

HOME

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The Judge's Room at the Horace Kellogg Homestead Bed and Breakfast in Amherst.



Pioneer Valley B&Bs

A place to lay your head — and so much more

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The Horace Kellogg Homestead in Amherst is named for the farmer who built the house in 1828.



CAROL LOLLIS

Craig and Kathy Della Penna opened the Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in 2003 after spending three years renovating it.

Visitors to Valley B and Bs find a HOME AWAY FROM HOME

By **CHERYL B. WILSON**
Gazette Contributing Writer

Inviting strangers into your home on a regular basis might not appeal to every homeowner, but local operators of bed and breakfast establishments say they enjoy it very much, as do their guests. Some travelers may like the cookie-cutter architecture, décor and breakfast bars of national motels chains with their predictability and anonymity, but there are those

visitors to the Pioneer Valley who say they prefer the personal atmosphere and warm welcome of a B and B.

"If I want more privacy I'll stay in a motel," said Judy Steyer of Homer, Alaska. "But if I'm in the country, I want to get a feel for the community."

Steyer and her husband, Bill, stayed last month at the Horace Kellogg Homestead Bed and Breakfast in Amherst with their daughter, Saanta, who was looking at East Coast colleges. "I wanted a historical experi-

ence," Judy Steyer said. She found it in the 1828 clapboard house that has been a B and B for six years.

The Pioneer Valley offers a wide range of B and Bs from historic homes to luxurious guest suites to a state-of-the-art solar-powered farm. The Web site for the Five College Bed and Breakfast Association lists 35 establishments from which three were chosen for this article.

Many guests at local B and Bs are families checking out the Five Colleges

or alums attending special programs. Others are visiting relatives in the area while some are participating in the Paradise City Arts Festival or other cultural events or here on business.

Most area B and Bs are small, offering one, two and three rooms. The owners do the work themselves, without hiring waitresses or chamber maids. They truly are opening their homes to unknown visitors but often their guests become lifelong friends.

It takes a certain type of person



GORDON DANIELS

Julie and Ed Berman, owners of Hillside House in Whately, say they had always wanted to run a B and B. "When we retired we knew we weren't going to the country club and play golf," Ed Berman said.



CAROL LOLLIS

Craig Della Penna, in the living room of the Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in Florence, says he enjoys promoting Northampton and Florence. "People are stunned to find them such wonderful places," he said.



JERREY ROBERTS

At the Horace Kellogg Homestead in Amherst, owners Susan and Stephen Mallett serve guests a full-cooked breakfast, featuring quiche, pancakes, French toast, casseroles and omelets. Typical “starters” include grapefruit halves topped with berries and quick bread.



JERREY ROBERTS

The Almarina Room, named for Horace Kellogg’s wife, is light and airy with wicker furniture, film light blue draperies and rag rugs. It is one of two guest rooms at the Horace Kellogg Homestead in Amherst.

to operate a bed and breakfast out of their home, says Craig Della Penna, owner of Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in Florence “I think you have to like people and [be] open-minded about people,” he said.

But, is it intrusive having guests in your home all the time? After all, running a small B and B is quite different from operating a full-scale inn with restaurant. It’s more like sharing your home with strangers.

Most guests respect the B and B keepers’ privacy. “They know they are coming to your home,” explained Susan Mallett of the Horace Kellogg

Homestead. “Sometimes [before guests arrive] I worry, but as soon as I meet them I know it’s going to be fine,” she said.

Julie Berman of Hillside House Bed and Breakfast in Whately, says there are some concessions that must be made: “We try not to have friends to dinner when we have paying guests,” Berman said. “This is not an inn. We don’t have a private dining room.”

Even so, Berman says she and her husband, Ed, had always wanted to run a B and B. “When we retired we knew we weren’t going to the country club and play golf,”

Ed Berman explained. “We have stayed in a lot of B and Bs ourselves and we like to entertain,” his wife added.

The Bermans were living in Louisville, Ky., when they began their search for the perfect B and B. They started on the West Coast where their daughters were living. “We looked from the Silicone Valley to Vancouver,” Ed Berman reported. “In the East Bay area [in California] you would pay \$1.2 million for a fixer-upper.” So they turned their sights to the East Coast, exploring the Delaware Valley, the Hudson River Valley and Connecticut.

They hadn’t considered Massachusetts until one of their daughters enrolled in the graduate School for Social Work at Smith College in Northampton. She urged them to consider the area.

After a long search they found the Whately property and moved there in 2003.

Other B and B owners are transplants to the area as well.

Susan and Stephen Mallett, for example, came from upstate New York to the Pioneer Valley in 2000. While visiting their friends Leslie and Elaine Cox of Hampshire College, the Malletts decided Amherst seemed a perfect place for a B and B. The Coxes found the Horace Kellogg House for them.

The Della Pennas were living in Agawam when Craig discovered the 1865 house right next to the Northampton Bike Trail, an appropriate setting for a man who has been an advocate of rail trails for decades.

The Horace Kellogg Homestead

The Horace Kellogg Homestead, named for the farmer who built the house in 1828, is ideally situated in Amherst, on Route 116 south of town, not far from the Amtrak train station and within easy walking distance of downtown. A PVIA bus stops right outside the door.

Recent guests, in addition

to the Steyer family, include recruiters for Teach Across America and two reporters from London for the BBC who were interviewing academic psychologists from Amherst to San Francisco.

Many guests are return customers, the Malletts said, and some have become friends.

Late last month, they were in Washington, D.C., staying with former guests who also run a B and B. They did a barter exchange for two nights. The Washington couple’s daughter went to Amherst College and now is a coach at Smith College so they visit the area often.

The Horace Kellogg Homestead has two guest rooms, each very different. The south-facing Almarina Room, named for Horace Kellogg’s wife, is light and airy with wicker furniture, filmy light blue draperies and rag rugs. There is a queen bed plus a single one which makes it popular for families checking out local colleges. The Judge’s Room, honoring the original owner of the property, Tory Judge Josiah Chauncey, is just across the hall. It has Federal-style mahogany furniture - an impressive carved four-poster bed with the pineapple motif of hospitality, highboy dresser and credenza. The woodwork is Colonial blue-gray-green with Oriental rugs on the wide plank pine floor. The two



JERREY ROBERTS

The living room at the Horace Kellogg Homestead in Amherst



GORDON DANIELS

Hillside House owners, Julie and Ed Berman, in the sitting area of the Pink Room, one of two bedrooms available to guests at the Whately B and B.



GORDON DANIELS

This main floor living room can be enjoyed by guests at the Hillside House in Whately.

rooms share a spacious bathroom and there is an additional guest bathroom on the first floor at the foot of the stairs.

The Malletts serve a full-cooked breakfast, offering quiche or pancakes, French toast, casseroles or omelets. Typical "starters" include grapefruit halves topped with berries, orange juice and quick bread. A

nearly self-serve coffee and tea station has a small refrigerator.

Outside, the warm entry courtyard last month had flowering snowdrops and crocuses, planted a few years ago by Susan Mallett as part of the Go Dutch promotion sponsored by Museums10 and the Five College Bed and Breakfast Association. Last fall she planted dozens

of daffodils for the town's 250th anniversary celebration.

With just two bedrooms, the owners often find themselves fully booked. "There are times when we could fill three or four rooms, especially at graduation," Susan Mallett said. "But two rooms is a good number for maintaining it and doing it adequately."

The only downside is the

necessity of planning well in advance for their own vacations, the Malletts said, a concern voiced by other bed and breakfast owners.

Hillside House

A very different ambiance is offered at Hillside House Bed and Breakfast in Whately. The contemporary 1970s house has a sweeping view of the countryside and impressive landscaping, including an outdoor pool.

Guests enter the house on the second floor up a flight of outdoor steps. A tiled entryway filled with plants leads to the living area while the guest bedrooms are downstairs. The Bermans welcome their guests with tea or a complimentary glass of wine on the deck in good weather. It's quite an introduction to the area with a panoramic view of Mount Toby to the north and Northampton and the Holyoke Range to the south.

The larger guest bedroom, the Pink Room, has a private deck with the same spectacular view. It also has a sitting area and is decorated with Oriental rugs and artwork collected during the couple's travels to Africa and Asia. The Yellow Room across the hall is smaller with a dragonfly kite on one wall. Both rooms have private baths. Guests may

use the hot tub on the sun porch overlooking the gardens.

The Bermans' clientele includes people visiting the colleges and Historic Deerfield but also relatives of local residents and people attending weddings or anniversaries. They even have one local couple who come every year for a peaceful getaway.

"About 40 to 50 percent of our guests are repeat business," Ed Berman said. The Bermans offer a full hot breakfast plus homemade granola, yogurt and fresh fruit. "I've made more pancakes in the past eight years than in the previous 60," Berman joked.

Jeff Caplan and his wife, Ann, are among the repeat guests. They discovered Hillside House on the Internet.

"The Web site presented them very well," Caplan said. The book was as good as its cover on the Web, he commented. "It was better than okay. It was quite remarkable. We have stayed there several times. They have very high standards."

Caplan says "the flavor of the keepers of the house" is critical to the enjoyment of guests. The Caplans now consider the Bermans as friends and have recently moved to Northampton from New York City.

Being in the country is a real draw for city people, the Bermans said. Many guests come from New York and Boston. One man, a "serious birder," listed in their guest book 29 kinds of birds he saw in just 2½ hours at Hillside House, Julia reported.

Looking for a B and B? Check the Internet

Finding a bed and breakfast establishment in the Pioneer Valley is quite easy, especially if you check out the Internet.

"I just Googled Amherst and bed and breakfast," reported Judy Steyer of Homer, Alaska, who stayed recently at the Horace Kellogg Homestead in Amherst.

"You can't operate a B and B today in the United States unless you have a Web site," said Craig Della Penna of Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in Florence.

There are three area Bed and Breakfast associations linked to the national www.bbonline.com. The three B and Bs described in the accompanying article all belong to the Five College Bed and Breakfast Association (www.fivecollegebb.com). Others belong to the Hampshire Hills Association

(www.hkbba.com) and/or the Hidden Hills Association (www.hidden-hills.com).

It doesn't hurt, however, to be mentioned in a good guide book like Christina Tree's "The Berkshire Hills & The Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts: An Explorer's Guide," published in 2007. Julia Berman said Tree stayed at Hillside House Bed and Breakfast and gave it a good review. Other area B and Bs are also mentioned in Tree's book.

In addition, it helps to be listed in state tourist publications as well as the local chamber of commerce. Some B and Bs place their brochures or rack cards at local tourist sites.

Susan Mallett of the Horace Kellogg Homestead is in charge of updating the Five College Bed and Breakfast

Association brochure and she is the Web coordinator for the group, helping other innkeepers improve their sites.

One of the great conveniences of the Five College Web site is its group availability calendar. You simply type in your proposed dates and the site will list those B and Bs that have openings.

Warning: you need to book for graduations months if not a year in advance. Only a few area B and Bs have openings for this spring's ceremonies.

There are local B and Bs that seem to do very well without belonging to associations and some thrive without a Web site. The Allen House and Amherst House in Amherst don't belong to any association and Sunnyside in Whately doesn't even have a Web site.

—CHERYL B. WILSON

Sugar Maple Trailside Inn

Craig Della Penna and his wife, Kathy, opened Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in 2003 after spending three years renovating it. "It was like opening the floodgates," he said. "We've been booked every weekend since we opened." And they've been featured in Yankee magazine, on HGTV and have won the Valley Advocate "Best B & B" award several times.

The Della Pennas capitalize on the proximity of the bike trail, providing free retro Cruiser bikes with white wall tires to their guests. In the front yard is an old bike decorated with seasonal greens or flowers.

The house was one of several on Chestnut Street provided to managers of the Florence Sewing Machine Company in 1865. When the railroad was built merely eight feet from the house in 1868, the railway company paid for reinforcement of ceilings to forestall any problems from train vibrations. The Della Pennas kept the dining room canvas ceiling when they restored the house.

The Della Pennas emphasize railroad history. "You need a theme," Della Penna said. Early 20th century blueprints and rail maps line the stairway.

The two upstairs bedrooms are named for the nearest stops on the old railway: Haydenville and Cedar Hill. In one room is an old dispatch table from a railway station as well as a brass bed.

"I like how relaxed and consistent it is," commented Jennifer Bella, a clinical social worker from New Hampshire who has stayed at the Sugar Maple at least five times in recent years while attending programs at Smith. "Craig and Kathy treat you like returning family but give you lots of space," she added.

Della Penna said he enjoys promoting Northampton and Florence, their history and their vibrant arts communities. "People are stunned to find them such wonderful places," he said.

The Della Pennas offer a Continental breakfast with cereal, yogurt, fruit and fresh pastries from local bakeries, including Evolution Café up the street in the old Florence Sewing Machine factory.

"It works well to have a two-

room B and B," he said. "With two rooms you can't quit your day job," he added. He works out of his home as an agent for The Murphys Realtors Inc. "Being a Realtor I get an influx of buyers at the B and B," he said.

The economic downturn has had a sobering effect on the local B and B owners to varying degrees. The Bermans said that when they started they could count on the B and B income to pay the mortgage and the taxes but that hasn't been true for the past two years.

Della Penna said that "the kind of traffic that said 'let's come up for a weekend' is slackening off" this year although he is still fully booked. "I've always considered it a gem and hope they thrive without raising their prices too much - which they could justifiably do," Bella noted.

Susan Mallett, whose rates are among the lowest in the area, said she can't bear to increase the prices.

"I can't raise prices and prevent parents from coming to see their students," she explained. Her husband, Steve, quipped, "It's our stimulus package."

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B and Bs: The particulars

Details about the bed and breakfast establishments described in the article:

■ Horace Kellogg

Homestead
459 South Pleasant St.
(Route 116), Amherst
253-4988 www.hkhbb.com

Two rooms, \$85 a night, shared bath, full cooked breakfast. Screened porch, wood stove in living room.

■ Hillside House

60 Masterson Road, Whately
665-5515
www.hillsidehousebb.com

Two rooms, \$100 and \$120 a night, private baths, full cooked breakfast, hot tub, outdoor pool in season, two fireplaces, decks with gorgeous views

■ Sugar Maple Trailside Inn

62 Chestnut St., Florence
585-8559

www.sugar-maple-inn.com
Two rooms, \$80-\$120, private baths, Continental breakfast, complimentary bicycles for use on adjacent

bike trail, period gardens, fireplace in living room. Resident pets are Calvin the cat and Ivan the Scottish terrier.

Among the other unusual bed and breakfasts in the area:

■ Purple Gables Bed and Breakfast

232 East Pleasant St.
Amherst
549-0705

www.purplegables.com
Listed on the Five College B and B Web site

Private suite with living room and dining area plus bedroom and private bath and private porch in house built in early 19th century. Gourmet breakfasts are served in your room, WiFi, TV and DVD, refrigerator, microwave and a free bicycle. \$185 a night.

■ Starlight Llama Bed and Breakfast

94 Chesterfield Road,
Florence
584-1703

Listed on the Hampshire

Hills B and B Web site
Built in 2000 on 65 acres of conservation land, Starlight Llama is home to llamas, emus, peacocks and a donkey as well as a flock of chickens. The house is entirely solar-powered, off the grid. There are three rooms with private baths. Gourmet vegetarian breakfasts include free-range eggs from the farm's chickens. \$100 per night.

Prices

In general prices range from \$60 to \$250 a night, compared to \$90 to \$300 for local motels and hotels. Check to see about such amenities as free robes, WiFi, TVs and DVDs in rooms, Continental or full breakfasts, private entrances, outdoor pools, hot tubs and refrigerators in rooms. Some B and Bs can be quite Spartan while others are the height of luxury. In season, gardens and pools can be quite a plus.

—**CHERYL B. WILSON**



CAROL LOLLIS

The cedar Hill bedroom at the Sugar Maple Trailside Inn in Northampton



GORDON DANIELS

The Yellow Room is one of two guest bedrooms at Hillside House.