



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH DEEANNE GIST

1. Why did you set *Maid To Match* at Vanderbilt's Biltmore mansion in North Carolina?

Biltmore is such a national treasure. It was built at the height of the Gilded Age by George Vanderbilt and, because it is still owned by the Vanderbilt family today, it has all its original furnishings and décor—which is very unusual for a historical home. It's like stepping back in time when you enter it.

The other thing that makes it unique is its sheer size. It was the largest privately owned home in America when Vanderbilt built it and it still holds that illustrious title today with 250 rooms and four acres of square footage.

But what fascinated me most was the lifestyle of the Vanderbilts and the staff who worked for them. There are hundreds of novels set in England where household servants make an appearance, but we never really see that in America. So, I decided to pen a story about two servants who work at Biltmore and fall in love.

2. Is it really true that servants like your characters were not allowed to marry?

It is. Romance below stairs was strictly forbidden. This was partly because of the living arrangements. The female servants lived on the top floor of the house and the men servants lived above the stable. It wasn't practical to house married couples within the mansion.

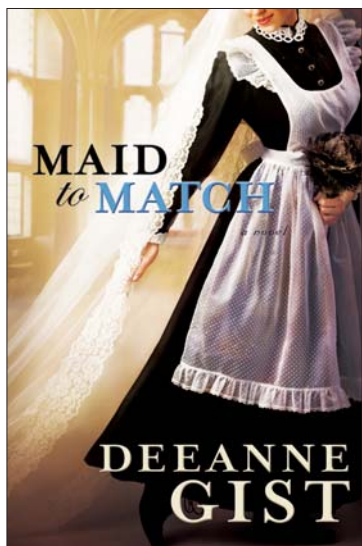
The other reason was to keep the women from becoming pregnant. A pregnant house servant just wouldn't do! As for the men, society at that time felt that a family man would be distracted by his home front responsibilities and would not give the job his all.

3. Did servant hierarchies really exist in households in America?

They were extremely important. In *Maid To Match*, the main character is up for a position as Mrs. Vanderbilt's lady's maid—which is the highest ranking position for a female, next to housekeeper. But to be awarded that position (and to keep it), she must remain unmarried.

That becomes a problem when she's enlisted to bring a mountain man up to snuff for a position as footman and the sparks begin to fly.

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Maid to Match
by Deeanne Gist

Trade Paper ISBN: 978-0-7642-0408-1
\$14.99; 368 pp.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-0-7642-0806-5
\$19.99; 368 pp.

Release Date: June 2010

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4. Were the Vanderbilts involved at all in the lives of the servants?

George & Edith Vanderbilt were unusual in that they were very progressive about their views of the master-servant relationship. They referred to their servants as “staff.” They had an open-door policy. They provided electricity and indoor plumbing for their servants, as well as windows in the basement.

On Christmas Day, they invited their household staff along with those who farmed and worked out on the estate (and who had families) into their home. Mrs. Vanderbilt had a wrapped present for every single child on the estate under a big 40-foot tree while Mr. Vanderbilt awarded cash bonuses to the entire staff.

5. What was the most fun part of researching *Maid to Match*?

Touring Biltmore House and learning about the lifestyles of Gilded Age society. I was so enchanted by Biltmore that I decided to invite all my readers on a getaway this fall. We are going to meet in Asheville and have a Gilded Age party where we dress up in turn-of-the-century clothing, play parlor games, and do a book swap. A Victorian expert is going to dress me from the inside-out in full Victorian costume so my readers can see the incredible number of layers a woman donned on a day-to-day basis. As a finale, we’re going on a private tour of the Biltmore mansion. For more information, readers can go to GetawayWithDee.com.