




HAMMOND CASTLE

"For the last three years I motored many miles through Europe. After traveling all day I would arrive at my destination to see a church, a cathedral, a town hall, a scrap of Roman wall or viaduct, a colosseum or an ancient theater. It was always a piece of architecture that suddenly dissipated the obscurity of time and brought the living presence back of all ages. It is in the stone and wood that the personal record of man comes down to us. We call it atmosphere, this indescribable something that still haunts these old monuments. You can read history, you can visit a hundred museums containing their handiwork, but nothing can reincarnate their spirit except to walk through rooms in which they have lived and through the scenes that were the background of their lives. It is a marvelous thing, this expression of human ideals in walls and windows."

— John Hays Hammond Jr., from an unpublished letter, 1929

Overlooking the infamous "Reef of Norman's Woe" on the rocky Atlantic shoreline of Magnolia, Massachusetts, stands **Abbadia Mare**, the **Abbey by the Sea**. Now known as **Hammond Castle**, this structure of striking medieval beauty was **Dr. John Hammond's** [1888-1965] home, laboratory, and safe haven. To fulfill a lifelong dream, Dr. Hammond, a prolific inventor who held a number of patents second only to the amount held by family friend **Thomas Edison**, began designing and building his domain in 1926. The ambitious task was completed in 1930 with the aid of Boston-based architects Allen and Collins, who were afterwards hired by John D. Rockefeller to create **The Cloisters** museum in New York City. This castle is a testament to this remarkable and brilliant man. His ambition was to leave a modest, but beautiful museum with an authentic atmosphere, artfully assembled with myriads of genuine architectural



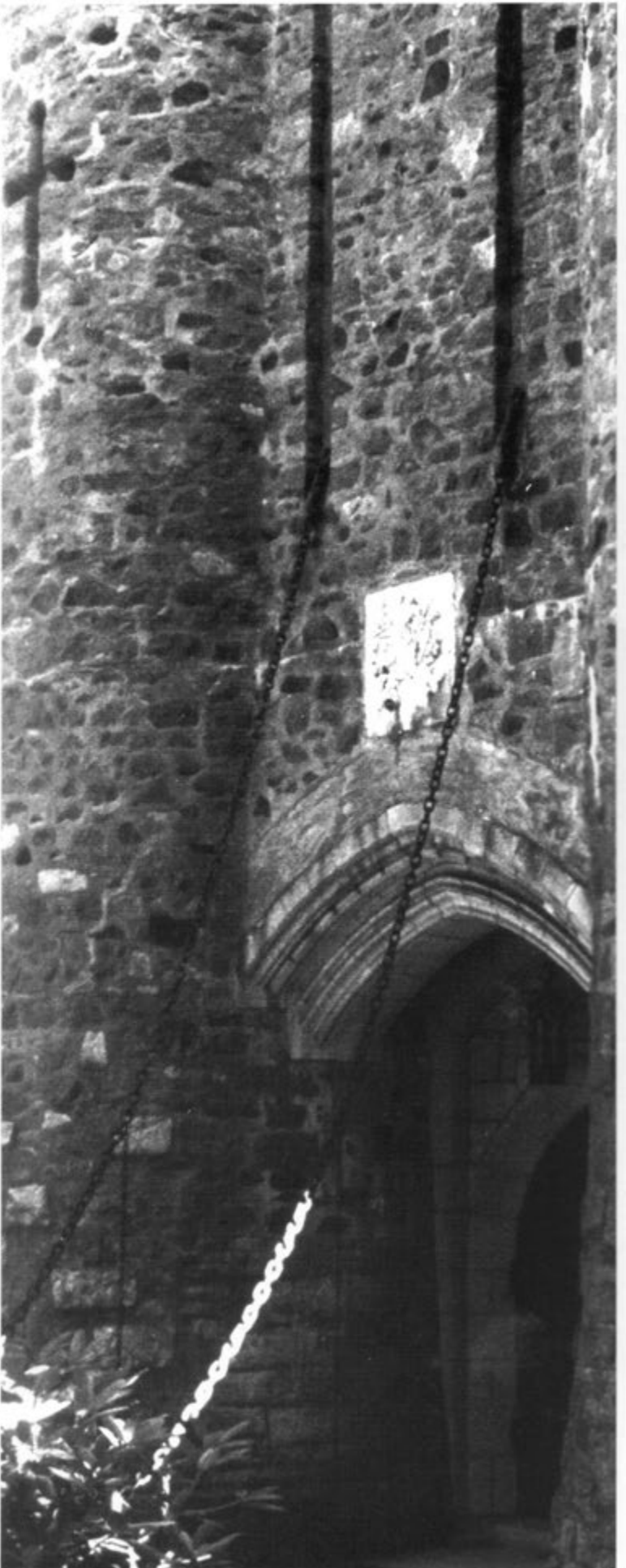
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Curse and Kambriel


pieces collected on his numerous journeys abroad.

The castle stands today as a magnificent edifice where one is immediately enchanted by the sight of the towering stone walls, including a series of grandiose gothic arches which frame the breathtaking view of the ocean beyond. A drawbridge leads to the front door where Dr. Hammond's guests were once greeted by his English butler, then instructed to await in the **Mirror Room** and sign a guest book while the host was informed of their arrival. Inside the castle awaits narrow spiral stone staircases which occasionally wind to the left in order to trick right-handed guests, evidence of Dr. Hammond's wicked sense of humour. From these serpentine staircases, one may travel upwards to the **Tower Galleries**, or descend into the **Great Hall**, which is reminiscent of the Cathedral of St. Nazaire at Carcassonne, France.

The imposing stone-floored Great Hall was designed to house Dr. Hammond's enormous pipe organ. This was the largest privately owned pipe organ in the world, with some of the longest pipes traveling underground to a depth of six stories. The organ resounds majestically up to the soaring cathedral ceilings, highlighted by a full-scale stained glass rosette window. With its atmosphere of grandeur and its collection of rare religious artifacts, the Great Hall provided the most suitable of backdrops for the many elegant parties hosted by Dr. Hammond.

Exiting the Great Hall, the **Courtyard** appears almost magically through the shadowy, arched Italian double-ported doors. The Courtyard is meant to depict an old church in France (the Great Hall). This opens upon the square of a town in which houses of the 15th century stand around the ruins of a Roman impluvium. On either side of the Courtyard, stand these picturesque medieval French house facades, one of which was transported intact; the other created from previously unrelated wooden architectural details, later filled in with skillful brickwork. The center of the Courtyard showcases an eight-foot deep Roman pool surrounded by lush





plants, carved columns, statues, and even a small Roman sarcophagus which long ago served as the tomb of a child (whose effigy is sculpted upon its lid). A distinguishing feature of the Courtyard is the skylight-style ceiling which Dr. Hammond crafted to provide the enclosed area with anything from a light sprinkling of rain to a torrential downpour, as well as artificial sunlight or moonlight, creating at any given moment the perfect atmosphere.

Behind one of the French 15th-century facades, lay two very unique guest bedrooms. The **Gothic Bedroom** was decorated as Dr. Hammond saw fit for the lord of a medieval manor, complete with a 14th-century wrought iron bed with a straw mattress. **Greta Garbo**, amongst other lucky guests, was known to have slept upon this bed. (Hammond believed everyone should have the experience of sleeping on a straw mattress at least once in their lives). Heavy, emblazoned velvet curtains covering deep gothic-arched windows overlook the Courtyard below. The **American Bedroom**, a few steps away from the darkly elegant Gothic Bedroom, was designed with early American antiques to indulge Dr. Hammond's beloved wife Irene, who had lighter tastes in décor. However, the mischievous Dr. Hammond did manage to fashion disappearing doors to perfectly match the papered walls, so a guest might wake up "trapped" in this room.

The entirety of the castle reflects the travels of the worldly Dr. Hammond. It came to a point where many of his trips were spawned by the castle itself. He once stated, "The house will never really be finished. This afternoon, next week, a month hence, it will always be able to make me leave it, very possibly to cross thousands of miles to track down some bit of carved wood, some sculptured stone, some ancient bit of emblazoned velvet it can not do without." These trips created a well-traveled *bon vivant*, a strikingly handsome man with a Byronic profile. Hobnobbing with movie stars, royalty, world leaders, and locals alike, Dr. Hammond's fertile mind even drew inspiration from favorite early twentieth-century macabre literary magazines like *Weird Tales* and *Astounding*. He too turned to writing atmospheric tales of haunted places, intrigue, espionage,

conspiring scientists and sirens of the silent screen. Seen as fantasy tales by most, these writings, recently collected for the first time in *Echoes from the Castle Walls*, actually mirrored Hammond's everyday life.

As we leave his Abbey by the Sea, we must thank Dr. Hammond for realizing and sharing his dream haven with us. He truly was, as one guest so aptly wrote, "a prince of a host, in this castle of fairyland."

Sources
Rubin, Nancy. *John Jays Hammond, Jr.: A Renaissance Man in the Twentieth Century*. 1987.
Hammond, John Hays, Jr. *Echoes from the Castle Walls*. 1999.