

Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, October 6, 1977

# Old lifesaving station coming here

By Jim Gilbert

During the October high tides, a Lowell company will push a huge barge on the Chatham backshore to move an old U.S. Lifesaving Service station to Provincetown.

The emergency move was finalized this week in a series of meetings between National Park Service and Chatham officials. The building, called the Old Harbor Station, is in immediate danger of destruction. The last two ocean storms, surging over the treacherous Chatham bars, sent waves right to the old station's foundation.

The Seashore now owns the station. Plans are for it to become a museum near the Seashore's Race Point bathhouse.

But first the 80-year-old station must be moved. Last week, Corey Crane Company of Lowell entered the only bid for the moving project. The price tag for the move is \$119,750.

In charge of the move is Marsh Feder, an architectural historian at the National Historical Preservation Center in Boston. Both she and Corey Crane Company spokesmen say this is the first time such a move has ever been undertaken on the back shore.

Feder said this kind of moving was common in the past but only along protected shores. She said, however, that a precedent for the move was set by crews at the station who ventured out to sea often under the most hazardous circumstances to make daring rescues.

The building was built in 1897. It is identical to the old Wood End station in Provincetown. Feder said she hopes the building can be restored to show how men in the Lifesaving Service used to live.

Feder and Seashore officials met Monday afternoon in Wellfleet to discuss moving plans. That evening, Seashore personnel went to Chatham to meet with the Chatham Conservation Commission. Alice Hiscock, commission chairman, said an order of conditions will be set as quickly as possible.

After the move was announced, many Chatham residents protested bitterly the decision to relocate the building to Provincetown.

Marge Burling, Seashore spokesman, said many different sites were investigated. Provincetown was selected because it was the only place available with sufficient land and existing facilities, she said.

A move to Orleans was contemplated, Burling said, but was rejected because there was not enough land. She said

Seashore officials were also working under a time restriction posed by the danger to the old station.

The Seashore acquired the station from Howard Rose of Chatham. He had purchased the station from the Coast Guard. The station consists of a main residence and a boathouse. Each is on a separate foundation. Both buildings will be moved to Provincetown. The total dimensions of the buildings are 40 feet by 60 feet.

Work will have to proceed quickly both in Provincetown and Chatham, Feder said. New foundations will have to be set before the move can be started.

Hopefully the wind, surf and tides will cooperate. October's high tides are around the middle of the month, Feder said. She said if everything works well, the move will be started in mid-month or shortly thereafter.

Hiscock is not so optimistic. She said the job of the conservation commission is to set conditions for the work quickly so the buildings can be saved. She said, "We all wish them godspeed. But we all have grave doubts." The conservation commission, she said, is also concerned with what will happen to the old foundations when the buildings are moved.

She said most of the people in Chatham are resigned to losing the station. "One way or another it was going to go," she said. "Either the Seashore is going to get it or the sea. Or both."

Feder said the station will be placed about 500 feet from the site of the old Lifesaving Station at Race Point. She said everything is being done on an emergency basis. There are no plans to join the new building to the existing Race Point Coast Guard Station when personnel there are moved to the new Coast Guard station planned for the West End of Provincetown. Feder and Burling said the Seashore would like to have the Race Point Station when it is vacated, but the two stations are being treated separately.

The Coast Guard in Boston said there are no plans yet to dispose of the existing station. Information officer John Brown said Monday if the Coast Guard released the building, it will be given to the Government Service Administration for disposal.

Various Provincetown groups have asked for title to the vacated facility.

Claims on the building will be handled by the GSA. Guidelines for the disposal of government property, however, dictate

what other government agencies get "first crack" at the property. Thus, the Seashore, which owns all the land around the station, will probably get top priority.

Feder said the Coast Guard may not give up the station.

Feder said she is optimistic the Old Harbor Station can be moved safely. She admitted that it will take an extraordinary combination of weather and tides to make the move possible. But there is no choice if the building is to be saved. "I wouldn't expect it to last through the winter," she said.

"Needless to say," Feder said, "The contractor will be watching the weather conditions very closely before moving the barge in."



Race Point Life Saving Station, left and the newly-located Old Harbor Station, right - October 1980 -

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AP Wirephoto

## Get The Barge Ready

Workmen prepare the former U.S. Life Saving Station at Chatham for move to Provincetown. Erosion of the beach has threatened the historic station, built in the 1800s. It

will be converted into a museum after it is moved by ocean barge.