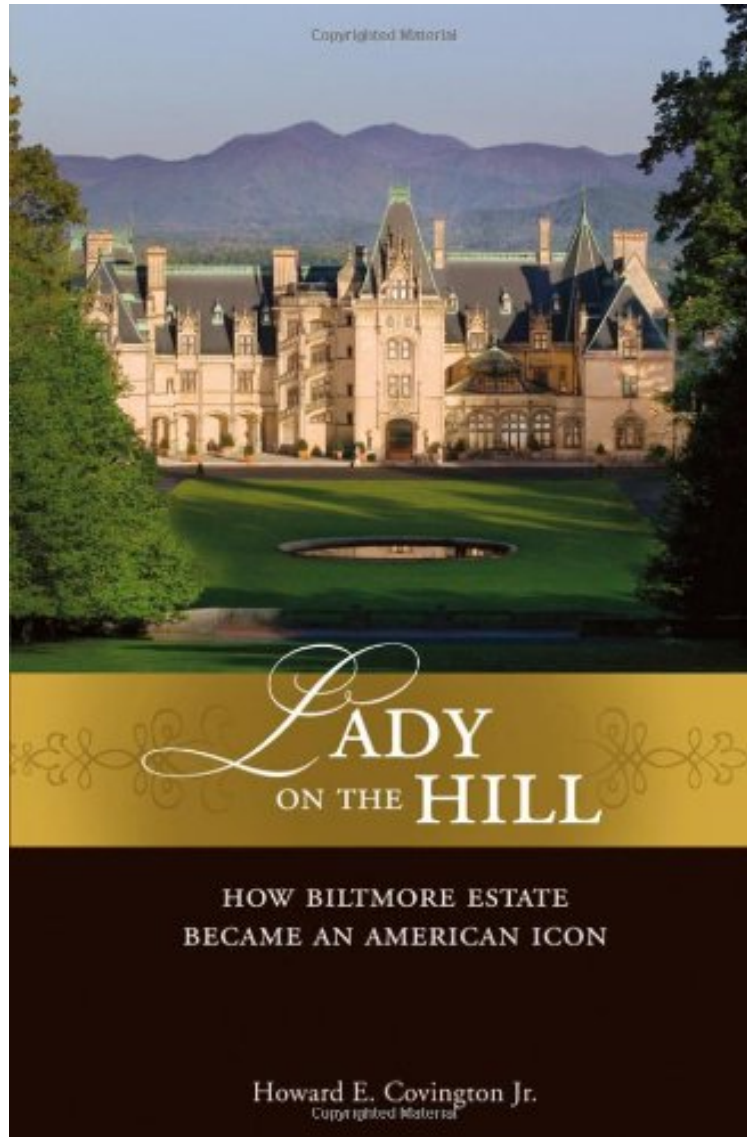


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Lady on the Hill: How Biltmore Estate Became an American Icon

Howard E. Covington Jr., The Biltmore Company
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"What William Cecil has accomplished at Biltmore Estate is one of the great preservation success stories of all time. He has set a high standard for what all historic house museums strive for: magnificently preserved buildings and grounds, engaging interpretation, and--perhaps most challenging of all--economic self-sufficiency. It is no surprise that Biltmore Estate is widely recognized as one of America's finest places to visit." --Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation "Biltmore is a glorious national historic landmark that, through creative vision and entrepreneurial management, preserves and provides insight into a way of life in the early 1900s. Bill is the imaginative and multifaceted leader who has built this great monument to enrich his community. George and I admire his dedication and success." --George and Abby Rockefeller O'Neill "Bill Cecil and his team at Biltmore Estate have sure proved that they know how to build a successful business. They did it the old-fashioned way: embrace a bold idea that others said could not be done and--through commitment, determination, and hard work--bring it to life. Their achievement against the odds is inspiring, and their vision and perseverance are valuable lessons to us all." --Don Logan, Chairman, Media Communications Group, Time Warner "If George Vanderbilt did nothing more than engage the two most prominent and storied designers of their time, architect Richard Morris Hunt and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, to carry out his vision of a European estate in the southern Appalachians, he would have created an American icon. The beauty of the method by which the estate was executed and, even today, the meticulous attention to detail, in the presentation and care of the estate by William Cecil, have brought history to life." --Gary J. Walters, Chief Usher, The White House

From Publishers WeeklySet amid thousands of lushly landscaped acres in the North Carolina mountains, the Biltmore estate is a 250-room Gilded Age mansion stuffed to the rafters with objets d'art. Writing a very authorized business history rather than an architectural appreciation, journalist Covington celebrates the estate's transformation from quasifeudal folly to lucrative tourist mecca. Built in 1895 by George Vanderbilt, who played lord of the manor to hundreds of tenant farmers and servants, the estate passed in the 1960s to his grandson William Cecil, whose tight-fisted budgets, canny marketing initiatives and rapt attention to customer service turned it into a profitable museum of robber-baron privilege, selling more tickets than Colonial Williamsburg. The author's sycophantic account of this not unduly exciting saga is mainly a tribute to Cecil, who wrote the afterword. Covington defends the Biltmore owner's model of private, for-profit historical preservation against charges of commercialism leveled by nonprofit preservationists, repeats his complaints about inheritance taxes, extols his entrepreneurial daring, salutes his Biltmore restoration projects ("surpassed what many had seen anywhere") and raves about "customer satisfaction reports... comparable to those enjoyed by a five-star resort." This anodyne hospitality-industry success story will find a place in the Biltmore gift shop, but probably nowhere else. (Mar.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Set amid thousands of lushly landscaped acres in the North Carolina mountains, the Biltmore estate is a 250-room Gilded Age mansion stuffed to the rafters with objets d'art. Writing a very authorized business history rather than an architectural appreciation, journalist Covington celebrates the estate's transformation from quasifeudal folly to lucrative tourist mecca. Built in 1895 by George Vanderbilt, who played lord of the manor to hundreds of tenant farmers and servants, the estate passed in the 1960s to his grandson William Cecil, whose tight-fisted budgets, canny marketing initiatives and rapt attention to customer service turned it into a profitable museum of robber-baron privilege, selling more tickets than Colonial Williamsburg. The author's sycophantic account of this not unduly exciting saga is mainly a tribute to Cecil, who wrote the afterword. Covington defends the Biltmore owner's model of private, for-profit historical preservation against charges of commercialism leveled by nonprofit preservationists, repeats his complaints about inheritance taxes, extols his entrepreneurial daring, salutes his Biltmore restoration projects ("surpassed what many had seen anywhere") and raves about "customer satisfaction reports... comparable to those enjoyed by a five-star resort." This anodyne hospitality-industry success story will find a place in the Biltmore gift shop, but probably nowhere else. (Mar.) (Publishers Weekly, January 2, 2006)From the Inside FlapLady on the Hill tells the inspiring story of the thirty-five-year effort to restore this fading beauty to her former gloryall without a penny of government funding or outside foundation grants. Central to this true-life tale of rebirth against the odds is George Vanderbilt's grandson William A. V. Cecil, a well-mannered, highly educated man who, when caught up in an idea, becomes a whirling dervish, generating enough energy and enthusiasm to motivate everyone around him. And, according to author Howard Covington Jr., Cecil gets a week's worth of ideas before he's done with his Monday morning shave. In the late 1950s, attorneys, financial managers, and tax accountants were united in advising Cecil and his brother, George, to sell off the estate's 12,000 acres in order to create a suburban subdivision. Cecil quietly ignored this advice and came up with a better idea: over the next four decades, he would turn this down-at-the-heels mansion that was a drain on the family business into the most successful, privately

preserved historic site in the United States, perhaps even the world. Cecil succeeded beyond even his wildest dreams. Not only did he raise the money needed to begin and continue a painstaking, decades-long restoration of the house itself, but he also achieved a goal that even his grandfather had found elusive. He made Biltmore Estate a self-sustaining, working enterprise that included a vibrant tourist destination, a working winery and vineyard, and a farming operation; employed hundreds of people; and attracted hundreds of millions of dollars to the local economy every year. Lady on the Hill tells a lively tale of eccentric, upper-crust characters, seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and one man's determination, innovation, loyalty, and stubborn persistence to succeed against the odds. It also provides a brilliant, if unorthodox, model for anyone involved with the preservation and restoration of a historic home.