

THE IHNKEN HOUSE

Owners: Col. and Mrs. Robert Norquest Hancock

Gerhardt Ihnken, from Grosswarm, Javerland, Germany, met his wife on the ship that brought him to Texas in 1846. She was French, the former Mary Pichot. It is told that she spoke no German and he spoke no French, but they had 11 children. This solid rock and mason house was built in 1867.

Mrs. Ernest Speed, a former owner, said that it had a "French and Formal" feel, with the long verandas and lattice-work balconies, front and back. Gerhardt Ihnken owned a sawmill and the cypress dovetailed beams were all milled at his mill, which stood where the Regional Park now stands. Mr. Ihnken was also particularly remembered for bringing the first binder and reaper to Castroville.

The pine floors of the house are the original. There are three fireplaces made of flagstone from the banks of the Medina River. The ceilings are 16 feet, and the braces have no nails as they were cut to fit exactly. The stairs leading to the second floor, which was used to dry pecans, are called 'stringer steps,' as they protrude from wood inserted into the wall. There is a basement which was used to keep fruits and vegetables cool.

The home passed from the Ihnken family to the Lawler-Lionberger ownership; Dr. and Mrs. Royal K. Stacey; Judge Ernest and Lillian Speed; to the present owners. Each added touches to enhance and preserve the house and property that extends to the banks of the Medina River.

During a recent removal of paint above the living room fireplace, a message from a young Miss Annie Ihnken was found written in the wood: "LET THIS BE A HAPPY HOME" and "Are you going to the dance?" The mantel was left in its original form!

There are many antiques in the house. In the dining room a French antique China cabinet from Strasbourg, the heart of Alsace, was purchased by the present owners in Metz, France. The solid brass locks say "Strassbourg" and were made about the same time the house was built. The light fixture in the dining room was an original gaslight bought and converted to electricity and installed in the house recently.

There is a Carriage House in the back in the process of renovation, a barn, a potting shed, and a gazebo in the garden amongst the pecan trees that is inviting and pleasant and worth the walk.

This house has the Pioneer Castroville Home Marker. It is to be featured on the Castroville Sesquicentennial Home Tour, on September 3, 1994.



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