

Man Made Dream a Reality—One Brick at a Time

Story and photographs
by Michael A. Banks

The banks of the Little Miami River in Loveland, Ohio, is probably the last place one would expect to find a 10th-century Norman castle. However, that is exactly what people will find in the small Cincinnati suburb.

The castle is the work of the late Harry Andrews—newspaperman, scholar and castle builder for more than half of his 91 years. It was his dream to build a real castle, and until his death in 1981, he labored nearly every waking hour to make his dream a reality.

Andrews' dream has become a magnificent building, standing like a lone sentinel on a steep hillside above the Little Miami River. One can't see the modern world from the castle, and as one approaches the mammoth structure, it is easy to imagine the countryside of medieval France. There is the feeling that, at any moment, a lookout in the castle's tower might raise an alarm to summon the castle guard.

Instead of foot soldiers brandishing swords, the castle's genial architect and builder used to meet visitors. Andrews was a friendly, soft-spoken man who welcomed visitors—as many as 10,000 per year—to his castle, providing guided tours, answering questions and telling tales of knights in armor.

The time spent entertaining visitors may be one reason it took Andrews so long to build the three-story, 17-room structure. He began work on the castle, which he dubbed "Chateau Laroche," meaning Rock Castle, in the spring of 1929. He had originally intended to construct a small, three-sided shelter for a boys' camp. But, once started, the castle continued to grow. In 1955 it was large enough

for Andrews to move into.

Asked why he had dedicated his life to building the castle, Andrews invariably cited his study of medieval castles in France, along with his admiration for the romance of the life of knights as his inspiration.

"This castle was erected as an expression of the simple strength and rugged grandeur of the mighty men who lived when knighthood was in flower," he said.

Some tried to point out that Andrews' image of the medieval world was more like the fictional world of King Arthur and his knights than reality. Andrews, who referred to himself as the castle's Seneschal, would smile and tell another story.

Andrews lived alone in the castle until his death. Except for incidental help from visitors, all the work was his, including digging and hauling more than 3 million stones from the river bed and surrounding hillside. He also made countless bricks from concrete poured into milk carton molds.

Except for having electricity, running water and oil heat, Chateau Laroche is faithful in detail to the 10th-century Norman castles that inspired Andrews to build it. He was in France during World War I, and stayed in the country afterward to study medieval architecture.




Harry Andrews spent 52 years building a castle by hand in Loveland, Ohio.

the elements to be used to defend the castle. But they illustrated his stories well.

Even after 52 years of labor, Chateau Laroche remained under construction. Andrews always had plans for additions. The final wing, completed over a period of 10 years, houses stables and a huge chapel.

One may well wonder what the dream cost, aside from a half-century of labor and dedication. By any measure, it was quite reasonable. In 1979, Andrews estimated that he had spent a little over \$10,000, including the cost of the land, an acre and a half, which was purchased at 1929 prices. Not bad for a castle to call home.

Chateau Laroche is a permanent monument to those days of old when knights were bold. It is also a monument to a modern knight who labored to realize a dream.

Andrews left the building and property to the city of Loveland, to be used as a park. Campers and youth groups often use the grounds, and the castle hosts weddings and receptions each year. 

The many authentic features of the castle reflect Andrews' passion for detail. Each feature duplicates the purpose of the original. Its narrow windows, for example, were designed to allow bowmen to shoot at attackers without presenting a target themselves. A narrow, tightly winding staircase between the first and second floors could be defended by one man, if necessary, and a multilayered wooden door at the castle's main entrance has thousands of nails embedded in it to resist axe-wielding invaders.

Small fireplaces can be found behind the crenellated walls on the roof. Andrews used those as outdoor grills, but they originally were designed by French castle builders for the purpose of melting wax and lead to pour on attackers below.

Of course, Andrews didn't intend