

The Robert Barber, Jr. House: A Relic of Quaker Hegemony

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Partially hidden behind old English boxwoods on an embankment overlooking the Susquehanna River in the southern portion of Columbia Borough stands one of Lancaster County's earliest surviving brick homes. Erected about 1760 by Robert Barber, Jr., the eldest son of one of the three original Quaker settlers, the formal Georgian design features of this home demonstrate how prosperous English Quaker families were beginning to transplant urban Philadelphia tastes to Pennsylvania's remote Susquehanna back country in the years following the close of the French and Indian War. After the Scots-Irish vigilantes known to history as the "Paxton Boys" burned Conestoga Indian town in 1763, they stopped at this elegant Quaker home to warm themselves by the fire, and perhaps to symbolically thumb their noses at Philadelphia's Quaker oligarchy whom they had long criticized for failing to take adequate defensive measures to protect frontier settlers against marauding Indians. The Robert Barber, Jr. house stands as a monument to the era of Quaker hegemony that met disaster in the turmoil and aftermath of the Seven Years War. Despite a destructive fire, long years of neglect, and numerous changes of ownership, this important historical landmark has in recent years been stabilized and returned to use as a single family home.

The Robert Barber, Jr. house is Columbia's second oldest surviving home and the first to be entirely constructed of brick. None of the original homes of Columbia's first three Quaker settlers, Robert Barber, Sr., John Wright, and Samuel Blunston, have survived. The original Wright and Barber homes were constructed of logs while Samuel Blunston, the wealthiest of the three, constructed a stone house that quickly became the center of community life. All of these homes were later greatly enlarged. By 1798, John Wright's

log home included frame additions that increased the size to three thousand square feet.¹ Torn down in 1873, this log and frame dwelling served as the community's first school house at a period when the settlement was still known as Wright's Ferry.² Samuel Blunston's stone home also received many later additions and eventually became known as Belmont or the Mt. Bethel Mansion. It was demolished in 1930 to make room to park equipment used in constructing the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge.³ The magnificent stone dwelling today known as Wright's Ferry Mansion was erected about 1738 on the land of Susanna Wright, John Wright's eldest daughter, by her brother James Wright.⁴ It is the only surviving home in Columbia constructed during the first two decades of the community's existence and has been beautifully restored to its pre-1750 appearance by the Louise Steinman von Hess Foundation.

All of the original English Quaker settlers at the present site of Columbia were personal friends of William Penn's secretary, James Logan.⁵ Though highly interesting correspondence sent by James Logan to Samuel Blunston, John Wright, and Susanna Wright has survived, no letters between Robert Barber and James Logan have been located. Nonetheless, the Barber and Wright families are known to have been closely related by marriage and Robert Barber was the first to purchase land at this site adjacent to the land originally patented to James Logan.⁶ The Wright, Barber and Blunston families constituted a tightly-knit Quaker oligarchy that played a central role in organizing Lancaster County as an independent entity in 1729, laid the legal ground work for establishing settlements on the western side of the Susquehanna River, and enforced Pennsylvania's interests in the border dispute with Maryland that came to be known as Cresap's War. The Wrights, Barbers, and Blunstons were James Logan's eyes and ears on the frontier and Logan could rely on them to do whatever was necessary to bring the rule of law to the backcountry.

The present site of Columbia was originally occupied by a Shawnee Indian village at least as early as the 1690s.⁷ At the period when these English Quaker families first arrived, this village consisted of several dozen wigwams and log huts scattered along the stream that became known as Shawnee Run.⁸ In erecting homes in this region, the Wrights, Barbers, and Blunstons assisted Logan in preventing further illegal occupation of land by German and Scots-Irish squatters. The land to the north of Wright's Ferry around Donegal Church had already been occupied by a few Scots-Irish squatters at Logan's invitation, but newer arrivals from Ireland continued to flood into the region without seeking his permission to settle.⁹ Alarmed at the quantity of land sold to Swiss-German Mennonites at Conestoga during his absence in England, by 1718 Logan was already busy having land in Conestoga Manor and Hempfield surveyed for himself and the proprietary government.¹⁰ More recently arrived Germans had located themselves west of the Susquehanna River without seeking permission from the proprietary government, and in some cases even

purchasing their land patents from Maryland.¹¹ In light of these events, it is significant that the three original Quaker settlers at this important Susquehanna River crossing, Robert Barber, John Wright, and Samuel Blunston, were respectively a sheriff, a justice of the peace, and a land surveyor.

Tradition asserts that Robert Barber, Sr. was the first to visit the present site of Columbia in the spring of 1726 where he erected a temporary log cabin in what became the southern portion of the borough.¹² A cordwainer by trade, he had unsuccessfully run for the office of sheriff for Chester County in 1719 and had been elected county coroner in 1721. In 1724 he was appointed as one of the assessors for Conestoga and Donegal Townships in the present Lancaster County and it was probably in this capacity that he first came to reconnoiter the site of his future home on the Susquehanna River.¹³ He purchased 500 acres here in August of 1726 and immediately sold off 250 acres from the northern portion of this parcel. John Wright purchased 150 acres and his daughter Susanna 100 acres from this tract.¹⁴ When the town of Columbia was formally laid out in 1788 by Susanna Wright's nephew the first lots lay upon the 100 acre tract purchased by her in 1726.¹⁵ In 1726 Samuel Blunston also purchased 600 acres from James Logan that bordered on the north of Susanna Wright's tract.¹⁶ An old Wright family account book records that John Wright and Samuel Blunston departed for the Susquehanna in company with several mechanics, slaves and an Indian guide on September 12 of that year.¹⁷

Soon after his arrival, Robert Barber constructed a sawmill on the stream that later became known as Barber's Run.¹⁸ He was first appointed and then elected to the office of sheriff when Lancaster County was created out of the western portion of Chester County in 1729.¹⁹ Hoping that Wright's Ferry would be selected as the permanent county seat, he constructed a sturdy log jail on his land that supplemented the log jail already standing at Postlewaite's Tavern in Conestoga Township where the first county court was held.²⁰ Severely disappointed when James Hamilton's land was selected over Wright's Ferry as the county seat, Robert Barber, Sr. withdrew from public life in 1731 to attend to his sawmill and farm. Upon his death in 1749, his estate was valued at £496 7s 9d and included four Negro slaves.²¹ It is notable that all of the early Quaker families at Wright's Ferry were slave holders and that two of Robert Barber's sons owned slaves at least as late as the year 1769.²² The abolition of slavery among English Quakers was a gradual process that was not fully completed until near the close of the eighteenth century. After his death, Robert Barber's widow, Hannah Tidmarsh Barber, paid off an outstanding mortgage to the General Loan Office, thereby preserving the original Barber land for her children.²³ The 1751 tax assessment records show Widow Barber being taxed at the rate of £12 in that year, placing her in the upper 18.8% of all rate payers in Hempfield Township.²⁴ Some idea of the degree of economic stratification in this community can be gleaned from the fact that

the upper 20% of the population controlled roughly 43% of the taxable property in the township.

Robert and Hannah Barber's eldest son, Robert Barber, Jr., was born in 1722 while the family still lived in Chester.²⁵ Robert Barber, Jr. married Sarah Taylor in 1746 and together Robert and Sarah Barber had thirteen children, ten of whom survived to adulthood.²⁶ The couple's sixth child was born in Philadelphia in 1756 during the period when five local families evacuated Wright's Ferry during the French and Indian War.²⁷ Their extended stay in Philadelphia would have exposed the Barbers to the latest fashions in urban architectural taste and furniture design being introduced from England. Up to this period, the only "great houses" standing at Wright's Ferry were James Wright's stone house erected on Susanna Wright's land about 1738 and Samuel Blunston's stone and brick mansion which was being enlarged and remodeled at the time of his death in 1745. The rest were log or frame houses, only a few of which had been enlarged much beyond their original modest dimensions.

When Hannah Barber transferred 62 acres of the original 250 acre Barber tract to her eldest son in 1760, Robert Barber, Jr. immediately began erecting a new brick dwelling that incorporated such urban refinements as corner fireplaces, a center hall, and formal balanced facade, features to which he had recently been exposed in Philadelphia.²⁸ The Robert Barber, Jr. house consists of a four room over four room plan having a central hall running the depth of the building. The facade is five bays wide and is composed of Flemish bond brickwork with a first floor water table. A pent roof originally encircled three sides of the building and each room was fitted with a corner fireplace. Despite the refined aspirations betrayed by these formal design features, this new brick dwelling remained very much a product of its frontier environment. One of Robert and Sarah's daughters, Rhoda, wrote in 1830:

I remember the old house my father lived in before he built the present brick house. Some of the wood in the old house is now in the brick house. There was no pine boards as in the present day. The joists, windows and door frames are all of oak, what little pine there is in it is logs which was found in the river and sawed at what was called Barbers Run where Nathaniel Barber once had a sawmill. There was a fulling mill on the same stream owned by Samuel Barber, another brother.²⁹

In 1888 the noted local historian Samuel Evans confirmed many of her observations with regard to the brick house, adding: "Forty years ago the writer laid new floors in the first story. The old flooring boards was oak, and not tongued or grooved, merely butted together."³⁰ Nonetheless, upon its completion this stylish brick dwelling must have constituted a dramatic presence in

a rustic community containing mostly log and frame dwellings that generally enclosed less than 850 square feet.

Though this home possesses many stylish Georgian design features, it is fairly modest in scale and the interior wood trim exhibits characteristic Quaker restraint. At 2,100 square feet it is the smallest of the three English Quaker "great houses" that existed at Wright's Ferry during the 1760s. While such comparatively large homes represented a stark contrast to the modest log and frame dwellings which most local settlers called home, during these years the local Quaker community was growing comparatively less wealthy and less influential. Neither Robert Barber, Jr. or any of his brothers would occupy political office and all of Robert, Jr.'s sons would eventually sell the land they inherited at Wright's Ferry in order to purchase larger farms in Union County, Pennsylvania.³¹ Despite the display of genteel pretension in this 1760 home, by the end of the eighteenth century the male Barber heirs apparently felt compelled to join legions of German and Scots-Irish yeoman farmers who cashed in on rising real estate prices to move further west where they could purchase much larger parcels of land. Such westward migration may have been driven less by the pursuit of personal wealth than by a yearning to preserve their families' status as middling rank yeoman farmers. As families grew while family land holdings remained fixed there were simply few other alternatives to ensure sufficient land for succeeding generations to remain in farming. The first detailed tax assessment records surviving from the period after the new brick house was built are those of 1769. In that year, Robert Barber, Jr. owned a total of 154 acres, his brother Nathaniel owned 130 acres, and the remaining two brothers, James and Samuel, forty acres each.³² During this period, the average parcel owned by property owners within a three mile radius of Wright's Ferry was just 56 acres of cleared land and 120 acres of uncleared land. It should be noted that these averages are slightly skewed to the high end of the spectrum by the late Samuel Blunston's large estate containing 600 acres, the care of which was by then under Susanna Wright's management.

It is interesting that this first brick home at Wright's Ferry is nearly contemporaneous with the 1762 William Willis house, perhaps the oldest surviving brick home constructed within the present bounds of York County. The similarities between these two homes are striking. Though the Willis house does not possess a center hall like the Barber house, and contains a basement fireplace which is not found in the Barber house, these homes have a great deal in common. The Barber house originally had eight corner fireplaces, one in each room, while the Willis house has six corner fireplaces between eight rooms plus a seventh kitchen fireplace in the basement. Both houses have nearly identical fenestration patterns, Flemish bond facades, interior brick partitions, and interior wood trim.³³ Located in Manchester Township, the 480 acre tract on which the Willis house was built was first purchased from the proprietors in 1752 by William Willis in partnership with John and James

Wright of Wright's Ferry.³⁴ The Wright and Willis families had both formerly belonged to the New Garden Monthly Meeting and each became members of Quaker meetings having connections through Sadsbury Meeting. Further, the Barber family is known to have been intermarried with the Wright family and both were members of the Wright's Ferry Indulged Meeting established in 1751. In view of these facts, it is probably not a coincidence that Robert Barber, Jr. and William Willis constructed stylish brick houses sharing nearly identical design features during virtually the same period. William Willis is credited with making the bricks for the walls of the York County Court House in 1754 and also with doing the masonry work on the York Friends Meeting House in 1766. In the York County tax records for 1780 his occupation was listed as brick maker and it is entirely possible, though not certain, that he may also have had a hand in constructing the first brick home at Wright's Ferry.³⁵

The year 1763 witnessed the return of Indian depredations in Pennsylvania's western settlements with the brief Indian uprising known as Pontiac's War. The attacks on frontier settlements began near Fort Pitt and spread rapidly until finally put down in 1765 by General Bouquet in the area now encompassed by the state of Ohio. This period of temporary unrest touched the local settlement in a most tragic way. Several local Indians reported that one of the Conestoga Indians named Bill Sock had committed murders on the frontier while he was supposedly away hunting with a band of Shawnee from Shamokin. These rumors reached the ears of a group of Scots-Irish Presbyterians living at Paxton, now the site of Harrisburg. Frustrated by what they perceived as many years of neglect on the part of the Quaker-controlled Pennsylvania Assembly, which they accused of failing to take proper defensive measures against marauding Indians on Pennsylvania's frontier, Captain Lazarus Stewart led a group of fifty-seven vigilantes known as the "Paxton Boys" on a mission to destroy the Conestoga Indian Village near Turkey Hill in Conestoga Manor where Bill Sock lived.³⁶ These Indians constituted the remnants of the Susquehannock, Seneca, and Shawnee tribes that occupied this area during the seventeenth century and who had gradually been reduced to a state of poverty and dependency as the local forests were cut down. The governor had placed the impoverished Conestoga Indians under the care of a local German farmer who lived in Conestoga Manor and James Wright of Wright's Ferry who provided flour for them from his stone grist mill that stood near the mouth of Shawnee Run.

The earliest written document specifically connecting the Robert Barber, Jr. house to the bloody Paxton Massacre of 14 December 1763 is contained in a Journal written by Robert Barber, Jr.'s daughter, Rhoda Barber in 1830:

One of the first things in my recollection is hearing an account of the massacre of the poor Conestoga Indians which took place 12th Mo. 1763, three years before my birth. The great

interest which every one who I heard speak of it seemed to fix it in my mind at a very early age. I thought to have heard some particulars from my brother who well remembered it but the recollection was so affecting to him, tho it is nearly 70 years since, that I forebore to ask him all I intended, but I think the principal facts are too strongly fixed in my memory to admit mistake. They were called the Conestoga Indians, but I think there were some among them of the Shawnee tribe. There was one among them called Shawnee John and the little run where they had their huts is still called Shawnee Run. They were here when the first white settlers came, they were entirely peaceable and seemed as much afraid of the other Indians as the whites were. They often had their cabins by the little mill, my older brother and sister used to be whole days with them. They were great beggars and the children were so attached to them they could not bear to hear them refused anything they asked for. Their principle residence was at a place called Indian Town about nine miles from here at a little distance from Turkey Hill . . . James Wright and a person of the name Of Hore, a german who lived near the Indian Town, were appointed by the government to supply them with flour and other necessities . . . One very cold morning in 12 Mo. 1763 a german neighbor came to my father's house requesting him to go with him in pursuit of some robbers who had been at his house the preceding night behaving in a peculiar manner, melting pewter to make bullets over the fire . . . but my father dismissed his concerns . . . the Paxton Boys later came to the house in a snow blizzard and my father invited them in to warm themselves by the fire . . . ³⁷

Rhoda goes on to relate that while the Paxton Boys were in the house her older siblings saw the bloody tomahawks hanging from the men's saddles as well as a gun they recognized as belonging to an Indian playmate named Christie. After the departure of the Paxton vigilantes, the children related what they had seen to their father who thereby became cognizant of the probable significance. He quickly organized a rescue party and rode to the scene of the massacre.

Since Bill Sock, along with most of the residents of the Conestoga Indian Town, were away selling brooms and willow baskets at Martic Forge on the morning the Paxton band arrived at Conestoga, only a handful of the Indians who had remained behind were killed on that fateful morning, though all of the Indian cabins were burned to the ground. Local authorities gathered the remaining fourteen Conestoga Indians together and placed them in the

workhouse adjacent to the Lancaster jail for their own protection. Two weeks later, the Paxton Boys descended suddenly on Lancaster Town, broke into the workhouse, and slaughtered all of the Indian men, women, and children they found there including Bill Sock. Matthew Smith, one of the leaders of the Paxton band, would later assert that two of the Indians they found there were definitely among those known to have committed murders on the frontier.

Susanna Wright and Benjamin Franklin both wrote to the Assembly and the governor deploring the actions of the Paxton vigilantes. None of those responsible were ever brought to justice, however, though their identities were well known throughout the countryside. The Paxton vigilantes even commenced an aborted march on the city of Philadelphia with the intention of carrying their work of carnage into the very capital city of the colony. Lazarus Stewart later wrote the following in defense of the actions taken by his men:

Were the counties of Lancaster, York, Cumberland, Berks, and Northampton protected by government? Did not John Harris of Paxton ask advice of Col. Croghan, and did not the colonel advise him to raise a company of scouts, and was not this confirmed by Benjamin Franklin? And yet when Harris asked the Assembly to pay the scouting party he was told that "he might pay them himself." Did not the counties . . . keep up the rangers to watch the motions of the Indians; and when a murder was committed by an Indian a runner with the intelligence was sent to each scouting party, that the murderer or murderers might be punished? Did we not brave the summer's heat and the winter's cold, the savage tomahawk, while the inhabitants of Philadelphia County, Bucks and Chester ate, drank and were merry? If a white man kill an Indian it is a murder far exceeding any crime upon record . . . If an Indian kill a white man, it is the act of an ignorant heathen, perhaps in liquer, Alas! poor innocent! he is sent to the friendly Indians that he may be made a Christian!³⁸

The Paxton vigilantes must have enjoyed the irony of being asked to warm themselves by the hearth of a prosperous Quaker yeoman farmer after carrying out their grisly mission of revenge against a tribe of Christian Indians living under the protection of local Quaker families. The formal orange-red brick Georgian facade that formed such a strong contrast to the rustic wooden settlers' cabins scattered over the landscape must have seemed to the Paxton Boys the very embodiment of the arrogance of the Quaker faction that had controlled Pennsylvania's Assembly since the founding of the colony.

In reality, the power of the Quaker faction in the Pennsylvania Assembly had already been broken by the events of the war years. In a letter to Lancaster

merchant Isaac Whitlock, Susanna Wright expressed great anxiety that the Paxton band was still roaming freely and threatening to take further vengeance against other Indians, Israel Pemberton, the leader of the Quaker faction in the Assembly, and her brother James Wright, under whose care the Conestoga Indians had been placed by the governor.³⁹ For the children of Robert Barber, Jr. the affair was particularly devastating, a subject painful to recall even in their old age. The final legacy of the actions of the Paxton vigilantes may well have been to ensure that when western Indian tribes came to choose sides during the American Revolution they chose to fight with Britain against colonists who had failed to accord them the legal protections that William Penn and his agents promised the native peoples of Pennsylvania more than half a century before.

During the years preceding the Revolutionary War, the settlement of Wright's Ferry witnessed a steady flow of emigrants into the western frontier lands. The original travelers had arrived via the old Conestoga Road that ran past Postlewaite's Tavern to Logan's Conestoga store, thence northward via Turkey Hill to enter the settlement of Wright's Ferry from the south. In the early days, the road ended at John Wright's log ferry house that stood on the north side of what is now the first block of Locust Street in Columbia. Robert Barber, Jr.'s new brick home would have been the first dwelling a visitor saw upon reaching the settlement by this road in 1760. By then, however, most travelers no longer used the old road but preferred a new road from Lancaster that was laid out in 1734.⁴⁰ The community was changing as the traffic on the ferry increased. Indentured servants first brought here to supplement slaves who worked the land of the Quaker elite earned their freedom but continued to live as tenants on the land of their former masters. Several of the former indentured servants who possessed training as weavers and shoemakers traded their services to the local farmers for grain since cash was always in short supply.⁴¹ Though only twenty percent of the land had been cleared of trees, the community was gradually growing more populous. A log Quaker meeting house was built in 1758 in which two Irish Quakers, Mary Pearly and Catherine Pigton, played a guiding role.⁴² The hill to the south of the Barber tract was early settled by the Scots-Irish Patton family and the land to the north in Donegal Township was occupied by large numbers of Scots Irish. The land bordering on the east was entirely occupied by German families. Rhoda Barber recalled that local farmers relied on hemp and hops as cash crops during these years as there was then little commercial demand for grain. As the century passed, the indigent population also seems to have increased. Rhoda Barber notes that a little settlement located along the stream below Chiques Rock called "Snake Town" consisted of rude squatters' cabins and became a "rendezvous for strolling beggars and such kinds of people, many a midnight brawl has been witnessed there."⁴³

Though the community of Wright's Ferry possessed a sawmill, fulling

mill, grist mill, and hostelry during the early years, there were no shops until after the town of Columbia was laid out in 1788. Lancaster Town constituted Wright's Ferry's closest contact with an urban market. The day books and ledgers of Lancaster merchant William McCord for the years 1761 to 1767 describe purchases made by a number of individuals living at Wright's Ferry. In December, 1763 McCord sold two and a quarter yards of broadcloth, three and a half yards of white shalloon, and buttons to Robert White of "Right's Ferry" for £3 10s 9d.⁴⁴ On the same day John Rolan of the same place bought one yard of Beauchin, one and a half yards of spotted broadcloth, a quantity of powder, a pair of pumps, and four buttons for £1 0s 10d. In October and November of 1765 John Patton purchased sundry items that totaled £5 8s. Hugh Patton purchased a bonnet for £1 on 5 November 1766 and returned two weeks later for other sundries that included one and a half yards of lace and a bobbin for £8 8s 2d.⁴⁵ Hugh Patton returned to Lancaster the following month to buy a whip and small amounts of coffee and sugar. In 1767 William McCord sold Robert Barber, Jr. four yards of checked fabric and a hat on the same day Hugh Patton had returned to buy an unspecified quantity of checked cloth.⁴⁶ William McCord was just one of thirty-eight shopkeepers operating in Lancaster during this period.⁴⁷ In addition to his customers at Wright's Ferry, William McCord's day books reveal that he had customers in Donegal and Derry Townships and even as far away as Paxton and Carlisle.

After his death in 1782, Robert Barber, Jr.'s brick home came into the possession of a son, John Barber, who is listed as the owner when the 1798 Direct Tax records were compiled. These records describe the house as being of brick construction, two and a half stories in height, and measuring thirty-five by thirty feet. The first floor contained ten windows each having eighteen lights and the second floor eight windows with fifteen lights each.⁴⁸ The property was valued at just \$600 in 1798, while Samuel Blunston's brick and stone mansion, then owned by Samuel Bethel, was valued at \$900 and the stone dwelling today called Wright's Ferry mansion, then owned by Samuel Wright, was valued at \$1200. Several recently erected brick dwellings were valued considerably higher. By way of comparison, of the forty-two dwelling houses then standing in Columbia, seven were valued at \$200 or less, twenty-one at \$600 or less, while only four were valued at more than \$900. After Samuel Wright laid out the town of Columbia in 1788, the community experienced a sudden and rapid increase in population and a corresponding inflation in real estate values. By 1800 there were 314 persons living in Columbia not counting those early residents, like the Barbers, whose land still lay just outside the boundaries of the rapidly growing town.⁴⁹ According to John Pearson, who visited the town in 1801, Columbia contained about forty dwelling houses, most of which were constructed of brick.⁵⁰ By 1820 the local population climbed to 1092, and by 1830 it was 2044.⁵¹ Similar growth rates continued through most of the nineteenth century as the population increased

to 4140 by 1850 and passed 12,000 during the 1890s.⁵²

Steady population pressure and escalating real estate prices during the early nineteenth century apparently prompted most of Robert Barber, Jr.'s heirs to sell their holdings. About 1813 John Barber collaborated with another local resident to lay out building lots on a portion of the Barber land located along Front Street below Union Street.⁵³ By the early decades of the nineteenth century all of the male Barber heirs had migrated to Union County, leaving three of Robert Barber, Jr.'s unmarried daughters, Susanna, Sarah, and Rhoda, in possession of their parental homestead. On March 26, 1831 all of the surviving Barber heirs transferred ownership of the house to Sarah Barber.⁵⁴ Upon Sarah's death in 1845 the property descended to Rhoda Barber.⁵⁵ After Rhoda's death in 1849 this parcel, by then containing just four acres, was purchased by the Susquehanna Rolling Mill, which converted the dwelling to use as an office.⁵⁶ Over the succeeding years, the Susquehanna Rolling Mill was reorganized, first as the Susquehanna Iron Company, then as the Susquehanna Iron and Steel Company, and finally was sold to the Reading Iron Company in 1908.⁵⁷ A major fire completely destroyed the roof and severely damaged the rooms on the south end of the building during these years. The pitch of the present roof is not nearly as steep as that of the original roof. Several of the original corner fireplaces in the south end of the building were removed during this period and all of the original windows and interior wood trim in these rooms were apparently destroyed or heavily damaged in the fire.

When the Reading Iron Company went into receivership in 1924 the brick office building and just over one acre of land were sold to Peter Sponar for use as a residence.⁵⁸ The changes undergone by the building up to this period were mostly subtractions from the original fabric. In the process of converting the home to a duplex, Sponar added an enclosed staircase to the southeast room and perhaps the brick kitchen wing on the north wall. A staircase, since removed, that once ran along the east wall of the northeast room probably was added during the nineteenth century. The window to the right of the original front door was replaced by a second front door either during the nineteenth century while the building was being used as an office or by Peter Sponar in 1924 to provide a separate access for the second dwelling unit. Peter Sponar also constructed a large verandah across the front of the entire building sometime prior to 1933.

Though described in 1933 as being in very good condition, the dwelling suffered a second minor fire and by the time of Peter Sponar's death in 1971 the building was rapidly falling into an advanced state of decay. Through the efforts of a succession of new owners in 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1984, the building was finally stabilized and returned to a habitable condition.⁵⁹ It is currently the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Snyder.

In order to visualize the appearance Robert Barber, Jr.'s house would have presented to the Paxton vigilantes on that snowy and infamous December

day in 1763 it is important not only to understand the changes the building has undergone but also to learn something about what the interior furnishings were like. Though no estate inventory for Robert Barber, Jr. could be found, twelve inventories for estates in and around Wright's Ferry have been examined for clues. Covering the years 1745 to 1795, four of these are inventories for members of the Barber family, three are from other English Quaker households, four are from the estates of German Anabaptists, and one from the estate of a Scots-Irish Presbyterian. Though only two of the inventories identify the room locations of enumerated items, both of these are Quaker estates, including that of Robert Barber, Jr.'s brother Nathaniel, who died in the same year as Robert, Jr. Interpreting estate inventories is, of course, fraught with a number of risks. In the first place, they do not provide a cross section across a community since they tend to cover only those individuals who were wealthy enough to own property. It is also not possible to know if a given inventory is complete since it is always possible that specific items might be removed by the family before the inventory was taken and certain categories of items might be routinely ignored by appraisers. There also appear to be some differences in the way inventories were recorded among different ethnic groups in Pennsylvania. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that inventories were not used for tax purposes during the period and tended to be recorded by prominent local citizens who were generally not members of the family.

Since Nathaniel Barber owned a somewhat smaller house and slightly less land than his older brother, it seems reasonable to believe that the contents of Nathaniel's home in 1782 suggest the minimum quantity and quality of furnishings Robert Barber, Jr. would have had in his larger and more fashionable home at the time of his death. Nonetheless, since Nathaniel's inventory was taken at the end of a long and productive life, it is likely that the furnishings found in his home in 1782 represent some improvement over those one might have found there in 1763. The second surviving room by room inventory is that of Samuel Blunston, who died in 1745. Despite its early date, this must be used with extreme caution since Samuel Blunston was by far the wealthiest of Wright's Ferry's eighteenth-century residents.

From his inventory, Nathaniel Barber's home apparently contained three rooms and an entry hall on the first floor. The kitchen was apparently located in a separate outbuilding. In contrast, Robert Barber, Jr.'s house contained four rooms on the first floor grouped around a central hall. Since no evidence could be found of a large kitchen fireplace having existed in any of these rooms, it is possible that the original kitchen in this home was also located in a separate outbuilding. Samuel Blunston's unusually detailed 1745 inventory provides some important insights into the way rooms were used at Wright's Ferry during the eighteenth century. The second floor room, described as the "the river chamber," and "the lodging room below" both contained bedsteads with curtains. The existence of sleeping chambers on the

first floor of houses was very common during the eighteenth century and this inventory suggests that such a first floor chamber might have been located in the front of Robert Barber, Jr.'s home in order to provide a view of the river. The room to the right of the front door on entering the central hall would seem to be a logical possibility for a first floor lodging room since the location of the original door appears to have been located rather far back the hall while the door to the opposite room is centered in that room. The significance of this observation is strengthened by the fact that, since all of the interior partitions of this house are brick, it is unlikely that many alterations have been made in relocating doorways from their original locations.

The room described in Nathaniel Barber's inventory as the "front parlour" contained "one large dining table, one tea table, one arm and six smaller chairs, a broken looking glass, a map, china, and plate."⁶⁰ The presence of such apparently good furniture as a dining table valued at £7 10s and plate valued at £12 5s suggests that this was the most formal room and probably corresponded to the room in the northwest corner of Robert Barber, Jr.'s house, which contains the most elaborate wood trim and fireplace mantel. The china stored in Nathaniel Barber's front parlour was valued at £4, the tea table at £1 5s, all of the chairs together at £2 5s. The stove room, corresponding to the common living area or "Stube" of local German homes, contained "a stove, table, looking glass, and gun" valued at a total of £8 5s. A noteworthy division of space by gender may be indicated by the fact that the family's china and better furniture were kept in the more lavishly furnished front parlour while the stove room was home to the only gun in the house. The "lodging room downstairs" contained a bedstead with curtains, a small walnut table, six old blue chairs, and an old cradle. As was characteristic of the period, the bed and curtains in this room were valued at a substantial £17 10s. The entry hall contained an old walnut table, a small walnut table, a broken set of carpenter's tools, and a large pair of stillyards. Though furniture composed of walnut was generally of the better sort, the presence of carpenter's tools and stillyards in the entry hall illustrates the informal way the entry hall was used in Nathaniel's home. The second floor chambers are grouped together in the inventory and contained four beds with bedsteads valued collectively at £56. The only case piece was a small chest of drawers valued at £2 5s. Other articles identified as being located on the second floor were two small spinning wheels, a wool wheel, a cotton wheel, two old reels, three bricks of flax seed, one trunk, and six old casks.

Nathaniel Barber's kitchen furniture was valued at £16 5s 3d and included two tubs, two buckets, one pail, three iron pots, one griddle, one tea kettle, two dozen pewter plates, six pewter dishes, eight tin cups, three small pewter basins, one coffeepot, one old brass kettle, a shovel, and a pair of tongs. A set of table linens that may have been stored in the kitchen were valued at a substantial £13 10s. With the contents of the house valued at just

over £180, Nathaniel Barber's furnishings probably were similar to those found in the homes of many of his neighbors who owned similar amounts of land. His inventory represents a sharp contrast to that of his father, Robert Barber, Sr. who died in 1749. Though the elder Barber's estate was valued at more than £496 and included four slaves, eighteen horned cattle, ten horses, a number of hogs, unspecified quantities of hemp, oats, barley, straw, hay, and hops, and bonds with interest due totaling £178, he seems to have owned little household furniture.⁶¹ The list specifies only "household and kitchen furniture" valued at £21 6s, table linen valued at £5, and a large Bible valued at £1. Nathaniel's wearing apparel was valued at £20, nearly identical to the appraisal placed on the apparel in his father's estate more than three decades earlier.

The estate of another brother, John Barber, who died in 1759, was valued at £40 14s. Of this amount, most of the value was placed on hemp, hops, winter grain, beaver skins, sheep, and hogs. John Barber's furniture consisted of one feather bed valued at £3, two guns valued at £2 5s, a walnut table and an oak table valued at a total of 15s, a chest valued at 6s.⁶² Kitchen furniture included a coffee mill, nine plates, eight dishes, one iron pot, two tubs and a quart tin that totaled just £1 17s. The inventory of James Barber, who died in 1785, was similarly valued at just over £50 but contained a greater quantity of household furniture including a bed, bedstead and bedding valued at £2 10s, a small chest of drawers at £3 and a large chest of drawers at £12. In addition, James also owned another table, a looking glass, five old chairs, books, pewter, a copper kettle, two sets of fire dogs, shovels, and tongs, three iron pots, smoothing irons, a griddle, frying pan, ladle, skimmer and two small tubs.⁶³ The inventory of Thomas Patton, who lived south of the Barber families in 1791, included £22 worth of feather beds, a chest of drawers, a chest, three tables, a corner cupboard, a looking glass, silver tea spoons and a ten plate stove.⁶⁴ Another Scots-Irish inventory, that of James Anderson of neighboring Donegal Township, listed a watch, a couch, a dining table, tea table, three other tables, a cupboard, five beds with two bedsteads, a chest of drawers, a large looking glass, silver tea and table spoons, a pair of silver sugar tongs, and a quantity of Delft and china plates.⁶⁵ The estates of local German farmers tended to be less specific with regard to descriptions of household furnishings but frequently include mention of a house clock and a ten plate stove.⁶⁶

Samuel Blunston's very large estate that was valued at more than £4000 in 1745 naturally included a dwelling house furnished more luxuriously than any other in the neighborhood. It was nonetheless not lavish by modern standards. Furnishings inventoried with the rooms totaled £110 while a number of specific legacies increased the total by an additional £343.⁶⁷ One of the most notable differences from most other estates of the period was the large library containing 160 volumes that was appraised at £100. In terms of value,

an even more noteworthy difference was the large quantity of china bowls, plates, teacups, saucers, chocolate cups, and silver. Twenty-eight plates valued at £143 were designated as a specific legacy. The sleeping chambers were also described in far greater detail than in other local estate inventories. From this inventory we learn that the "river chamber" contained a bedstead having white linen curtains that was valued at £2, a featherbed, bolster, and pillow at £3 10s, a pair of sheets, pillow case, and blanket valued at £1 10s, a calico quilt and a cotton coverlet valued at £2 10s, a calico counterpane at 15s, and swinging bed and fly curtains at 15s. This room also contained two looking glasses valued at £13 and three leather chairs at £1 each. Another looking glass valued at £2 was found hanging on the wall in the stair hall. The other second floor sleeping chamber was similarly fitted up with a bedstead, curtains, and other fabrics that totaled more than £8. In addition this room contained two of chests of drawers, three dressing tables, and a looking glass that added another £5 10s. Six rush bottom chairs were appraised at £1 4s.

Samuel Blunston's first floor lodging room was equipped with a bedstead having old calico curtains, old silk cloth and tester, two feather beds, bolsters, and sheets, a small quilt, and a blanket. Other furniture in the room included a pair of low drawers at £1 10s each and another looking glass at £2 10s, six rush chairs at 18s, a pallet bedstead at 7s and an old chest at 5s. The "dining room" contained a large table appraised at £2 and a small table at £1, a round tea table at £1, a couch and small oak tables at £1, five old leather chairs at 10s and two wooden arm chairs at 10s. Perhaps most noteworthy of the dining room, however is the presence of a "chamber clock" appraised at £9. Such tall case clocks were highly prized symbols of status during the period. Yet another sign that this was the home of a refined English gentleman was to be found on the walls, which were hung with a looking glass, several maps, and pictures valued at a total of £3. In addition to the large quantity of china found in the buffet and the pantry, the latter room contained two tables, two cases containing spoons and knives, two brass chafing dishes, a warming pan, five damask and diaper table cloths, two dozen damask napkins and a much larger than usual assortment of brass and iron kitchen ware. From the time of its construction, the Blunston home had been distinguished from other local homes as a center of entertainment and hospitality to prominent people who passed over the ferry.

The formal design features of Robert Barber, Jr.'s 1760 home express the genteel aspirations of a middling rank yeoman farm family. Though the home was probably somewhat more lavishly furnished than were many of its neighbors, its interior would have looked spartan to modern eyes. A comfortable home for a family with ten children, it represents a transitional stage toward the development of the stylish brick residences that came to line the streets of Columbia at the end of the eighteenth century. Originally the home had a very steeply gabled roof that was covered with wooden shingles

and flanked by end chimneys. A few surviving windows reveal that the house originally had nine-light over nine-light windows on the first floor, nine-light over six-light windows on the second floor and a four-light transom over the front door. The corner fireplaces having high molded mantel shelves are nearly identical in form to those surviving in the William Willis house in York County and may originally have been painted with the same type of cream colored paint found on the interior door frames during restoration of that building. The Willis and Barber homes both have interior brick partitions, white oak door frames, and nearly identically carved chair rails and baseboards.

On the morning the Paxton Boys partook of the warmth of Robert Barber's hearth, his home probably possessed a first floor lodging room equipped with a curtained bedstead that may have had a river view. The formal parlour across the hall could have been furnished with a tall case clock such as those that were valued as status symbols in the homes of the wealthier local German and English Quaker families, though the homes of a number of Robert Barber's siblings and most of the local Scots-Irish settlers were apparently without them. This formal parlour also probably contained the family's better quality walnut chairs and tables. One of the first floor rooms in the back of the house served as a less formal space, containing perhaps a cheaper table and chairs. With a cupboard to store dishes and eating utensils, this room could have served as a combination living and dining area. The remaining first floor room may have constituted a work area or an office since there is reason to believe that the first kitchen may have been located in a separate outbuilding. As in other local homes, several of the second floor chambers were probably also fitted with one or two curtained bedsteads and that floor also probably contained a chest of drawers or two. The rest of the second floor space was almost certainly taken up with domestic working implements such as spinning wheels.

Erected in a remote backcountry settlement, Robert Barber, Jr.'s house also stood along a route of heavy migration into the vast wilderness beyond. Its formal design standing amid rude squatter cabins embodies the contradictions of life on Pennsylvania's colonial frontier. The home stood near enough to Philadelphia to reflect the aspirations of urban elites yet was too remote to escape the sometimes harsh realities of life in a remote backcountry settlement. Descendants of Wright's Ferry's English Quaker oligarchy were destined to be outnumbered by the continuing influx of German and Scots-Irish settlers who indelibly shaped the character of the region. Though Robert Barber, Jr.'s home was substantially constructed of brick to stand for centuries, dynamic change and rapid population growth induced his children and grandchildren to abandon the parental homestead in favor of the perennially American westward quest for opportunity. This gem of Georgian architecture that has suffered so many vicissitudes of misfortune is a reminder of the spirit of restless energy and aspiration which drove the European settlement of the North

American continent. The minor drama enacted there on the morning following the Paxton Massacre is a reminder of the tragic cost the coming of Europeans inflicted on the native populations whom they displaced.

The author extends his heartfelt gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Snyder for graciously permitting me to view the interior of their home while I was conducting background research for this article.

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Endnotes

¹*Federal Direct Tax Records for 1798, Part A of the First District, Composed of the County of Lancaster in the 2nd Division of the State of Pennsylvania*, National Archives Microfilm Publications, Washington, D.C., 1982, Roll 6 Microcopy 372, pp. 127-128.

²"Notice" of Public Sale of Real Estate, *Columbia Spy*, April, 1973, 3. See also Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Everts & Peck: Philadelphia, 1883), 539, 583.

³"Span Will Edge Out Historic Shrine Here," *The Sunday News*, Lancaster, Pa., November 3, 1929, 1. See also *Letters From a Bethel Lady*, MG-47, Samuel Bethel Collection, Lancaster County Historical Society (LCHS) and James H. Mast, "John Pearson's Description of Lancaster and Columbia in 1801," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society*, 61 (April 1957): 56.

⁴Elizabeth F.G. Hiestand, "Unveiling of the Tablet Commemorating the Bicentennial of the James Wright House," *Papers Read Before the Lancaster County Historical Society*, (1938):125-128. See also Elizabeth Meg Schaefer, "Wright's Ferry Mansion," *The Magazine Antiques* CXXII (December, 1982): 1244.

⁵Evelyn A. Benson, "James Logan As The First Political Boss Of Lancaster County," *Papers Read Before The Lancaster County Historical Society*, LIX (1955), 57-77. See also volumes 2, 3, and 4 of the Logan Letter Books in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

⁶Barber Family Broadside B-13 at the Chester County Historical Society provides a genealogy chart for the first three generations of the Barber family at Wright's Ferry.

⁷*Maryland Archives*, 23 (Baltimore. 1917): 444. See also Evans & Ellis, *History of Lancaster County*, 538.

⁸Rhoda Barber, "Journal of the Settlement of Wright's Ferry on Susquehanna River," Ms., 1830, .012, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). The pages in this manuscript are not numbered but a portion of the journal was printed by the *Columbia Spy* in 1832 and also reprinted in *Hazard's Register*.

⁹Logan Letter Book 4, 152, 168; Logan Letter Book 2, 289 on deposit at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰Connected Warrantee Map for Hempfield Township, Map 40-5-1, Archives at Lancaster County Courthouse.

¹¹A fuller discussion of the troubles arising from the German settlements on the west side of the Susquehanna is provided by Paul Doutrich "Cresap's War: Expansion and Conflict in the Susquehanna Valley," *Pennsylvania History* 53 (April, 1986), 89-104 and Charles Desmond Dutrizac, "Local Identity and Authority in a Disputed Hinterland: The Pennsylvania-Maryland Border in the 1730s," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* CXV (January 1991), 35-61. For original documents describing these events see *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania* Vol. 3 (Harrisburg: Theophilus Fenn, 1840) and in the fourth volume of the Logan Letter Books at HSP.

¹²Rhoda Barber, "Journal."

¹³Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 539.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 538.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 540-541.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 538.

¹⁷"A Journal of Our Removal from Chester & Darby to Conestogo in order to begin a Settlement at Shawanah Town on Susquehanna upon the 12th Day of September 1726, Company: Jno. Wright, Samuel Blunston, H. Scarlet, L. Ryley, Jno. Devel, Prince an Indian, Negro Peter, Negro Sal," in "Susanna Wright," Pamphlet 2 printed by Colonial Dames (1906): 15.

¹⁸Ellis and Evans, 582.

¹⁹I. Daniel Rupp, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (Gilbert Hills: Lancaster, 1844): 241.

²⁰Samuel Evans, "Biographical Sketches of the Pioneer Settlers," *Columbia Spy* (September 29, 1888): 1.

²¹Estate Inventory of Robert Barber of Hempfield Township taken 22 December 1749, on deposit LCHS.

²²Tax Assessment for Hempfield Township for 1769, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

²³Deed Transfer of 62 acres from Hannah Barber to Robert Barber, Jr., 5 June 1760, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

²⁴Tax Assessment for Hempfield Township, 1751, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

²⁵Samuel Evans, 'Biographical Sketches . . . ,' 2.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 2. The microfilm record of the marriage between Robert Barber, Jr.

and Sarah Taylor may be found on deposit at the Swarthmore College Library. The Barber family genealogy is summarized in Broadside B-12 at the Chester County Historical Society.

²⁷Rhoda Barber, "Journal," Ms., HSP.

²⁸Deed Transfer of 62 acres from Hannah Barber to Robert Barber, Jr., 5 June 1760, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

²⁹Rhoda Barber, "Journal," Ms., HSP.

³⁰Samuel Evans, "Biographical Sketches of the Pioneer Settlers," 2.

³¹Deed Transfer "Robert Barber, et al. to Sarah Barber," 26 March 1831, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

³²Tax Assessment Records for Hempfield Township, 1769, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

³³Illustrations of the interior wood trim and measured plan for the main floor of the William Willis House that was prepared by Ray Hearne in October 1977 is on file with the York County Historical Society.

³⁴See notes in the William Willis house file on deposit at the York County Historical Society (YCHS).

³⁵York County Tax Assessment List for Manchester Township, 1780, on deposit YCHS.

³⁶Frank J. Cavaoli, "A Profile of the Paxton Boys: Murderers of the Conestoga Indians," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 87 (Trinity 1987): 74-96; Alden T. Vaughan, "Frontier Banditti and the Indians: The Paxton Boys's Legacy, 1763-1775," *Pennsylvania History* 51 (January, 1984): 1-29; Brook Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 3 (1946): 461-486. See also Evans and Ellis, *History of Lancaster County*, 13-14.

³⁷Rhoda Barber, "Journal," Ms., HSP.

³⁸Sherman Day, *Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania*, (Philadelphia: George W. Gorton, 1843): 280.

³⁹Letter from Susanna Wright to Isaac Whitlock, 16 January 1764, Pemberton Papers, Parrish Collection, HSP.

⁴⁰H. Frank Eshleman, "History of Lancaster County's Highway System from 1714 to 1760, and Map," Papers Read Before the Lancaster County Historical Society, 26 (1922): 46.

⁴¹Rhoda Barber, "Journal," Ms., HSP.

⁴²*Ibid.*, HSP.

⁴³*Ibid.*, HSP.

⁴⁴Ledger Book of William McCord for December, 1763, Business Records Collection MG-2, Box 16, Pennsylvania State Archives (PSA).

⁴⁵Invoice Record Book of William McCord, 23 November 1763, BRC MG-2, Box 16, PSA.

⁴⁶Daybook of William McCord, 4 February 1767, BRC MG-2, Box 16, PSA.

⁴⁷Jerome H. Wood, *Conestoga Crossroads* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1979): 97.

⁴⁸Direct Tax Records for Hempfield Township in 1798, Schedule A, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

⁴⁹Second Federal Census of Hempfield Township 1800.

⁵⁰James H. Mast, "John Pearson's Description of Lancaster and Columbia in 1801," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 61 (April 1957): 57.

⁵¹Third and Fourth Federal Census records for Hempfield Township in 1820 and 1830, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

⁵²Fifth Federal Census of 1840 and Tenth Census of 1890, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

⁵³Ellis and Evans, *History of Lancaster County*, 543.

⁵⁴Deed Transfer "Robert Barber, et al. to Sarah Barber," 26 March 1831.

⁵⁵Deed Transfer "Heirs of Sarah Barber to Rhoda Barber," 14 November 1845, C-7-85.

⁵⁶Deed Transfer "Heirs of Rhoda Barber to Susquehanna Rolling Mill," 1849.

⁵⁷Deed Transfers "Susquehanna Iron and Steel Company" to Reading Iron Company," 5 May, 1920, H-14-233.

⁵⁸Deed Transfer "Reading Iron Company to Peter Sponar," 13 August 1924, X-24-563.

⁵⁹Deed Transfers from "John T. Sponar, Adm. for Peter Sponar to Joseph Manning and Edward Brown," O-61-537; thence to Richard Seibert (R-63-1004), thence to Daniel B. and Huberta Kepner (M-67-44), thence to Peter C. and Cynthia L. Austin (E-72-507), and finally to Robert L. and Edna M. Snyder (Y-73-249).

⁶⁰Inventory of Nathaniel Barber recorded 4 June 1782, microfilm on deposit LCHS.

⁶¹Inventory of Robert Barber, Sr. recorded 1749, on deposit LCHS.

⁶²Estate Inventory of John Barber recorded in 1759, on deposit LCHS.

⁶³Estate Inventory of James Barber recorded in 1785, on deposit LCHS.

⁶⁴Estate Inventory of Thomas Patton recorded on 23 April 1791 on deposit LCHS.

⁶⁵Estate Inventory of James Anderson recorded in 1790 on deposit LCHS.

⁶⁶Three such representative inventories of German farmers who lived to the east of Wright's Ferry are those of Joseph Scherch taken on 2 August 1770, Jacob Scherch taken on 28 April 1788, and Andrew Kauffman taken on 2 February 1795, on deposit LCHS.

⁶⁷Estate Inventory of Samuel Blunston recorded in 4 May 1746, Ms., Griffiths-Pashall Collection, HSP. See also Last Will and Testament of Samuel Blunston, 22 September 1745, Will Book H, No. 39, pp. 61-63, microfilm copy on deposit HSP.