



SUMMER 2023 NEWSLETTER

THE NICKERSON FAMILY ASSOCIATION, INC.

William Nickerson
Signature of
William¹ Nickerson

Chatham History Day June 17, 2023



*Sonny Gada plants a Three Sisters Garden
as Barbara Nickerson watches.*



*Gary Nickerson offers
Tales From The Dig.*



*Period Carpenter Ian Ellison and Moka.
Hand Made Pegs (below).*

Chatham History Day, June 17, 2023, dawned with a heavy rain and temperatures in the low 50s. Despite the weather, the day was a fun and busy one as the Caleb Nickerson Homestead was open for guided tours.

At 11 a.m. the rain stopped so that period carpenter **Ian Ellison**, in charge of reconstructing the historic North Chatham barn that was recently dismantled and brought to the NFA campus, gave an outdoor demonstration on how he restores a timber frame barn using only traditional carpentry methods of earlier centuries.

Ellison, owner of **Ellison Timberframes**, earned a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from McGill University in Montreal with the aim of designing aircrafts for a living. After he graduated in 1985, he realized he was more interested in timber framing than aircrafts. He is now considered an expert in the field and is a member of the **Timber Framers Guild of North America**.

The earliest settlers to New England brought tools with them from their native countries and soon got to work building timber frame barns across the landscape, Ellison says. While timbers from the historic barn are being stored at the NFA, joining those old timbers are timbers that Ellison fashioned from new wood. Trees from western Massachusetts became beams and trees from the eastern part of the state became boards. The entire barn will be made of pine, continuing a Cape Cod tradition of white pine structures. (In England, oak was the traditional wood used in a barn.) When the barn is completed, the proportion of old wood to new will be about 70/30, Ellison says.

Wood speaks to Ellison, and he can tell by examining a barn's joinery—wooden elements that are attached to one another such as beams, stairs, cupboards—roughly what decade an old barn was built. And he can tell, too, what may have made an old barn collapse, such as “bad decisions in the joinery.” Unlike houses, “the way barns are put together is visible from the inside,” according to *Old Barns in the New World* by Richard W. Babcock and Lauren R. Stevens. Pointing to some antique timber from the barn that he displayed on a table, Ellison says, “all the history is in this piece of wood—these pieces of wood.”



“Nickerson House.”

...being, in a sense, the printed voice of the Nickerson Family Association



Join us at the NFA's 2023 Reunion Sept. 8 to 10!

This year we'll be at the NFA Campus at 1107 Orleans Road, North Chatham.

FRIDAY: Our annual reunion is the perfect way to meet your Nickerson cousins and reunite with old friends. We'll begin the reunion weekend with a **tent sale** of genealogical books, Gifts for Nicks, miscellaneous and auction items. **One-hour consultations with a genealogist will be available on Friday and Sunday.** Our genealogists will work out a simple line of descent or examine a more complex question. Morning and afternoon sessions are available by appointment only. Tour the **Atwood Museum**, 347 Stage Harbor Road, and view its current and permanent exhibits highlighting the town's history over the past century as the Chatham Historical Society commemorates its 100th anniversary. The Nickerson North Beach Camp will also be open.



Karen and Ron Nickerson with grandsons Evren and Eli Ozbek



Nick, Linda and Kaitlin Lapham

SATURDAY: A **light breakfast** will be served during check-in at 9 a.m. After the annual business meeting, David Martin, former president of the Cape Cod Genealogical Society, will speak on **"Genealogy: A Passion or an Obsession?"** and Gary Nickerson, who volunteered during the two seasons of the excavation of William and Anne's c. 1664 homestead, will speak on **"Tales from the Nick Dig."** A **group photo and lunch** will follow. For the first time, we are offering a guided tour of the Mansion at Ocean Edge Resort, Brewster. Fieldstone Hall, once the home of the Samuel Mayo Nickerson⁸ family, was completed in 1912. In the afternoon, The Caleb Nickerson Homestead will feature **open hearth cooking** with Anne Firth. Don't miss the inaugural display of artifacts from the excavation of William and Anne's c. 1664 homestead. A **book signing event** with Renee M. Dee, author of *The Nickerson Family of Brewster and Chicago* will be held during our cash bar **wine party**. A delicious **cookout** under the tent will follow. After dinner, period carpenter Ian Ellison will offer an update on the authentic reconstruction of **the historic barn** on the NFA campus.

SUNDAY: The annual "Nickerson Sunday" **Church Service** will be held at the First Congregational Church of Chatham, 650 Main Street, Chatham.

The church was founded by William Nickerson¹ in his home in the late 17th century.

Register for the reunion at www.nickersonassoc.com before September 1



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*Every effort has been made for accuracy.
Please let us know if you have been inadvertently omitted from this list.*



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A word from President Robert E. Nickerson...

The Barn Reconstuction: Where are we now?

Dear Nick Cousins:

After the barn was disassembled in the fall of 2022, the NFA embarked on an attempt to determine the approximate age of the structure. The Chatham Historical Commission indicated early on that it was thought to be William¹'s son William²'s original barn.

As you can surmise, the precise dating of a historic structure can be challenging. To determine the most accurate age of the barn, we contracted with William "Bill" Flynt, a highly recognized dendrochronologist. Bill served as the architectural conservator for Historic Deerfield, Inc. for 40 years, retiring in 2019. Since 2003, he has conducted dendro-archaeology studies on over 250 structures in New England and eastern New York State. What is dendrochronology? The simplest definition is "the science of studying tree ring growth." This is done by extracting core samples, analyzing the samples, and comparing the results to a master chronology of tree rings for the same species.



Based on the results of Bill's efforts as well as those of Ian Ellison, the well-recognized timber frame expert who is leading this effort, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The main frame of the Nickerson barn was built with timbers from at least three other barns.
2. The original barn's timbers were all hand-hewn, using axes. The second and third barn's timbers were cut with an up-and-down saw at a sawmill. All joinery was cut by hand. The original timbers had holes drilled with a spoon bit auger, as was used in the 1700s and earlier. The later timber's holes were drilled with drill bits that had a pilot lead screw, an early 1800s development.
3. The barns in the early era must have had significant rot in the roof systems and associated beams and posts; this led to structural failures and hence partial collapse. The failed building would have been dismantled, to save what timbers could be reused.
4. The original barn was probably built in the late 1770s, later than the 1695 originally thought. The barn was rebuilt in about 1837, almost 50 years later.

Our project follows in the footsteps of what transpired in the mid-1800s, when material from multiple barns was used in rebuilding "our" barn. Ultimately our resurrected barn will have timbers from the mid-1700s, 1832/1837 and from 2022 (the year the trees were felled).



Where are we now? The project has been approved by the Chatham Conservation Commission and the Chatham Planning Board. The site for the barn has been surveyed and cleared. The next step, once the building permit is issued, will be to complete the site work so the foundation can be installed. Once that is complete, reconstruction will begin.

In the meantime, Ian has finished hewing the new roof beams, repaired existing material that is salvageable and completed drawings for the building. In the fall we anticipate the barn “raising” which will require about 20 volunteers to assist. We will provide sufficient notice for those interested in participating as this will likely be the only current barn “raising” done without machinery.

While some may be disappointed that the barn isn’t from 1695, it is still an important restoration. Why? Because a limited number of early barns are restored using the same methodologies of the 1700s. Ian is using only hand tools from that era, hewing and pit sawing new roof rafters from pine trees felled specifically for this restoration and erecting the barn with ropes and manpower. All new mortices will also be made by hand, doors will be hand-made with boards planed smooth by hand and joined together using only cut steel cinch nails.

Stay tuned...

Thanks for being a part of the Nickerson Family Association
and for your interest in your Nickerson heritage.

Please visit our website at:

<https://nickersonassoc.com>

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FALLEN BRANCHES

Kenneth Needham, 79, a former lead docent in the Caleb Nickerson Homestead and a former NFA board member, died on June 2 of congestive heart failure. Ken's wife Judy also served on the NFA board for many years and as the NFA's treasurer.

Those who worked with Ken in the homestead remember Ken with great fondness.

"He was a positive 'can do' kind of guy who took care of the Nick gardens and gave tours of the Caleb Homestead every Wednesday," says former board member Ron Nickerson. "His friendly personality made visitors feel welcome."

In addition to his regular Wednesday duties, Ken took charge of the fires for the open hearth cooking sessions and for the annual beehive oven baking session.

"He was good with the people, he was very engaging," says docent Tish Noyes, a volunteer at the open hearth cooking events. She remembers Ken taking a particular interest when her husband, Richard, built an outhouse for the NFA using only traditional carpentry methods.

Ken also trained NFA President Robert Nickerson on how to heat the beehive oven. "Ken was amazing and it's so sad to hear this news," Bob says.

Ken was born in Worcester, Mass. and met Judy while studying at UMass Amherst. He continued his education at the University of California, Berkeley. Working in the new field of computer systems, he and a business partner established demographic mapping companies including Urban Decision Systems and later Scan/US.

As well as Judy, his wife of 57 years, Ken leaves a daughter, son, six grandchildren and a sister.

A resident of Yarmouth Port, Ken died in the McCarthy Care Center in East Sandwich, a town close to his heart as he summered there as a child. Judy and their children were by his side. Judy suggests memorial gifts may be made in Ken's name to the NFA.



Maureen Leavenworth/Ken Needham



Joshua Atkins Nickerson Jr., 88, died on July 11 in Brewster. "Jan," as he was known, was born in April 1935 in Boston. Through the years, Jan was a great friend to the NFA. In 1994 he donated a half-Cape, bow-roofed house that had served as a Nickerson Homes model home. Jan, who was president of Nickerson Lumber at the time, said of the donation, "I thought it would be a neat thing to do." The house, which was in Orleans, made a four-hour voyage across Pleasant Bay on a barge on June 16, 1994 and, the following day made the final 7/10 mile leg of its journey from Ryder's Cove to the NFA campus. Today that building serves as the Nickerson Genealogy Center.

Jan's line: Joshua Jr.¹¹, Joshua Sr.¹⁰, Oscar⁹, Warren^{8,7}, Seth⁶, Stephen^{5,4}, William^{3,2,1}



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