

Treasure in those old timbers

Leominster barn yields harvest of vintage boards, rich history

By Chris Camire, ccamire@sentinelandenterprise.com

The family owns StoriedBoards, a company based in Lake George, N.Y., that harvests vintage wood from old barns in the Northeast that have fallen into disrepair

The Russells, and two workers, were sweating under the hot Leominster sun this week as they dismantled the 40-by-80-foot barn, piece by piece, and stacked its materials into neat piles. The nails alone will nearly fill a 55-gallon drum.

The crew will be on the job site for the next three weeks. They sleep in a 25-year-old camper that Whitney describes as "a little wounded."

"It's not ideal," added Tyler. "Someday we'll have nicer digs."

The Russells believe their company's potential growth hinges on what they offer beyond old wood -- stories.

The family researches each structure they dismantle and creates a book chronicling its history that they give to their customers.

"All things being equal, if you have a choice between lumber with history versus lumber without history, you're obviously going to choose the history," said Tyler. "That's our differentiator. That's our innovation."



Whitney Russell and his sons, Tyler, left, and Garrett pause from their work dismantling a 40-by-80-foot barn on Pleasant Street in Leominster on Thursday. Their company, StoriedBoards of Lake George, N.Y., harvests vintage wood from old barns that have fallen into disrepair. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY LUCENTE.



The Pleasant Street barn was likely built in the late 1800s or early 1900s by the Boyden family on one of the original settlements in the city. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY LUCENTE

The Russells have been piecing together the story of the Pleasant Street barn via interviews with its owners, neighbors and by researching town records.

This is what they know so far: The barn was likely built in the late 1800s or early 1900s by the Boyden family on one of the original settlements in the city. The property was purchased in 1962 by the late Dante DiRusso, who raised six children in the adjacent home.

Over the years, the barn was used for storing apples, horses and other animals, as well as a workshop, said one of DiRusso's daughters, Amy Peralta, who lives in a home she built directly behind the barn.

The property where the barn sits is being sold by Peralta and her five siblings, but because the barn has fallen into disrepair, it was considered a liability and had to be taken down. That's where StoriedBoards came in.

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The Russells have agreed to take the barn down free of charge.

In exchange, they get to keep all of its materials.

"This is a highly distressed barn," said Tyler. "It's become a liability. If the town came in and said, 'Hey, this barn needs to be taken down because it's going to fall and hurt somebody,' it would cost \$50,000 to crush it up. We come in and write a new chapter with all of the materials."

The materials from the Leominster barn will be shipped by tractor-trailer back to New York where they will be cleaned and then run through a high-temperature kiln to remove moisture from the wood and kill any insects or larvae that have wormed their way into it.

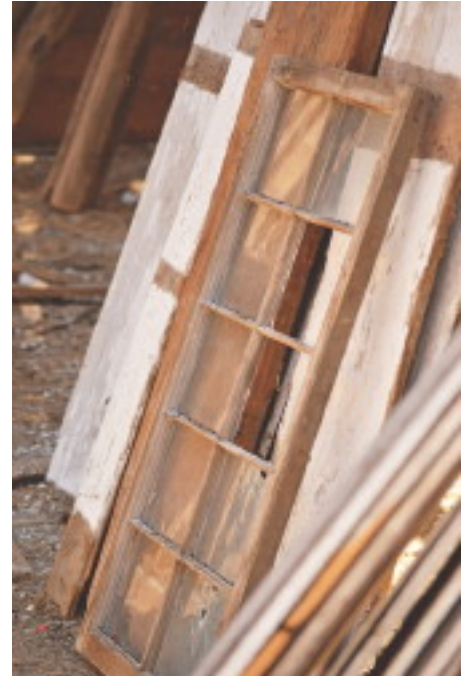
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An old window rests against boards inside the barn. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY LUCENTE



Whitney Russell looks over a handful of square-cut nails dating back to the barn's construction well over a century ago. His sons, Tyler, left, and Garrett have been working with him to disassemble the structure on Pleasant Street in Leominster. Their company, StoriedBoards of Lake George, N.Y., reclaims vintage materials in barns throughout the Northeast. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY



A view through some windows in the barn gives a sense of the rustic wood that the company will sell. SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / ASHLEY LUCENTE