

**A STUDY OF THE LIGHTING
OF THE STATE HOUSE**

Miriam Q. Elin

**Independence National Historical Park
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

May 1966

As dusk descended upon the members of the Pennsylvania Assembly sitting in session in the State House, and the business of the day was as yet unfinished, the Speaker would order "that Candles be brought in. And they were brought in accordingly."¹ This was the established practice of the Assembly and is noted time and again in the Votes of the Assembly (Pa. Archives, 8th Series). The schedule of Assembly meetings meant that many sessions were held at those times of the year when darkness comes earliest, thus requiring the introduction of supplementary lighting late in the afternoon. In accordance with a provision of the charter, the Assembly convened each year on October 14. It adjourned after a very short session (often only a day or two) until late December or early January; they then held sessions for a month or two--at this time of year supplementary lighting would be needed on many dreary days even in the early afternoon. They reconvened in early May and met until the end of that month or the beginning of June. In late August or early September they met again and finally adjourned on September 30, the day before the provincial elections were held.²

Like the Pennsylvania Assembly, the Second Continental Congress often met in the Assembly Room late in the afternoon, and evening sessions were not uncommon. In December 1778 Congress resolved that it would "meet two hours at least each evening, beginning at six o'clock, Saturday evenings excepted until the present state of their foreign affairs be fully considered."³ Committee meetings were also held at night.

The Constitutional Convention, however, met in the daylight hours. There was no rule in the beginning of the session about the time of

adjournment. On August 18 they passed a resolution to "meet punctually at 10 o'clock every morning (Sunday excepted) and sit till four o'clock in the afternoon." According to James Wilson the hour of adjournment was very strictly adhered to, "even if a member were in the middle of his speech." A few days later the hour of adjournment was changed to three o'clock. On August 23, 1787 the Pennsylvania Packet commended the delegates for their dedication and tireless efforts, and "the long time they spend in the deliberations of each day (sometimes 7 hours)."⁴ The reason behind the establishment of the rather early adjournment hour is unknown--very likely it had nothing at all to do with the matter of lighting, but rather with the heat of the Philadelphia summers.

The lack of documentary evidence of a chandelier having hung in the Assembly Room during the historic period cannot be taken as conclusive in itself owing to the dearth of specific information of fittings for the State House before the 1750's. (See architectural data section for information re: 18th century chandelier hanger.) In 1824 in preparation for the reception for Lafayette a chandelier was bought for the room.⁵ For most of the time between 1824 and 1955 a chandelier hung in the Assembly Room.

The central hallway of the State House might have been expected to have had illumination too. However, results of the architectural investigation prove that a chandelier was not installed until 1816 when Thackara put the medallion there. In 1837 City Council ordered "that the Lamp of the Passage in Hall of Independence be lighted with gas."⁶

The public balls, suppers and concerts held in the State House, generally in the Long Room, were occasions for the building to be "elegantly"

and "grandly" illuminated. The King's birthday was celebrated "with the greatest Solemnity" with "a grand Ball at the Statehouse, at which were present upwards of one hundred Ladies, and a much greater Number of Gentlemen, who formed the most brilliant Assembly that had ever before been seen in this Province. The whole Company were elegantly entertain'd by his Honour there at Supper in the Long Gallery and every Thing conducted with the greatest Decorum, and to general Satisfaction."⁷ Besides the annual celebration of the King's Birthday, other official state celebrations and entertainments took place in the Long Room. The "Gentlemen of the Army" gave a "grand Entertainment and a Ball" during the French and Indian Wars.⁸ And there in 1771 the merchants of the city expressed their pleasure at the appointment of Richard Penn as Governor of the Province with "a very genteel entertainment," marked by "great festivity, mirth and humour"--all of which was enjoyed by more than 350 persons.⁹ Two years later the merchants attended Mr. Penn at the State House, expressed to him their thanks and appreciation for "the particular interest he has shown the trade of this Port." They enjoyed with him "an elegant entertainment" including many toasts, each accompanied by an artillery discharge, and music performed by a military band.¹⁰

Assemblies such as these would necessitate not only sufficient lighting in the rooms of the second floor to enable hundreds of guests to enjoy the elegant dining, but also lighting of the Tower and stairway to permit access to the second floor.

In 1802 Charles Willson Peale removed the partition which in 1781 the Assembly had erected at the eastern end of the Long Gallery to make a room identical in size with the Assembly Room below--then the meeting place of the

Continental Congress. He thus reestablished the Long Gallery across the front and the two smaller rooms on the Square side and restored the second floor to its original arrangement. The problem of lighting the State House was a pressing one for Peale. Soon after establishing his famous museum there he wrote to his sons Rembrandt and Rubens in London that "glass Chandeliers should also ornament the 3 Rooms--5 to six of them might be sufficient with patent lamps in them."¹¹ His final solution of the problem however was the use of five chandeliers in the Long Room as shown in his self-portrait "The Artist in His Museum" (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts) and his son Titian's watercolor "The Interior of the Peale Museum" (Detroit Museum).

The Evening illumination of the State House was an important feature of Peale's use of it. Lighted "with Patent Lamps and Candles, equivalent to the light of 220 Candles"¹² it served as "a genteel 'promenade', offering both music and the still rare pleasure of walking by night in a brightly-lighted room."¹³ In 1807 Peale advertised his "RATIONAL MUSEUM and FASHIONABLE LOUNGE," and "the display of the MUSEUM by lamp light."¹⁴ There is among the Peale Papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania a volume of "Current Expences" for 1808 to 1819 which contains entries which reveal much about the method he, in the early part of the 19th century, used to light the rooms.

1810			
Jan 1	2 Shandeliers of		60.00
	W ^m Bradford		
4	12 Lamps made by Lead		
	Crater and Co: in fil-		
	bert St. at 4\$		48.00

	4	18 Bulb Glasses for Lamps	6.75
	...		
	8	4 Tin Sconces	1.00
	...		
1811			
Oct	4	To 2 brass lamps with 4 burners &c	40.

In 1816 Rubens Peale, now the manager of the Museum, introduced gas lighting into the steeple and second floor rooms.¹⁵ The gas, C. W. Peale hoped, would remedy the situation caused by the former lighting fixtures which emitted smoke and injured the Museum's collection.¹⁶

Candles were the only means of illumination until the end of the 18th century when lamps were introduced. The rooms of the State House were lighted by candles--standing on desks, tables, perhaps even window sills. The candlesticks used in the State House during the historic period were varied in size, type and material. They included: "1 pair of large Oval feet candlesticks," 3 pairs of small [oval feet candlesticks]," "3 pair of [small] Round [feet candlesticks]," all purchased for the Senate in 1790¹⁷; "1 pr Steel Candlesticks" bought for the Senate in 1791,¹⁸ and "2 pr of Still [steel] Candlesticks," bought by the Assembly on November 26, 1778 from Lewis Grant.¹⁹ In August 1743 the Assembly purchased for its use a lantern for 5 shillings. Exactly how and where this was used is not known.²⁰ However, the Council Chamber on the second floor where the Governor and his Council met, and later the Supreme Executive Council, had sconces in addition to candlesticks. On March 14, 1777 Colonel Timothy Matlack, secretary of the Supreme Executive Council, purchased from Timothy Berrett "for the use of the Council"²¹ "1 Set of Plated Candlesticks 16.0.0" and "1 Pair Double

Scenes 3.10.0.²²

Large and small purchases of candles frequently appear in the ledgers and journals of Pennsylvania government. All branches of the government were supplied with them. Both "Mould candles"²³ and "spermacetti candles"²⁴ were specified, but most of the entries merely list "candles." They were purchased both by the pound and by the box.²⁵

(See Appendix 1 for chart from Dobson's Encyclopedia, vol. IV, p. 94:

Experiment to determine the real comparative value of burning Candles of different sorts and sizes.)

It is impossible to determine precisely how many candles were used in the State House in a given period of time because the entries in the accounting records of the State did not always specify the quantity purchased or even the amount of payment made. The various officials of the state, however, did purchase candles at regular intervals. As an example--in November 1790 the State Senate purchased one box of spermacetti candles and, early in March of 1791, fifty-two pounds of candles.²⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. Pennsylvania Archives, 8th Series, IV, 2908.
2. Sr. Joan de Lourdes Leonard, C. S. J., "The Pennsylvania Assembly," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, CXXII, 220.
3. Lee Transcript II, 30, Mss. 1151a, Virginia Historical Society.
4. Max Farrand, The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 (New Haven, 1937), II, 322-23; III, 137-138; III, 75.
5. Lafayette Reception Mss., Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
6. Minutes of Committee on City Property, 1836-38, Vol. B, Municipal Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
7. Pennsylvania Gazette, Nov. 16, 1752.
8. Ibid, Sept. 25, 1755.
9. Pennsylvania Packet, Nov. 18, 1771.
10. Ibid, Sept. 20, 1773.
11. C. W. Peale to Rembrandt and Rubens Peale, Aug. 30, 1802, C. W. Peale Letterbook, III, 165-166, American Philosophical Society.
12. American Daily Advertiser, Jan. 2, 1806.
13. Charles Coleman Sellers, "Peale's Museum," Historic Philadelphia, (Phila.: Transactions of American Philosophical Society, vol. 43, pt. 1, 1953), p. 259.
14. American Daily Advertiser, Dec. 24, 1807.
15. C. W. Peale to Linneus Peale, Apr. 21, 1816, C. W. Peale Letterbook, XIV, 33, American Philosophical Society.
16. C. W. Peale to Mons. Beauvoir, Oct. 13, 1816, C. W. Peale Letterbook, XIV, 96, American Philosophical Society.
17. Voucher: Jos. Anthony to Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Dec. 28, 1790, Folder 23, Box 9, McAllister Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia.
18. Voucher: Edw. Pole to Timothy Matlock [sic], Dec. 12, 1791, Folder 8, Box 10, McAllister Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia.
19. Lewis Grant's Bill, Nov. 26, 1778, Public Improvement File, Division of Public Records, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

20. Votes of the Assembly, Pennsylvania Archives, 8th Series, IV, 2896.
21. "Minutes of Supreme Executive Council," Colonial Records, XI, 20.
22. Folder A: Independence Square, Public Improvement File, Division of Public Records, Harrisburg, Pa.; Journal of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, 1776-1781, p. 281 [Library Company of Philadelphia.]
23. Voucher: Israel Jones, Jan. 19, 1791, Folder 5K, Independence Square Papers, Division of Public Records, Harrisburg, Pa.
24. Journal of the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania 1776-1781, p. 281, April 1, 1777.
25. Bills: Nov. 20, 1790 and Mar. 3, 1791, Folder 23, Box 9, McAllister Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia.
26. Ibid.

Dobson's Encyclopedia (Philadelphia, 1798) IV, 94.

Experiments to determine the real and comparative value
of burning CANDLES of different sorts and sizes.

	Numb. of candles in one pound.	Weight of one candle.	The time one can- dle lasted	The time that one pound will last	The expence in 12 hours when candles are at 6d. per dozen, which also shows the proportion of the expence at any price per dozen.
		Oz. Dr.	Hr. Min.	Hr. Min.	Farthings and 100th parts.
Small wick	$18\frac{1}{3}$	0 14	3 15	59 26	4.85
Large wick	19	0 $15\frac{1}{2}$	2 40	50 34	5.70
	$16\frac{1}{2}$	0 $15\frac{1}{2}$	2 40	44 2	6.54
	12	1 $\frac{1}{3}$	3 27	41 24	6.96
•	$10\frac{3}{4}$	1 8	3 36	38 24	7.50
•	$7\frac{3}{4}$	2 1	4 9	32 12	8.94
•	8	2 0	4 15	34 0	8.47
	$5\frac{3}{4}$	2 13	5 19	30 15	9.53
Mould candles					Mould-candle at 7s. per doz.
	$5\frac{7}{8}$	2 12	7 20	42 39	7.87
	4	4 0	9 3	36 20	9.28

N. B. The time that one candle lasted was taken from an average of several trials in each size.