

Leominster consignment shop has wide array of items -- and sometimes, a family connection

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LEOMINSTER -- At first glance, the carriage might look like any antique stroller to most passersby, but this was not the case for Pat Whitney.

"I went up to Cutiques and saw it there on the floor. I happened to see it there with the original advertising. I walked out and I must have come back in three times before I eventually bought it," she said.

Her purchase was a stroller for dolls that she estimates to be close to 100 years old. Made from brass and a material like old leather, it stands about waist high atop four spoked wheels.

"I was stupefied because it was literally right down the street from where the factory once was," she said.

That factory is the old F.A. Whitney Carriage Company. And Whitney's family are descendants of the former Leominster industrialists.

Cutiques owner Cassandra Abramson said helping unite customers with items they have a personal attachment to is one of the more meaningful aspects of running a consignment shop like hers.

"We never really know who's walking through the door," Abramson said. "We don't know their back story or what their connection might be to these pieces ...

"Is there fate involved? You almost have to question it."

Founded in the late 1850s, the Whitney Carriage Company was one of Leominster largest employers. It grew into one of the country's biggest manufacturers of baby carriages.

Whitney said her late husband, Peter Ralph Whitney, was part of the same family who owned the business. He and his immediate relatives had few mementos of the significant mark the Whitney Carriage Company left on the community.

She said she had traveled to yard sales and consignment shops for years hoping to find a carriage, which she described as a "bucket list item," but could never find one.

"(Peter) was very proud to be a Whitney and he would have loved this," she said. "I always thought that I've got to have something that my kids could have, because it is part of their heritage. I really couldn't pass this up."

Abramson said her inventory consists of whatever people bring in to sell, so Cutiques can't always guarantee that it will have what a customer will be looking for. But she said she and her staff will make note of a customer looking for something in particular and will notify them when it is brought in.

"We do see a lot of things from the plastics manufacturing time in Leominster. We also get a lot of bottles from soda companies, milk bottles that are local, and, of course, the lawn flamingos," Abramson said, noting that local items don't last long on her shelves.

Before it was displayed in Cutiques' showroom, Whitney's carriage had been a part of an estate of a local woman that was given to the store after she passed away.

Apart from artifacts from the Whitney Carriage Company, Abramson said her store often acquires products like furniture or combs from other defunct factories from the area.

"It's something that I think is totally important," she said. "To keep these things and help them find a new home, it's pretty special to help pass them along to the next family or person who needs them."

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