, an immigrant from Sweden. She oversaw a staff of African American laundresses who commuted to Biltmore from the local community of Shiloh.

Your tour continues back upstairs on the first floor. Continue back into the hallway. Stay to the right side of the ropes. Follow the signs to the stairs. Your next stop is one flight up, room number [53], the Smoking Room.

###

FIRST FLOOR

53 SMOKING ROOM

NARRATOR—This room, with blue wallpaper, is The Smoking Room. Find the doorway on the right hand wall. This is the other side of the hidden doorway you saw in the Billiard Room. Male guests retired to the smoking room after dinner to enjoy a cigar or a pipeful of tobacco.

Continue to the next room along this hallway, number [54]

###

54 GUN ROOM

NARRATOR—This room houses some of Mr. Vanderbilt's collection of firearms. Before hunting expeditions on the estate, his guests would come here to select their gun of choice. Today, the room also features the smaller specimens from Mr. Vanderbilt's animal trophy collection.

Biltmore has stayed in the family's hands since it was built in 1895. George and Edith Vanderbilt's daughter Cornelia and her husband John Cecil opened the house to the public for the first time in 1930.

Continue to the end of the hallway. You can see their portraits hanging on either side of the exit doorway. Your last stop is number [55] on your map.

###

55 BACHELOR'S WING HALLWAY/CONCLUSION

NARRATOR: Cornelia and John Cecil wanted to generate revenue to help maintain the estate as well as to boost local tourism at a time when the economy was hit hard by the Great Depression.

Cornelia spoke at Biltmore's public opening ceremony:

CORNELIA VOICE: *Mr. Cecil and I hope that the people who go through the house will get as much pleasure and enjoyment out of it as [we] do in making it possible. ... We both feel that in doing this, it is a fitting memorial to my father. After all, it was his life's work and creation.*²⁴

NARRATOR—Thank you for visiting Biltmore House. Please return your player to the audio attendant nearby.

If you like the music you've heard on this tour, you can find it on "Biltmore Christmas" volumes 1 and 2, available in the Carriage House gift shop. Consider returning for a rare after-hours visit during our *Candlelight Christmas Evenings*, filled with live music, dancers and dramatic Christmas readings.

Just outside the exit, the old stable area has many shops and dining opportunities. You can stroll through the gardens and be sure to visit River Bend Farm, and our Winery, with complimentary tastings of Biltmore's award winning-wines.

²⁴ Asheville Citizen. March 16, 1930

To learn more about the house, ask about our special guided tours. And, consider joining the Biltmore family as a 12-month pass holder, giving you unlimited visits to the estate. Thank you, again, for visiting. We hope you will return often. This has been an Antenna Audio Production.

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