

Sandwiching in History
Dr. Clarence W. Koch House (Castle on Stagecoach)
6601 Stagecoach Road, Little Rock
June 3, 2016
By Rachel Silva



Intro

Good afternoon, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of the Koch House, better known as the Castle on Stagecoach. I’d like to thank Walter Rognrud for allowing us to tour his wonderful house! I’d also like to thank several people for their help with the tour—Walter Rognrud, Dr. C. W. “Bill” Koch, Jr., Kevin Blazer, and all of my colleagues at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program and Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission.

This tour is worth one hour of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you’re interested.

Completed about 1935, the Castle House, as most people call it, was designed by Little Rock architect Ed Brueggeman for Dr. Clarence W. Koch and his wife, Marie. Clarence and Marie Koch didn’t live here very long. They sold the house in 1941 as the result of a divorce. The house was occupied by a handful of families between 1941 and 1963, when it was purchased by John and Eugenie Rognrud, Walter’s

parents. The house has been owned by the Rognrud family for 53 years. It now serves as a private residence and wedding and event venue.

Stagecoach Road

Present-day Stagecoach Road runs along the route of the Southwest Trail as it came through Little Rock. The Southwest Trail was a network of overland routes stretching from the St. Louis area of Missouri to the Red River Valley in northeast Texas and northwest Louisiana. First traveled about 1760, the Southwest Trail entered Arkansas in northeastern Randolph County and ran diagonally across the state, skirting the foothills of the Ozark Plateau and Ouachita Mountains and avoiding the swamps of eastern Arkansas, and came out at several crossings of the Red River in southwest Arkansas. The Southwest Trail was later known as the Military Road after the U.S. Congress appropriated funds for its improvement in the 1820s and 1830s. The Army resurveyed the route and cleared a better path so that it could be used as a wagon road and mail route. Stagecoach Road follows the old Military Road from the junction of the Upper Hot Springs Highway (now called Colonel Glenn) in a southwesterly direction toward the Saline County line, where it becomes Highway 5 and in Benton, the Military Road. Stagecoach Road has at various times been called the Southwest Trail, the Military Road, Fourche Pike, 19th Street Pike, the Hot Springs Highway, and the Benton Highway.

Archibald McHenry

According to the Abstract of Title for the Koch House, the first record of this property dates from March 1834 and shows it as part of a 40-acre tract sold by the United States Land Office to Archibald McHenry. Archibald McHenry was one of the earliest white settlers in this area. He owned more than 1,400 acres between his landholdings here and across the Arkansas River at Crystal Hill. His property in this area was located southwest of the intersection of present-day Stagecoach Road and David O. Dodd Road. About 1830, McHenry's sons, John and Henry, built the brick, Federal-style house that still stands at 6915 Stagecoach Road. The home is commonly called the Ten Mile House as it was located ten

miles from downtown Little Rock as well as the Stagecoach House because it was rumored to have been a stagecoach stop along the Military Road and may have boarded travelers.

David O. Dodd

After Union forces occupied Little Rock in September 1863, the Ten Mile House was used as a Union outpost on the southwestern edge of the city. In December 1863, David O. Dodd was stopped near the Ten Mile House by Union troops. Because his notebook contained a Morse code message about the strength and position of Union troops, all evidence pointed to the fact that he was a Confederate spy. Dodd was detained overnight in the smokehouse at the Ten Mile House before being transported to Little Rock, where he stood trial and was hanged on January 8, 1864. David O. Dodd Elementary School, which opened in 1924 in an earlier structure (current school built in 1959 with a 1974 addition), and David O. Dodd Road were so named to commemorate the “boy martyr of the Confederacy.”

Koch House/Castle House Construction

Dr. Koch

Dr. Clarence William Koch was born on October 29, 1896, at Johannisburg, Washington County, Illinois, to Frederich and Emelie Koch. Although Dr. Koch’s parents were born in Illinois and Missouri, respectively, they were the children of German immigrants. And his hometown of Okawville, Illinois, (“O-kah-ville”), located about 40 miles southeast of St. Louis, had a high concentration of German immigrants who came to the area beginning in the early-to-mid-19th century to farm the rolling prairie. In fact, according to Dr. Koch’s son, Bill, everyone in his dad’s family spoke exclusively in German until his dad was 10 or 11 years old (about 1906).

Dr. Koch served in World War I. Interestingly, he never served in the United States Army; rather, he volunteered to fight for the British forces before the U.S. entered the war. In 1921 Koch graduated with high honors from Washington University Dental School in St. Louis. He moved to Little Rock in 1923 and opened a dental practice specializing in orthodontics. For many years, his practice was located in the Donaghey Building at 7th and Main. Dr. Koch and his wife, Marie, who he met in St. Louis, initially lived in a house at 505 F Avenue in Park Hill (NLR). According to the 1930 Census, their house in Park Hill was valued at \$6,000, which was the cost of a nice home at that time.

In 1931 Clarence and Marie Koch traveled to Europe, where they admired castles along the Danube River. In 1933 the Kochs purchased this property on the Hot Springs Highway. They hired architect Ed Brueggeman to design a house and stable that resembled the castles they had seen in Europe. It is likely that Dr. Koch became acquainted with Brueggeman while the two of them lived in St. Louis.

Ed Brueggeman

Edward Frederick Brueggeman was born in 1905 at St. Louis but spent his formative years in Asheville, North Carolina, where he graduated from high school. During high school, Brueggeman studied under Asheville architect D. J. Dreyer during the afternoons. **Important side note: since he was interested in architecture, Brueggeman would have been very familiar with the Chateausque-style Biltmore House, built during the late 19th century in Asheville. Brueggeman attended Washington University in St. Louis and worked for the architectural firm of LaBeaum and Klein in that city until 1928, when he moved to Little Rock to work for the firm of Thompson, Sanders & Ginocchio. He opened his own practice in 1932 and soon partnered with Guy Swaim, Jr., and Bill Allen in the firm of Brueggeman, Swaim & Allen.

Back to the Koch family...

According to Little Rock city directories and the property's abstract, Clarence and Marie Koch were living in their "dream home" by 1935. Keep in mind that it was just the two of them; they didn't have any children. Up until that time, they lived in Park Hill. Dr. Koch mortgaged this house for \$10,000 in May 1935 (equal to almost \$175,000 in 2016).

Two things—1. It has been said that Dr. Koch began work on the house and stable in 1928. I have not been able to document that. He didn't acquire the property until 1933. 2. It has been said that the guest house was built first so that the Kochs would have a place to stay during construction. While it is likely that workers stayed in the stable and in tents on the property during construction of the main house, I don't think that the guest house was built until the 1940s.

What I do know with certainty is this—the house and stable were under construction between 1933 and 1935. These two structures were built with native stone and oak trees harvested on the property. At least some of the millwork was done by the Monarch Mill and Lumber Company at 2507 W. 7th Street in Little Rock. And the house has its original steel casement windows and French doors.

About 1939, Clarence and Marie Koch divorced. Dr. Koch remarried soon thereafter to Mary Aley Koch, with whom he had two children, Dr. C. W. "Bill" Koch, Jr., and Mary Koch Youree. Clarence and Mary Aley Koch initially lived at 1520 Broadway but raised their children in the house at 1727 Center, right next to the front gate of the Arkansas Governor's Mansion.

Dr. Koch was one of the first orthodontists in Arkansas. He worked diligently to increase professionalism in the field of dentistry and published articles in trade journals during the 1930s and 1940s. He was active in several professional associations, including the American Dental Association, Arkansas State Dental Association, American College of Dentists, American Association of Orthodontists, and the Southwestern Society of Orthodontists. He served as secretary of the Arkansas State Board of Dental Examiners and as a member of the staff at St.

Vincent Infirmary's Department of Dental Surgery. Koch was also a Mason, Shriner, Rotarian, and a director of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Koch died on November 2, 1979, at the age of 83. Koch's obituary contained a quote from his esteemed colleague, Dr. William R. Alstadt, who called Koch the "father of modern orthodontics" in Arkansas. He went on to say, "He was a great teacher and a wonderful friend. Although he retired from his orthodontic practice in 1962, he never lost his interest in the welfare of the public nor dentistry—particularly orthodontics. He consistently maintained high ethical standards and I honestly believe all who were fortunate enough to have known him, regarded him fondly. He had a keen sense of humor and many of us will miss him tremendously." [*AR Democrat*, 3 November 1979, p.14D]

Later Occupants of the Koch House

From 1941 to 1946, the Castle House belonged to Wilton Robert "Witt" Stephens and his first wife, Joy. Of course, you all recognize that name—in 1933 Witt Stephens founded the W. R. Stephens Investment Company, known today as Stephens, Inc.

In 1946 the house was purchased by Gus B. Walton and his wife, Caroline. At that time, Walton was president of a Little Rock investment securities firm called Walton & Company. He later developed Walton Heights on a hill overlooking the Arkansas River northwest of Highway 10 and Interstate 430. The Waltons remained in the house until 1954, when they sold to Eugene Raines, Jr., and his wife, Mary Hutson Raines.

Eugene and Mary Raines divorced about a year after they bought the house, and the property remained in the family of Mary Hutson Raines and her father, Wilbur L. "Bill" Hutson, until 1958.

In June 1958 Bill Hutson sold the property to Homer and Macie Whitcomb. Finally, in May 1963 the Whitcombs sold the property to John and Eugenie Rognrud, and it has been in their family ever since.

Rognrud Family

John and Eugenie Rognrud had five children: Rachel, Walter, Rebecca, Peter, and Riesa. John Rognrud had an aluminum siding business called Arkansas Louisiana (or ArkLa) Home Modernizers, Inc. He later opened a surplus and salvage yard and quickly discovered that he could make money in the salvaged building material business. In 1970 his business name changed from Surplus & Salvage to Ron-co Surplus & Salvage. He had two stores—one at the Saline County line in Alexander and another at 3908 E. Broadway in North Little Rock. Rognrud was a founding member of Pleasant Valley Country Club and even had a three-hole golf course in his back yard for a while. In the 1980s, the Rognruds hosted polo matches and outdoor operas on the grounds. John died in 2004. His widow, Eugenie, still lives here.

Current Use

In 2011 John and Eugenie's son, Walter, started a wedding and event venue business. His business partner is Kevin Blazer, who owns Little Rock Carriage. They currently book weddings, parties, and other events at The Castle on Stagecoach, and they have started offering brunch one Sunday each month, usually the third Sunday. Brunch usually starts at \$65/person and includes a carriage ride from your vehicle to the house, champagne, mimosas, buffet-style brunch, music, and more.

Upcoming Father's Day Events:

They are doing some special things on Father's Day weekend. There will be a Father's Day Dinner on Saturday, June 18, and a Father's Day Brunch on Sunday, June 19. Reservations are required. Visit their Facebook page for menus and more information.

Details

- House is about 9,000 square feet
- 3 finished floors and attic
 - Basement:
 - Originally housed the boiler, mechanical systems, storage space. It was rumored that Dr. Koch had a whiskey still in the basement. The basement was later finished out and has hosted parties and dances over the years.
 - Main Floor:
 - Sun Room (originally a screened porch) on west side
 - Living Room with Fireplace and exposed wood beams in ceiling
 - Be sure to check out the turret staircase and ceiling, but don't go upstairs, please.
 - Dining Room with rich wood paneling
 - Kitchen, which has been updated several times over the years, last in 2006
 - Two rooms above the garage were maid's quarters originally. Now part of the family's private living space.
 - Second Floor (Off-limits):
 - 4 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms
 - Walk-in attic, which provides access to the room in the top of the turret, which is a wood-floored library with bookcases
- Now own about 100 acres
- Notice the cast-stone seal above the front entrance, featuring a knight's head and castle tower with the phrase "Grati Amici," meaning Grateful Friends
- Hand-stenciled wood beams on the living room ceiling and in the top of the turret
- John Rogrud installed the swimming pool in the early 1970s
- Mid-1980s Remodel:

- The basement floors, which had been asbestos tile and carpet, were replaced with flagstone
- Basement walls were changed from unfinished concrete to rock-face concrete
- Screened porch on west end of main level was glassed-in
- Hired a stone mason from Leslie, AR, to add a staircase on the west end of the back porch
- Added flower beds

****Next tour is Friday, July 1 at All Souls Church in Scott.**