



Large main building of the Claremont was built in 1884. Some families have been coming here for generations. At bottom is view of Southwest Harbor from the veranda.

(Photos by Helga Lovers)

CLAREMONT HOTEL IN MAINE

At inn overlooking the sea,
tradition has a capital T

Southwest Harbor, Me.

It was searingly hot when I arrived at the Claremont Hotel, a venerable hostelry overlooking Southwest Harbor, Me. Although it was late afternoon and the hotel was right by the ocean, it was still around 28 C. Carrying my bags inside, I fantasized about having a dip in the sea or at the very least, sitting by the shore with a cool drink in my hand.

When I checked in at the reception desk, I thought I must be seeing things. A fire was roaring in the grate.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "A fire? On a day like this?"

The check-in clerk looked at me without a hint of a smile.

"Madam," he replied severely, "lighting a fire at the end of the day is a Claremont tradition. A fire welcomes newcomers and gives cheer to the guests."

Firmly put in my place, I meekly followed into a creaky, old-fashioned elevator. With a faint bow, he lifted up my luggage. Tradition, I was quick to learn, was not something to treat lightly at this old, but charming, resort.

Built in 1884, the Claremont is

MATURE TRAVELLER



BY HELGA LOVERSEED

something of an anachronism. The hotel comprises a large, primrose-coloured clapboard building with a wide veranda, several smaller buildings and two hectares of manicured land, sloping down to the sea. The setting is simple but the view is spectacular. No attempt has been made to gussy up the hotel, or turn it into a glitzy, four-season resort. (The Claremont closes during the winter.) Its recreational facilities include a clay tennis court, badminton, bicy-

cles, a croquet lawn and a couple of rowboats — hardly the sort of attractions to stir young blood.

The pace is gentle, the clientele, genteel. The preppy-looking guests (they could be models for a Ralph Lauren advertisement) tend to be elderly, but during the time that I was there, several were travelling with their children and grandchildren.

The Claremont may not be the kind of place for a wild weekend, but it's a wonderful place for enjoying other people's company and for forging permanent relationships. Several of the families that we chatted with had been coming for many generations — another Claremont tradition.

What makes the Claremont so different from other hotels of a similar vintage, is that it still has the air of a resort from the 1950s. The decor is discreet and subdued. The rooms and public areas are furnished in a style similar to an English country home, with antique furniture, chintz upholstery and shelves groaning with books and magazines.

Dinner was a formal affair. Jackets and ties were the order of the day (we even spotted a few tuxedos) and although we were lucky enough to get a table by the window — the hotel overlooks the entrance to fiord-like Somes Sound and the view is spectacular — the long-established guests tend to get seating priority. (At breakfast one morning, a guest who has been coming here for 43 years, grudgingly gave up her table so that a family could sit by the window.)

The food was a pleasant surprise. Because of the traditional nature of the hotel, we had expected an old-fashioned menu of hearty steaks, roast chicken and the like. Instead, we were served with garlic-flavoured steamed mussels, followed by broiled haddock cooked in a white wine sauce with vegetables served *al dente*. Dessert was a delicious *crème brûlée*.

Our days passed slowly and pleasantly. One morning, we took a ride on the mailboat that chugs around the neighbouring islands. Another afternoon, we drove around Acadia National Park, then on to Bar Harbor to stroll around its boutiques and galleries, which are housed in old, renovated buildings.

However, my favourite activity was drinking in the view from the veranda of the Claremont. Seated in a rocking chair, I let my eyes drift aimlessly over the ocean, soothed by the sound of seagulls' cries and the thwack of wooden croquet mallets.

Double rooms at The Claremont range from \$80-\$165 (U.S.) (high season rates are slightly higher). For information, write to The Claremont Hotel, P.O. Box 137-Southwest Harbor, Maine, 04679; telephone (207) 244-5036.

