Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Count Rumford Birthplace

AND/OR COMMON
Rumford House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
90 Elm Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN — VICINITY OF — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Woburn — 7th

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Massachusetts	25	Middlex	017

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	XX OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	X MUSEUM
XX BUILDING(S)	XX PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	XX EDUCATIONAL	XX PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	XX YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Rumford Historical Association

STREET & NUMBER
90 Elm Street

CITY, TOWN — VICINITY OF — STATE
Woburn — Massachusetts

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Middlesex Registry of Deeds, Southern District

STREET & NUMBER
3rd and Ottis Streets

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Cambridge — Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE — X FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL
1965

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Washington — D.C.

(6)

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	XX UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Count Rumford's Birth-Place, as the sign which is situated on Benjamin Thompson's home in Woburn, Massachusetts, proclaims, was built in 1714 by his grandfather Ebenezer Thompson. The building is a three story frame structure, sheathed in clapboard, with a gimbral roof in front and salt box in the rear. Only the first and second floors have furnished rooms.

The integrity of the building is whole. The exterior and interior are said to be little changed from Rumford's day. The flooring, hardware, paneling, and fireplaces are supposed to be original. The excellently preserved building functions as a house-museum dedicated to the memory of Benjamin Thompson.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	X SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
XX 1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
XX 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Benjamin Thompson was born on March 26, 1753, in the home of his grandfather in Woburn, Massachusetts. After attending schools in Woburn and Byfield, he was apprenticed to a merchant for three years. Although his service appears to have been satisfactory, the ambitious young man was more interested in science than commerce. In 1770 he commenced the study of medicine with a local doctor and at the same time attended lectures at Harvard. He soon gave up medicine to take a teaching position in Concord, New Hampshire. While in Concord he met a wealthy widow thirteen years his senior who was also related to New Hampshire Governor John Wentworth. Recognizing that a marriage would free him from financial worry and also enhance his social position, Thompson went to the alter in 1772. Shortly thereafter he was commissioned a major in the 2nd Provincial Regiment of New Hampshire and settled down to the life of a gentleman farmer.

Partly because he believed in the loyalist cause, and also probably because he felt the American rebellion was doomed to failure, Thompson joined the British. In 1774 and 1775 he acted as a agent for the British sending secret intelligence reports to their headquarters in Boston. When the British abandoned Boston in 1775, Thompson made his final choice and departed with them leaving behind his wife and baby daughter. He returned to the United States in 1782 as a British officer, but he saw no significant action. In 1783 he accompanied his regiment back to England. He never returned to the land of his birth.

Thompson's life between 1783 and his death in 1814 was truly remarkable. Born without title or means in a small American village, and possessing only a limited formal education, Thompson in Europe rose to a position of respect and esteem. Arriving back in England he retired on half pay and set out for the continent. By 1785 he had been knighted by King George and received permission to enter the service of the Elector of Bavaria. Thompson remained in Germany for the next 13 years. While in Munich, in addition to adding the title of Count Rumford of the Holy Roman Empire, Thompson reformed the Bavarian welfare system by establishing work houses for the poor, reorganized the Bavarian army, created Munich's famous English Gardens, and conducted the scientific experiments upon which his fame as a scientist rests. In 1798 in recognition of his services the Elector appointed him Bavarian minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain. Unfortunately for Thompson the British refused to recognize one of their own citizens as a minister of a foreign power. Disappointed Count Rumford settled in London and put his energies to work in founding the Royal Institution, which soon employed Humphrey Davy,

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Benjamin Thompson," Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. 18, (New York, 1936).

Egon Larsen. Graf Rumford, Ein Amerikaner in Muenchen (Muenchen, 1961).

W. J. Sparrow, Knight of the White Eagle, Count Rumford of Woburn, Massachusetts. (New York, 1975).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James Sheire

ORGANIZATION

National Park Service - Historic Sites Survey

DATE

February 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

11

in redesigning heating systems, and reforming the British welfare service. In 1802 after a visit to Munich he left England for good. Settling in Paris he courted Ann Lavoisier, the widow of the great French chemist Antoine Lavoisier. They were married in 1805. Rumford did not enjoy social gatherings at which he was not the center of interest and was unable to adjust to Madame Lavoisier's brilliant salon. Feeling unappreciated and rejected Thompson separated from his second wife in 1809. He settled down outside Paris, where he lived quietly with his American daughter and worked on his experiments and inventions. He died suddenly on August 21, 1814.

Benjamin Thompson's significance in the history of science in America is that he was the first native born American who made contributions to science that were of international significance during a period when American science was essentially derived from Europe and provincial in nature.

In his history of Yankee Science in the Making (1948), Dirk J. Struik says of Thompson, "Benjamin Thompson is one of the greatest scientists America has ever produced, but all his scientific activities were carried on outside the United States and independent of his native land - unless we see in his eminently practical approach to even the most theoretical results the spirit of the Yankee farmers from which he came." Thompson's major contribution to science was a new theory of the nature of heat. During the 1780's and 1790's he conducted experiments aimed at improving the quality of canon. In 1798 the Royal Society of London published a short paper by Thompson in which he stated that heat was a type of motion and was not, as prevailing opinion held, the loss by a body of a fluid substance called "caloric." In disproving the caloric theory of the nature of heat and pointing to a dynamical theory of heat, Thompson made a major contribution to physics. His principal biographer says of Thompson the scientist, "But though not in the first ranks his work ensures him a place not far behind the great leaders."

Thompson's interest in basic research was limited to his research on heat. He was above all a practical experimenter. His goal was, in his words, "the application of science to the common purposes of life." Thompson experimented with everything from stoves, fireplaces, and kitchen utensils to carriages and coffee. He was always intent on improving the quality, utility, and efficiency of the instruments of everyday life. In 1799 Thompson published a proposal that resulted in the establishment of the Royal Institution a year later. The title illustrates Thompson's devotion to science as a means of improving material well being. The title read, "Proposals for Forming by Subscription in the Metropolis of the British Empire, a Public Institution for Diffusing the Knowledge and Facilitating the General Introduction of Useful Mechanical Inventions and Improvements and for Teaching, by Courses of

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Philosophical Lectures and Experiments, the Application of Science to the Common Purposes of Life." Although in later years the Royal Institution under Davy and Michael Faraday would become a famous pure science institute, the intention of its founder was that science should always serve "useful mechanical inventions and improvements." A part of Thompson's significance rests in his early recognition of the interrelationship between science and technology.

Although Thompson, a true cosmopolitan, never returned to the United States, he did not forget his native land. He endowed a chair at Harvard and established a Rumford Prize and Medal for "the most important discovery, or useful improvement, in any part of the continent of America, or in any of the American Islands on Heat or on Light." To the present day the Rumford Premium is awarded in his name.