

Washington House Inn is a modern inn with a historic feel in Cedarburg

Brian E. Clark, Special to the Journal Sentinel Published 9:00 a.m. CT June 30, 2017 | Updated 1:38 p.m. CT July 3, 2017



(Photo: Washington House Inn)

When Cedarburg was gaining popularity as a place to visit in the 1980s, James Pape decided this Ozaukee County town needed a hotel.

So Pape, who had already restored the Cedar Creek Settlement structure, chose the Washington House Inn to renovate and return to its former life.

Located in the center of town, the 1886 Cream City brick building had served as a hotel until 1920, when it was converted into shops and apartments, said Wendy Porterfield, whose official title at the B&B is “innkeeper.”

“There wasn’t any lodging here at all back then,” said Porterfield, who has been involved with the hotel since its renovation. She said she likes the place so much that she wants to retire there. She even has a room picked out on the first floor where she thinks she might like to live. It’s No. 104, is named for Edward Blank, the town’s second postmaster, and has a king-size bed, a whirlpool tub and a red brick bathroom floor.

Porterfield’s brother, Kevin Porterfield, and the owner’s brother, Kevin Pape, did most of the restoration of the then rundown building, she said. But instead of the modest spaces from 130 years ago, they knocked down walls and opened up the hotel to offer oversized rooms with features like fireplaces and soaking tubs in many of the rooms.

They reclaimed the hotel’s late 1880s ambiance, the period when many of the homes and other structures in Cedarburg were built. And while just a few of the hotel’s antiques were used in the hotel long ago, many are from the late 19th century.

“Only the lobby is original to the 1880s hotel,” she said. “The rest was reconfigured. We like to say it’s a modern inn with a historic feel.”

The hotel opened in September 1984 with 15 rooms on the three floors of the old hotel. Two years later, a walkway linked it to five new rooms in the building next door above the Chocolate Factory. The third addition, with nine rooms, came in 1989 and is over Amy’s Candy Kitchen. Then they added the five rooms of the Schroeder House, up the street half a block, in 1994.

That brought the total to 34, each of which is named for an early Cedarburg resident. I stayed in No. 212, which has exposed brickwork, an antique armoire and a large quilt hanging on the wall. It gets its moniker from stone mason Frederick Asche.



The Fred Asche Room in the Washington House Inn includes a king bed, a fireplace and a whirlpool tub. (Photo: Washington House Inn)

No. 102 is named for Theodore Hartwig, the town’s first doctor, who lived and practiced in the original Washington House, which was built in 1846 and was made of wood. Room 306 got its name from John Armbruster, a jeweler and watchmaker, and No. 220 was named Mary Gannon, one of Cedarburg’s first teachers. Seven of the hotel’s rooms are named for women.

The Schroeder home, Porterfield said, was the home of William Schroeder and his descendants for 150 years. And it was Schroeder and his partner Frederick Hilgen who built the town’s five-story grist mill, which, along with the Settlement, are two of Cedarburg’s more prominent structures. Both sit

beside the town's Cedar Creek, which was the lifeblood and economic engine of the community. At one point in the 1880s, there were five dams and mills on the creek.

The Settlement's claim to fame, she noted, was that it was once home to the Cedarburg Woolen Mill, which provided socks to many Union soldiers during the Civil War. By the last decade of the 1880s, it was the largest woolen mill outside the East Coast.

Porterfield credits Steve Fischer, Cedarburg's mayor in the '60s, for fighting efforts to tear down the grist mill then and pushing to keep the community's 19th-century character intact.

"He recognized the historical value of all these buildings and now the whole downtown area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, from the big St. Francis Borgia Catholic Church at the top of the hill on our Main Street all the way to the Settlement, which is home to the Cedar Creek Winery, Anvil Pub and Grille Restaurant and a number of shops.

"Cedarburg has always been a viable, living town dating back to its founding in the 1840s. But people like Steve Fischer and Jim Pape did a lot to preserve its character. The Washington House Inn, the grist mill and the Cedar Creek Settlement are a testament to that."

No story on the Washington House Inn would be complete without a mention of its remarkable breakfasts, which are created daily by two talented bakers, Jodi Rotter and Sue Jarvela. Rotter has won awards for her scones from the Wisconsin B&B Association, Porterfield said.

When a friend and I visited, items on the what Porterfield calls the B&B's "expanded continental breakfast menu" included chocolate marble bundt, multigrain croissants, fruit tart, cherry pecan scones with maple butter, pistachio or orange bread and a Tex-Mex egg scramble with bacon, sausage, peppers, potatoes and onions.

"No one leaves hungry on our bakers' watch," Porterfield said with a chuckle.

She was right. I wished I had an extra stomach so I could have comfortably enjoyed all the food offerings. My favorites: the scones and the fruit tart.

More information: Rates at the Washington House Inn start at \$139. It often books week in advance. For reservations, see washingtonhouseinn.com (<http://washingtonhouseinn.com>) or call (800) 554-4717.

For ideas on other things to see and do in Cedarburg, see cedarburg.org (<http://cedarburg.org>).

Getting there: The Washington House Inn, W62-N573 Washington Ave., is about 20 miles north of Milwaukee via I-43 and Lakefield Road.

Read or Share this story: <https://jsonl.in/2txq392>