



Somerset County Historical Trust **Tribune**

Preserving the Legacy of Somerset County



Updates FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

In 2026, the Somerset County Historical Trust continues to find itself deep into two major preservation projects.

Since 2024 we have committed to the largest transcription effort ever undertaken of early 19th century letters of important Eastern Shore citizens. Beginning with the letters of Elizabeth Upshur Teackle (1783-1836), we have expanded our research to include all her family members, business contacts, and their interactions with local and national political figures.

Most of the letters, journals, and diaries are being viewed for the first time in 200 years. Visit the project's website – voicesoftheeasternshore.org - for a world-class dive into history. With support from local Trust members, extensive research and transcription work by Dr. Ray Thompson and Dreanna Belden of the University of North Texas, over 8,000 pages now comprise the project. Donations by Trust members continue to make this possible.

Our other program is the saving of the Teackle Mansion South Gate House. The old property sat for decades hidden in trees on Prince William Street and significant neglect left it in a sorry state. Again, our members have understood the significance of this historic relic and have contributed to its salvation. Months of clearing and cleaning have revealed an 1818 gable-end house with 6 fireplaces and a sagging c1885 Victorian addition. A grant from the Maryland Historical Trust will enable us to raise this section, build a solid foundation, and to place a much-needed cedar shingle roof over the entire house. Our granting organization required an archeological survey which took months to arrange but is now nearing completion.

Thanks to all members who believe in our work and who make it possible.

Teackle South Gate House



UPDATE ON OUR

Project

ARCHAEOLOGY ON PRINCE WILLIAM STREET

At the time of this writing, the Trust is in the midst of an archeological survey at the South Gate House of the Teackle Mansion. The Gate House project is now in its second year and includes an archeological examination of the soil beneath the western Victorian wing of the structure.

- The house was built in 1818 as a tenement during the construction of the wings of the nearby Mansion and likely was used by workers on the project.
- Around 1825, an addition was added to the south end of the house and at some time after 1873 owner Thomas J. Dixon added a Victorian wing on the west and a bay window on the east side. Thomas and family occupied the home for 30 years.



Dawn Chessaek with Ed Otter, Inc.

In our examination of the building, we discovered a 5 ½ inch slope in the Victorian wing resulting from settlement due to termite damage in the distant past. We applied to the Maryland Historical Trust for funds to correct this problem and were awarded a grant to raise the western wing end of the building and place a new foundation. The Trust stipulated that first we engage an archeologist to survey the area where we planned to dig.

For the past three months the team of Edward Otter, Inc. has engaged in a surprisingly extensive excavation. They have identified evidence of post holes from an earlier structure, a well, builders trenches, and have sifted mounds of soil to retrieve thousands of artifacts from the site. To date the processing of these materials is ongoing and we await their discoveries. We will keep everyone informed as we get the final report and review their findings.



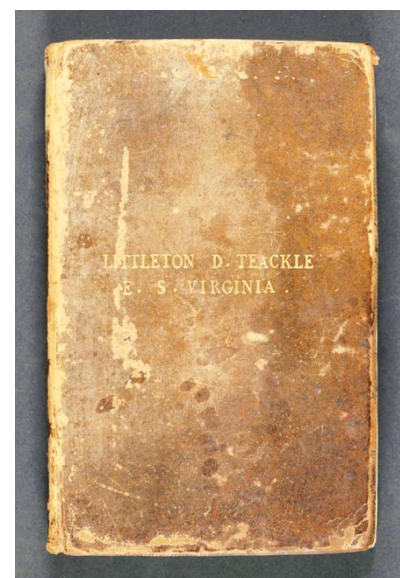
ADVICE TO A YOUNG TRAVELER

LITTLETON DENNIS TEACKLE'S GRAND TOUR OF THE BRITISH ISLES

By Ray Thompson

At age twenty, Littleton Dennis Teackle, having completed studies at Columbia University, decided upon a “grand tour” of England and Scotland before settling down on the Eastern Shore of Maryland to marriage, a life of business and, doubtless, leadership. He documented his travels in a six-volume diary describing his three-month trip from Philadelphia to England and Scotland.

Before boarding the ship, *Asia*, at Philadelphia in late February of 1799, Littleton had prepared well for his impending journey. He had received letters of recommendation from dozens of prominent Americans. These letters would provide entrée to many noble palaces and to important businesses throughout the British Isles. Littleton was so impressed with this packet of commendation letters that he identified each letter in the early pages of his travel diary.



But what is perhaps most significant is the interchange he had with a family friend, Thomas Fisher, a prominent Philadelphia Quaker with Sussex County, Delaware roots. In a letter, and later, in a personal interview, Fisher offered Littleton advice about travelling in a foreign land. He welcomed Littleton into his house just prior to his departure for England. Lest Littleton might plan to “sow wild oats” while abroad, Fisher urged him not to be attracted to the dissipated lifestyle of the upper-class English.

He also provided Littleton with a detailed itinerary which he should follow in his travels in England and Scotland, suggesting not only the name of the city but also all the outstanding features of that city/area of which he was to visit. For example, he suggests the following:

ADVICE TO A YOUNG TRAVELER (continued)

"I would recommend thy landing at Falmouth, or as near the western part of England as thou cans't. Thou may go thro' a part of Cornwall to Devonshire, to Plymouth, where thou mayst see one of the first Dockyards for Shipping in the World; if time permits, pay a visit to Lord Edgecome's seat on the west side of that harbor. From Plymouth I wou'd recommend thy passing thro' Devonshire, into Hampshire to Salisbury to visit the Plains and Stone-Henge.. . . Every attention to the stupendous works of nature and of Art, thou meet'st with, shou'd obtain thy careful observation, so as to console thy friends on thy return."

In speaking of Scotland, he says: *"Perhaps a short stay in Scotland may be best, tho' thou mayst learn some useful lessons, from their Temperance, Frugality (and in some parts) Industry, but in the latter good qualification, they are deficient to England, as well as in Farming, yet from the cheapness of living, and the low price of Education, thou wilt find amongst even the lower class, better information, than in any part of England."*

Fisher urged Littleton to "examine and gain all possible information that may be useful to thee" on his trek throughout England. He says:

"By no means go to New Market if it shou'd be at the time of the Races, which, and all other Public diversions, I hope thy Education and good habits will preserve thee from. The many enchanting Scenes of dissipation which an unexperienced Traveller meets, will require all thy firmness of mind to avoid. I know thy disposition is easy and unsuspecting, wherefore it will be necessary to guard thyself against the first introduction into Play-Houses and other fascinating scenes."

But if thy curiosity shou'd be so great as to lead thee to some of these scenes, I beseech thee to leave them to the very last.... Likewise, I wish thee to avoid as much as possible mixing with the Great, and particularly of getting a relish for their dissipated mode of life. Thou will experience much more safety and probably gain much more profitable information by associating with the Middling class of People who are generally more virtuous."

"Take care of getting into any kind of revelling and keeping late hours. I advise thee spending thy evenings at thy lodgings, which will give time for reflection. . . . I may inform thee, that I travelled about this same time of life, that thou dost, so that I speak from experience. I was many times in



ADVICE TO A YOUNG TRAVELER *(continued)*

great danger, yet was mercifully preserved from the many corruptions that then prevailed, increased since very much and with many to sap the foundation not only of Religion but Morality. . . and are more dangerous to the mental than any Beast of Prey to the human frame, as much so as a happy future state is to the transitory enjoyments of this world, and by recurring to that Principle in thy own mind, which if rightly attended to, will direct thee, but which is only to be experienced when the soul is calm, away from the hurry and confusion of the World . . .

My best wishes for thy welfare and preservation, desiring that thou mayst so conduct thyself, as on thy return thy Dear connections and friends may find thee improved in knowledge and every virtue."

In musing over this friend's comments as the Asia was leaving America, Littleton reflected:

"Its correctness imposes an impressive confidence, conscious that it was dictated by the Zeal of affection and had received the test of experience and attentive observation. Yet, however, I think my highly valued friend pays but an ill compliment to my firmness of mind in strictly entreating me to avoid the Theaters, lest my Morals should be contaminated, ...yet I cannot but be grateful for [his] friendly effort."

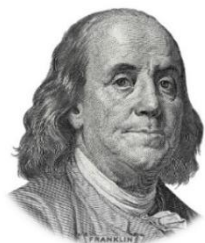
As we read the various days of the journal as Littleton proceeds through England, we cannot help but be impressed by the maturity he exhibits as a novice traveler. Littleton seems to have adhered to his friend's advice.



THE SMOKY FIREPLACE

By Randy George

Everyone with a fireplace, ancient or modern, has at some time dealt with smoking. For millennia humans have sought to deal with the byproducts of the fuel they used for heat, and our colonial forebearers were said to have lived in houses filled with varying concentrations of wood and tobacco smoke and beset with soot. We can only imagine the effects that this had on their health and happiness. Numerous designs of fireplaces were devised to avoid smoking and to deliver warmth, but, until the 18th century, all fixes were speculative or steeped in tradition. Even today we risk falling prey to contractors who sell products and advice, often expensive and frequently non-productive, as fixes for poorly drafting fireplaces.



Benjamin Franklin, first patent holder of the Franklin Fireplace as well as its namesake.

But the formula for drawing smoke successfully up a chimney has long ago been deciphered by two of America's greatest scientist-inventors. Everyone is familiar with Benjamin Franklin who successfully solved the problem by enclosing fire in a sealed iron furnace with a controlled intake of air, internal baffles to circulate the heat and a chimney pipe to exhaust the smoke. Even his invention of the Franklin Stove required later refinements to make it work reliably.

The other little known American inventor of similar or equal stature was someone that history has tried to forget. Born in Woburn (now Concord),

Massachusetts in 1753, Benjamin Thompson, a farmer's son, apprenticed in 1766 to a country storekeeper in Salem, Massachusetts, then served as an apprentice to a well-known physician. Benjamin studied on his own and undertook a series of remarkable and successful scientific experiments in his spare time. At fourteen, he was sufficiently advanced in algebra, geometry, astronomy and higher mathematics to calculate a solar eclipse within four seconds of absolute accuracy.

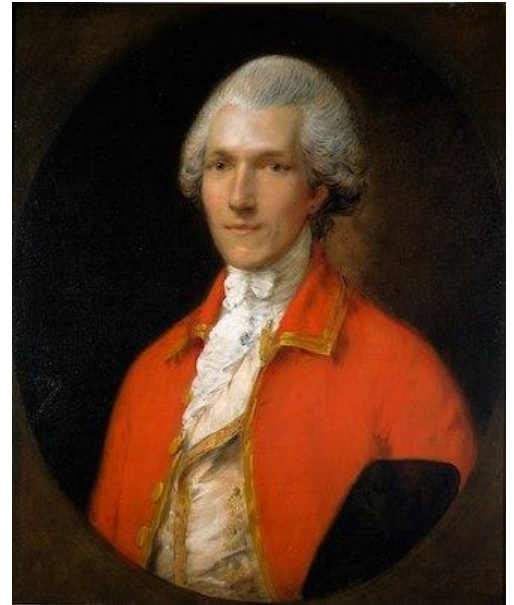


Franklin stove

At nineteen, he was married, through the aegis of John Wentworth, governor of New Hampshire, to the widow of Colonel Benjamin Rolfe. Though much older, his new wife brought with her a respectable amount of property. Whether the marriage was fortuitous or calculated, Ben Thompson's precocity and personality clearly caught the eye of Governor Wentworth. This was in 1772, a pivotal time in our country's history. Benjamin definitely was a loyalist to British traditions and to King George III. He early associated himself with General Gage, commander of the King's troops in Boston. Because of his Tory views, Benjamin was

hauled before a Committee of Safety in Concord, New Hampshire, denounced as a traitor, and narrowly escaped being tarred and feathered by the mob. He escaped into Boston. After General Gage evacuated his troops from Boston in 1776, he selected Thompson as courier to carry official dispatches to Lord George Germain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Germain clearly appreciated the young man's genius and ability and appointed him his private secretary. Benjamin was 23 years old. Within 4 years he was advanced to the position of Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. In 1779 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, and by the end of the war in 1783 held a royal commission of Lieutenant Colonel, later promoted to Colonel, of a British Regiment. King George III bestowed him a knighthood.



His fortunes led him next to the Continent where he was introduced to the Elector, Karl Theodor, monarch of the Kingdom of Bavaria. On arrival Benjamin was made aide-de-camp to the Elector, and during his most active and productive period rose in the ranks from Colonel to General in the Bavarian Army, Minister of War, Grand Chamberlain of the Court, Minister of Police and was soon the highest-ranking person at court, next to the Monarch himself.

During his stay in Bavaria, he reorganized the Bavarian Army, made advances in military logistics, invented a system of naval signaling, undertook the study of the tensile strength of silk and the warming qualities of wool cloth. His discovery of convection currents, the photometer, the method of boring cannon, the nutritious feeding of troops, the calorimeter to measure the heat combustion in wood, coal and other fuels, a modern method of organizing hospitals and almshouses, the use of portable cooking utensils, the invention of the first drip coffee pot, and of a system for heating houses with steam were among his major innovations. In 1790 he was granted the title of Graf (Count) of the Holy Roman Empire. Then, by diplomacy he saved Munich from an invasion by the armies of Austria and France in 1792.

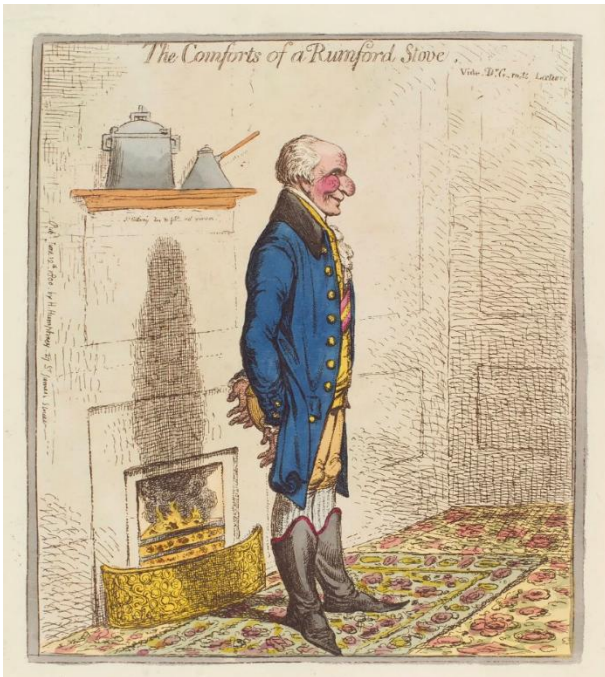
Thompson made major advances in the lighting of houses, the manufacture of gunpowder, in the science of cooking and baking, and not the least in building and correcting fireplaces so they would never smoke. From his experiments he proved that heat was not a concrete substance - as was the understanding of the day - but was produced by the movement of particles. From this discovery he was the first to coin the term "radiant heat."

By 1799, Thompson, now Count Rumford, founded with Sir Joseph Banks, the Royal Institution of Great Britain, the first museum of science for the instruction of the public on scientific advances. He selected as lecturer Sir Humphrey Davy, another preeminent scientist of the time. During his short stay in England, Rumford and his masons corrected over 500 fireplaces.

Thompson established the Rumford Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Rumford Chair of Natural Philosophy at Harvard University.

Next to Franklin, Count Rumford was arguably the most original spirit of his era. He was interested in everything that was not settled and he probed the unknown wherever he found it.

Nonetheless, he largely has been erased from American history, likely on patriotic grounds.



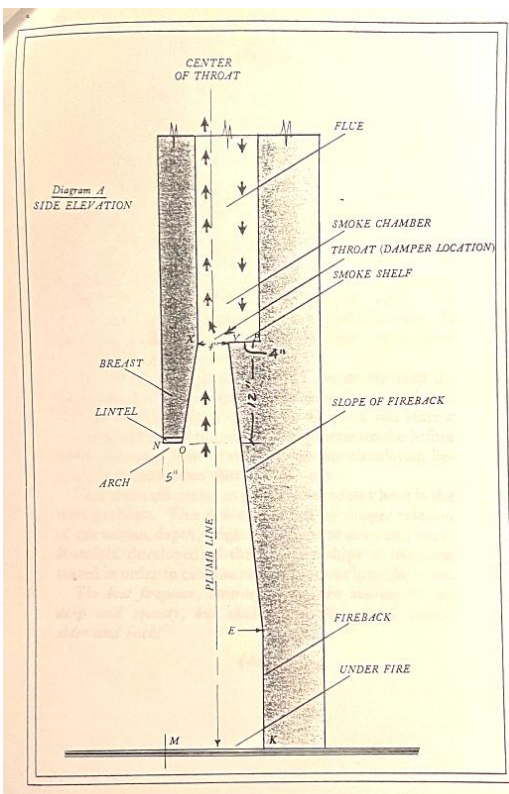
His scientific treatise on fireplaces, however, remains unblemished. By experiment and experience Rumford designed the perfect fireplace! In 1796 he published his essay "Chimney Fireplaces, with Proposals for Improving them to Save Fuel; to Render Dwelling-houses more Comfortable and Salubrious, and Effectually to prevent Chimneys from Smoking".

Thomas Jefferson began building Monticello that year and used Rumford's design for his new fireplaces. The Rumford essays were published in three American volumes in 1798 and 1799.

As stoves and furnaces became available in the nineteenth century, fireplaces were bricked up or ripped out and destroyed and Rumford's lessons were lost. In the early 20th century a few persons decried wholesale destruction of a

feature that had meant so much to our ancestors. And so began a resurgence of understanding of the charming value, aesthetic and social, of the open fire. Tragically, from about 1900 onwards, masons, contractors, builders, handymen and architects began to design and construct "modern" fireplaces to meet the new demand. Many of these new inventions were badly designed, smoked, and failed to heat. For 200 years Rumford's foolproof principals of fireplace design have resided in libraries, only utilized by a fortunate few.

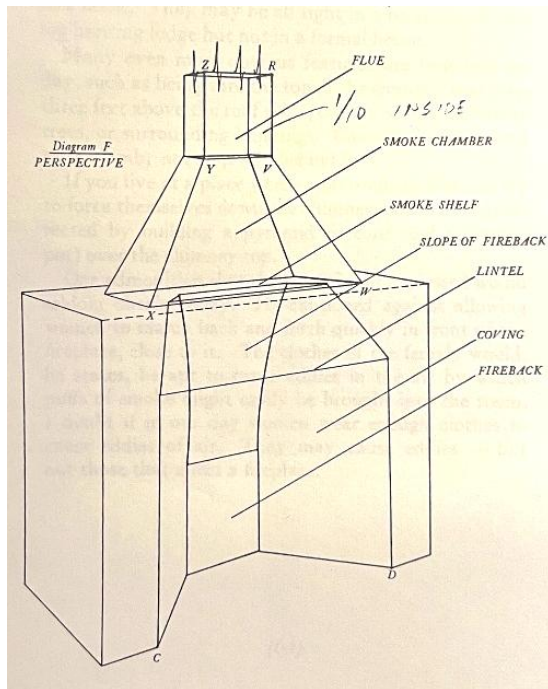
Ben Franklin deduced that smoky fireplaces were due to a lack of fresh air in the room and recommended opening doors, windows, and even creating an opening in the hearth. His success in conquering smoke came from abandoning the open hearth and enclosing fire in a stove.



Rumford approached the problem by understanding heat. He published his conclusions in 1795.

First, he instructed that smoke must rise directly up the chimney without obstruction. One of the hindrances in the 18th century fireplaces was the oversized throat, that area where the fireplace ends and the chimney begins. This tradition had allowed little boy chimney sweeps to climb unimpeded up the chimney. He discovered that good radiating materials were poor reflectors and recommended brick or stone for construction instead of iron. For radiant heat to be cast out into the room, the sides of the firebox needed to be beveled and the back wall slanted inward. The walls of the fireplace and chimney needed to be smooth.

The first rule is that the fireplace and chimney should be built such that a plumb-line dropped from the middle of the top of the chimney should fall precisely in the middle of the floor of the fireplace.



The second rule is that there be a two-way flow of air within the chimney. This is achieved by the construction of a smoke shelf. About 12 inches above the lintel on the back wall of the chimney or throat is a narrow shelf three or four inches deep. Cold air descends down the back wall of the chimney, hits the smoke shelf, and is then carried upward by the rising hot air in the front. In this way less incoming air need be drawn from the room. The reason for this internal circulation of air is that three times more heated vapor, gases, and smoke rise up the chimney than the radiant heat going out into the room.

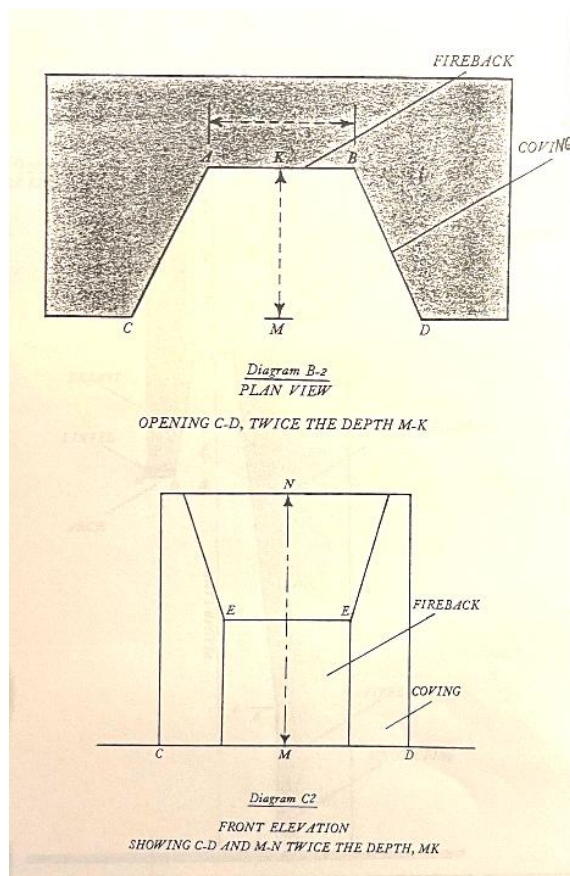
The third rule is that the shape of the firebox should allow maximum radiant heat to be transmitted into the room.

This requires that the sides be slanted or coved and that the upper part of the back (the fireback) lean forward. The slanted back wall radiates heat slightly downward into the room. The depth of the firebox should equal the width of the fireback, and the height of the opening should be 2-3 times this depth. Thus, the best fireplace, contrary to modern masons, is not deep and squatty, but shallow and high, with slanted sides and back.

Next, the depth of the throat should not be more than four inches or less than three. This is essential to allow the cold down-flowing air to mix with the hot updraft. This four-inch throat may be the site of an iron damper, though the damper, even when open, must not narrow the opening. Most dampers manufactured today are not adapted to these dimensions. Wide dampers placed instead at the top of the chimney obviate this difficulty.

Lastly, these dimensions ensure a critical ratio between the cross-sectional area of the chimney and the cross-sectional area of the fireplace opening: 10%. Ideally this ratio should lie between 9 and 12%. Also, due to the drafting requirements within the chimney, square flues are preferable to round ones. The top of the chimney should be at least three feet above the roof ridge.

Today, as then, remedial masonry can achieve these dimensions to correct square, deep fireplaces, without needing to tear apart the entire interior.



Somerset County Historical Trust

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