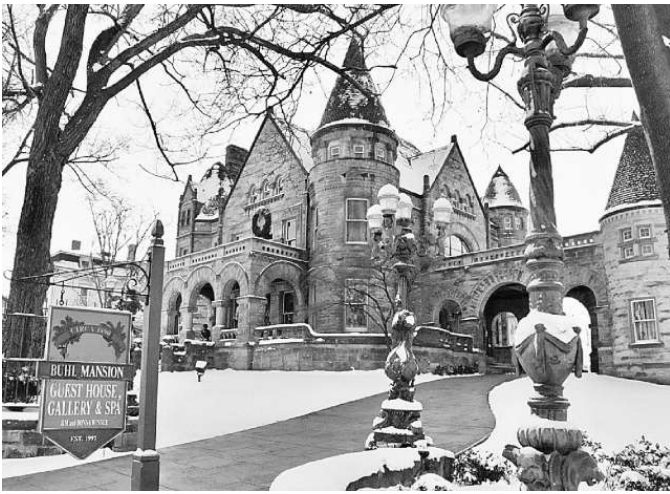


THE BUFFALO NEWS

One-Tank Trip/Western Pennsylvania History, movie help create romantic settings

By MARIA CERAULO
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Laura Ackley/Buhl Mansion The Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa is a dreamlike, turreted castle built of Italian stone.



John Lisbon The ceiling-to-floor canopy is a stunning sight in Belle's Boudoir, one of 27 rooms in Tara, A Country Inn.

This is the final part in a three-part series on secret romantic getaways near Buffalo

In nearby Western Pennsylvania, two inns dating to the 1800s create an atmosphere that inspires romance.

Tara, A Country Inn, and nearby sister property, Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa, are located about 15 minutes apart, and about 90 minutes north of Pittsburgh. Owned by Jim and Donna Winner, they contain stunning collections of art, antiques and historic memorabilia. Informative tours are available at both properties and visitors are encouraged to explore their numerous rooms. In both inns, the richly decorated bedrooms are

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left open for viewing when not occupied.

Tara, A Country Inn

Tara, A Country Inn, in Clark, Pa., is steeped in Civil War history and "Gone With the Wind" movie memorabilia. Built in 1854 by Senator Charles Koonce, Tara has white Ionic columns and porches to give the home a southern Georgian plantation look.

Look for the robe Clark Gable wore, Vivien Leigh's bed jacket from the movie's honeymoon scene and Leigh's personal collection of "GWTW" photos. Other treasures include an original Tiffany lamp and President Buchanan's dining room set.

Two stunning rooms are the Carpetbagger's Vacation, layered in green tapestry, and Belle's Boudoir, with a ceiling-to-floor canopy. The Katie O'Hara Suite is a spacious two-floor suite. An original 1854 staircase leads to the bedroom and the sitting room that includes a gas fireplace. Guests will be surprised to learn this luxurious suite was once the servant's quarters of the home.

Tara offers both casual and formal dining options. The more relaxed Stonewall's Tavern serves fine steaks (the prime rib portions are huge and very tender) and fresh seafood. At Ashley's Dining Room, dinner is a seven-course gourmet meal by candlelight with white glove service. Jacket and tie are required and live piano music adds to the romantic mood. A life-like four-walled mural depicting life on a southern plantation surrounds Ashley's Dining Room.

Tea is offered at 4 p.m. daily. Servers are in period dress, as are the tour guides and staff at the front desk and Stonewall's Tavern. The lovely gardens overlook Shenango Lake. There is a small indoor pool in a gardenlike setting and a heated outdoor pool, used in season.

Details: Tara, A Country Inn, features 27 distinctive rooms. Located at 2844 Lake Road (Route 18), Clark, Pa., it's set off the road slightly from its location at the intersection of two country roads.

Rates include \$195 for midweek arrival and continental breakfast; \$350 for weekends with full breakfast and dinner at Stonewalls Tavern (\$80 maximum); and \$395 for weekends with breakfast and a seven-course dinner in Ashley's Dining Room. **Information:** Visit www.tara-inn.com which has a photo and description of every room in the property or call (800) 782-2803.

Buhl Mansion

Tara, A Country Inn's sister property, Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa in Sharon, Pa., is one of only two bed and breakfasts in the United States to receive the coveted AAA Five Diamond award. Also owned by the Winners, Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa is a dreamlike turreted castle built of Italian stone. It is located in Sharon's historic district that includes several other stately homes.

Pull up to the winding driveway and you're most likely to be met by a staff person who will gladly valet your car and assist with luggage. That person might even be Laura Ackley, the Winners' niece and Buhl's general manager.

"The most requested room is the Grand Turret room," Ackley notes without hesitation. "People wait weeks to get it on a Saturday night." The room contains a four-poster bed and a huge bathroom with a Jacuzzi located directly under the soaring 28 foot turret, the largest in the house.

Completed in 1898 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Buhl Mansion took seven years to build and cost \$60,000. The property had been unoccupied

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several years before it was purchased by the Winners in 1996 for \$250,000.

The Winners had not seen the interior, and its condition was worse than expected. Though the parlor was in the poorest condition, it now has a handpainted ceiling and is the mansion's most spectacular room. Today, almost every room has a fireplace, and all fireplaces have been converted to gas. A photo album in the parlor lets visitors marvel at the extensive renovations.

The Buhl Mansion Spa, a soothing, full-service spa, is tucked away in the Buhl Mansion's basement. The most popular spa package is the Buhl Mansion Romance Package for two which includes dual massages, facials, manicures, lunches and a bottle of champagne for \$440. Ackley suggests guests interested in the spa arrive before check-in time for a spa treatment (reservations needed) to maximize their time.

Although a spa lunch is offered (chicken salad) and a full breakfast (either in your room or the dining room), dinner is only served at nearby Tara Inn. **Details:** Buhl Mansion has ten spacious rooms and is located at 422 East State St., Sharon, Pa. Prices range from a standard rate of \$325 including full breakfast (arrival any day) to \$445 for the weekend Ashley Dining Package rate in the Grand Turret or Grand Gables rooms. A second night is available at a discounted rate.

Information: Call (866) 345-BUHL or visit www.buhlmansion.com.

Nearby: For last-minute Valentine's Day gifts, Daffin's Candies (496 East State St., Sharon, Pa.) is located steps from Buhl Mansion. In addition to candy, the store stocks small gifts, children's toys and cards. Daffin's candy boxes are conveniently wrapped and ready for giving. Both inns can arrange for Daffin's treats to be waiting in your room. Info: www.daffins.com; call (724) 342-2892, (877) 323-3465. Tours of the nearby Daffin's candy factory can be arranged.

Next to Buhl Mansion is the Flamingo Rose Gift Shop and Tea Room, another Winner enterprise, in a pink

Victorian house which is also a good source for last-minute gifts.

About 23 miles from Buhl Mansion, Wendell August Forge, (620 Madison Avenue, Grove City, Pa.) offers a taste of old-world craftsmanship.

Wendell August is the oldest and largest continuously operating forge in the country and offers tours. Some master craftsmen show off their trade by creating handcrafted metal ware during tours that run Monday through Saturday. The gift shop is open daily and offers a sweetheart votive, heart-shaped dishes, keepsake boxes, picture frames, vases and mugs. Some items can be engraved, which can take an hour to a week, depending on the product. Order in person, online at www.wendellaugust.com or request a catalog at (800) 923-4438. Info: (724) 458-8360.

Also in Grove City is the enormous Prime Outlet Mall, rated by Value Retail News as one of the top 20 outlet centers in the country.

Grove City's Prime Outlet Mall offers a great opportunity for Valentines to pick out something special. The mall features more than 140 brand name outlets such as Coach, Dooney & Bourke, four different Jones New York stores and Liz Claiborne. Best of all, there is no sales tax on most clothing and shoes. Prime Outlets at Grove City is located at the intersection of I-79 and Route 208 in Grove City, Pa. Info: (888) 545-7221, (724) 748-3875, www.primeoutlets.com.

Tourist info

Visit www.visitpa.com, (click on southwest region) or call (800) VISITPA.

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For additional information on Mercer County (which includes Grove City, Clark and Sharon), visit the Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau at www.mercercountypa.org or call (800) 637-2370.

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