



CITIZEN JOURNALIST

PATTI AHERN

attiarma@aol.com

Could Errol Magidson be a modern-day knight of sorts? Just what makes a knight? For the most part, knights have quests and pursue them with single-minded determination. They also aim to speak the truth and seem very connected to castles.

In Magidson's case, his castle is Givins' castle, at 103rd Street and Longwood Avenue in the Beverly community of Chicago. His quest is to document the castle's history as truthfully and accurately as possible.

Magidson began to explore the castle's history in December 2009, although his interest in the structure goes as far back as the late 1970s. It was 1977 when he and his wife, Jan, were driving through Beverly, looking for a home, when they happened to drive past the castle.

"We were driving on 99th Street and turned onto Longwood Drive. The light changed at 103rd Street, and I looked up and saw the castle. It took my breath away," Magidson said.

The couple eventually bought a home in Beverly, and now, some 30 years later, Magidson belongs to the "Men of the Castle," a local group affiliated with Beverly Unitarian Church that is dedicated to the preservation of Givins' castle. When members of the group started talking about the castle's history in late 2009, Magidson volunteered to be the documentarian.

Thus far, Magidson, 68, a retired professor from Daley College and an adjunct professor at St. Xavier University, has spent more than 1,500 hours and an unspecified amount of money on the project, which he hopes to complete by this fall.

"This is sort of like being a paleo-anthropologist," he said. "Anthropologists go looking for dinosaur bones, and with logic and luck, they get found. The castle's 'dinosaur' information is out there. Finding it is like looking for those bones."

His "bone-hunting" has taken him to the Ridge Historical Society, the Chicago Public Library and the Chicago History Museum. His research has shown that the castle was built in 1886-87 by Robert Givins, a prominent real estate developer.

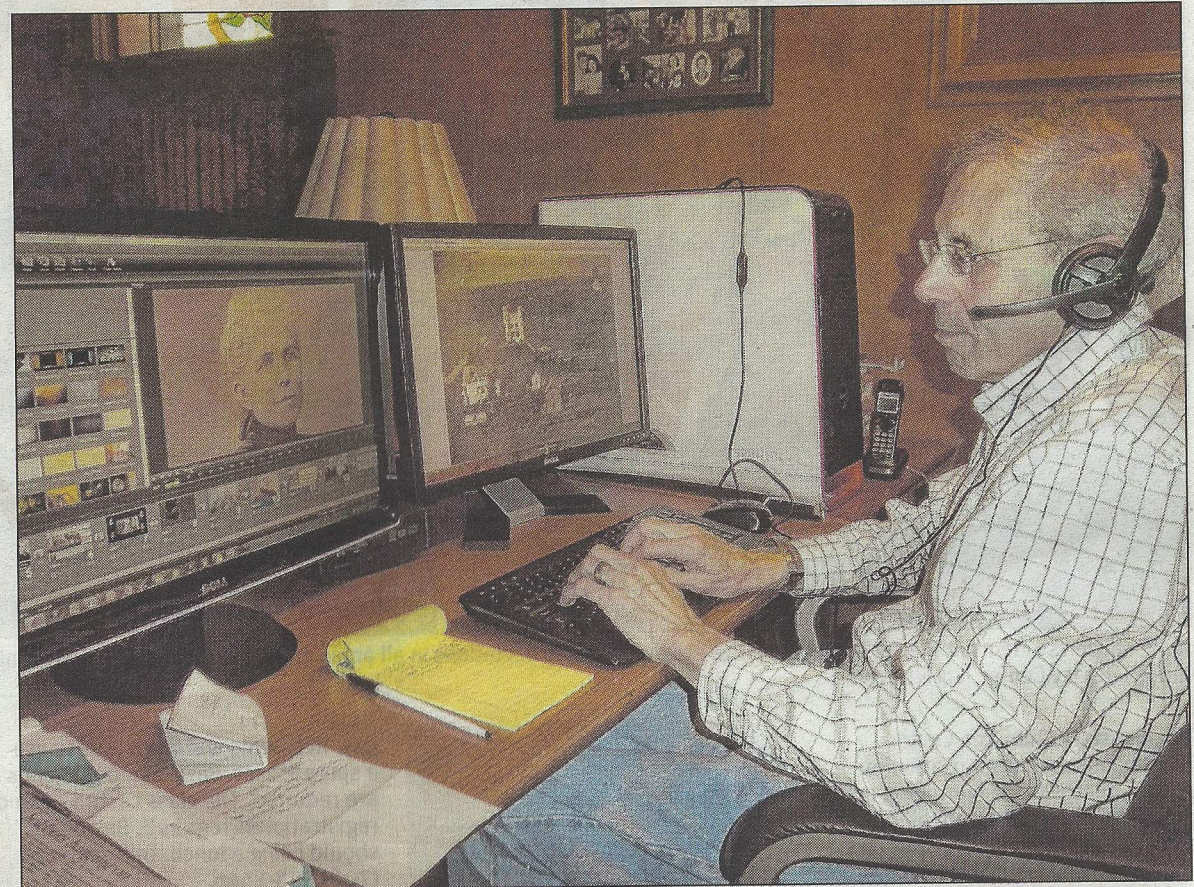
Legend has it that Givins had the castle built to impress a fiancé living in Ireland, but that's apparently not true. Some historians believe he built the castle to promote his real estate business. Magidson said his documentary will explore the various reasons why Givins may have built the castle.

Regardless of why it was built, Givins lived in the castle, off and on, from 1887 until 1909. After that there were three owners, or "castle keepers," until 1942 when the current owner, Beverly Unitarian Church, purchased the building for about \$17,000.

While the castle has had updates, such as electricity and additional radiators, it has a lot of its original features, including stained-glass windows, one of which is inscribed with the motto: "While I breathe, I hope."

When Magidson finishes his video history, entitled "Chicago's Only Castle: the History of Givins' Irish Castle and its Keepers," he would like to make a Blu-ray disc of the documentary that could be sold to raise money for the preservation of the castle.

Beverly castle history project nears its completion



Hard at work: Errol Magidson, in the basement office of his home in Chicago's Beverly community, examines photos for his documentary on the history of Givins' Castle. | SUPPLIED PHOTO

Renee Wilson is a harpist from Beverly, and it's her job to provide music for the documentary. Wilson is an enthusiastic supporter of the project.

"I'm thrilled to be working with Errol on this project. Picking out music for a castle theme is a riot, just like you'd think it would be," Wilson said. "I've had a great time asking people who aren't even

involved with the project what they think is proper castle music. Absolutely everyone has an opinion about what would be perfect, and it is really fun to hear all of the different perspectives."

Josh Van Tuyl, assistant director of media services at St. Xavier University, is also a volunteer for this project, working as a co-director and videographer. He said he

spends "lots of hours" working on the film.

"For every 30 seconds of film, there is almost three hours of editing time," Van Tuyl said. "I feel excited, though, everytime I look at this and I can't wait to show it off. It's really amazing that not many people know about the castle. It's almost a secret of the community."