



'I love a mystery'

New tour packages combine wining, dining, sleuthing



1-of-a-kind traveler
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contributing travel editor

An invitation was waiting for us when we arrived at our room on the 17th floor of the Hilton International hotel in Windsor. In the movies, "Murder at the Manor" would occur under a thunderous sky, but on that Sunday afternoon the sun was gleaming on the Detroit River and on the Renaissance Center beyond the river.

It was a great day for the dastardly deed to be done. Or, as the Homicide Hosts, who produced this particular mystery weekend, would say, it was a great way to kill a Sunday.

Mystery legs have become increasingly popular in resorts, on trains and in other mysterious places nationwide. They all have the same ingredients: you sign up for the tour; the hosts stage a mystery, usually a murder mystery, with a cast of actors; you and the other guests play sleuth and try to solve the mystery.

Our mystery tour was 24 hours in Windsor, sponsored by Hilton and Homicide Hosts. The invitation waiting in our room was to a party at Willstead Manor, a stately mansion built in 1904 by architect Albert Kahn for Edward Chandler Walker, son of distillery king Hiram Walker. The cast of characters for Murder at the Manor was all spelled out in the letter. Mr. Artemus T. Rutledge, "whose money was acquired by less-than-legal means," was throwing a party.

The six people he invited were a suspicious lot; his personal assistant Sarah Rooney, who planned the party; Benjamin Hart, his former attorney,

recently fired; Geoffrey Browne, former business associate, ruined by Rutledge; Dr. Michael Willet, dismissed for living too well; gardener Julian Lane, picked up as a hit hiker and now rumored to be the sole inheritor; Melanie Stone, an actress wooed and then ruined by the villain.

HOMICIDE HOSTESS Helen Olmstead and her husband, Donald Olmstead, who smoked a Sherlock Holmes pipe, waited for us at the appropriate time in the hotel lobby. The Olmsteads are from Howell, Mich. We learned later that the cast was also from the Detroit area.

Many of the 75 registered guests, most from the Detroit area, had come properly dressed in the styles of 1925, when the murder supposedly took place: short fringed dresses, headbands, gray fedoras, straw hats, long strings of pearls.

The rest of us stood around looking sulky and jealous in our 1980s dresses and slacks, waiting for the bus. The bus wasn't air conditioned, which put us in an old-fashioned if slightly grumpy mood on a 90-de-

gree day. Willstead Manor is an impressive Tudor mansion set in 15 acres of green parkland. When "Sara Rooney," played by Renee Blankenship of Livonia, invited us in and showed us around we were too impressed with our surroundings to start looking for clues.

We didn't even realize she was part of the cast until Artemus Rutledge appeared in his silk neckscarf and 1920's look; we knew he wasn't just another dressed-up guest because he didn't have a name tag on.

We were pretty well into the wine, cheese and fruit when the cast of characters arrived, suitably attired. Ben, discharged attorney, slipping from his flask; businessman Browne, whose wife had killed herself after a scandal created by his host; Dr. Willet in his white suit; actress Melanie Stone, twittering away in her beaded dress; and Julian, the villainous bearded gardener.

In real life they are Jeff Alder of Dearborn, Louis Seguin of Garden City, Bob Clesson and Michael Burden of Detroit, and Judy Williams of Westland. Director Glenn Blankenship of Livonia, who came in later to play the private detective, wasn't on our list of characters of course, because he wasn't really invited to the party, was he?

THE SCENE FROZE as we realized that the action had begun and we were in for a real killer of an afternoon. There were a few preliminaries of course: a letter dropped casually on the dark staircase, another found in a drawer, a secret panel in the wall.

It was the sound of a gunshot that sent Sarah screaming through the house and the rest of us pushing and shoving into the study. The corpse of our host, Artemus T. Rutledge, was in a chair, blood all over his chest. A game of backgammon was before him on the desk, along with a drink, a dried yellow rose, a bowl of nuts and a book opened to the story of Horatio Alger.

Foul deed



Guest sleuths get a look at the murder victim, Artemus T. Rutledge, played by Dave Tucker of Garden City.

Detectives for a day



Guests on the "Murder at the Manor" tour gather by the stairs of the stately Willstead Manor in Windsor to hear a private detective.

We would all have stood there for the afternoon, staring at the corpse and looking for clues, if the crazy detective hadn't stormed into the room Columbus-style, grey striped suit, brown hat and all.

The plot thickened, and occasionally sickened, as he questioned the characters and we questioned everybody. Where were you when the gun went off? Do you write with India ink? Could there have been two murderers? Was that cyanide on his breath?

When we had drunk all the wine and eaten all the cheese we went back to the Hilton, where we chewed over the clues and awaited the next step in the action.

Dinner was at 7:30 p.m. in the ballroom. As we gorged on Veal Oscar and a dessert topped with a tomato, stone, we examined and re-examined

the clues. Does cyanide taste like almonds? Could Julian have been the victim's son? Was that innocent-looking girl one of the villains?

We each had to make a decision eventually, and write our solution down on a card. The last act of the mystery was played out around our dinner tables. The villain was caught and arrested. Prizes were given.

I'm not going to tell you who dunnit. If you want to join the crowd in hunting down the villain, Murder at the Manor will be presented July 20, Aug. 3 and 17, Sept. 28, Oct. 12 and 26, Nov. 9 and 30.

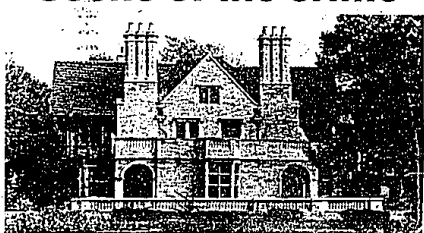
The price is \$140 in Canadian money, \$107 U.S., per person for two people sharing a room at the Hilton, and includes everything: Sunday afternoon at Willstead Manor, dinner in the Great Lakes Ballroom and a buffet breakfast Monday morning in

the Terrace room that looks out on the Detroit River.

Telephone the Hilton at its Detroit number, 962-3834, or write with a \$50 deposit to Hilton International Windsor, 277 Riverside Drive West, Windsor, Ontario N9A 5K4. Homicide Hosts are at 4109 W. Allen Road, Howell, Mich. 48843, telephone (517) 546-2843.

Ask your travel agent about other mystery tours around the state and the country. They have been held at Meadowbrook Hall in Rochester and the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, among other places.

Scene of the crime



Willstead Manor in Windsor is where the murder takes place in the "Murder at the Manor" tour.

Questioning a suspect



The private detective (Glenn Blankenship of Livonia) questions suspect Geoffrey Brown, played by Louis Seguin of Garden City, as guest sleuths look on at the manor.

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