

Travel

Europe's dead still speak to the living. K4

More than one psychic medium has suggested Lizzie is still there, and prefers to be addressed as "Lizbeth."



Tour guide Richard "Jack" Sheridan pretends to ax Rachel Michelle Jones as she holds up the face of Abby Borden during a tour of the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast. Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer

Traveling the historic and spooky Lizzie Borden Trail

Andrea Simakis asimakis@plaind.com

FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS — On a bright morning in May, after surviving the night at the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast, I witnessed something I haven't been able to fully explain. It happened in a sunny sitting room where, nearly 127 years earlier, Andrew Jackson Borden was whacked in the head with the blade of an ax or a hatchet at least 10 times while he dozed on a sofa.

His wife, Abby, was already dead in a guest bedroom upstairs. She'd been bustling about, making up the bed when she was attacked. The force of the blows — 19 in all — shattered her skull.

I'll leave it up to you to judge if what I saw was paranormal or pretty banal. But let's not get ahead of ourselves, shall we?

This spring, Plain Dealer photographer Lisa DeJong and I joined Victoria Bussert, head of the Baldwin Wallace University music theater program, and BW grad Rachel Jones on a trip along what is loosely known as the Borden Trail (not to be confused with Kentucky's infinitely tastier and less creepy Bourbon Trail).

They'd come on a pilgrimage of sorts, to "walk in Lizzie's shoes," as Bussert put it. Bussert and Jones got hooked on the saga of the accused ax murderess of Fall River, Massa-

chusetts, in 2012, the year Bussert directed the rock musical "Lizzie Borden" at Playhouse Square's now-defunct 14th Street Theatre. The production — starring an all-female student cast that included Jones as Lizzie's forbidden love interest Alice — was gore-ious and spawned a slew of others, all directed by Bussert.

The rechristened "Lizzie" made its European premiere at Denmark's Fredericia Teater in 2014. A U.K. debut at London's Greenwich Theatre followed in 2017. And a run at the Firebrand Theatre in Chicago in 2018 had to be extended to accommodate the demand of rabid fans. Although a buzzy, off-Broadway production was scrapped in 2019, it's hardly the last we'll hear of "Lizzie"; more productions are in the works across the country.

That's because more than a century after the killings we can't get enough of the enigmatic woman at the center of the grisly, Gilded-age murder case.

The crime rolled Fall River, then a booming town thanks to its numerous textile mills, in August 1892, but soon became an international sensation. Other than the victims,

SEE TRAIL, K2



Lizzie Borden, pictured here, allegedly murdered her father, Andrew Borden, and her stepmother, Abby Borden, with an ax in their home in Fall River, Massachusetts, on Aug. 4, 1892. Lizzie Borden was ultimately found not guilty.

Ohio's haunted hotels: Where to spend a spirited night in October

Susan Glaser sglaser@plaind.com

Looking for a spirited getaway this fall? Numerous hotels in Ohio claim to be home to some friendly ghosts, from former guests to longtime employees. Several of the historic inns are offering October tours and other special events to better acquaint you with their supernatural visitors. Here's where you're most likely to experience a spooky overnight:



Punderson Manor, Newbury Township: Employees at the Tudor-style state park lodge in Geauga County have long reported strange occurrences throughout the hotel — doors opening and closing, faucets turning on and off, sounds of laughter when no one is around. The lodge is hosting special haunted tours (plus dinner) on Fridays through October; see pundersonmanorstateteparklodge.com.



Golden Lamb Inn, Lebanon: First opened in 1803, the Golden Lamb has more than 200 years of haunted history. Among the tales: the story of Sarah Stubbs, niece of the hotel's manager in the early 1800s, whose ghost appears as a young girl in a white nightgown. A museum room on the fourth floor bears her name. (Overnight rooms are named after the inn's many famous guests, including Charles Dickens and Ronald Reagan.) The Warren County Historical Society (wchsmuseum.org) is hosting the Hungry Ghost at the inn, Oct. 25 and 26, featuring dinner and a tour of the inn and historic town. Information: goldenlamb.com.



Rider's Inn, Painesville: Built in 1812, Rider's Inn has been a stop on the Underground Railroad, a hospital for Civil War soldiers and a speakeasy. Today, the 11-room inn is reportedly haunted by the gentle spirit of Suzanne Rider, wife of the original owner, "who is more helpful than harmful," according to the inn's website. To maximize your ghost-spotting chances, request Room 11, Suzanne's Suite. The inn is hosting Taleful Candlelight Dinners throughout October. Information: ridersinn.com.

SEE HAUNTED, K3

Trail: A spooky trip into the past



Illuminated by a backyard lamp, the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast glows as the moon peeks through the clouds. Photos by Lisa DeJong, The Plain Dealer

FROM KI

the only people who were home at the time were Andrew's youngest daughter, Lizzie Borden, and Bridget Sullivan, the family's maid. Despite the carnage, neither woman claims to have heard a thing. A murder weapon was never found.

Lizzie, 32, soon became the prime suspect and her trial, held in the Bristol County Courthouse (441 County St.) in the nearby whaling port of New Bedford, made the whole OJ thing look like no big whoop.

The courtroom in which Lizzie's every facial tic and fan flick was scrutinized is still in use today for civil matters. Borden devotees will delight to know that its worn wood railings, dangerously creaking chairs in the spectators gallery and peeling paint suggest the place hasn't been refurbished since the first day of Lizzie's trial on June 5, 1893.

Looky-loos flocking to the preliminary hearing alone made streets impassable, wrote Cara Robertson in the indispensable "The Trail of Lizzie Borden," published earlier this year. As one reporter observed, "It was worth one's life to attempt to enter the building." He and the 50 or so ink-stained wretches in attendance were packed in so tightly, they rubbed elbows as they took notes.

The motive, the prosecution argued, was greed. Lizzie wanted to get her hands on her father's money. Andrew, known to be very loaded and just as cheap, had forced the family to live in a cramped warren of a house on Fall River's Second Street, situated not on the airy hilltop with the rest of the rich folks but among the common working-stiffs below.

Stepmother Abby, whom the girls reportedly never really liked, was collateral damage. She had to be dispatched lest she inherit Andrew's fortune.

"Lizzie" the musical, and some modern-day historians, suggest another reason: Lizzie picked up a hatchet because she'd had enough of her father's sexual abuse.

Whatever you believe, Lizzie was quickly acquitted by a jury of 12 men. Their deliberations lasted under two hours, perhaps because they couldn't bear the thought that a woman, so like their own daughters, was capable of such a violent assault on her Pa and, by extension, the patriarchy. No one has ever been convicted of the crime, a fact that cemented the mystery's lasting appeal.

Soon after the trial, Lizzie and sister Emma moved into a stately Queen Anne-style mansion with ornate stained glass windows, high ceilings and a generous wrap-around porch on that airy hilltop they'd dreamed about. Lizzie called their new home Maplecroft (306 French St., lizzie-bor-

den.com), a nod to the posh neighborhood filled with giant maple trees, their leaves the deep, rusty red of dried blood.

Other occupants throughout the years included a loyal staff Lizzie reportedly treated with fairness and affection, and her much-loved pets. Among a treasure trove of Borden artifacts at the Fall River Historical Society (451 Rock St., lizzieborden.org) is one of its most prized possessions: a black-and-white photo of Lizzie, late in life, seated on the Maplecroft piazza and holding her beloved Boston Terrier, Laddie Miller Borden, on her lap.

Lizzie died, of natural causes, in 1927 just shy of her 67th birthday. She was laid out in the parlor, explains tour guide Sue Vickery, a no-nonsense woman with a flair for black, rocker-chick eyeliner.

More than one psychic medium has suggested Lizzie is still there, and prefers to be addressed as "Lizbeth," the name she took for a fresh start following her acquittal. Thus far, Vickery's interactions with the lady of the house have been reassuringly benign.

"She's perfectly fine as long as we're respectful and don't talk about the other house," says Vickery. She pulled out her smart phone and played a recording she made on one her first visits to Maplecroft. "Can you say hello to me?" Vickery asks.

"Hello," a woman's voice responds. Vickery told Lizbeth that if she allowed them to give tours at Maplecroft, they would share the proceeds with the Animal Rescue League of Fall River (arlr.com), a passion of both Borden sisters, who bequeathed thousands to the organization. Their pictures still hang in the entryway of the nonprofit at 474 Durfee St.

"She said she's very proud of the house and wants to show it off," says Vickery.

Although not yet open to the public because of nagging permit snafus, Maplecroft is available for rentals, private tours and special events. (Coming up: A Night with Lizbeth, Oct. 25 and 26. Sign up at lizzie-borden.com. And remember — "no prior paranormal or ghost hunting experience necessary.")

You can find Lizbeth's grave at Oak Grove Cemetery (765 Prospect St.); she left instructions "to be laid at my Father's feet" in the Borden family plot.

Directions to the graveyard's most sought-after occupant are painstakingly discreet. Just a tiny handwritten sign taped up at the entrance of the main gates:

"Lizzie Borden's Gravesite"
Go to the left & follow the white arrows
Painted on the road.

Some in Fall River are less than excited to be known as Lizzietown or Bordenville or any number of indelicate nicknames. There is no summer Lizziepaloosa, for instance, where revelers can dress as their favorite characters and wander the town wearing a dizzying array of Borden accessories available at the gift shop behind the murder house (ax earrings and necklaces are only the beginning). Or compete in ax-throwing contests at Stumpy's Hatchet House (75 Ferry St.) while drinking Lizzie's Famous '81 Whacks by Buzzards Bay Brewing.

The bright red can is emblazoned with "a stick figure in a pinafore-dress, a devious smile and a hatchet held high," read The Herald News on the occasion of this year's annual limited release. (The verdict on the Red India Pale Ale? Good to the last ruddy drop.)

This wasted opportunity for tourist dol-



The legend of the Lizzie Borden runs deep in Fall River, Massachusetts. Lizzie Borden's blood-spattered ax is tattooed on the neck of Richard "Jack" Sheridan, a native of South Boston. Sheridan has been a tour guide at the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast for 10 years. Abby Borden and her husband, Andrew Borden, were murdered in their home allegedly by their daughter, Lizzie Borden, on Aug. 4, 1892.



If you go

Lizzie Borden Trail

What: A collection of sites in and around Fall River, Massachusetts, related to Lizzie Borden, acquitted of murdering her father and stepmother in 1893.

Start your tour at the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast/Museum (230 Second St., lizzie-borden.com) or Fall River Historical Society (451 Rock St., lizzieborden.org). The Borden house is also open for tours to visitors who are not staying overnight. Tours are \$22. Admission to the historical society is \$12.



Visitors have left stones and other trinkets on Lizzie Borden's gravestone in Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River, Massachusetts. Lizzie Borden took on the name Lizbeth after her murder trial. Lizzie Borden is buried in the same family plot as her murdered parents.

**Lizzie Borden
took an ax,
And gave her mother
forty whacks,
When she saw
what she had done,
She gave her father
forty-one.**

SEE TRAIL, K3



At top, Vicky Bussert investigates the front porch as Alex Woods, 3, the child of Maplecroft property manager Ryan Woods, looks out of the porch window at Maplecroft. At right, Meshell Branan, 43, of Pittsburgh, left, and Vicky Bussert, of Cleveland, laugh when their fingers magically float across the Ouija Board as the two try to conjure up the spirit of Andrew Borden at the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast. Above, Magnets of Lizzie Borden are a big seller at the gift shop. Photos by Lisa DeLong, The Plain Dealer



Trail

FROM K2

lars aside, on the anniversary of the murders, there are reenactments of the crime at the bed and breakfast, a place I was happy to learn from Vickery that neither Lizzie nor Lizbeth currently occupied. But that didn't mean there weren't others hanging around.

I'd been properly freaked out by a tour the night of my sleepover, led by a guide dressed in top hat and other Victorian-era garb who called himself "Jack" and sported two Lizzie-themed tattoos on his neck, including my favorite: a hatchet in a splatter of blood. Consequently, I spent the rest of the evening wide awake in Bridget the maid's attic room, a bout of insomnia for which I paid \$225.

I clambered down the steep, narrow steps to eat breakfast the next morning joining a handful of other guests in the very same spot where doctors performed a post-mortem on the bodies of Andrew and Abby Borden after laying them out on the dining room table.

There was Meshell Branan from Pittsburgh, whose boyfriend Brendon bought her a night in Andrew and Abby's room as a Valentine's Day gift. (Hey, it's more creative than chocolates or lingerie.) And Jill Easdale and her Mom, from Omaha, Nebraska. They'd fearlessly bunked in the room where Abby had breathed her last.

I love the house, I love being here and knowing that I'm touching door handles that Lizzie and Abby and everybody touched," said Easdale. "I love being part of the story."

We repaired to the room where Andrew Borden took what would be his final nap on Earth and broke out an ancient Ouija Board. My fellow guests conjured him and asked the eternal query: Who swung that hatchet?

The stylus pointed to the letters "L-I-Z-Z" before it stopped moving. I was interested but unconvinced.

The divining rods were another story. When I held them, they dangled like limp spaghetti. Then Bussert took over. Theoretically, the movement of the copper dowels can be driven by spiritual activity. As Andrew was likely tucked out after the Ouija session, Bussert called on his unlucky spouse.

"Abby, are you in the room? Abby Borden?" Bussert said. The rods started to quiver.

"Abby, did you see who did this?" she asked.

And that, dear readers, is when those rods, despite Bussert's wrists appearing as firm as granite, suddenly moved in one, swift, perfectly parallel swoop to a picture of Lizzie hanging on the wall. Mystery solved.

Haunted

FROM K1



The Buxton Inn, serving Granville since 1812 — and plenty of spirits.

Buxton Inn, Granville: Also founded in 1812, the Buxton Inn is reportedly haunted by the ghosts of former innkeepers Bonnie Bounell and Maj. Horton Buxton. Rooms 7 and 9 are the most popular with guests seeking a spiritual encounter. The inn is hosting "Tours and Ghostories" on Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 2. Information: buxtoninn.com.

Hotel Lafayette, Marietta: For years, visitors to the Lafayette have reported unexplained oddities — personal belongings that go missing, shampoo and conditioner bottles that are dumped out, suitcases turned upside down. Book a room on the third floor to maximize the likelihood of strange occurrences — this is where the ghost of former hotel owner S. Durward Hoag supposedly hangs out. Hidden Marietta (hiddenmarietta.com) offers occasional ghost tours of the hotel, along with tours of the town. Information: lafayettehotel.com.

Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza: This Art Deco beauty is reportedly inhabited by a "Lady in Green," who may be the wife of a worker killed during the building's construction in the 1930s. She's been spotted in the hotel's elegant Hall of Mirrors, among other areas. For more ghosts in Cincinnati, take the Queen City is Haunted tour from American Legacy Tours (americanlegacytours.com).

Information: cincinnati.hilton.com Sources: the hotels; "Ghosthunting Ohio" by John Kachuba; hauntedrooms.com



A chandelier and vaulted ceiling at the Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel. The art deco building is stunning in its decor. Lynn Ischay, The Plain Dealer

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