

VLR Listed: 4/20/1994  
NRHP Listed: 7/22/1994

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INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Clifton  
other names/site number VDHR File No. 81-288

**2. Location**

street & number N side SR 631, 2000' E of jct. w/US 11 not for publication N/A  
city or town Lexington vicinity x  
state Virginia code VA county Rockbridge code VA zip code 24450

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide x locally. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

W. C. Miller

5/4/94

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources** \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. (    See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet. Guynn M. Dugan 7/22/94 Entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

for Signature of Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_



8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance c. 1815-1860

Significant Dates c. 1815
1860

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation on file (NPS)
preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

- Primary Location of Additional Data
State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
X University
Other
Name of repository: Washington and Lee University Archives

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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Acreage of Property 24.7 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	639090	4183760	2	17	639310 4183670
3	17	639270	4183580	4	17	639030 4183670

     See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====  
**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

name/title Elizabeth Harralson

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 25 February 1994

street & number Route 5, Box 16 telephone 703-463-3979

city or town Lexington state VA zip code 24450

=====  
**Additional Documentation**  
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage  
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Clifton

Rockbridge County, Virginia

=====  
**Property Owner**  
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Elizabeth and John Harralson  
street & number Clifton, Route 5, Box 16 telephone 703-463-3979  
city or town Lexington state VA zip code 24450

=====  
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Clifton  
Rockbridge County, Virginia**

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

Clifton is located about 100 yards above the north bank of the Maury River, which was called the North River until 1945. It is surrounded by 26 acres of pasture, vestiges of the original 200-acre grant. The house is a two-story red-brick structure in the Valley Federal style. On the property is a small stone servant's quarters or foreman's house with one room on each floor and a fireplace on each floor. Additionally there is a wooden icehouse with double wooden walls that once were filled with sawdust for insulation. The house and its occupants have been closely linked with changes in transportation in western Virginia--first river, then canal, followed by rail, and finally highway. Clifton retains its rural setting despite encroachment by residential development.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

Clifton is located on a steep hill on the north bank of the Maury River. The main house is of two-stories and red brick, but because of the slope of the land the basement is above ground on the south and gives the house a three-story appearance. The house is built about two-thirds of the way up a steep sweeping slope. When the present owners purchased Clifton, the drive ascended the hill to the west of the house, and the lawn in front of the house undulated in regular terraces. In 1982, a circular drive was built from the road to the front of the house and the lawn circumscribed by the driveway was graded to a smooth surface. The driveway still curves around the west end of the house to the back and down to the east to the back of regular terraces, which oral tradition claims were slave made. The east side of the lawn slopes down more gently and is not terraced.

The front facade has seven bays--indicating that it is a wide house. However, the house is only one room deep except where the north wing was added. The gabled roof is covered with standing-seam metal and pierced by four chimneys. At the eaves of the front facade is a wide wooden cornice with double brackets that is certainly not original to the house but was probably added by 1860. The north wing and north facade still retain their original molded brick cornices. The brick facade of the house is mostly Flemish bond and is especially fine in the north wing. The color of the bricks is an unusual salmon color. However, where bricks have been uncovered in renovation, the original color was cocoa brown. The salmon color is a result of layers of paint of many colors, including brick red, white, and medium blue. On a protected part of the east wall of the north wing, evidence remains of penciled mortar, a popular nineteenth-century custom in this area. The front facade shows evidence of a previous porch and reveals that one of the first-story windows, the second bay from the left, has been bricked up. The Victorian porch and window changes were made by 1867. The earliest extant photo of Clifton, dated 1867, shows the front facade with the Victorian porch and windows as they are now. The windows and doorways are surmounted by flat brick lintels. There is an exterior entrance to the east basement room from the east side.

The west end wall brick shows evidence of major repairs that were made in 1982 by the present owners. The wall bulged from deteriorating brick damaged by moisture and contemporary bricks from a dilapidated slave quarters were used to repair the wall.

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The first-floor windows have nine-over-nine sashes while the basement and second-floor windows, which are smaller, have six-over-six sashes. In 1960 the original windows were replaced with reproduction windows.

A Victorian-period porch existed from sometime in the mid-nineteenth century until 1983. It was not, however, the original porch and no documentation could be found of what the original looked like. Thomas W. C. Craven, a Charlottesville architect, designed the present two-story portico based upon another Valley house of the same period, Stono, now owned by the VMI Foundation and, designed by John Jordan. Two wooden stairs approach from either side (east and west), and both first- and second-story decks have wooden floors supported by hollow wooden Doric columns. The portico is surmounted by classical pediment with a lunette. The front casing appears to be original and is distinguished by a rectangular transom ornamented with Chinese Chippendale fretwork.

The plan of the main floor consists of three large nearly square rooms arranged in a row across the front of the house. To the east end is a long narrow kitchen. On the north is a wing (which was added by the mid-nineteenth century) consisting of a large square room with a narrow passageway on the east side. The central entrance hall is sixteen feet by seventeen feet. Off this central entrance hall are three small wings to the west, north, and a larger one to the east.

In the mid-1970s, evidence of a stair was found in the northwest corner of the entrance hall. The stair was removed at some point and replaced by a stair that began in the southeast corner of this room and ascended behind the fireplace in the space between the entrance room and the dining room. This stair was quite narrow and steep and was removed in 1982. A new stair was built at that time in the southeast corner but not in exactly the original position. The wainscoting in the entrance hall is original yellow poplar formed from single boards twenty-three inches wide. The six-panel front door is a twentieth-century replacement. Over the front door is a rectangular transom with original tracery. The mantel in the entrance hall features vertically reeded flat pilasters. The flat frieze is very simple and is bordered on the sides by recessed panels. All the floors on the first and second floors are the original yellow pine except for the kitchen, bathrooms, and the stair. The stair is also yellow pine, but it is a recent addition.

To the west is a parlor seventeen feet by fifteen feet. Until 1982, the entrance hall and parlor were joined by a large nine-foot-wide doorway with a set of three 6-panel folding doors. This doorway was not original as the previously mentioned stair in the northwest corner would have been located here. In 1982 the present owners installed a stair near the location of the original stair and replaced the large opening between the entrance hall and parlor with a standard doorway with narrow double doors. The walls of the parlor were replaced in 1960 with wire lathe and plaster but the chair rail may be original. The mantel is original and is distinguished by fluted pilasters with decorative stops. Under the mantel shelf, the molding profile is *cyma recta*. The frieze is flat but is framed by decorative moldings. Below the frieze is a border of dentil molding, and above it is a dentil course interrupted regularly by gougework. Plain flat panels border the frieze on the side. Just below the mantel shelf is a convex band of vertical reeding. The bookshelves and cabinets on either side of the mantel are twentieth-century additions. There is a window on both the south and north sides of the west half of this room. The previously-mentioned bricked-up

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window is located on the south wall of this room and may have been bricked up when the partition between the parlor and entrance hall was changed in the nineteenth century.

To the north of the entrance hall is a room that was used as the master bedroom by all previous owners in this century. The present owners use it as a study. This room is sixteen feet by eighteen feet. The ceilings in this and the previously described two rooms measure nine and a quarter feet high. The west wall of this room features two tall, nine-over-nine-sash windows, while the north wall features a fireplace that has the simplest mantel of any on the first floor. The pilasters and panels bordering the flat frieze are in the form of recessed panels. To the right of the fireplace on the north wall is another tall window, also, nine-over-nine sash. On the east side of this north wing are located two long, narrow rooms that originally (until 1960) enclosed a staircase but now contain a small bar and bathroom.

To the east of the central hall are two small passages on the front and back of the house. Proceeding through either of these passageways, one reaches the dining room by descending two steps. This room is seventeen feet by seventeen feet and the ceiling is ten and a quarter feet high. This room has two windows on the south front balanced by two windows on the north back, as the house is only one room deep at this point. The east and west walls feature two doors each--a pleasant symmetrical Federal effect. The mantel in the dining room features pilasters with diagonal reeding, a flat frieze with a border of diagonal reeding across the top, and panels with herringbone reeding on the sides. The wainscoting and chair rail in this room are original. The wainscoting consists of flat panels outlined by beaded moldings. On the north wall the wainscoting shows evidence of a stair. A cousin of Houston Harlow, a former owner, remembered a dumbwaiter in the dining room which brought food from the basement kitchen. The floorboards show evidence of this dumbwaiter in the northeast corner.

By passing through either of two small passages on the east side of the dining room, one enters the kitchen. Like the dining room, the kitchen is the full depth of the house. Photographs from the 1940s show a chimney rising from the eastern kitchen wall and no front window in the kitchen. In 1960 Houston and Martha Harlow removed the partition that divided a pantry from a warming kitchen, removed the chimney and fireplace, and installed a front window and modern kitchen. The current owners have added a twelve foot by twelve foot breakfast room on the north side of the kitchen. This addition, the north wall of the dining room, and the east wall of the north wing form three sides of a recently added screened porch.

The floor plan is similar on the first and second floors, however the kitchen wing is only one story high. There is a full basement under the front three main rooms plus the kitchen, but the north wing has only a crawl space under it. The basement is reached by a stair from the back passage between the entrance hall and dining room.

The basement consists of four chambers that correspond to the southerly first-floor rooms. The Harlows had a concrete floor installed in 1960. The rooms under the dining room and entrance hall in the basement have large fireplaces that could have been used for cooking. Oral tradition holds that the winter kitchen was the room under the dining room. The windows on the south front of the house are six-over-six-sash and have the original frames and chestnut sills. The walls of all the basement rooms are decorated with lively



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murals painted in 1977 when Clifton was the site of the Yellow Brick Road Day Care Center.

On the second floor--over the parlor, study, and dining room--are three bedrooms. None of the fireplaces are still functioning, all having been sealed when flues were installed for the first-floor fireplaces in 1960. However, the mantel in the west bedroom is original as is the chair rail in this chamber. The mantel is distinguished by the same fluted piasters with decorative stops and a bold border of dentil work at the top edge of the flat frieze as in the parlor mantel.

The bedroom in the north wing over the study is now the master bedroom. The present owners had closets installed on the south wall of this room and a door cut between this bedroom and the west bedroom. The long narrow space on the east side of this wing was made into a closet and bathroom in 1960, but the present owners removed the partition in 1982 and made a master bath accessible from the north bedroom.

The space over the passages between the entrance hall and dining room has been altered to accommodate a modern bathroom, linen closet, and laundry area. The laundry area occupies the space where the stair previously ascended.

In the east guestroom is a large mantel with faux firebox and hearth. These were in 1960 for the Harlows' younger daughter who wanted a decorative if non-functioning fireplace in her bedroom. The mantel in this room is not original to Clifton.

The room over the entrance hall is at present used as a sitting room. The stair leads to this room, and from it are doorways to the three bedrooms and the upstairs porch. The pull-down ladder to the attic is in the northwest corner of this room.

There is disagreement among architectural historians about which is the oldest section of the house. A Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey completed in 1978 under the supervision of Pamela H. Simpson indicates that the original section is the two rooms on the west end facing south. Rafters in the attic of this section are hand-hewn and are pegged together, and hand-hewn timbers in the basement support the first floor.

The late Thomas W. C. Craven, a Charlottesville architect who specialized in late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century architecture, thought that the dining room section was the original section--basement and first floor with a half-story above. Supports in the basement under this section are also hand-hewn and evidence remains of a stair in the northwest corner of the dining room. The brick in the chimney on the exterior of this room are different from the bricks in the east facade, and Craven surmised that the chimney predated the brick facade and may have been part of a log or frame dwelling that was bricked over when two rooms were added to the west. There is no documentary evidence to support either hypothesis.

Both Simpson and Craven agree that the house was begun about 1815 as evidenced by the style of the interior woodwork and that the room to the north was added around 1840.

One of the most interesting aspects of this house's many transformations is the location of several previously existing stairs. As mentioned, according to the VHLC survey

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form there was evidence of a stair in the second-level floor boards of the central entrance room. Houston descendants remember a "back stair" on the east side of the north wing and which rose from the first floor to the second floor and continued to the attic. This stair was removed in 1960 when the Houston Harlows inherited the house and needed to install bathrooms on both the first and second floors. At the time the present owners purchased the house, the stair ascended from behind the fireplace in the central entrance room. The present owners removed this stair and relocated it near the location of the previous stair in this room in the northwest corner. There is also the previously-mentioned evidence of a stair in the northwest corner of the dining room.

In 1960, the house was extensively remodeled by Mr. and Mrs. Houston Harlow. They used the services of Lexington architect Henry Ravenhorst, and every effort was made to preserve original woodwork and floors where possible. Mr. and Mrs. Harlow inherited a house in serious disrepair and with little modernization. They installed the first electricity, hot water heater, and central heating system. The original plaster was replaced with wire lathe and plaster, and, as previously mentioned, windows were replace. A window was inserted in the south wall of the kitchen and a partition that divided the kitchen was removed so that a modern kitchen might be installed. They were responsible for the first modern bathrooms as well--one on the first floor and one on the second. In 1982, the present owners added a second bathroom upstairs in a former closet. In 1989, with the help of Charlottesville architect John D. Dalgliesh, Jr., the present owners added a breakfast room to the north side of the kitchen and remodeled the kitchen, In 1992, they roofed over the brick terrace for a screened porch.

Outbuildings include a stone cottage from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century to the southeast and a wooden building with double walls, probably originally intended as an icehouse. The stone cottage is thought to have served as an office for the farm and perhaps the farm manager's apartment. When the present owners purchased Clifton, the first-floor room of the stone cottage was partitioned into two small rooms. There is a fireplace on the east end of both the ground floor and the second floor. The present owners have removed the partition, put in a concrete floor, and built a salt-box addition on the north side to serve as a two-car garage.

The wooden icehouse is located to the southeast of both the stone cottage and the main house. Its date is unknown, but both the icehouse and the stone cottage appear in turn-of-the-twentieth-century photographs. It has a stone foundation that is in poor repair on the north side. The walls consist of double wooden walls--the exterior wall boards placed vertically, and the interior wall boards placed horizontally with a several-inch space between presumably to provide space for sawdust to insulate ice cut from the river during the winter. The steeply-pitched gable roof features a ventilation cupola that runs the full length of the ridgepole. There are also vents on either end in the siding. The walls and floor are in a good state of repair as is the standing-seam metal roof. Photographs from glass plate negatives that date from the turn-of-the-twentieth century indicate that as many as 15 other dependencies have been destroyed. These included poultry houses, stables, and a brick slave quarters with molded brick cornices. The brick slave quarters was demolished in 1982 in order to use its brick to repair the west wall of the main house. When the present owners purchased the property, one wall of this small building had fallen down and the roof had caved in. No archaeological survey has been conducted on the property.

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Clifton is an important example of Federal-style domestic architecture expressed in a form popular in the Valley of Virginia. It has large, nearly square rooms with floors of yellow pine, wainscoting, and chair rail, but no crown molding. The most decorative details in each room are the handsome but restrained mantel carvings. Except for a rather fanciful Chippendale fretwork rectangular light over the front door, this house reflects the simple, spare Presbyterian dignity of the people who built Clifton. Clifton is significant locally for its architecture. In addition, Clifton is important for its association with Major John Alexander. Alexander, a veteran of the War of 1812, alumnus of Washington College, and scion of the founding family of Rockbridge County, became a county leader in three areas--agriculture, military, and politics. He was a leading citizen with wide influence.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Clifton's proximity to the river meant that its occupants were affected by changes in modes of transportation, floods, and freezes. From 1810 until 1852 the North River was navigable by batteau from Rockbridge County to the Tidewater. A canal with a series of locks was opened to East Lexington in 1852. Although freight moved on the canal from 1852, it was not until 15 November 1860 that the first passenger-carrying packet boat reached Lexington, establishing a regular line of boats between the village and Richmond. Although subject to blockages by floods and freezes, the canal furnished the area's most important mode of transportation until the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s. Bateaux and packets regularly passed in front of Clifton on their way to the warfs located westward a quarter mile up the river.

In October 1881, river transportation was supplanted by the opening of the C&O railroad spur from Buena Vista. The train came toward Lexington along what is now the Chessie Trail, turned up the east leg of the river fork which borders Clifton on the east for 900 feet. Then the train backed down the west leg of the river fork past the front yard of Clifton, across the railroad bridge and up the hill behind VMI and Washington and Lee University to the train station. This great advance in transportation and improvement in both freight and passenger service must have been greeted with mixed feelings by the then-inhabitants of Clifton--certainly they experience a great trade-off. The noise and vibrations of the trains, plus the intrusion on their privacy must have seemed a great price to pay.

The residents of the house were profoundly affected by the river, the canal, and the railroad--several Alexanders were merchants who shipped by canal boat and Finley Willson Houston was a cress and hog farmer who shipped his produce by train. The railway served Lexington with freight and passenger service until Hurricane Camille in 1969 washed out the South River railroad bridge.

The first owner of the Clifton tract was Benjamin Borden, who sold it to James Randalls in 1747. Richard and John Randalls, who sold Clifton to William Alexander in February 1776, may have been James Randalls's sons, brothers, or nephews.

William Alexander was one of the most important figures in Rockbridge County in the second half of the eighteenth century. He was the first sheriff of the county, a trustee of Liberty Hall Academy from 1782 until his death in 1797, and an elder at Monmouth and

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later the Lexington Presbyterian Church. It is unclear whether William Alexander ever lived at Clifton, but he did live somewhere on North River. In 1778, he purchased a piece of land where Woods Creek meets the North River, presumably part of Jordan's Point. There he built a house and store where he and his family lived until 1789 when he built the Alexander-Withrow House in the town of Lexington to house his business and family. He owned six of the half-acre tracts marked off when the town of Lexington was created.

Maj. John Alexander, the third son of William and Agnes Ann Reid Alexander, was born at North River on 28 March 1776. He was a farmer and a military man, and in all the Alexander family records he is referred to as "Maj. John" in order to differentiate him from his uncle. Major John Alexander is the first Alexander known to have lived in Clifton. William Alexander died on 2 May 1797, leaving John the land in his will which stated, "I give and bequeath to my son John the land I purchased of Richard and John Reynolds (sic) lying on the North side of the North River and bounded by the River, Mill Creek, William Ramsys, John Thompsons and James Caruthers lands." The farm consisted of 200 acres, but whether there was a dwelling is not documented.

In 1797, when John Alexander inherited the farm, he was twenty-one years old. He qualified as a lieutenant in the 8th Regiment, Virginia Militia, on 28 September 1799, was named commissioner of tax revenue for the Southeastern District of Rockbridge County on 18 October 1799, and graduated from Washington College in 1803. Dr. William Ruffner, a local historian who remembered the Alexander brothers from his childhood, wrote that John Alexander inspected the troops on general muster day.

Something of the man excited in me that hero-worshipping spirit which seems to belong to all boys. He was the only one of his family, so far as I know, who had the soldierly bearing and taste. He had the look and movement of the soldier, with also the tenderness of the bravest. As he walked the street, his robust frame, bluff, honest countenance, bold step and military carriage excited my boyish admiration; and this admiration became enthusiasm, when on general muster day with the regiment in line on Main St., stretching from the courthouse nearly on the head of town and fronting west, Major Alexander, mounted on his magnificent charger, Pompey, would ride in front of the line with red sash and drawn sword. The Major was no mere holiday soldier; he had acquired his title in the army of 1812. At the time I speak of, he was inspector of the Brigade, which took him into a number of counties, whither he traveled with a mounted drummer and fifer, to be used in drilling the officers in each county, for three days before the general muster. His visit was the great event of the year. He was himself so grand, and like Cadmus, he seemed to call up from the unknown a host of armed men. But the major had social and pastoral qualities equal to his military. He would hail even the small boy on the road with a loud cheery salutation and he kissed the old ladies whom he loved when they were all young, and passed lightly, though not slightly, over their more beautiful daughters. He was honestly affectionate with his friends, and genial with all. Good sense, courage and cheerfulness were his daily characteristics. He, of course, was a church member--who ever saw an Alexander of this family, who was not a church-member? And he was an elder who served faithfully for forty-seven years. In business, though always honest, he was careful, and he required full duty of his slaves. He had large property, many different interests, and a large household, with a wide circle of visiting friends, and a ready invitation for the stranger. It required all of his fine practical judgment and untiring energy to manage his business successfully. His 'Clifton' farm was one of

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the best and my impression is that he was considered one of the best farmers in the county. He raised big crops, and kept his land improving. His watchword was 'clover.' The contents of the barnyard went to the poor spots, and he kept the land turning under the plow. Like his father, his brother, and his son, the Major was a Washington College trustee from 1812 until his death in 1853. His vigorous constitution enabled him to continue his activity without abatement until he was stricken down by apoplexy at the age of seventy-seven. He trained his own colts until the last. He considered himself the best rider on the farm and no doubt he was— up to the time of his death.

As Ruffner mentioned, Alexander was a trustee of Washington College from 1812 until 1853, and the trustees' minutes indicate that he was frequently assigned practical responsibilities such as "seeing to the repair of that part of the building which was injured by a late storm," or being named to the committee to make an accurate survey of the college land and determine what could and should be sold (the committee subsequently recommended that none of the land should be sold). With Samuel McDowell Reid, he was responsible for the sale of John Robinson's Slaves, which were left to Washington College in Robinson's estate.

Alexander's first wife, Elizabeth Lyle, was his first cousin on his father's side. She bore two children, one of whom was William Lyle Alexander. William Lyle Alexander graduated from Washington College and moved to Alleghany County where he operated an iron furnace named Clifton Forge after his home place.

After Elizabeth Lyle died in 1803 at age 23, Alexander then married another first cousin and another Elizabeth. She was Elizabeth Reid, daughter of Andrew Reid and Magdalen McDonald. She bore eight children and outlived Major John by 17 years.

When Major John Alexander died on 10 November 1853, all his effects were inventoried and the inventory was recorded in the Will Book in the Rockbridge County Courthouse along with the results of the sale of the household goods and the slaves. His widow, Elizabeth Reid Alexander, bought most of the household effects and continued to live at Clifton. In 1862 John McDowell Alexander, one of her sons, broke up the farm and sold off all but 17 1/2 acres. She purchased the house and the 17 1/2 acres but the amount of the sale was not included in the deed.

Major John's son Arch became a merchant like his grandfather William Alexander. At first he rented a warehouse at Jordan's Point, but later he relocated his warehouse on the north side of the river, approximately 300 yards below the covered bridge. He continued to operate his business, later known as Clifton Warehouse, until September 1876.

On 2 July 1867, Elizabeth Alexander sold Clifton and its accompanying acres to William Preston Johnston and his wife, Rosa. William Preston Johnston was the son of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, a legend and icon of the Confederacy, killed at Shiloh and considered by Southerners a martyr for the Southern cause. At the time he came to Lexington, William Preston Johnston was a 36-year-old Yale-educated lawyer who had enjoyed a successful practice in Louisville, Kentucky, before the war. During the war, he had served as Jefferson Davis's aide-de-camp. At war's end, Johnston returned to Louisville but was unable to overcome the stigma of a Confederate history in a border area. Lee

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Rockbridge County, Virginia

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invited Johnston to join the faculty of Washington College. Johnston was extremely grateful for the opportunity to make a living to support his six children.

During the first few years, the Johnstons enjoyed relative prosperity--and socializing with General and Mrs. Lee. At Clifton the Johnstons enjoyed visits from General Lee, who watched the rowing crews, Albert Sidney and Harry Lee, work out on the river in front of the house. The names of the two clubs were taken, presumably by the students themselves, from the distinguished fathers of Johnston and Lee.

Johnston was employed as a full professor until June 1872, when he took a leave of absence to devote his full attention to the biography of his father, Albert Sidney Johnston. He formally resigned in June 1874 in order to have time to complete the work. He spent six years writing the book, mostly at Clifton, and the published volume ran to more than 700 pages of closely documented material. This work is still regarded as a seminal and definitive biography of this significant Civil War figure.

In the autumn of 1877, when the fortunes of the family were at their lowest ebb, the second daughter, Henrietta, was married to Henry St. George Tucker, a rising young lawyer, who afterward served in Congress for several terms. So difficult was the financial situation for the Johnstons that only the insistence of the prospective bridegroom and the management of Mrs. Johnston prevented a postponement of the wedding date. Mrs. Johnston wrote to Colonel Johnston's sister, "The girls took charge of the house and decorated beautifully with flowers. We did all we could to make Clifton look pretty for the occasion and Aunt Emily and I did our best for the supper and everyone says it was a great success. After getting Henny ready the rest of us will have to be very quiet for awhile."

In the summer of 1876, Johnston mortgaged Clifton to Washington and Lee University to help defray his family's income. In 1880, Johnston and his family left Lexington for him to assume the presidency of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. The university's trustees were divided in their goals, and the infighting made Johnston's three-year tenure there quite unbearable. In 1883, Johnston accepted the presidency of a new institution that was to be founded in New Orleans due to the generosity of Paul Tulane. For the next sixteen years, Johnston served with distinction as Tulane's first president. He also served on the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution until his death on 16 July 1899, at Col Alto, the home of his daughter Henrietta in Lexington, Virginia.

When William Preston and Rosa Johnston left Lexington, Washington and Lee University had guaranteed loans to the Johnstons with Clifton as collateral. The house was sold on 1 October 1883 for \$4,000 to John J. Gillock to satisfy the debt on the mortgage. Apparently, Gillock defaulted on his payments because the house was auctioned on 8 October 1887 to B. L. Partlow for \$2,790. Partlow immediately sold the property to the Lexington Development Co., for \$6,000. Robert K. Godwin headed Lexington Development Co., and intended, according to Lyle and Simpson, to build new streets and houses on the property at Clifton. The proposal was abandoned with the company's bankruptcy in 1892. In Deed Book 79, there is a chancery suit listed against the Lexington Development Co. by B. L. Partlow and the property was again brought to public auction. The property was transferred from the purchaser, Robert K. Godwin, to R. S. Anderson when Godwin was arrested and

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Rockbridge County, Virginia

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convicted for making false entries with Godwin's brother-in-law, Charles M. Figgat, absconded with \$145,000 of the Bank of Lexington's capital stock and deposits.

In Deed Book 85 it is recorded that on 17 April 1897, F. W. Houston and Mrs. Grace A. Houston purchased Clifton for \$2,600. Finley Willson Houston was the quartermaster at Virginia Military Institute from 1885 until 1902 when he resigned to become the president of the Gazette Publishing Co. He also engaged actively in the growth and shipment of watercress, produced in quantity in the waters of Colliers and Buffalo Creeks.

The Houstons had three lively daughters, Ann Bruce, Annette Louise, and Mary Alexander Houston. The girls enjoyed riding, shooting, fishing and rowing on the river, ice skating in the winter, and amateur photography. The eldest daughter, Bruce, was one of the founders of the national sorority Zeta Tau Alpha at the teachers' college at Farmville.

The second daughter Annette married Benjamin F. Harlow 7 September 1905 at Clifton. In 1916, F. W. Houston had a heart attack and asked Ben and Annette to take over the running of the Gazette and the care of Clifton. Maj. Houston died in 1926, leaving Clifton to Annette.

Ben and Annette Harlow had one son, Finley Houston Harlow, who was born in 1913. He grew up at Clifton and after World War II he took over the management of the Lexington Gazette from his father, B. F. Harlow Jr.

When Annette Houston Harlow died in 1960, Finley Houston Harlow and his wife Martha inherited a crumbling dwelling. They renovated and modernized the house and enjoyed living there until Houston Harlow died of cancer at age 58 in 1972. Martha Harlow continued to live at Clifton alone until 1 August 1977, when she sold the property to Paul and Nancy Leonhard. Martha Harlow died in 1980.

The Leonhards planned to open a day-care center at Clifton which Nancy called Yellow Brick Road. It did, in fact, begin in the basement of Clifton, but met there for only one year as the house did not meet the state standards for child care institutions. Yellow Brick Road was moved to the undercroft of R. E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church in the summer of 1978 and now boasts some 600 alumni.

In the summer of 1982, the Leonhards and the present owners of Clifton, the Harralsons, agreed to trade houses. The Harralsons' house on Jackson Ave. was one of six houses built by Robert K. Godwin as speculation houses in the late 1880s and known as Godwin's Row.

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Rockbridge County, Virginia**

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary of the nominated property is described in the Tax Maps of Rockbridge County, Virginia, as Parcel 61-A1-((A))-40, Parcel 61-A1-((A))-40, Parcel 61-A1-((A))-40, together comprising 24.7 acres.

**Boundary Justification**

The area included is the 24.7-acre portion of the original 200 acre Borden Grant historically associated with Clifton that has not been subdivided and is considered essential to preserve the rural setting of the resource.

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All photographs are of:

CLIFTON  
Rockbridge County, Virginia  
VDHR File Number: 81-288  
Elizabeth Harralson, photographer

All Negatives are stored with the Department of Historic Resources collection at the Virginia State Library and Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: southeast corner, main house; view looking north  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 1 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: south elevation, main house; view looking northeast  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 2 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: south elevation, main house; view looking northeast  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 3 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: west elevation, main house; view looking east  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 4 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: northwest corner of north wing, main house; view  
looking south  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 5 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: northeast corner, main house; view looking  
northwest  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 6 OF 32

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**Clifton  
Rockbridge County, Virginia**

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DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: east elevation; view looking west  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 7 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: southwest corner, stone outbuilding; view looking  
          northeast  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 8 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: southeast corner, stone outbuilding; view looking  
          north  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 9 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior east wall, ground floor, stone  
          outbuilding; view looking southeast  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 10 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior west wall, upper floor, stone outbuilding;  
          view looking northwest  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 11 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior east wall, upper floor, stone outbuilding;  
          view looking southeast  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 12 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: northwest corner of wood icehouse; view looking  
          southeast  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 13 OF 32

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National Park Service

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Clifton  
Rockbridge County, Virginia

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DATE: Autumn 1992

VIEW OF: southwest corner of wood icehouse; view looking  
east

NEG. NO.: 13590

PHOTO 14 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior southeast corner of wood icehouse;  
view looking south

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 15 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992

VIEW OF: floor joists, basement under entrance hall, main  
house; view looking east

NEG. NO.: 13590

PHOTO 16 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992

VIEW OF: interior east wall, entrance hall; view looking  
east

NEG. NO.: 13590

PHOTO 17 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior northwest corner, entrance hall; view  
looking west

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 18 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior west wall, entrance hall, view looking  
west

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 19 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior south wall including interior front door,  
entrance hall; view looking south

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 20 OF 32

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Rockbridge County, Virginia

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DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: exterior south front door; view looking northeast  
NEG NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 21 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: interior east wall, dining room; view looking east  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 22 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior west wall, dining room; view looking  
          northwest  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 23 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992  
VIEW OF: interior northwest corner, dining room; view  
          looking north  
NEG. NO.: 13590  
PHOTO 24 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior west wall, dining room; view looking west  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 25 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior south corner, dining room; view looking  
          south  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 26 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior northeast corner, dining room; view  
          looking east  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 27 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994  
VIEW OF: interior wet wall, parlor; view looking west  
NEG. NO.: 13591  
PHOTO 28 OF 32

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**Clifton  
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DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior southwest corner, parlor; view looking  
west

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 29 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior northwest corner, parlor; view looking  
north

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 30 OF 32

DATE: 7 February 1994

VIEW OF: interior southeast corner, parlor; view looking  
south

NEG. NO.: 13591

PHOTO 31 OF 32

DATE: Autumn 1992

VIEW OF: interior northeast wall of study; view looking  
north

NEG. NO.: 13590

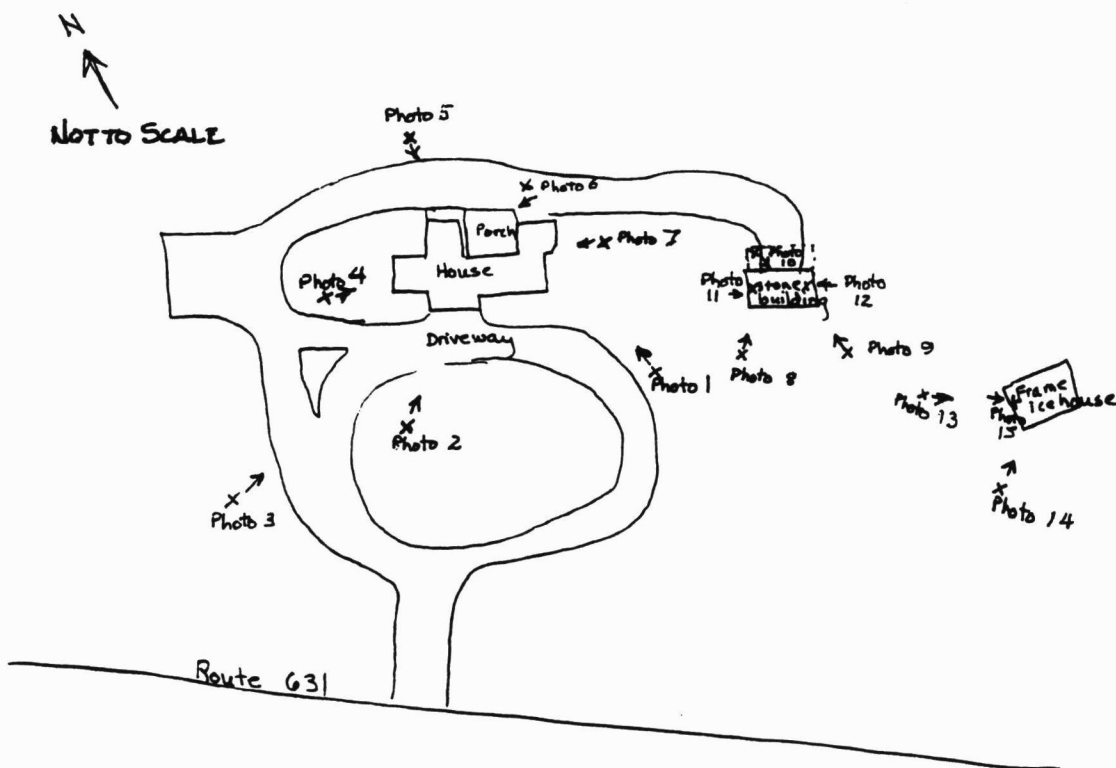
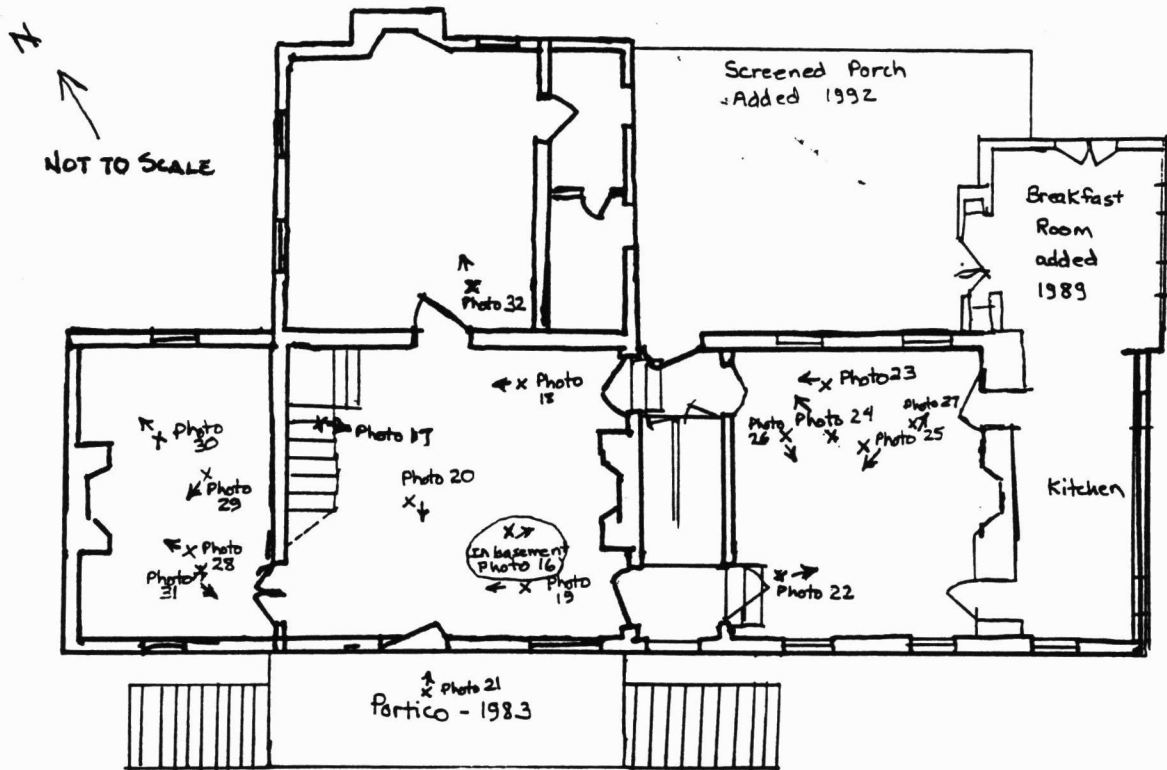
PHOTO 32 OF 32

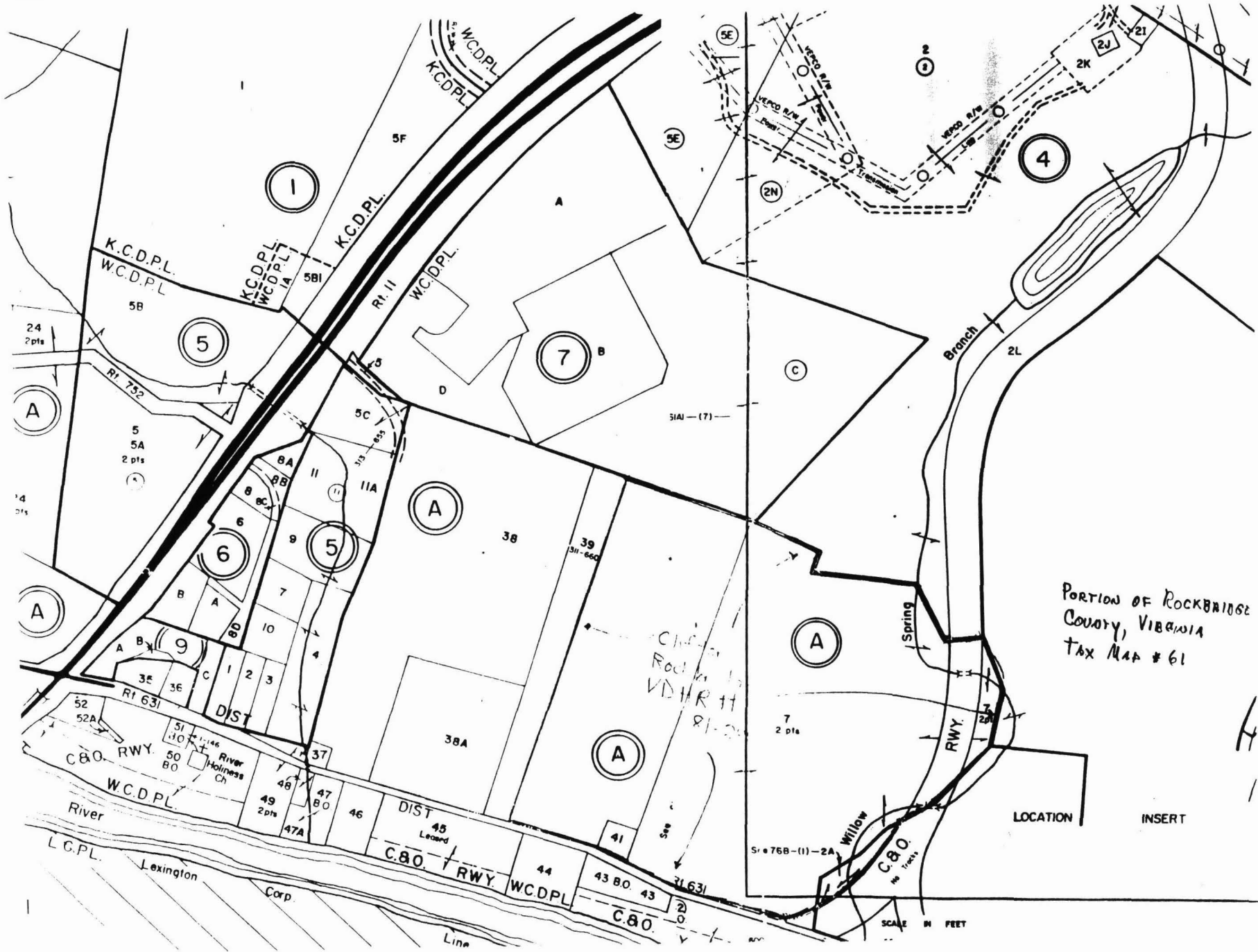
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Section Sketch Map Page 18

Clifton  
Rockbridge County, Virginia



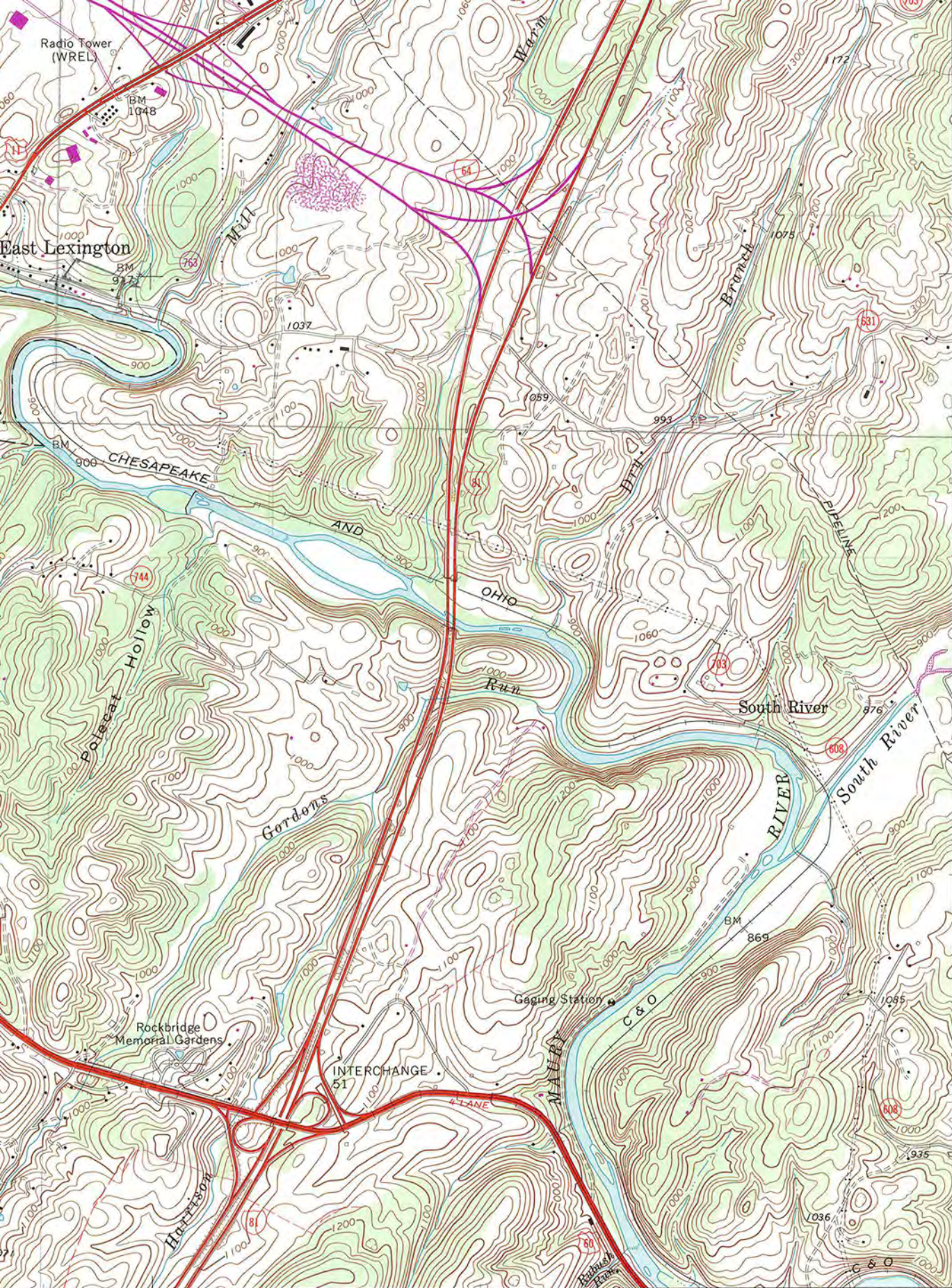


PORTION OF ROCKBRIDGE  
 COUNTY, VIRGINIA  
 TAX MAP # 61

LOCATION INSERT

SCALE IN FEET

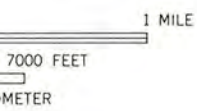




4184 CLIFTON  
 ROCKBRIDGE CO VA  
 47'30"  
 UTM REFERENCES:  
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 2 17|639310|4183670  
 3 17|639270|4183580  
 4 17|639030|4183670

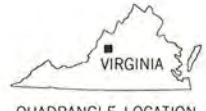
4183  
 4182  
 4181  
 4180000m.N.

639 25' 8 MI. TO INTERCHANGE 50 ROANOKE 46 MI. 641000m.E. 37°45' 79°22'30"



**ROAD CLASSIFICATION**  
 Primary highway, all weather, hard surface Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface   
 Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route



LEXINGTON, VA.  
 SW/4 LEXINGTON 15' QUADRANGLE

(BUENA VISTA)  
 5159 III NE