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Chapter IV

CASTLE ON A HILL

Representative of the great wealth associated with one segment of the early Argentine experience is a home that has been a familiar landmark for many generations of Argentineans. High on a hill overlooking Argentine and the valley this majestic home is known as Sauer Castle. Anthony Phillip Sauer built the two-story brick building and its four towers of Viennese design sometime around 1868. The surrounding land was unsettled.

<http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/wyandott/history/1911/volume2/s/sauerap.html>

http://www.kcghostpage.com/sauer_castle.htm

<http://www.kckplanning.org/anthony.htm> (Kansas City Planning & Zoning site)

<http://www.kpalliance.org/Pages/0200endanger.html>

<http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/KS/Wyandotte/state.html>

Sauer was a pioneer of the Argentine community and was one of the many men who were prominent in the settlement of Kansas. He was of foreign descent, born on March 10, 1826, at Hessen-on-the-Rhine in Germany. There, he grew up and received an education. In his late teens he sailed to Australia to become a merchant. In 1853, he immigrated to the United States and established a tannery and imported leather business in New York City.¹

Then, about five years later, his health failed and he came west in search of a healthier climate. He came to St. Louis and entered the steamboat business. Later, he and his two sons, Gus William and Anthony P., Jr., operated a freighting business. He eventually located in Kansas City, Kansas, where he established a tannery and later a real estate business.²

Anthony Sauer married Mary Messersmidt who was born in Bavaria, Germany, on November 22, 1840. Her parents immigrated to the United States in 1848 and eventually came to Kansas City, Kansas. The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Sauer produced seven children.³

Sauer decided to establish a permanent home in Kansas City, Kansas. He tried to pick a scenic location reminiscent of his birthplace on the Rhine River in Germany. He chose a location on a bluff overlooking the Kansas River. Presently, this house is located at 945 Shawnee Road between the Argentine and Rosedale districts.

Sauer planned to create a large fruit farm. He wanted to raise grapes for the manufacture of wine. He invested about \$60,000 on improvements for his sixty-three acres of property. About \$20,000 of this sum went for the building of a three-story brick mansion. This dwelling, when constructed, was one of the largest buildings in the state. With the exception of the stones used for the foundation, all of the material for the building was shipped by boat from St. Louis, Missouri.⁴

The furnishings of the new house illustrated the fabulous wealth of its builder. A solid walnut stairway with a rosewood rail ran from the basement of the house to the upper floors. The floors were walnut. Marble for the mantels came from Italy, crystal chandeliers came from Australia, and lace curtains came from Brussels. An Italian sculptor came from St. Louis to carve the stone lions that still guard the entrance to the grounds. Miniature statues were also placed for the high-arch windows.⁵ The building resembled a castle of the Rhineland in every sense of the word. Hence, it became known as Sauer Castle.

¹ Kansas City Times, October 21, 1950, p. 34

² Pearl W. Morgan, History of Wyandotte County Kansas (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), p. 574

³ Ibid

⁴ Kansas City Times, October 21, 1950, p. 34

⁵ Ibid

While workmen were building the home, they also built a wine cellar. The ground was tunneled out from a cliff. Vine covered arches led to the entrance to the cellar. This cellar was about fifty feet long and thirty-five feet wide.⁶

Eighteen acres of vineyards were planted. Almost every kind of grape that could grow in this type of country was planted.

Sauer had a very extensive knowledge of engineering and horticulture. His home was one of the first in the area to have running water piped into the house. A hydraulic engine was used for this purpose.⁷

The fabulous interior of Anthony Sauer's home resembled many of the old homes of Europe. There was an extensive library with hundreds of books written in Italian, French, and German. Many religious paintings by Spanish artists hung in the house.⁸

On the second floor were two large bedrooms and a master bedroom. Solid walnut furniture, some of it hand carved, lace curtains, and expensive rugs adorned the rooms. The third floor of the home was utilized as the servants' quarters. Also, on this floor, a small school was conducted. The Sauers saw to it that all their children were well educated. Special tutors were hired. All of the children learned to speak several languages.

A stable, carriage house, and milkhouse were built near the home. Large brick ovens were used three times a week. In the front yard was a large fountain. Water was piped from these springs throughout the year.⁹

Huge flower gardens were planted on the grounds. These grounds were probably among the most elaborate seen anywhere. People came from miles around just to see the gardens. Rare shrubs and trees came from all over the world. Nothing remains of the old gardens. The greenhouse was later utilized as a chicken house.¹⁰

Anthony Sauer's home was completed in 1871. By that time, he was dying of tuberculosis. In those times, this was a dreaded and almost always fatal disease. He did all he could to prevent the terrible coughing spells. <http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/tbhistory.htm> In the summer he wore a mask over his nose to prevent the pollen from his garden flowers from getting into his lungs. This mask was made of very finely woven pure gold mesh. He also wore chest protectors of heavy felt. These protectors were almost ½ of an inch thick. They were specially made in Europe to meet his requirements. Sauer believed that these devices would protect his lungs from the damp and ever-changing Kansas climate. None of these devices seemed to help. Only eleven years after his marriage, and at the age of fifty-three, he died. He passed away in his home on a hot summer night, August 16, 1879. He was buried at the side of his infant daughter in the old Union Cemetery.¹¹

<http://www.ncte.org/pdfs/members-only/ej/0891-sept99/EJ0891Community.pdf>

Using the Community for Collaborative Internet Research – Dennis P. Lawrence

Sauer died in the prime of his life. He was one of the most respected and influential men in this part of the state. He died only a couple of years before the town of Argentine was plotted. Doubtlessly, had he lived, he would have been influential in the growth of the town. All of his sons and sons-in-law, however, did aid in the early growth of Kansas City, Kansas.

At the time of her husband's death, Mrs. Sauer was still a young woman. She continued to raise her family in the house, but she was not able to maintain the large grounds. The orchard and vineyards were sold. Different sections of the land became housing additions.

Mrs. Sauer lived in the home until her death in 1919. Other members of the family, including even a fifth generation, lived in the home for many years. The current estate, in a large residential area, now

⁶ Don Simmons, "Sauer Castle." This is an unpublished foldout furnished by Mr. Simmons. The Simmons family is one of the oldest families of Argentine and are the proprietors of the Simons Funeral Home in Argentine. Don Simmons is one of the most knowledgeable persons on the history of this community.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ [Kansas City Times](#), October 21, 1950, p. 34

¹¹ Simmons, "Sauer Castle".

comprises only four acres. Mr. Paul Berry has owned the home and property since 1954.¹² Don Simmons of the Simmons Funeral Home in Argentine gave the author a charcoal drawing of Sauer Castle.

¹² Ibid