

have been familiar with the writings of Benjamin Franklin. According to Thomas Jefferson, Franklin's treatises were required reading at the time. In addition, Charles Willson Peale confirmed Clark's design. On July 14, 1788, he and his brother went to Philadelphia to see His Excellency Doctor Franklin to ask his opinion on the efficacy of lightning rods on the State House. They were unable to see Franklin, but did see Robert Patterson and David Rittenhouse, both eminent authorities on the physical sciences. Peale reported that Mr. Rittenhouse was of the opinion that "if the points are good and near enough the Building and the part going into the ground so deep as to get into soft earth no danger is to be apprehended, but if the end could be put in water of a Well it would be best."

The engineering of the lightning rod and the acorn which holds it in place represents an astonishing achievement. Protruding 28' into the air, the rod is anchored at its bottom to the top of the dome. It then runs through the pedestal of the acorn and the acorn and is surmounted by a weather vane in the shape of a fish. The acorn and pedestal have served to stabilize the Franklin rod and hold it in place through 208 years of extremes of Maryland weather.

Although the exterior of the dome was completed by 1788, the interior was not completed until 1797. Tragedy struck the project in 1793 when a plasterer named Thomas Dance fell to his death from the inside of the dome. By 1794, Joseph Clark was completely disillusioned with the project and left it to John Shaw, the noted Annapolis cabinetmaker, to complete. Over the years, John Shaw did much of the maintenance work on the State House, built various items for it and, in 1797, made the desks and chairs which furnished the Old Senate Chamber. Although these pieces were given in 1835 to John Needles of Baltimore as partial payment for new furnishings, some of them have been returned to the room, including the president's desk and chair. Others have found their way into museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Clark's life was marred by tragedy: his brother Stephen died in 1792, followed shortly by the death of both of his sons. Clark alleged that the State House project put him 17,000 pounds in debt, and his business dealings with Robert Morris of Philadelphia cost him another 49,000 pounds. He did, however, deliver an eloquent oration as grand master pro tem at the laying of the cornerstone of the new U.S. Capitol in 1793. He died in Baltimore on April 26, 1798. In 1828, his only surviving child, Mary S. Magee, petitioned the General Assembly for relief from her father's debts, including money thought to still be owed from the state. The petition was never answered.

The dome which Clark designed and built for the State House has been the defining landmark of the Annapolis skyline for 208 years. It was also, for many years, a popular spot from which to observe the city and the Chesapeake Bay beyond. Charles Willson Peale planned a dramatic cyclorama of Annapolis with eight views from the dome and a centerpiece drawing of State Circle from Cornhill Street. Only the drawing of the State House was completed and published in 1789. In 1777, Thomas Jefferson reported spending a most enjoyable evening on the balcony of the dome with an Annapolis friend who entertained him with the gossip related to each of the houses they could see from their perch above the town.

Recent examinations of the dome and the acorn have revealed that almost all of the material in the acorn, its pedestal and the lightning rod is original from the 18th century. It is known from drawings made in 1788 by Charles Willson Peale that the top of the acorn was gilt and the bottom of it green. Paint analysis has provided a history of the various treatments which have been applied over the centuries. In 1837, the acorn was gilded again on top and painted dark red on the bottom. Its middle and pedestal were marblized. At the same time, the pedestal was covered with lead and signed and dated by its installers, T. Bennett and P.J. Herold.

In the next couple of months, the acorn will be removed and replaced by a new one. It has been