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Castle Oron

The Library



You are now looking at the masterpiece of this castle: the library. Before we tell you about the contents, we would like to point out the early 16th century panelled ceiling and the thickness of the wall, which reminds us that we are in an old fortress. In the times of the bailiffs, this room was possibly the bailiff's hearing room.

Why is there such a library in a medieval castle lost in the country? We will start telling the story as follows: a young Polish woman, H el ene Massalska, niece to the Vilna archbishop, received a French education in 1770 in Paris, at the Abbaye au Bois. She married the oldest son of the Prince de Ligne. H el ene Massalska learned during her studies to love books and she bought more and more. Prince de Ligne travelled a lot, and she accompanied him. In Vienna, she met a Polish prince, Vincent Potocki, and she fell desperately in love with him. She left her husband, even though she had just given birth to a daughter, Sidonie, who will be raised by her grandparents. H el ene follows Prince Potocki to Poland, they could not get married because she is still married to Prince

de Ligne, and Vincent Potocki is also married. They try to have their respective marriages annulled. Fate has Prince de Ligne killed at war in 1792, which frees H el ene. Vincent Potocki then obtains the annulment of his marriage after fighting down all family opposition. H el ene de Ligne becomes H el ene Potocka and the couple leads an ostentatious life, but progressively the Prince is more and more absent, and H el ene finds herself at the Saint-Ouen Castle in Paris among her books. In 1815, she dies and her apartment inventory lists 20,000 novels and 20,000 rare works.

Before she died, she tried to come closer again with the de Ligne family and she makes up with Sidonie, her daughter, whom she succeeds in getting wed to Fran ois, the son of her husband Vincent Potocki. These children inherit their parents' fortune. The books of the castle are almost all marked with the Vincent Potocki book-plate. The family owned in Poland and the Ukraine some 300 hamlets and about ten towns, the area of their estates reached a total of 400 square kilometres.

Around 1815, after the sale of the Saint-Ouen castle, the Potockis went back to one of their castles in Poland, the Brody castle, which is now in the Ukraine, with the whole library. Around 1880 the Brody library was put up for sale. This is when the last landlord of Oron, Mr Adolphe Gaïffe, whose portrait is shown on this sheet, enters the scene. Mr Gaïffe travels to Brody with Prince de Sagan to purchase the books. In 1936 nobody was interested in this library. Then through the years, and after a complete indexation, its wealth was revealed. A great number of 18th century novels can be found, some unique and others very rare. Next to these novels there are science books, travel accounts, medicine books, encyclopaedias (for example: the Diderot encyclopaedia), dictionaries, etc. This library is completely indexed per matter and author. This library is the world's largest private library for 18th century novels.



Catalogue of the
library

