

# Sharon mansion sees return to glory

Most of us are quite content living in our Cape Cods, Tudors, condos, bungalows or split levels.

Would we turn down an offer to try out a castle?

Hard to tell and I know I'll never get the chance. But lucky Julia Forker Buhl lived in a real castle because her husband, Frank, wanted only the very best for his wife. And the steel magnate had the resources to make that happen.

It's hard to miss the impressive stone Buhl Mansion on East State Street in Sharon with its turrets and wrought iron fence. In its



Lugene  
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Cruisin'

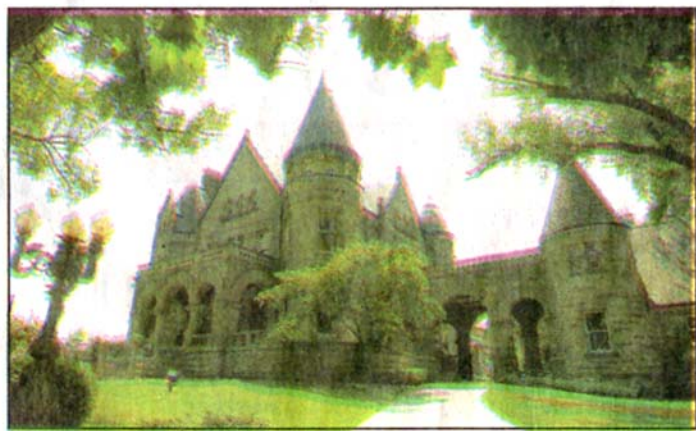
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prime, it was a stunner. Later, it was converted into apartments, underwent other changes and consequently fell into disrepair. That is until, Jim and Donna Winner came along in 1996 and restored the castle to its former acclaim. That's one less historic structure

that caved to a wrecking ball. Today, it is Buhl Mansion Guesthouse and Spa.

For Cruisin', we were fortunate to be shown around by general manager/marketing director Laura Ackley.

Before you even step inside, though, there's much to admire. Like its sister



Erica Galvin/NEWS

The Buhl Mansion has been a staple on East State Street since being built in 1896.

home in Clark, which we'll explore in a future Cruisin', the grounds are spectacular. We walked over a footbridge and passed a lily pond, greenhouse and carriage house. Behind the home with

more than seven acres, massive peonies scented the summer air.

In the parlor of this

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# Mansion

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Richardsonian Romanesque mansion, we chatted with Laura about the legacy of the Buhls and how the structure got a second chance. Today, with its tasteful appointments such as bronze statuary, white ceilings with gold embossments, reproductions by famous artists such as Monet, Degas, Renoir and Rembrandt commissioned by the Winners and Italian marble floors, it seems preposterous this place could have faded into oblivion. Before and after pictures show just what a transformation occurred here.

Such stories. On the front porch is a full-size replica of Julia. It's the perfect place because she often sat here talking to steel workers as they walked to the plant and handed out sandwiches and other nourishments. That's just a small segment of the Buhl tradition, which focuses on philanthropy.

Frank was born and raised in Detroit and graduated from Yale. His father, who is still regarded as one of the most influential men in Detroit history, invested in a steel mill in Sharon and Frank arrived to manage operations. Frank retired from the steel business in 1902 and went into land development.

"The steel industry paled in comparison to that," Laura acknowledged.

Frank developed a quarter of a million acres in Idaho, which he later sold. Today, there are towns in Idaho, Minnesota and Florida, all with the name of Buhl.

But this mansion is driven by history. Although the Winners had to practically start all over again, a few of the original features remain. The library, with its copper ceiling, has the most intact woodwork, Laura said, who went on to establish a timeline.

It took six years to complete the building in 1896. Frank died in 1918 and his wife passed away in 1936. Julia's nephew, Henry Forker, lived here after his aunt's death in a single family dwelling until the 1960s when the mansion was converted to three luxury apartments. Henry sold the house in the 1970s. After that, it was a cosmetology school and even a haunted

## MANSION CONNECTION

### Buhl and Tara...

► Buhl Mansion is an impressive structure in downtown Sharon that was built in the late 1800s.

► A few miles away is a contrast in architecture — Tara, the columned white frame home reminiscent of the antebellum South.

► The two have a connection. Both were totally renovated by Jim and Donna Winner and both now are considered romantic inns.

► Tara, as it is now known, was built in 1954 in Clark, Pa., by Charles Koonce. That area was then called Clarksville. And this home was a red brick Federal-style farmhouse. It was abandoned at some point after a succession of owners.

► Obviously the inspiration was the plantation in the Academy Award-winning film, "Gone With the Wind."

► Later, the home was white-washed and Ionic columns were added along with porches to provide the home with a Southern charm.

► The Winners purchased Tara in 1984 and opened it in 1986.

house and for some time was vacant and neglected.

In its days of high grandeur, the 100,000-square-foot Buhl Mansion had four floors including a ballroom on the third floor and servants quarters. The Youngstown architect, Charles Owsley also designed the Mercer County Courthouse. During reconstruction, staircases were rearranged and a stained glass window was installed to replace the original.

Laura described the mansion as having 14 very large rooms. All together, there are 15 fireplaces and four of the fireplace mantles are original. Three of the bedrooms still have original woodwork, she indicated.

"We were mostly trying to recreate the grandeur of the Industrial Age. The Winners wanted people to see this beauty and it was a labor of love."

The Buhls also owned 350 acres where they had a summer home. That property is now Buhl Park, is operated by Buhl trustees and features among other things, Julia's gardens and a country club.

Next week: More history, more opulence, more Cruisin' at the Buhl.