

# Estate Co-Owner Calls Ad Campaign The Hard Soft Sell

By NAT OSBORNE  
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It all began on Friday, July 29, 1966.

That was the day the first advertisement featuring Alice and the Mountain Queen and selling Biltmore House and Gardens to the touring public, appeared in newspapers in North and South Carolina and Georgia.

"The ads did quite well. We are pleased with the results and had a lot of fun turning them out," said William A. V. Cecil, who with his brother,

George H. V. Cecil, own and manage Biltmore House and Gardens and Biltmore Dairies and Dairy Farms.

George Cecil manages the vast dairy operation. William Cecil manages Biltmore House and Gardens and is the originator of the Mountain Queen ads. He is also chief copy writer.

Probably no one is better qualified to sell Biltmore House and Gardens. George W. Vanderbilt, who built the mansion, was Cecil's grandfather. Both brothers

were born in Asheville and spent their early childhood on the estate, before the family moved to Europe.

William Cecil returned to the United States in 1949 and entered Harvard University. He was graduated there in 1952.

He started his business career with Chase Manhattan Bank as an officer in the International Department and later was in charge of the bank's Washington office.

In 1959 he returned to Asheville and took over the management of Biltmore House and Gardens, building the estate into one of America's outstanding tourist attractions.

A tall, restless man, Cecil uses his banking experience and his business ability in running the Biltmore operation. He probably averages an idea a minute, some he quickly discards, others he checks out on a small calculating machine on his desk.

If that plan shows, in black and white, a promise of profit he pushes it with enthusiastic aggressiveness. If it doesn't work, he drops the idea and forgets it. He doesn't waste time worrying about the flops. Nor does Cecil ride a good horse to death.

"The Mountain Queen ads have served their purpose," he said last week. "We are going to put Alice away forever."

"But I am working on a new advertising plan now that will reach more people, with a better presentation of Biltmore House and Gardens than ever before," he quickly adds.

The new campaign will

begin this spring. All Cecil will say about it is that it will be colorful, inviting and in a new format.

Working with Cecil on the ads are William M. Guillet of Guillet Associates of Asheville, and Bert Shipman, staff photographer for the Citizen-Times.

Between them they have sold a lot of admissions to Biltmore House. Cecil said admissions were up 25 per cent in 1966 and 13.75 per cent in

1967. Last year's tourist season was dominated by cool and rainy weather.

Cecil describes the Mountain Queen series as a "soft hard sell campaign."

"We were selling a national shrine," Cecil said, "not something one could wrap up and tie a string around and carry home."

"We wanted plenty of good art; short, inviting copy all in a new and different type layout," he explained.

"Since we were in the mountains, the Mountain Queen was a logical character."

"Alice more or less evolved in the straight role. There was no intended similarity between our Alice and Lewis Carroll's," Cecil said.

At first glance the ad doesn't hit the reader like being slapped with a sockful of soap. However, it does reach out and grab for attention.

A full eight columns, always on the first page of a section, the art is overwhelming; the copy short, in large type, easily and quickly read.

It consists of dialogue between Alice and the Mountain Queen. Alice makes a statement about the season, the wonders of the mansion, or what is happening on the estate.

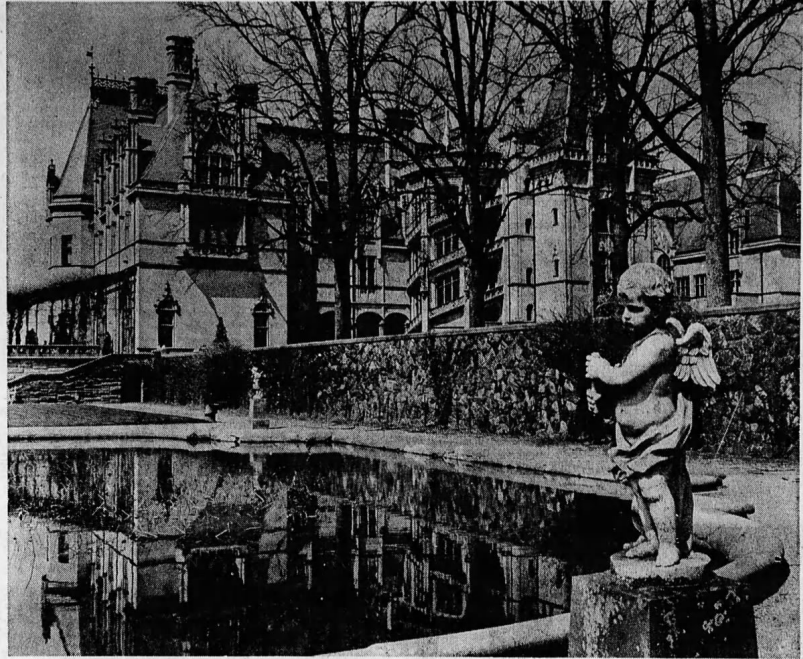
The Mountain Queen delivers the kicker; a sharp, cutting reply.

That's it: the soft hard sell. It sold admissions to Biltmore House and Gardens, quite a few of them. It is hard to argue with success.

And the Cecil brothers are sole owners of a very successful enterprise.

The formula for success is usually part idea and part hard work with just a dash of luck and a good advertising campaign. William Cecil has followed the formula.

SUN, JAN. 21, 1968



... bring thousands annually to Biltmore House and Gardens.



WILLIAM A. V. CECIL, his ideas