

**New Hampshire House Museums  
of Historic New England** (formerly SPNEA)

Christopher Ciesielski  
History and Theory Of Historic Preservation, HPRES 5006  
Historic Preservation Program, School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
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Don Kalec

Historic New England, formerly known as the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA), was formed in 1910 by William Sumner Appleton and a small group of like-minded individuals for “the purpose of preserving for posterity New England’s buildings, places and objects of historical and other interest.”<sup>1</sup> William Sumner Appleton was born in 1874 into a wealthy Beacon Hill family. He was a boy who enjoyed history from a very young age and was commonly found digging through the archives at the Boston Historical Society.<sup>2</sup> He attended boarding school in Boston and was admitted into Harvard for college. While at Harvard, he studied history under a number of professors that taught him that understanding our history was the first step in solving our modern day societal problems.<sup>3</sup> Sumner, as he was referred to, studied the philosophies of Ruskin and William Morris in his fine art classes while at Harvard. One of Sumner’s most influential professors, Charles Eliot Norton, lectured him on the importance of saving our hereditary homes in his fine arts three and four courses. “Norton told Appleton that those hereditary homes represented the foundation of a stable community by anchoring Yankees to a bedrock of landscape and heritage.”<sup>4</sup> Sumner would forever be changed by the teachings of Norton and it was these teachings that set the wheels in motion for a lifelong career in preservation.

After graduating from Harvard, Sumner tried his hand in selling real estate and realized that he was ill equipped for this profession, eventually suffering a nervous breakdown. He traveled west to Nevada for a time to try his hand at mining, although this too he found not to his liking.<sup>5</sup> He returned to Boston, and took a full time position as a historian at the Sons of Revolution which he was a member of while attending Harvard.<sup>6</sup> The Sons

of Revolution fought hard to stop demolition that had been taking place in fast changing Boston during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As immigrants increased in Boston the grand old neighborhoods of Beacon Hill and the North End became overcrowded and fell into decline as old homes were torn down to make way for boarding houses.<sup>7</sup> One house in particular that Sumner spoke out against the demolition of was the John Hancock house. Sumner tried in vain to raise the \$30,000 to purchase the house but the initiative failed and the house was lost.<sup>8</sup> Sumner at first focused his attention on buying Boston's most notable and historic structures with varied success. He soon moved on to purchasing smaller houses throughout New England with his own funds. One article cited the fact that because Sumner had so little funding he focused primarily on purchasing small early colonial buildings because they could be obtained inexpensively and these houses represented the early period of American history that he valued most.<sup>9</sup>

Today, Historic New England owns thirty-seven house museums throughout New England, with five house museums in the state of New Hampshire. Four of these houses are found in the port side town of Portsmouth including the Jackson House, Governor John Langdon House, Gilman Garrison House and the Rundlet-May house. The fifth house, the Barrett House, is located about eighty miles southwest of Portsmouth in New Ipswich. All five of these houses were either purchased by or willed to Historic New England, beginning in 1924 with the purchase of the Jackson House. The Jackson House is particularly important not only because it is the oldest wood frame house in New Hampshire and Maine, but also because it is the only house bought directly by William Sumner Appleton in 1924.

### **Jackson House** – Portsmouth, NH

The Jackson House, built by Richard Jackson in 1664, is the oldest surviving wood frame house in New Hampshire and Maine.<sup>10</sup> Richard Jackson was a woodworker, farmer and most notably a shipbuilder, making his fortunes building ships from the pine forests in the surrounding region. The house is an excellent study in early American Colonialism because it is built in the New England saltbox style with a heavy timber frame, sheathed with vertical planks that are covered with exterior clapboards.<sup>11</sup> The house carries a distinct medieval quality with its steeply sloping gable roofline and narrow casement windows. It is built on a traditional two-room plan, which is very typical for early Colonial houses with a massive chimney positioned at the center of the house.<sup>12</sup> The massive central chimney served a two-fold purpose. Primarily, it functioned as the main stove, around which the Jacksons prepared all their meals but it also provided all the heating needs of the house during the long cold New England winters.

Two small lean-tos were added to the each end of the house in 1764. Each of these rooms have a small fireplace in the far corner and the north lean-to acted as the shipping office of Mr. Jackson.<sup>13</sup> One very interesting lean-to was subsequently added to the back of the property, at a date not known. It features a roofline that continues almost all the way down to the ground level. This rear lean-to acted as the new kitchen of the home with two rooms flanking the central kitchen, to the left was the buttery and to the right was the birth and death room.<sup>14</sup>

The exterior of the house features very darkly stained wood clapboards with matching dark wood triple casement windows on the oldest central section of the house. The windows of this central section are worth noting because windows in this fashion were very rare for the English Colonies in the seventeenth century. Sash windows were used throughout England and Holland during this time but only for the grandest public buildings.<sup>15</sup> The fact that Mr. Jackson incorporated these windows into his house provides a clue to his stature in the Portsmouth area.

The interior of the house is an excellent example of the seventeenth century New England saltbox. The centrally located front entryway leads to a small vestibule. Inside a steep staircase leads to the upper chambers with the hall to the right and the parlor to the left. The interior is finished with rough plaster or sheathed walls, broad oak plank flooring, and exposed beams throughout.<sup>16</sup>

The original property, which was deeded to Mr. Jackson by his father-in-law Richard Seaward, was twenty-five acres, which lead down to the Piscataqua Riverfront. The property grew to encompass more than sixty acres at the height of Mr. Jackson's career although, by the time William Sumner Appleton purchased the property in 1924, the property came with less than an acre of land.<sup>17</sup> William Sumner Appleton purchased the property in 1924 from a member of the seventh generation of the Jackson family, with full intentions of living in the residence. During his tenure in the house he limited his restorations to the property, despite pressures to remove post-17th century additions. The only changes he undertook were "stripping of 20th century plaster and lath on the interior

and replacing eighteenth century sash with diamond-pane casements where evidence of the original fenestration was too compelling to ignore.”<sup>18</sup> Three years later in 1927, William Sumner turned the property over to the care of SPNEA. As an interesting side note, in 1959 the adjacent George Rogers House built in 1839, was in danger of being sold to a developer. SPNEA bought Rogers House to use it as a caretakers house for the Jackson House and to maintain the context of both properties.<sup>19</sup>

### **Governor John Langdon House – Portsmouth, NH**

Historic New England calls the Gov. Langdon house, “one of the Society’s finest and most historic houses.”<sup>20</sup> John Landon built the house in 1784 after he had become a highly accomplished businessman and political leader in Portsmouth.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Langdon began with humble origins. Initially, he was a merchant and shipbuilder and after his spectacular leadership role in the Revolutionary War he became one of New Hampshire’s most respected men. This respect and notoriety elected him to eight one-year terms as President of New Hampshire as well as his consideration for and appointment to several political positions on the national level.<sup>22</sup>

The Gov. Langdon house is an exquisite example of Georgian architecture. *New Hampshire Profiles* called the house, “one of the great Georgian houses in America.”<sup>23</sup>

The house features a three story, five bay symmetrical design with a hip roof and captain’s walk around the top. Two wings project from the rear of the house forming a “U” shape with a central open-air court found at the center. The exterior of the Gov. Langdon house is flush with elaborate detailing including intricately carved engaged

pilasters on the corners of the house as well as carved modillions under the cornices, lintels and dormers.<sup>24</sup> The interior of the house is no less extravagant than the exterior, featuring elaborately carved wood paneling in the rococo style. Special attention was paid to the drawing room, where above each of the windows, is an arched panel into which a fleur de lis is carved.<sup>25</sup> The combination of the exterior and interior hand carved detailing with the extensive gardens that surround the house, remind the viewer that this property is something grand, reminiscent of a property of the French nobility.<sup>26</sup> The Gov. Langdon house is important for its architecture, but equally important are the notable people that have walked its halls during the early Colonial period.

After the defeat of the British in the Revolutionary War, the people of New Hampshire felt that they owed much to Mr. Langdon and in 1784 he was elected as a New Hampshire President (today this position is called governor).<sup>27</sup> This was the beginning of a long and fruitful political career. Mr. Langdon twice administered the oath of the United States presidency to our first two presidents, George Washington and John Adams. He served as Speaker of the Legislature as well as being considered for the Vice Presidency of the United States. Mr. Langdon hosted many notable people at his New Hampshire house including John Hancock, Lafayette, James Monroe and Louis Philippe.<sup>28</sup> “Washington, a guest in 1789, remarked upon his lavish hospitality, as did the Marquis de Chastellux, who expressed admiration for his ‘elegant and well-furnished’ mansion.”<sup>29</sup>

Gov. John Langdon lived in the house until his death in 1819 and afterwards other leading families of Portsmouth occupied the property. Langdon's decedents purchased the property back at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and restored it to its 18<sup>th</sup> century glory during which a wing was added to the mansion to house modern conveniences.<sup>30</sup> In 1946, the great, great granddaughter of John Langdon donated the property to SPNEA and they have maintained and operated the property as a house museum since.<sup>31</sup>

### **Barrett House – New Ipswich, NH**

The Barrett House was built as a wedding present for Charles Barrett and his bride around 1800. Mr. Barrett, Charles' father, was a successful farmer in New Ipswich who had several business interests including a glass factory, toll road, canal system as well as New Hampshire's first cotton mill.<sup>32</sup> The house, also referred to as Forest Hall, was built in the Federal style, and is said to be a compilation between Charles's father and his bride's father. "The scale of the house was encouraged by his bride's father, who promised to furnish the interior of the house as lavishly as possible."<sup>33</sup>

Forest Hall is a grand three-story Federal style mansion. The façade of the house has four engaged pilasters running from ground level to the roofline essentially dividing the façade into three equal parts. The center section features a centrally located front door flanked by two sidelights with a fanlight over the top of the door. Again four smaller engaged pilasters are repeated in the entryway, two on each side of the door. A massive pediment is found at the roofline spanning the center two engaged pilasters. Sixteen massive windows punctuate the façade with either eight over eight or twelve over twelve

divided lights found throughout. The word that comes to mind when examining the façade is symmetry. The overall footprint of the house is a perfect square where every element on the exterior is reflected from one side to the other.

The interior of the house is lavishly furnished as the bride's father had promised. Large hand printed mural wallpapers are found in the main dining room and hand carved wood is found throughout the house.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the main house, the property also includes a carriage barn as well as a working barn. These two structures still remain on the property on their original footprints.<sup>35</sup>

Forest Hall represents the prosperity of New Ipswich during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, New Ipswich was bypassed by the railroads and the town fell into economic stagnation as a result. This had a beneficial effect on preserving the historic character Forest Hall as well as the region of New Ipswich.<sup>36</sup> Charles Barrett's descendents continued to use the house as a summer home until Caroline Barr-Wade donated the house to SPNEA in 1948. In the 1950s, SPNEA undertook a restoration of the kitchen to return it to its early 1800s appearance.<sup>37</sup> At one point the large wallpaper murals in the dining room became quite deteriorated and replacing them was determined to be the only feasible solution, since the plaster wall behind the wallpaper was crumbling and falling from the lath. SPNEA located a house in Quincy, MA that had the exact same wallpaper that was being slated for demolition. They removed both the wallpaper and the plaster wall in one piece from the Quincy, MA house and reinstalled it into the dining room in Forest Hall. Forest Hall most recently has undergone several

smaller restorations including upgrades to the mechanical systems and a small restoration to the carriage barn.<sup>38</sup> Today, the house and contributing structures are in excellent shape due to SPNEA's ongoing care.

### **Gilman Garrison House – Exeter, NH**

The Gilman Garrison House was built in 1709 by John Gilman as a fortified house or a “garrison.” John Gilman was a sawmill owner that strategically sited the house to protect his business from Indian attacks as was common in the New England frontier. The house is constructed of massive hewn logs attached horizontally to the interior walls of the house. A pulley is attached above the front entrance that operates a portcullis, or a reinforced door.<sup>39</sup> In the mid-1700s Peter Gilman enlarged the house by adding a wing with formal rooms that could be used to entertain. The Gilman Garrison House is a standard two story early colonial building, built in an “L” shape with the new addition positioned perpendicularly to the original building.<sup>40</sup> When the new wing was built a new front entryway was constructed with two engaged pilasters and a simple top light above the door delineating this as the main entrance. The house features clapboard siding and cornices above each of the windows and the windows are eight over eight divided light on the old portion of the house and six over six divided light on the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century addition.

After the addition to the house was completed, it hosted John Wentworth the royal governor of New Hampshire, on his many of his visits to Exeter. Mr. Wentworth abruptly ended his visits in 1774 when he had to seek refuge in the Fort of William and Mary at

the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.<sup>41</sup> The attack on the Fort of William and Mary was led by none other than John Langdon, owner of the Gov. John Langdon House in Portsmouth. In the 1950s the Gilman Garrison House was restored by William Dudley to reveal its early architecture.<sup>42</sup> After Mr. Dudley's death in 1966 the house was willed to SPNEA and opened as a house museum. SPNEA has not done any restoration work to the house since taking ownership in 1966.<sup>43</sup>

### **Rundlet-May House – Portsmouth, NH**

The Rundlet-May House was built in 1807 by James Rundlet. James Rundlet was the son of a farmer from Exeter, NH and an outsider to the Portsmouth society. By 1794, he moved to Portsmouth and had become a successful merchant acquiring his wealth in the textile trade. He built the house upon a hill in an undeveloped portion of Portsmouth so that passersby would have to “look up” to the house, reinforcing his important place in the Portsmouth community.<sup>44</sup>

The house is constructed in the Federal style, with two and a half stories on a square floor plan. The façade features a centrally located front portico that is supported with two columns and a small balustrade atop. When viewing the façade, the house is composed of five bays with the center bay positioned directly over the front entryway portico. The windows appear large and stately with cornices atop and black shutters found on either side. The windows on the first and second stories are six over six divided lights and three over three divided lights composing the top half story of the house. Two large rectangular

chimneys are positioned at opposing ends of the roofline and around the perimeter of the roof runs a white balustrade identical to the one found atop the portico.

James Rundlet outfitted the interior of the house with the latest technologies. Inside the kitchen a Rumford roaster and Rumford range were found along with a set kettle. The house also had an elaborate venting system that vented smoke to the smoking room on the third floor. An early coal-fired central heating system heated the house and in the basement there was an indoor well that supplied water to the house.<sup>45</sup> Mr. Rundlet also spared no expense when it came to furnishing his house. He imported English wallpapers to decorate the dining room walls and all the furniture found in the house was locally made by a cabinetmaker who was known for his fine craftsmanship and use of wood veneers.<sup>46</sup>

In 1971, SPNEA obtained the Rundlet-May House after Ralph May, the great-grandson of James Rundlet, willed the property to SPNEA upon his death. The house was obtained with many original furnishings including those used by James Rundlet himself. In addition to the house, SPNEA also acquired the adjacent land that included the formal gardens, orchards and two privies that remained from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> The house has undergone no restorations to date and SPNEA has decidedly chosen to act strictly as preservationists with the property, keeping all 19<sup>th</sup> century technologies in place.<sup>48</sup>

Today, the house appears in excellent condition and has changed remarkably little in its two hundred year lifetime.

## End Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Wikipedia: Historic New England, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic\\_New\\_England](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_New_England).
- <sup>2</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 15.
- <sup>3</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 18.
- <sup>4</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 21.
- <sup>5</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 23.
- <sup>6</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 25.
- <sup>7</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 29.
- <sup>8</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 37.
- <sup>9</sup> James M. Lindgren. *Preserving Historic New England*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004) 45.
- <sup>10</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. *The Richard Jackson House*, 10 August 1977, 2.
- <sup>11</sup> National Historic Landmarks Program. *Jackson, Richard, House*, <http://tps.cr.nps.gov/nhl/detail.cfm?ResourceId=766&ResourceType=Building>.
- <sup>12</sup> National Register, p. 2.
- <sup>13</sup> National Register, p. 2.
- <sup>14</sup> National Register, p. 2.
- <sup>15</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. *The Richard Jackson House*, 10 August 1977, 5.
- <sup>16</sup> National Register, p. 5.

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<sup>17</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Historic New England. *Jackson House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/jackson.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. *Governor John Langdon House*, 3 July 1973, 2.

<sup>21</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. *Governor John Langdon House*, 3 July 1973, 2.

<sup>25</sup> National Register, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> National Register, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form. *Governor John Langdon House*, 3 July 1973, 5.

<sup>28</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> National Register, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Historic New England. *Governor John Langdon House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/langdon.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Lisa Santola, interview by Christopher Ciesielski, December 1, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Historic New England. *Barrett House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/barrett.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Historic New England. *Barrett House*.

<sup>34</sup> Historic New England. *Barrett House*.

<sup>35</sup> Lisa Santola, interview by Christopher Ciesielski, December 1, 2009.

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<sup>36</sup> Historic New England. *Barrett House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/barrett.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Lisa Santola, interview by Christopher Ciesielski, December 1, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Lisa Santola.

<sup>39</sup> Historic New England. *Gilman Garrison House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/gilman.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Historic New England. *Gilman Garrison House*.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Radcliffe Rogers and Stillman Rogers. *Insiders Guide: New Hampshire Off The Beaten Path, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (Kearney: Morris Book Publishing, LLC., 2007) 19.

<sup>42</sup> Historic New England. *Gilman Garrison House*,  
<http://www.historicnewengland.org/visit/homes/gilman.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Lisa Santola, interview by Christopher Ciesielski, December 1, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> SeacoastNH. *Rundlet-May House*,  
<http://seacoastnh.com/houses/rundletmay/index.html>.

<sup>45</sup> SeacoastNH. *Rundlet-May House*.

<sup>46</sup> SeacoastNH. *Rundlet-May House*.

<sup>47</sup> SeacoastNH. *Rundlet-May House*.

<sup>48</sup> Lisa Santola, interview by Christopher Ciesielski, December 1, 2009.

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Jackson House | [historicnewengland.org](http://historicnewengland.org)



Governor John Langdon House | [historicnewengland.org](http://historicnewengland.org)



Barrett House | [newhampshire.com](http://newhampshire.com)



Gilman Garrison House | [wwowens.com](http://wwowens.com)



Rundlet-May House | [historicnewengland.org](http://historicnewengland.org)