

# Villa Kathrine

Gardner Expressway - Moorish - 1900 - George Behrensmeyer, architect

Despite the romantic light-opera fantasy generally told of the origin of the Villa Kathrine, the truth, while less poetic, is no less interesting. The one thing of which you may be perfectly sure is that only wisps of facts are known and that most of the truth about the Castle will never be known. No interior photos exist, as George Metz, the builder, was a very private man. Metz was a perennial world traveler with personal tastes for the finer things in life in whatever part of the world he happened to find himself.

One of the strongest tastes he developed during his travels was for Islamic architecture and Middle Eastern and Far Eastern artifacts, both of which he brought home to share with Quincy. Between extended trips, Metz contacted architect George Behrensmeyer and the two began the planning which was to result in the only castle on the Mississippi. The planning centered around a large castle with which Metz had fallen in love in North Africa situated high over the Nile River. Therefore the site Metz chose for his Castle fit his requirements more perfectly than any other Quincy or nearby location. Metz's sketches, descriptions, and research provided Behrensmeyer were enough to proceed to duplicate on a much smaller scale the Metz dream Castle. The accomplishments of Behrensmeyer are amplified by the fact that he did all the construction and atmosphere trimming with local materials. The foundation stone is local limestone, the brick locally made. The interior and the exterior grillwork and screening are of local dimension lumber and sheet metal. Heavy ornate cast iron porch railings and exterior panel inserts may or may not have been from local foundries, but speculation is that they were custom cast from molds made of photos from the African castle. A weakness in original specifications, however, called for use of a newly patented exterior plaster which does not hold to the brick and can be seen on an early photo scaled off the east side. None of the original finish flooring remains, none of the mantles, none of the original plumbing fixtures or lighting; but all this loss only adds to the mystique of Quincy's most unique structure.

Most of the exterior remains in recognizable original condition minus normal 80 years wear and tear--and occasional vandalism; but the drama of the Castle remains in its dogged stately countenance on the bluff after years of unplanned and planned neglect, real estate opportunists, near demolitions, some architectural eliticism which demanded its removal from the Quincy riverscape, and most pitiful of all--lack of interest either way.

Interested visitors can take heart in the efforts of a small number of Quincians, the "Friends of the Castle", which was begun by the Quincy Jaycee-ettes. Their first act was to gain recognition of the federal government by having the Castle included on the National Register of Historic Places. They have since stabilized the exterior and have been awarded a matching government grant for exterior restoration of the building. A fund drive for the local matching funds will be mounted within a short time.

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