



History

The Vallombrosa Center in Menlo Park is located on a 10-acre site that was originally the home of Edward W. Hopkins, nephew of the noted Mark Hopkins. The Hopkins home, built during the Civil War period, remains an important part of the Center. At first a simple wooden structure, it was later expanded and the Italianate touches that characterize it were added at that time.

The 10 acres on which Vallombrosa is situated are graced by trees from all over the world. The ginkgo tree of Chinese origin, located in front of the “Old Mansion,” is the largest of its kind in the area and a rare female of the species. The elm trees on the property are among the oldest and tallest on the West Coast. These many different trees, and the interplay of the sun and shadow which they provide, undoubtedly influenced Mr. Hopkins in choosing the name of his estate.

“Vallombrosa” means “Shady Glen” and is named after a beautiful forested area southeast of Florence, Italy. In 1095 St. John Gualbert established a monastery of Benedictine monks which survives to this day. At one point in his life John Milton visited that monastery, and referred to the “shady glens of Vallombrosa” in his Paradise Lost.

The Vallombrosa property was purchased by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1947 to serve as a retreat house for women. Over the years its purpose has expanded, and while still serving as a retreat house, the Center also sponsors and hosts a broad variety of seminars and programs of a spiritual and educational nature. The present facility, with its welcoming accommodations and chapel, was completed in 1964. The special character of the buildings reflects the spiritual sensitivity of the late architect Shigenon Lyama.

Vallombrosa continues to fulfill its mission through its beautiful grounds, peaceful atmosphere and friendly, helpful staff. It is a particularly appropriate location for groups seeking a quiet and serene setting for meetings.