



# SANTA BARBARA

YACHT CLUB

## **Francis T. Underhill, 1908, 1910**

1863-1929

An exceptional Renaissance man (businessman, rancher, writer, architect, yachtsman), Francis Underhill was a significant figure in Santa Barbara history. Arriving in 1884, he raised prize-winning cattle (both Holsteins and Herefords) and thoroughbred swine on the various ranches he owned: the Ontare Ranch in Santa Barbara, El Roblar Ranch in Los Alamos, and the Los Alisos Ranch on Sheffield (Ortega Hill Ranch). A member of New York's "Four Hundred," Gotham's original society circle, Underhill also wrote books on horse breeding and yacht racing. He belonged to four yacht clubs in the east and was proud owner of two America's Cup defenders, the Mischief, and the Mayflower (he was a descendent of Captain John Underhill who helped finance the original Mayflower). During his year as commodore, Underhill had the privilege of hosting Navy officials when the Great White Fleet arrived in Santa Barbara. He also oversaw the very successful 1908 regatta.

1910: This was Underhill's second term as commodore, and about this time, he began his career designing homes. Best known locally for his architectural genius, Underhill was a remarkable natural talent. He was a self-taught draftsman who designed the first local Craftsman-style bungalow, "La Chiquita", around 1906. It was built near the present Biltmore Hotel for his second wife, Carmelita Dibblee. Many Montecito men who were impressed with Underhill's architectural abilities and had him draw up plans for their mansions. So, Underhill began designing estates for George Owen Knapp (Arcady), C.K. Billings, Frederick Forrest Peabody (Solano), Edward Ditmars Wetmore (Senuelo Montecito), and Joseph Coleman (The Gables). He also designed the Dibblee House on Los Olivos across from the Mission for his mother-in-law. Underhill was adept in a number of styles including Spanish, Craftsman, and English. Amazingly, although he was untrained in the field, Underhill is counted among Santa Barbara's distinguished architects, joining George Washington Smith, Bertram Goodhue, and Windsor Soule.