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Last Updated: 12:17 pm | Sunday, March 16, 2008

## Pampering and alpacas amid history

BY KATHY WITT | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

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The stately historic home with welcoming porch and shaded courtyard at the top of the gently inclining drive is completely expected; the alpacas, however, are a surprise - and something of a novelty in these parts.

Here in Springfield, Ky., home of the Maple Hill Manor, an 1851 Greek Revival Plantation home listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 30 Suri alpacas roam the nearly 15 softly rolling acres, protected by six formidable llamas, their jaws made for crushing foolhardy coyotes.

"We were looking for a small farm to raise alpacas after seeing them at a state fair and doing some research," explains Todd Allen, who co-owns this relax-in-style bed and breakfast with Tyler Horton. "Alpacas are ideally suited to a small farm."

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The exotic animals - rare outside of their native South America - give Maple Hill Manor a notable niche on the lodging landscape and present something of a motif in the guestrooms and gift shop. The innkeepers import products made from alpaca fleece.

The fleece products include teddy bears, throws, sweaters, capes, mittens, scarves and more, and several of them cozy up the rooms.

"This is a super silky, lustrous fiber," says Allen. "People compare it to cashmere, but I think it's actually softer than cashmere."

Luxurious alpaca fiber blankets are found on all guest beds, an especially welcoming touch for chilly winter nights. The cuddly teddy bears and swaddling throws add soft, homey touches in each of the seven guestrooms. Adding to the elegant yet comfy ambience are fireplaces in several suites and, in two, Jacuzzi tubs.

### BACK IN THE DAY

When construction began on the house in 1848, it was part of a 600-acre plantation and was to be Thomas McElroy's wedding gift to his 17-year-old bride, Sarah Jane Maxwell. It was finished in 1851, with the help of a labor force made up of 20 to 30 slaves, and the couple moved into the 13-room home with its lavish Italianate architectural accents one week after Sara Jane's 20th birthday.

Visitors today can still appreciate the home's graceful craftsmanship, arched windows, 2½-foot cornices, 14-foot ceilings and nine-foot windows, as well as the gleaming hardwood floors and floating cherry staircase that nimbly spirals up to a spacious, antique appointed sitting hall.

Considered one of the best preserved antebellum homes in the Commonwealth, Maple Hill Manor is in the heart of Kentucky's picturesque Bluegrass Region, with a 3,000-acre horse farm on one side and a 300-acre cattle and tobacco farm on the other. In the immediate vicinity are the innkeepers' 100-plus fruit tree orchard, 200-plus raspberry bush bed and a nature preserve.

Over the past century and a half, Maple Hill has been used as a Civil War Hospital, the childhood home of former New York Giants' quarterback Phil Simms - Super Bowl XXI's Most Valuable Player - a popular dinner hall and a children's home. A Kentucky Landmark Home, it has been a bed and breakfast for 19 years and owned by Allen and Horton for the past seven.

Famous Kentuckians or notables who left their mark on the Bluegrass lend their names to the

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### IF YOU GO

What: Historic Maple Hill Manor

Where: 2941 Perryville Road (U.S. 150), Springfield, Ky. 40069

Information: 800-886-7546;  
[www.maplehillmanor.com](http://www.maplehillmanor.com).

Special package: Ultimate Indulgence package for \$899 includes a two-night stay, wine and hors d'oeuvres each afternoon, private country gourmet "crystal & china" breakfast each morning and dinner certificate each night with stretch limo service. A bottle of chilled champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries will be waiting in your room and two one-hour massages will de-stress you. Upgrade your stay to the McElroy Honeymoon Hideaway for an additional \$20.

Getting there: Springfield is about 2 1/2 hours (142 miles) south of Cincinnati by way of I-71/I-75 South to the Blue Grass Parkway, Ky. 555 south and U.S. 150 east.

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individually decorated guestrooms, each of which is outfitted with antique furnishings and private baths: the McElroys, whose name brands the lavish honeymoon suite; John James Audubon; composer Stephen Foster who gave the 15th state its anthem with "My Old Kentucky Home"; Lincoln, whose mahogany wood-trimmed Library Suite (the customized bookcases hold 600 books) adjoins the Stephen Foster room by way of a back staircase; and writer Elizabeth Madox Roberts, whose roomy suite looks out via three windows onto the undulating countryside.

Two other rooms, the adjoining Kentucky Artisans Suite and the Harriett Beecher Stowe Suite, are well-suited for family and ladies groups. The former features a double antique turn-of-the-century sleigh bed and a Jenny Lind twin bed; the latter also has antique beds, plus a view of the lake.

The inn can accommodate up to 20 guests with most of the rooms featuring queen-size beds, including cherry four-poster beds.

"Each evening, we serve a warm homemade dessert, local wines, specialty teas, hot cocoa and our own specialty evening drink - hot toddies," says Allen, noting that Maple Hill prides itself on using Kentucky-made products, wines and spirits.

Guests may unwind beneath the soft lighting provided by an antique chandelier, join a game of cards or indulge in a solitary pursuit like curling up with a good book. In the morning, guests find themselves gently roused with the plaintive strains of chamber music and the wafting aromas of freshly brewed coffee, chef Horton's signature eggs in a basket (scrambled eggs and cheese wrapped in a crescent shaped like a basket).

Breakfast offerings might include maple-glazed bacon, cranberry and cream cheese-stuffed French toast, lemon soufflé pancakes and other fragrantly spiced concoctions.

Outside the dining room, the first-floor entry hall gives a preview of the delights to be found in the gift shop, a converted shed steps away from the main house called Manor Cottage Gifts, with a display of teddy bears, sweaters, capes, slippers and other items. Shop favorites are the teddy bears, capes and shawls, sweaters, gloves and scarves, fur hats and purses.

## SPECIAL EVENTS

A hard-working bed and breakfast and alpaca and llama farm, Maple Hill Manor does double duty as a wedding/special events venue.

"Maple Hill Manor is a wonderful, romantic setting, ideally suited to marriage proposals, honeymoons and milestone anniversaries," say Allen. "And we enjoy the exhilaration of providing 'over the top' services just as much as our guests."

Area attractions include historic Bardstown, My Old Kentucky Home, My Old Kentucky Dinner Train, Abraham Lincoln's Birthplace National Museum in Hodgenville, Lincoln Homestead State Park & Golf Course, the Bourbon Trail and area wineries, including Springhill Winery and Lover's Leap Winery.

Turn up the winding country drive and let yourself be surprised (and delighted) by the alpacas and llamas (pygmy goats, too) and charmed by the bed and breakfast. Most likely, you'll be met at the door by the inn's two unofficial greeters, golden retrievers Sophie and Samson, and ushered into a weekend of peace and pampering.

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




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