

# Kalamazoo's Castle



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Henderson Castle, located on West Main Hill in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and bordered by Mountain Home Cemetery and Kalamazoo College, has fascinated locals and tourists alike for more than a century.

The castle's original owner, Frank Henderson, moved to Kalamazoo from Dowagiac in 1860, later forming a saddlery business with Charles Brown in 1866. Henderson later bought out Brown and expanded the business to include uniforms and regalia. In 1893, the Henderson-Ames Company was formed when Henderson consolidated with the Chicago branch of the Ames Sword Company in Chicopee, Massachusetts, and was, later that year, awarded the medal and diploma for excellence of quality and design at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Henderson-Ames Company manufactured uniforms, regalia, ceremonial swords, flags and emblems for fraternal organizations, secret societies, bonds, police and fire departments, railroad workers, and the United States military. Although out of business now for more than sixty years, many of its products have become heirlooms and collector items.



Knights of Templar sword made by Henderson-Ames Company in Kalamazoo

In 1895, Henderson moved to his new home, Henderson Castle. Henderson's wife Mary had previously inherited a plot of undeveloped land on the western edge of the city. Henderson had a vision, so in 1888 he enlisted a team of surveyors, engineers, and landscape architects to plot the land and create Kalamazoo's first natural site plan. Two years later he was ready to start construction in what he saw as a future residential district in Kalamazoo.

Designed by C. A. Gombert of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, "The Castle," as dubbed by local residents because of its ornate style and hilltop location, the Victorian-style house cost a meager, by today's standards, \$72,000 to build. With seven baths, a 13-head shower, an elevator, and a third-floor ballroom, the 11,000

square foot, 23-room castle still exemplifies high society and expensive taste. The exterior is made of Lake Superior sandstone and brick, while interior wood includes mahogany, bird's eye maple, quartered oak, birch, and sycamore.

The housewarming in 1895 was attended by many prominent Kalamazoo citizens. Unfortunately Henderson died in 1899; his wife Mary remained there until 1908. Thankfully, Henderson didn't live to see the scandal that resulted from Henderson-Ames Company purchasing large quantities of unused military uniforms at salvage prices, only to sell them back, at full price, to the State of Michigan after making a few minor alterations.

Yet Henderson-Ames survived the scandal, in 1900 building a five-story factory on the corner of W. Main Street (now Michigan Avenue) and N. Park Street. The company manufactured uniforms during World War I, enjoying great prosperity — maintaining annual business of more than \$1 million by 1924. But then the Great Depression hit, and in 1933 the Henderson-Ames Company merged with another regalia firm, the Lilley Company of Columbus, Ohio, to form the Lilley-Ames Company. Operations were subsequently moved to Ohio, forever ending the company's affiliation with Kalamazoo. Sadly, in 1940 the building that had housed the Henderson-Ames Company was razed.

Over the years since the deaths of the Hendersons, eight individuals have owned Henderson Castle, including Charles B. Wing, Vice-President of Bryant Paper Company, and Bertrand Hooper, President and Treasurer of Kalamazoo Stationery Company. In the 1920s, Hooper converted the brick stable on the property to a four-car garage, which was later renovated into a separate residence.

William Stullbergen purchased the house in 1945 and divided the rooms into several apartments, one in which he and his family lived.

In 1957 the house was purchased as the future site for the Kalamazoo Art Center, but when the Institute of Arts remained downtown, the castle became the property of Kalamazoo College.

Dr. Jess Walker bought the house in 1975 and began a restoration process that continued under Frederick Royce, who purchased it in 1981, eventually turning it into a bed and breakfast.

Henderson Castle, now more than a century old, was put up for sale last February; although priced to sell at a cool \$2 million, no one made an offer. Last August, Royce put the castle up for auction, with bidding beginning at \$1.3 million, and again there were no takers.

But the castle may soon have new owners, who have plans to add a community center to the

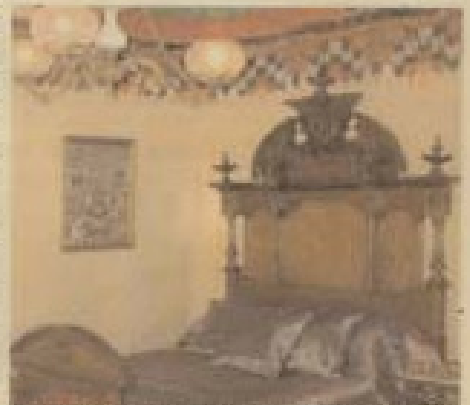
bed and breakfast inn.

Laura and Peter Livingstone-McNelis, both graduates of Kalamazoo College, began renting and caring for the residence November 1, with hopes of officially closing on the property by January. They and Royce decline to say how much the couple offered for the property, pending the closing.

The castle had previously served as Royce's home and office as well as a bed and breakfast inn. Laura said Royce is currently moving out of the residence.

The couple officially opened for business December 1 and are planning several improvements, including a name change to Henderson Castle Bed and Breakfast, Meetings and Banquets (a cultural and community center for the city), a larger food menu, a new catering service, additional parking, handicapped access, and Web site upgrades.

The couple hopes to open the facility to



The Italian Room features a chandelier that belonged to Lt. Governor Grosvener from Jones, Michigan. Courtesy of Dave S. Livingstone for Henderson Castle.

bridal showers, retirement parties, weddings, wedding receptions, luncheons, retreats, recitals, workshops, wine-tasting events, dinner parties, theater performances and ballroom dancing competitions, among others.

Laura said she likes the idea of opening up the castle to the community and making it more of a community center available for a range of activities. "Peter and I feel that it is really an honor to be a kind of catalyst between the Castle and the community center," she said. "I think we can serve a lot of purposes for the community."

Royce is enthused about the plans the Livingstone-McNelis have in store for the mansion.

"This is a great win for the community," he said.



The Henderson-Ames Company sold uniforms and clothing, such as these