



Beached Mansion

WHEN longtime summer resident Donald D. Dodge stumbled across this sprawling, Federal-style house tucked on a Phippsburg backwater below Bath in 1925, he knew he'd found an appropriate home for his stunning oceanfront property on Deadman Point in Rockport. Originally built in 1806 by ship captain Thomas McCobb and designed to be "the most beautiful house in Maine," the home had become known as Spite House on account of it being deliberately built to overshadow a family home that McCobb believed had been usurped by a stepmother. Dodge, however, was so completely unconcerned both with Spite House's contentious past and the eighty-five-mile deep-sea voyage required for it to reach Rockport that he stipulated that the house, its cupola, and its four chimneys all be moved intact, and he insisted, moreover, that none of the great home's plaster walls be cracked during the entire operation.

This remarkable photograph, made shortly after Rockland Captain John Snow had beached Spite House in Rockport in late July 1925 (after a two-day layover in Rockland so extra pumps, including the wheeled one sitting at left, could empty the nearly flooded barge), shows that the former New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad wooden scow has been further burdened with Spite House's granite foundation slabs and even another whole house. The 1796 Stover House from South Harpswell was dismantled for the journey, but its windows and doors are visible stacked at right.

Presumably just moments after this image was captured, crews began unloading Spite House in the same manner it had

been loaded — on greased skids, drawn by horses hauling lines passed around a windlass. Some of the 2,000 feet of timber used to stabilize the structure are visible bracing the chimneys, while strips of lathe and an interior door peek out, left of center, from the scar created when an 1850 ell was left behind in Phippsburg.

One enterprising soul from Camden or Rockport has already capitalized on Spite House's arrival, pulling his horse-drawn wagon and its "Home of Good Values" umbrella, at lower right, onto the mudflats to peddle supplies — or maybe just refreshments and snacks — to the many workers unloading the great house.

Moving to Rockport was only part of Dodge's dream, however, and after this barge was unloaded and Spite House was firmly anchored in its new surroundings, the grand home was extensively renovated and Dodge, a noted horticulturalist, created elaborate Colonial Revival gardens.

Curiously, after all the painstaking preparations Dodge and his crew made — each floor joist, at center, has been carefully marked — they seem to have overlooked one of the simplest precautions. Despite the promise of rolling ocean swells and brisk sea breezes on Spite House's ocean journey, the movers have closed just one set of wooden shutters — an oversight, perhaps, or possibly even back on this July day seventy-nine years ago Mr. Dodge just couldn't wait to fling open these tall windows and take in the views of the Camden Hills, at left, from his proud new home on Penobscot Bay.

—Joshua F. Moore