

Gamblers, ghosts and families can call Hilltop Castle home

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

For Howard Broadman, growing up in Farmington Hills was the epitome of the average childhood.

Others might take a different view of the situation. Howard, his brother Alfred and sister Eva grew up in Hilltop Castle on Middle Belt, Farmington Hills. Growing up in a replica of a German castle yielded a garden of childhood delights.

They could amaze their friends by revealing the secret passage in the castle library. For real thrills and chills, they could lay claim to possessing an almost bona fide dungeon at the end of a narrow wooden stairway hidden behind the library's secret door.

What was unique to their friends and other outsiders about growing up in a castle was taken in stride by the Broadman youngsters.

"We didn't see anything unusual about it when we were young," said Howard, 27.

While they were indifferent to their surroundings others took the time to concoct fanciful tales about the 14-room Hilltop castle that vaguely resembles Nuremberg castle. Tall tales were easy to come by since being the Broadman home was only one phase of the house's history.

"PEOPLE SAY THAT THIS house was built by a mad doctor. They say it's haunted. One time I was at this party and someone started talking to me about the house on the hill," laughed Alfred, 22.

"I didn't tell him that I lived here and he told me that you could drop an egg on the kitchen floor and it would bounce back."

"I said that I'd like to see that house someday," he said.

"Drop an egg on the floor here and it breaks," added Howard, wryly.

Hilltop was built on Middle Belt near Eleven Mile in 1938 by the Yoder family who took a fancy to the German castle and designed their home around it. Trees have since obscured the house from the road. The turret side of the dwelling is hidden from view, diminishing the home's resemblance to a story book castle.

Surrounded by seven acres of land, the house originally had a view of the

nearby stables with its own small turret topping the roof. A small apartment over the stables served as living quarters for a servant. That structure has disappeared. Only the small turret remains on top of the garage.

INSIDE VISITORS are greeted by a small pool with a fountain that rests near the main staircase in the house. The pool is fed by a six inch artesian well that also supplies the home with running water.

Bay windows provide a view of the woods in the back of the home from the living room. At one end of the room a huge wooden mantelpiece hovers over a fireplace.

Set inside the turret, which gives it a round shape, the library is hidden from the immediate view of the living room. It's lit by a round glass panel in the ceiling. "Through seas of knowledge, our course advance—discovering still new worlds of ignorance" is inscribed in circles around the lamp.

Since it appears that the light is flush with the ceiling, it would seem that changing the bulbs would be a major undertaking.

That's where the secret passage helps out. Although the panel was once covered by a bookcase, it's now openly displayed and used as another door. A wooden ladder dangling along the side of the passage offers access to the area between the ceiling and the next floor and makes it possible to change the bulbs.

DOWNSTAIRS IS A small room that the Broadmans call their dungeon. After that, the passage opens out to the back of the property.

In the dining room's doorway, there are two small closets that once constituted a second hidden passageway that led to the second story.

"There's supposed to be a third passageway that led to the two guest houses out back but my father never told us where it was. I guess it was destroyed when we put in the pool," Howard said.

A sun room and quite ordinary combination kitchen-breakfast nook make up the remainder of the first floor. Three bedrooms are on the second story.

Domesticity was far from the norm at the house in the 1950s when it was a mecca for *hula* rollers. Under new owners, the house was the site for the players who liked their games expensive and exclusive. For small timers, the two guest houses out back were the place to lose or win a few bucks on a Saturday night.

The sporting life continued at the house until Oct. 18, 1952, when both federal and local law enforcement agencies decided to raid the place.

"I guess there really wasn't that much gambling in the house itself," Howard said. "And the warrant was for this house and not for the guest houses so they beat the charge."

WITH THAT LAST BIT OF excitement, the house settled down to become a vacant, ill-repaired mess of a place until the day the late Dr. Sylvan Broadman decided to look it over in 1957.

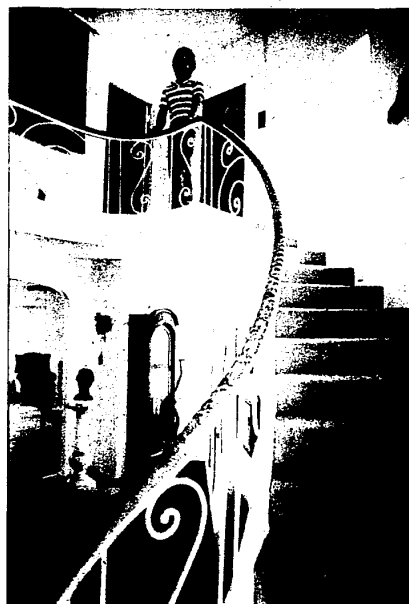
It began as a lark, but after seeing the home, Broadman decided he could look beyond the immediate need for repairs and bought the dwelling.

"It was father's house, really," said Howard, as he sat in the living room. "And those of us who would want to keep it up, can't afford to. So we're trying to sell it."

His mother, Margaret Broadman, is directing the only nursing school in Saudi Arabia. Alfred lives in Kalamazoo.

With that state of affairs, the house is slated to embark upon another phase of its existence. For the moment, it awaits an answer to the offer printed on a white sign mounted near the edge of the road: Castle and two houses for sale.

Now if you happen to have a spare \$250,000 on hand.



Howard Broadman (top) pauses at the top of Hilltop Castle's main staircase, which boasts a tapestry bannister. Among the other advantages to the home is the view from the living room's bay windows and the opportunity to enjoy the rounded rooms that a turret affords. The turret, which lends a castle-like air to the dwelling can be seen from the wooded side of the grounds, (left). Instead of a regular set of house numbers the castle offers its own method of mounting the address—a replica of a knight's shield, (bottom left). (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)



Mysteriously, a door swings open in the library leading to a small room between the walls (top left). The passage leads out to the seven acres of land around the house, (middle) leading to the medieval atmosphere of the exterior. Inside (bottom), the large living room with wooden mantelpiece manages to create a cozy affect in spite of its size.

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