

FRANKLIN'S HOUSE 'LIKE HIM'
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THE WASHINGTON TIMES
JANUARY 12, 2007

Benjamin Franklin's wide-ranging talents as a diplomat, inventor, scientist, printer and writer inspired an equally diverse crowd to honor his legacy in the State Department's Diplomatic Reception Rooms on Wednesday night. Former Redskin Sonny Jurgensen, philanthropists Robert and Clarice Smith, businessman Mark Ein, Treasury Undersecretary Robert K. Steel and Lady (Catherine) Manning were among those supporting the Benjamin Franklin House Foundation's campaign to raise an \$8 million endowment for the Founding Father's only surviving home.

The 18th-century house isn't located in Philadelphia, but in London, at 36 Craven St., near Trafalgar Square. Franklin lived in it between 1757 and 1775 while lobbying for the American Colonies.

"It's a simple row house that's very much like him -- unpretentious and practical," said Walter Isaacson, head of the Aspen Institute and author of a recent best-selling Franklin biography, before his dinner address. "It has wonderful little rooms. You can imagine him flirting with his landlady there."

In January 2006, the restored Georgian house opened as a house museum and educational center. "If Franklin came walking up to the door, he'd still recognize it," assured director Marcia Balisciano. The year-old museum already has drawn 10,000 visitors, including Lynne Cheney, noted Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Colleen Graffy.

During the champagne reception, there was an opportunity to wander through rooms filled with rare antiques such as the desk where Thomas Jefferson drafted parts of the Declaration of Independence. "Our Foreign Office isn't furnished with this degree of magnificence," Lady Manning admitted.

A dinner of butternut squash soup, apple-grilled salmon and chocolate cake followed in -- where else? -- the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, with David Martin's famous 1767 portrait of the patriot looking down over the 150 assembled guests.

Kurt Volker, principal deputy assistant secretary of state, said he admired Franklin's moxie for "going around Paris in a coonskin cap" to persuade Louis XVI and the French court to support the American Revolution.

Mr. Isaacson got the biggest chuckle of the night when he heaped praise on our first ambassador to France's diplomatic skills. "Other than Jerry Lewis," he said, "no one has ever pulled the wool over the French people's eyes like Benjamin Franklin."