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The Coedmore Castle is a well known historical gem found in the Kenneth Stainbank Nature Reserve.
PHOTO: Supplied.

Coedmore Castle:

A historical gem and sanctuary for wildlife

Dillon Pillay

IN the lush greenery of Yellowwood Park, nestled along the banks of the Umhlathuzana River, stands a remarkable testament to history and perseverance, the Coedmore Castle.

Built in 1885 by Dering Stainbank, an early Natal settler, this majestic stone structure was envisioned as a farming homestead but has since evolved into much more than just a dwelling.

Jenny Keith, the great-granddaughter of Dering Stainbank and granddaughter of Kenneth Stainbank, recently shared insights into the rich history and significance of Coedmore Castle. "Coedmore was more than just a home to us; it was a symbol of our family's legacy and our commitment to preserving nature," she remarked.

Dering Stainbank, hailing from England, arrived in Durban at the age of 16 in 1857. With a vision

and determination characteristic of pioneers, he purchased land on the south bank of the Umhlathuzana River. The site, known as "nDaba nKulu", held historical importance as it once hosted a cattle kraal belonging to King Shaka Zulu, serving as a strategic stopover for his warriors after cattle raids.

Jenni said Coedmore Castle was constructed from stone quarried on the farm, with the assistance of two skilled Scottish stonemasons. "It's castle-like appearance was a nod to Dering Stainbank's English heritage and a testament to his ambition. Initially, the farm cultivated coffee and naartjies, later transitioning into a dairy farm that supplied milk to neighbouring communities," said Jenni.

The castle's historical significance extends beyond its architectural beauty. During the tumultuous African-Indian riots of 1949, over 2000 members of the Indian community sought refuge at Coedmore. Despite the unrest elsewhere, the farm

remained a safe haven, with no attacks or loss of life recorded.

Following in his ancestor's footsteps, Kenneth Stainbank inherited Coedmore Castle. Jenni said, "My grandfather recognised the importance of preserving the natural habitat, he had a vision to create a sanctuary for wildlife." She added he generously donated land to establish a nature reserve, now managed by KZN Ezemvelo Wildlife, and eventually gifted the castle itself to the State.

However, the stewardship of Coedmore Castle took a new turn in 2019 upon the passing of Jenny Keith's mother, Elizabeth Keith. The usufruct, which ensured the family's involvement in the property, expired, placing the responsibility of maintenance squarely on the Department of Public Works.

Jenni said as the future of Coedmore Castle hangs in the balance, she hopes the decisions made regarding its future, may continue its legacy to inspire stewardship and preservation for generations to come.