



TRAVEL + LEISURE

Top 50 Best Hotel in the World
Top 3 Inn & Small Hotel in USA

CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER

Top 100 Hotel in the World
Top 15 Hotel in USA

Reflecting the influence of both Second Empire and Colonial Revival architectural styles, The Willcox was established in the last years of the 19th century by Frederick Sugden Willcox. It assumed its present form in 1928 when the last of several additions was made to the hostelry.

Frederick Willcox came to America in 1891 from Cheshire, England, with his Swedish wife Elise. He made his way to Aiken to be a cater for the Old Highland Park Hotel, where he soon formed lasting friendships with social leaders from the East Coast, among them Mrs. [Thomas Hitchcock](#), who visited Aiken each winter. After fire destroyed the Highland Park Hotel in 1898, Willcox opened a small hotel of his own with encouragement from influential friends. The Willcox Inn welcomed its first guests in 1900.

An increasing demand for accommodations led Willcox to add to the hotel in 1906, when an adjacent two-story house at Colleton Avenue and Newberry Street became part of the hotel. In 1928, further expansion was undertaken, including alterations in the west wing. The Willcox Inn was said to have had the first bathtub in the South connected with hidden plumbing.

It was reported that at the height of the winter season the bellman would shake his head “no” as he escorted a would-be-guest to the registration desk. Owner Frederick Willcox knew that was his signal to tell the caller there was no room at the inn. One day Willcox asked the bellman, “How the devil do you know whether I should register a guest or not?” To which the employee replied, “His shoes, Mr. Willcox. If they don’t wear shoes by Peel or Maxwell of London, we don’t want ’em.”

In those days, Aiken was known as the Newport of the South, the Queen of the Winter Colonies. The ideal of the Winter Colony was to play three sports a day: [polo](#) in the morning, golf in the afternoon and a hunt after dark, when riding was at its most hazardous. Both the men and the women, having inherited extraordinarily large fortunes from their ancestors, amused themselves with daring pastimes that were just as challenging as labor. Too rich to work, but too active and restless to sit still, they developed in Aiken a hectic style of leisure that became a lifestyle for the privileged.

The far-reaching reputation of The Willcox was built on its atmosphere, impeccable service and excellent cuisine. It became “the hostelry” for national and international political, business, and social leaders and their families. Many guests returned year after year, and during the winter social seasons of the 1920s and 1930s, The Willcox was the setting for lavish entertainment. Famous guests included Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Harold Vanderbilt, W.R. Grace, Gov. Averell Harriman of New York, Elizabeth Arden, and Count Folke Bernadotte of Sweden. During a crowded Masters Week, the hotel was regrettably forced to turn down a request for accommodations from the Duke of Windsor.

As grand and graceful as ever, The Willcox continues to draw people from all over the world to enjoy superb personal service, gracious accommodations, excellent cuisine and their individual interpretation of the “Aiken lifestyle.” This treasured piece of Aiken’s history is the living room of the community and a warm and comfortable second home to out-of-town guests.

