



*The Salem Cross Inn in West Brookfield, Massachusetts is a family-owned New England restaurant housed in lovingly restored 18th-century buildings.*



# SALEM CROSS INN

*A Graceful Marriage of Tradition and Innovation*

*Written by Daniel Lieberman  
Photography by Scott Erb and Donna Dufault*

**W**ide pine paneling in the oldest part of the inn should have gone, as the law required, to King George for the masts of ships-of-the-line to defend the British Empire. Plaster walls in one room were left unpainted—a signal of wealth; plaster was so expensive this far inland that not painting them showed them off better. The Salem Cross Inn straddles the gap, in culinary terms as well as décor, between tradition and innovation with charm, grace, and tact.

Brothers Henry and Dick Salem restored the old White homestead, which had been in the same family since 1707. They originally intended it to be a residence, but once the brothers realized the historic quality of the buildings, they raised their sights and decided to use the property as a business. A golf course was considered (the property runs to around 600 acres) but a demographic study showed it was a poor fit for 1960s West Brookfield. A restaurant actually got thumbs down, too, but the family decided to open one anyway. It opened in 1961 as the Peregrine White House. The name was changed in honor of the Salem Cross symbol found on the front door of the farmhouse.

*continued on page 58*

A Salem Cross is a symbol in the shape of the Roman numeral 10 (X) with a line across it. It was intended as a “spirit ward” to protect the house from witchcraft, still widely feared in early 18th-century New England.

Two chefs make the magic in the kitchen. Charles Johnson is the master of weddings, banquets, and feasts. The day we visited, Charles was up to his elbows in turkey for the Inn’s sold-out Thanksgiving Dinner. He presides over the Inn’s Fireplace Feasts, featuring clam chowder prepared in a cast iron cauldron over the fire and prime rib cooked over wild cherry logs on a Roasting Jack (an ingenious clockwork device for spit roasting—the only known operating example in America). Charles has been with the Salem Cross Inn for over twenty years (Martha Salem told us nobody remembers exactly how long).



Laurent brings his French sensibility to Salem Cross’s forthright New England cooking. A traditionalist when it comes to sauces, he makes everything from scratch using heirloom herbs and vegetables from the Inn’s kitchen garden, started by Martha’s brother John, and meat from the Inn’s own Polled Hereford and Black Angus cattle. French dishes like bouillabaisse and braised lamb shanks mix with fare from further afield, like homemade marinara sauce and even Asian-inspired beef dumplings.

Whether you crave traditional fare or want to try something more cosmopolitan, a visit to the Salem Cross Inn will be memorable. Visit the website for more information about the Inn’s menus and special events. **F**

**Salem Cross Inn**  
260 West main Street  
West Brookfield, MA 01585  
508.867.2345  
[www.salemcrossinn.com](http://www.salemcrossinn.com)



*“Laurent brings his French sensibility to Salem Cross’s forthright New England cooking.”*

Laurent Olivier is from Normandy. He cooked in France and England before moving to the United States 14 years ago. He came to the Salem Cross Inn from the Beechwood Hotel in Worcester where he was sous-chef. Martha’s brother-in-law Alan had been chef at the Salem Cross for many years; the search for his replacement involved “kissing a lot of frogs along the way” until a chef friend recommended Laurent. He has helped the Inn weather the transition from pure Yankeeedom to a more outward-looking style. Change wasn’t easy; early attempts to revamp the Inn’s menu met resistance from tradition-minded customers. Signature dishes like liver with onions and bacon, chicken pot pie, meatloaf, and Yankee pot roast simply aren’t going anywhere, but more adventurous choices now include shrimp and crab risotto, and cedar plank salmon.

