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Talk about a plot twist: Fans of Maggie Wheeler's latest mystery novel actually got to go where the story takes place

By **TOM VAN DUSEN**

As an added treat, fans of Maggie Wheeler mysteries set in the Lost Villages of the St. Lawrence Seaway can actually visit the scene of the crime in her latest novel.

That's because fictitious Sterling House B&B which plays a pivotal role in *All Mortall Things*, Wheeler's third book weaving fact and fiction along the St. Lawrence over 50 years, is fictitious in name only.

The lodging house where a murdering protagonist meets a surprise blood-spattered end is based very closely on existing Nightingale House B&B here which dates back to the Lost Village of Wales, one of several communities dismantled during Seaway construction 50 years ago.

HISTORIC

Built in 1880, the sprawling residence now housing the Nightingale was the largest wooden building to be flat-bedded to the new village of Ingleside.

It boasts original butternut interior trim, gas fixtures, fireplace tiles and a rabbit warren of second-storey bed and sitting rooms where much of the *Mortall* action takes place. The Nightingale is even said to contain a ghost. So does the novel.

Last Thursday, fans attending a book launch at the real-life B&B were invited upstairs to check out -- according to helpful posted signs -- the rooms each of the characters in the novel holes up while OPP Insp. Jerry Strauss investigates a mysterious death which could have been committed by any one of them.

"When I next enjoy a Victorian tea here, I'll certainly check for bloodstains near the fireplace," said local author Rosemary Rutley as she picked up a copy of *Mortall* at the launch.

THIRD NOVEL

Released by General Store Publishing House and selling for \$19.95, it's Wheeler's third *Lost Villages* novel featuring Strauss and reluctant love interest Farran Mackenzie -- whose namesake is another *Lost Village*.

The previous novels in the series were *A Violent End* (2001) and *The Brother of Sleep* (2004). Wheeler, whose father was OPP detachment commander at Long Sault when he died in 1980, has already announced there'll be a fourth and last book, *On A Darkling Plain*, which she'll begin to write in January for release in 2008.

A resident of an Ingleside house which was moved from the *Lost Village* of Dickenson's Landing, the author said her books seem to have touched a chord with many Eastern Ontario residents, particularly ones with a connection to the *Lost Villages*.

"I was being asked all the time when the third book would be ready."