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ROUGEMONT PRIORY

by *Pierre
Savoie*

Rougemont has many interesting timbered constructions and chalets of remarkable architecture. Just outside Rougemont stands a castle whose history blends with that of the locality. According to tradition, this region was peopled by a band of refugees from Gruyère who arrived to settle there under the leadership of a nobleman.

The first document that we know of is a charter dated 1115 bearing the seal of Giraldu, Bishop of Lausanne, recalling a deed of donation by which Count Villermus and his family had given to the Prior of Rougemont rights to the "wilderness" extending between the torrents of Flendruz and Fenils. Though described as a wilderness, this land was already inhabited at the time. It had been reclaimed and the pastures of Mocaussay and Ruble were already in use.

The foundation of the priory of Rougemont dates from 1080. Belonging to the Order of Cluny, this priory was erected on the site of the actual castle and became the centre of a colony.

In 1340, the parishioners of the priory had already formed a community enjoying some rights on the neighbouring mountains. These rights were extended in 1396.

The Counts of Gruyère were the overlords of the country. The last of

them, Michel, had his possession taken by Berne and Fribourg in 1554. The territory was governed jointly by both cantons until 22nd December, 1555, date of the partition. Berne then received Gessenay, Rougemont, Chateau d'Oex and la Rossinière, while Fribourg settled for the remainder of the former estates of the Count of Gruyère.

Learning that their country had fallen under the control of a reformed canton, the priests and monks of Rougemont left the monastery and the reformation was imposed on the village population.

The country eventually became a Bernese bailiwick. It was under the fourth bailiff, between 1569 and 1578, that the priory was converted into a castle serving as residence for the bailiff. This castle was repaired in 1658 and 1756, and restored completely following a fire on 30th September 1757. In 1798, the castle was declared national property of Canton Vaud, and the effigies of the Bernese Bear were carefully scraped off.

This beautiful building, which became the private property of an American family in 1924 and was restored in 1953, was completely gutted by a fire during the night of 6-7th February, 1973 with the deplorable loss of a rich collection of antiquities worth three million francs. The castle will fortunately be rebuilt to its former splendour.

Of its monastic past, which lasted from 11th Century to the Reformation, the charming locality of Rougemont has kept the church with its beautifully timbered bell-tower, picturesquely sheltered under its vast overlapping roof.

Inside, the stark structure of the three naves is characteristic of the Romanesque style apparent in the primitive churches of Switzerland. To be noticed is the motif of a crane, symbol of Gruyère, on the Renaissance windows of the Choir. The adjoining buildings of the castle harmonize nicely with the cowed outline of this sanctuary.

Pierre Savoie

