

CASTLE

11-03-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

THERE HAS BEEN FEW CASTLES BUILT IN DENVER AND NEARBY; PARTICULARLY, ONE HIGH ON A CRAGGY KNOLL OVERLOOKING PEASANTS AND PLAINS BELOW, AS BEFITTED NEUSCHWANSTEIN THE CASTLE OF KING LUDWIG IN SCHWANGAU GERMANY.

YET, THERE IS ONE WHICH I VISITED OFTEN UPON ARRIVING IN DENVER IN 1948. IT WAS NAMED CHARLFORD AND WAS LOCATED THIRTY MILES SOUTHEAST OF DENVER, ATOP A HILL, EAST OF SEDALIA, COLORADO.

BY THEN THE CASTLE HAD BECOME A PART-TIME HOME FOR THE C.A. JOHNSON FAMILY OF DENVER. MRS. JOHNSON, A BEAUTY WHEN YOUNG AS ALICE PHILLIPS, HUSBAND TO JAMES LAUGHTON PHILLIPS. IN JUNE 1918 THEIR ONLY CHILD GIFFORD PHILLIPS WAS BORN. NOT LONG LATER. JAMES LAUGHTON PHILLIPS WAS KILLED LATE IN THE WAR, LEAVING HIS ESTATE TO SON GIFFORD; WIFE ALICE AS GUARDIAN UNTIL GIFFORD WAS TWENTY-FIVE.

IN THE 1920s MRS PHILLIPS MARRIED CHARLES JOHNSON, A DENVER REALTOR. THEY HAD A SON CHARLES JOHNSON III.

IN DENVER, C.A. JOHNSON II AND HIS WIFE WERE ACTIVE IN SOCIETY, BUILT A CASTLE, NAMING IT CHARLFORD, AFTER THE TWO CHILDREN.

WHEN I MET GIFFORD PHILLIPS HE WAS 30, SINGLE, ONE OF THE FEW IN DENVER SOCIETY OUTSPOKEN IN SUPPORT OF THE NEW DEAL, HARRY TRUMAN, ALL DEMOCRAT LEANINGS. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR A NUMBER OF BUSINESSES, AN ACTIVE MANAGER IN EACH.

WITHIN HIS FAMILY CIRCLE, HE WAS ALSO ACTIVE IN SOCIETY, CONTRIBUTING TIME AND MONEY TO ART AND MUSIC, SOCIAL GROUPS. THESE FRIENDS TENDED TO BE MARRIED., GIFF AN ELIGIBLE BACHELOR.

IN GIFF'S PERSONAL AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES, HIS BUSINESS ASSOCIATES AND MANAGERS WERE YOUNG, GENERALLY SINGLE, INVOLVED IN SPORTS, JAZZ, ENTERTAINMENT, COMMUNICATIONS.

IT HAPPENED THAT I CAME TO DENVER WITH MY NAVY COMMANDING OFFICER TO ESTABLISH A RADIO STATION FOR PHILLIPS. (ALAS, THE FCC FAILED TO GRANT ANY NEW LICENSEES THOSE YEARS, FEELING THAT THE COMING TELEVISION WOULD USURP ALL ADVERTISING DOLLARS.)

MY NAVY FRIEND, WHO BECAME MY BROTHER-IN-LAW WHEN HE WED MY WIFE'S SISTER, BECAME GIFFORDS' DENVER BUSINESS MANAGER.

THE JOHNSON FAMILY BUILT AND LIVED AT CHARLFORD UNTIL WWII WHEN HER HEALTH REQUIRED A LESS RIGOROUS LIFE STYLE. THEN IN 1948 HIS FAMILY MOVED TO SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. ONLY GIFFORD REMAINED IN DENVER, USING THAT RESIDENCE FOR ENTERTAINMENT AND RELAXATION.

CHARLFORD WAS NOT LARGE. BUT IT DID HAVE THE **GREAT ROOM**, FURNISHED WITH HERALDRY PIECES ON WALLS, KNIGHTS ARMOR STAND ON THE FLOOR WITH , THE LARGE DINING TABLES, STRAIGHT BACK CHAIRS. YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BE A ROMANTIC TO FEEL YOU WERE IN AN EUROPEAN SETTING WHEN IN THIS ROOM. IMMEDIATELY OUTSIDE THAT WEST WALL, THE GROUND DESCENDED MORE THAN 300 FEET VERTICAL;. FROM THIS SECURITY THE SIMPLE WISDOM, THERE WOULD NEVER BE AN INVADER COMING THROUGH THAT WINDOW .

TO THE EAST THE GROUND WAS ROCKY, PLANTS NATIVE TO WESTERN UNITED STATES, AND ANIMALS LIVING THERE ETERNALLY. AS A TRANSPLANT EASTERNER, I SOON LEARNED A RATTLE IN THOSE ROCKS COULD NOT BE IGNORED. AND ONE MORE FIRST, SUMMER'S DELIGHT IN A DIP IN THE OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL.

CHARLFORD WAS A GREAT VISIT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, RUGGED HIKES EVERYWHERE EAST, COMPLEMENTING THE MEDIEVAL FURNISHINGS INSIDE. AND ALWAYS, CONTINUAL GREAT CONVERSATION, FOOD.

GIFFORD'S STAFF WAS SOCIALLY AWARE, AND WHEN ENTERTAINING FOR ANY REASON, SOME GUESTS PHOTOS WOULD APPEAR IN A DENVER SOCIETY PAGE. I WAS PARTY TO GROUP THE SUMMER OF 1953, TO THE SURPRISE OF FRIENDS.

STILL, THE CASTLE DOMINATED ANY GUEST.

