

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

YES

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1** NAME

HISTORIC

Voorhies Castle

AND/OR COMMON

Nels Larson House

**2** LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

-- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Voorhies

 VICINITY OF South of Bement

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

44<sup>TH</sup>

21

STATE

Illinois

CODE  
012COUNTY  
PiattCODE  
147**3** CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
			<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4** OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Joshua Alper/Dennis Prinn

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Voorhies Castle

CITY, TOWN

Bement

 VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

61813

**5** LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Piatt County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Monticello

STATE

Illinois

61856

**6** REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of Historic Landmarks/Piatt County

DATE

January, 1974

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Illinois Department of Conservation, 405 E. Washington St.

CITY, TOWN

Springfield

STATE

Illinois

62701

# DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR
- DETERIORATED
- RUINS
- UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

- UNALTERED
- ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

- ORIGINAL SITE
- MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Voorhies Castle, completed in 1904, is located four miles south of Bement in Piatt County. It overlooks what used to be the small town of Voorhies (named after the original owners of the land) and rich, fertile, wide-open farmlands. The castle was built by Nels Larson, a Swedish immigrant who, through hard work and determination, eventually accumulated over 540 acres of farmland. His estate encompassed the whole town of Voorhies which included, by 1886, a barber, a jeweler, a blacksmith shop, a general store, a church, a post office, and a coal house. His more personal and farm-related needs were met by other improvements which included an elevator, a corn crib, two barns, his son's home, four other homes and his own residence--the castle.

The castle faces south and is prominently placed at the end of a cul-de-sac leading in from the road. It has a rectangular plan which is 50 feet wide along its east-west axis and 30 feet deep with ten foot diameter towers extending out an additional five feet at the southern corners. Beautifully nurtured flower beds and many plants once graced the landscaped front yard which also boasted two fountains operating continuously in the summer with water that had to be pumped to a tank located on top of the elevator.

The castle is two stories high, contains fourteen rooms and is a scaled down version of a palatial manor house in Larson's native land, Sweden. It is most closely associated with the Queen Anne style which in itself is somewhat eclectic. This Victorian house (Photo C-1) is unusual however, in that, unlike Queen Anne, it is almost entirely symmetrical. The exterior skin is covered with horizontal clapboard siding on the first floor and decoratively scalloped overlapping wood shingles (Photo C-4) on the second floor and towers. These scallops complement, yet at the same time contrast with the original wood shingles of the roof. The central portico is supported by pairs of Doric wood columns which taper to the architrave. The vertical line of the columns is continued by prominent balusters which culminate in pendants and carry a protective balustrade above the porch roof. The roof is most characteristic of the Queen Anne style in that both gabled and hipped dormers as well as turrets are represented (Photo C-3). These two-story turrets capped by finials are located at the southeast and southwest corners of the building. The front facade which faces south has a main hipped dormer centered over the porch with secondary hipped dormers centered between the main dormer and corner turret. Each side facade (Photo C-2) culminates in a double-gable end which features stencils of provincial Swedish designs (Photo C-5). The eave lines of the roofs are punctuated by evenly spaced dentil-like brackets and all of the ridges are capped by highly decorative wrought iron ornaments and strategically placed Swedish scrolled lightning rods.

The Squire, which Nels Larson became known as locally, first built the corner towers to be three stories high so he could use them as vantage points to overlook his properties. A short time later, he ordered them lowered because they were not aesthetically pleasing.

The interior architecture was even more elaborate than the exterior. The front door, known as a "casket door" for its extra width, is flanked by sidelight windows. The windows throughout the house are unusually wide with one large pane in the lower sash and a series of small ones in the upper sash. The main floor features the

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

sitting or reception hall, the central living and circulation space in the mansion. This space flows freely through large pocket doors into other rooms which are all spacious and high-ceilinged. The corner fireplace in the reception hall is oak. Its carvings, which feature the amaranthus leaf, bleeding heart flowers, and lion's heads, are adapted from Sheraton and Hepplewaite. The intricate carvings for all three fireplaces were done by a Swedish craftsman imported by Larson especially for this purpose. The oak fireplace had a plate glass mirror across its mantle and a pink, green and white glazed tile decorated its hearth.

The west parlor contains a cherry wood fireplace (Photo C-6) with a green and brown glazed tile hearth and more beveled glass mirrors. Scrolled woodwork adorns the doorway to the tower room (Photo C-7). The original ceiling paper was decorated with clouds and stars. Two kinds of wallpaper were used--a golden floral pattern above the picture molding and a striped satin pattern below. A narrow gold leaf beading provided the border trim where sidewall and ceiling meet.

The east parlor was the music chamber. Scrolled woodwork also adorned the tower doorway here. The walls here were not papered, but left as smooth slack lime coated plaster.

A beautiful, intricately detailed parquet floor designed of maple, mahogany, birch, oak and sycamore pieces is the pride of the dining room (Photo C-8). A stained glass north window by Tiffany, thick double doors opening into the sitting room, and a maple fireplace are other features of this room. The fireplace was simply carved with the Swedish lil-jen motif, and its hearth was green, brown and beige mottled glazed tile. Beveled plate glass originally flanked each side and continued above the mantle. Golden wallpaper of grapes-and-lattice design reached from ceiling to picture molding. Below the picture molding a dark red flocked velvet paper was used.

Three walls of the kitchen contain five doors which lead to: the basement, the upstairs, a back porch, the dining room and a pantry lined with cupboards from floor to ceiling.

The upstairs contains four bedrooms and a hall. Larson's son George had the west bedroom at the head of the stairs; his daughter Ellen had the central room overlooking the front porch and the master bedroom, which is also the largest, is located at the end of the hall and extends across the east end of the house. A smaller fourth bedroom, located above the dining room, was used as a guest bedroom. All of the bedrooms have transomed doors and the central room features stained glass by Tiffany over the main window. None of the upstairs rooms were wallpapered but the plaster was smoothed with a slack lime finish.

A basement is located under the entire structure. The remains of two, 1000 gallon wood cisterns can be found in the south half. A unique compressed air system forced the water into the kitchen, sinks, bathroom and water closet. A coal bin and hot air furnace occupied the other side of the basement.

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In 1906, a carbide-gas lighting system was installed with its generator located in the west basement tower room. Special permission had to be obtained to install this system which was considered by many as unsafe.

Soon after the mansion was completed, Nels Larson became dissatisfied with the appearance of his barn and made plans to erect a new one in its place. This barn, which was built in 1905, soon became even more prestigious than his castle. The barn, which became a famous central Illinois historical landmark because of its uniqueness, was dominated by a 68 foot high clock tower that housed a one and one-half ton clock mechanism (Photo C-9). The clock itself wasn't installed in the tower designed for it until 1910. It took the Seth Thomas Clock Company of Connecticut five years to build the clock which they described as the finest they could make. The clock's four faces were made of solid milk glass, six feet wide and two inches thick. These came from Virginia; the works came from Connecticut; and the weights were sent from Chicago. A 14 pound hammer once struck a solid brass bell and the numerals and hands were made of gold.

Unfortunately, the tower and the bell, with its deep tone that could be heard four to five miles away, are no more. On March 21, 1976 a tornado swept across the prairie and levelled the barn with its tower. The clock which had been seen from the surrounding fields for so many years was scavenged and sold for its parts. The remains of the barn now lay rotting in a large heap where it fell.

The castle has fared somewhat better than the barn. Although it has not been significantly altered in any way over the years, natural weathering and vandalism has taken its toll. The castle was abandoned for fifty-five years (See Section 8) and was unoccupied from 1914 until 1972. Curiosity seekers and unfounded rumors of hidden treasures helped to destroy much of the finer woodwork and ornamentation. Almost every window has been broken and replaced at least once and only one curved tower window remains intact--all the rest have been boarded over to prevent further violation.

The current owners have pledged to restore the castle to its once stately condition. To prevent further destruction they have removed much of the remaining details and ornamentation. They will store these artifacts and protect them and the building from further natural and man-created damages until the castle can be restored properly after careful planning and research is completed and with professional guidance.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1900 (see below)

BUILDER/ARCHITECT William H. Schroeder

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Voorhies Castle owes its significance to the idealism and tenacity of its creator. Nels Larson was a manual laborer from Sweden who immigrated to America in 1867 and settled on the central Illinois prairie. Upon this prairie he created a town and a vast estate, an achievement not unlike his Swedish countrymen who preceded him by twenty years and settled near Peoria forming the colony known as Bishop Hill. Larson achieved his success however, almost singlehandedly and his prosperity in his adopted country embodies the American dream. This inventive and almost eccentric behavior was the expression of a highly motivated and determined human spirit who attempted to recreate a small portion of remembered grandeur from his native land. The grand scale of his overall plans and dreams were recognized by all who came in contact with him and his "castle on the prairie." So unique was the castle in a region of wide open spaces and prairie that it became a symbol of pride and accomplishment for all of the residents of Piatt County. Within a short time, the curiosity and interest it provoked made the Voorhies Castle a central Illinois landmark. Even today, although the castle is less splendid, a string of visitors make their way along rural roads to glimpse a view of this "cornfield castle."

This gabled Victorian mansion was begun in the summer of 1900. It was designed by Larson to resemble a castle-like manor house in Christianstadt, Sweden, that had impressed him as a youth when he worked there as a wagonmaker. William H. Schroeder of Chicago, a licensed architect in the state of Illinois, drew the plans (see Addenda A) according to Larson's specifications. By the time the mansion was completed in 1904, the cost totaled over \$9,000.00. The Voorhies Castle is also significant for its unusual architecture, especially when one considers it is sited in the middle of the Illinois prairie. A detailed discussion of its architecture and unique architectural features can be found in Section 7.

## Chronology of Important Dates and People

- 1840 Nels Larson born in Sorby, Sweden on March 29.
- 1867 Larson arrives in Galesburg, Illinois; works as a farm hand.
- 1868 Larson moves to Bement; continues farming.
- 1872 Nels Larson marries Johannah Nilson, his Swedish sweetheart, on March 16.
- 1885 Larson purchases land from Ralph Voorhies on April 24.
- 1900-1904 Voorhies Castle under construction.
- 1914 Johannah Larson dies on May 13; Nels abandons his castle and its contents the next day, never to return.
- 1923 Nels Larson dies on March 29.
- 1967 Larson's heirs convey land to Illinois Pioneer Heritage Center, Inc. on July 11.

Continued on Continuation Sheet

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Chronology of Important Dates and People (continued)

- 1970 Illinois Pioneer Heritage Center, Inc. conveys Voorhies Castle (Lot #4, Village of Voorhies subdivision) to Millikin National Bank of Decatur.
- 1972 Castle purchased by Sue and Milton W. Streenz of Bloomington in January. In September they move in.
- 1976 Tornado destroys clock tower barn on March 21.
- 1978 Voorhies Castle sold at public auction to Joshua Alper and Dennis Prinn for \$49,000.00 on June 10.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

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Newspaper Articles

- "Voorhies Castle--A Victorian Vignette." Chicago Sunday Sun-Times, Midwest Magazine.  
May 26, 1968, pp. 20, 21, and 23.
- "Voorhies Castle: New Life for an Old, Lonely Place." Decatur Sunday Herald and Review.  
October 22, 1972, Section 3.
- "Castle on the Prairie." The Journal Star. September 23, 1973, Section B, Family Living.
- "A Castle, Its Treasures on the Block." The Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette. June 11, 1978,  
p. A-10.
- "Castle Sold to Urbana Pair." The Morning Courier. June 11, 1978, Vol. 99, No. 162,  
p. 1.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Russell, Dorothea. The Squire of Voorhies: The Saga of Nels Larson. Illinois Pioneer Heritage Center, Monticello, Illinois. December, 1967.

See attached sheet for newspaper articles.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

QUADRANGLE NAME Bement, Illinois

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:62500

UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 6 3, 64 5, 0, 0 4, 4 1, 4 2, 0, 0

B                                    

C                                    

D                                    

E                                    

F                                    

G                                    

H                                    

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The east 1/2 of the southwest 1/4 of the southeast 1/4 of Section 1, Township 16N, Range 5E.

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	NA	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE		CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Gary L. Olsen, AIA, Architect

ORGANIZATION

Olsen-Lytle Architects

DATE

January 15, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

627 1/2 South Wright Street

TELEPHONE

217/359-3453

CITY OR TOWN

Champaign,

STATE

Illinois 61820

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL   

STATE   

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

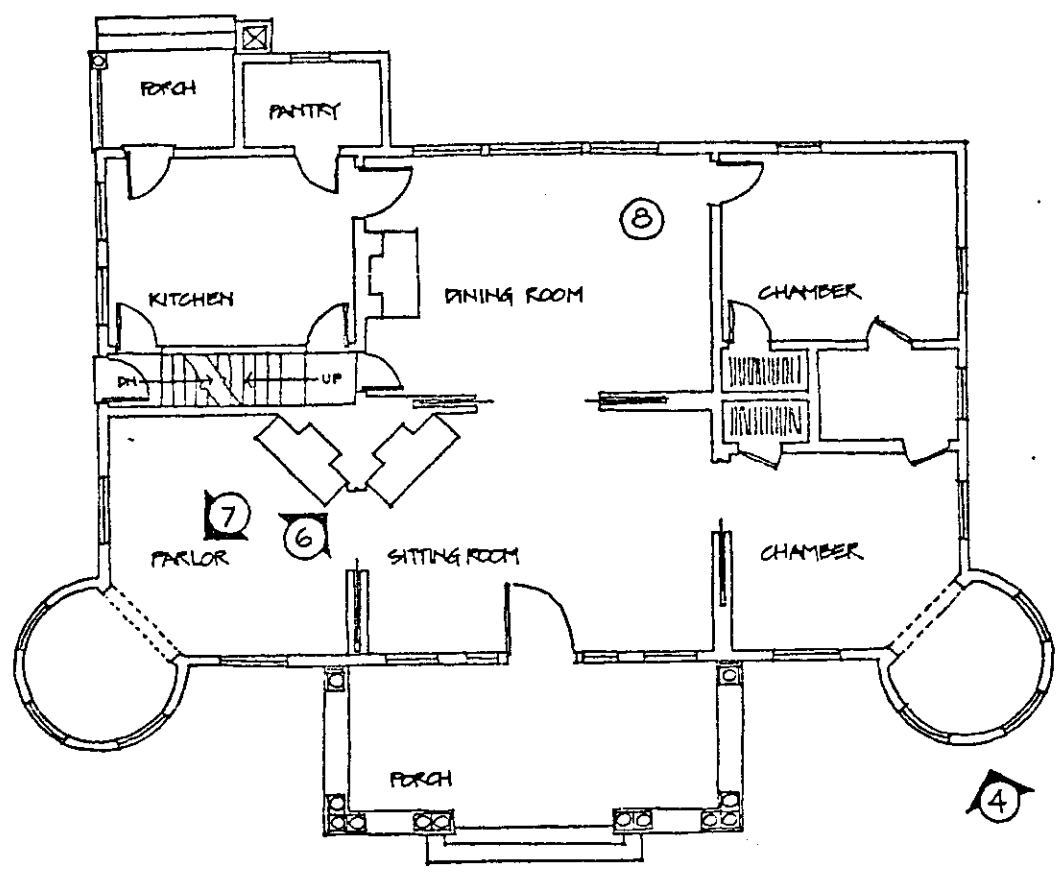
DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION



2

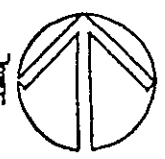
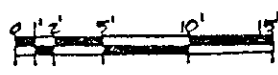
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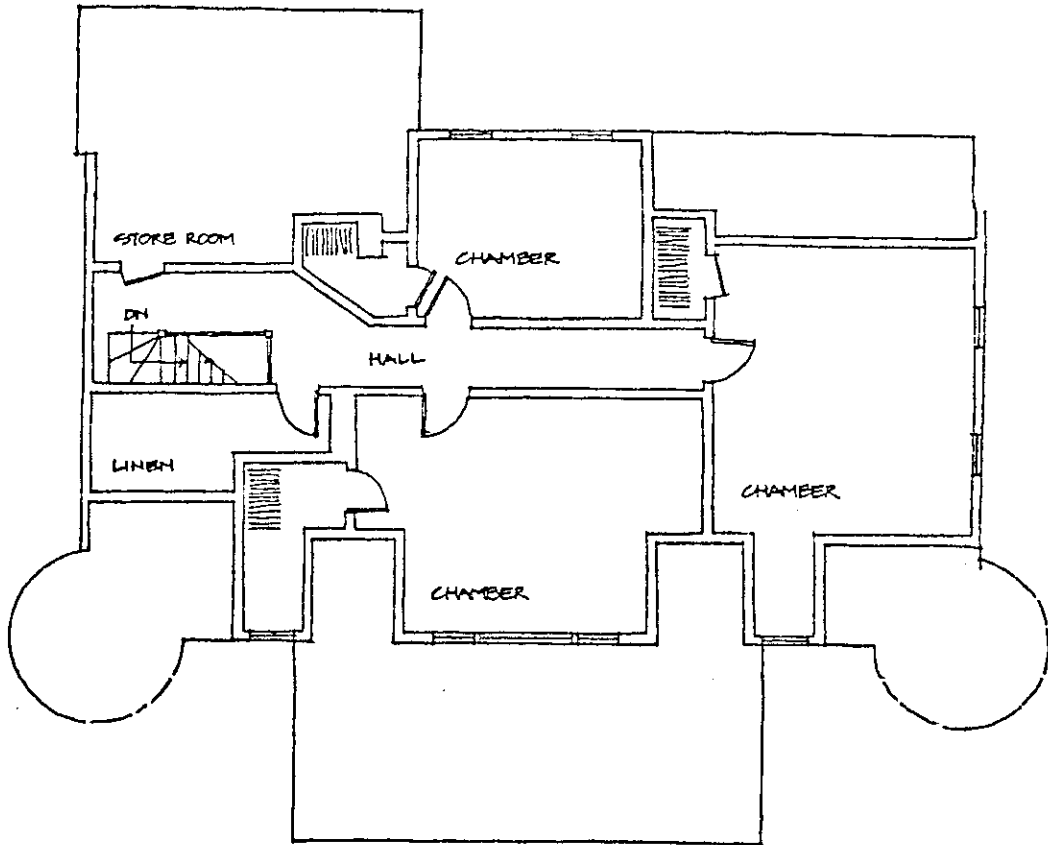


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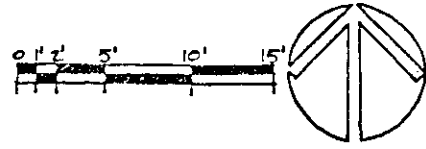
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

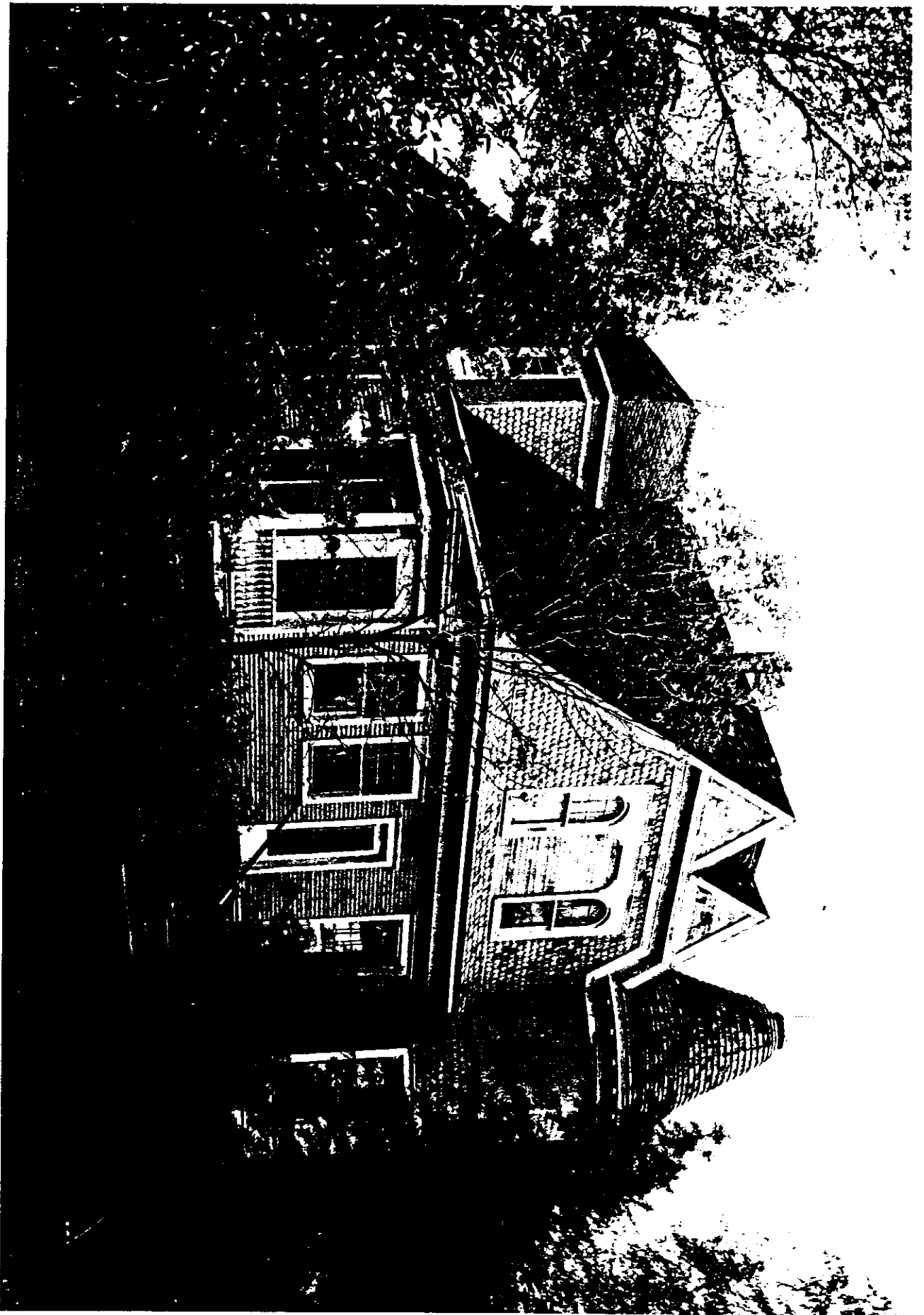




SECOND FLOOR PLAN









ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ILLINOIS

STATE

Date Entered

JUN 20 1979

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
Gardner, Robert W., House	Quincy Adams County
<u>Voorhies Castle (Nels Larson House)</u>	South of Bement Piatt County
Wicker Park Historic District	Chicago Cook County

Also Notified

Honorable Charles H. Percy  
Honorable Adlai E. Stevenson  
Honorable Paul Findley  
Honorable Edward R. Madigan  
Honorable Cardiss Collins

**COPY OF CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION**

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

BARN DEMOLISHED BY TORNADO - MARCH - 20, 19

1. Name of Site:
Common Voorhies Castle
Historic Nels Larson Home

2. Location:
Street and Number
City or Town Voornies
County Piatt
Township T16N
Section 1 SE

3. Classification:
Category (check one)
( ) District (x) Building
( ) Site ( ) Structure
Integrity (check one)
( ) Altered (x) Unaltered
( ) Moved (x) Original Site

4. Ownership:
(x) Private
( ) Public
Status (check one)
(x) Occupied
( ) Unoccupied
( ) Preservation work in progress

Access to Public
( ) Yes ( ) Restricted ( ) Unrestricted (x) No

Present Use (check one or more)
( ) Agricultural ( ) Industrial ( ) Religious
( ) Commercial ( ) Military ( ) Scientific
( ) Educational ( ) Museum ( ) Transportation
( ) Entertainment ( ) Park ( ) Other (specify)
( ) Government (x) Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:
Owner's Name Milton Streenz
Street and Number Voorhies Castle
City or Town Voornies
State Illinois County Piatt Zip Code

6. Description:
Condition:
(x) Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( ) Deteriorated ( ) Ruins
( ) Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway? ( ) Yes (x) No

AGRICULTURE





7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- Archeological Site (Pre-Columbian)
- Archeological Site (Post-Columbian to 1673)
- French Influence (1673-1780)
- Illinois Frontier (1780-1818)
- Illinois Early (1818-1850)
- Illinois Middle (1850-1900)
- Illinois Late (1900-present)
- Famous People (give names & dates)

8. Specific Date: Occupied 1901-1914 by Nels Larson

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- Aboriginal (historic)
- Aboriginal (pre-historic)
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communication
- Conservation
- Education
- Engineering
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape Architecture
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Political
- Religion/Philosophy
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Theater
- Transportation
- Urban Planning
- Other (specify)  
Cultural minorities (Swedish)

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)  
Use additional sheets if necessary.

See the attached sheets.

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title: Keith A. Sculle Date December, 1973  
Illinois Historic Sites Survey  
Organization: 1505 W. Kirby, Apt. 3 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Champaign, Illinois 61820  
Street and number: \_\_\_\_\_  
City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for references for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

- Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.
- Russell, Dorothea. The Squire of Voorhies. Monticello: Pioneer Heritage Center, 1967.
- Champaign-Urbana News Gazette, September 23, 1973. (This article is attached to this form.)

# Voorhies Castle Will Live Again

By **STEPHEN YELVINGTON**  
News-Gazette Staff Writer

**VOORHIES**—A soft, yet strong bell voice sings across the fields.

A hand on the six-foot lavender clock moves silently.

Voorhies Castle, despite the torments of time and intruders, is still alive in the middle of the Platt County prairieland.

**Milton and Sue Streenz**, formerly of Bloomington, have become the first residents of the Swedish chalet on the Illinois prairie, since it was locked up by its first owner, **Nels Larson**, in 1914.

The "castle" and its accompanying barn, probably the most unusual in the world, seem finally to be in hands that will restore the beauty that once distinguished the estate of a very rich and very eccentric Swedish immigrant.

**Nels Larson** came to the United States in the 1850s practically penniless, in search of fame and fortune. By 1901, he had both. His 540-acre estate was made even more impressive with the construction of a 14-room home, a replica of a structure near Christenstadt, Sweden.

The building included many modern innovations not usually seen in a 1901-vintage home: central heating; a self-contained water plant and a pressurizer to produce hot and cold running water; even a carbide-powered gas generator for the gas lighting system.

The unusual barn was built, according to one story, when a neighbor built a bigger barn than **Larson** had. In order to keep ahead, **Larson** built what is probably the world's only barn with a clock tower and chimes.

**Larson** was fond of clocks, but the 3,000-pound **Seth Thomas** clockworks and the 68-foot clock tower topped everything.

The estate was abruptly abandoned in 1914 after the death of **Larson's** wife **Johannah**, and the Voorhies Castle stood empty until 1967 when it was acquired by the Illinois Pioneer Heritage Center in Monticello.

The historical group had plans to restore the castle, barn and even the town of Voorhies—once owned in entirety by **Larson**—as a Swedish-American cultural center and historical museum.

The castle and barn were opened for "pre-restoration" tours and between July 13 and July 29, 1967, an estimated 10,000 visitors went through the two buildings.

There were even plans to build a geodesic dome over the barn and castle, and to suspend a restaurant and dance hall from the top of the dome.

Nothing came of the dome idea, and after a few years' operation as a museum and tourist attraction, the castle was taken over by the Millikin National Bank in Decatur, foreclosing on a sizable mortgage.

Between then and early this year when the **Streenz's** took ownership of the property, vandals and thieves reduced the once-beautiful interior to rubble.

The ornately carved cherrywood fireplace mantels were smashed and ripped apart. Scrollwork decorating the huge doorways was knocked down and taken away. Windows were shattered.

When **Mr. and Mrs. Streenz** took over, not a stick of furniture was left in the house, and even the doorknobs had been stolen.

**Milton and Sue Streenz** hope to restore the outside of the home to its original state. The inside will probably be somewhat different, but they have a few pieces of the carved wood that once decorated the interior and hope to be able to duplicate the pattern.

Even the old windmill will eventually be working again, they say, pumping water to keep the lawn, gardens and trees lush and beautiful.

**Streenz**, a retired machinist, has already straightened the clock tower, which leaned a full twelve inches from vertical. And one of the 1,000-gallon water tanks in the castle basement again holds water, "clear as a bell," **Streenz** says.

Most of the work done so far has been on the yards, as they expect to be able to concentrate on the inside of the house during the cold months.

When they finish, the Voorhies Castle will be a showcase — but a showcase house, not a showcase museum. They have no plans to operate it as a tourist attraction, although it will probably always be one.

There are legends and stories

## Another Picture On Page 11

associated with the old castle and barn which heighten the eerie feeling that accompanies a first encounter with the place:

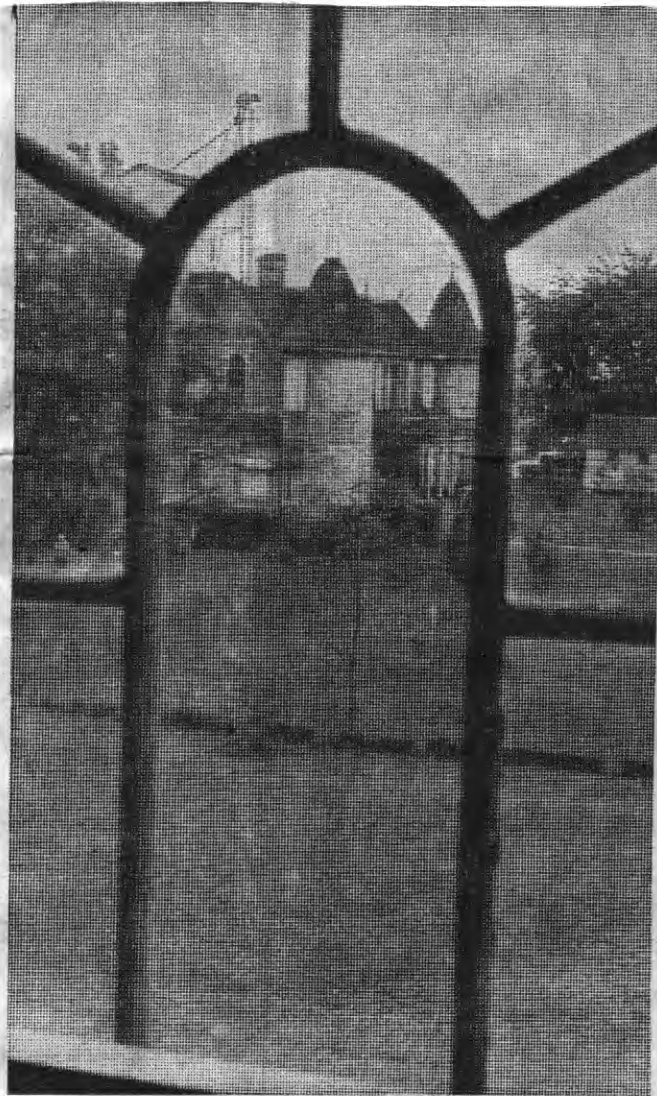
Stories of ghosts, secret rooms and passageways.

And a legend that says **Larson**, once he made his fortune, brought relatives from Sweden and made them work as indentured servants—serfs of a cornfield king.

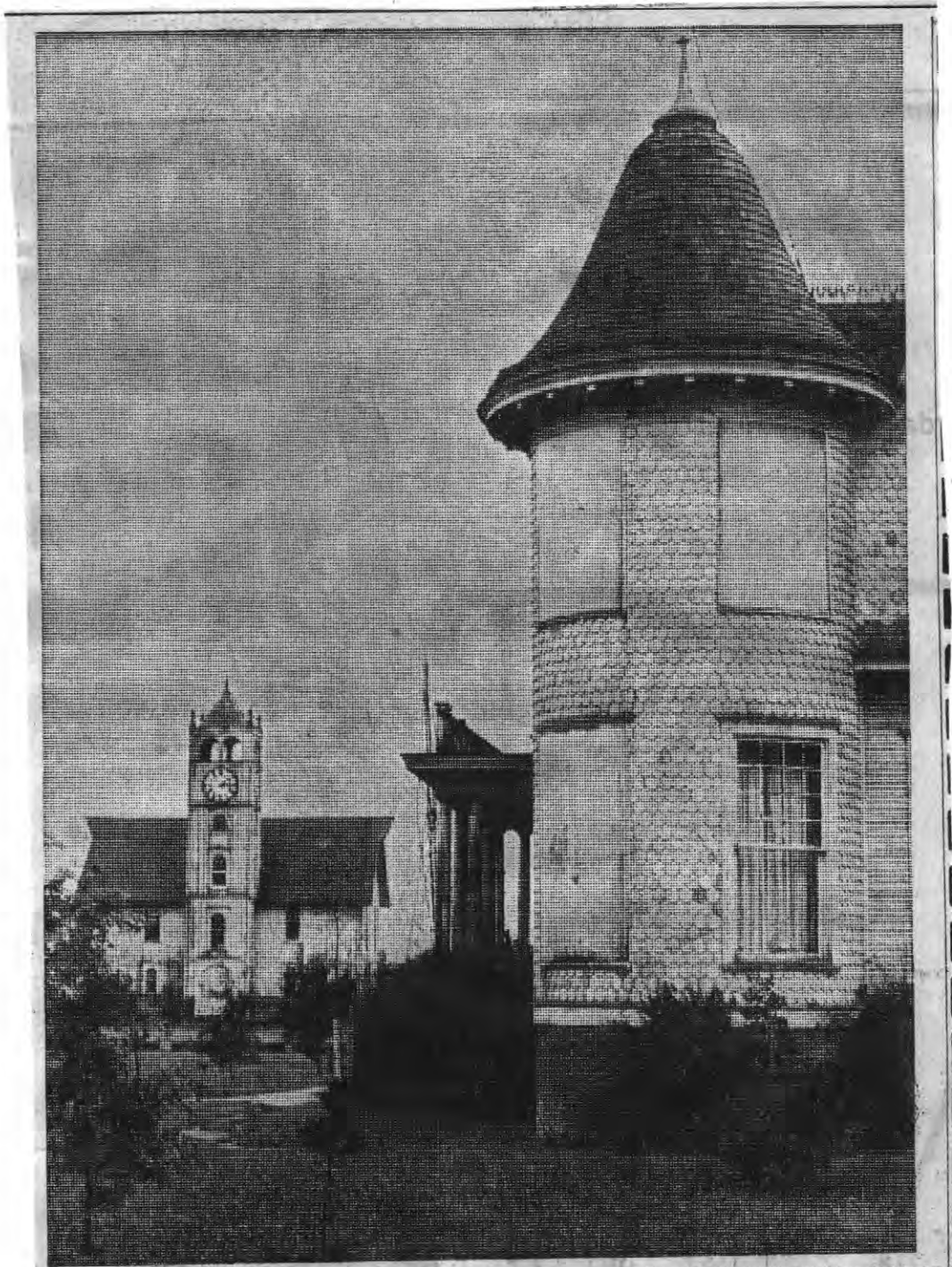
Ghosts in the attic? **Streenz** isn't worried. They're just 'coons on the roof. And a secret room? It was shown to be a large closet on the original floor plans, but no door was constructed.

There is a lot of work to be done before the Voorhies Castle will be properly renovated. A new roof is needed, along with plumbing, electricity and gallons upon gallons of paint. How do they keep plugging away at such a monumental task? **Mrs. Streenz** says she just thinks of the castle as it will be, and not as it is.

It must work, because no matter how busy they are they still have the time to chat with an occasional traveler who stops by to see, for himself, that the Voorhies Castle and the barn with the clock tower really do exist.



**THE CASTLE.** Seen through a window in the clock tower of the unique barn, the Voorhies Castle features round towers at the southwest and southeast corners. In the background is part of a grain elevator on land that was once part of the Larson estate.



News-Gazette Photo By Steve Yelvington

**TWO STYLES.** The squared-off clock tower designed by Seth Thomas on the barn at the old Voorhies Castle con-

trasts with the circular towers of the front of the house itself.

**LOOMING.** The old barn at the Voorhies Castle looks down on acres of soybeans as a flock of birds flies by. To the right of the

barn is the framework of a windmill. Story and more pictures on Page 11.

News-Gazette Photo By Steve Yelvington

