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98 tons moves 60 feet

Historic house shifts again in Easthampton

By CATHERINE BAUM
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EASTHAMPTON - Conventional wisdom has it that when you move furniture, whether it be a table, a desk or a bureau, it's best to empty it out first.

Turns out that may not hold true when you move a house.

When The Williston Northampton School moved one of its buildings on Park Street Monday, to make way for a new dormitory, it up and moved the thing lock, stock and barrel.

Dean of Students Glenn F. Swanson emptied only his refrigerator before the 98-ton, nearly 220-year-old-home he lives in was moved 60 feet north along the property line. He left the china in the cabinets and the pictures on the walls.

"It's moved without any damage to the house at all - that's why it takes four hours to move it," explained Jeffrey A. Tannatt, director of physical plant at the school.

He was among the crew at the construction site as the home was moved Monday, and said: "It's big, heavy stuff, but it has to be done right."

The home, located at 31 Park St., had to be moved to make way for a paved entrance to the residential quad, where an ecologically friendly \$6 million, 24,000-square-foot dormitory has been under construction since December. That building will be a home for 32 male students and three faculty families when school starts in the fall.

The house was built by Payson Williston, Easthampton's first minister, around 1790, and is the birthplace of Samuel Williston, who founded the school in 1841. The living room and parlor are original, with built-in book cases and parquet floors. Renovations to rooms like the kitchen and living space have been made at least three times.

Monday was not the first time the historic building was moved - in 1843 it was moved about 250 feet across the street from its original location at 28 Park St. to 31 Park St., the same side it is on today.

Tannatt said he suspects that more than 150 years ago people used screw jacks to crank the building up, put logs underneath, and then used horses to pull it.

"It was a more manual job," Tannatt said.

Of course, those days are gone. The cost of moving the 3,000- square-foot building this time around was about \$30,000.

1



JERREY ROBERTS

Workers from Payne Building Movers in Strafford, N.H., move a house located at 31 Park St., Easthampton, about 60 feet onto its new foundation Monday, to make way for the entrance to a new dormitory.



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Williston's long-term plan is to have about five dormitories on the residential quad that connect to the main campus, according to Tannatt. There are two female dorms and a male dorm on Main Street, which officials hope to see renovated and reopened in the long-term future. The goal is to provide housing that doesn't require the students to cross Main Street to get to campus.

Part of the new dormitory project is the renovation of a historic home formerly owned by David J. and Natalie Strong on 194 Main St. Strong, who founded Strong Bus Co., granted the home to his son, David Strong Jr., in 1998.

David Strong Jr. then sold the building to The Williston Northampton School a few years ago. The remainder of the project will be additions to that piece. It costs about \$50 more per square foot to renovate an old building than it does to build new, but preserving the historic architecture is worth the cost, according to Tannatt.

"We're very excited about this," said Richard Teller, archivist and librarian at The Williston Northampton School. He noted that this project is the first new dormitory the school has opened in 45 years.

Many of the school's 11 dorms are old and tired wood buildings, Teller said, and have had a "hard life" housing students. The school is looking to provide housing with better space, ventilation and energy-efficiency, in part to be competitive, Teller said.

"We are a 24-hour-a-day institution," Teller said. "When you ask people to take on the roles of parents you want their living conditions to be good. This will help tremendously."

A new crosswalk made of brick and granite will connect to the main entrance of The Williston Northampton School on Park Street, pending approval from the Board of Public Works, according to Tannatt. The project, which was conceived in early December, was paid for in bond funding, gifts and existing endowment funds.

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