

History of Mizzentop Cottage and the Bluenose Inn

Mizzentop Cottage was first envisioned when Mrs. Louisa Hunt, the widow of the famed artist William Morris Hunt, solicited the services of Mr. H.L. Putnam of Boston for the architectural design. It is believed that this was Mr. Putnam's first design on Mt. Desert Island. Cliffstone Road (now known as Cleftstone Road) was selected as the site for Mizzentop. The property boasted magnificent views of Frenchman Bay and had more than enough space for the cottage, as well as stables for carriages. Cars were not allowed on the Island until 1913, making the preferred method of transportation horse and carriage. The cost of construction of the cottage and stables was to exceed \$10,000 (\$266,530 in today's dollar). In today's market, this is quite a bargain. Many of the homes on the water or with water views in Bar Harbor can sell for upwards of 10 million dollars.



Figure 1 Sketch of the newly built Mizzentop – A.W. Brunner, Building 1884

Mizzentop began its existence the week of November 22, 1883. John Clark was contracted to be the master builder. The granite foundation was put in on a balmy

November week with temperatures in the 40's and 50's. Remnants of this granite foundation can still be found at the bottom of the Mizzentop Hotel building.

Work continued throughout the winter. By June of 1894, George Hamilton was doing grading work at the new residences. A beautiful lawn was put in and a massive stone wall was constructed on the steep hillside separating the house and stables.

Mizzentop's twin, the Kane cottage was receiving its finishing touches from painters and wallpaper hangers.

Just as work was finishing on Mizzentop, the Mount Desert branch of the Maine Central Railroad began its summer schedule of three trains daily between Boston and Bar Harbor.

Mrs. Hunt's daughter, Enid Hunt Slater, inherited ownership of the cottage and began renting it out to Alexander Reilly and his family of Philadelphia. In 1895, Mizzentop was sold to Robert Hall McCormick.

McCormick was the member of an extremely influential family from Chicago. His grandfather had invented the McCormick Reaper, which revolutionized modern grain trade, began the mechanization of the gathering of grain, and helped break the bonds of slavery. Through the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, later the International Harvester Company, the McCormick's became one of the wealthiest families in the United States. Other members of the McCormick family expanded into media (Tribune Company, owner of the Chicago Tribune), finance (William & Blair Company, currently with 123 billion dollars of assets under management), and real estate (notably the McCormick House in Contigny Park).

After purchasing the home, Mr. McCormick had the firm Jordan and Paine remodel and build an addition onto Mizzentop. The construction lasted from October 1895 until June 1896. The front of house was enlarged, and the entrance and porch were enclosed to become part of the library. Rooms in the front of the house were octagonal in shape. The dining room was oak with paneling on the side walls. The first-floor parlor was enlarged and trimmed in red birch. A new stairway was constructed leading to the second floor with natural lighting offered by a French window. Blasting work into the hill allowed the basement area to be expanded and then new hardwood floors were installed in the basement area.

Mrs. McCormick's room was on the second floor in addition to three other bedrooms. Two bathrooms and a linen closet completed the second-floor accommodations. All rooms on this floor had hard pine flooring.

The third floor consisted of six bedrooms and one bathroom. All these rooms were finished in North Carolina pine. The front octagon shaped rooms had high ceilings and were raised 14 inches from the other rooms.

On the fourth and highest floor were three bedrooms and a trunk room, which were all finished in pine.

The house was filled with every modern convenience available at the time. Leighton Davenport and company installed hot water from basement to attic. Every room and closet had electric lighting. Other electrical work included the installation of bells and burglar alarms. Speaking tubes facilitated communications between rooms.

The mason for the construction was Mr. Wescott. W.P. Blanchfield graded the grounds. The stables were enlarged to accommodate seven horses.

Alterations on the house and stables were as costly as the original construction with a final cost at \$10,000.

Mr. McCormick purchased additional property on Central Avenue in 1916 to allow room for a large garden to supply Mizzentop with fresh fruits and vegetables. He also purchased a number of cows and a cream separator for fresh dairy products.

In 1909, Shea brothers built a granite pergola. The architect was Hilton Stratton. The stone construction serving garden was made of 300 tons of granite. All faces were cut stone. The columns of the pergola were granite, and the floor was tile.

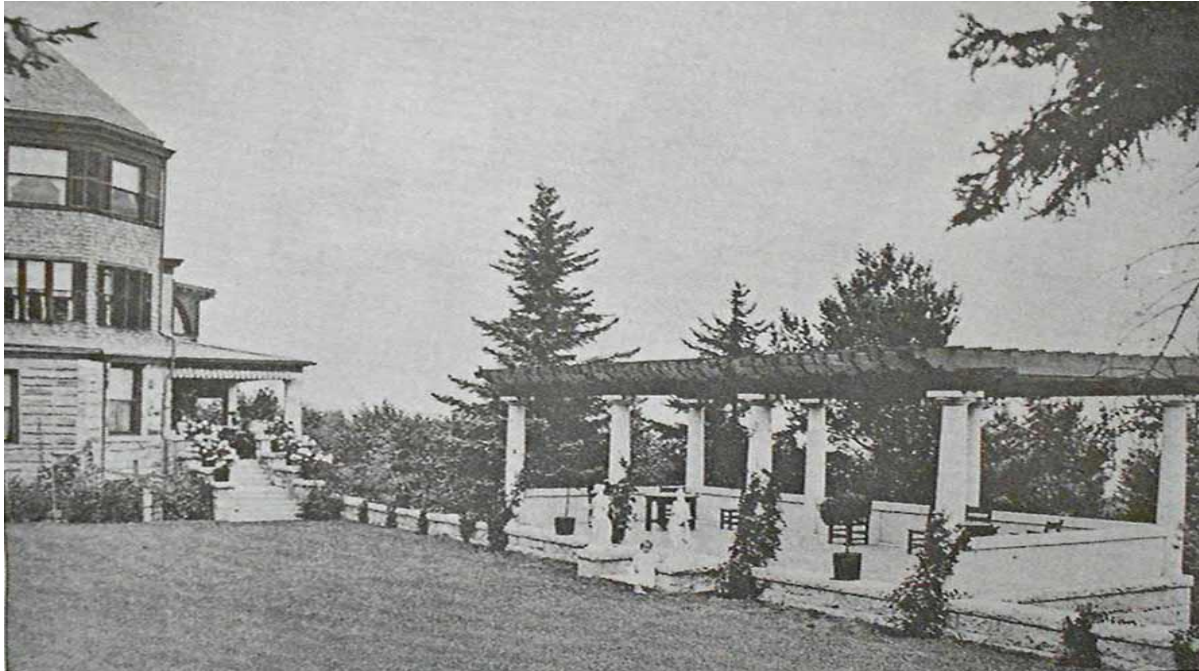


Figure 2 The granite pergola and side of Mizzentop

At the same time, A.E. Lawrence began construction on a servant's quarters with laundry designed by Stratton.

The Mizzentop passed from the hands of Mr. McCormick to his daughter Sarah Hall McCormick. She then sold it to Mr. Henry Morgenthau Sr. of New York on December 26th, 1925. His wife and four children greatly enjoyed the palatial estate. Mr. Morgenthau, ultimately destined to become United States Ambassador to Turkey and Secretary of the Treasury under Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, was in those years advancing his political career. Mr. Morgenthau and his wife, Elinor, were close friends of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

Mizzentop was considered to be one of the grandest homes in Bar Harbor. It was a fitting place for a family of such national prominence.

The next major change for the structure was an unfortunate one. On October 17th, 1947, after a very dry summer, a large fire began on Mount Desert Island in a cranberry bog next to a dump on the Crooked Road. No one knows the exact cause of the fire. Some speculate the fire started when bog or dump workers dropped a lit cigarette or when the sun hit a piece of glass, which then acted as a magnifying glass intensifying the sun. In the following days, wind fanned the flames and the fire spread across most of the eastern side of the island. At one point all roads leaving the island were blocked by the flames. Fishermen from the mainland fishing villages of Winter Harbor, Gouldsboro, and Lamoine used their fishing boats to rescue over 400 people. Eventually, bulldozers were able to clear a path for cars to escape. A caravan of 700 cars carrying over 2,000 people made it safely off the Island to Ellsworth. According to eyewitnesses, the drive was quite terrifying with sparks hitting the cars and flames burning overhead.

All in all, the Great Fire of 1947 (as it came to be known) burned 17,188 acres of land on the island, including 10,000 acres in Acadia National Park. The fire destroyed 5 grand historic inns and almost all the cottages along Millionaire's Row in Bar Harbor, including Mizzentop.

One building that did survive the fire is the Farm House, whose owner, Mildred McCormick, was a relative of Robert Hall McCormick, former owner of Mizzentop. This house is located on the other side of Highbrook Road right across from our Livingston House building on the Wonder View Inn side of our property. Descendants of Mildred McCormick still live in the house and frequently have their guests stay at the Bluenose Inn and Wonder View Inn.

The Farm House is famous for its landscape architecture done by Beatrix Farrand, one of the most famous landscape architects in America from the early 1900's. Beatrix was one of the founding members, and the only woman, of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Her work can be seen in private homes, public parks, and even at the White House and on the campuses of Princeton, Yale, and Occidental.



Figure 3 Recent picture of part of the gardens designed by Beatrix Farrand at the Farm House.

Mr. James MacLeod purchased the ruins of the once magnificent Mizzentop in 1952 and constructed the Bluenose Hotel. In 1976, the ownership was transferred to William Lacy and Gordan Berg.

In late 1980, Ed and Judy Hemmingsen purchased the property. They made significant changes and upgrades to the property. A new guest building, the Stenna Nordica, was added to the property affording deluxe motel style accommodations in addition to the stately Mizzentop.

Unfortunately, another fire claimed the Mizzentop in 1994. The reconstruction caught the attention of residents and visitors alike as the worksite was cocooned in a white bubble to allow work to continue over the winter.

In 2004, the property was acquired by Lafayette Hotels. Lafayette Hotels is a Bangor, Maine based family-owned hotel company with over 2 dozen hotels in Maine and New Hampshire.

Lafayette Hotels is committed to extraordinary customer service and will do everything possible to ensure your satisfaction during your stay. In addition, the renovations and upgrades will continue to ensure the hotel will meet your expectations now and in the future.