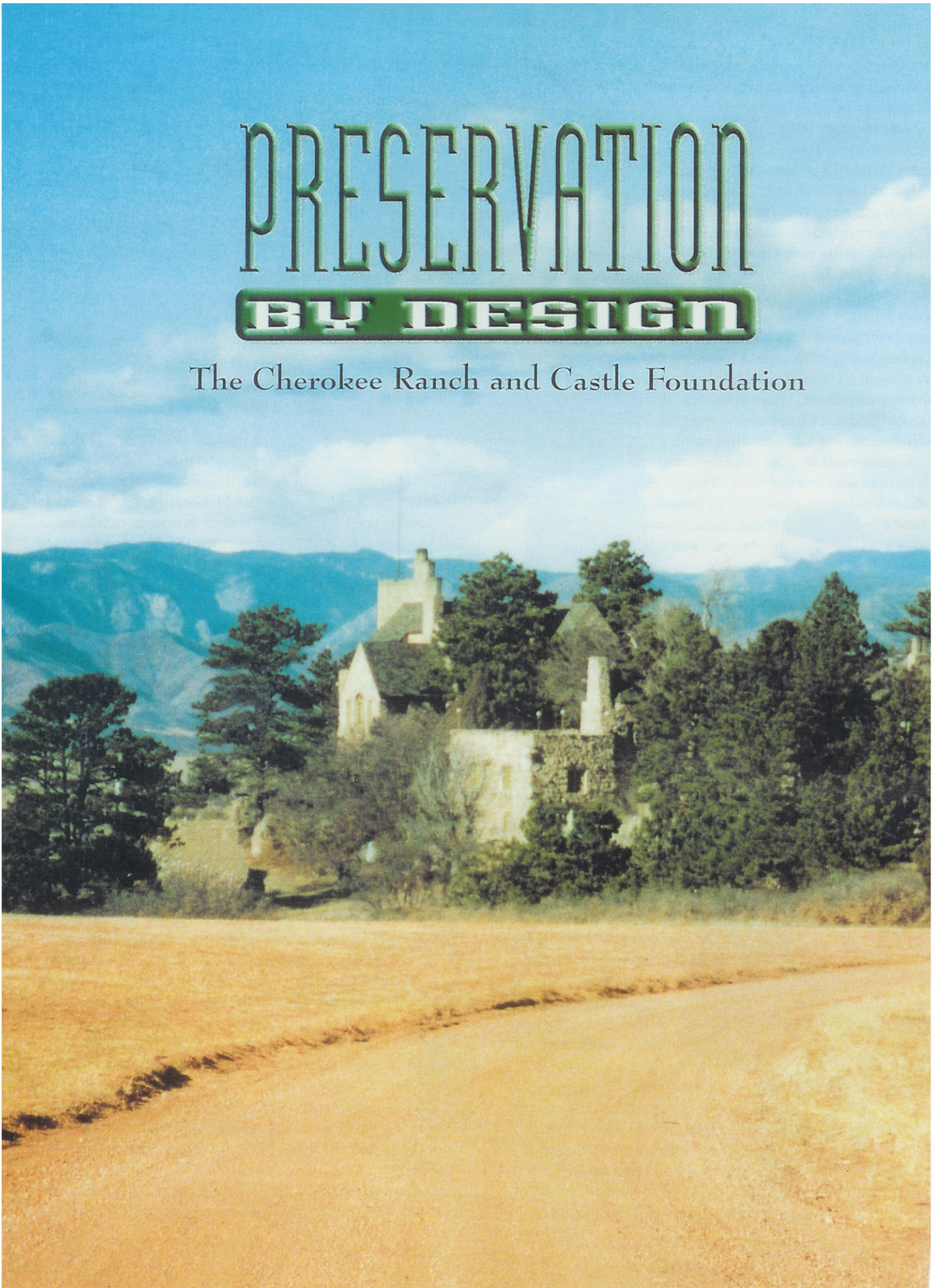


PRESERVATION BY DESIGN

The Cherokee Ranch and Castle Foundation



TEXT BY CORINNE J. BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ART SILK

A majestic panorama stretches north and south behind the flying hooves and raised Winchester of a bronze horse-bound rifleman. Mounted securely on the terrace guardrail of the castle at the Cherokee Ranch, high on a hilltop in Sedalia, Colorado, is the sculpture of the running horse and cowboy titled *When The Password Was Winchester*.

The sculpture, by artist William G. Duncan Jr. III, stands in sharp contrast to the many-hued peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Yet, the merger of the two images seems to encompass all the romance and permanence of the Old West, a vision hard to find in the unchecked urban sprawl spreading across Colorado's front range.

Just one bronze among many in a fine collection, the sculpture of the horseman appearing to float before nature's timeless backdrop seems an apt metaphor for the Cherokee Ranch and Castle Foundation.

A private home and cattle ranch belonging to 84-year-old cattle baroness Tweet Kimball, it has become not only a buffer from civilization but also a stronghold of commitment to a way of life that was, and, hopefully, always will be.

This is a place where the view is still pristine and the sounds of cattle, horses, and wildlife prevail over the traffic and highways not far away.

The new Cherokee Ranch and Castle Foundation, encompassing a Scottish castle at its heart and 3,140 acres of open land, is a place where humans and animals live together, protected, and in turn, protecting a true sense of life in the West.

Mildred Montague Genevieve Kimball, otherwise known as "Tweet," a nickname coined by her father, has done what few individuals in this century will ever have an opportunity to do. By committing her life to raising a herd of one of the first indigenous North American breed of cattle ~ the Santa Gertrudis ~ on one of the most beautifully framed parcels of land on this earth, Tweet created a dream for the rest of us.

By staving off the hordes of developers who have extended the impact of newcomers to Denver as far south as Colorado Springs and as far north as Greeley and

Photography by Corinne J. Brown



High atop a hill near Sedalia, Colorado, is the imposing Cherokee Castle, designed by Denver architect Burnham Hoyt in the style of a Scottish castle, circa 1450.

then, preserving her property, she succeeded in creating an unmatched refuge of hillside, forest, and grassland that has become home for more than 42 species of wildlife including elk, bear, mountain lion, antelope, and deer. Raccoons feed daily on the balcony overlooking the magnificent view. A true home on the range, in a place where the range is fast becoming a memory.

Tenacious in her hold on the ranch acquired in 1954, a partial result of a fortunate settlement in a divorce, she could have never imagined that her passion and persistence in maintaining the ranch's integrity would one day serve Colorado in such an inspiring way.

For the Cherokee Ranch of to-



Tweet Kimball stands on Rattlesnake Road, surveying her castle and her kingdom.

day, thanks to the provisions of the county's conservation easements program, has become a non-profit foundation dedicated to creating a world-class education and wildlife sanctuary, where the spirit of its founder will be felt in perpetuity.

Long-range Foundation plans are many. With on-going development via fundraising and private donations, the educational opportunities on the site will encompass the following projections: the study of an ancient Native American culture and its ruins; the history of western agricultural and immigrant expansion; the understanding and preservation of the Santa Gertrudis cattle breed; and the observation and preservation of the premises' wildlife.

The Castle is currently Tweet's



Tweet Kimball greets visitors to the Great Hall, with its stone walls and arched timbered ceilings. One of the castle's eight fireplaces is featured in this room.

home and a museum showcasing its previously private collection and is open for group tours by appointment. At this time, a major project is the creation of an Education Center providing wildlife videos and lectures, the history of the many previous homesteads of which the ranch is comprised, and the display of artifacts from the 1300 A.D. Woodland Indian tribe, which once lived there.

The centerpiece of the ranch is the remarkable residence itself, a 10,000 square foot replica of a 15th-century Scottish castle with 26 rooms, originally designed and built by noted architect Burnham Hoyt for his client, Charles Alfred Johnson, between 1924-1926.

Exemplary of the preference for British themes and architecture preferred by the well-to-do of that



Seated in the library, Tweet shows some of her first edition books, many of them handbound in the 16th century.

era, the castle is a magnificent reproduction of a Caledonian fortress featuring handhewn and chiseled

rhyolite blocks inside and out, molded oak beams beneath vaulted stone and wood inlaid ceilings, and a fully crenelated rooftop terrace and tower that provides unparalleled breathtaking views in every direction.

The Castle is filled with 15th- to 19th-century antiques, antiquarian books, and a world-class art collection that ranges from European old masters to glowing oil portraits of Mrs. Kimball's prime Santa Gertrudis cattle.

Paintings are mainly Anglo-Saxon from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and furniture ranges from two carved Florentine credenzas, circa 1450, to a canopied bed built especially for the visit of King Charles II to the home of his relative Hoare Eustace in Gloucestershire in

1670, an Englishman who is an ancestor of Tweet's.

A Spanish mirrored screen in the great room, circa 1703, serves as a shimmering room divider that stands behind an original Adams' sofa. Upon the grand piano one can find a lifetime of personal photos showcasing family and friends as well as British royalty, and of course, beribboned Santa Gertrudis champions shown by Tweet at cattle fairs all over the world.

From a full suit of armor on the main floor to a haunting portrait of Saint Peter by the Dutch master, Sir Peter Paul Reubens, near the library, each room and turn of a stairway reveals another page out of history or another story from Tweet's colorful past. A number of remarkable portraits of the owner hint at the rare beauty and charisma Tweet obviously possessed in her youth.

As one wanders from the grand foyer, with its Serbian icons on the wall through the richly appointed Great Hall and on to the formal dining room and back, notable are the many bronze wildlife sculptures by the "appointed court artist," William G. Duncan Jr., a neighboring rancher and longtime friend who has been executing commissions for Tweet since 1970.

Just off the winding road that climbs toward the castle, one can even find a remarkable bronze cast bas-relief commemorating *Minotaur*, the ranch's great Santa Gertrudis bull, a most compelling portrait of the memorialized giant now mounted to the face of a huge boulder.

The majesty and power of this sculpture is not tarnished in the least by the verdigris patina of time already upon the animal's carefully crafted muzzle and horns. Thanks to the mission of the Foundation, one can only imagine the continued softening of his gaze 100 years from now.

Descendents from the Montague clan of Salisbury, England, the Kim-



From the Winston Churchill Room, visitors can see views of Pike's Peak as well as Long's Peak on the Front Range of the Rockies.

ball family can trace its beginnings to Drogo de Montacuto in 1066. Born out of Southern aristocracy in Virginia, Tweet Kimball's grandparents actually owned plantations in the South, eventually moving the family to Chattanooga after the war, taking with them whatever they could.

Throughout her own travels, including a stint in London with one of her four husbands who was a diplomat during the 1950s, a continued longing for ancestral roots instilled in Tweet an enormous sense of appreciation for land and place.

"I'm not really a westerner," she reminds the writer with a subtle smile, "I'm a southerner who just loves the West!" That sense of pride

helped her transform the Cherokee Ranch into what it is today ~ an old-world enclave on the edge of a teeming American metropolis, filled with as much culture, grace, and style as the inimitable lady herself, who has lived there for more than 40 years entertaining royalty, hosting lavish parties, and birthing a calf now and then when she needs to.

The land value of the Cherokee Ranch is currently estimated at \$20,000,000 in the booming Regional real-estate market. Its salvation as a cultural resource became a fact when, in the fall of 1996, the foresighted Douglas County Commissioners, under the guidance of Ed Tepe, Director of Planning, agreed to

pay \$2,000,000 to obtain a conservation easement on the property to prevent subdivision. The money exchanged would help pay the taxes on the project and support the ranch's upkeep for the next decade.

This critical move could only be made by the formation of a non-profit organization that would keep vigil over the easement's mission and use. Although it is difficult to credit one individual for the formation of the Foundation, Chancellor Dan Ritchie of the University of Denver, and longtime friend of Tweet's, as well as a fellow cattle rancher in Colorado, deserves the first distinction of honor.

Under his creative leadership in establishing the Foundation and its board, the changeover from private to public ownership became official in the fall of 1996. As a result, Tweet will continue living under the grand roof that has become synonymous with her name and still retain more than 1,000 acres south of the main stronghold until her death.

Although required to reduce her herd for practical purposes, she will continue to breed and perfect some 150 of her prized Santa Gertrudis cattle, which have become a virtual standard in the industry.

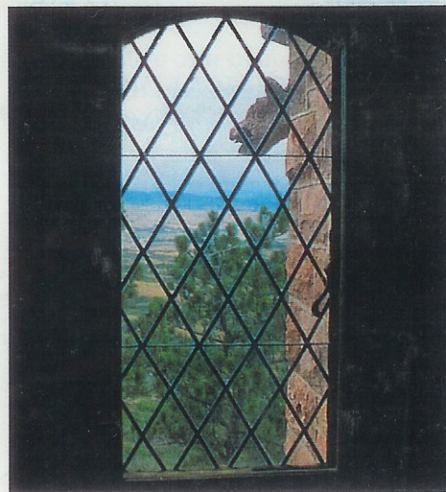
Sitting with Tweet in what has become known as the Winston Churchill Room, a comfortable and airy alcove featuring portraits, photographs, and writings by the great statesman, one cannot help but be impressed by the clarity and perspective of Tweet's life and experience.

She is both witty and wise: nostalgic and wistful one moment, tenacious and opinionated the next. Sure of where she's been and moreover, just where she's going, she is truly the "queen" of her castle, fully involved and ever, one step ahead.

Still a strikingly handsome woman with auburn hair, she is elegant, on this day, in an Oriental-inspired red silk jacket, a classic black skirt, and low, fashionable heels. As she talks, her omniscient green eyes never



Tweet poses on the balcony of one of the castle's turrets, overlooking the magnificent never-ending vista. Below, a gargoyle is seen through leaded glass windows.



miss a thing.

"Just look out there," she points, where the view is so dazzling it is all one can do not to get lost in the far-reaching vista of blue skies and unfolding mountain ranges. Large stone-framed windows open out in three directions, placing the viewer

at bird's-eye level, topmost above the ponderosa pine and the rocky hillside. "If you're lucky, you can see the eagles fly right off the mountain from here. Can you imagine?" Tweet asks.

One can only nod affirmatively. In this paradise, the vision of these great birds soaring majestically over the open valley and woodland below seems completely appropriate. If all goes well, thanks to the provisions of conservation easements and so many others who love this West as Tweet Kimball does, no one will ever have to imagine it otherwise. 🐾



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