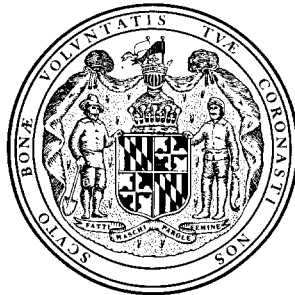


*THE GOVERNORS
OF MARYLAND
1777-1970*

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*Thomas Sim Lee**1779-1782, 1792-1794*

THOMAS SIM LEE, Maryland's second state governor and like Johnson, a friend of George Washington, was born in Prince George's County on October 29, 1745, the son of Thomas and Christian (Sim) Lee. Through his father, the governor was a descendant of the Colonel Richard Lee, of Shropshire, England, who had emigrated to Virginia about 1641. The colonel's grandson, Philip Lee had removed to Maryland about 1700 and had settled in Prince George's County. Thomas Lee, the Governor's father, was a distant relative of the Virginia statesman and soldier Richard Henry Lee. On his maternal side, the governor was a descendant of both the Brooke and Smith families.

Little is known about the governor's early life. It is thought that he spent his boyhood years at his grandfather's estate "Blenheim," because his father died when the governor was only four years of age.

On October 24, 1771, Thomas Sim Lee married Mary, the only daughter of Ignatius Digges of "Melwood Park," in Prince George's County. They had six sons and two daughters. Through his wife, he was a convert to Catholicism of which faith both were devout members.

Even less is known of Lee's life between his boyhood years and the outbreak of the American Revolution. At its beginning, he cast his lot with the patriot cause and organized a local militia unit in Prince George's County, serving as its colonel. In July 1775, he represented Prince George's County at the Provincial Convention held in Annapolis, signing the Association of the Freemen of Maryland. He was also clerk of the Prince George's County Court between 1767 and 1777.

Lee continued as colonel of the Lower Battalion of Militia in Prince George's County until March 26, 1777. On that date, he surrendered his commission because of his election to the Governor's Council to replace Charles Carroll, Sr., who had resigned. He served on the Council throughout the remainder of 1777 and until 1779.

When Thomas Johnson's term as governor expired in November of 1779, Lee was nominated to be his successor. The Legislature proposed only two candidates for that office. These were Lee, who received thirty-

nine votes and Colonel Edward Lloyd of Talbot County, who received eighteen votes. At the time of his election on November 8, Lee was not nearly so well known as his predecessor. Lee had almost no public service except for membership on the Council.

Lee took office on November 12, 1779, bringing to it "unusually well developed social talents, the exercise of which continued to add to his popularity throughout his life."¹ Shortly over a month after he was inaugurated, George Washington concerned about the war going badly for the newly-independent states, wrote him about the shortage of food supplies for the army and the lack of money or credit to replenish them. He urged Lee to "rescue us from the danger of an event, which, if it did not prove the total ruin of our affairs, would at least give [the states] a shock from which they would not easily recover, and plunge us into a train of new and still more perplexing embarrassments, than any we have hitherto felt."² Lee immediately brought Washington's letter to the attention of the General Assembly which within a few days passed an act for the immediate supply of flour and other provisions for the army. One of Lee's first official acts was the issuance of a proclamation on December 29, 1779, which called for the collection of food for the starving soldiers.

During the remainder of the war, Washington called on Lee on numerous occasions for assistance in supplying additional troops. In 1781, Lee gave every assurance that he might rely "on every Exertion that is possible for us to make to accelerate the Movements of the Army on an Expedition, the Success of which must hasten the Establishment of the Independence of America, and relieve us from many of the Calamities of war."³

Lee was re-elected both in 1780 and 1781. Unfortunately, the conduct of the war and the problems of supplying the Army prevented him from turning his attentions to the problems of the State government. Other than raising Maryland's quotas for Washington, the Legislature enacted only a few bills of a local nature. Probably the most important of these were the naturalization of the sons of the Baron de Kalb who had been killed at Camden, the confiscation of British property, the general assessment act, and the founding of Washington College.

After Cornwallis' surrender, Washington notified Lee of the happy event and expressed his thanks for Maryland's assistance. "My present engagements," he wrote, "will not allow me to add more than my congratulation on this happy event, and to express the high sense of the powerful Aid which I have derived from the State of Maryland, in complying with every request to the Executive of it."⁴ This high praise by Washington more than entitled Lee to recognition as one of the outstanding leaders of the Revolutionary War.

¹Ella Lonn, "Thomas Sim Lee," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XI, p. 132.

²Helen Lee Peabody, editor, "Revolutionary Mail Bag; Governor Thomas Sim Lee's Correspondence, 1779-1782," *Maryland Historical Magazine* XLIX (March, 1954), p. 7.

³*Ibid.*, XLIX (December, 1954), p. 330.

⁴*Ibid.*, L (June, 1955), p. 97.

The Legislature elected William Paca as the successor to Governor Lee on November 22, 1782. At the same time it adopted a series of resolutions commending the retiring governor, as follows:

"The faithful execution of the trust reposed in you as first magistrate of the state, together with your genteel and polite deportment towards all ranks, have given general satisfaction, and justly claim our warmest acknowledgements.

"Your close attention to the public welfare, and your firm unshaken conduct in the time of greatest danger, are proofs that the confidence of your country has not been misplaced; and your strict regard to the requisitions of congress and of the commander-in-chief, and the polite treatment of the officers of His Most Christian Majesty, has done honour to the state. Accept Sir, this public testimony of our approbation, and our sincerest thanks for the zeal, activity and firmness, with which you have so faithfully discharged the duties of your station."⁵

To these, Lee replied on November 23, 1782:

"I feel myself happy in having executed the powers entrusted to me to the satisfaction of my country.

"That my conduct in danger, and my attention to the resolves of congress and the requisitions of the commander-in-chief, should receive the approbation and thanks of the honourable body over whom you preside, excites the most pleasing ideas, with the warmest emotions of gratitude.

"It gives me pleasure that the treatment with which I distinguished the officers of His Most Christian Majesty has attracted the notice of the general assembly. If my endeavours to support the dignity of my station have exceeded the strict bounds of economy, I was influenced by a zeal for the honour of my country, and a desire of evincing the esteem and affection which this state entertains for its illustrious ally and his generous subjects; and I did not fail to assure them, that I could not otherwise comply with the expectations of my countrymen."⁶

On April 3, 1792, following the death of Governor George Plater, Lee was chosen to succeed him. The *Journal* of the Senate for that date is unusually brief. It mentions only that Thomas Sim Lee, Nicholas Carroll and Benjamin Ogle were nominated, and Lee, having a majority of the votes cast, was declared elected.

Lee's second administration covered the period between April 1792 and November 1794. The most important event occurring during these years was the so-called "Whiskey Rebellion." In 1794, the residents of Western Pennsylvania and parts of Maryland opposed the efforts of the federal government to collect revenue from the distillers of domestic alcohol. When the insurrection began to assume serious proportions, Washington called upon the governors of several states, including Mary-

⁵*Votes and Proceedings of the House of Delegates, November Session, 1782, p. 5.*
⁶*IMd.*, p. 7.

land, to supply troops to quell the rebellion. By his prompt response, Lee helped to crush the rebellion and the federal government's authority was once more asserted.

During Lee's second and third terms, there was little legislation of note enacted. The only law of importance was one which reorganized, regulated and disciplined the militia. In 1794, after his term had ended, Lee established his winter home in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., which became the headquarters for the Federalist Party. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1794, while in November 1798, he was unanimously chosen governor for a third administration, but he declined to accept either of these offices.

Instead, he shortly thereafter, retired to "Needwood," his large estate in Frederick County. Here he spent the remainder of his life, dying there on November 9, 1819, within a few days after Thomas Johnson. The *Maryland Gazette* for November 18, 1819, carries a brief notice of his death as well as that of Johnson's. It stated only that Lee was "in the 75th year of his age," and that "Mr. Lee bore a conspicuous part in the arduous struggle for independence," and "was second governor of Maryland, and immediate successor to the late governor Johnson."

Posterity is forced to draw its own conclusions as to the personal appearance of Thomas Sim Lee. He is reputed to have been a very handsome man, but he left no portrait of himself. On June 28, 1824, John Lee, his son, wrote the Mayor of Annapolis that he had never seen a portrait of his father.⁷ Word pictures, therefore, are the only descriptions of Maryland's second governor left to the reader, and these, in addition to writing him down as a handsome man, relate that he was six and a third feet high, and that every inch of him was "magnificently proportioned."⁸ He left an estate valued at over \$20,000. He devised \$1,000 for the construction of a Roman Catholic Church in the vicinity of "Needwood," together with \$1,000 to support it.⁹ He was originally buried in a private cemetery at "Melwood," Prince George's County, but he was later reinterred in the Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Cemetery near Upper Marlboro.

⁷*Annapolis Corporation Proceedings, 1821-1826 (Annapolis Records 15)*, f. 100.

⁸Heinrich E. Buchholz, *Governors of Maryland* (Baltimore, 1908), p. 13.

⁹*Frederick County Inventories, HS No. 4*, ff. 120-131; *Frederick County Wills, HS No. 2*, ff. 299-304.