

Local Resident Preserves West Orange History in Debut Novel

Linda Lauren inspired by hometown in her book, "Hostage In Time"

By Samantha Goldberg

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If you've ever dreamed of traveling back in time and seeing how your hometown looked in the early 19th century, long-time West Orange resident Linda Lauren could probably help you out.

Lauren, a fourth-generation Psychic Medium and Energy Artist, recently released her debut novel, "A Hostage In Time," which largely takes place in the fictional "Serenity House" during the late 1800s, created from a combination of different historic houses Lauren has visited over the years. One of these houses is West Orange's famous Glenmont estate in Llewellyn Park, a national historic site where Thomas Edison lived for 45 years.

"I've written about West Orange's historic houses in the past, and I decided to write this novel to teach people about the importance of preservation," Lauren said. "I want people to remember these places. It's important to save them."

Lauren has lived in West Orange for most of her life and attended West Orange schools, making West Orange and its historic landmarks a very important part of her life, Lauren said.

Edison and the Glenmont estate are also important to Lauren because of a unique experience she had on a particular visit one hot August day about 10 years ago. On this visit, Lauren went to pay respects to Edison and his wife who are buried at Glenmont, but she had trouble finding their graves. As she sat down on a bench, feeling upset, Lauren said she saw in the clearing a disheveled man who looked like Edison pointing towards the brush, which led to Edison and his wife's grave, Lauren said. After that experience, Lauren began reading more on time travel and decided to write her novel.

Aside from Glenmont, Lauren included another West Orange historic house in her novel called the

Rollinson house, the first colonial-style mansion that was built on Northfield Avenue in 1808. Expert on West Orange history, Joe Fagan, whose family has been in West Orange for five generations, said that the Rollinson house got its name after the daughter of the house's builder and a man named Samuel O. Rollinson married in 1869 and lived in the house.

"The Rollinson name is an old family name in West Orange and the house was built during colonial times. It was an architectural achievement for West Orange," Fagan said.

Lauren recalled the intricate architecture of the Rollinson house from stories her mother told her of the house's beauty and the elegance of the people living in it when she visited it during Halloween in the 1940s.

"The house even had a wishing well. It was really one of a kind," Lauren said.

By the late 1960s, the Rollinson house was deteriorating, and Lauren, with several other West Orange residents, fought to preserve the house.

"While the town talked about preserving the site and making it into a museum, that never happened. The house needed a lot of work and I would guess the real issue was who would want to provide the funding," Fagan said.

The Rollinson house was knocked down and turned into an office building in 1969 that is still standing at 100 Northfield Ave, Fagan said.

As exploring historic homes became a hobby for Lauren, she began to wonder what it would be like to go back in time and live during colonial times, which greatly inspired the creation of "Hostage in Time."

"Amanda [the protagonist] experiences all my wishes and dreams if I could go back in time," Lauren said. Throughout the novel, Amanda struggles to adjust to the 19th century lifestyle after she's mistaken for a man and accused of being a spy due to her modern-day clothing, which includes pants and a black hat. She also finds love in the fictional attorney for Thomas Edison, who is also Amanda's cousin in the novel.

"Both Thomas Edison and West Orange are mentioned throughout the book," Lauren said.

Lauren hopes that her novel will not only help people remember historic landmarks, such as the ones in West Orange, but also inspire people to dream big and know that they can do anything, Lauren said.

"I want everyone to read the book and travel in time with me, and I want everyone to think of preserving the historic values of our country," Lauren said.