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TROOPING THE COLORS

Story by Anne Z. Cooke & Steve Haggerty



Some say that autumn in Massachusetts, when the trees troop the colors in the Berkshires, is the only time to visit the Old Inn on the Green. And it's hard to disagree. Oaks and maples, a hundred shades of red and gold, shade the Inn's peaked roof and porches, overlooking the historic Village Green. Breezes from the [Berkshires](#) waft across the lawn and through the windows, ruffling the curtains. Crickets sing of the end of summer and the kids in the swimming pool (one of the Inn's few new-fangled additions) splash and shout.

A recent visitor lucky enough to arrive at midday unloaded the luggage, checked in, and hopped back in the car for the short drive to the [Appalachian Trail](#), about five minutes away. After an hour on the trail, strolling beneath the changing colors, he headed back to the Inn for a cold drink and a lazy afternoon on the porch. What a difference it was from an earlier visit, on a wet, grey weekend in late March. Few trees bud out until April, here in [New Marlborough](#), Massachusetts, and the grass was brown and matted. The weather had done its work over the winter and the trim on the railings needed a touch of paint.

With the garden bare, the Inn showed its years: 254 of them, in fact. A venerable age, indeed, stretching from its birth during the British colonial era, to proud statehood, to federal nationhood and on to the present decade. And the Old Inn is still welcoming visitors. Originally a coaching inn, built in 1760, the Inn was a stopover on the newly-opened wagon road between [Westfield](#) and [Sheffield](#). With a tavern, rooms upstairs and a post office, it was a bright spot of comfort in the wilderness, a refuge in a rainstorm and a place to stable a horse.

Tucked into a chair beside the fireplace, travelers could expect a bed and home-cooked meal. But today's visitors, travelers of a different stripe, want just the opposite. Most are trying to escape the city for a weekend getaway in the woods, a chance to enjoy both the outdoors and the Inn's award-winning cuisine, courtesy of the owner, [Executive Chef Peter Platte](#) and his wife Meredith Kennard. And thus commences a step into history, one that begins just inside the front door.

Ancient floor boards creak underfoot. Suitcases bump as they're carried up the narrow staircase to the second floor. Each of the five bedrooms upstairs and the six bedroom suites in the adjacent Thayer House," next door (built in 1820 and also part of the Inn), are unique, furnished with unmatched but similar beds, chairs and pedestal tables. The Windsor chairs in the restaurant's three small rooms scrape the bare floors when waiters rearrange the dining room, or pull them out to seat guests in for dinner. And everyone dines by candlelight, but not just because it's the romantic thing to do.

"None of these dining rooms have electric lights," said Steven St. John from Connecticut, who identified himself a frequent weekend guest. Sitting at the adjacent table, he noticed his fellow diners looking up at the six-candle fixture mounted over the table. "I didn't notice it on my first visit," he said, "but it was soon apparent that the dining rooms are lit entirely by candles. It's especially nice in winter, when the fireplaces are lit."

But the pleasure of a meal here at the Inn doesn't depend on the atmosphere. The restaurant, a Four-Diamond award winner for ten years, more than deserves its current place in the Zagat guide, which lists it among the Berkshire's top-ten best cuisine. The wine list offers a wide range of reds and whites, selected to match the menus. And the murals on the plaster walls, quaint renderings of local scenes, while painted recently, are historically appropriate.

The Old Inn itself, a typical colonial structure, is a two-story box with evenly spaced rows of double-hung windows. Two covered porches, one above the other, run the length of the front. Utilitarian, it was designed to provide maximum interior space. And like most 18th century road houses, the Inn was located near the road for easy access. As you pull up and park, you can't help thinking of the thousands of people that have done the same over the years. If a horse and carriage had pulled alongside, driven by a farmer come to buy ten pounds of salt and to pick up his mail, it would feel natural. Downing a pint in the tavern, waiting for the innkeeper's hired girl to dish up plates of boiled onions and venison stew, he'd find himself debating the issue of the day: the Colonies' right to self-government and independence from Britain.

In the 1970s, the then-owners restored the property. Preserving authentic features, they installed new plumbing, modern bathrooms and enlarged and updated the kitchen. Wherever possible, electric wires were brought through accessible areas of the house. Today's owners, Platt and Kennard, have maintained and improved the property, keeping it comfortable and up-to-date, adding HD TV and internet connections.

Platt and Kennard's other venture, the [Southfield Store](#), is a mile away. A good place to stop for lunch, it combines a bakery, and cafe with a deli counter and specialty food store. Lunches are simple but tasty, made



from fresh ingredients. According to Platt, the bakery supplies fresh breads and muffins not just to the Inn but sells to other local stores and restaurants, helping to pay for itself.

Customers stream in and out all day, to eat, to shop or to meet friends for a cup of coffee. For guests who want to enjoy the outdoors, country lanes wind through the area and among the trees, paths familiar to the Platt's dog, Chapman, a chocolate lab who joins every walker willing to have him along. Other recreation options include driving to the closest town, [Barrington](#), or a stop to look at the Butternut ski area, a popular family snow sports destination, located along the road.



[Great Barrington](#), the region's tourist hub, is a pretty small town with a lively main street, brick buildings, a couple of churches, a real estate office or two (or three), several hip-looking cafes and a selection of gift and sports stores. For the Inn's regular visitors -- and there are many who've made holiday visits a tradition -- a few hours strolling through town is a must.

JUST THE FACTS: The Old Inn on the Green is at 134 Hartsville-New Marlborough Road, in New Marlborough, MA 01230. Call (413)229-7924 or go to [oldinn.com](#). A la carte dinners are served daily except Tuesday. The prix fixe meal is \$75 per person; a \$35 Welcome Menu is served Sun/Mon/Wed/Thurs. Room rates for two, including breakfast, start at \$260; the lodging and dinner special on week nights only is \$249; holiday rates start at \$285.

Anne Z. Cooke writes Travel & Features for the Tribune News Service (formerly McClatchy-Tribune News Service) and her stories also appear in the Huffington Post Travel Blogs. Images used with the permission of Steven St. John/ColorWorld; the photo with the inn and autumn leaves with permission of Kevin Sprague/Studio Two.