



# Living History: The Biltmore House

## The Owners

William A.V. Cecil, Senior and his son, Bill Jr., **managed / have managed** the estate since 1976, when Mr. Cecil's mother **died / has died**.

His family **owned / has owned** the estate for over 115 years. Biltmore House **was / has been** passed down the Vanderbilt family for three generations. And the next generations, Mr. Cecil's son, daughter and grandchildren, are involved in the running of Biltmore House.

Mr. Cecil **left / has left** a job in banking to manage the estate with his brother in 1960. He **worked / has worked** hard to keep the estate financially independent by introducing new ways to make money and remain self-sufficient.

## The Largest Private Estate in the U.S.

Biltmore House is situated in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina. It is the largest privately owned house in the US. It has 255 rooms (with 65 fireplaces and 43 bathrooms) and is set on over 8,000 acres of land. Approximately 1,700 people work on the estate. The art collection includes paintings by Renoir and Sargent as well as many works by Tiffany. The whole estate is worth about \$2.5 billion.

It costs approximately \$126 million a year to run Biltmore House, so it **was / has been** open to the paying public since 1930, and now more than one million people visit each year. There are often flower shows, horseback riding events, and gardening seminars on the grounds.

The House also earns money from the movie and TV industry. It **was / has been** used in the 1992 movie *Last of the Mohicans* with Daniel Day Lewis as well as in the 1998 movie *Patch Adams* starring Robin Williams. In addition, it **was / has been** featured in the TV series *One Tree Hill*.

## A Working Estate

Many American estates **were / have been** built during the late 19th century by wealthy families. George Washington Vanderbilt, the original owner, **hired / has hired** architect Richard Morris Hunt to design the estate to reflect a

working French estate. In addition to the house, chicken, cow, and pig farms **were / have been** set up. A furniture-making business **was / has been** added as well. The idea was to make Biltmore House a self-supporting estate.

Over the years Biltmore House **evolved / has evolved** with the times. The opening of the estate to the public in the 1930s was to increase local tourism. During World War II, Biltmore House **stored / has stored** paintings for the National Gallery of Art to keep them safe. In the 1970s and 1980s the family **started / has started** a winery. And in the 21st century, the construction of an inn, luxury shops and restaurants help keep Biltmore House financially successful without the help of any government money.

**When you finish reading, discuss with your group/partner:**

1. Would you like to visit the Biltmore House? Why/why not?
2. Are there any famous houses in Morocco?
3. Who owns them?
4. Are they open to the public?
5. Have you visited any of them?