

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TRIANON



### **The Baldwin's**

She was heiress to the Comstock Lode in Nevada, inheriting millions in silver, gold and timber interests. He was a Harrow- and Harvard-educated business executive and polo player. Together they built Claremont, a French-style estate known today as the Trianon, and home of The Colorado Springs School since 1967.

Charles and Virginia Baldwin moved to Colorado Springs in the late 1800s. Like many other people in those days, they came here as a remedy for tuberculosis. What distinguished them, however, was their massive wealth-inherited from Virginia's family in the town she was named after, Virginia City, Nevada.

A caption in a newspaper article from the early part of the century described Virginia as "The vivacious and charming mistress of 'Claremont,' one of the handsomest homes in the West." It continued, "Mrs. Baldwin is an acknowledged leader in the smartest set of Colorado Springs and is prominent socially throughout the country." An art aficionado, Mrs. Baldwin collected masterpieces of statues, paintings, and tapestries.

Charles Baldwin was no relation to the Baldwin piano nor the locomotive families. He was a son of Admiral Charles H. Baldwin of San Francisco and a descendant of Captain Daniel Baldwin, who was an original member of the Society of the Cincinnati - soldiers who served in Washington's army during the Revolution.

### **Yes, Virginia, there is a Claremont**

The Trianon (or Claremont, as the Baldwin's called it) was built in 1907 as a monument to East Coast values and "civilized" culture. Although sketched originally by Stanford White, architect Thomas MacLaren completed the plans after White's murder on the roof of Madison Square Garden in 1905.

Deliberately-and painstakingly-scaling down the Grand Trianon at Versailles, MacLaren

produced a replica that is 148' long by 88' wide with 22,000 square feet of living space. He captured and emulated many details from the French palace. For example, just as Versailles is decorated with entwined "Ls" for Louis XIV, so the Trianon displays the entwined initials "C" and "V", for Charles and Virginia.

Despite its stately, 18th century French exterior, the home contained some surprisingly modern features, such as a central vacuum system and a flagpole that could be lowered into an aperture.

Like its East coast counterpart, Rosecliff (which was, incidentally, the site where "The Great Gatsby" was filmed), the Trianon's edifice is steel and concrete with an overlay of white enamel terra-cotta. It is one of the few remaining terra-cotta buildings in the nation.

### **Gloom for "The Great Gatsby"**

Fate, however, was not good to the Baldwins. Their two children preceded them in death, and there was no heir when Charles died in 1934. In 1949, Virginia sold the estate to the owner of the American Ballet Theater, Blevins Davis, and moved to California with her second husband, a Russian prince.

Davis renamed the estate the Trianon and spent a fortune on restorations and redecorating. In 1952, he received a court order from his wife's \$80 million estate to give the Trianon to the Poor Sisters of Saint Francis. By 1960, the Poor Sisters found the maintenance of the estate overwhelming and turned it over to John Metzger, former Colorado Attorney General.

In 1961, Metzger opened the Trianon to the public for the first time. He ran an art school and then a museum, but by 1962, the museum's failure and Metzger's debt threatened to demolish the building.

### **Save the Trianon**

In the fall of 1964, Metzger established the "Save the Trianon" fund and proposed to move the building, brick by brick, to his ranch near Denver. The project proved unfeasible, and Metzger had to auction off over 4,000 art objects in the building to meet his mortgage payments.

Meanwhile, The Colorado Springs School for girls had started just a block from the Trianon in 1962. With a virtual explosion in the size of its student body (the school quadrupled in its first five years), the school's Board of Trustees was hungrily eyeing the Trianon property. Through the astute negotiations of William Boddington and Otis White, Metzger agreed to sell the property to the school in March 1967.

### **A Noble Calling for a Noble Building**

That fall, the school held classes in the Trianon for the first time. The sounds of pencil-scratching, lively debate, and excited, youthful laughter have filled the building ever since. We believe that the Trianon has found its most noble calling as The Colorado

Springs School.

Today, the school enrolls over 450 students in grades Preschool through 12. Approximately 15 high school students come to this college preparatory school from around the globe, staying with host families from the school community. As a college preparatory school, our mission is to teach Preschool-12 students thinking and problem-solving skills and to send forth life-long learners who are resourceful, responsible, independent individuals.