

8/14/08

QUINCY PARK DISTRICT

Board backs landmark status for Villa Kathrine

By STEVE EIGHINGER

Herold-Whig Staff Writer

The Quincy Park District Board of Commissioners has endorsed a request to designate the Villa Kathrine as a local landmark.

The seven-person board unanimously approved an application Wednesday night from the Quincy Preservation Commission, which will now submit the same request to the City Council.

"The Villa Kathrine is a special part of Quincy's architectural heritage," said Mike Parks, executive director of the Park District.

The Villa Kathrine, 532 Gardner Expressway, is a 108-year-old structure that showcases Moorish/Islamic architecture. It is maintained by the Friends of the Castle, a nonprofit group that leases the building from the Park District for \$1 a year.

Along with being a tourist

attraction, the Villa also houses the Quincy Tourist Information Center and Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau. The QCVB moved into the Villa in May.

"The Villa Kathrine is a unique and beautiful structure in our city," said Janet Conover, chairman of the Preservation Commission.

"Because it is open to the public for tours on an almost daily basis, the Villa is not only a great value to those living in Quincy

but also provides the economic benefit of bringing tourists to our community."

The Villa Kathrine was built in 1900 for Quincy native and world traveler George Metz. According to the Villa's Web site, the facility was based on his sketches and photos of villas in various part of the Mediterranean.

The Villa has already received

See VILLA, Page 12A

VILLA: Friends group supports move

FROM PAGE 9A

federal and state landmark status. The facility has welcomed more than 100,000 visitors from all 50 states and 75 foreign countries and is used for a variety of local events.

Friends of the Castle, which recently raised \$75,000 for a new roof, supported the local landmark request. The group has worked hand-in-hand with the Park District for almost 30 years.

"The Park District and Friends of the Castle have a longstanding, cooperative relationship of working together to restore, preserve, maintain and operate the Villa Kathrine and surrounding grounds," said Paul Brown, vice president of the Friends of the Castle.

Being designated a local landmark means the property owner can repair or replace damaged or unserviceable items so long as the repair or replacement is consistent with the original item, according to Conover.

"This is important because most repairs are routine maintenance and do not require any kind of formal review or paperwork," Conover said. "We are always available to assist and provide guidance as needed."

In other action:

• Director of Program Services Mike Bruns said Wavering Aquatic Center will close Sunday for the season. Indian Mounds Pool will remain open through Labor Day, operating from 3 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and noon to 7 p.m. on weekends and Labor Day.

Bruns also said the Batting Cage area will assume fall hours beginning Monday. It will be open from 3:30 to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and noon to 9 p.m. Sundays.

4-30-98
P.4D

Villa Fever

Friends of the Castle celebrated the almost-finished Villa Kathrine project

By Jamie Busen

Herald-Whig Staff Writer

Trudy Rollins and Kathie Clark have "Villa Fever."

Rollins is president and Clark vice president of Friends of the Castle, a not-for-profit organization formed in 1986 to maintain, restore and operate the Villa Kathrine.

The once-crumbling villa on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River has since been the subject of a massive overhaul, and the end is finally in sight.

To celebrate, Friends of the Castle will conduct an open house at 7:30 tonight to show off the latest improvements.

"It will never really be completed," Rollins admitted. "It's a very high-maintenance place. There's still fine points to be looked at. It has water problems, so the paint will be always chipping off."

The group is in its final phases, which requires raising money to buy furnishings and establish an endowment fund for maintenance.

The most recent phase consisted of restoring a porch and replacing exterior woodwork and stucco. The villa is handicapped accessible, and a new heating system has been installed to make the structure more energy efficient.

Inside, the reflecting pool has been restored, light fixtures have been added, and plaster and paint was stripped and redone to restore the villa's original look.

The latest phase, started in 1996, cost about \$700,000. The Illinois Department of Transportation agreed to pay 80 percent of those costs, with Friends of the Castle financing the rest through fund raising.

"I've talked in the past with people and it

seems as if when they come in to the villa or are associated with it in some way they get that 'Villa Fever,'" Clark said. "It takes over and it's fun."

The Islamic-style building is one of Quincy's best-known landmarks.

It was built in 1900 by George Metz, an eccentric world traveler who patterned his villa after the Villa Ben Abben in northern Algeria. Metz lived in the mansion for a dozen years with his dog, Bingo, before selling it. The house gradually fell into disrepair.

The Quincy Park District bought the property in 1955 and did some rehabilitation. But the villa once again fell into disrepair.

Friends of the Castle then took on the challenge of restoring the building. The first phase of the restoration focused on stabilizing and renovating the building's exterior.

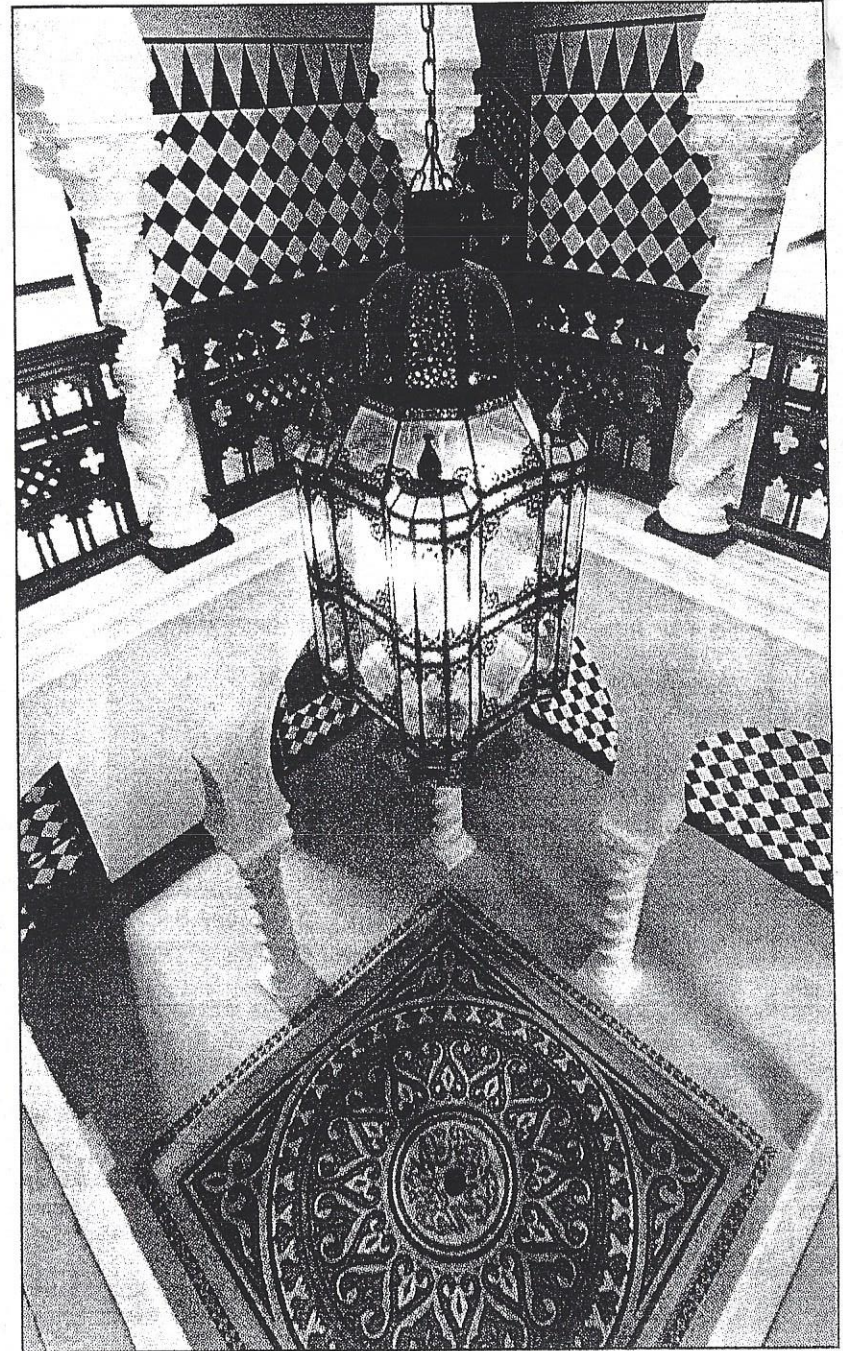
The second phase entailed a major overhaul of the interior. Eight rooms were painstakingly restored to look the way they did when Metz lived there. Decorative elements have been restored as close as possible to the way they originally looked.

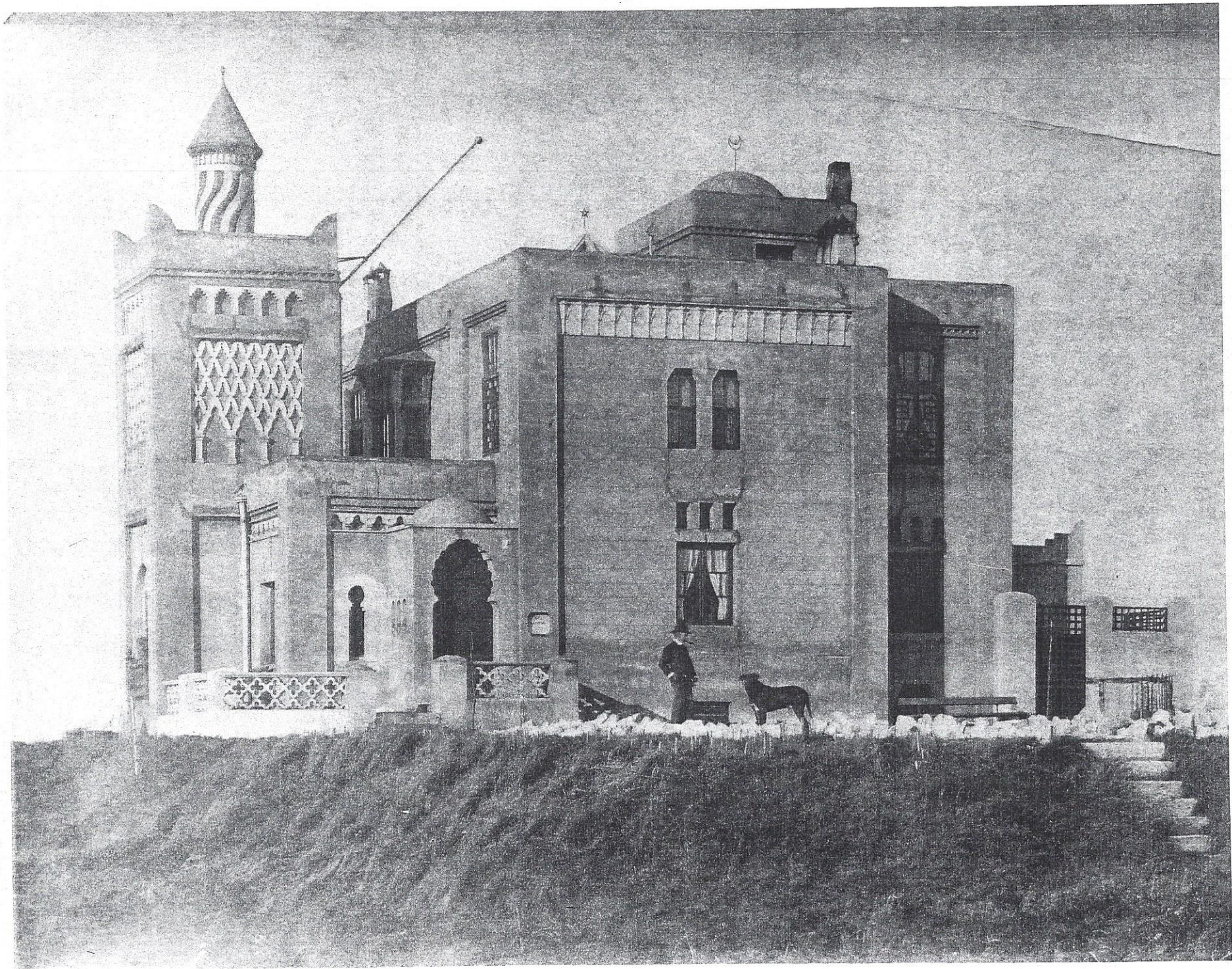
The next phase will include decorative painting and obtaining furniture that Metz owned. The goal is to one day furnish the entire castle.

The villa, located at 532 Gardner Expressway, has served as Quincy's tourist information center since 1987. It is part of the proposed Arts Corridor, a transition area between Quincy's riverfront and business core.

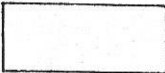
H-W Photo/Michael Kipley

At right, a view of the mosaic floor and reflecting pool in the courtyard inside the Villa Kathrine.





THE GARDNER MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN



HISTORIC PROPERTY INVENTORY

HISTORIC PROPERTY NAME
Villa Katherine

COMMON PROPERTY NAME

PROPERTY LOCATION — STREET & NO.
500 block - Gardner Expressway

CITY, TOWN/VICINITY OF ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO.
Quincy

TOWNSHIP COUNTY
Adams

PRESENT OWNER PHONE
Quincy Park District

STREET & NO./P.O. BOX

CITY, TOWN STATE ZIP

FORM PREPARED BY DATE
Bret Johnson 7/80

PHOTO BY DATE

VIEW NEG. NO.
Roll #4 17

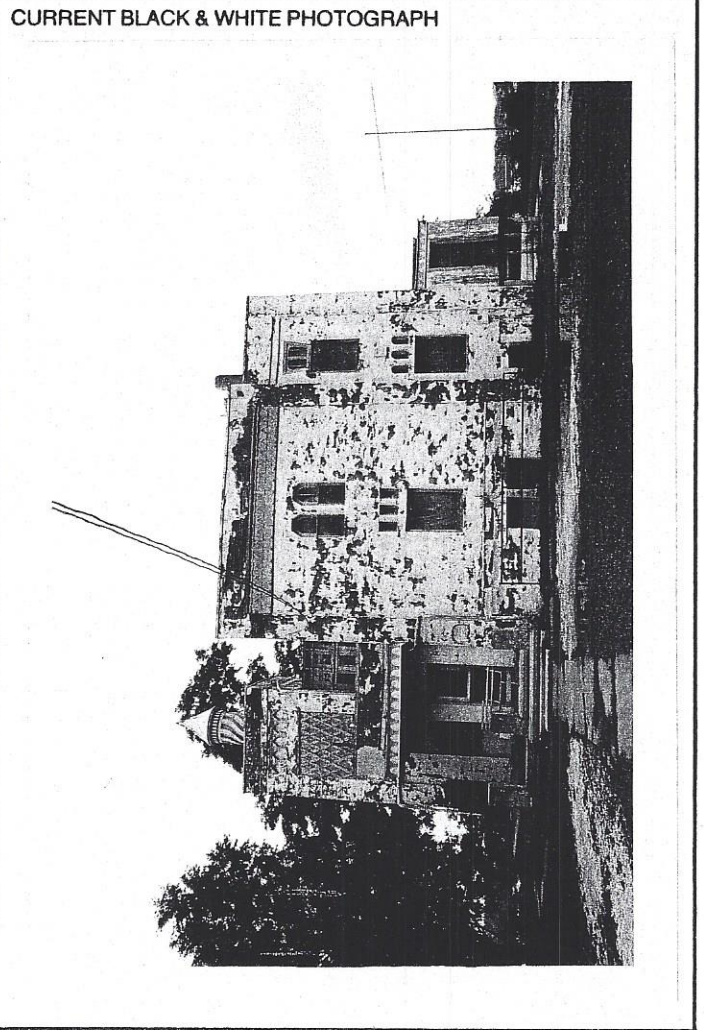
HISTORIC USE

PRESENT USE/OCCUPANT ACREAGE/SQ. FOOTAGE

ARCHITECT/BUILDER
George Behrens/meyer / Herman Schachtsiek

CONSTRUCTION/MODIFICATION DATES
1900

STYLE
Moorish



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE/HISTORY

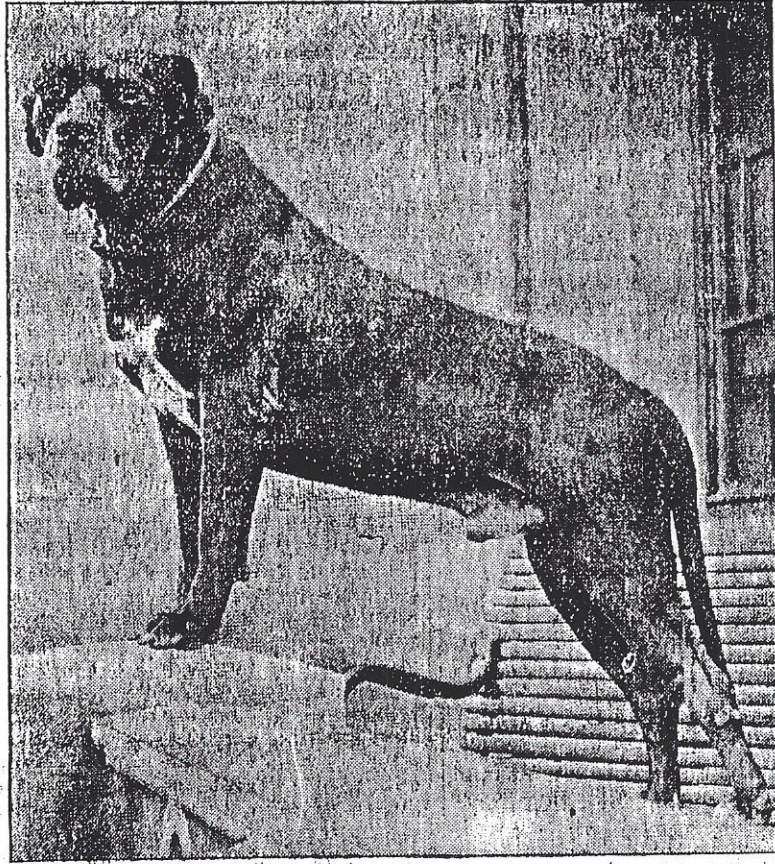
SOURCES OF ABOVE INFORMATION/BIBLIOGRAPHY

Herald-Whig 9/19/76

ADDRESS 500 Block Gardner Expressway

BINGO LAID TO REST WITH ROYAL HONORS

The Largest Dog in the World Buried on the Grounds of the Villa Kathrine Overlooking the Mighty Mississippi in Quincy.



BINGO, THE KING OF THE DANES.

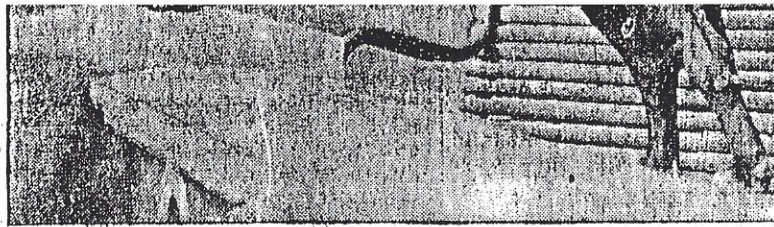
At eventide big and kindly Bingo was laid to rest. He was given a burial commensurate with the majesty of his pedigree and proportions. The body reposed in state in an especially built casket in the main salon of the beautiful white castle known as the Villa Kathrine, which stands like a shimmering sentinel on the lofty bluff guarding the Mississippi river.

The casket was four feet eight inches in length, eighteen inches deep and twenty-nine inches wide. In its upholstered depths rested the silent body of the most massive and perfectly proportioned dog in the world—the real king of the Great Danes.

The cemetery sexton, the undertaker and two other men served as pall-bearers and the services of all were needed, as the coffin with its

known to the dog fanciers of Europe than to many residing in the city. Chancellor Bismark had three splendid Great Danes in his lifetime, but those who knew them and knew Bingo pronounced the latter a far superior specimen than the ones in the kennel of the Iron prince.

Bingo was generally believed to be the most massive and magnificent canine in the world. He could be fattened and beefed up to 250 pounds, but the owner kept him in trained condition at something over 200. He was over six feet long from head to tail, and would have made the fortune of any Uncle Tom's Cabin company. Yet withal his owner would never exhibit or breed him and Bingo dies without known heirs. Had he been exhibited at the various bench shows he might have had enough blue ribbons to make him



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The cemetery sexton, the undertaker and two other men served as pall-bearers and the services of all were needed, as the coffin with its finite contents weighed considerably over 300 pounds.

On the highest point of the bluff the sexton had dug a grave and there with flowers upon the casket, mighty Bingo was laid to rest. It was the sleep that knows no waking, for the theologians, who have charted the white man's heaven, have left no porthole to the walls to admit man's best friend—his dog.

Nor was it necessary to hire mourners at the burial of Bingo. One indeed there was sincere and in tears. This was the kindly master, George Metz, from whose sight Bingo had never been absent for more than an hour at any time during his seven years of residence in Quincy.

Bingo was more famous abroad than at home, and he was better

known to the dog fanciers of Europe than to many residing in the city. Chancellor Bismark had three splendid Great Danes in his lifetime, but those who knew them and knew Bingo pronounced the latter a far superior specimen than the ones in the kennel of the iron prince.

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But Bingo, who was born in Denmark, is now dead. After an illness of a month with pleurisy he succumbed. He was quiet, sedate, kindly and harmless. He looked like the avenging nemesis, but he was as peaceful as a kitten.

Quincy Quiz

By Carl Landrum

We have been asked several times how long George Metz, the builder of the Villa Kathrine, Quincy's Moorish castle, lived in the structure. Metz was born in Quincy on May 20, 1849, the son of William and Kathrine Metz, who were in the drug store business. Metz traveled all over the world. After his parents died he lived at the Hotel Newcomb until he erected the castle in 1900. He lived there for 12 years and then returned to the Hotel Newcomb. He died in St. Vincent Home on June 12, 1937.

The castle, the only one of its kind on the Mississippi River, was built upon Metz's return from Morocco in 1900 and its design followed the old Moorish custom. Being a type of recluse by nature, Metz did not discuss his plans or give the reasons for the structure. There have been two theories: One that the castle was built to be occupied by his sweetheart; the other that it was named for his mother, Kathrine Metz.

The castle was modeled after the Villa Ben Ahben and was the only one of its type in the United States. George Behrensmeyer was the architect and Herman Schatsieck was foreman of the construction crew. Schatsieck, whose carpenter shop was at 14th and Ohio, was probably the contractor-builder.

In 1913 Metz talked with reporters of the St. Louis Republic and visited the castle he had left in 1912. Carefully avoiding any reference to a long forgotten romance, he told of the years of searching for the type of home he had dreamed about and longed for from childhood and that he found every detail in the century-old villa.

Metz said he wandered about for two years attempting to complete

his collection of furnishings and art objects. With sufficient plans, sketches and a large amount of furnishings for the villa, he returned to America. Then he began to organize his hundreds of notes and sketches into definite drawings for the contractor. More than a year was lost in conference with the architect, Behrensmeyer.

Metz told the St. Louis newspapermen that when completed the castle's many eastern terraces and lawns were blanketed with varicolored flowers and many, many roses and the drives lined with sycamore trees, making the Villa Kathrine a picture of grandeur. A replica of the famous Mosque of Tunis surmounted the main tower.

About the court in the center of the castle were cloistered rooms, which in the original villa were occupied by members of the harem. There was no harem in the Quincy castle. Metz lived alone with his big dog, Bingo.

While traveling in Denmark years earlier, Metz had bought the dog, said to be the largest great Dane in the world. He was Metz's constant companion, at his side all day and sleeping on a Turkish rug in his bedroom at night. When the dog died there was an elaborate funeral and the dog was buried in one of the rose gardens. It was said that the loss of the dog greatly affected Metz.

When Metz reached his 59th year, he sold the villa to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad for switchyard space, moving to the Hotel Newcomb and leaving his treasures behind him. The railroad's plans did not develop and for a time the castle was used as a rooming house. It was obtained by the Quincy Park District in 1955.

On the Cover

VILLA KATHRINE

By Jean & Don Schweda

After many years of neglect and decline, the only Islamic villa along the Mississippi River seems to have been given a new lease on life.

But in order to have some awareness of this structure's history and to have some understanding of the frustrations, the complications, and also the satisfactions involved in this "second chance," one has to talk with Robert Christie, a prominent local interior design consultant who is the Director of Restoration at the Villa and President of "Friends of the Villa."

Christie likes to begin the story by telling about the Villa's origins and about George Metz, who built the Villa in 1900. He was the son of William and Catherine Metz; his father, an immigrant from Germany, became very wealthy in the furniture and drug business. Both parents died when George was young and left him with an immense estate.

George apparently had no interest in or need for a regular job, but instead began travelling around the world. He appears to have been particularly intrigued with North Africa, and while there, he was especially attracted to the architecture of the Mediterranean.

Metz decided he would have an exact duplicate of an Islamic residence built on land he owned along the Mississippi River; therefore, he made detailed sketches, notes and drawings of North African villas and spent a great deal of time collecting authentic furnishings, antiques and other artifacts with which he could fill his Quincy villa.

Upon his arrival back home, Metz convinced local architect George Behrensmeyer to undertake his project; within a year, and at a cost estimated to be about \$7,000.00, Metz' unusual new home was completed.

"There have been various stories told as to whether Metz built this villa and named it for a woman he loved and lost or whether he was honoring his mother's memory," Christie said. "Whatever the truth might have been, we do know that Metz lived in 'splendid isolation' in his sumptuous villa with only his 200-pound Great Dane dog, Bingo, for companionship for the next 12 years."

Then in 1912, Metz was approached by a stranger who begged him to sell the villa. At first he resisted, but at the persistence of relatives, Metz finally agreed. So at age 59, he left Villa Kathrine and all its Moorish treasures and moved to a room at the Newcomb Hotel where he lived until his death in 1937.

It was not until after the sale of his villa that Metz learned the "stranger" was an agent for the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad which had a plan to build a switchyard at the site. This plan never materialized and a long period of neglect and decay, really not ending until the late 1970's, began for Villa Kathrine.

Until the Quincy Park District acquired the Villa around 1955 thru the aid of Fabiola Moorman, there were a variety of owners, caretakers and even squatters living in or using the building for various purposes.

"In fact," Christie said, "when I was just 7 years old, my own father was approached about buying and restoring the Villa: My parents and my brother and I visited the building many times and I have never forgotten how wonderful and mysterious it seemed to me. My father declined to purchase, however, since my mother could not deal with the thought of her two young sons racing around and playing at the top of this high bluff."

With the Park Board's acquisition of the building and grounds in 1955, some rehabilitation was done for use as a community center and recreation area for the Franklin School neighborhood area. After a few years, the Villa closed again but reopened in 1976 when some repair work by CETA workers took place. Within a year, though, serious vandalism occurred once again, leaving

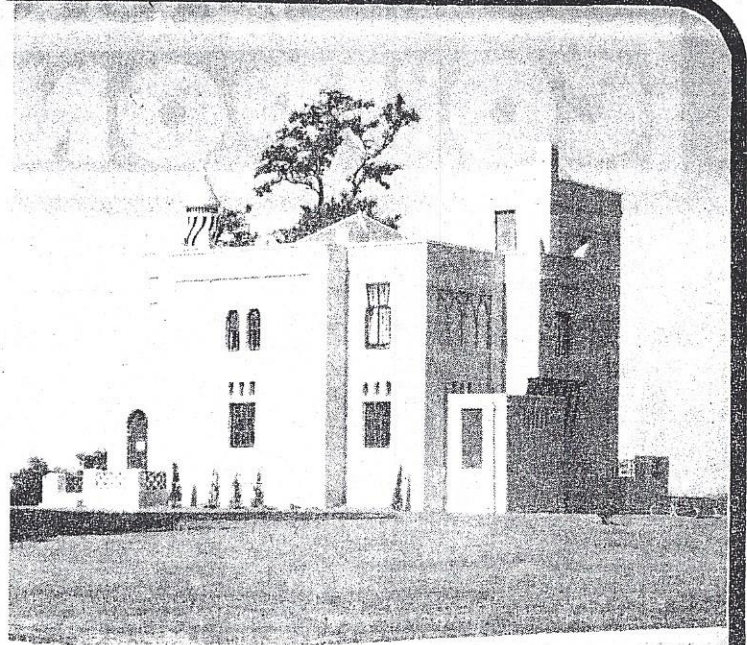


PHOTO BY SCOTT NOZAWA PHOTOGRAPHY

the interior nearly in ruins.

It was in 1978, then, that serious interest began to be taken in saving and restoring this unique structure. The Quincy Jaycee-ettes, under the leadership of Sharron Jett and Jorja Frazier, first obtained a lease for the property from the Park Board and then had the Villa listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These women then formed a group known as "Friends of the Villa," which they hoped could work toward the restoration of the castle to its original form.

"The newly formed group came to me and asked that I assist them as a design consultant. I also became their only male board member after the organization was incorporated," Christie said.

Christie added that "we are now embarked on four phases of restoration, the first phase of which is nearly completed. The exterior of the building has been stabilized and rebuilt and is essentially complete except for some ornamentation work. Also, through financial support received from the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Great River Road Commission, we have completed a parking lot, a driveway, a comfort station, landscaping and the main 'tourism room' located on the first floor of the building."

"Our second phase of restoration will involve the entire interior; the third phase will involve re-furnishing, redecorating and re-appointing the interior; and phase four will establish an endowment fund for perpetual maintenance."

Christie emphasized that "Friends of the Villa" is happy that the Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau decided recently to move their offices onto the second floor level of Villa Kathrine. This structure is one of four in Illinois for tourist promotion and information sites along the Great River Road and a perfect spot for QC&VB to be located. This is a one-of-a-kind tourist site and there will be volunteer guides working at the location to assist visitors.

"We also have just begun a rather quiet fund-raising effort," Christie stated.

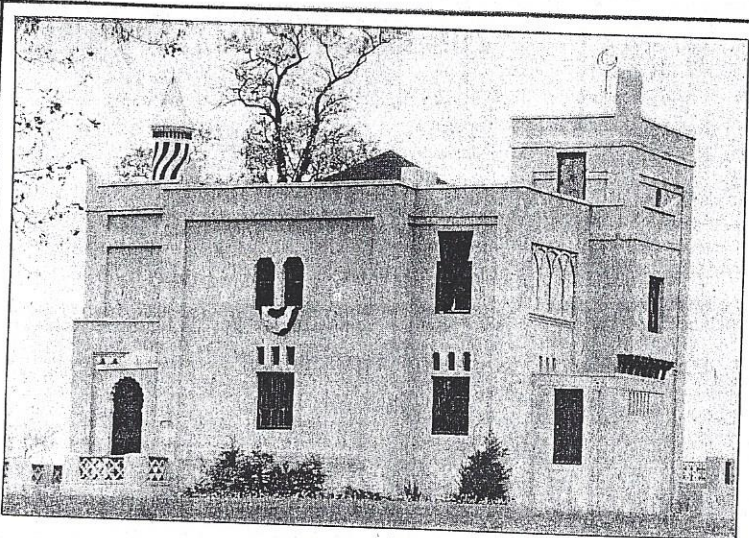
"My hope is that the average Quincy citizen becomes interested in our efforts and will contribute toward helping us with its completion. I also hope that people will realize that while this building is an unusual one, it is also a most functional one — we have already had requests to hold annual meetings, parties, and receptions here."

"While it is true that George Metz lived mostly alone in his home," Christie said, "he did occasionally give parties for small groups of friends with serving girls in harem costumes and musicians playing Middle Eastern music. So, I think George would be very tickled if he knew that once again his beloved Villa Kathrine will be filled with music and laughter."

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Swivel Rockers

Good selection



Volunteers' hard work helps Villa Kathrine shine

By Edward Husar
Herald-Whip Staff Writer

Madalene Miller was a 6-year-old girl when her father took the family on a Sunday drive in his Model A Ford to see the "castle" on the bluffs overlooking Quincy's riverfront.

Miller was impressed by the massive, odd-shaped house, which she said was in a "ruined" condition at the time. "The exterior was coming off," she recalls.

Today, many years later, Miller spends more time at the castle than perhaps anyone else. She works 20 hours a week in the tourist information center housed on the first floor of the restored Moorish-style building, now known as Villa Kathrine.

The villa, owned by the Quincy Park District, has been extensively restored, but much more work is needed to complete the interior.

The preservation effort, launched in 1978 by the Friends of the Castle, has brought back to life one of Quincy's most notable landmarks. The villa, adorned with Moorish accoutrements, is illuminated at night with floodlights and glows like a beacon atop the bluffs.

Miller is delighted to see the villa shining again at Quincy's doorstep.

"It's very beautiful right now, and my wish is that some day it will be completely restored back to the way it was originally," she said.

That day may come eventually, but it will take a major commitment of funds.

Teena Nickelson, Friends of the Castle president, said a fund drive may begin sometime this year on the second phase of the restoration.

The first phase was a \$300,000 effort that involved massive repairs to the exterior and part of the inside. That phase ended in mid-1987 when the villa opened as a tourist information center.

Seventy-five percent of the costs were paid by the federal government through the Great River Road program, with the remaining 25 percent — \$75,000 — raised by Friends of the Castle.

The second phase will cost about \$450,000.

"There's quite a bit of work that needs to be done," said Jerry Preston, executive director of the Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau, which operates the tourist information center.

Preston said the villa is worth preserving because it is the only example of Mediterranean architecture along the Mississippi River, and "it excites a curiosity" in visitors.

The villa was built in 1900 by George Metz, an eccentric world traveler who was intrigued by the Islamic villas along the Nile River in Africa. After returning from one of his trips, Metz commissioned architect George Behrensmeier to build a villa in Quincy patterned after the Villa Ben Abben in northern Algeria.

Metz lived in the mansion for a dozen years with his dog, Bingo, before selling it. Eventually the house fell into disrepair.

The Park District bought the property in 1956 and did some rehabilitation, with the villa serving as a neighborhood center before once again falling into disrepair.

The villa was given a breath of new life in 1978 when the Quincy Jaycee-ettes (now the Illinois Women of Today) agreed to do some cleanup work as part of "Pride of Quincy Week." Nickelson, a club member at that time, said the group planned some painting and general cleaning.

"But we saw that it was going to take more than a bucket of water and a gallon of paint," she said.

The club adopted the villa as a long-term project, forming a not-for-profit group (Friends of the Castle) to oversee the restoration.

The group leases the building from the Park District and allows the Quincy Convention and Visitors Bureau (QCVB) to use the villa for the tourist information center.

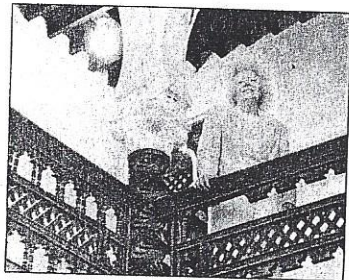
For three years, the QCVB's offices were on the villa's second floor, but the bureau now is housed in the WCU Building awaiting transfer to its new quarters in the convention center/theater complex planned for Third and York.

Until further restoration can be undertaken, the villa will continue to serve as a tourist information center, open from 9 to 5 Mondays through Fridays and from 1 to 5 on weekends. Weekend hours, however, depend on the availability of volunteers to staff the center, which logged 7,500 visitors last year.

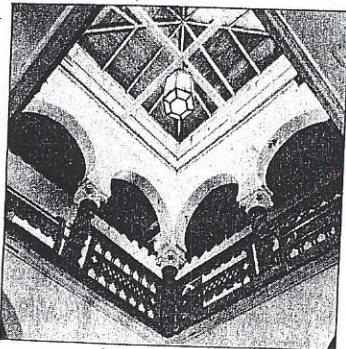
"They come from all over the United States," Miller said.

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FRIENDS OF THE CASTLE HISTORY



Madalene Miller works 20 hours weekly at Villa Kathrine, the castle she remembers visiting as a child.



The Villa Kathrine

Nearly a century after its construction, the Villa Kathrine still remains on the Quincy, Illinois bluff overlooking the Mississippi River where its original owner, George Metz, built it in 1900.

Quincy native George Metz was intrigued with the Middle East and Mediterranean architecture. The Villa ben Ahben in Morocco was Metz's choice as a model for the Villa Kathrine.

After traveling extensively, Metz returned to Quincy and convinced a prominent local architect, George Behrensmeyer, to undertake his project. Within a year, the Villa Kathrine was completed based on sketches, notes, and drawings done by Metz during his trips to the Mediterranean area. Metz filled the Villa with authentic furnishings, antiques, and other artifacts gathered from his many travels. The total cost of the construction was \$7,000.

The construction was completed with local materials. The foundation stone is local limestone, and the brick was locally made. The interior wooden grill of the second floor balcony and the exterior metal grill are of local lumber

and sheet metal. The heavy ornate cast iron porch railings were probably custom-cast from molds made from photographs of the North African model. One weakness in the original specifications, however, was the use of a then newly-patented exterior plaster which did not adhere to the brick. An early photograph shows where stucco had scaled off the east wall.

Little is known about the original interior furnishings of the Villa. Since Metz was a very private man, very few photographs exist, and this made accurate restoration difficult.

It is from these early, undocumented years that a great deal of local legend has arisen. Two stories persist concerning the naming of the Villa. Some claim that Metz named the building for his mother, Catherine, as a memorial to her. Others insist that the Villa was named for a young woman named Kathrine with whom Metz had fallen in love, and who died before the building was completed.

Metz lived in the Villa Kathrine with Bingo, his 212-pound mastiff. Legend also surrounds Bingo. Metz purchased the dog, reportedly the largest mastiff in the world, in 1900 in Denmark. When Bingo died, Metz supposedly buried him in the Villa's rose garden wearing a diamond-studded collar. This legend has resulted in more than one futile late-night treasure hunter digging for the collar. As the grounds are now city park

property, digging these days would, of course, result in arrest and prosecution.

In 1912, Metz was approached by a couple who begged him to sell the Villa. He resisted at first, but at the persistent urging of relatives, finally agreed to sell. He sold the Villa, furnishings and all, and at the age of 63 moved to an apartment in the Newcomb Hotel. It was not until after the sale of the Villa that the couple's identities became known. They were, in fact, agents for a railroad, which had planned to build a railroad yard at the site. The plans never materialized, so the building lay vacant and fell into a long period of neglect and decay. Metz, meanwhile, remained in Quincy until his death in 1937 at the age of 88.

The Quincy Park District acquired the property in 1955, with the aid of Fabiola Moorman, and is still the owner. With the Park District's acquisition of the building and grounds, some rehabilitation was done to make the building a community center and recreation area for the neighborhood. The Villa was closed a few years later, not to be reopened to the public until 1976. At that time repair work was completed by CETA workers, but within a year serious incidents of vandalism forced the Villa to close again, with the interior in ruins.