



ADVOCATE PHOTOS BY SUE SICK

The 288-year-old Foster-Emerson House crept its way up Grove Street from the Meadow Brook Golf Club to its new home on property bought by Les and Chae Sidelinker.

# An Historic Moving Day

## Foster-Emerson House hauled to its new home on Grove Street



**E**levated on hydraulic, wheel-mounted jacks and supported by huge steel beams, the historic Foster-Emerson House creaked and groaned Tuesday as it moved away from its 288-year-old foundation at the Meadow Brook Golf Course and began its half-mile journey to its new home on Grove Street.

Under the direction of master house mover Gary Sylvester, workers carefully shifted the weight of the historic two-story farm house, coaxing it down the small hill by the clubhouse and over two stone gateposts out onto Grove Street.

Tuesday was the long-awaited moving day for Les and Cheryl Sidelinker, who successfully outbid the Friends of Historic Preservation last May for the right to restore the house built in 1710. Moving the house from the Meadow Brook Golf Course to its new home further up Grove Street is the most visible event to date in the rescue project and the beginning of a seven-month recon-



**Workers from the Reading Municipal Light Department cover dropped power lines with wooden planks to protect them as the 62-ton house moved over them.**

struction process.

"I'm very nervous," said Cheryl Sidelinker, who watched the house move from the opposite side of the street. "Although it's pretty solid, it does make me nervous."

The moving of the Foster-Em-

erson House is the beginning of the end of a long, community-wide effort to save the First Period home. Last year, the Meadow Brook Golf Course announced it wanted to demolish the house, which sat on the edge of its parking lot.

The Historical Commission imposed the demolition delay bylaw, allowing six months for a benefactor to come forward to rescue the house. The town offered to sell part of the Water Department's property on Grove Street for its relocation to a party willing to restore the house to its historic appearance.

Although the Friends of Historic Preservation lost the house to the Sidelinkers, they and the Historical Commission are working closely with the Sidelinkers as advisors in the restoration process.

"It's a sense of discovery and as they keep working through, we can see the changes the house has gone through in the past," said Virginia Adams, co-chairperson of the Historical Commission.

Preparing the house for the move began almost immediately after the Sidelinkers closed on the house and the town-owned Grove Street property. Les Sidelinker, a professional carpenter, spent the last six weeks stripping the house of trash, refuse and unusable materials. By the time the house



# Historic house moved to new home

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was ready for moving, Sidelinker filled four, 40-yard trash bins.

Sidelinker also disassembled and catalogued the rear shed and removed the saltbox rear quarter from the house. The saltbox will be replaced with a new dormer, while the shed will be rebuilt with much of the original material.

The one complication befalling the project came two weeks ago when the massive central chimney collapsed as it was being prepared for the move.

Whether the chimney would survive the move was a subject of much debate during the bidding process. The Friends of Historic Preservation, which also bid on the house, proposed moving the chimney intact, while the Sidelinkers wanted to disassemble it and rebuild it at the new site.

The Sidelinkers solicited opinions and reviews from several historic home and masonry experts over the summer and decided to try to move the chimney with the house. "We just wanted a working fireplace and make it historically accurate," Cheryl Sidelinker said.

When they tried to lift the massive pile to place a steel plate under it, the chimney collapsed under its own weight. Cheryl described many of the bricks as unusable and the mortar as a soft, mud-like material that couldn't hold the bricks together.

Moving the house with the chimney was going to cost the Sidelinkers \$30,000, but without it the move only cost \$23,000.

"What we were going to spend on the chimney, we will spend on the rebuilding," she said.

The rock-solid 62-ton house seemed very delicate perched atop the moving truss as Sylvester moved about securing the structure and preparing it for departure with unwavering confidence.

"It's like everything else. If you know what you're doing and have the right equipment, it's easy," said Sylvester, as he adjusted the chains holding the house in place.

Lifting the Foster-Emerson House off its foundation was a textbook example of how to move a house, he said. Based in Falmouth, Sylvester has moved literally dozens of homes, many historic. He said every house has its own particular problems or special requirements, but this house required little improvisation.

"We've moved a lot of historic houses, but this one is particularly old," Sylvester said.

The moving was a slow-motion spectacle that drew a small crowd along Grove Street. Pearl Street resident Debbie Reilly brought her two sons to watch the action.

While her children were fascinated by the house on wheels and the big trucks, Reilly remembers babysitting for a golf pro who lived in the Foster-Emerson and how her parents, treasures of the golf club, had their



office there.

"I'd rather have it put to use than to have it sit there," Reilly said.

David Totter, who is visiting Reading from Northern Ireland, was fascinated by the process, since nothing like this happens in his country.

"This is unique event to see a house because in Ireland we don't have the skill or the expertise to do this and we don't have timber houses that can be moved," Totter said. "They bring it down to a fine art. They make it look so easy."

It will take approximately two weeks to build a foundation to match the house's footprint. In the meantime, Les Sidelinker will repair rotted timbers and support beams under the house.

Over the next seven months, Les will spend all of his time and spend upwards of \$300,000 on renovations and restorations.

"This is his job for the next seven months," Cheryl Sidelinker said.





ADVOCATE PHOTOS BY SUE SICKLER

**Les Sidelinker, the new owner of the Foster-Emerson House, shows Wilbar Hoxie of the Historical Commission the condition of the sills. Once on Grove Street, building mover Gary Sylvester and RMLD supervisor Joe Boyan (below) had to measure the house's height to see if it would pass under the power lines.**