

The Colorado Springs School's Historic *Trianon*

Introduction – The Baldwins

Interwoven with the early history of our city, The Colorado Springs School's *Trianon* has a history full of glamour and tragedy. Charles and Virginia Baldwin moved to Colorado Springs in 1900 or 1901, setting Wood Avenue society atwitter when they arrived in not one, but *two*, automobiles. Like many other people in those days, they came here as a remedy for tuberculosis, with Virginia the one in need of the cure. What distinguished them, however, was their massive wealth—inherited from Virginia's family in the mining town after which she was named, Virginia City, Nevada.

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.

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 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.

The Trianon

The *Trianon* was completed in 1907 as a monument to East Coast values and "civilized" culture. Although reported to be sketched originally by Stanford White, architect Thomas MacLaren completed the plans after White's murder on the roof of Madison Square Garden in 1905. The building was also a second effort by the Baldwins to replicate a building from Versailles.[Prior to relocating to Colorado Springs, they lived in

Cupertino, California, where they built a replica of Le Petit *Trianon* and developed a vineyard and winery. That building has been moved to the grounds of De Anza College and now houses the California History Center.]

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 "L's" for Louis XIV, so the wrought iron window grilles and the library railing displays the entwined initials "C" and "V", for Charles and Virginia.

In addition to 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, designed by Stanford White and also 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.

Fate, however, was not kind to the Baldwins. Their three children preceded them in death, and there was no heir when Charles died in 1934. In 1949, Virginia sold the estate—including the art collection and Mr. Baldwin's enormous library of books—to Colorado College alum and 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 sold it 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.

In the fall of 1964, Metzger established the "Save the Trianon" fund and proposed to cut the building into four sections and move it 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 believed the Trianon property was perfectly suited for its needs. Through the astute negotiations of William Boddington and Otis White, Metzger agreed to sell the property to the school in March 1967.

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 approximately 450 students in preschool through grade 12. Students in all grades have the opportunity to "learn by doing." The curriculum allows students to apply academic concepts to classroom activities and to field studies on campus, in the community, in the nation, and around the world. Up to 15 high school students come to The Colorado Springs School each year from around the globe, staying with host families from the school community. As a college preparatory school, our mission is to prepare students to think independently and to meet the needs of a dynamic world with leadership, ingenuity, problem-solving skills, and personal integrity.

