

Caenen Castle (1907)

12407 Johnson Dr. - Shawnee
Register of Historic Kansas Places

The formidable battlements of Caenen Castle have loomed over Johnson Drive for almost a century. Built in 1907 by dairy farmer Remi Caenen, the house is thought to be modeled after a French or Belgian castle. Caenen quarried the stones for the house by hand, working alone in a pit on one of his farm tracts, and hauling the stone to the site where a stonemason and his two assistants did the construction work. Caenen did the quarrying in his “spare” time, and the home took two years to complete.



Constructed in 1907 by dairy farmer Remi Caenen, Caenen Castle is thought to have been modeled after a Belgian or French castle. Caenen quarried the stones by hand in his spare time. *Johnson County Museum Collection.*

The castle had a full basement, twelve rooms, and two and a half stories. According to the book *The Caenen Family of America* by Florence Boehm Vandever, Caenen also installed a “lighting plant” which produced gas for the home’s lights using water and calcium carbide. Caenen also installed an interior water system for the home.

Caenen came to the United States with his family from Belgium. They moved to Cahokia, IL. In a flood of the Mississippi River the family lost all of their possessions. They relocated to a farm west of present day Lenexa. At the age of 52, Remi bought a farm in Monrovia and started an 80-cow dairy. After his wife died, he started work on the house. Called “the big house” by his family, it was completed in 1907, at a cost of \$10,000. Caenen also built other stone houses in the area, including two that are located across the street from the castle.

Members of the Caenen family lived in the house until 1925, when they rented it to Dr. Elstone, who operated the house as a nursing home for the mentally disturbed. The house changed hands several times, operating as a restaurant, a nightclub, and a Halloween haunted house. When the Caenen home operated as “The Cock Robin’s Castle Nightclub” the nickname “Caenen Castle” was born.

The "Caenen Castle" has had several changes over the years. The building suffered a fire, which burned much of the pine interior of the home. An owner, to give the house a more "open" feel, removed two of the bedrooms. The home now has central heat and air conditioning, as well as a modern kitchen.

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