

The Colonel Williams Inn c 1769



A SHORT HISTORY

The Colonel Williams Inn has been a landmark on Route 9, the old stagecoach road between Brattleboro and Bennington, for over 200 years. Situated on 9 acres of meadows overlooking a beautiful spring fed pond, it is a haven of serenity for all its guests. The Inn which is a classic example of a 1770's Vermont farm house holds a significant place in Marlboro's history. And its story begins here....

Origins of Marlboro and its Early Settlement

Marlboro is one of the New Hampshire land grants. It was chartered from the Crown of England under the reign of George II in 1751 by Benning Wentworth, Governor of the Province of New Hampshire. The Governor granted the tract of land known as Marleborough to Timothy Dwight and his associates, all members of the Massachusetts Colony. Although the Grantees (called proprietors) laid out the boundaries of the town, they were unable to bring settlers to farm the land. The proprietors blamed the well-founded fear of Indian raids. So, the Charter was forfeited. By 1761, in the waning days of the French and Indian War, most of the 'unfriendly' Indians had been chased out or killed. The town was re-chartered in 1762 and Governor Wentworth re-granted the land to the exact same people, and again in 1764 to a slightly different group, this time changing the name to "New Marlborough". The "New" was never popular and years later, the town residents officially changed the town name back to Marlborough. The town was most likely named for Marlboro, Massachusetts since several of the grantees were from that town.

At long last, the land was surveyed and sixty-four equal parcels or "rights" were offered for sale. The first settlers of the new town began to arrive. What they found was a place where the woodsman's axe was unknown. They found a dark and dreary forest heavily timbered with massive trees of hemlock, spruce, fir, beech, maple, birch, ash, elm, red oak and cherry. From what is now Brattleboro to Bennington the forest was vast and uninterrupted, without inhabitants, used only as hunting grounds by the native Indians. And from this forest the first settlers carved their town.

In 1763 Timothy Dwight sold the first two parcels of land to Abel Stockwell from West Springfield, Massachusetts and Francis Whitmore from Middletown, Connecticut. Whitmore, traveling by way of what is now Halifax, Vermont, brought his provisions in on his back, a distance of 30 miles! He settled in the southern end of the town. Stockwell traveled by way of Brattleboro and settled near the eastern border. The two men spent nearly a year in town and endured many hardships without any knowledge of each other, each considering his own the only family in town! Other settlers soon followed the first two families.

In 1769, Colonel William Williams from Northboro, Massachusetts moved his family to Marlboro to the property where his house still stands today. Colonel Williams was a member of that famed Williams family which originally resided in western Massachusetts. A cousin, Ephraim, founded Williams College in 1755 a month before he was killed in battle during the French and Indian War.

Colonel Williams bought the property in 1769 from one of the original proprietors and the purchase was later recorded in the first book of town property records "in the year of the reign of King George, King of England, this eleventh day of June Anno Domini 1770". His signature and property description are found in Book 1. The signing was witnessed by early settlers, Charles Phelps and James Ball. It is interesting to note how the date was written.

William Williams – Good citizen, Gentleman Farmer, Revolutionary War hero

Although no pictures of William Williams exist, it was said that he was quite a handsome man, tall with easy manners and graceful deportment. He and his wife had two daughters, Lydia and Phoebe, both born in Massachusetts. He had fought in the French and Indian War and received the rank of Captain. He was not only considered a brave soldier, but an enterprising citizen. He was active in the settlement of Marlboro, encouraging other prominent men such as Captain Nathaniel Whitney to settle in the new town. However, he did not live in Marlboro for too many years. By 1777 he had moved to Wilmington. He continued to be an active citizen and helped to run town business. Colonel Williams was both head of the local militia and head of the Lower Regiment of Cumberland County which included Wilmington, Whitingham, Halifax, Brattleboro, Marlboro, Dummerston, Guilford and Vernon.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, he became a supporter of the American cause. In 1775 he offered his services to the Provincial Congress and promised to raise a regiment of good citizen soldiers. He said the object of these patriots, as stated by themselves was to form a body of minute-men who would be "duly prepared at the least notice to ... keep under proper subjection, regulars, Roman Catholics, and the savages at the northward; as also to be ready at all times, to defend our rights and privileges against ministerial tyranny and oppression."

Colonel Williams was promoted to the rank of Colonel in 1777. In the early summer of 1777 the British, with their German and Indian allies, were ransacking Eastern New York. General Burgoyne planned to send over 1500 Brunswick troops from the Hudson River to capture Bennington and its American supply base and attempt to march over the mountains and down to Boston. All the towns of the New Hampshire Land grants were directly in that path. In late July Williams marched between Wilmington and Brattleboro picking up his minute-men along the way. He met General Stark at Fort #4 in Charlestown, New Hampshire. On August 16 he fought with General Stark at the Battle of Bennington. Colonel Williams's men fought bravely and the American patriots captured or killed most of the British, German and Tory soldiers. The battle saved New England from British invasion and gave the Americans the confidence to win a further victory at the Battle of Saratoga. After the battle he continued to play a role in Wilmington's civil and military affairs.

Both Phoebe and Lydia married local men and remained in Wilmington, but the Colonel and his wife continued to move from time to time and ultimately settled in the province of Lower Canada where they both died in 1823.

Clearing the Land and Building the Homestead

After settling his family in what was probably a simple and quickly erected log cabin, Colonel Williams began to clear his land. Taking advantage of the dense forest which provided a huge quantity of logs and the rivers and streams which provided an abundant source of water power, Colonel Williams erected the first saw mill in 1772. (The mill passed through several hands and existed until at least the 1860's.) Williams then built the first frame building in town, his barn. The barn was expanded by 50% in 1821, to become a dairy barn.

Georgian Colonial c. 1725 - c. 1775

First Period |
17 & 18th Century Architecture | 19th & 20th Century Architecture



From *The Salem Handbook*, Historic Salem Incorporated, 1977

Plan

Classical symmetry of floor plan and facade composition. Central hall flanked by 1 or 2 rooms was common. Central chimney replaced by end/side chimneys.

Doorway

Soon after the land purchase, Colonel Williams began building his house. He built a simple, yet grand clapboard two story farm house using the timber from his own sawmill. The original house had at least 6 large rooms built around a center chimney. The downstairs rooms included a parlor, a keeping room and an open family room kitchen. Upstairs were three bedrooms, two of which had fireplaces off the central chimney. The house is a classic late era Georgian Colonial (c. 1725 – c. 1775). What distinguishes it from the later Federal Style Colonial (c. 1780 – c. 1830), is its roof line, and chimney placement. The Federal Colonials maintained the same general symmetry of the earlier colonials, but the central chimney was replaced by 2 end/side chimneys.

According to the property transfer records in Marlboro Town Hall, Williams sold his property for 400 pounds to Town Clerk William Mather, formerly of Suffield, Connecticut. It is written that Williams, as the original grantee of the land “sells to William Mather and gives up all claims to the land on the 29th day of October in the 14th year of His Majesty’s reign, Anno Domini 1773 ...and all appurtenances thereof.”

In 1783 Captain Simeon Adams, also from Suffield, Connecticut, bought the property from William Mather. Captain Adams had been a soldier in the French and Indian War and was twice captured and taken prisoner to Canada, each time being exchanged for a Frenchman and returned home. Historians think that he most likely was present at the Battle of Bennington. By the time he moved his wife Susannah and family to Vermont he was already 60 years old. He died in 1803 and was buried in the Central Graveyard by the old Stage Coach Road (now Route 9, the Molly Stark Highway), only a mile from his home.

The house remained in the Adams family for 4 generations. The ownership passed from father to son; from Captain Simeon Adams to his son, Simeon Adams born in 1776, to his son Timothy Mather Adams born in 1811, then to his son Hugh Mather Adams born in 1858. The farmstead was finally sold out of the family in 1896. The executor of his father Hugh’s estate was his son, yet another Simeon Adams who according to town records deeded the land and all its buildings which now included 2 barns and a Carriage House to Luron Eames. By this time the farm had grown to 600 acres with a sugar orchard of over 600 trees.

Sometime after his father’s death, Simeon Adams (who was also known as Captain Adams) completed the first expansion of the house. He added a new kitchen and three additional bedrooms. Extra bedrooms were especially needed as Captain Adams and his wife Lucy had 11 children, all born in the house. A carriage house and a second, smaller barn were also built

During the last few years of Adams ownership the house slipped into disrepair. It was rented out briefly by two families, the Hadlock Family c. 1890 and the Ryder Family c. 1896. The earliest existing photograph of the house was taken with the Hadlock Family sitting outside on the front lawn. The fact that times were tough is evident in the deep sway of the horse’s back and the somewhat worn appearance of the house’s façade.

When Luron’s son, Horton and his wife, Lillian took over the ownership, they called their home the “5 Maples Farm”. They named it after five towering 300 year old trees that lined their driveway. Following the tradition of the Adams, the Eames family continued to operate the homestead as a dairy farm well into the 1940’s. A photo of the farm house taken in the early 1940’s shows the house when it was owned by Horton’s son Raymond and his wife Viola. The outward appearance of the house looks considerably improved. Mrs. Eames planted rose gardens and ivy which climbed the front walls. A small portico shielded the front entrance.

Out of a total of 600 acres, 150 acres were dedicated to pasture land for the grazing herd of dairy cows. The abundant sugar maples provided the family with a rich and delicious source

of profit. (The ruins of the old sugar house are hidden under an overgrowth of small trees and bushes near where the greenhouse now stands.) Most of the trees that supplied the sap were second growth that grew on the land once cleared by Colonel Williams.

The property remained in the Eames family for many years. Many older residents of Marlboro still remember the 5 Maples Farm, and the Eames family; Horton, "Grandma" Eames, Raymond and Viola, and their son Wooster.

For almost 2 centuries, the inhabitants of Colonel Williams's house peacefully farmed their land, haying the fields, tending the dairy cows and tapping their fine grove of maples trees to make syrup. But this bucolic existence would end in 1945 when Mr. Eames sold the farm to H. Parks Holcomb and his wife Minnie. Farming days were over!

Mr. Holcomb saw no profit in farming, haying or sugaring. He promptly did 2 things which changed not only face of the land, but also transitioned the house from private home to college dormitory! Mr. and Mrs. Holcomb never lived in the house; instead they rented it to the newly established Marlboro College.

Marlboro College was founded in 1946 by a returning World War II veteran. Over 100 young men, taking advantage of the GI Bill, enrolled. As there was not yet sufficient housing on the young campus, the College rented "Eames House". For a period of years in the late 1940's and early 1950's the old house was home not only to a group of students but also home to the art department.

During this time period several parcels of the farm property were sold off. Then sometime in the 1950's Mr. Holcomb profited once more from the land. He cut most of the sugar maples and sold the wood to make "Japanese bowling alleys"! Fortunately the 5 ancient sugar maples for which the farm had been named were spared and still grace the property with their beauty.

Once the new dormitory was built, the students moved to the campus. With the house now vacant and with no trees left to cut, Mr. Holcomb sold the property to Thomas and Ruth Renwick in March 1959. For several months the old house languished in neglect, until it caught the eye of Dr. Walker, a physician in Brattleboro. Although the house and grounds were in need of much repair, the dedicated doctor envisioned a new life for the still impressive former family homestead.

In November 1959 after only a few months ownership, the Renwicks sold the farmhouse, barns, and 75 surrounding acres to "Hope Haven", Vermont's first licensed nursing home caring exclusively for alcoholics. With Dr. Walker as Director, the old colonial mansion became a rehabilitation facility for recovering alcoholics. According to a 1960 article in the Brattleboro Reformer the house was "restored to its natural beauty by dedicated workers from the surrounding communities and dedicated alcoholics who have found a contented way of life". Unfortunately for Dr. Walker, Hope Haven did not remain open for long. This quintessential Vermont farmhouse was ready for its final transformation.

A House Becomes an Inn

In November, 1961 Isobel Hartenbach purchased the property including the house and all its furnishings for the sum of \$18,500.00. Carefully and tastefully, Mrs. Hartenbach transformed the house into a country inn, providing lodging and fine dining for the growing number of travelers to the area. She called her new inn, Marlborough House. Before opening the doors to the public, Mrs. Hartenbach added on a dining room, a large kitchen, and a two bedroom suite.

The carriage house was converted into guest space, allowing its beautiful post and beam construction to remain clearly visible throughout all the rooms. Mrs. Hartenbach managed Marlborough House for over 13 years, family style. According to Bob Anderson, Mrs. Hartenbach's son, she would often put him to work as bartender on special occasions. He still remembers coming home from college and sleeping in the carriage house before its conversion, "when it still smelled of horses!"

There have been several different Innkeepers over the years, and the inn's name has been changed from Marlborough House, to The Longwood Inn, and then to Tamarack House, after the 50 foot Tamarack tree which shades the front lawn. In 1997 Judy Mackler, the new owner and innkeepers, Tom and Denise Ware changed the name to The Colonel Williams Inn. At long last, the Inn was given its most fitting name, honoring the man and the house he built over 230 years ago.

The Inn Today

With much of the original house intact, the Colonel Williams Inn retains many fine details including wide floor boards, hand hewn beams, wainscoting, a working beehive oven and 4 additional 18th century fireplaces. The "Captain Simeon Adams Bar" which was patterned after a tavern in Colonial Williamsburg, occupies one of the original rooms built by Colonel Williams. The creaky wide board floors attest to its age. The attic with its steep staircase remains virtually untouched, looking much the same now as it did in 1770. Here, one can easily view the sturdy colonial post and beam construction complete with hatchet marks. The original trap door entrance to the cellar remains untouched, although it's now covered by an old Belgian rug.

The Inn remains family run. It is now home to Innkeepers, John, Nancie and Peter Marinaro, with help from daughter Gina and son Michael. Since buying the Inn in June 2005 they have kept the colonial-style decorating theme of the 1700's. In addition they have added their own antiques and furnishings from different time periods and different countries.

Enjoy your stay!

Love and Marriage

The first courtship in the town of Marlboro occurred in this house in 1770. Dinah Fay who traveled with Colonel Williams' family from Northburo, Massachusetts, met Perez Stockwell, who was already a town resident. They wed in autumn of 1771 which was the first recorded marriage in Marlboro.

The romantic, historic Colonel Williams Inn continues to be a place for love and marriage. The recently restored barn (85' x 45', 4 stories high!) has been the site of many wedding receptions. No longer a home for cows and sheep, it has skylights and special lighting. From the hay loft, wedding guests can now look down upon a band stage, dance floor, a long pine bar crafted from a single tree, and a sitting area for up to 200 guests. The Marinaro family is happy to give their guests a guided tour of the barn.