

# The hall the Cluffs built, Part 1

By D. ROBERT CARTER (208-489-8256) Daily Harold, Provo, Utah (Sunday, April 24, 2005)

For slightly more than four decades, a large, two-story, adobe building stood on the northeast corner of the intersection of 200 North and 200 East.

This structure once claimed the title of Provo's largest building. For years it served as the growing settlement's main social center and manufacturing hub. Residents called it Cluff Hall, and Provo's Cluff family felt proud to have it bear their name. After all, it was largely their industry, perseverance, skill and hard work that built it.

David Cluff Sr., the patriarch of Provo's Cluff clan, hailed from Nottingham, N.H., where he learned the shipbuilding trade. At age 29, David and his first mate, Elizabeth "Betsy" Hall, launched their life together on matrimonial waters. The Cluff crew eventually grew to include 11 sons and a solitary daughter. Betsy also raised the son of David's second mate, Hannah Chapman, so there were actually 12 boys in the family.

While traveling on a canal boat in about 1830, David met Martin Harris, who was serving his first mission for the LDS Church. Harris interested Cluff in Mormonism, and David's family joined the new religion. In order to gather with fellow church members, the Cluffs moved to Kirtland, Ohio, and then on to Nauvoo, Ill.

In 1850, the family started for the Great Basin in the Edward Hunter Company. They arrived in Salt Lake City in early October. After spending a few days in that city, the Cluffs traveled south to Provo, where they arrived on Oct. 8 and camped on the Provo River near Fort Utah.

According to Betsy's biography, she sat on the wagon tongue following supper that night and surveyed their situation. After taking a good look at the shabby condition of the fort and the wild-looking country surrounding it, she spoke in a disheartened voice, "So, this is Provo, where we have come to make our future home. The outlook is dreary; the future is not very bright."

Her young son Benjamin overheard her dejected soliloquy and replied, "Mother, remember the old adage, 'The darkest hour is just before the dawn of day.' "

This response somewhat cheered the pioneer mother, and she responded in a slightly more positive tone, "Yes, my son, we will hope for the best and put our trust in the Lord who has never failed us."

The Cluffs soon moved into Provo's second fort located near the present North Park at 500 North and 500 West. Being an experienced carpenter, David found ample work in the growing frontier community. Like most other settlers, he also took up farming to ensure a ready supply of food for his family.

As soon as trouble with the Utes subsided enough to make life outside the fort safe, David and some of his older sons chose city lots and began to move onto them. Most of the first Cluff lots were located on three blocks near what is now the center of Provo: the current tabernacle block, the block just north of it and the block immediately north of the historic Utah County Courthouse.

In 1852, David Cluff, one of his sons (likely David Jr.) and Ross R. Rogers opened a carpentry shop in a small adobe building near the northeast corner of the tabernacle block.

The Deseret News printed a February 1852 letter David wrote to Willard Richards. In this missive, Cluff announced the opening of the cabinet shop and wrote enthusiastically, "We manufacture almost all kinds of furniture out of the best of seasoned Box Elder; and we have now on hand the choicest kind of Box Elder, from 12 to 30 inches in width, and it is equal, if not superior, to eastern maple for dining tables."

Cluff likely cut most of his box elder from the virgin groves bordering the Provo River.

About a year after Cluff founded the Provo cabinet shop, his oldest son, David Cluff Jr. was called to Parowan to establish a cabinet business in that small southern Utah community. He did cabinet work and farmed in Parowan for about six years.

In the spring of 1859, David Jr. attended LDS general conference in Salt Lake City. Shortly thereafter, he asked church authorities for, and received, permission to return to Provo to re-enter the cabinet business on a larger scale.

When David Jr. arrived back in Provo, several of his brothers still lived in town. His father was serving an LDS mission in Canada and the eastern United States. His brother William, who had just returned from a mission to Hawaii, soon left Provo again in September 1859 destined for a mission to Denmark.

It had long been Father Cluff's wish "that his sons should unite in business and pull together." David Jr. and several of his brothers -- likely Moses, Benjamin and Harvey -- started a cooperative business venture early in 1860. They began construction of a 60-by-36-foot, two-story, adobe building on the corner of 200 North and 200 East.

Since none of the brothers had much ready cash, the people of Provo regarded the project "as an undertaking entirely too great for the 'Cluff boys.'" Regardless of local opinion, they started building. Each brother's interest in the structure equaled the amount of labor, material and money he invested in it.

The brothers may not have been able to raise a large amount of hard cash, but they showed themselves capable of raising a large building. They achieved their goal by hard work. The Cluffs dug the excavation, hauled rock and sand, cut logs and transported them to the mill. They made the adobe bricks and prepared the mortar. In fact, they did almost everything but put in the foundation and lay the adobe. John Watkins, Provo's master mason, put up the walls.

The Cluff boys raised roof trusses that they had expertly fastened together with wooden pegs. Since the iron nails made by local blacksmiths were expensive, they used wooden pegs as fasteners wherever they could in the building.

The result of their labors towered above all of Provo's other buildings. Travelers frequently visited the east part of town just to see Cluff Hall, as it came to be called.

A letter written to the Deseret News in August 1860 described the new structure. The paper said the Cluffs installed a cabinet shop on the lower level. The west room contained a lathe, two circular saws and an upright saw.

A 10-foot-tall by four-foot -wide undershot waterwheel -- a wheel propelled by the water that ran under it -- provided power to run the machinery. The East Union Canal, a cooperative effort of the

Cluffs and other families who owned land in the bench area of Provo in the 1850s (roughly the area east of 200 West), provided water to run the wheel.

The Cluffs used the east room on the lower level as a place to construct furniture. The brothers kept a stock of furnishings on hand for customers to choose from. Their new business commenced during the fall of 1860.

The second story of Cluff Hall contained a painting room and a large multi-purpose room used as a school, dance hall, meeting room and theater.

After inspecting the structure, the News correspondent complimented the Cluff brothers by stating: "The boys deserve great credit for the industry and perseverance they have shown thus far in this undertaking. People spoke discouragingly and some manifested opposition, but the boys stuck to their text and have succeeded almost beyond their expectations."

The Deseret News recognized David Cluff Jr.'s skill as a carpenter and cabinet maker. In October 1860, the News stated, "Cluff's specimens of carpentry would do honor to any builder." The newspaper also referred to Cluff Hall as "a first class building in design, and also in strength."

Provo occupied what was likely the best site for settlement in the Great Basin. It was blessed with good soil and ample water for irrigation and manufacturing. LDS leaders expected the people of Provo to use these resources to rapidly develop into a manufacturing center, but to their dismay, progress came slowly.

The Deseret News hoped the construction of Cluff Hall indicated that the people of Provo were finally beginning "to realize their natural advantages, and we trust before long she will become a first class manufacturing city."

David and Harvey carried on the furniture-making business for many years, and they provided employment for local artisans. D.F. William Christiansen, a recent convert to Mormonism, was one of these craftsmen. He arrived in the Great Basin in 1864 and worked for Dinwoody's Furniture in Salt Lake City for a short time before moving to Provo, where he found employment working for the Cluffs.

Christiansen made and repaired wagons and built coffins. He also made dolls, sleighs, rocking horses and wagons for children. He left Provo to live in Pleasant Grove in 1868.

In addition to his work as a cabinetmaker, David Jr. built coffins in Cluff Hall, and he performed the duties of an undertaker. For a few years, his showroom was in the Lewis Building on the corner of Center Street and 300 West.

When David Cluff Jr. left for a mission to Australia in 1875, he sold his interest in the furniture business to George White.

Harvey Cluff remained in the furniture business and took a partner named Booth. In 1877, Cluff and Booth built a two-story, 22-by-40-foot adobe furniture store on the east side of Center Street between University Avenue and 100 East.

After David Jr. returned from his Australian mission, he took up the undertaking business once more. His July 9, 1881, ad in Provo's Territorial Enquirer reads: "The oldest and only Undertaker in Provo

that keeps a full and complete stock of Undertakers goods on hand. Coffins, from the cheapest to the most elaborately trimmed, furnished on short notice at the old stand."

Several types of activities began in the upstairs multi-purpose room soon after it was finished in the fall of 1860. The LDS Church used local industrial and agricultural fairs to encourage improvement and foster unity in each settlement. Local leaders held Provo's fair in Cluff Hall in 1860 and for several succeeding years.

The Deseret News reported that in addition to the regular fruits, vegetables and manufactured articles, the fair held in Cluff Hall in 1865 included "good home-made cloth, some exquisite needle work and penmanship, and a few curiosities." (Curiosities were likely common in Provo.)

The Cluffs sponsored the first public dances in their hall at Christmastime in 1860. The family donated all of the money they made to help buy a bell for Provo's first tabernacle, which stood just north of Provo's current tabernacle.

Samuel Sampson Cluff remembered that first dance for the rest of his life. In a roundabout way, it helped win him a wife. Twenty-four-year-old Samuel decided he was ready for marriage and selected Miss Frances Worsley as his potential partner. Three grand dances were scheduled for the holiday season in 1860, and Samuel asked Frances to be his partner for the first one. Possibly playing hard to get, she refused his invitation, claiming she had already been asked.

Samuel formulated a plan of action that through the years has trapped more than one wily female. Without delay, he asked Miss Whipple, one of Provo's foremost belles, to accompany him to the dance. She accepted without hesitation.

On the night of the grand ball, Frances immediately noticed Samuel enter the new hall with Miss Whipple on his arm. Samuel caught the cagey girl of his dreams in his trap. Frances immediately changed her mind about wanting Samuel to court her. She accepted his next invitation.

According to Frances's sage suitor, "The flame of love kept burning brighter and brighter until on the 19th day of May, 1861 ... we were united in the holy bonds of matrimony."

Other dances of a similar type occurred in Cluff Hall throughout the following years. In November 1865, Provo held a ball in honor of Daniel H. Wells. According to the Deseret News, "Dancing continued until a late hour, and all went merry as a marriage bell."

A variety of other public and private activities occurred in the hall during the 1860s. The Deseret News reported public lectures being held there every Tuesday evening during the winter of 1863. Each week the hall saw "large and attentive audiences, which speaks the interest that is taken in them."

The fact that two choirs and a band presented music during these meetings likely helped keep the audience awake and attentive.

Pending the completion of the Provo Meeting House (first tabernacle), citywide Sunday religious services took place in Cluff Hall. On rare occasions, the congregation attending these meetings heard a plea for tolerance similar to that recorded in the Minutes of Provo Stake on December 12, 1866: "The gentiles would [like to] come among us, we must receive them at our gates in a friendly manner, Not curse them simply because they are gentiles." The upcoming Christmas season apparently helped soften the normally bombastic rhetoric heard over the pulpit in early Provo.

In the fall of 1877, other LDS Church groups also used Cluff Hall. Provo's Second Ward outgrew the small adobe building they were using for a schoolhouse and a church. The ward temporarily used Cluff Hall until a larger building could be erected a half block west of the original one.

Even Provo's small but growing Masonic Lodge used Cluff Hall. For about nine months in 1872, the lodge leased the hall before moving their meetings to Benjamin Bachman's house.

In a very broad sense, Cluff Hall served as the preexistence of Brigham Young Academy's development. In 1861, Warren Dusenberry taught school in Provo's LDS First Ward. The next year he rented Cluff Hall for \$50 a month and started a school of his own. He made the desks himself.

Dusenberry left his school to start a private business and serve an LDS mission in 1865. When he returned to Provo in 1869, he and his brother Wilson started a school in the Kinsey Building. It was so successful, they expanded to the Lewis Building on 300 West Center Street.

They used the same desks in the Lewis Building that Warren had manufactured for his school in Cluff Hall. This new institution became known as the Timpanogos Branch of the University of Deseret which became the predecessor of Brigham Young Academy. So, you see, it all started in Cluff Hall.

**To be continued... See "From footlights to foundry - Cluff Hall, Part 2"**

### **David Cluff Sr.**

David Cluff Sr. learned of Mormonism from Martin Harris while both men were traveling on a canal boat in about 1830. After converting to the new religion, Cluff lived in Kirtland and Nauvoo. In 1850, he moved his family to the Great Basin and settled in Provo. Cluff, one of his sons and Ross R. Rogers founded what may have been the settlement's first cabinet shop in a small adobe building on the northeast corner of the current tabernacle block. --Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah

### **Benjamin Cluff**

In the fall of 1850, young Benjamin Cluff tried to soften his mother's disappointment in the rough and tawdry appearance of Fort Utah. He became a partner in the construction of Cluff Hall 10 years later. -- Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah

### **Cluff Hall**

Provo's Cluff Hall, constructed by David Cluff Jr. and three of his brothers in 1860, stood on the northeast corner of the intersection of 200 North and 200 East. The original hall is the adobe building seen at the right. The first floor served as a cabinet shop. A small paint room and a large multipurpose room filled the second floor. This picture was likely taken about 1901. -- J.B. Walton Collection

### **Furniture Ad**

This advertisement from the 1873 Provo Daily Times shows that in addition to manufacturing furniture, David Cluff Jr. was selling furniture brought to Utah Territory by the transcontinental railroad. Cluff also built custom-made coffins. He accepted grain for payment in lieu of money. -- Provo Daily Times.

### **Samuel S. Cluff**

Samuel Cluff remembered the first dance in Cluff Hall for the rest of his life. He won his future wife's heart at that dance by initiating a rather crafty plan of action.-- Pioneer and Prominent Men of Utah