

Manchester Life Magazine

Visit Newfane

Posted on **April 29, 2019**

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The elevation at the point at which VT Route 30, the road from Brattleboro to Manchester, bisects the village green in the Town of Newfane is 1,000 feet above sea-level—it is a slow and steady climb up into the ski country of the Green Mountains! Newfane is as old as Vermont, settled eight years before the town was officially organized. The early residents were farmers, pioneers really, on rugged terrain that the Reverend Timothy Dwight IV (1752– 1817) described as “uneven” in the diaries he kept during his famous journeys through New England. Off the main road, up in those “uneven” hills, are two more villages that are part of the Town of Newfane: Williamsville and South Newfane.



In the foyer at Four Columns, a Newfane mural by Lisa Adams.

Vacationers who spend a week in town can have the pleasure of eating at all of Newfane's restaurants. Rick's Tavern has been a hangout, as the expression goes, for generations. When there is a fish fry dinner on a Friday night, show up hungry. Rick's is as laid-back as it gets, and ideal for family dinners. Fat Crow opened last season, after a fire destroyed the popular Newfane Café & Creamery at that same site. Here, the décor and ambience are the stunners, featuring the inspired work of the virtuoso metal artist Johnny Swing. A hint! Seating is limited so plan accordingly. Four Columns is the gorgeous Greek revival-style inn on West Street, and the dining room at the inn's Artisan Restaurant, Tavern and Garden draws a melting pot of locals, second-homeowners, and visitors. It has become incredibly popular in the past few months, thanks to Chef de Cuisine Erin Bevan, who came to Newfane after a time in Boston at a James Beard award-winning restaurant there. She has moved the dial up several notches on "farm-to-table" dining because she directly partners with more than 30 local growers and producers for vegetables, grains, and meat for Artisan's menus. Adjacent to the lovely, rustic dining room, with its huge stone hearth, is a cozy bar and tavern room. In the summer, cocktails and meals are served on the umbrella-dotted patio between the duck pond and the pool. Indoors or out, it is a magical setting.



The grand portico of the Greek revival-style county courthouse on the town green is often the stage for outdoor concerts in Newfane

Hikers headed for the West River Trail or to a scenic spot on the banks of the Rock River can pick up snacks, beverages, and lunch from the deli counter at Newfane Market. At Dutton's Farm Stand, it takes less than 10 minutes to stuff a picnic basket full of country-gourmet fare, baked goods, and veggies and fruits grown in their own nearby fields. Starting in June, Dutton's opens some of their fields for pick-your-own strawberries, and later in the season, blueberries and blackberries. Filling small cardboard containers and tin cans with big, juicy berries is a radical departure from video games but children, even teens, just love it. A few quarts of berries are the best take-home souvenir from a weekend in Newfane. Pick enough to make jam, and stock up on local honey and maple syrup, too.



Pick your own at Dutton Farm Stand

The Williamsville Eatery on Dover Road is in the old village general store and here is an important fact: there are nine, count them, nine taps for craft brews and hard cider. Chef-owners Glenn Richardson and Dylan Richardson update the menu with the seasons. Be there for Pizza Night! That said, do not feel uninvited to any of Newfane's frequent, fire-department breakfasts, community lunches, church suppers, and triple-combo soup-fest-silent-auction-fundraisers. Visitors are always welcome. Here are three things that vacationers and day-trippers can drop in on any time: the mind-calming yoga classes at Newfane Village Yoga, the small but remarkable art gallery at the Moore Free Library, and the new antiques store by the town green called Fayetteville Corner. When everyone's favorite and beloved general store closed its doors there several years ago, a tide of forlorn feelings swept over the townsfolk as the vintage storefront stood empty. However, last season new owners and proprietors moved in, filling the space with art and antiques, and the odd collectible item here and there, and reopened the shop. Co-owners Mark Goguen and David Gagnon seem to find a new treasure-trove of artifacts to boost the temptations every week. Don't miss the crystal and china wall in the side gallery. Mark's and David's fondness for the past is evident in the name they chose for the store: Fayetteville was the original name of Newfane Village.



The dining room of Artisan Restaurant, Tavern & Garden with bountiful fresh bread, produce and flowers
It is entirely possible to make a spur-of-the-moment decision to spend a night or two in Newfane. There are 16 elegantly-appointed rooms at Four Columns on the green; five beautiful rooms with private baths at the secluded Fieldstone Lodge, an estate overlooking the babbling brook that runs the length of West Street; and, for all the adventuresome souls who drive around with pup tents and sleeping bags in their trunks, there are many quiet and shaded sites at Kenolie Village Campground. The campsite has flush toilets, hot showers, and laundry facilities. There are sites for RVs and trailercampers, offering all the extra amenities, too. The newest place to sleep over in South Newfane is Treehouse Village Inn—yes, it has an A-frame treehouse that was featured on Animal Planet’s cable television show Treehouse Masters. There are also five rooms in the inn.



The Four Columns, Newfane Village, est. 1832

Some things in Newfane require just a wee bit of prior planning to be in the right place at the right time. For example, there's Olallie Daylily Garden on Auger Hole Road in South Newfane— although there are blooms from late June through September, there is a mind-blowing peak moment around mid-summer when it is as close to Monet's gardens at Giverny as ever a garden could be. There are six acres of color, color, color, and there is no fee to walk the garden paths. Olallie, too, has an irresistible pick-your-own blueberry patch. For a truly memorable visit, aim to be in Newfane for the Rock River Artists Open Studio Tour, held every summer during the third week of July. It is also free, and the self-guided map leads tour-goers up and down Newfane's back roads and country lanes to 14 of the most inspired potters, painters, photographers, woodworkers, and craftspeople now working in Vermont.



Daylilies at Olallie Daylily Garden

Finding the studios is half the fun, and visiting one-on-one with these talented artists becomes, for some, a once-in-a-lifetime moment. If there is one true thing about Newfane it is this: the town has all the scenic “photo ops” anyone would ever want in Vermont. The iconic white clapboard churches, the commanding courthouse, the wooden covered bridge, the old country store, the maple trees, the forested hills—in other words, it is the perfect picture-postcard visitors seek. Another truth is that nearly every day in Newfane begins to feel special for those who will stop long enough to tap its historical roots, and who will readily blend in a little bit with the community. It’s that kind of place. Life in this old shire town is truly as idyllic as it appears to be.



Awaiting passengers at Newfane depot

All Aboard!

The hottest new site in Newfane since last summer is actually one of the oldest. It is the Windham County Historical Society’s exhibition at the newly restored train depot on Cemetery Hill Road, 100 yards off the northeast corner of the town green. The 1880 depot tells the story of Newfane at the heyday of the railroad era in Vermont. Train buffs from all across the country, and Canada, too, have dropped into the depot to see one of the tiny stations on the famous, or rather infamous, West River Railroad Line. Visitors are always amused to learn that the tracks that once connected Brattleboro (to the south) and South Londonderry (to the north) are, to this day, known as the “36 miles of trouble.” Save time to see the water tank structure! These were the days of steam trains and storing water was one of the duties of the section crew. Make a donation at the desk inside the depot, as there is no admission fee. It’s a child-friendly, pet-friendly site, and well worth the visit. The railroad station property is a short walk from the Windham County Historical Society’s Museum. Both are open weekends from Memorial Day weekend in May through Columbus Day weekend. Newfane Village, VT Rte. 30. 802-365-4148 or historicalsocietyofwindhamcounty.org