

THE WAY WE WERE

Death drew artist to area, but beauty made him stay

Vincent Nicholas Rossi

VALLEY CENTER—In the midst of the boulders, oak trees and cactus of Moosa Canyon stands the tower of a medieval castle, three stories high with turreted top and walls 3 feet thick.

It has been there 112 years, lending its name to nearby Old Castle Road.

The building originated in the convergence of a bloody Old West gun battle and a gentle artist with a dream.

The gun battle was a January 1888 shootout in the canyon that left four people dead. The artist was Isaac Jenkinson Frazee, called in by the sheriff's office to sketch the crime scene.

Frazee, who was born in Indiana in 1858, moved with his family to Southern California in 1873, according to Craig Walker, his great-grandson, who has extensively researched Frazee's life.

Visitors to the Valley Center History Museum can learn more about the castle in an exhibit running through Dec. 30. The exhibit includes paintings by Isaac Frazee, his sketched blueprint for the castle, as well as pictures of the castle, the Frazee family and other memorabilia donated by Walker and by Norton and Marcia Wrisley, the current owners of the castle.

Isaac Frazee was a great uncle to former Carlsbad mayor and state assemblyman Robert Frazee, Walker said.

When Isaac Frazee was summoned to Moosa Canyon in 1888, he was homesteading a ranch in the San Luis Rey Valley while also painting and writing poetry. After he was called in to draw the sketches, Frazee fell in love with the canyon. Trees and a nearby waterfall touched his artistic sense. Indian artifacts he found heightened his longtime interest in American Indian culture.

Frazee went home and convinced his reluctant wife, Bettie, to sell the homestead. He used the money from the sale to buy 160 acres in Moosa Canyon, and the Frazees arrived there in 1890.

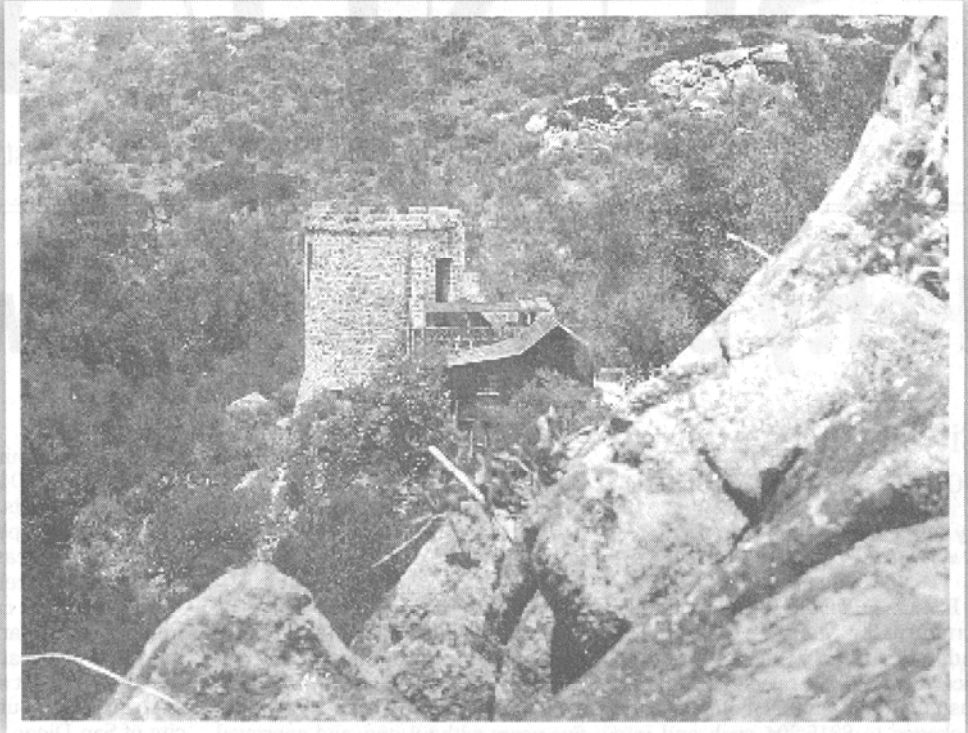
Isaac Frazee "was a dreamer," Walker said. "That was part of the reason he built the castle."

Walker said Frazee had traced his ancestry to inhabitants of Dunnotar Castle near Aberdeen, Scotland. The artist sketched a blueprint for a castle home modeled after Dunnotar.

For two years Frazee worked on his own, breaking up rocks to be used in the project. At first, he and his wife lived in a tent and later in a wooden house erected nearby.

One day, a man named Donald McGilvriap passed through and asked for a drink of water. When he learned that McGilvriap was a Scottish stonemason, Frazee hired him.

By 1893 Frazee and McGilvriap had built the tower and part of an adjoining outer wall. Then, according to Walker, the stonemason had to leave "and Isaac ran out of money. So he moved his two-story, wood-framed house next to the tower and called it good."



Woreland Castle is shown in a photo taken about 1900. Isaac Frazee built the castle overlooking Moosa Canyon near what is now Old Castle Road. Photos courtesy of Valley Center History Museum



Bettie and Isaac Frazee lived in the castle from 1893 to 1927, before moving to Laguna Beach. This photo of them was taken about 1930.

Frazee originally called his castle Warland in acknowledgment of the gunfight. Later, he altered the name to Woreland Castle.

The Frazees raised seven children there, instilling in them a love of nature and the arts.

To Frazee, "the essence of love was service," Walker said. Often Frazee would decide to keep a painting he'd just finished rather than sell it, or he'd give paintings to friends.

Walker said Frazee "spent hours developing the property as a park," inviting people from all over the area to camp there. He never charged admission.

The Frazees presided over an informal colony of artists and intellectuals. They put on musical pageants with family and friends at a natural amphitheater on their property.

The Peace Pipe Pageant, staged in 1915, attracted 1,500 people from all over the state, according to an article that year in *The San Diego Union*. Participants included a prominent singer who was a family friend, with music written by a member of the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra. *Sunset* magazine called it "one of the most remarkable outdoor pageants" in the state's history.

Again, no admission was charged.

In the early 1920s, age made it more difficult for Isaac and Bettie Frazee to maintain their relatively isolated estate. The accidental death of their oldest son, Jenkinson, during the same period was an additional blow, Walker said.

In 1922 the Frazees began spending the winters in Laguna Beach, returning to their castle home in the summers. In 1927 they moved permanently to Laguna Beach. Isaac Frazee died in 1942.

The castle, with more rooms added, has continued as a private residence for a number of owners over the decades.

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