

BALDPATE INN KEY MUSEUM

by Helen Gowan

There's a dandy little museum in Estes Park which you may not have visited. It is the Baldpate Inn Key Museum. In a good sized room adjacent to the dining area you will find more than 20,000 keys of every description, antique and modern, large and small, historic and insignificant.

The founders of Baldpate Inn, Ethel and Gordon Mace, were so enchanted when they came to spend their honeymoon in Estes Park in 1917 that they decided to open a small hotel for the many visitors who were beginning to make their way to the mountains. They called it Baldpate Inn after Earl Derr Biggers' popular mystery "Seven Keys to Baldpate". The maces gave hotel guests their own room keys to keep as souvenirs, as in the novel, until the cost of metal became prohibitive during World War I. Guests began bringing their own keys to give to the innkeepers. This became a tradition and over the years returning guests vied to bring the most unusual keys. The museum has keys to Westminster Abbey, Frankenstein's Castle, the Pentagon, among thousands of others.

When I visited the museum some years ago, the Inn was open for lunch, not lodging. A garden-side window provided a show of humming birds to accompany our simple but adequate meal, and the self-guided tour provided the rest of the entertainment.

Baldpate Inn Key Museum is located on the east side of Highway 7, south of Estes Park,, and opposite Lily Lake. It is open from the end of May to mid-October. If you are considering adding it to your itinerary on a trip to Estes Park, it behooves you, in these financially challenging times, to call ahead, 866-577-5397, to be certain the museum is open and lunch is available.