

# Travel



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photos by JUDY COLBERT

The Waybury Inn in Middlebury, Vt. is the real-life inn filmed for the opening of the "Newhart" TV show, pictured as the show's mythical Stratford Inn. A producer reportedly spent 10 days

searching the New England countryside for the perfect place before finding the Waybury.



Jim and Betty Riley are the real owners of the Waybury, and although Bob Newhart has never visited their inn, he sent a photo that hangs in the lobby. If you look closely on TV, you can spot the Rileys as two of the people walking in and out of the Stratford (Waybury) on the "Newhart" show.

## Vermont inn was perfect for 'Newhart' show

By Judy Colbert  
special writer

"Okay, where's Bob?" is the most frequent question people ask when they come in to the Waybury Inn. "They know they're asking a ridiculous question," say Jim and Betty Riley, the inn's owners. "That's a way of breaking the ice."

The Bob they refer to is Bob Newhart, proprietor of the Stratford Inn on the very popular Monday night television show called "Newhart." The Waybury is famous because its facade was filmed for the opening of the show.

It's said a producer spent 10 days driving around New England with a list of inns looking for "the perfect inn." The Waybury was selected and the exterior was filmed on two different occasions. The crew left the Stratford sign in the basement of the Waybury.

People know Bob Newhart isn't going to be at the Waybury. He's been invited, and what he's done is send an autographed picture to Claudia, one of the Waybury's chefs. It hangs unobtrusively in the lobby. Larry and the two Darryls have visited, though, and left an autographed photo, which hangs under Newhart's.

THE RILEYS haven't been invited to California to be in the show, but they do appear, with Jim's older son, in some of the outdoor scenes. When the film crew came by a second time, they needed some people to go in and out of the inn, so the Rileys were selected. Fame is fleeting, and you'd better look quickly or you won't see the Rileys.

There's little similarity between the show and reality. CBS's Stratford Inn supposedly was opened in 1774. The real-life Waybury, sitting on

three acres of land in East Middlebury, Vt., was built in 1810. It was a stagecoach stop at Middlebury Gap, one of four passes through the Green Mountains. As stagecoaches came across or prepared to cross the gap, the horses would be changed at the inn.

It also was a stop for the passengers. It has been in continuous operation as a boarding house or inn since then, with the exception of two years during World War II because of gas rationing. Because of that historical connection it has been declared a National Historical Place, one of a few in Vermont still in existence from that era.

An observant eye will notice other clues. The film footage of rural Vermont country roads leading to the Stratford Inn at the opening of the show is reported to have been shot in New Hampshire and is supposed to be outtakes from the movie "On Golden Pond." If you relied on these visual roads, you'd get lost on the way to the Rileys.

PEOPLE OFTEN come into the Waybury saying, "Hey, the exterior color's all wrong. It should be white with black shutters." To some extent they're right. That's the way the Waybury looked three years ago when it was filmed for the show. Betty points out the white pigment was too expensive to use when the inn was constructed and probably came along around the 1930s.

The Waybury needed repainting so the Rileys scraped down layers and layers of paint to the original color. It was something paint companies now call Old Salem Gray, so that's what it is today.

Another difference people notice are the hedges. When you study the opening shots closely, the front porch is overwhelmed by overgrown hedges. They've been torn out and replaced by more proportionally sized flowerbeds. They're visible in

the few seconds of spring footage shot the second time the camera crew came to film the inn.

There is one strong similarity between the Stratford and the Waybury. Both sets of innkeepers, the Loudons at the television Stratford and the Rileys at the Waybury, share a basic interest in people and a concern for their comfort and well-being. The Waybury is warm, friendly and charming and guests feel comfortable putting their feet up on a coffee table, taking a nap on the living room sofa or answering a late night phone call at the registration desk in robe and slippers.

FOURTEEN STEPS of uneven

riser heights lead to a wide hallway and the 12 rooms. Each guest room is individually decorated. A special feature in each guest room is a stuffed animal personally selected by the Rileys. That may sound corny, but the animals are so carefully chosen to make the room feel homey that they frequently "leave" with the guest.

You won't find a television, telephone or writing desk with stationery in the guest rooms, or a swimming pool on the premises.

Equally as comfortable is the dining room (dinner \$8-\$16). Light airy classical music fills the background. Jim feels "music in the dining room is every bit as important as the food."

You can't have one out of kilter. People listen and relax, mellow out.

Scafold, beef, veal and lamb are menu specialties. "The kinds of things you would have found in New England in 1810. We are challenged to make a menu compatible with tourists and local residents, who represent a large number of our dinner guests."

The story of the Rileys and their inn could be the story of any number of people who dream of leaving the rat race for a nice quiet place out in the country.

Jim came from the McDonald's corporate world. Betty Riley is a native of St. Louis and worked as a guidance counselor in Indianapolis.

BOTH DECIDED they didn't want to work for someone else. They wanted a historic inn in New England.

"Betty and I had a tradition of going to the grocery store for our Friday evening dinner, which was special because we spent the entire week apart on our jobs. In checking out we picked up a magazine of commercial real estate property available around the country. The Waybury Inn was in there long with four or five others."

For more information, contact the Waybury Inn, East Middlebury, Vt. 05740, (802) 368-4015. Closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Rate for two \$56-\$85.

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