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Rector St. James Parish, Lancaster, Pa., 1759 to 1778
THOMAS BARTON AND PENNSYLVANIA'S COLONIAL FRONTIER

The frontier of colonial Pennsylvania was a place of vigorous cultural change. This change was due to many factors, but especially to the deliberate efforts of progressive community leaders to raise the level of culture and learning on the frontier. The life of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Barton of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, offers a rare opportunity to observe the efforts of one such leader. His life also provides some insight into how the harsh and primitive conditions of the frontier may have affected the outlook and development of a cultured and educated man newly arrived from Europe.

Barton was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, in 1730, into an Anglo-Irish family. Although he was an eldest son, he had no prospects for a worthwhile inheritance and was thus forced to seek his fortune in the New World. Before leaving Ireland, he received a classical education from a private tutor, and at Trinity College, Dublin. Soon after finishing his studies in either 1750 or 1751, he arrived in Philadelphia and began his career as a schoolmaster.

In 1751, Barton established a school in Norriton Township, near present-day Norristown, Pennsylvania. During the next year-and-a-half, he formed a close friendship with the family of a local farmer, Mathias Rittenhouse. Barton was particularly impressed by the family's brilliant but untutored son, David, who was two years younger than he, and David's older sister, Esther, who was Barton's own age. Barton was apparently the first man to recognize the poten-

tial of the young man who was to become eighteenth-century America's greatest astronomer and scientist, and he helped him greatly in the early stages of his career. Although he had nowhere near the natural abilities of Rittenhouse, Barton did have the benefits of a superior education which he willingly shared with his younger friend. He stimulated Rittenhouse's thinking, supplied him with useful books and new ideas, and constantly encouraged him toward greater achievement. The friendship of these two men was strengthened on 8 December 1753, when Barton married Esther Rittenhouse. Despite political differences which developed later, they remained on good terms until Barton's death.

In the fall of 1752, Barton moved to Philadelphia where he began two years of work and study as a tutor at the institution which was soon to be named the College of Philadelphia. Here, he met one of colonial America’s foremost educators, Dr. William Smith, the provost of the college. Soon his interests began to stray from the purely academic life, and in August 1754, he resigned his teaching-post and traveled to England where he was ordained as a minister of the Church of England.

This marked the end of Barton's career as a teacher, although he never entirely lost interest in education. In later years, he supervised a charity school which his church had established in Lancaster. He also tutored his own sons and other boys sent to him for instruction, and he directed the studies of young men interested in the Anglican ministry. In recognition of his academic and other achievements, Barton was awarded honorary A.M. degrees by the College of Philadelphia in 1760, and King's College, New York in 1770.


4. Thomas Barton (hereafter cited as TB) to the Secretary, 8 August 1765, 29 June 1771, Hugh Neill to the Secretary, 18 October, 1764, 25 June 1765, 3 September 1765, MSS of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, B Series, Vol. 21, on microfilm at the University of Texas Library, Austin, Texas; and S.P.G. Letters and Journals, on microfilm at the University of Texas Library, Austin, Texas, 19:117-119.

5. Montgomery, History of the Univ. of Pa., pp. 169, 348.
Since the Church of England was not established in Pennsylvania, Barton served as a minister for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) which he joined in 1755. He was ordained by the Bishop of London on 29 January of that year, and he returned to Philadelphia on 16 April. Before leaving for England, he had arranged to serve as minister to several communities along the Pennsylvania frontier, and by May he had moved into his new home in Huntingdon. From there, he rode a circuit which included Carlisle, York, and a number of smaller missions in the area.

Barton arrived in Huntingdon full of plans for the future. He hoped to revive and expand Anglican influence in the area, construct new churches, and convert the Indians. Unfortunately, his plans were frustrated by the defeat of General Braddock in July. As Barton saw it, Braddock's defeat alienated the Indians from the English interests and drove them into alliance with the French. As a result, "poor Pennsylvania has felt incessantly the sad effects of Popish Tryanny and Savage Cruelty!" Searching for deeper causes for these misfortunes, he blamed them on failure of the English to convert the Indians to their brand of Christianity. Instead of sending well-trained and capable missionaries to the Indians,

we did nothing but send a set of abandon'd profligate men to trade with them who defrauded and cheated them, and practic'd every vice among them that can be named, which set the English and the Protestant Religion in such a disadvantageous light, that we have reason to fear they detest the name of both.

6. S.P.G. Letters and Journals, 13:8-9, 18. Barton's letters to the S.P.G. are an invaluable source of information on his life and career. In addition to the S.P.G. MSS and the S.P.G. Letters and Journals mentioned above, many of these letters are found in William Stevens Perry, ed., Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church, Vol. II, Pennsylvania (Hartford, Conn.: The Church Press, 1871). Those letters and sections of letters found in Perry are generally not reproduced in the S.P.G. Mss microfilm which is based on a Library of Congress transcript of the original documents.

7. TB to the Secretary, No. 8, 1756, Perry, Historical Collections, pp. 275-281. Huntingdon (also frequently spelled Huntington) was in what is today Huntington Township, Adams County, near the town of York Springs. See also: Montgomery, Hist. of the Univ. of Pa., pp. 167-168; Frederick Lewis Weis, "The Colonial Clergy in the Middle Colonies," Proceedings of The American Antiquarian Society 66 (1956): 179; and R. G. Barton, "Thomas Barton," p. 101.

8. TB to the Secretary, Nov. 8, 1756, Perry, Historical Collections, pp. 276, 279-280.
Barton did not remain idle in the face of dangers which threatened his community. If, for the moment, he was unable to win over the Indians for Protestantism and English civilization, he could at least rally the white settlers of Pennsylvania to their own defense. Therefore, one of his first public actions was to preach a vigorous sermon on the need for "unanimity and public spirit." Delivered at Carlisle and then repeated at his other missions, this sermon was soon published along with a long introductory letter from Dr. Smith. In this sermon, Barton argued that in times of public danger, all political differences should be subordinated to the need for unity. Otherwise, the people of Pennsylvania might lose their "pure Protestant Faith," their "equitable Laws," and their "sacred Liberties." He also vigorously condemned the Catholic religion, and he warned of the cruel tyranny which his fellow-countrymen could expect at the hands of the French and Indians.9

Barton did much more than simply harangue his congregations. One serious problem which Pennsylvania faced in 1755 was a leadership and organizational vacuum created by the absence of a militia law in the province.10 This vacuum was partly filled by Barton and a few other clergymen who organized informal bands of neighbors and parishioners. As settlers from the most advanced frontier areas poured back across the mountains, Barton and his men helped hold the line at Carlisle and thus contributed greatly to saving the trans-Susquehanna frontier from total subjection.11


10. William A. Hunter, "Thomas Barton and the Forbes Expedition," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 95 (1971): 432. This article consists of an introduction by Hunter (pp. 431-439) and the journal which Barton kept while he was with the expedition (pp. 439-483) along with Hunter's explanatory notes.

Barton’s actions earned him high praise, especially from supporters of the proprietary party in Pennsylvania. For example, Richard Peters, who was a fellow Anglican minister as well as secretary of the colony, was deeply impressed by Barton’s activities. Barton’s actions also won praise from Governor Thomas Penn, whom he had first met while in England for his ordination.12

This military phase of Barton’s career was climaxed in 1758 by his participation in General Forbes’ expedition against Fort Duquesne. Several of his young parishioners offered to join the expedition if Barton would agree to accompany them as their chaplain. He agreed to do so, and was offered a chaplain’s commission by the provincial government. However, due to a quarrel with some of the non-Anglican officers, he rejected this commission and joined the expedition as a volunteer. Although Barton felt that both he and his church had been insulted by what appears to have been a Presbyterian attempt to keep him from joining the army, he put the matter behind him and carried on with what he felt was his duty to aid those soldiers who wanted an Anglican chaplain.13

Barton was with the army from 24 July until at least 26 September, and the journal he kept throughout this period shows very well his powers as an “intelligent and informed observer.”14 He carefully described the countryside through which he passed, often with an eye to which lands might be best suited for future settlement. He took time out to examine and describe some of the local natural oddities and possibly valuable mineral resources of western Pennsylvania, and, finally, he met many of the leading American military figures of the period, among them Colonel George Washington with whom he had several meetings.15

Barton’s journal ends abruptly with the entry for 26 September in which he relates the grim details of an execution for desertion. This revolting incident may have finally convinced him to leave the


expedition. His unhappiness had been growing for some time. He had had little ministerial work to keep him busy, and he had been deeply upset some time earlier when he had presided at the burial of a naked soldier, an act which he considered grossly improper and unchristian. However, since no record of his actions until the spring of 1759 has been found, it may be that he stayed with the army a good deal longer. It is also interesting to note that the Forbes expedition was not his last military connection. A few years later he again served as a military chaplain, and, at one time, he even considered leaving the S.P.G.'s service, moving to Montreal, and making a career of the military.

In the fall of 1757, Barton had expressed a desire to leave the advanced frontier region around Huntingdon and move to the more settled area east of the Susquehanna River. The S.P.G. headquarters in London had then offered him the mission at Lancaster. He took up his new mission at Whitsuntide, 1759, although it was late in the year before he settled his family there. He remained in Lancaster as rector of St. James Church for nearly twenty years.

In Lancaster, Barton found ample time and space to raise his large family which eventually numbered six sons and two daughters. His life was far from easy however. He still had to spend a great deal of time on horseback, for his duties included services at several nearby towns. He regularly traveled to the major missions of Caernarvon and Pequea located twenty and eighteen miles away respectively. Each of these missions had congregations which were as large as that of Lancaster, although not as wealthy. Barton also served a large number of smaller missions located as far as fifty miles from his home.

16. Hunter, "Thomas Barton...,” p. 438, speculates that Barton may have left the expedition shortly after 26 September, but Ford, in David Rittenhouse, p. 20, has stated, without citing any sources, that Barton was with the expedition when Fort Duquesne was taken and that he did not return to the east until April 1759. As noted below, he did not take up his new mission until that spring and thus could easily have been with the expedition until then. The copy of his journal which Hunter found was apparently written at some later date from original notes, and it could have been stopped after the 26 September entry for any number of reasons even if Barton had been with the expedition for a longer time.

17. Young, “Thomas Barton,” p. 36; TB to the Secretary, 23 January 1766, Perry, Historical Collections, pp. 400-402; and S.P.G. Letters and Journals, 17:76-80.

18. S.P.G. Letters and Journals, 14:80-82; TB to the Secretary, 21 December 1759, Perry, Historical Collections, 282-283; and George Craig to the Secretary, 17 July 1760, S.P.G. MSS.

19. For material on Barton's Children see “Commonplace Book containing Rittenhouse Letters, etc.,” Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania;
Throughout the 1760s, Barton suffered from nagging financial problems. His congregations were too small and too poor to adequately support him and his constantly growing family. Low pay was a common problem for the Anglican clergy of Pennsylvania at this time, but it affected Barton especially hard. Despite occasional extra help from the S.P.G., his financial problems were not solved until about 1769. At that time, he secured control of the valuable farm of Conestoga Manor through the intercession of Thomas Penn and Sir William Johnson. Thanks to the income from this five hundred acre farm and its three tenants, he was able to support his family comfortably until the disorders of the Revolution and his Loyalist views again made his life more difficult.  

In Lancaster, Barton immediately concerned himself with projects for community betterment, such as the organization of a fire company and a library company. In both these projects, he was one of the leading spirits. The creation of the library company was perhaps his earliest and most significant endeavour. The company was organized in late 1759, and although he was a new citizen, Barton was a member of its first board of directors. It was the third library established in Pennsylvania outside the city of Philadelphia, and he and his friends were justly proud of it.  

Barton used his friendship with Thomas Penn to secure several valuable gifts for the library—largesse stimulated perhaps by naming the library after Penn’s wife, Lady Juliana. It is not clear whether this move was Barton’s idea or not, but it was he who wrote to the Penns about it. In return for this honor, the Penns sent the Library a set of globes, a planetarium, and some books.  


Barton’s close connection to the library and his strong feelings for it can be seen in an incident which occurred in 1767. At that time, he was unhappy with his poor pay and with the lack of intellectual stimulation in Lancaster. In response to his cries of distress, Penn sought to improve the attractions of Lancaster by persuading the S.P.G. to make a donation to the library company, a move which must have pleased Barton greatly.22

Barton saw the library company as much more than a means of intellectual diversion. He felt that it had a vital role to play in the taming and civilizing of the frontier. This sentiment can be seen clearly in the preface to a printed catalogue produced by the library company in 1766. Barton was possibly the author of this preface, and he certainly agreed with its ideas.24 The preface deals with such conventional topics as the value of reading and of knowledge and the progression from barbarity to civilization, but, unexpectedly, the library is also described as a tool for dealing with the Indians. The optimistic hope is expressed that

the rude Barbarians of our Country may be led, by the light of Knowledge, to lay aside their savage Nature, to become polished Members of Society; and even to serve the Public in some of its most honorable Offices.

This was to be accomplished by the gradual spread of knowledge westward from individual to individual, through the books and other materials of the library, until it reached, “to the Borders of Error and Barbarity . . . to the very Doors of the poor untutored and unenlightened Heathen.”25

Several of the men with whom Barton associated in the Juliana Library Company were leading citizens of Lancaster and of the entire province.26 Edward Shippen, for example, was a member of one of Pennsylvania’s most eminent families. He was the grandson of a mayor of Philadelphia as well as a former mayor himself, and he was the father of a future chief justice of the Pennsylvania supreme

23. Thomas Penn to TB, 17 June 1767, ibid., reel 4, unit 1, p. 132.
count. From 1752 until 1778, he lived in Lancaster and served as prothonotary (chief clerk) of courts. Another director was George Ross who became a leading revolutionary and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. These men and the other members of the library company provided the most illustrious company available in Lancaster, but soon Barton joined even more illustrious company in the provincial capital.

As an avid amateur scientist, it was almost inevitable that Barton would find the company of like-minded men, and it is not surprising that on 8 March 1768, he was elected to the American Philosophical Society. The Society had been substantially reorganized in 1767, and in early 1768 it began a major membership drive which increased its membership from eleven to 128 by the end of the year. Although none of Barton's close friends were among the original eleven members, several of them joined in 1768. Among them were David Rittenhouse and Dr. Adam Kuhn (a director of the Juliana Library Company), both of whom were elected on 19 January. Barton's close friends, Edward Shippen and Richard Peters, were also elected at the same meeting as Barton. Although he was not able to attend many meetings of the society, he pursued his scientific interests vigorously. He was particularly active in helping his brother-in-law, David Rittenhouse, and in pursuing that branch of natural history which dealt with the collection and classification of minerals.

Rittenhouse's reputation as America's leading scientist was established before the Revolution by the construction of his famous orrery and by the observations which he and others made of the transit of Venus on 3 June 1769. Barton was intimately involved in both of these enterprises. He constantly urged Rittenhouse to carry through his project of the orrery. In fact, according to his son, William Barton, he made some sort of arrangement to help finance its construction. In the event that Rittenhouse could not find a buyer for the orrery, Barton guaranteed payment for the materials involved and for Rittenhouse's time. In light of Barton's own financial problems, it is not clear how much this guarantee was worth, but, in any

28. See Hindle, Rittenhouse, pp. 27-59. An orrery was a mechanical planetarium with clockwork and dials to indicate the positions of the planets. A transit of Venus is a rare astronomical occurrence in which Venus passes directly between the Earth and the Sun. Venus then appears as a black dot drifting across the face of the Sun.
case, Rittenhouse had no problem whatever in selling his creation. The observation of the transit of Venus involved the combined efforts of most of the scientifically inclined citizens of Pennsylvania, and here again Barton was a participant. At the observation itself, he assisted Rittenhouse by supporting the astronomer's head while he lay flat on his back looking through his telescope. Barton also gave the signal to the other observers of the team working at Norriton when Rittenhouse finally reported his observation.

Barton's skill and interest in natural history were considerable although devoted primarily to collection and description. He gave some "curious mines, minerals, and fossils" to the Juliana Library Company, and he sent a large collection of materials to Thomas Penn in England. This latter collection included specimens of North American animals, plants, and minerals, some of which Penn turned over to the British museum for study and safekeeping. Along with these specimens, Barton sent Penn some observations and speculations on the rattlesnake and on the discovery of "elephant" bones in the interior of North America. Barton's skill as a naturalist cannot be readily evaluated since both his collections and his speculations have been lost. Nevertheless, one of his sons, Benjamin Smith Barton, felt that he had devoted more attention to the study of minerals than anyone else in the colonies. Since the younger Barton was the leading naturalist of his day, his opinion may be more than mere filial pride.

Barton's collection of minerals and his other scientific interests had very practical aspects, for he always displayed a healthy interest in schemes for economic development. In his collections, he included potentially valuable minerals, and he tried to ascertain their economic worth. He also interested himself in the scientific study of agriculture, as can be seen in an article he wrote on hemp-raising. Finally, he advocated developing the transportation system of inland

29. W. Barton, Memoirs of Rittenhouse, pp. 193, 195-197, 204, and passim; Thomas Penn to TB, 20 July 1768, Records of the States, Pa., E.2b, reel 4, unit 1, p. 271; and Ford, David Rittenhouse, p. 32.
32. Benjamin Smith Barton A Discourse on Some of the Principal Desiderata in Natural History (Philadelphia: Denham and Town, 1807), Early American Imprints, Series 2, #12086, p. 86.
Pennsylvania. He wrote enthusiastically to Thomas Penn about schemes to make the Schuylkill and Susquehanna rivers navigable and published an article in favor of a turnpike from Philadelphia to the interior.\(^{33}\)

Soon after Barton settled in Lancaster, he turned his attention once again to schemes for carrying Christianity to the Indians. He planned to spend several months deep inside the Indian territory in order to learn their languages and lay a foundation for future work, but his plan was disrupted in 1763 with the outbreak of Pontiac's War. Once again, as in the period after Braddock's defeat, he saw the devastation and suffering produced by savage Indian attacks on the poor and defenseless white settlers of the frontier.\(^{34}\)

In July 1763, he wrote to his friend Richard Peters about the sad conditions he saw in the backcountry. He reported that many settlers had abandoned their homes and fled to the towns where they huddled in misery and poverty. He did not feel that the situation was hopeless, for he noted that the provincial assembly was meeting in Philadelphia. He prayed that the assembly would finally act to provide something for the defense of the frontier. He argued that with proper leadership, the people would be able to defend themselves. The most popular demand was for a "Scalp Act" which would have provided a reward for every Indian scalp presented to the government. With such an act

vast numbers of Young Fellows who would not desire to enlist as Soldiers would be prompted by Revenge, Duty, Ambition & the Prospect of Reward to carry Fire & Sword into the Heart of the Indian Country.

He apparently had some doubts that this method might not be fully compatible with "the Humanity of the English Nation," but if it could be reconciled with them he felt that it was the only method likely to succeed.\(^{35}\)


35. TB to Peters, 5 July 1763, Peters Papers.
We can only guess at what divided feelings lay behind Barton's words in this letter. He had been an eyewitness to most of the recent conflicts between Pennsylvania's whites and Indians, and he saw these conflicts from two different and contrasting perspectives. On the one hand, he saw the great suffering produced by Indian attacks on defenseless white communities. He sympathized with their sufferings, for he shared them. On the other hand, he was acutely aware of the just grievances of the Indians. Throughout his career, he had sought ways to end the conflicts between these two peoples. He hoped that by bringing Christianity and civilization to the Indians, they might be tamed and transformed into stable and productive citizens. Indeed, at one time, he argued that the Indians should not even be considered heathens since "they feel and own the being of a God, and all-ruling Providence." But, in the end, all his schemes failed, and he was compelled by circumstances to condone the use of military force as the only means of stopping the violence and cruelty of the Indians.

Perhaps in an attempt to escape his moral dilemma, he tried to shift the blame for the Indian problem to the Quakers. Their influence in Pennsylvania politics at this time was great, and they successfully blocked all attempts to provide for the military defense of the colony. They also controlled most aspects of Indian policy. Thus, in his letter to Peters, Barton hinted that much of the fault lay with the provincial assembly through which Quaker influence was expressed. In this feeling of hostility to the assembly, he was far from alone as can be seen in the events of 1763 and 1764.

Pontiac's War touched off a severe political crisis within Pennsylvania. Frontier residents had long resented the fact that their counties were under-represented in the assembly which was therefore dominated by the eastern and Quaker counties. In 1763, they were outraged at the seeming indifference of this assembly to their sufferings, for, as death and destruction spread throughout the western counties, the assembly did nothing. Some of them, led by men from the Paxton area of Lancaster County, decided to take matters into their own hands. The Paxton Boys, as they were called, vented their frustrations in savage attacks on their Indian neighbors. In these attacks, they focused not on the far-away and dangerous

36. S.P.G. Letters and Journals 15:145-146; TB to the Secretary, 6 July 1761, Perry, Historical Collections, p. 329.
37. The following summary is based on Brooke Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 3(1946):461-486.
Indians operating under Pontiac, but rather on the local reservation Indians.

These reservation Indians were considered by the Quakers to be peaceful and friendly, and they were supported, at least in part, at public expense. On the other hand, the frontiersmen considered them at best a public nuisance and at worst a fifth column. Since the frontiersmen already blamed the Quaker-dominated assembly for the lack of adequate frontier defenses, the use of government money to support these reservation Indians was too much for many of them. Resentment rapidly escalated into a major political crisis as the Paxton Boys marched.

Since the reservation Indians were surrounded, out-numbered, and virtually helpless, they were easy prey for the Paxton Boys. In late 1763, there were several bloody attacks on the Indians. The worst of them was the murder of the twenty Indians from the Conestoga Reservation, located near Lancaster. Six of these Indians were killed in a pre-dawn raid on 14 December during which all their homes were destroyed. The remaining Indians were rounded up and placed for their own protection in the country workhouse at Lancaster. There they were murdered by a band of Paxtonians on 27 December.

In early 1764, the situation worsened as the remaining reservation Indians of Pennsylvania fled to Philadelphia where they sought Quaker protection. The Paxtonians then threatened to invade the city and kill the Indians and anyone else who stood in their way. In response, the provincial government began military preparations to resist the invasion. Although the crisis was eventually settled without further bloodshed, political tensions remained high. These tensions were expressed in a fierce political debate and pamphlet war which raged during the first half of 1764. Thomas Barton was one of the participants in this pamphlet war.

The pamphlet war focused on several key issues. First and most obvious was the incident at Lancaster. The opponents of the Paxton Boys easily labelled this action as wanton and unjustifiable murder. Their supporters charged that some of the slaughtered Indians were guilty of crimes although they could not deny the fact that they had been killed without any trace of legality. They had better luck in condemning the hypocrisy of the Quakers who took up arms in defense of Philadelphia after years of failure to lift a hand to protect the frontier. Although the number of Quakers who actually took up arms was small, there were enough of them to undermine the moral
stance of those who out of principle had resisted all provisions for defense. The debate also included fierce attacks on the Presbyterians who were felt to be the ring-leaders of the Paxtonians. It was argued that this troublesome sect was merely using the recent crisis as a means of gaining power for themselves. The bitterness of the Quaker-Presbyterian feud allowed for a temporary anti-Quaker alliance between the Anglicans and the Presbyterians, who were generally on very poor terms with one another. Finally, the political struggle between the proprietary and assembly factions became involved as each tried to lay the blame for the crisis on the other.  

Barton was brought into the debate for several reasons. For one thing, he was an eyewitness to the crisis on the frontier and perhaps to the massacre at Lancaster as well. He was sympathetic to the Paxtonians because of his years spent on the frontier, and he was on good terms with the local Presbyterian ministers and laymen. Finally, he was a partisan of the proprietary faction in Pennsylvania politics and was in a position to aid them by joining the pamphlet war.

Barton's pamphlet was published as a reply to an earlier pamphlet by Benjamin Franklin in which the actions of the Paxton Boys were condemned and the role of the Quaker-dominated assembly defended. Barton began with an attack on what he felt was the Quaker attachment to non-violence. He argued that on many occasions in the past Quakers had been willing to take up arms if they thought the struggle was just. In Pennsylvania, they had been willing to pursue non-violence because the cost of that policy was borne by the frontier residents and not by the Quakers of the eastern counties. They abandoned their precious policy only in order to defend "a Pack of villainous, faithless Savages" against the righteous anger of their victims.

Barton claimed that although he was not an encourager of mobs and riots he did oppose "the domination of a free people by a willful faction" such as the Quakers. This was the heart of his argument. At the base of the Paxton affair, he saw a political struggle for

38. This summary is based on a survey of the various pamphlets relating to the Paxton affair found in Early American Imprints.
39. TB, The Conduct of the Paxton-Men (Philadelphia: Andrew Stewart, 1764), Early American Imprints #9594; Benjamin Franklin, Narrative of the Late Massacres (By persons unknown, n.d.), Early American Imprints #9667. Both pamphlets were published anonymously, but their authors soon became known.
40. TB, Conduct of the Paxton-Men, pp. 9-12.
control of the colonial government. He argued that a people does not riot unless it is oppressed or feels that it is oppressed and that Quaker control of the assembly was oppressive when they used that control to frustrate the legitimate complaints of the frontiersmen.  

In discussing the events in Lancaster, he began by defending the actions of the local magistrates. Franklin had accused them of conniving with the Paxtonians in the massacre, but Barton demonstrated that there was nothing that they could have done to stop the quick and thorough actions of the Paxton Boys. He reiterated that he did not approve of the killings, and he expressed the wish "that the Women and little Ones at least, could have been spared." Nevertheless, he presented evidence intended to prove that the Conestoga Indians were not the peaceful, harmless Indians pictured by the Quakers. They were, rather, a "drunken, troublesome crew" who had capped years of mischief by supporting the warring Indians during the recent troubles. If they had not actually participated in murders of whites, they had at least given information and assistance to those who did.

Barton then launched into a series of Biblical and Classical references designed to prove that a free people has the right to use force, even brutal and uncivilized force, in order to destroy traitors. This section of the pamphlet seems to display some of the inner tensions which must have gripped Barton as he studied the savage consequences of the Indian war. He gives the impression of a deeply troubled man who is desperately searching through the Scriptures and the Classics for information which will reassure him of the righteousness of his cause. Perhaps he feared that in the savage frontier fighting of the Paxton Boys his own people, whom he supposed to be Christians and civilized Englishmen, were degenerating into barbarians. By pointing out that the ancestors of his civilization had been forced into savage acts without losing their moral values, he may have reassured himself about the possibilities of future improvement in Pennsylvania.

He concluded his pamphlet by reiterating his analysis of the plight of the frontier settlers and by expressing the hope that the Quakers would finally be willing to do something to help them. He claimed that the executive part of the government was trying

41. Ibid., p. 13.
42. Ibid., pp. 17, 19-21, 23.
43. Ibid., pp. 23-26.
to do something, but that all their efforts were being frustrated by the assembly. Surely, he argued, the Quakers would now end their tyranny and hypocrisy and fill the people's need. 44

Barton's analysis of the Paxton affair has much to recommend it. The Conestoga Indians were less than purely innocent, and he did correctly see that the key issue was one of political power. 45 His pamphlet was not intended as "objective" history but as political polemic, and, as a polemic, it effectively presented the views of the frontier. He also presented the views of the Presbyterian faction so well that an anonymous critic of his pamphlet accused him of being a Presbyterian minister. 46

Although Barton dedicated his pamphlet to reasoned and factual analysis, he naturally arranged his arguments so as to put his own case in the best possible light. For example, in discussing the Quaker's past history of military vigor, he ignored the fact that their doctrine of non-violence did not emerge fully-matured at the very start of the sect's history. Many of his examples of militant and military Quakers were from the early history of the sect when its doctrines were not fully developed. He also failed to note that many of the individual cases he sighted led to censure by the Quaker establishment. 47 Even more importantly, he ignored the role played by the whites in arousing the Indians to violence although he was perfectly aware of that role. He condemned Franklin for "acting as judge and jury" for the Paxtonians when he called their actions "murders." 48 Yet, he himself repeatedly acted as judge and jury for the Indians in exactly the same way. Furthermore, he relied on a series of sworn and affirmed statements which show a long record of ill-feeling between Indians and whites in the Lancaster area, but which are hardly proof of criminal misconduct on the part of any individual Indian. 49 In attempting to place the blame for the inadequate defense of the frontier on the assembly, he ignored any possible responsibility of the proprietary party in that matter. Finally, he

44. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
49. Ibid., pp. 18-20.
came dangerously close to advocating vigilante justice and mob-rule on a number of occasions. Perhaps these inconsistencies and shortcomings resulted from the political passions about this issue, but they may also have been due to his own internal turmoil.

There is no record of any direct participation by Barton in the Paxton affair. There is also no further record of his participation in the public debate. Interestingly, he did eventually benefit indirectly from the Paxton affair. The rich Conestoga Reservation, renamed "Conestoga Manor," became an object of much interest after its owners were killed. It was first occupied by some of the Paxton Boys under what Barton called "their ridiculous notion of a right by conquest." The local authorities shared this assessment of their claim and soon drove them off. The deed for the farm then passed through the hands of Governor John Penn to Sir William Johnson, and, as mentioned earlier, Barton obtained the use of the farm from Johnson.\(^5\)

When things began to return to normal after the Paxton affair, Barton once again turned his attention to missionary work among the Indians. The recent events seem to have convinced him more strongly than ever that civilizing and Christianizing the Indians was necessary for the peace and prosperity of both races. In order to further this work, he enlisted the help of Sir William Johnson of New York, the royal superintendent of Indian affairs in the northern colonies. In September of 1765, he journeyed to Johnson's home for what turned out to be a fruitful meeting.\(^5\) Barton was particularly interested in training young Indian boys as missionaries for the Church of England. For years, he had favored establishing a series of schools for this purpose, and he hoped that with Sir William's help he might be able to put them into operation. Sir William was quite receptive to Barton's suggestions, and he agreed to support them. He also agreed to join the S.P.G. itself in order to make his ties


51. TB to the Secretary, 23 January 1766, Perry, Historical Collections, pp. 400-402; TB to Sir William Johnson, 7 October and 9 November 1765, Johnson Papers, 11:954-955, 4:865-868; and Sir William Johnson to TB, 7 November 1765, Doc. Hist. of N.Y., pp. 360-361.
with the missionary effort that much stronger.  

Johnson established two schools in the Mohawk country near his home for which Barton recruited promising young schoolmasters. He also recommended ministers to Johnson for service in upper New York. The most important man whom Barton sent to New York was a young College of Philadelphia graduate named John Stuart. Stuart had been a schoolmaster in Lancaster from 1763 until 1770, and while there Barton apparently directed his readings in theology. Stuart remained in New York until the end of the Revolutionary War when he fled to Canada. In Canada, he became a leading churchman and acquired the reputation as "the father of the Church in Upper Canada."  

In order to further his missionary schemes, Barton was anxious to educate Indian boys in his own home. His most important pupil was Sir William's Indian son, William, who stayed with Barton for almost a year in 1767 and 1768. Although he frequently asked Johnson to discover other Indian boys who might be sent to Pennsylvania for instruction, it is unclear how many others he was actually able to help.  

The friendship between Sir William and Barton was based on more than their mutual interest in Christianizing the Indians. Both men were amateur scientists. On his way home from his first meeting with Johnson, Barton stopped in New York City in order to arrange for the purchase and construction of various components which Sir William needed for his "electrical apparatus."  

As the 1760s came to a close, Barton had built for himself a very happy and contented life in Lancaster, but the political passions of the 1770s shattered this life. As the Revolution approached, he found it impossible to transfer his loyalties from England to his adopted country. His feelings evolved from concern, to alarm,
to bitterness as he found himself increasingly cut off from the American mainstream. He also became alienated from many of his friends and neighbors who adopted the rebel cause. Even his relations with some of his very close friends, such as David Rittenhouse, were strained as he stubbornly clung to his Loyalism.

The first sign of trouble for Barton came in the 1760s in the bitter debate over the need for Anglican bishops in America. This debate produced a decisive break between the Anglican and Presbyterian communities of Pennsylvania. The Presbyterians led the opposition to the creation of bishops, and past cooperation between the two groups was forgotten in the acrimonious debate which developed. Since the frontier was the stronghold of Presbyterianism in Pennsylvania and since he had many Presbyterian friends and acquaintances, Barton must have felt the results of this debate most acutely.

As an Anglican missionary, Barton naturally supported the creation of an American episcopate. He felt that bishops might solve many of the problems facing the Church in America. In particular, they might be able to stem the tide of wild "enthusiasm" which was sweeping the colonies. They might also help improve the quality and effectiveness of the American clergy. Although he made his opinions clear in his private correspondence, there is no record of Barton's direct participation in the public debate and pamphlet war touched off by the issue of American bishops. It seems likely that on this issue as on many others which arose in the stormy years which followed he tried to avoid trouble by avoiding public statements which would have antagonized the Revolutionaries.

With the Stamp Act crisis, he expressed growing alarm over the approaching conflict. He feared that it was no longer safe for a man to speak or write openly in defense of the Mother Country. As the storm clouds gathered, he devoted himself more and more to his ministerial duties. He always claimed that he remained neutral in the revolutionary conflict, but his true feelings must have been apparent to those around him. In his correspondence, he made no secret of his support of a compromise peace which would


restore British authority in America. He also condemned the revolutionary cause for tyranny and oppression. For example, in November 1776 he stated that the struggle had been brought on "by a few ambitious and designing men" and that it "might have been prevented if Lord Howe's conciliatory proposition had been accepted." It is doubtful that such feelings would have been tolerated for long by the Revolutionary authorities.

In the 1770s, Barton also suffered personal tragedies. His wife's health failed, and after a long period of serious illness she died on 18 June 1774. She left him alone with eight children to raise. His own health also began to suffer, as his many years of frontier life began to take their toll. He gave up his practice of frequent trips to Philadelphia and throughout most of the 1770s remained isolated in Lancaster. He was thus shut off from the centers of Anglican and Loyalist strength when the war began.

During the war, Barton came into conflict with the Revolutionary government of Pennsylvania. He refused to do anything which he felt would violate his vows as a minister. In particular, he refused to omit the collects and prayers for the king and royal family from his services. Because of this refusal, he was forced to shut up his churches and conduct his ministry in private. Even then, he could not avoid trouble. Although some of his friends who had gone over to the rebel cause remained loyal to him, and although he admitted that he had received no "gross insults, or personal abuse," he found life in Lancaster increasingly difficult. He was harassed by what he called "the Mob," and he found the security laws of Pennsylvania oppressive and impossible to live with. There were also ugly rumours about his participation in Tory plots and sabotage. Finally, when he refused to take the Test Oath of loyalty to the Revolutionary government, he found his freedom of movement restricted until at last he was confined to his rectory.

60. TB to the Secretary, 25 November 1776, ibid., pp. 489-491.
61. Pa. Gazette, 29 June 1774; Ford, David Rittenhouse, pp. 56, 89-90; TB to Peters, 8 November 1770, Peters papers.
62. TB to the Secretary, 1 March 1775, S.P.G. MSS.
63. TB to the Secretary, 25 November 1776, Perry, Historical Collections, pp. 489-491.
In the fall of 1778, the pressure became too great, and with the knowledge of the Revolutionary state government, he fled Pennsylvania for New York. He left behind all eight of his children, six of whom were still minors. He was accompanied only by his second wife whom he had married in 1776. Her family were prominent New York Loyalists, and she had promised before they married to accompany him to New York or even to England if that became necessary.65

Barton's family eventually fell under the protection of his eldest son, William, who returned from England in January 1779. William Barton shared some of his father's Tory sympathies, although in the summer of 1775 he had served as a secretary for the Revolutionary government of Lancaster. In September 1775, he left for England in order to study law. This experience apparently deprived him of his Tory leanings, and he returned to Pennsylvania where he began a long and successful career as a lawyer and Federalist politician.66

William Barton hoped to arrange for his father's return to Pennsylvania, and Thomas Barton apparently encouraged him despite the fact that in his correspondence he complained bitterly over his unjust treatment in America. He maintained that he had always obeyed American laws without public complaint despite his personal feelings.67

Early in 1780, William and Thomas Barton obtained permission from their respective governments to meet for one last time. In April, they went to Elizabeth-Town, New Jersey, and discussed the possibility of Thomas's return to Pennsylvania. Nothing came of this meeting, and on 25 May 1780, Thomas Barton died in New York after apparently having finally decided to leave for England.68

Except for these few sad personal matters there is little record of Thomas Barton's activities during the Revolutionary period, but there are several rather obvious reasons why he chose to become

66. "Extract from Biographical History of Lancaster County by Harris," Commonplace Book Containing Rittenhouse letters, etc.; Ford, David Rittenhouse, p. 91; "Extracts from the votes. . ." broadside, Early American Imprints, # 14142 and # 14143; TB to the Secretary, 24 August, 20 October 1775, S.P.G. MSS.
67. TB to the Secretary, 15 December 1778, 8 January 1779, S.P.G. MSS.
68. W. Barton, Memoirs of Rittenhouse, p. 281; Rivington’s Royal Gazette, 31 May 1780.
a Loyalist. First, he was an Anglican minister. His whole career and his religious faith were built around loyalty to the Crown. He was also a member of the ruling elite of Pennsylvania, and many of his friends and close associates from that elite had become Loyalists. They had little to gain and much to lose from a change in the relationship between the colonies and England.

The circumstances of his birth may also help explain Barton’s Loyalism. He was born in Ireland, but his family was thoroughly English. They had settled in Ireland during the Civil War and occupied lands captured from the natives. It is not surprising that someone raised in such a colonial environment might grow up to be a strong patriot. Finally, Barton had sound ideological reasons for his Loyalism. Although he shared many of the ideological goals of the Revolutionaries, he was a conservative. He felt that the best way to protect rights and liberties was by maintaining the constitutional link with England. In the Revolution, he thought he saw the beginnings of mob-rule and tyranny. These, he feared, would soon threaten the rights and liberties which both he and the Revolutionaries believed in. In light of his own experience during the war, it is obvious that his fears, while they may not have been accurate, were certainly not groundless.

In conclusion, we have seen that Thomas Barton was a man of varied interests and activities. His life has given us some small insight into the problems faced by an educated and cultured immigrant who came to America in the middle of the eighteenth century and settled along the Pennsylvania frontier. Although he died an outcast from the society he helped to build, he still contributed to the process of cultural change in America.