ON June 10, 1769, William Trent wrote to his old friend and former partner, George Croghan, of his arrival in London. Although quite personal and somewhat casual in character, his letter presents an interesting picture of a gathering at Franklin's lodgings in Craven Street, and mentions the practical application of two of Franklin's scientific inventions.

William Trent and George Croghan, like the young Quaker Samuel Wharton, were prominent figures in the Indian trade and colonial land speculations. With others, they had suffered heavy losses in the French and Indian wars. In December, 1763, after the peace treaty, Croghan had gone to England to seek compensation for the "Suff′ring Traders." Failing in that, he and his associates had tried to recoup themselves by securing direct concessions from the Six Nations. In 1768, with the aid of Sir William Johnson at Fort Stanwix, a vast area of two and a half million acres between the Appalachians and the Ohio River was secured from the Indians in a deed in the name of the King to be held in trust for the traders. This treaty aroused considerable opposition, and since it had to have royal approval, some of the traders, of whom George Croghan was the foremost, subscribed to a fund to send William Trent and Samuel Wharton to London to obtain the royal assent. Trent was unable to go at once, and since he held the power of attorney, Wharton was seriously handicapped until his associate arrived in London. In a letter of April 3, 1769, he wrote to Croghan:

Doctor Franklin will most cheerfully serve you and has employed a Solicitor to conduct the matter before the King in Council. . . . Captain Trent's unpardonably delaying to embark with me, has been of great detriment, otherwise we might have got the Business in some Forwardness;—We are however preparing our petitions and making all the interest we can.


With this background in mind, the major portion of Trent’s letter takes on added significance. The “large and polite Company” at Doctor Franklin’s where he met with Samuel Wharton, who was being introduced everywhere to persons of consequence by Franklin, Mr. McClane, a wealthy M. P., and the “all-knowing” Richard Jackson, who had served as colonial agent for Pennsylvania in Franklin’s absence in America, conjures up a lively picture of a high pressure group in the interests of land concessions. Within the year, the Grand Ohio Company was organized, with proposed concessions, so wrote Croghan, of “thirty od millions of acres.”

Trent’s statement that Franklin assured him that if Sir William Johnson and the Indians stood firm against ministerial intimidation, the settlement wisely made at Fort Stanwix would undoubtedly be ratified, was somewhat optimistic, though shared by Wharton and others. Despite the prolonged efforts of both Trent and Wharton, the grants were not approved. Trent’s request to Croghan, that in passing through Trenton he “will not fail to call and see my Wife and Children,” has a poignancy for all who know that, during his long absence in England, his family lived in penury. However, while the prospects were bright, he also comments hopefully on the political situation: “[John] Wilks is still in the King’s Bench Prison; But has I am told a most powerfull Party in his Favor.” The government is afraid of the threat of the manufacturers to “come down in a Body to London” on account of the idleness brought on by the American merchants having “stoped all their Orders.”

But while the representatives of the Associates of the “Suff’ring Traders” and their friends were intent upon the effect of a change in the government’s attitude toward their particular interests, it should be pointed out that Franklin, although himself keenly interested in the land grants, adhered steadily to the larger objective of reconciling colonial liberties within the Empire. In a letter to Thomas Cushing, he wrote:

... All who know well the State of Things here, agree, that if the Non-Consumption Agreement should become general, and be firmly adhered to, this Ministry must be ruined, and our Friends succeed them,—from whom we may hope a great Consti-
Trent’s pleasure and amusement at the appearance of Franklin and Wharton at Court, “dressed in rich Silks” and making “a very genteel Appearance,” the young Quaker wearing “his Sword &c. with as much ease, as if He had allways done it,” is manifestly quite genuine. But this, and the other personal references are of minor importance by the side of the larger questions discussed above, or the subject matter of the short paragraph toward the end of the letter, in which, after telling of Franklin’s hearty appearance, surprising influence, and popularity in London, he says: “He is now at the request of the House of Commons forming some Pipes &c. to keep a proper Degree of warmth allways in the House in Winter, and is fixing Wires, on St Pauls, the Royal Exchange &c.”

The pertinence of this in 1949, the two hundredth anniversary of Franklin’s “Opinions and Conjectures concerning the Properties and Effects of Electrical Matter arising from Experiments and Observations, made in Philadelphia, 1749,” is obvious. Here we have, come to light two centuries later, one of those casual historical sources of a private character that delight historians, especially when confirmed by official or other dependable evidence. The materials for the story of the application of Franklin’s discoveries and theories to useful purposes, always a major concern with him, are found in various contemporary sources including his own memoirs and correspondence. That of the lightning rod, invented in 1750, and the acrimonious controversy that developed around it, is treated again and again in the later literature on the subject. Among the contemporary printed sources, the papers and communications to the Royal Society, printed in the Philosophical Transactions, volumes 47, 49, 52 and 63, served as the source for subsequent writers. Weld’s History of the Royal Society makes use of these, but refers to volume 45.6 In France, Dalibard and M. le Roy came to the defense of Franklin’s ideas, while from Italy Abbé Beccaria sent new and suggestive proof based upon his own experiments.7

7 By good fortune, the extensive papers and correspondence of Beccaria were acquired recently by the American Philosophical Society and are now available for the use of scholars.
On the subject of ventilation also Franklin wrote a great deal. His theory about the origin of northeast storms (1743), the invention of the Pennsylvania, or Franklin, stove (1740), and his habit of sleeping with open windows in his Craven Street lodgings were all well known to contemporaries. His plan of heating the House of Commons was fully described by Alexander Small in an account written for Durbourg's *Oeuvres de B. Franklin* (Paris, 1773), reprinted in English in William Temple Franklin's works of Franklin, and elsewhere.

The question of protecting London's great historic buildings against lightning had been precipitated, early in 1769, by a formal request from the Dean of the Chapter of St. Paul's to the Royal Society for an opinion on the best method of installing electrical conductors on the cathedral. In response, the Royal Society appointed a committee of five, of which Franklin and his then friend, Benjamin Wilson (who had painted an excellent portrait of him), were both members, to study the question. In accordance with the committee's report, metallic connections were made between the cross, the lead-covered dome and roof, and the rain pipes, which served as conductors to the ground. Although this was apparently the end of the matter as far as the installation of the conductors on the cathedral was concerned, it was only the beginning of a protracted and acrimonious attack by Wilson on Franklin's ideas.

In 1772, the Ordnance Department of the government also approached the Royal Society for an opinion on the best form of lightning conductors for its powder magazines. As before, a committee was appointed on which Franklin and Wilson again served. But on this occasion the latter bitterly opposed the majority report, which recommended conductors with the pointed rods espoused by Franklin. Wilson argued vehemently for rounded knobs. While the dispute seems relatively trivial, it rapidly assumed a political character in which the King himself finally took part. Since Franklin, the leader in the fight for the colonies, advocated pointed rods, the Tory opposition perforce sided with Wilson and "round knobs." "Advocates of pointed conductors," wrote the historian of the Royal Society, "soon became identified with the insurgent colonists; and those opposed to blunt points were considered disaffected subjects." To

9 Weld, 100-102.
settle the matter, His Majesty George III ordered the president of the Royal Society, Sir John Pringle, to support the merits of rounded knobs. Sir John's answer was simple and direct: "Sire, I cannot revise the laws and operations of nature." Whether the King forced his resignation as president of the Society is beside the point here, although the evidence favors the conclusion. "The undue importance" attached to the controversy called forth the following couplet after the manner of Pope:

"While you, great George, for knowledge hunt
And sharp conductors change for blunt
The Empire's out of joint.
Franklin another course pursues
And all your thunder heedless views
By keeping to the point."

On the continent interest was also divided, though less on the conductors than on other phases of Franklin's electrical theories. Soon after the publication of "Opinions and Conjectures . . . ," the Abbé Nollet vehemently attacked Franklin's ideas. Commenting on this in a letter to his friend Cadwalader Colden in 1753, Franklin wrote:

I see it is not without Reluctance that the Europeans will allow that they can possibly receive any Instruction from us Americans. Kanster opposes your Principles, & Nollet mine. He has lately wrote and published 6 Long Letters, directed to me, on the Subject of my Pamphlet, in which he imagines he has taken me all to pieces. I have read and consider'd them, and remain of the same Sentiments. In one or two Places he seems to apply to the superstitious Prejudices of the Populace, which I think unworthy of a Philosopher. He speaks as if he thought it Presumption in man to propose guarding himself against the Thunders of Heaven! Surely the Thunder of Heaven is no more supernatural than the Rain Hail or Sunshine of Heaven, against the Inconveniences of which we guard by Roofs & Shades without Scruple.

The appeal by Nollet to superstition and prejudice was something to reckon with even in America. In Franklin's own Philosophical Society there had been doubts and questionings. According to a minute of January 18, 1760, there was a serious debate on the question:

May we place Rods on our Houses to guard them from Lightning without being guilty of Presumption?

10 New-York Historical Society Collections, Cadwalader Colden Papers, IV (1920), 382.
Not until more than a year after Franklin’s death did the Society finally decide to “guard” its Hall against lightning.

Minor questions, like the term “flying machine” applied by Trent to the eighteenth-century express coach, are self-explanatory to readers of his letter.

American Philosophical Society

William E. Lingelbach

William Trent to George Croghan

London June 10th 1769

Dear Sir

I have the pleasure of informing you that I arrived in Bristol on the 25th of last month after a very disagreeable Passage; having been obliged to put into the West of Ireland. I immediately proceeded in a flying machine to this City and on my arrival went to Doctor Franklin’s, where I luckily met with Mr. Wharton with a large and polite Company.

With respect to my particular Business here, it is not necessary for me to say much, as Mr. Wharton and Doctor Franklin has wrote you so fully; but the Doctor told me yesterday that if Sir William did not suffer himself nor the Six Nations to be intimidated by the ministerial Letters; But steadily supported his and their Conduct, the whole Transactions, as wisely settled by Him at Fort Stanwix, would be undoubtedly ratified.

It is astonishing to what a highth Party and Faction has got to in this Kingdom. Wilks is still in the King’s Bench Prison; But has I am told a most powerfull Party in his Favor and it is increasing throughout all parts of the Nation.

The Duke of Grafton, since the dissolution of his marriage courted the Daughter of the Reverend Sir a Relation of the Duke of Bedford’s and they were to have been married three Days ago, But the match is put off untill after the Birth Day and
On the 11th Day, Mr. and Dr. Franklin went to Court together,
dressed in rich Clothes and made a very genteel appearance.
Dr. Franklin looked better than I knew him in America and
had a most surprising influence here, and is much talked of in
America.

He is now at the request of the House of Commons printing some Papers
"to keep a proper Degree of Warmth always in the House in Winter, and in
keeping three or Four Days the House is opened."

I hope we may pass through London you will not fail to call on my Wife
and Children, which will be very pleasing to them.

Will to make use of Business, Dr. S. W. able to.

From William Trent's Letter to George Croghan, June 10, 1769
some say forever, As He is of a very fickle Temper. The Duke is a very young Man; But is a man of hasty Spirits and it is said a good Speaker in the House of Lords; But as the Opposition is made up of Mr Granville, Lord Shelburne, The Marquis of Rockingham with their Friends, Bush Barry Dondswell, &c. it is the general Opinion the present Ministry will be dissolved before the opening of the next Parliament. The Ministry have assured the Friends of America, That at the Opening of the next Session of Parliament, if they are in Administration, They will carry a Bill into the House of Commons for a Repeal of the Act laying a Duty on Glass Paper &c.—The Reason for which, is, That the manufacturerers begin to be idle, as the American Merchants have stoped all their Orders and the manufacturerers will they fear, come down in a Body to London.

I have the happiness to inform you, That Mr Wharton is perfectly hearty and through the Means of Doctor Franklin and Mr McClane (who is a member of Parliament and a Man of great Fortune and weight here) and Mr Jackson &c has been introduced to the first People of the Nation. I never see Him, Only early in the Morning when I call at his Lodgings, as He is visiting from Eleven o’Clock till three o’Clock and dines out every Day with some of the Nobility, Members of Parliament &c.

He has a great deal of Attention paid to Him for his general Knowledge of American Affairs and the Commerce of both Countries, and knows every thing that is doing at Court.

You would laugh to see Him dressed, as He has not the least sign of a Quaker about Him and wears his Sword &c. with as much ease, as if He had allways done it.

On the Birth Day, He and Doctor Franklin went to Court Together, dressed in rich Silks &c and made a very genteel Appearance. Doctor Franklin looks heartier than ever I knew Him in America and has a most surprising influence here, and is as much talked of as in America.

He is now at the request of the House of Commons forming some Pipes &c to keep a proper Degree of warmth allways in the House in Winter, and is fixing Wires, on S’ Pauls, the Royal Exchange &c.

I hope as you pass through Trenton you will not fail to call and see my Wife and Children; which will be very pleasing to Them.
Please to make my most respectfull regards to Sir William, Colonel Johnson Sir John and all the Family\textsuperscript{11} and believe me to be

Dear Sir
Your sincere Friend & humble Serv\textsuperscript{t}
William Trent

P S.
I beg my best Compliments
to Mr & Mrs Prevost,\textsuperscript{12} Colonel Butler\textsuperscript{13} Mr Adems\textsuperscript{14} &
Mr Mrs Fundy\textsuperscript{15}—

\textsuperscript{11} Members of the Johnson family mentioned are Sir William Johnson, his nephew Col. Guy Johnson, and his son Sir John Johnson.
\textsuperscript{12} Mr. and Mrs. Augustine Prevost. Mrs. Prevost was the former Susanna Croghan, daughter of George Croghan. At this time they were living at Otsego Lake, N. Y.
\textsuperscript{13} Col. John Butler, a trusted agent of Sir William Johnson.
\textsuperscript{14} Robert Adems, bookkeeper for Sir William Johnson.
\textsuperscript{15} Maj. Jelles Funda, a New York merchant with whom Croghan dealt.