

LOCAL 136 MOVING CHICAGO





What happens when a historical landmark gets in the way of necessary economic expansion? Simple, the owner enlists the help of Machinery Movers, Riggers and Erectors Local 136 (Chicago) to relocate the structure.

The 400 Yard Move: The Harriet F. Rees House

How do you parallel park a house? Ask members of Local 136 (Chicago), who were a part of the historic 2014 move of the Harriet F. Rees House, formally located at the corner of Prairie Avenue and 21st Street in Chicago.

For over 126 years, the Harriet F. Rees House and its two-story coach house, both historical landmarks now, stood on the 2100 block of South Prairie Avenue. It was built

in 1888 for Harriet Rees, the widow of James H. Rees, a real-estate innovator who drafted one of the early maps of Chicago. Following the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, pivotal Chicago figures, including George Pullman, Philip D. Armour and Marshall Field, built mansions on Prairie Avenue, considering it to be a safe distance from the city. The house, made of limestone and wood, is three stories tall, and includes a basement and attic. In 1910, the Rees House was sold and became a boarding house under several different owners. In 1970, it was converted into a restaurant, the Prairie House Café, and in 2001, the house was sold to its current private owners.

In January 2012, the Harriet F. Rees House became a Chicago

landmark. Situated on Prairie Avenue, just blocks from McCormick Place, the house was the only thing standing in the way of the city's proposed plan to build out the McCormick Place entertainment district. Because of the home's landmark status, the city couldn't knock it down, but it also wasn't going to move itself. With the help of Local 136 and general contractor Bulley & Andrews, the only thing that would change about the Harriet F. Rees House was the address, which would eventually move to 2017 S. Prairie Avenue.

Both structures were lifted from their foundations and loaded onto massive dollies that wheeled these structures down the street. To keep the structures intact throughout their moves, angle irons were



placed on all four corners of the building and secured with chains and binder chains.

The Rees House was the heaviest residential building ever moved in the United States, weighing an estimated 762 tons, and weighed more than four times as much as the coach home, which weighed around 187 tons. Moving this large of a structure, requiring the use of over 25 75-ton jacks, 10,000 pieces of solid oak crib and one of the largest hydraulic-pump units in the country, proved to be a bit trickier than the coach house. “The main house was facing the wrong direction when it came out,” said Rob Fulton, business manager for Local 136. “This means we had to go as far north up Prairie as we could, jack it up, reverse the dollies and then bring it back to put it in place.”

Prepping the 125+ year old house for the move took roughly two months, but after moving the smaller coach house, jacking the Rees House 12 feet off its foundation and welding shackles around the house to protect the exterior, the house was

ready to move. Similar to the day the Widow Clarke House moved in 1977, weather was not on their side. Although on November 9, 2014, rain and freezing temps wouldn’t stop Local 136, and Bulley & Andrews, from taking the Harriet F. Rees House on a successful two-day, 400-yard trip north on Prairie Avenue.

The Caretaker’s House at Wrigley Field

As members of the various construction trades began working to renovate Wrigley Field in November 2014, the riggers were hard at work outside the structure, moving the iconic caretaker’s house out of harm’s way. The move was a two-step process that relocated the structure to the Blue Lot, directly across Waveland Ave, just west of the firehouse, for several months. In June 2015, the riggers helped place it back in its original space.

The house was built between the 1922 and 1923 seasons for the team’s former grounds superintendent, Bobby Dorr. William Wrigley Jr. offered to build the house for Dorr and his family, if

Dorr agreed to watch the property. Dorr lived there with his family until his death in 1957.

A Specialized Trade

The members of Riggers Local 136 are some of the most in demand union members in the northern hemisphere. The Department of Labor recognizes Riggers Local 136 as the only rigging local in the country. Members are trained specifically on machinery moving, rigging, welding and burning. They are hired out to trade shows all over the world, including shows in Orlando, Las Vegas, New York and Atlanta. They have worked on a variety of shows, moving heavy equipment across the showroom floor, including the Graph Expo, the Pack Expo, the Radiology Conference, the Motorcycle Show and the Boat Show.

“Our main concerns are to get the job done safely so that no one gets hurt and to ensure that the structure doesn’t collapse,” said Fulton. “The Machine Tool Show is the largest show in the world that is pulled together in the shortest amount of time. We move more than 38 million pounds of machinery.” Fulton stated that the recent show in Chicago went in successfully. “We had over 350 ironworker riggers on the jobsite. With that many workers, it takes a coordinated effort from everyone to get it done on time without damage to any machines.”

The last time the riggers moved an object the size of the Rees House was the relocation of the U-505 in 2004 to the Museum of Science and Industry. They also moved the Pioneer Zephyr, a diesel-powered railroad train, to the museum in 1998, and the United Boeing 727 airplane in 1994. After the plane landed at Meigs Field, the riggers removed the wings, loaded it on a

barge, moved it down Lake Michigan and across Lake Shore Drive, and eventually hung the plane at the museum.

Fulton added, “We’ve been around for a long time. We celebrated our 100th anniversary in 2013. A lot has changed over the years, even since the time I started. When the Machine Tool Show first started coming to Chicago, it took an entire year to load it in. Now, we move it in in less than two weeks. The machinery on the show hasn’t shrunk, but the equipment we use to move it and the training we offer our members has greatly improved.”

A Touch of History: The Making of Local 136; Machinery Movers, Riggers and Erectors

The Machinery Movers, Riggers and Erectors were born in 1901 as the Machinery and Safe Movers and Riggers Local 714 of the Teamsters International, located on Halsted Street in Chicago.

On March 3, 1913, that local split in two, Local 714 Teamsters and Local 136 was started as a part of the Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Ironworkers. At the time, Local 136, Machinery Movers, Riggers and Machinery Erectors, was

one of only a few “straight rigging locals” around the country, a group that specialized in the offloading, transportation and erecting of any—and all—types of equipment.

From working in the steel mills to installation of coffee grinding machines, the riggers were the men that installed equipment in industrial, residential house relocations, commercial and institutional properties. They’ve worked in hospitals and museums, moving everything from CAT scan machines to the U505 World War II captured submarine. Removing smoke stacks from power plants and factories and old wooden water tanks from the tops of buildings was a big part of work as a rigger.

One of the many projects the riggers were regularly involved in was the moving of structures: apartment buildings; a fully functional church weighing a total of 1,500 U.S. tons relocated to the south side of Chicago; and animal structures at Lincoln Park Zoo relocated within the zoo property. In 1977, they moved the Widow Clarke House, and more recently, the riggers have been a part of high-profile house moves around the city.

The riggers might not be known for building skyscrapers or bridges

across the Mississippi, but they can definitely move anything, anytime, anywhere. The riggers will bring your project in safely, on time and hopefully under budget.

Moving the Widow Clarke House

In 1977, the historic, 120-ton Widow Clarke House was relocated to Indiana Avenue in Chicago. The complicated move required the building to be jacked up and slid over a portion of the Chicago transit rails, which didn’t exist when the building was initially moved in 1872. The structure was wheeled on dollies to the tracks and then jacked up 27 feet on wooden cribs until it sat above the tracks.

The day of the move, December weather in Chicago was not on their side, and the hydraulic equipment that would have been used to lower the house froze. Luckily, at a time when traffic was slow, the crew was able to slide the house across the tracks. The house was finally moved to the new site on December 18, 1977, and new foundation was eventually built to support the 100+ year old house.

Contributing to this story were Alexandra Fulton, William Hudgins and Federation News.

