

Joseph Clark, Maryland Architect

BY KYM SNYDER RICE

THE THIRD Statehouse to be built in **Annapolis** was erected between 1772 and 1780, (1) but by 1775 the copper roof, laid down in 1773, had blown away. On January 14, 1785, the General Assembly authorized money for repairs to the roof and dome of the Statehouse as well as to the governor's house and gardens.² In February "Mr. Joseph Clark, architect,"³ was contracted to execute the repairs.

Clark (c. 1753-1799) may have been the indentured servant of that name, a cordwainer, who at age twenty-one sailed from London to Virginia in 1774.⁴ More than twenty years later he indentured his own fourteen-year-old son for a six-year term as a cordwainer in Baltimore.⁵ On November 6, 1777, a Joseph Clark married Bell (or Isabella) Ferguson in Maryland⁶ and in the following year took a "patriot's oath" in Washington County.⁷ A Joseph Clarke, merchant, appears in the 1783 Annapolis tax list with two slaves, a substantial family, and a net worth of £530.⁷ Whatever his background, Joseph Clark the architect advertised in the Baltimore *Maryland Gazette* on April 7, 1785:

JOSEPH CLARK, Architect, Builder and Surveyor, COMPOSES designs, draws plans, elevations, and sections of buildings of all kinds in civil architecture; makes out bills of scantling, and all other materials; makes calculations and estimates of the expence of the labour as well as the materials; values all kinds of work in buildings that is already executed; directs workmen, and surveys the execution of building; and will contract for the execution of any kind of building in civil architecture; surveys and plots lands, &c.

In the same advertisement he called for thirty journeymen carpenters and two foremen "who understand lines" to assist him for one year in the repair contract he had signed.

Clark began work on the new dome for the Statehouse in late 1785 or early 1786. The exterior work on this dome, which still stands, was completed by late 1788. The roof was rebuilt of cypress and was finished at the same time. Before his contract expired in 1789 Clark is thought to have built an octagonal privy next to the Statehouse which echoed the octagonal base of the dome.⁸ The Assembly appropriated additional funds in 1792 with which Clark was able to complete work on the interior of the dome.

In addition to his architectural practice Clark kept a bookstore on Church Street in which he also sold a wide assortment of imported merchandise useful to the building trades. (9) In 1792 he listed architectural publications as part of his stock—probably some of the popular English pattern books of the day.¹⁰

In 1786 St. John's College acquired the extraordinary mansion known as Bladen's Folly which stood on four acres of land overlooking Annapolis. It had been begun by Governor Thomas Bladen (1698-1780) in 1742, but two years later the House of Delegates withdrew funding for the building, and it was abandoned before completion.¹¹ By 1766 the roof had collapsed. When St. John's College took it over, the board of trustees voted to repair and enlarge the building¹² and awarded Clark the contract.¹³ The board was still petitioning the General Assembly for funds to finish the building in 1792, and new wings that had been planned were never added. However, presumably Clark supervised the addition of the top floor, the hipped roof, and the cupola. The simple porch and pediment may also have been added at the same time.¹⁴ The building is strikingly similar to the Statehouse in design. Still in use today, it has been renamed McDowell Hall (Fig. 2).

One of Clark's supporters was Alexander Contee Hanson (1749-1806), a prominent Annapolis lawyer and