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The CASTLE that ROCKED

The history of Castle Farms music theatre

by **Richard A. Wiles**

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The CASTLE that ROCKED

The history of
Castle Farms
music theatre
(1976-1993)

By Richard A. Wiles

It began as the dream of a Chicago attorney and corporate executive in 1917. Albert Loeb decided he wanted to build a summer residence along the shoreline of Pine Lake (now Lake Charlevoix) so he purchased 800 acres of land south of the city of Charlevoix. The property would eventually grow to over 1,600 acres, and besides containing his lake-side mansion, the estate would be the home of a self-sufficient, scientifically designed, “ideal farm.” It was called Loeb Farms.

Albert Loeb was an executive with Sears Roebuck & Company, at that time a leading seller of farm equipment



Castle Farms music theatre. Photo from Castle Farms of Charlevoix, Photography Plus

in the United States. He felt Loeb Farms would be the perfect showcase for his company’s newest farm implements. Inspiration for his summer residence along a bluff area of Pine Lake came from Romanesque/Gothic castles found throughout Normandy, France. It would be nicknamed the “Big House.” All of the farm buildings would have the same Gothic style as the residence.

By the summer of 1919, with the help of 35 stonemasons and more than 100 local workers, plus thousands of northern Michigan fieldstones, the residence and barns were completed. The stone barns were filled with Sears Roebuck & Co. farm machinery, prize-winning Holstein-Friesian dairy cows and Duroc-Jersey hogs, plus 13 pairs of magnificent Belgian draft horses. There was a large fieldstone



The "Big House" on the bluff of Pine Lake.
Photo from Vintage Views of Charlevoix

main barn, and two massive stone wings extending both in an eastern and western direction. The structures were built along the highway leading from Charlevoix south to Ironton and on to East Jordan. Loeb Farms was open to the public that summer of 1919 as the Midwest "showcase for modern technological farming." Soon, the complex was producing dairy cows and hogs.

From the summer of 1919 through the summer of 1924, Loeb Farms was a northern Michigan tourist attraction. Loeb had a baseball diamond built close to the farm complex. Some of his workers formed a team he named the "Sodbusters" to entertain visitors coming to see to his working farm estate. While never becoming the profitable enterprise he had hoped for, Loeb Farms, in many other ways, was a huge success. The architecture of the buildings was widely admired, the farm technology being showcased was envied, and the farm's prize-winning farm animals were world-renowned.

Then disaster struck. Loeb succumbed to a fatal heart attack in October of 1924. He had known heart problems, and after he died, the "castle farm complex" was eventually faced with the same pre-Great Depression woes as everyone in the United States farm industry. Second son Ernest took over the day-to-day operations. He had

been trained at Michigan State University in agriculture, and he did his best to continue the work begun by his father. From 1924 until 1927, the farm continued to operate, but by 1927, the family decided to end its existence. All of the farm equipment and livestock were auctioned off or sold, and for the next 30-plus years, the stone farm buildings were just used for storage. Their upkeep waned and, by 1962, when Muskegon artist and businessman John Van Haver purchased the property, it was in ruins. The barn's roofs had collapsed. An extensive cleanup of the property was needed.

It took Van Haver until the summer of 1966 (July 2, 1966) to ready the 100 acres into Castle Van Haver. It was once again to be a summer tourist attraction — this time featuring artist Van Haver's design and metal casting studio, art gallery, gift shop, coffee house and furniture craft shop. Besides being a professional artist, Van Haver



Construction of Loeb Farms in 1918. Photo from Castle Farms

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Loeb Farms was home to 200 head of prize-winning dairy cattle, including Marion, Queen of the cows! Marion was the second largest producer of milk in the world in 1923. She produced 35,000 pounds of milk per year, and had to be milked four times per day. Loeb Farms (1918-1927) was the first farm in Michigan to use electric milking machines and electric watering troughs — available for sale in the Sears catalog, naturally!

was a professional body builder who competed in Mr. Universe contests. His restoration of the “castle” included the addition of a large Romanesque arch opening into the courtyard.

By the end of the summer season of 1969, Van Haver was having financial difficulty. He decided in November of that year to sell his property to Arthur and Erwina Reibel of Charlevoix.

Reibel had moved his family to the resort town in 1968, after a successful career in the Detroit area. He had been



Arthur Reibel



Loeb Farms horse barn in the 1920s. Photo from “Reflections of Yesteryear”



The Carriage Hall was originally an open air structure that housed buggies and automobiles during the days of Loeb Farms.

a corporate auditor for the Internal Revenue Service, a certified public accountant, and a law partner in Reibel-Oliver-Dinion of Troy, Michigan. He also had served a stint in the United States Army. Art Reibel grew up on a farm in the Detroit suburb of Oak Park and, along with Erwina’s influence, saw the “castle” property’s potential of becoming a horse stable and riding academy.

The property was now given its third name, Castle Farms, and the Reibels proceeded to turn the facility into an arts and crafts center complete with studios, a dinner theatre with a tavern and medievally dressed waitresses. Until about the mid-80s, Castle Farms operated, but not as successfully as the Reibels had hoped. By 1975, the federal government’s Small Business Administration was considering foreclosure



Loeb Farms Charlevoix, Mich.



JOHN VAN HAYER,
Artist, Owner
Castle Van Haber



Castle Van Haber

2 MILES SOUTHEAST ON
HIGHWAY M-66 AT CHARLEVOIX

— Come as you are — Everyone welcome —

JOHN VAN HAYER, OWNER
Castle Van Haber Charlevoix, Mich.
Phone 547-9757

Castle Van Haber

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of the property. Meanwhile, Reibel had been elected in November of 1972 to the 90th District Court's judgeship. It was to be a six-year term of office but ended abruptly on Wednesday, January 8, 1975, when he was forced to resign his office under allegations of misconduct by the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission. There were a total of 13 charges of misuse of office pending against Reibel including a conflict of interest charge involving Castle Farms.

In order to pay the bills, the Reibels decided to convert Castle Farms into a concert venue. So, a large stage was constructed close to the main dairy farm building, and on Tuesday July 6, 1976, Castle Farms Music Theatre was born with the appearance of the progressive, album-oriented rock band, Pavlovs Dog, along with the Hamburg, Germany, band NEKTAR.

Three weeks later, on Saturday July 31, around 6 p.m., traffic came to a standstill at U.S. 31 and M-66 in Charlevoix. Castle



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The Record-Eagle, Traverse City, Mich. 49684

Thursday, August 5, 1976

LAST MICHIGAN CONCERT — In the afternoon of Saturday, July 31, two Lear-Jets leased from Jet-Avia out of Las Vegas landed at Charlevoix Airport. At 7:10 in the evening Art Reibel opened the gates to his Castle Farms and approximately 7,500 people began streaming in. First, it was the Bellamy Brothers who played to set the mood. But the people who paid six and seven dollars to attend waited to hear the stars — Loggins and Messina. Castle Farms was the concert site for the last Michigan appearance of the duo. After this summer's national tour, Jim Messina, left, and Ken Loggins, right, will separate to do their own thing. Already, they seemed disjoined, playing in their different styles — Loggins rocking hard, Messina strumming his guitar mellow. After an encore and a fireworks display marking the end of the concert, the people who bought 3,000 pre-sold tickets from Traverse City headed home.

(Record-Eagle photo by Ken Smith)



Farms had sold over 7,500 tickets for its second concert which featured the Bellamy Brothers and Loggins & Messina.

The August 5, 1976, *Traverse City Record Eagle* article, Last Michigan Concert, stated: "In the afternoon of Saturday, July 31, Lear Jets leased from Jet-Avia, out of Las Vegas, landed at Charlevoix Airport. At 7:10 in the evening Art Reibel opened the gates to his Castle Farms and approximately 7,500 began streaming in. First it was the Bellamy Brothers, who played to set the mood. But, the people who paid six and seven dollars to attend waited to hear the stars—Loggins and Messina. Castle

Farms was the concert site for their last Michigan appearance."

From July of 1976 through the summer

season of 1993, a total of 125 separate concert dates were filled with over 135 different performers. The band Chicago appeared four times, Willie Nelson,

and the Beach Boys each appeared three times. Other national acts to play at The Castle included: The Doobie Brothers, Foreigner, Seals & Croft, Bob Seger, Mitch Ryder, The Marshall Tucker Band, John Cougar Mellencamp, Alice Cooper, REO Speedwagon, Chuck Mangione, Ozzy Osbourne, The Oak Ridge Boys, Rick Springfield, Def Leppard, Huey Lewis, Frankie Valli, Billy Idol, Aerosmith, Tina Turner, ZZ Top, Bryan Adams, Alabama, Bob Dylan, AC/DC, Sting, Bon Jovi, Ted Nugent, Metallica, Kenny G, Rod Stewart.

For most summers, beginning in 1980, Castle Farms hosted an average of nine concerts per season. There were 12 concerts in 1990 and only three in 1991. The concerts became controversial in Charlevoix since they added greatly to the summer traffic congestion. One newspaper account in the 1980s quoted a Charlevoix resident as saying, "The noise, traffic, drunkenness and other problems resulting from those concerts made for a lot of complaining ... It was a wreck and ruin after they started having them."

By the mid 1990s, the number of concerts were down and the Reibels had begun hosting a Reggae festival, along with an art festival. The last official concert year was 1993. The Friends of 4-H in Charlevoix attempted to buy the property in 1994 to make a camping/activities park but money could not be raised. By 1999, Reibel had died of a massive heart attack, and the property went up for auction for back taxes. In 2001, Linda Mueller purchased the property for \$550,000. That included the buildings and 38 acres on both sides of the M-66 highway. Linda Mueller also paid the Reibel heirs \$200,000 to sign a warranty deed to the property and refrain from any other legal action concerning Castle Farms.

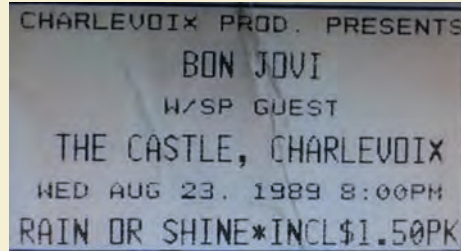


Castle Farms 1980s



Art Reibel, Susan Shea, Brad Parsons, Renee Chandler pictured at the Castle July 23, 1983. Photo from gwood.us

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By 2005, Castle Farms was restored and renovated for the fourth owners whose revival ideas included a special events venue for weddings, receptions, proms, festivals, trade shows, corporate, and other social events. Castle Farms was listed in 1995 on the National & State Historic Registries. It is now one of the premier historic attractions in the state of Michigan. IT is open year 'round to visitors interested in touring the property. 🌿

Richard A. Wiles is a retired history and reading instructor at Petoskey High School and a former Spring Arbor University class instructor in research. He has written five White Paper research projects for the Petoskey Public Library involving historical events in the area, including the crash of the B-52 Air Force bombing trainer into Little Traverse Bay in 1971.

Wiles holds a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Toledo, a Master's degree in reading development-psychology from Michigan State University and an Educational Specialist degree in community leadership from Central Michigan University.



Castle Farms, 2014. Photo from Castle Farms of Charlevoix

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Who ROCKED the Castle?

1976

Pavlovs Dog and Nektar
Donovan

1977

Chicago
Jackson Browne
The Beach Boys

1978

The Doobie Brothers
Heart and Pablo Cruise
Foreigner and Eddie Money
Seals and Crofts

1979

Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band
Dr. Hook & Jay Ferguson
The Doobie Brothers
Chicago & Orleans
The Cars

1980

Marshall Tucker Band
John Cougar Mellencamp
Savoy Brown
Spirit with Randy California
.38 Special
The Doobie Brothers
Foghat
Alice Cooper & Billy Squier
Bob Seger & Silver Bullet Band
The Cars
J. Geils

1981

Molly Hatchet & The Rockets
Ted Nugent, Blackfoot & Krocus
Cheap Trick and Billy Squier
Tom Petty
Foghat and Mitch Rider
REO Speedwagon
Chuck Mangione
The Doobie Brothers
Rick Springfield

1982

Ozzy Osbourne
Blue Oyster Cult & Aldo Nova
The Oak Ridge Boys
Rick Springfield & Theatre
The Police, English Beat & Theatre



Heart and John Cougar
Go Gos & A Flock of Seagulls

1983

Willie Nelson
Loverboy and Quiet Riot
Men at Work and INXS
Def Leppard/Krocus/Gary Moore
Asia

1984

Scorpions
Huey Lewis
.38 Special
Frankie Valli
Aerosmith
Temptatinos
Night Rider
Quiet Riot
Bily Idol

1985

Iron Maiden
Ratt and Poison
Pointer Sisters
REO Speedwagon
Beach Boys
Power Station
Kenny Loggins
Tina Turner
John Cafferty & The Beaver
Brown Band

1986

ZZ Top
Beach Boys

Loverboy
Stevie Nicks
Willie Nelson
John Denver

1987

Ratt & Poison
Chicago
Bryan Adams
Whitesnake
Monkees
REO Speedwagon
Huey Lewis
Alabama
Tina Turner

1988

AC/DC
Heart
Randy Travis
Bob Dylan
Whitesnake
First Reggae Festival
Def Leppard
Sting
David Lee Roth
Judas Priest
Scorpions
Rod Stewart

1989

Poison
Amy Grant
Ozzy Osbourne
Second Reggae Festival

Beach Boys and Chicago
Ringo & All Star Band
Bon Jovi

1990

Aerosmith
Randy Travis
Third Reggae Festival
First Ann CF Art Festival
Jambalaya Jamboree

1991

Ted Nugent
Willie Nelson
Second Annual Art Festival

1992

Moody Blues & Symphony
Marshall Tucker Band
Metallica
The Wild Blue & John D. Lamb
Third Annual Art Festival
Castle Farms Wine Tasting
Opens

1993

John Anderson/Gary Grapp
Def Leppard
Reba McEntire, Lorrie Morgan
Hank Williams, Jr.
The Beach Boys
Kenny G
Marty Stuart & Sammy Kershaw
Fourth Annual Art Festival
Castle Farms Wine Tasting