

# 231-Year-Old Caleb Nickerson House Relocated

In early winter of 2003 IASM member Robert Hayden, President & Owner, Hayden Building Movers, Inc., Cotuit, MA 02635, was contacted by E.R. Nickerson, Nickerson Family Association, Inc., Chatham, MA to complete particulars involved in the moving of a 1772 period house. A uniqueness was that the structure was unaltered from its original construction, contained three chimneys, a beehive oven and



*Robert Hayden  
Hayden Building Movers, Inc.*

was structurally sound. Mr. Hayden shared his thoughts and actions about the project.

“While on my way to the IASM Annual Conference in Sacramento, CA in February, 2003 I put pen to paper to come up with some substantive ideas. The movement of this structure through the highways and byways of the Town of Chatham would be formidable allowing greatly to the fact most of the



*Although not evident, the structure had three chimneys inside but all exterior portions had to be removed for the move. The structure plus steel use for the move weighed 35 tons.*

road system was both narrow and considered by the town to be Scenic roads. Of specific concern was the chimneys of the structure were in “rough” shape. Therefore we redefined the route by movement overland by approximately two miles to the Stage Harbor Bulkhead. This particular movement took approximately one day.”

“Over the next few days we availed ourselves of a 130-ton crane a barge and tow boat. The building was lifted by the crane with a heavy-duty spreader bar and placed on the barge. The move was quite an attraction for citizens of the Town of Chatham and of the occupants of an Amphicar that circled the barge as the move commenced. Leaving Stage Harbor the barge went due east and then southeast, with the aid of a navigational pilot, through a passage known as the “Southway.” After three or four miles down the “Southway” we proceeded out into the Atlantic Ocean for six or seven miles until our re-entry into Chatham

Harbor located at the Chatham Lighthouse. Mother Nature accorded us a spectacular day with the Atlantic Ocean as calm as a lily pond. We proceeded through the harbor until we arrived at Ryder’s Cove and moored the barge for the next couple of days.”

“With the boat operator and crane company in concert we maneuvered the barge to the Ryder’s Cove Bulkhead area and unloaded the structure onto dry land. Our dolly wheels were reset, the truck attached and the delivery of the building was made to its new location, a distance of approximately 1.5 miles. “In the ensuing weeks and months following the October move an excavation was completed, foundation poured, building rolled over and positioned above the new foundation, after which a subcontractor applied a brick veneer for appearance not dissimilar to the prior location of the structure. Many Trades people followed our work in rehabilitating the chimney, painting the interior and generally “gussying up” the



*Mary Ellen and Robert Hayden aboard the towboat.*

building. The building is now in completed form and is open to the public through favorable months. The move presented many challenges but in all I felt we did a commendable job.”



*The barge transporting the house had a flotilla escort plus Amphicars.*

## Historic Chatham house floats to new location

For a house that had weathered 231 years, a leisurely float through Chatham, MA waters was no big deal. Dozens of people crowded the shores near Chatham Lighthouse to watch the relocation of the Caleb Nickerson House, a full-cape home built in 1772 by a Revolutionary War militiaman. He was the great-great grandson of Chatham's founder, William Nickerson. Since the day it was built, this 1.5 story house has rested at its location on Stage Neck Road. In 2003 the plot was sold due to high taxes. So the Nickerson Family Association, which was founded a century ago, had to find a way to save the historic home from demolition.

Association members talked with town officials and decided to move the house to an acre of land at the Nickerson Genealogy House, a museum near Ryder's Cove. But transporting the 35-ton structure 3 miles without damaging its three brittle fireplaces, beehive oven and foundation would be a dusting task.

In stepped Robert Hayden, owner of Hayden Building Movers, Inc. in Cotuit, who said moving the 25-by-31-foot building over Chatham's narrow roads, would be impossible. Hayden has moved thousands of houses on the Cape over 25 years. So Hayden tapped boat towing contractor Dale McClure and local boat pilot Dave Murdoch to help

move the house by water – a 15-mile journey that would take the old residence ...

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*Off-loading at Ryder's Cove for transfer to the final destination.*



*Elevating utility wires and removal of roadside obstructions are common elements that must be overcome when moving most any large structure.*



*Photo by TIM WOOD/Cap Cod Chronicle*

*Just another day at the beach. The historic house's journey from Stage Harbor to Ryder's Cove by barge was smooth sailing, thanks to calm seas and light winds.*