

5821 Elwood Street
Pittsburgh PA 15232
19 January 1987

Dear SPACES:

I very much enjoyed Mr. Rosen's talk, "Environmental Folk Art and the American Landscape", at the Cincinnati symposium, and was happy to learn about SPACES. I enclose a check to begin my membership.

I still have in mind my promise to send along impressions of Mrs. Pope's Georgia site, and shall do that as soon as I can.

A note on another location, Chateau Laroche, Loveland, Ohio, which Rob and I visited on our way back from Cincinnati:

It was an appropriate day for castle-visiting. The rock-encrusted form from another century stood in the gray light of late afternoon, its texture highlighted by a fine drizzle. Tufts of mist floated across the dirt road from the nearby Little Miami River and nestled low on the stairway which led to the entry. At the top, we knocked at a large wooden door and a tall Dane with a deep voice invited us into a rectangular stone and concrete room made cheerful by a sparkling fireplace. An Oriental woman sat behind a desk which held a donation box and post cards, small plaster Chateaus (designed by the builder to sell to visitors), and other souvenirs. Across the room, a young couple sat in their coats at a table, playing chess.

According to a booklet authored by Harry D. Andrews (1890-1981), builder of Chateau Laroche, work was begun in 1929 on lots originally purchased by Andrews so that his "Sunday School Class of young men might have a place to camp, fish, swim and boat". Work progressed slowly, with a hiatus during the Depression and again during World War II, but after Andrews retired in 1955 and moved to the site, rooms were more rapidly added.

The booklet is full of statistics which reveal the zealotness of the builder (56,000 pails of stone carried from the river and nearby gorge, 2,600 sacks of cement used, etc.), and examples of his ingenuity (e.g., he placed tin cans into the forms to lighten the weight of the concrete bricks and to provide insulating air pockets in the walls).

His inspiration apparently came from a fascination with medieval history heightened by a stay in Europe after World War I, during which time he saw many castles. Attention to historical detail was given throughout, one notable example being the main door of the Castle, which "opens from the north side of the main room, and is very stoutly constructed. There is a low 'stoop door' cut into its center, through which, in olden times, as a safety measure, anyone entering had to stoop low, and enter with his 'neck out', giving the inside guard an opportunity to chop off a head in case the visitor proved to be an enemy.

"This door is composed of 238 pieces of wood in three layers. The various pieces have the grain running in all directions, to make it difficult, indeed, impossible, for anyone to cut through with a sword. In order to prevent anyone from chopping through with an ax, the doors are (and were) filled with many nails. This particular one contains 2530 nails."

Andrews never married (in his booklet he says "the Castle is his family and probably will be his monument"), but he enjoyed the company of many visitors who stopped to see his work (by his estimation, 30,000 a year) and of the members of the Knights of the Golden Trail, who serve as guides and work to complete a wing of the Castle according to Andrews' plans.

A foreword to Andrews' brochure says that the Castle was built as a reminder of the time when "Knighthood was in flower"...when knightly "zeal for honor, valor and manly purity...lifted mankind out of the moral midnight of the dark ages...". It continues, "Present human decadence proves a need for similar action. Already the ancient organization of Knights has been re-activated to save society. Any man of high ideals who wishes to help save civilization is invited to become a member of the Knights of the Golden Trail, whose only vows are the Ten Commandments. Chateau Laroche is the world headquarters of this organization, started in 1927."

We were told that children's groups hold camp-outs at the Castle, people come to picnic on the grounds during the summer, and at least one wedding has taken place there (the bride and groom, appropriately, members of the Society for Creative Anachronisms).

Clippings in my Ohio file refer to two other castles, neither of which appear to be owner-built:

Glamorgan, built 1905 by William H. Morgan; Alliance, Ohio; in Morgan family until 1939, now occupied by local school district; National Register of Historic Places.

Castle Piatt Mac-A-Cheek; West Liberty, Ohio; built by General Abram Saunders Piatt, 1864; guided tours; admission fee.

I continue to look for environmental sites in this area and shall let you know of them if I find any.

Best wishes,

Jo Preston
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