



## Living Inn the Past

Framed by live oak trees and set near the Indian River in Eau Gallie, the 1886 Queen Anne mansion, formerly owned by the Gleason family, has been transformed into a lovely bed-and-breakfast that draws guests from far and wide

Story by **Lynn Pickett**  
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Nancy and Al Szklany live in Rochester, N.Y., but they know how to appreciate a taste of Brevard County history. They are regular visitors to The Old Pineapple Inn, a striking bed-and-breakfast in the Eau Gallie section of Melbourne.

Built in 1886 as a home for the William H. Gleason family, the inn is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Gleason was the first lieutenant governor of Florida and an important figure in early Melbourne. He owned extensive real estate in the area, coowned the Eau Gallie Saw Mill and was a boat builder, among other interests.

The three-story Queen Anne home, with its gracious veranda, gingerbread trim and elegant turret, is one of the loveliest historic homes in Central Florida. It sits on a spacious corner lot on quiet Pineapple Avenue, which runs parallel to the Indian River, surrounded by a white picket fence and framed by large oak trees.

Walk through the front door and you'll find not only charms of the past, but also many pleasing modern touches.

Owners Celeste and Robert Henry bought the house



in 2001 and spent the next several months renovating.

"When we bought it, it was in rough shape," Celeste recalls. "The front porch needed repairs. There was no décor. The walls were painted. It had been stripped. There was nothing in here."

The house had been empty for five years before the Henrys moved in.

William Gleason's widow, Sarah, left the home to their son, William Henry Hunt Gleason, in 1912. The last Gleason to live there was Isabelle Gleason, who stayed in the home until the 1990s. Celeste believes she was a daughter or granddaughter of William H.H. Gleason.



Another couple bought the house after Isabelle died, and they lived in it several years before selling it to the Henrys. When they moved in, the Henrys discovered, and carefully preserved, one unique remnant of Gleason history in the home. On the doorjamb of one of the bedrooms, the family had carefully plotted the growth of one of their children - "L. Gleason," probably Lansing Gleason, who, judging from the lines carved in the door, grew from a small child to a man in the house. The dates next to the measurements start in 1891.

The Henrys were uniquely qualified to restore the neglected old home to its original beauty. Celeste is a graphic designer with a sure sense of color, pattern and style. Robert is a facilities engineer with a background in the construction trades.

They moved to Brevard County from Framingham, Mass., fell in love with the house and felt they were equal to the challenges it presented.

"We've done home restoration in the past, although this is our first one on the National Historic Register," Celeste says.

When the Henrys moved in they discovered some changes already had been made.

The original house did not have an attached kitchen. As was the custom of the time, the cookhouse was separate from the main structure - to reduce heat inside the living quarters and protect the home from fires.

A kitchen had been added, but the Henrys made further additions and updates to be in compliance with restaurant codes of a bed-and-breakfast.

Two bathrooms had also been added, and the upstairs bathroom features a Jacuzzi tub and other modern plumbing conveniences unknown to even wealthy Victorian householders. Isabelle Gleason had installed an elevator during the 1960s, but when the Henrys moved in, the elevator didn't work. They had it fixed. "I figured if we couldn't find someone to fix it, it would become a large, walk-in closet," Celeste jokes.

When it came to decorating, the Henrys were more concerned about making the home comfortable for themselves than making it an inn.

"Comfort was our first consideration," she says. "It's not a museum. You can sit and work in every room."

The Henrys have decorated the house with lovely antiques - some they brought with them from the north, others they bought especially for the house.

When it came to furniture, they wanted modern, wellpadded, upholstered pieces. There are no stiff Victorian sofas or unforgiving chairs in the parlors. Guests are encouraged to sit, lounge and relax.

The original hard-pine floors still shine like new patentleather shoes. The 10-foot ceilings provide a



feeling of elegance. The original pine molding frames the walls darkly, setting off the attractive wallpaper in period styles lovingly put up by the Henrys.

"The wallpaper isn't antique, but I picked it to blend with the house," Celeste says.

The house has 12 rooms and none are the same. "I would take one object, or the color from one object, and work from there," she says.



The front parlor boasts an antique piano purchased on eBay. It is Celeste's favorite antique, and guests love to sit and listen to the old piano rolls.

The house features its original "wavy" glass and wooden frames.

The Henrys added an imported marble mantle from Italy. When they moved in, the fireplace mantle was old wood that did not fit the rest of the house. The marble mantle provides a perfect focal point for the parlor.

Rounding out the décor are lace curtains and lamps with fringed lampshades.

The trim on the home's front porch also needed work when the Henrys moved in.

"We found the original templates in the garage so we could duplicate it. We also added the brick-paved walkway that leads to the porch," Celeste says.

The large porch, decked out with antique white wicker furniture, recalls an era where people could linger in comfort, enjoying the breezes from the nearby river and the conversation of friends.

The home has two sets of stairs. In the front, a curved set has an original stained-glass window that provides light and beauty. The banister is dark pine, beautifully carved at the post. The back stairs are steep and narrow.

The back parlor is less ornate than the front parlor. It features a built-in bookcase and a radio that came from Robert Henry's grandfather, along with comfortable seating.

"This was a much more informal room. It was probably used for business," Celeste speculates.

Behind the back parlor is another room that used to be Gleason's office. The bookcases in the room are original and contain some old law books. The back door of the home is there, as is Isabelle Gleason's elevator.

The three upstairs guest suites are lovingly appointed with antiques and colorful quilts. Guests can choose from king-size beds or a double. Adjoining rooms are available for family members traveling together.

Within a few minutes of arriving at the inn, Nancy Szklany was perched happily on the bed in her suite working on her laptop computer. She was happy to show the upstairs porch that she and her husband could access from the bedroom. It overlooks a tall live oak and several historic buildings.

"We love staying here," Szklany says. "I love that they use the old china dishes at meals. We've been here several times, and when we call them up, they remember us right away."

In addition to accommodating stay-over guests, The Old Pineapple Inn also is used for weddings, seminars, banquets and other gatherings.

#### **Panoramic room views:**

[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#), [10](#),

*The Old Pineapple Inn is located at 1736 Pineapple Ave., Melbourne. Call 254-1347 or visit [www.oldpineappleinn.com](http://www.oldpineappleinn.com) for more information.*

