

News

Razing will become raising when Cloud Barn is rebuilt

By Jason Sweeney

The Sam Cloud Barn has stood in Saratoga for about 125 years, but it won't be standing much longer. Craig Awbrey and his partner Bob Hausmann have plans to tear the three-story structure down piece by piece.

Awbrey and Hausmann will then put in a new foundation before restoring the barn to its original condition, but retrofitted and updated so that it meets city building codes.

"We're not doing a demolition," Awbrey said. "What we're doing is a surgical deconstruction."

The Sam Cloud Barn stands just off Big Basin Way, wedged between the Bella Saratoga restaurant and the Inn of Saratoga. The barn was built in the late 1800s from old-growth redwood and Douglas fir. Cloud was the original owner of the barn built to house stagecoaches and horses back when Saratoga was a town full of hard-drinking lumberjacks. The stagecoaches and buggies

were kept on the main floor. The top floor was a hayloft. A chute still leads from the hayloft down through the main floor to the bottom floor where the horses were once stabled.

Cloud also owned a general store where the Harmonie European Day Spa is today. Bella Saratoga was once Cloud's home. Cloud died in 1907 from injuries sustained in front of his home after he was struck by the trolley that ran down Lumber Street, now called Big Basin Way.

"Old Sam Cloud and his workers did a good job building it," Awbrey said of the old barn. "Renovating it is a challenging project because we're dealing with a 125-year structure on a steep slope. But it's a fun project."

Local architect and historian Warren Heid worked with Awbrey and Hausmann drawing up plans for the renovations. The plumbing and electrical systems have already been removed. Awbrey said Saratogans could expect to see the building come down soon. Then it will be gone for six to nine months. Each piece of wood from the barn will be labeled and warehoused before being put back in place when the structure is rebuilt on its new foundation. Once the project is completed, Awbrey said the barn would house office condominiums.

Awbrey said as a fifth-generation Californian whose ancestors came to the state on a wagon train, taking on a project to restore the old structure has particular significance to him. While the building is a registered historical landmark, the city declared it structurally unsafe in 2003. There was a possibility that it might have to be torn down. "I love the building," Awbrey said. "I know Saratoga loves the building. We want to preserve it for the future of Saratoga."

During its life, the barn has been used as a meeting hall and an electronics repair shop, and it was once home to the Saratoga News. Awbrey bought the building from Helen and Joseph Brozda, who decided to sell it after it was declared unsafe.

Brad Lind, a building official for the city of Saratoga, said the barn is in need of an extensive overhaul. "It's leaning, and it's really unsafe right now. It needs to be retrofitted and seismically

strengthened, or else it could collapse in an earthquake or in high winds."

Lind said the fire department has had concerns about the structure for quite some time. Awbrey's plans to put in a sprinkler system would address those concerns. Also, an elevator is going to be installed that will provide access to all three floors.

"I'm happy that this thing is finally going to be done," Lind said. "I guess you could say that Craig came in and saved the day. The barn will be around for at least another 100 years."

The yellow paint is peeling off the walls of the old barn. It leans sideways on its cobblestone and mortar foundation as it waits for disassembly.

Awbrey said he would keep the barn's yellow color. "When we're done you won't be able to tell the difference, except it will be straight and not leaning."

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