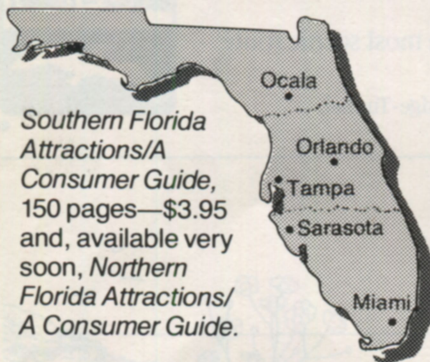


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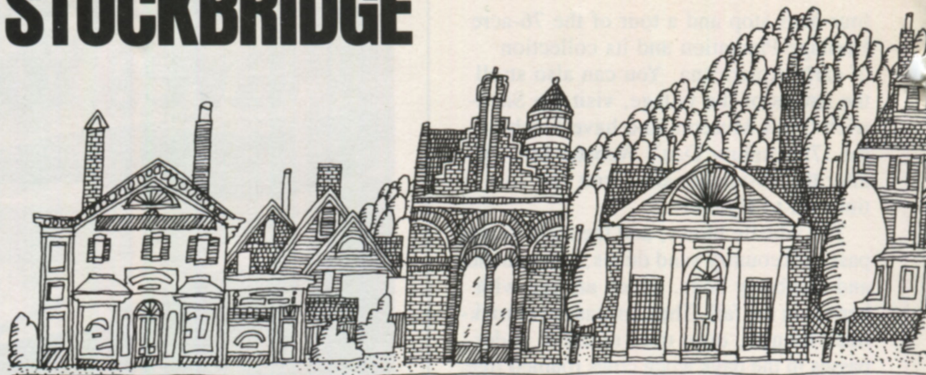
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STOCKBRIDGE



A beauty of a village in the Berkshires

In 1785, my great-great-great-grandfather, Theodore Sedgwick, the fifth speaker of the fledgling U.S. House of Representatives, built himself a stout Federal-style mansion on Main Street in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He thereby formed a bond between our family and a town that, two centuries and many generations later, still thrives. Indeed, locals swear that crickets in this little Berkshire town chirp nightly. "Sedg-wick, Sedg-wick, Sedg-wick."

Although I've never lived in Stockbridge, I've visited it often enough to develop a keen sentiment for the place—our musty but elegant old manse, the gentle Housatonic that flows behind, and the deep-green ridges of the Berkshire hills off in the distance. While thoroughly New England in spirit, Stockbridge is oddly Midwestern in look, mostly because of the broad, treelined boulevard, Main Street, that runs through the town. Most of the houses along it, however, are situated well back from the road, making it seem even wider and more imposing. The downtown itself is tiny, just a little row of shops propped up like books on a shelf by the town library and the massive Red Lion Inn at either end. Actually, a variety of modern boutiques are tucked in behind, out of sight, in a walk-in shopping area called the Mews, and more stores have cropped up of late around the corner.

Religious Roots

One certainly needn't be a Sedgwick to be attracted to the little town. Nearly equidistant from Boston and New York City, in the southwest corner of Massachusetts, Stockbridge has an unusually rich history for such a small place (population 2,328), and much of it is preserved for visitors to see. The town was founded in 1734 by a Yale tutor named John Sargeant who was serving as a missionary to the Mahican Indians. In Stockbridge's early years, the English settlers and Indian natives lived together easily, tepees and Colonial frame houses standing side by side. One of those origi-

nal houses, belonging to John Sargeant himself, stands on Main Street and is open to the public. Fancy in a primitive sort of way, it is surrounded by a garden of herbs and dwarf fruit trees. Up the road a short distance off Route 102, Indians are interred in the Ancient Burial Ground on a hillock looking out over the land that was once theirs.

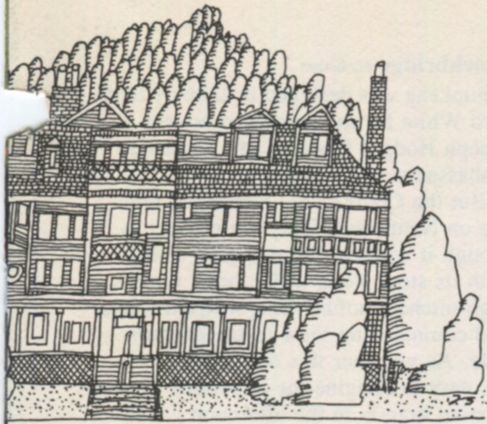
In keeping with Stockbridge's strong religious associations, Calvinist Jonathan Edwards took up residence here in 1751 after he was evicted from his Northampton, Massachusetts, ministry for his extreme views. He, too, served as a missionary to the Indians, and he settled in the center of town on the site of the present-day Austen Riggs psychiatric institute.

A Haven for the Arts

Exactly a hundred years later, the town became home to another American dignitary, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who moved into a small red cottage above the broad lake now called the Stockbridge Bowl. His house, rebuilt after a fire, has been turned into a small museum and stands about four miles north of the town center on Pine Street. At Stockbridge, Hawthorne wrote *The House of the Seven Gables* and planned *Tanglewood Tales*, but he proclaimed great dissatisfaction with the region, largely because it was so different from his native Salem. The Hawthorne museum is across from the famous Tanglewood music center, summer home of the Boston Symphony, and if you go out there, stop in at Tanglewood and stroll about the center's luxurious grounds.

The sculptor Daniel Chester French built a glorious stucco estate for himself in Stockbridge at the turn of the century. "I live here six months of the year—in heaven," he exclaimed. "The other six months of the year I live, well—in New York." Called **Chesterwood**, the extensive property has been opened to the public by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. To get there from Stockbridge center, take Route 102 west two miles to Route 183 south and follow the signs.

You can look at a number of exhibits



by John Sedgwick

in the barn, including plaster models of French's famous seated Lincoln and the Minute Man statue from the Concord Bridge, which he completed at age 25. Visitors can also tour the elegant living quarters and walk through French's high-ceilinged studio, which was built with large double doors and equipped with a short railroad track that enabled him to wheel his sculptures outside to inspect them in natural light.

The town's chief claim to fame in the popular mind, however, has nothing to do with history or high culture, but rather with an artist whose interests never diverted from the mainstream—or from Main Street. He was Norman Rockwell, who moved to Stockbridge in 1953 and stayed until his death in 1978. Through hundreds of paintings of local people and scenes—doctors, countermen, justices of the peace, little leaguers and garage mechanics—Rockwell transformed the town into pure Americana. And, in a case of life imitating art, the tiny downtown is still almost precisely the way Rockwell depicted it in a magazine Christmas illustration almost 20 years ago: the gingerbread-house antique store, the oddly gabled Town Hall, Nejaime's Grocery, the Red Lion Inn—all of them just as they were. Visitors can make the comparison for themselves at the **Old Corner House**, which displays an assortment of Rockwell's paintings from its large collection. It is open Wednesday through Monday from 10 to 5; admission is \$3 for adults, \$1 for children ages 5 to 12.

A Retreat for the Rich

Not so long ago, however, the town's appeal was exclusively to members of the upper crust—well-heeled New Yorkers who built summer homes in Stockbridge in the late 19th century to escape the city's swelter. Today's tourists can gape at a prime example of these summer "cottages," as the stately mansions were termed, in **Naumkeag**—Haven of Peace—which stands about a half-mile up Pine Street from town, on Prospect Hill overlooking the public cemetery. A glorious shingled palace of 26 rooms,

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Stockbridge continued

Naumkeag was designed in 1886 by Stanford White for the renowned lawyer Joseph Hodges Choate, who served as ambassador to Great Britain.

But the Court of St. James had nothing on Naumkeag. The house looks as though it could withstand quite a siege, with its stout stone walls, hefty turrets, high-pitched roof bristling with chimneys, and commanding view of the countryside. As you tour this delightful estate, it's easy to imagine the imperious Choate sipping brandy in the afternoon garden surrounded by the imitation Venetian hitching posts. (He had the beams dredged up from Boston Harbor, where they'd lain for 75 years acquiring their ancient weather-beaten look.) Or perhaps he's taking a stroll along the Linden Walk, or through a water stair in a grove of white birches, or around to the front of the house to the Chinese Garden.

A far more spartan existence can be found at Colonel John Ashley's house, also open to visitors, in nearby Ashley Falls. The oldest dwelling in Berkshire County, the house was built in 1735 and has attained some historical stature as the home of a slave woman named Mumbett. Intrigued to learn during the Revolution that all men are created equal, she prevailed upon my ancestor Judge Sedgwick to argue for her freedom in court. She was the first slave to be freed by a court in Massachusetts. In gratitude, she went to work for the judge and became a loyal member of his household. She is buried in the family graveyard.

Outdoor Diversions

Down the road from the Ashley house is **Bartholomew's Cobble**, a domelike geological formation that is home to an extraordinary 700 species of plants, including 44 types of ferns. Always warm because of its southern exposure, the Cobble is a lovely place for a picnic well into the fall.

More energetic outdoorsmen might want to climb **Monument Mountain**. Hardly a true mountain at 1,750 feet, it nevertheless affords good views of the fabled Berkshire countryside from its summit. From there, gazing at the gentle valley, you can see why the author Catherine Maria Sedgwick, the judge's spinster daughter, compared Stockbridge so favorably with paradise. Quizzed on this point, she once replied, "Madam, when I die I expect no violent transition." She is now taking her heavenly rest in the family plot. ■

How and Where

Summer Events: There are three major summer festivals in the Stockbridge area. Tanglewood is home for the Boston Symphony Orchestra during July and

August. For ticket information, call 617-266-1492 until June 30; after that, 413-637-1666.

Celebrating its 55th anniversary season is the Berkshire Theatre Festival, with shows from June 29 through August 28 at two theaters—the Playhouse (Main-stage) on Main Street and the student-run Unicorn on Route 7 north. Tickets cost about \$7 at the Unicorn and \$11 to \$18 at the Playhouse; write for tickets to the Berkshire Theatre Festival, Stockbridge, Mass. 01262, or call 298-5576.

Also open during the summer months is the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, held at the Ted Shawn Theatre on George Carter Road in Becket, about 15 minutes east of Stockbridge on Route 8. From June 28 through September 3, different groups will perform every week, including the Paul Taylor Dance Company and the Jazz Tap Ensemble. Tickets for the Tuesday through Saturday evening and Saturday matinee shows range from \$9 to \$16 and can be reserved by writing to the festival at Box 287, Lee, Mass. 02138 or calling 243-0745.

Getting There: From New York, go north on the Taconic Parkway, then east on Route 23 to Route 7 north, which passes through the center of town. From Boston, take the Massachusetts Turnpike to Exit No. 2, then head west on Route 102.


Where to Stay: The best place to stay is the **Red Lion Inn**, which is not only in the center of town but *is* the center of town. A wonderful, creaky old place whose hallways are slightly bowed with age, it is chockablock with antique furniture, grandfather clocks and a large collection of porcelain teapots. The Red Lion maintains the New England inn tradition with style, grace and—to judge by the attentiveness of the service—snap. Despite the large scale of the inn—there are 100 rooms—each guest is made to feel right at home. Fresh flowers are placed everywhere in summer; the hearths are always blazing in winter. The price of a double room with private bath for a weekend night is \$80 to \$95, depending on the room, through October 31; about \$60 afterward, until May 27. Write for reservations to the Red Lion Inn, Stockbridge, Mass. 01262, or call 298-5545.

Where to Eat: The Red Lion Inn provides the best dining in town, with a menu that favors such New England fare as clam chowder, scallop-and-oyster pie and lobster. The baked goods are particularly satisfying. While the large dining room is light and pleasant, the dark-wood Widow Bingham's Tavern has the same menu and more charm. It is snug and has pleasantly old-timey New England feeling. Dinner for two without drinks runs \$30 to \$40; the telephone number is the same as the inn's: 298-5545.

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