

Roadside Attraction

Last October, after an out-of-control dump truck heading north on Massachusetts Route 57 careened through a stop sign, failed to make a sharp left turn, and slammed through the front wall of the New Boston Store in Sandisfield, Mass., proprietor Susan Murray knew just what to do. She and her husband, Peter, turned off the power, discarded any food that might have been contaminated in the crash, and called local builder Steve DellaGiustina to temporarily tarp off the damaged area.

Although the invasion was unwelcome, it could not have been called a surprise. The historic structure had been struck by at least a dozen vehicles since the Murrays took over the store in 1977, and many of them ended up partially or wholly inside the building. DellaGiustina and his son Nick had been called on to rebuild another section of the store two years earlier, after a passenger car took out the gas pumps and came through the front window.

According to town historian Ron Bernard, the New Boston Store has been in continuous operation on the same site at least since 1790, and possibly since 1760, making it one of the oldest — perhaps *the* oldest — store in the U.S. Even before the advent of the automobile, it

provided plenty of work for local carpenters. As a result of piecemeal rebuilding during its first century, none of the original structure survives; the oldest existing section dates back to about 1850. Like the mythical heirloom axe that's outlasted two heads and six handles, in other words, it's both the original item and a newer copy.

In this latest incident, the driver escaped without injury but the truck itself was held captive for months. Because its cab and bed had taken over the loads previously carried by the destroyed corner post, it couldn't be removed without bringing down much of the building.

Eventually, though, after the completion of a state-required survey of the damaged area for asbestos and lead paint, the westernmost 15 feet of the building was demolished and the wayward truck was returned to its owner. The DellaGiustinas buttoned up the opening and covered up the exposed section of basement. Although the Murrays have yet to announce their plans for the building, few locals expect it to reopen as a store.

But whatever business takes over the building, carpenters of the future have reason for optimism: There are still a lot of bad drivers out there. — *Jon Vara*



With its uncanny knack for backstopping out-of-control vehicles, the historic New Boston Store has provided repair work for generations of local carpenters. It's located at a sharp bend in the road, tight against a bridge.

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