

Meadow Brook: Helping make dreams come true

By Sharon Hahn
staff writer

It's called a cultural adventure — but it's a fantasy come true. The 110-room English Tudor manor home of Meadow Brook Hall in Avon Township provides a chance to actually live amid wealth and splendor in gracious surroundings of an earlier era. The 80,000 square-foot home, built by Alfred and Matilda Wilson in the late 1920s at a cost of \$4 million, was donated along with the surrounding 1,400 acres of rolling countryside to Michigan State University in 1957 for another campus. That campus is now Oakland University.

Mrs. Wilson was the widow of auto pioneer John Dodge prior to her marriage to Wilson, a Wisconsin lumber broker. The hall was opened to the public in 1971 as a cultural and conference center for continuing education, and tours are given to the public each Sunday afternoon from 1-5 p.m.

But for those who prefer a more leisurely look at the architecture, art objects, exquisitely carved paneling and antiques of the Wilson estate, becoming a house guest at Meadow Brook Hall may be the answer.

"This wasn't built as a museum," said Marilyn Brooks, a special project director at Meadow Brook Hall. "It was built as a home. In an hour-and-a-half tour, you can't get that feeling. But (you can) after you have slept here for a few nights."

THE EXPERIENCE is called "Exploring Meadow Brook Hall Heritage" and includes two days and nights of gracious living in a home decorated with furnishings "that Mrs. Wilson liked to live with," said Mrs. Brooks.

There are antiques as well as imitations, and house guests are taught to tell the difference, she said. Touching a 1680 stool is permitted and even encouraged in order to examine the wood smoothed by years of polishing and hand rubbing.

House guests are welcomed at Meadow Brook midweek in January, February, March and September, arriving Monday at 2 p.m.

and departing after breakfast on Wednesday.

Cost is \$150 per person for room with private bath and \$140 for room with shared bath. All meals, cocktails and wine with dinners are included.

Groups as large as 38 can be accommodated for each session, Mrs. Brooks said.

While most sessions are reserved for groups, Jan. 18-20, 25-27, and Feb. 8-10 are set aside for singles and couples, she said. Only a few openings are available for these dates.

"It's a great time for single people," said Mrs. Brooks. "Most people come not knowing anybody else. After the first dinner, they all seem to know each other."

Meals are served in various dining rooms throughout the mansion with a candlelight dinner held the second evening at a long banquet table in the ballroom.

HOUSE GUESTS are free to move about the home and grounds at their leisure and tours, teas, and lectures are scheduled throughout the two days in keeping with the cultural theme.

In past sessions, speakers have lectured on stonework, antiques and china. All of which are available to examine in the mansion.

Lectures are given on books found in the library, many of which include architecture of English homes from which ideas were used in the building of Meadow Brook.

Each night at 10, snacks are served in the Game Room, where guests can partake in a game of cards or perhaps shoot some pool.

It's the life of a millionaire, said Mrs. Brooks.

"We like to explore what it would have been like to be a guest of the Wilsons at Meadow Brook Hall," she said.

But after breakfast on the third day, the fantasy comes to an end and guests depart — taking with them a unique experience to remember.

"There's no other place where you can come as an individual and live like this," said Mrs. Brooks.

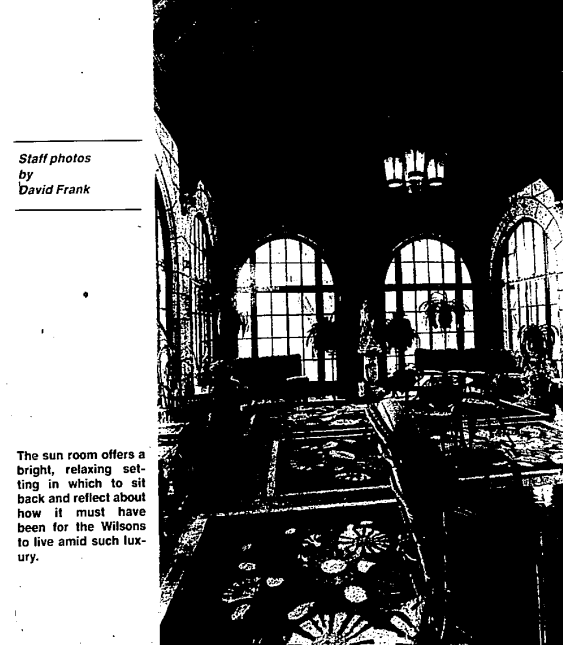
For the week of Jan. 18 through Super Bowl Sunday, Jan. 24, only, Meadow Brook Hall will have special hours and dining available. For more information, call 377-3140.



The main stairway features wide, easy-to-climb steps, but it could leave the faint-of-heart short of breath.



Matilda Wilson's room is not rented, "unless, of course, if Queen Elizabeth wants it," jests Marilyn Brooks, Meadow Brook Hall's special project director.



Staff photos by David Frank

The sun room offers a bright, relaxing setting in which to sit back and reflect about how it must have been for the Wilsons to live amid such luxury.



A view from a bedroom window overlooks a snow-capped, open, scenic landscape.

Elegant bathrooms have Powabic pottery, gold fixtures and multi-nozzled showers.

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