

**THE RUMFORD FOUND OF  
THE  
AMERICAN ACADEMY  
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**

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The Rumford Found of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences by Various

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**VARIOUS**

**THE RUMFORD FOUND OF  
THE  
AMERICAN ACADEMY  
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES**





THE RUMFORD MEDAL.

1501

THE  
RUMFORD FUND  
OF THE  
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.



BOSTON:  
PUBLISHED BY THE ACADEMY.  
1905.

## THE RUMFORD FUND

**B**ENJAMIN THOMPSON, Count Rumford, was born at Woburn, Massachusetts, March 26, 1753, and died at Auteuil, France, August 21, 1814.

During his boyhood he showed an intense interest in scientific matters and attended scientific lectures at Harvard College. Afterwards he studied medicine, though he never practised, and taught school at Concord, New Hampshire. He was suspected of being unfriendly to the cause of liberty in the War of the Revolution, and on the evacuation of Boston by the British — in March, 1776 — he went to England.

Here he prosecuted various scientific researches, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1779. He subsequently entered the employ of Prince Maximilian of Bavaria, to whom he was of great service, reorganizing the army, instituting important social reforms, and at the same time prosecuting valuable scientific researches. Of these the most noteworthy was his well-known investigation into the cause of the heat produced by friction, by which he conclusively disproved the hypothesis of the fluid nature of heat, and laid an important stone in the foundation of the doctrine of the conservation of energy. He was created a count by Prince Maximilian, and chose the title Count

Rumford, after the New Hampshire town from which the family of his wife had come.

In 1799 he returned to England, and soon after projected the Royal Institution of Great Britain. He went to France in 1804, subsequently married the widow of Lavoisier, and died in 1814. By a bequest in his will he founded the Rumford Professorship of the Application of Science to the Useful Arts in Harvard University.

The Rumford Fund had its origin in the gift by Count Rumford to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of the sum of \$5000; which was simultaneous with the gift of a like sum, £1000, to the Royal Society of Great Britain. The purpose of the fund was the same in each case, the award of a suitable premium for discoveries or improvements in Heat and Light.

The intention of the donor was announced to the Academy in the following letter:—

LONDON, July 12, 1796.

To the Hon. JOHN ADAMS, *President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.*

SIR, — Desirous of contributing efficaciously to the advancement of a branch of science which has long employed my attention, and which appears to me to be of the highest importance to mankind, and wishing at the same time to leave a lasting testimony of my respect for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, I take the liberty to request that the Academy would do me the honour to accept of Five Thousand Dollars, three per cent stock in the funds of the United States of North America, which Stock I have actually



purchased, and which I beg leave to transfer to the Fellows of the Academy, to the end that the interest of the same may be by them, and by their successors, received from time to time, forever, and the amount of the same applied and given once every second year, as a premium, to the author of the most important discovery or useful improvement, which shall be made and published by printing, or in any way made known to the public, in any part of the Continent of America, or in any of the American Islands during the preceding two years, on Heat, or on Light; the preference always being given to such discoveries as shall, in the opinion of the Academy, tend most to promote the good of mankind.

With regard to the formalities to be observed by the Academy in their decisions upon the comparative merits of those discoveries which in the opinion of the Academy may entitle their Authors to be considered as competitors for this biennial premium, the Academy will be pleased to adopt such regulations as they in their wisdom may judge to be proper and necessary.

But in regard to the form in which this Premium is conferred, I take the liberty to request that it may always be given in two medals, struck in the same die, the one of gold and the other of silver, and of such dimensions that both of them together may be just equal in intrinsic value to the amount of interest of the aforesaid Five Thousand Dollars stock during two years: that is to say, that they may together be of the value of Three Hundred Dollars.

The Academy will be pleased to order such device or inscription to be engraved on the die they shall cause to be prepared for striking these medals, as they may judge proper.

If during any term of two years, reckoning from the last adjudication, or from the period for the adjudication of this Premium by the Academy, no new discovery or improvement should be made in any part of America, relative to either of the subjects in question (Heat or Light), which, in the opinion of the Academy shall be of sufficient importance to deserve this Premium, in that case,

it is my desire that the Premium may not be given, but that the value of it may be reserved, and by laying out in the purchase of additional stock in the American funds may be applied to augment the capital of this Premium ; and that the interest of the sums by which the capital may, from time to time, be so augmented, may regularly be given in money with the two medals, and as an addition to the original Premium at each succeeding adjudication of it. And it is further my particular request that those additions to the value of the Premium arising from its occasional non-adjudication may be suffered to increase without limitation.

With the highest respect for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the most earnest wishes for their success in their labours for the good of mankind,

I have the honour to be, with much Esteem and Regard, Sir,  
Your most Obedient, Humble Servant,

RUMFORD.

The gift was accepted by the Academy, but for many years no award of the premium was made, as no claimant appeared whose merit was such in its opinion as to justify this. Meanwhile the fund had accumulated to the amount of \$20,000, and in view of the fact that there was no possibility of expending the income in the precise manner contemplated by Count Rumford, application was made in 1831 to the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for relief, if such should be possible.

The Court issued a decree which modified the possible disposition of the income of the fund in such a manner as to increase its usefulness while keeping entirely within the spirit of the original gift, saying in part as follows :—

“It further appears that the said donation was made to the American Academy for a general purpose of charity, that, namely, of promoting a useful branch of science for the benefit of mankind; that the Academy accepted the same, upon the terms stated, and for the purposes contemplated by said donation, and are now under obligation to carry the general intent of the donor into effect, as far as it is practicable to do so. It further appears, that, in consequence of the impediments set forth in the Bill, it is impracticable for the Academy to carry the general charitable intent of the donor into effect in the exact and precise mode specified by him; but, considering the general and primary intent of Count Rumford to have been to awaken and stimulate the ingenuity, and encourage the researches and experiments of individuals on the continent or the islands of America to make important discoveries or useful improvements upon the subjects of Light and Heat, and to cause them speedily to be published for the good of mankind, it does appear to the Court that it is quite practicable for the Academy to accomplish and carry into effect the general charitable intent and purpose of Count Rumford by some slight alterations in the mode particularly prescribed by him for carrying the same into effect.

“It is therefore by the court ordered, adjudged, and decreed, for the reasons set forth in the bill, that the plaintiffs be, and they are by the authority of this court, empowered to make from the income of said fund, as it now exists, at any annual meeting of the Academy, instead of biennially, as directed by the said Benjamin Count Rumford, award of a gold and silver medal, being together of the intrinsic value of three hundred dollars, as a premium to the author of any important discovery or useful improvement on heat or on light which shall have been made and published by printing, or in any way made known to the public, in any part of the Continent of America, or any of the American Islands, preference being always given to such discoveries as shall, in the opinion of the Academy, tend most to promote the good of mankind; and to add to such medals as a further reward and premium of such dis-