

best means of protection. This school was convinced that a pointed rod sticking up towards the heavens was but an invitation for lightning to strike and burn the building down. A major proponent of this school was King George III.

Again, the fact that Joseph Clark's brother had a bookshop in Annapolis points to the likelihood that he was familiar with the writings of Benjamin Franklin. According to Thomas Jefferson, Franklin's treatises were required reading in any library of the day. In addition, Charles Willson Peale reports in his diary that he and his brother went to Philadelphia on July 14, 1788 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 another astonishing achievement. Protruding almost 30' 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 itself. This structure has served to stabilize the rod and hold it in place through 200 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.

1792

Clark's life was marred by tragedy: his brother Stephen died in 1782, followed shortly by the death of both of his sons. The State House project put him 17,000 pounds in debt, and his work on the U.S. Capitol 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 was never fully compensated for his work on the State House and, in 1828, his only surviving child, Mary S. Magee, petitioned the General Assembly for compensation. The petition was denied on the ground that the act of limitation had passed.

200

roofs

The dome which Clark designed and built for the State House has been the defining landmark of the Annapolis skyline for 300 hundred years. It was also, for many years, a popular spot from which to observe the city and the Chesapeake Bay beyond. Thomas Jefferson reported spending a most enjoyable evening on the balcony of the dome with ??? who entertained him with the gossip related to each of the windows they could see from their perch above the town. Charles Willson Peale took his drawing machine to the top of the dome to make a cyclorama of Annapolis.

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. Copper sheathing on the acorn appears to also date from 1837 and is signed by its installers, T. Bennett and P.J. Herold.

read on pedestal