

## Cranwell...Steeped in History



As you stroll about the grounds of Cranwell, you are walking through history. Over the years, Cranwell has served as a home to wealthy industrialists, clergy, writers, students, golfers, and culture lovers. The centerpiece of the property, with its extraordinary views of the Berkshires, is the hilltop Tudor-style Mansion, which has dominated the countryside for more than a century. The history of Cranwell is entwined with many stories of the opulent period between 1880 and 1920 that is known as the Gilded Age. Cranwell was constructed then, and the era's vision of rural splendor is the source of the exceptional beauty we still revel in today.

In 1853, the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher purchased Blossom Hill, where the Cranwell Mansion now stands, for \$4,500. He loved the views from the top of the hillside. These are the views that can be seen today when you sit on the Rose Terrace at dusk and are reminded of the legendary parties that took place on this same hillside some 100 years ago.

The Reverend Beecher had presidential aspirations, which were ended by numerous romantic affairs. It was left for his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe to claim fame through her anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

General John F. Rathbone purchased the property from Beecher in 1869 and began construction by moving Beecher's farmhouse to the side of the hill so the new home would have the commanding view of the countryside. The home he built, Wyndhurst, was enormous by any standards of the day and it was set on the vast acreage of the property, which today numbers 380. The irony of this is that these palatial homes were called "cottages."



At the same time, on the backside of the hill, another family was building yet another "cottage." United States Naval Captain John S. Barnes, Flag Officer of the North Atlantic Fleet during the Civil War, purchased the land for \$10,000 in 1882 and erected Coldbrooke, now known as Beecher's Cottage and part of the Cranwell property.

John Sloane, a relative of the Vanderbilts and co-owner of the famous furniture firm, W & J Sloane, became the next owner of the property when he built his "cottage" in 1894. After tearing down Rathbone's Wyndhurst and Beecher's farmhouse, Sloane constructed another Wyndhurst, which rivaled the enormity and elegance of the first. He also commissioned Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect who created New York's Central Park, to design the grounds. It is this new Wyndhurst that stands on the hill today.

After a brief stint as the Berkshire Hunt and Country Club in the 1930's, Edward Cranwell deeded the estate to the Society of Jesus of New England, to be turned into a private school for boys named after the generous benefactor. After prospering for many years, the school slipped into decline, closing its doors in 1975.

Today Cranwell, with much of its original grandeur restored, thrives as a premier four-season resort. The resort offers 105 deluxe rooms situated in five buildings: the Carriage House, Founder's Cottage, Olmsted Manor, Beecher's Cottage (formerly Coldbrooke), and the Mansion (formerly Wyndhurst). The Spa at Cranwell, the Northeast's largest and most comprehensive resort spa opened in March, 2002. Golf Digest Golf School's staff of PGA pros offers professional instruction on a state-of-the-art training facility encompassing 60 acres. Cranwell's 18-hole championship golf course is the original designed by Stiles and Van Cleek. In the winter, snow turns the course into a cross-country skier's paradise. Exquisite cuisine is served in Wyndhurst and the Music Room, while casual fare can be found in Sloane's Tavern year round. Each year, even as companies from around the world gather here to meet, Cranwell plays host to storybook weddings of all proportions. Hosting thousands of guests annually, Cranwell indulges them in every contemporary comfort while offering them the experience of a luxurious bygone era. It is a hotel and resort that is unique to the Northeast.