



FIG. 1. GILMAN-CLIFFORD HOUSE, EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE. Photo by W. H. Halliday. Library, S. P. N. E. A.

# Ebenezer Clifford, Architect and Inventor

JAMES L. GARVIN

ON October 29, 1746<sup>1</sup> a child was born in the small town of Kensington, New Hampshire, who was to become celebrated for his diverse talents even in an age and a locale noted for unschooled inventiveness. Ebenezer Clifford, Esq., joiner, cabinetmaker, architect, justice of the peace, legislator, submarine explorer, and mill operator, is still remembered in his native area as an "extraordinary genius." Beginning life as the offspring of a family of rural carpenters, Clifford earned the respect of men in many professions. In the field of architecture, he left the impress of his fertile mind on a number of buildings, some of which were fashioned by his own hand and today are key structures in New Hampshire's architectural history.

Clifford's earliest work as a joiner, to the extent that it can be traced, is of special interest for its originality. Around 1774 or earlier,<sup>2</sup> Moses Shaw, Jr. of Kensington constructed a new home on Stumpfield Road in that town. The house, destroyed in the 1920s, was apparently a two-story, central chimney structure of the type that is common in New England. What made this house extraordinary, and perhaps unique, was the interior finish, traditionally attributed to Ebenezer Clifford. One of the second-floor chambers of the Shaw House was panelled on all four walls, unusual at this date. Far more distinctive, however, was another chamber, which was panelled not only on all four walls, but on the low ceiling as well. This exceptional room was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of New York, and is today displayed in the American Wing. Although this chamber reportedly

underwent extensive restoration during installation in the museum, its basic elements presumably were not altered. The ceiling is without precedent in the seacoast region of New Hampshire. Its most striking aspect is the peculiar triple arrangement of the stiles and rails that hold the large panels.

In 1781 a house similar to the Shaw House was built by "Squire" Lovering of Kensington, again with finish work attributed, without proof, to Ebenezer Clifford.<sup>3</sup> This structure was moved to Judd's Bridge Farm in New Milford, Connecticut in 1948.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time that Ebenezer Clifford was working as a joiner in Kensington, he was also engaged in cabinetmaking. According to Sawyer's *History of Kensington*, Clifford was noted as a clockcase maker (the movements were made by another man).<sup>5</sup> This reference is confirmed by a bill of 1788, in which Clifford charged Samuel Marston of Hampton for the following:

july 1788 for a Clock Case	
Cherrytree	@ 54/
glass and hinges for do.	@ 3-4-10 <sup>6</sup>

One tall clock with a case supposedly made by Clifford was illustrated in *Antiques* magazine in July, 1948 and is now privately owned in Kensington.

Clifford made other furniture in these early years as well. In November 1781 he charged Jonathan Greely III of Kingston for several types of furniture:

To a Mahogany Stand Table	£ 2-14-0
To 6 Delf [?] Chairs painted	5-8 -0
To an 18 inch Mahogany	
Teaboard	0-9 -0
To one 12 inch Do.	0-6 -0 <sup>7</sup>

Clifford's purchase of some 1600 board feet of cherry, 900 feet of maple, and 900 feet of birch joist from a farmer in Candia, New Hampshire in 1788 and 1789 implies a fairly extensive use of these cabinet-maker's woods.<sup>8</sup>

As early as 1777, when he was thirty-one years old and had recently returned from military service in Medford, Massachusetts, Clifford and his apprentice apparently built a staircase for Stephen Batchelder, a farmer of Deerfield, New Hampshire:

To 7 Days work of myself at 4/ as money [was] in 1774	1 -8-0
To 14 Do. of my servt. at 3/6 as Do.	2 -9-0
To turning 31 balusters @ 1 as Do.	1-11-0 <sup>9</sup>

Thus, Clifford gained diverse experience as joiner, cabinetmaker, and turner early in his career.

By about 1790 Clifford seems to have felt that his talents and interests demanded a wider field. He naturally turned to the adjacent town of Exeter. In 1788 Brigadier General Peter Gilman, former Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives, had died in Exeter without male issue. His house, a wooden garrison dating from about 1700, then passed to the heirs of his daughter Abigail (Fig. 1).<sup>10</sup> The house boasted an extensive front wing, probably added by Peter Gilman in 1772 or 1773 when he was a councillor of the province.<sup>11</sup> Well-panelled, well-lighted, and spacious, this wing could easily have served its reputed occasional use as the governor's council chamber. A second desirable feature of the Gilman House was "the Saw and Gristmills and privileges belonging thereto" lying directly across the road and included with the "Mansion." In April of 1793 Clifford purchased the old garrison from Abigail Gilman Odlin's heirs and

became a resident of Exeter.<sup>12</sup>

Exeter in 1793 was a town with a population of only about 1700, but in this small population was a disproportionate amount of talent and enterprise. In 1783 John Phillips of Andover, Massachusetts had established the famed Phillips Exeter Academy. Exeter was the home of Benjamin Clark Gilman, silversmith, mathematical instrument maker, clockmaker, engraver, and aqueduct engineer.<sup>13</sup> Since 1785, Bradbury Johnson, who was soon to become associated with Clifford in the design of several striking buildings, had worked as a joiner and lived at the corner of Court (now Front) and Spring Streets. The town could boast its own poet, Thomas Odiorne—"an American predecessor of Wordsworth."<sup>14</sup> Exeter had had a gunpowder mill since 1777 and a duck (sailcloth) manufactory since 1790. A description of the village in 1795, written by the learned Dr. Samuel Tenney, states that the dams over the falls near Clifford's newly bought house "afforded seats for four double geared corn-mills, four sawmills, two oil-mills and one fulling mill," some of which then belonged to Clifford.<sup>15</sup>

But Clifford was engaged in activities other than the operation of his mills. He had come to regard himself as a man of some learning and had begun to acquire a select library. Moreover, he had found like-minded companions in Exeter. In 1797 Samuel Tenney, Oliver Peabody, Benjamin Abbot, Gideon Lamson and Ebenezer Clifford petitioned the state legislature for incorporation as "Proprietors of the Social Library in Exeter," having "expended considerable sums in the purchase of Books for their use in Company."<sup>16</sup> The nature of Clifford's personal library is suggested by a book now in the Phillips Exeter Academy Library: James Paine's *Plans, Elevations,*

*and Sections, of Noblemen and Gentlemens Houses.* . . (London, 1765). This folio volume is part one of a two-volume series, the second half of which appeared in 1783. The book bears an unusually large bookplate identifying its owner as Ebenezer Clifford of Kensington—clear proof that Clifford's mind had developed an inquiring bent before his removal to Exeter.

Helen Park, in her article "A List of Architectural Books Available in America before the Revolution," does not list James Paine's first volume as having been known in America before the war.<sup>17</sup> Having no details of mantelpieces, doors, and windows, construction features or the five orders, Paine's book contains little of direct use to American builders. Most of the houses depicted were far too large for emulation in America—so much so that it is surprising to find the volume in a practical New Englander's library at any time. Unless Clifford's ownership of the book was a mere accident, its presence in his library suggests a more extensive collection of architectural books, probably beginning with the serviceable builder's guides common in America both before and after the Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Clifford's reputation as a "student of architecture" was probably due less to his private library than to his services as a designer of buildings. There was not a major public or semi-public structure built in Exeter during the late eighteenth century with which Clifford was not associated in some way. In 1791, even before he moved to Exeter, Clifford seems to have been engaged as a consultant, builder, or possibly a designer for the new Rockingham County Courthouse that was built in Exeter. This building cost more than had originally been anticipated, and in August 1792 a special committee was appointed "to report what further sum

will be necessary to compleat the Court House." This committee reported that "from the representation of the Honl. Committee for building said House & *Ebenezer Clifford Esqr.* [italics added] Three hundred pound more will be necessary to compleat said building..."<sup>19</sup> The fact that Clifford was consulted suggests that he may have been employed either to build or design the courthouse. Unfortunately, the County Treasurer's records for 1791 give no account for the construction of the building.

Not much is known about the Exeter Courthouse. The only pictorial representation of the building seems to be the miniature drawing on Phinehas Merrill's 1802 map of Exeter. Beyond this, there is a brief description written by the ubiquitous William Bentley in 1801:

The Court is a small but neat Building of two Stories not far from the mill seats & Bridge. It suffers from a narrow pediment which does not afford a proper piazza, which might well fill the front.<sup>20</sup>

Undoubtedly, Bentley's standard of comparison was Samuel McIntire's Salem Courthouse, which had been illustrated in the *Massachusetts Magazine* in March, 1790 and was thereby perhaps known in Exeter as a prototype for this sort of building.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not Clifford provided the plans for the 1791 courthouse, there is documentary proof that he served as a draftsman at least as early as 1794. In February of that year, soon after Clifford's arrival in Exeter, a contract was signed for the erection of a new building for the Phillips Exeter Academy:

I hereby agree with John Taylor Gilman Nathaniel Gilman Benjamin Abbot & Oliver Peabody a Committee for Building an Academy in Exeter to deliver to them a Frame for the same 76 feet long, 36 feet Wide, & 27 feet Post to [be] made according to a plan of the same drawn by Ebenezer Clifford Esqr.



FIG. 2. 1794 PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY BUILDING. Photograph from the collections of the Phillips Exeter Academy.

& to raise the same in such place in sd Exeter as they shall direct by the first day of May next—they paying me therefor One hundred & twenty pounds Lawful Money—Witness my hand February 6th 1794—Stephen Fogg<sup>22</sup>

Here, then, is evidence that Clifford had established a local reputation in the practice of architectural design sufficient to bring his talent to the attention of the Academy building committee even though he had just arrived in Exeter.

It is impossible to say just how much of the finished design of the 1794 Phillips Exeter Academy building derived from Clifford's draft (Fig. 2). The matter is complicated by the association of a younger builder-architect, Bradbury Johnson, with the Academy building. On July 20, 1794, about a month after the building frame had been fully raised, another contract was written:

I hereby agree with the Committee for Building the Academy in Exeter to build

a Cupola on the Top of said Academy according to a plan presented to said Committee—and to find all the timber & every other material the Glass & Nails Lime & Lead excepted, to make the sashes & set the Glass & do every thing for all which they are to pay me the sum of Sixty five pounds Lawful Money. N.B. The ball on the Top is not to be included in the above.—

Witness my hand July 28th  
1794—Bradbury Johnson<sup>23</sup>

Since this contract implies that Johnson designed the cupola of the Academy, while the earlier contract suggests that Clifford planned the body of the building, full credit for the design of the structure cannot properly be assigned to either Clifford or Johnson. It seems reasonable to suggest that in this, as in at least two other instances, the two men cooperated in producing the necessary drawings for the building. Both men evidently combined the aesthetic sense of the architect with the skill of the builder, for the con-

struction accounts for the Academy clearly show that Clifford and Johnson were the master joiners of the structure. Apart from small sums paid to each man at various times, Clifford received £234:16:11 for his labor while Johnson was paid £214:0:0, and these sums far exceed those paid to any other workmen on the job.<sup>24</sup>

The Academy building, which burned in 1870, was of a striking, if somewhat *retardataire*, design. It was described in Dr. Tenney's article of 1795, when it had just been completed:

The school room is calculated for about ninety; and for neatness and convenience it is thought to exceed all others known in the country. The second story forms a spacious room for exhibitions, and a small one for a library. The building . . . has on top an elegant cupola . . . [and] does honor to the institution, and to the taste of the gentlemen [note plural] who designed it.<sup>25</sup>

Dr. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale College, concurred with Dr. Tenney's judgment, calling the Academy "superior to any other building, destined to the same purpose, within my knowledge."<sup>26</sup>

Several photographs of the Academy building survive, and show it to have been a dignified structure with a seven-bay facade and a central pedimented pavilion three bays wide. The detailing reflected nothing of the Adamesque or Federal architectural style prevalent in Boston by 1794, but rather showed a Palladian taste characteristic of every Exeter building associated with Clifford's name. Apart from Johnson's cupola, the embellishment of the structure was confined to the central pavilion. This was ornamented with two superimposed orders of Tuscan pilasters, those on the first story rising from high pedestals and those on the upper story supported by a heavy horizontal cornice that marked the second floor level. The

door of the Academy was a focal point, and bore a close resemblance to a window enframingent illustrated in Plate XLVII of Batty Langley's 1745 *Treasury of Designs*. Both the first and second floor windows of the Academy appear to have been derived from Langley as well.

While Exeter's new Academy building was being completed, the nearby meeting house of the First Church, built in 1730, was rapidly deteriorating. In April, 1796 a committee of five men was appointed to prevent the boys of the village from playing around the building—a sign that its condition was indeed precarious. Finally, on January 22, 1798 it was

Voted, That J. T. Gilman, O. Peabody, Nathl. Gilman, S. Tenney & E. Clifford, Esquires, be a committee to make & report a plan or plans of a [new] meeting house.<sup>27</sup>

And on February 6th,

...the Committee appointed for the purpose reported the plan of a meeting-house consisting of the ground floor, and the elevation of the front.<sup>28</sup>

This plan was unanimously accepted and resulted in the construction of the unique building that still stands in Exeter, and was said to have been erected at a cost exceeding £10,000.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the archives of the First Church contain no vouchers or accounts for the erection of the house, and so the detailed history of its construction cannot be compiled. It would be especially instructive to know who drew the plans, for the building reflects a significant departure from established types of meeting houses both in plan and elevation. Although the interior of the building was completely remodelled in 1838, the facade retains its original appearance (Fig. 3). The house is essentially T-shaped.<sup>30</sup> The main body, hip roofed and two stories high, is oriented so that its longest dimensions form

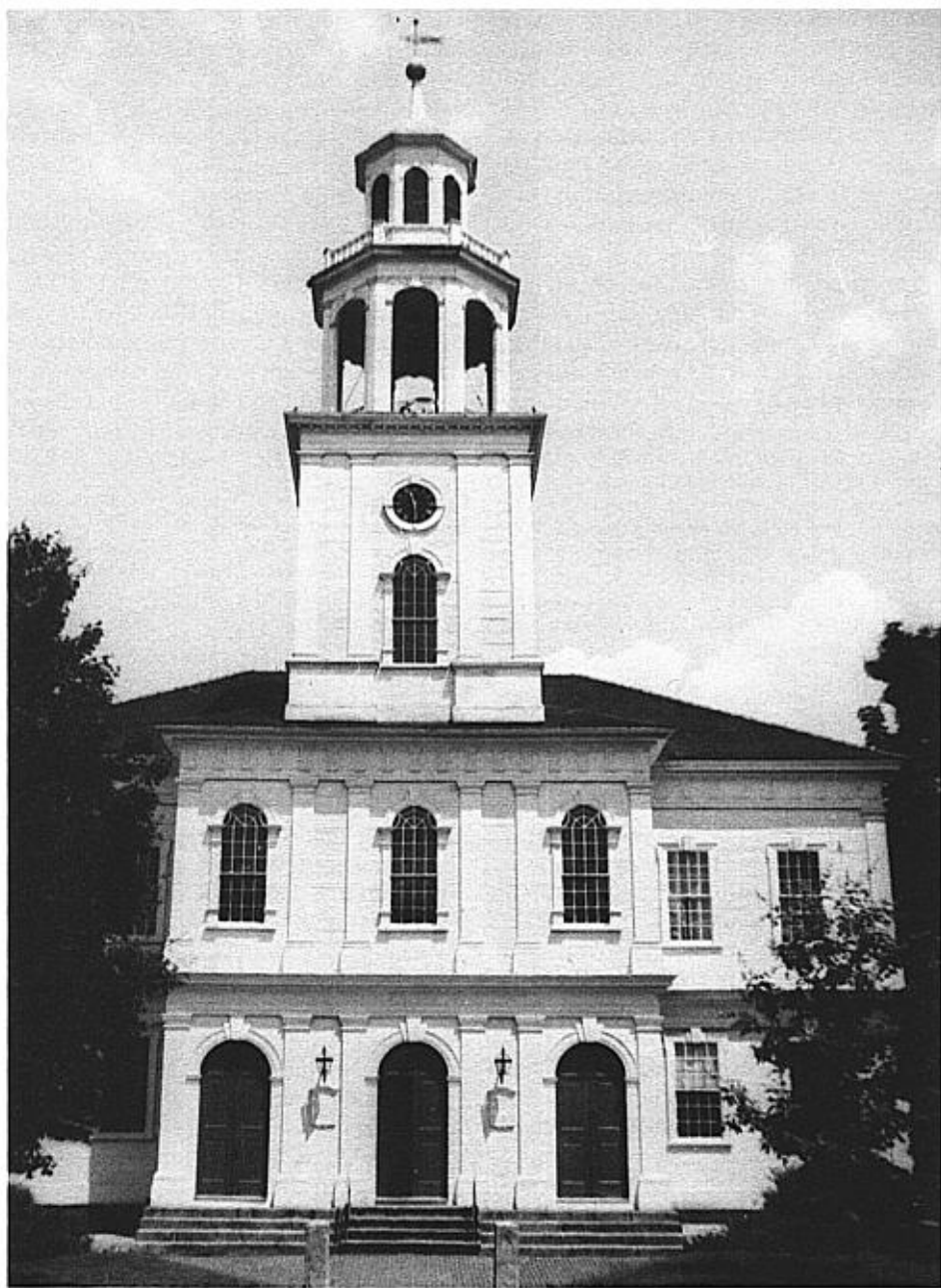


FIG. 3. 1799 FIRST PARISH MEETING HOUSE, EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE.  
Photo by the author.

the front and rear elevations of the building. Projecting from the front of the body is a striking pavilion from which the tower rises. This pavilion, three bays wide and two stories high, has arched doors and windows in contrast to the rectangular openings elsewhere in the building. The tracery in the arches of the windows is Adamesque in inspiration; and yet, the composition of the facade is essentially Palladian and is strongly reminiscent of the front of the Phillips Academy building a few hundred yards up the road. As in the Academy, the meeting house facade is divided horizontally into two stories by a heavy entablature, and each story is ornamented with unfluted pilasters. The roof entablature is basically a copy of Palladio's Roman Doric order, although it may be a composite from plates in various builder's guidebooks.

Soon after its completion, this meeting house became well known throughout eastern New England. Samuel McIntire was sent to study it before designing the South Church in Salem.<sup>31</sup> In 1801 William Bentley wrote:

The new Church [in Exeter] is the most elegant in the state .... It has a pediment in front well supported, & upon the tower two Lanterns with as good effect as this kind of architecture admits. There is a flight of stone steps to the entrance in front & the building within is arched & finished well. The pulpit stairs pass behind. The front of the galleries is the best finished work I ever saw, & with admirable effect. The pews are all long, entirely unornamented, & not even painted. I am sorry to see any of them touching the walls of the house. The isles [*sic*] ought to be through and round such a house.<sup>32</sup>

Shortly afterward, in recording his impressions of the unfinished meeting house in Newburyport, Bentley further showed his pleasure with the Exeter building:

In Cary's new house I should have preferred the front of the Exeter gallery

to their own with all its ornaments ... the house cannot display such a front as the Exeter & the Steeple is not yet finished.<sup>33</sup>

In 1888, Charles Bell wrote of the Exeter meeting house, "Its style and proportions have been much admired, and it is undoubtedly a fine specimen of the architecture of the period. Ebenezer Clifford of Exeter is understood to have designed it."<sup>34</sup> Since then, virtually every author who has discussed the building, including Fiske Kimball, has attributed it to Clifford. There is no doubt that Clifford was associated with the structure: he was a member of the committee to secure plans for the building, and among the few vouchers remaining in the church archives from the time of the construction of the house is one that reads:

Gentlemen                      Exeter April 1st 1799  
Pay Ebenezer Clifford Esqr thirty pounds  
fifteen Shillings and six pence in full for  
his acct for meeting house.  
£30.15.6                      Gideon Lamson<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, as in the case of the Phillips Exeter Academy building, the attribution of the design of the Exeter meeting house to Clifford alone is not secure. In *The First Church in Exeter*, written in 1898, John Taylor Perry stated:

It has generally been thought that the new house, which has been much admired, had for its architect Mr. Clifford, but he cooperated with a Mr. Johnson, who may have furnished the specifications. This statement, Mr. Alfred Connor had from his father, who worked on the structure...<sup>36</sup>

The full identity of this "Mr. Johnson" is provided by the First Parish tax records for 1798. Opposite the name of Bradbury Johnson is the notation "(architect of Meeting House) Standing 1874."<sup>37</sup> Thus, some person in 1874 appears to have had either evidence or recollection of the fact that Bradbury Johnson, and not Ebenezer



Clifford, designed the meeting house. As is the case with the Phillips Academy building, the precise contributions made by these two men have become inextricably confused by time and incomplete documentary evidence.

There are elements of the meeting house that suggest a true "cooperation," as mentioned by Perry. While nothing is known about Bradbury Johnson's library, the Palladianism of the meeting house suggests the careful use of a builder's handbook. Clifford, because he is known to have owned at least one architectural volume, may perhaps be credited with the strictly academic features of the building. On the other hand, the cupola of the house is nothing other than an enlarged and somewhat attenuated version of the cupola on the Academy building. Since the earlier cupola was built (and presumably designed) by Bradbury Johnson, the tower of the meeting house may be Johnson's work. Further, the pulpit window of the meeting house is, except for some Doric trim, an exact counterpart of the doorway of the New Hampshire Fire and Marine Insurance Company building in Portsmouth (now the Portsmouth Athenaeum), which Johnson designed a few years later in 1803.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the meeting house appears to reflect the taste and design skills of two talented and closely-associated builder-architects.

In 1800, at the time of the completion of the meeting house, the Exeter surgeon, Congressman, scientist, and author Dr. Samuel Tenney erected a new mansion house next to the church building. According to John Taylor Perry, either Ebenezer Clifford or Johnson "built" this house.<sup>39</sup> Either man could have designed the dwelling, for both men knew Dr. Tenney.<sup>40</sup> The house shows a strong kinship to the meeting house next to it,<sup>41</sup> and to the Academy building as well (Fig.

4). More surprising, it is related to several plates in James Paine's *Noblemen and Gentlemens Houses*, suggesting that Clifford had an important part in its design (Fig. 5).<sup>42</sup> Its exceptional feature is a clerestory rising above the central three bays of the facade, capped with a pediment and flanked by balustraded hip roofs over the two outer bays of the house, thus affording a low third story in the center of the building. The doorway of the Tenney House is almost an exact duplicate of the entrance of the Academy building, even to the point of having two lights of glass in place of the two upper door panels. It is slightly more modern than the Academy door in the fact that its pilasters lack the high pedestals seen on the older building and are fluted. In the tympanum of the pediment there is a delicate motif of intertwined wooden tracery, which clearly derives from still another builder's guidebook, William Pain's *The Practical Builder* (1774; Boston edition 1792), which appears to have been available in Exeter at least as early as 1794.<sup>43</sup>

Both the clerestory roof and the general doorway type of the Tenney House are suggested by plates in James Paine's *Noblemen and Gentlemens Houses*. The building thus affords a striking example of the adaptation of grand English designs to the modest needs of the New England town—an adaptation all the more ingenious in that Paine's book appears, at first glance, totally inapplicable to American building practice. The designer of the Tenney House, whether Clifford, Johnson, or both, revealed an imagination greatly to his credit.

In 1803, when Ebenezer Clifford was fifty-seven, he planned the only structure which today can be documented as solely his own design. On November 15, 1802 the academy building in the town of Atkinson, about fifteen miles from Exe-



FIG. 4. DR. SAMUEL TENNEY HOUSE, EXETER, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1800.  
Photo by the author.



FIG. 5. PLATE LXV, "PRINCIPAL FRONT OF ST. IVES," from James Paine's *Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, London, 1765. Owned by Clifford, this book may have provided the design source for the Tenney House. Photo by the author, courtesy of the Henry Francis DuPont Winterthur Museum.

ter, burned to the ground.<sup>44</sup> On March 15, 1803 the Trustees of Atkinson Academy

Voted:—that the new building for the Academy be erected . . . on an eminence north of the road leading from the house of Nathaniel Peabody to the meeting house . . .

Voted:—that the building be erected according to a plan drawn and presented by Ebenezer Clifford, Esq.<sup>45</sup>

The frame of the new building was raised on May 12, 1803. From the first, the building must have been planned for only one room on the first floor and one above;<sup>46</sup> and in July 1805 William Bentley recorded in his diary that the "lower part lays in one great undivided room & the stairs ascend on the south part of this room."<sup>47</sup> On the exterior, the Atkinson Academy building was an almost exact duplicate of the somewhat larger Phillips Exeter Academy (Fig. 6).

Only in its details does the newer building betray Atkinson's lack of the large endowment that had benefited Exeter. The doorway is in the Tuscan order rather than in the more elaborate Roman Doric at Exeter. The window heads have flat boards in place of the pulvinated friezes of the earlier building. The cupola rises from a square tower rather than from the octagonal base on the Exeter Academy. Apart from these economies, there are a few differences between the academy buildings which may have been dictated by aesthetics. Clifford, in designing the Atkinson Academy, retained the essential form of the Palladian Exeter Academy building, yet was apparently aware of the Federal architectural style that was making its appearance along the New Hampshire seacoast. The roof pitch of the newer academy is slightly lower than that in Exeter, both on the main building and on the frontal pediment. More important,



FIG. 6. 1803 ATKINSON ACADEMY, ATKINSON, NEW HAMPSHIRE. Photo by author.

the superimposed orders that ornamented the pavilion in Exeter are abandoned in Atkinson, being replaced by two attenuated pilasters that rise two stories to the cornice of the building and that can only be termed Federal in style.

The favorable impression that the Atkinson Academy produced upon an intelligent and critical viewer is conveyed in Bentley's diary entry for July 24, 1805:

We found above 60 youths, about an equal number of males and females, & in good order. The building is in an most elevated situation & well accommodated. It is in a plain but lofty style & is surmounted by a bellfry with good effect . . . The School of the Academy is in a spacious room & the females are on one side & the males on the other.<sup>48</sup>

As creative and independent as Ebenezer Clifford appears to have been in his architectural work, only a part of his remarkable personality is revealed in the buildings with which his name is connected. One persistent tradition about Clifford, now confirmed as a fact, reveals him to have been both inventive and adventurous. According to one account:

he was an ingenious mechanic, and constructed a diving bell, with the aid of which he is said to have recovered a quantity of silver money from the wreck of a Spanish or other foreign vessel, at the Isles of Shoals. The coin had suffered, during its long submersion, a wondrous sea change, and was found to be covered with some kind of marine incrustation. A portion of it was placed for safekeeping in the old Exeter Bank, and when the vault of that institution was entered and robbed of its valuable contents, about the year 1828, some of Mr. Clifford's silver pieces were among the spoils. The story goes, that the peculiar appearance of the money afforded the clew by which the guilty persons were detected.<sup>49</sup>

A carved wooden swan similar in appearance to a full-sized decoy was used as a signal buoy by which the diver com-

municated with his attendants in a vessel above.<sup>50</sup> It is still preserved in the Clifford House, and a replica is now used as a weathervane on the barn.

Clifford's remarkable character is revealed by the date at which he engaged in these dangerous experiments. At least one descent was made in 1803, the same year that Clifford designed the Atkinson Academy building—when he was fifty-seven.

In 1803 a gundelow, loaded with twenty tons of bar iron, sank in seventy-two feet of water in the Piscataqua River. Ebenezer Clifford of Exeter and Richard Tripe of Dover used a primitive diving bell (5'9" high x 5' across) in their attempt to get a tackle to the gundelow. There were seats for two men in the bell. The shank of an old anchor served as a footrest. Fifty-six pound iron weights were attached to the rim of the base, bringing the total weight to about two tons. Many successful descents were made. The bell stayed under water for an hour or more each time, about twenty minutes of which was required for gradual descent and ascent. Though they failed to salvage the gundelow, Clifford and Tripe were as much interested in the healing properties of the bell as in its hydraulic significance. Clifford, long an habitual rheumatic, always felt better for his submarine experience.<sup>51</sup>

Although Clifford and Tripe (a Dover house-carpenter) failed to raise the gundalo at this time, Clifford salvaged the iron sometime between September 1806 and September 1808. Meanwhile, Tripe had obtained a United States patent for "improvements in Diving Machines" on April 1, 1806<sup>52</sup> and, feeling that the iron at the bottom of the Piscataqua River belonged to him as much as to Clifford, he brought suit against the latter in October 1808. Unfortunately, the records of this lawsuit do not show whether Clifford or Tripe was the actual inventor of the diving bell, though they state that Tripe highly

resented "a certain advertisement in a Portsmouth paper, which gave to Esqr. Clifford the honor of the diving bell."<sup>53</sup> When Tripe died in 1817, he still owned this patent, which was due to expire on April 1, 1820 and was evaluated at \$50.00.<sup>54</sup> Clifford, however, seems to have retained custody of the diving bell itself, since it was in his barn during the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Again, as in the case of Clifford's involvement with Bradbury Johnson as an architectural designer, it is difficult to define the precise role played by Clifford as opposed to that of Tripe. What is clear in every instance, however, is that Clifford possessed a highly original and inventive mind that acted as a catalyst in stimulating similarly talented men to their best efforts. The fact that Clifford inevitably appears as a participant in the series of extraordinary designs and inventions that occurred near Exeter at the turn of the nineteenth century is clear testimony to the influence of his unique personality.

In the years around 1800, when Clifford was engaged in the most interesting building designs and submarine adventures of his career, he influenced the development of two younger men, both of whom gave early evidence of unusual skill and both of whom died too young to realize the full extent of their talents. The first of these youths was Clifford's own son, George Clifford (1783-1805), who is known only through his obituary notice:

... this valuable young man, inherited a double portion of those excellent mechanical powers, for which his father, is so eminently distinguished; and having served an honorable apprenticeship, with the ingenious Mr. [Langley] Boardman of this town [Portsmouth], he repaired to the Havannah, in the fond hope of obtaining more than a competence ... but death stepped in at the close of 6 months, and loosed the silver cord of life, at early 22.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most interesting revelations of this sad account is that Clifford apprenticed his young son to Portsmouth's leading cabinetmaker. Here is another instance of the close relationship between the craftsmen of a particular region. These men were well acquainted with the talents of their fellows through a series of complex trade and family connections. Indeed, in 1803 a number of these men incorporated themselves as the Associated Mechanics and Manufacturers of the State of New Hampshire, "for the laudable purposes of promoting and encouraging industry, good habits, an increase of knowledge in the arts they profess and practice, and their common interest."<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the most significant instance of Clifford's direct influence on the younger generation (apart from the effect he must have had on his associate Bradbury Johnson) was realized in the life of one of his apprentices, Jonathan Folsom (1785-1825). Born in Exeter, Folsom began his service with Clifford about 1800. At the conclusion of his term (which would have extended to 1807 if this were a seven-year apprenticeship), Folsom moved to Georgia "in pursuit of business and information."<sup>58</sup> After a few years' residence there, he returned to Portsmouth where he soon began to build some of the most remarkable dwellings constructed in the Piscataqua region in the eighteen-teens. Among these was the Thomas Haven House of 1813, which in Folsom's own words was "noted for its grand and romantic appearance."<sup>59</sup> This house bore a striking resemblance to Thornton's "Octagon" in Washington, D.C., which Folsom may have seen in his travels. After superintending the construction of a granite breakwater at the Isles of Shoals and building the first ship-house at the Portsmouth Navy Yard,<sup>60</sup> Folsom crowned his brief career by erect-

ing the granite Unitarian Church of 1824, which may have been designed by Alexander Parris. During this project Folsom died at the age of forty from over-exertion and exposure.

Despite his varied interests in architectural design, marine salvage and mill operating, Clifford evidently did not terminate his career as a joiner until ill health and advancing age forced him to do so. Actually, one of the best-documented instances of Clifford's work as a joiner occurred somewhat after he had gained local fame for his other pursuits. Between 1807 and 1809, the merchant James Rundlet, who had moved from Exeter to Portsmouth about 1794, built his three-story frame dwelling in the latter town (Cover). Fortunately, many of the accounts for the construction of the Rundlet House were published in 1946 by Rundlet's descendant, Ralph May.<sup>61</sup> Considering Rundlet's Exeter origins (and the fact that Portsmouth's leading craftsmen were then engaged in building St. John's Church),<sup>62</sup> it is not surprising to find many Exeter names among the craftsmen who fashioned Rundlet's mansion. Significantly, the leading joiner on the job, and in fact the highest-paid workman in the accounts, was Ebenezer Clifford. In January 1808 Rundlet paid Clifford \$555.05 for "joiner's work, etc.,"<sup>63</sup> and it is likely that much of the interior detail of the Rundlet House is the product of Clifford's hand.

It is clear, then, that Clifford continued to be active and influential at least until the age of sixty, and that he was still one of the finest joiners of his region at that

age. If the attributions of his early work in Kensington are correct, Clifford had passed from the simple, almost vernacular, work of the pre-Revolutionary period through the highly academic Palladianism of the early Federal period and had ended his career as a master of the delicate and inventive Adamesque design of the years after 1800. As an architect, he had been involved with the design of some of the most impressive buildings in northern New England, buildings that made his home-town of Exeter one of the most distinguished villages in the region.

Toward the end of his life, Clifford suffered a decline in health and spent several idle years with his wife Anna and his unmarried daughters, Eunice and Elizabeth. Elizabeth (Betty), in her diary entry for December 2, 1819, sadly wrote:

My father, too, he is declining, nor is it probable that he will ever commemorate another anniversary day of thanksgiving! on Earth—<sup>64</sup>

Actually, however, Clifford did not die until October 10, 1821.

Ebenezer Clifford's wife survived him by nine years, and his property eventually came into the hands of his daughter Elizabeth. Elizabeth died in 1863 and unfortunately specified that her entire estate be sold at auction. This was accordingly done, and in that auction most of Ebenezer Clifford's effects were dispersed.<sup>65</sup> With this dispersal began the obscurity that has deepened ever since, until the surprising talents and accomplishments of the man have been reduced to a half-remembered legend.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>“Diary of Betty Clifford,” 1819-1828, files of the First Congregational Church, Exeter, New Hampshire, entry for November 9, 1820. “This day my father [is] 74 years old he was born Octr. 29th (Old Stile) 1746—the change of Stile makes it 9th of Novr.”

<sup>2</sup>The Rev. Mr. Roland Sawyer dated the erection of the Shaw House at “around 1774” in an article in the *Hampton Weekly Union* (Hampton, N.H.) of March 21, 1952. However, Mr. Sawyer states that this house was sufficiently finished for occupancy by December 1768, in a letter dated November 2, 1946 to Mr. Joseph Downs (in the files of the Metropolitan Museum of New York). In 1938 R. T. H. Halsey, in *A Handbook of the American Wing* (p. 85), conjectured that the panelling had been installed in a seventeenth century house in a remodelling of ca. 1725. Until the land titles can be checked, the exact date of this house must remain in question.

<sup>3</sup>Sawyer, article in *Hampton Weekly Union*, March 21, 1952.

<sup>4</sup>Sawyer, article in *Hampton Weekly Union*, February 28, 1952.

<sup>5</sup>Sawyer, *The History of Kensington, New Hampshire, 1663-1945* (Farmington, Maine: the author, 1946), 229-230, 270. Brooks Palmer, “The First New Hampshire Clockmakers,” *Antiques*, July, 1948, 36-37.

<sup>6</sup>Rockingham County Superior Court Records, A-10875.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, A-4791.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, A-11378.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, A-4895.

<sup>10</sup>Rockingham County Deeds, 133:374; 133:375; 134:158; 134:159; 134:160. The construction date of the Gilman Garrison is based upon research by Richard M. Candee in the files of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, which owns the building.

<sup>11</sup>Charles H. Bell, *History of the Town of Exeter, New Hampshire* (Exeter: the author, 1888), 417. This wing has sometimes been attributed to Clifford, without known documentary proof.

<sup>12</sup>See deeds cited in note 10, above.

<sup>13</sup>Frank O. Spinney, “An Ingenious Yankee Craftsman,” *Antiques*, September, 1943, 116-119.

<sup>14</sup>Leon Howard, “Thomas Odiorne: An American Predecessor of Wordsworth,” *American Literature*, X (March, 1938-January, 1939), 417-436.

<sup>15</sup>Samuel Tenney, “A Topographical Description of Exeter in New-Hampshire,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society for the Year MDCCXCV* (Boston, 1795).

<sup>16</sup>Isaac W. Hammond, ed., *Documents Relating to Towns in New Hampshire, A-F*, State Papers Series Vol. XI (Concord: The State of New Hampshire, 1882), 669. The Exeter Social Library was incorporated by an act passed June 20, 1797.

<sup>17</sup>Helen Park, “A List of Architectural Books Available in America Before the Revolution,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XX, 3 (October, 1961), 115-130.

<sup>18</sup>An inventory of Clifford’s estate taken for a lawsuit in 1802 (Rockingham County Superior Court Records, A-21204-21209) includes “5 Large Books” and “9 Bound Books.” This is certainly not an extensive personal library, yet the existence of the Paine volume with its bookplate hints that some or all of these fourteen volumes may have been architectural books.

<sup>19</sup>Rockingham County Superior Court Records, A-12876.

<sup>20</sup>William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley* (Salem: The Essex Institute, 1907), II, 392.

<sup>21</sup>*The Massachusetts Magazine* for 1790 was available in Lamson and Odiorne’s Exeter bookstore at least as early as 1794, and probably before. Edward C. Echols, ed., *The Phillips Exeter Academy, A Pictorial History* (Exeter: The Phillips Exeter Academy Press, 1970), back endpaper.

<sup>22</sup>Archives of the Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Account book of John Taylor Gilman, 100-108, Archives of the Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire. The author is particularly indebted to Mr. Rodney Armstrong, former Librarian of the Davis Library, Phillips Exeter Academy, for making available the material relating to the 1794 Academy building.

<sup>25</sup>Tenney, *op. cit.*, 96-97.

<sup>26</sup>Timothy Dwight, *Travels; in New-England and New-York*, I (New Haven: the author, 1821), 417-418.

<sup>27</sup>Record Book of the First Parish, Exeter, N.H., entry for January 22, 1798.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, entry for February 6, 1798.

<sup>29</sup>“A Sketch of the ecclesiastical Affairs of

Exeter from its first settlement in the 1638 down to the year 1827—" MS, no author, no pagination. MSS NHT Exeter, New Hampshire Historical Society.

<sup>30</sup> The extension at the rear of the building is a modern alteration.

<sup>31</sup> "Some Account of the South Church," *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, XXXI (1894), 80.

<sup>32</sup> Bentley, *Diary*, II, 390-391.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 395.

<sup>34</sup> Bell, *op cit.*, 190.

<sup>35</sup> Archives of the First Parish, Exeter, N. H.

<sup>36</sup> John Taylor Perry, *The First Church in Exeter, New Hampshire* (Exeter, 1898), 94.

<sup>37</sup> Tax Records of the First Parish, Exeter, 1798, p. 36, Archives of the First Parish, Exeter, N.H.

<sup>38</sup> James L. Garvin, "Bradbury Johnson, Builder-Architect," unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1969, p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> John Taylor Perry, *op. cit.*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> As has been seen, Ebenezer Clifford and Dr. Tenney were both on the committee to report a plan for the Exeter meeting house. Dr. Tenney and Bradbury Johnson lived only five buildings apart on Court Street in Exeter; and when Johnson sold his house in 1802, Samuel Tenney and Oliver Peabody purchased it (Rockingham County Deeds, 161:273).

<sup>41</sup> In the late nineteenth century the Tenney House was moved from its original location next to the meeting house to 65 High Street in Exeter.

<sup>42</sup> The facade of the Tenney House relates especially to Plates XXXIX and XL of Volume I of *Noblemen and Gentlemens Houses*, showing the south front of Serlby, Nottinghamshire and to Plate LXV, the principal front of St. Ives.

<sup>43</sup> The 1794 catalogue of Lamson and Odiorne's Exeter bookstore (see note 21, above) lists "Paine's Architecture." This probably refers to William Paine's *The Practical Builder* (Boston edition, John Norman, 1792) rather than to James Paine's *Noblemen and Gentlemens Houses* of 1765, which never appeared in an American edition.

<sup>44</sup> Harriet Webster Marr, *Atkinson Academy, The Early Years* (n.p., 1940), 73.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>46</sup> An excerpt from the diary of Rev. Stephen Peabody of Atkinson (now owned by the American Antiquarian Society), quoted by Marr, states that at a trustees' meeting "a majority appears to be against two chimneys in the schoolroom." Marr, *op. cit.*, 78.

<sup>47</sup> Bentley, *op. cit.*, III, 175.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> [Charles H. Bell], *Exeter in 1776* (Exeter, 1876), 33-34.

<sup>50</sup> Bell, *History of Exeter*, 418.

<sup>51</sup> William G. Saltonstall, *Ports of Piscataqua* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 185n. Unfortunately, Saltonstall did not cite the source of this detailed information, and no newspaper account of these descents has yet been located.

<sup>52</sup> Edmund Burke, *List of Patents for Inventions and Designs Issued by the United States from 1790 to 1847* (Washington, D.C.: 1847), 170.

<sup>53</sup> Rockingham County Superior Court Records, A-30059.

<sup>54</sup> Strafford County Wills, 21:204.

<sup>55</sup> William Gilman Perry, *Exeter in 1830* (Exeter, 1913), 23.

<sup>56</sup> *New-Hampshire Gazette*, September 10, 1805. George Clifford had died on August 5, 1805 ("Diary of Betty Clifford," 1819-1828, files of the First Congregational Church, Exeter, N.H., entry for August 5, 1821).

<sup>57</sup> *Constitution of the Associated Mechanics and Manufacturers of the State of New Hampshire* (Portsmouth: C. W. Brewster and Son, 1869), 3.

<sup>58</sup> *New-Hampshire Gazette*, October 25, 1825.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, October 26, 1813.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Knowles Folsom, *Genealogy of the Folsom Family, 1638-1938* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle Publishing Company, 1938), 234, 396-7.

<sup>61</sup> Ralph May, *Among Old Portsmouth Houses* (Boston: the author, 1946).

<sup>62</sup> James L. Garvin, "St. John's Church in Portsmouth: An Architectural Study," *Historical New Hampshire*, XXVIII, 3 (Fall 1973), 153-175.

<sup>63</sup> May, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> "Diary of Betty Clifford," 1819-1828, files of the First Congregational Church, Exeter, N.H., entry for December 2, 1819.

<sup>65</sup> Letter, Rev. Mr. Roland Sawyer to Mr. Joseph Downs, dated November 2, 1946, in the files of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Mr. Sawyer writes: "In 1878, my father attended an auction at the old Clifford home when the last of the fourth generation of cabinetmakers sold the place—and a farmer bought their old planes and tools for firewood, many of them then over 100 years old—he had to go twice with a two horse wagon to haul them home for firewood." Since Elizabeth Clifford's auction was in 1864 (Rockingham County Wills #189960), the date given in Mr. Sawyer's letter is either wrong, or this auction was of another estate.