

## THE REV. THOMAS BARTON

Read by Frederick Marx Barton

Thomas Barton was born in County Monaghan, Ireland, in the year 1730, but he was of English extraction; his ancestors having removed to Ireland during the Protectorate. He was educated at "Trinity College," Dublin, and after graduation came to America in 1750, and was first of the name in America. He came to Pennsylvania, likely in quest of fame and fortune, though probably his mission was purely altruistic.

Thomas Barton belonged to a very limited class of immigrants, having been equipped with a collegiate education, he had not quite attained his majority when he crossed the ocean in quest of employment in the realm of Letters. Soon after his arrival in America he achieved an instantaneous success, and in 1751 was called to a tutorship at the "Academy of Philadelphia," the "University of Pennsylvania" of the present day.

While teaching in Philadelphia he met David Rittenhouse who was then 19. A very warm attachment sprang up between the Rev. Thomas and Esther Rittenhouse and from that romance resulted their marriage. They lived happily on the banks of the Conestoga in their delightful home.

It was chiefly through the effort of the Rev. Mr. Barton that the uncommon ability of David Rittenhouse was discovered, and he offered him every facility for developing his genius; and he became the founder of "The American Philosophical Society."

The friendship early cemented between the great philosopher and the Rev. Thomas never ceased, even the unfortunate difference of their political opinion as regarded the propriety of Revolution never marred the kindly feelings they had the one for the other. Would that such high toned feeling would become universal in the hearts of mankind."

He continued at the Academy as tutor until 1754 and a meeting held by the Trustees on August 13, 1754, a letter from him, signifying his purpose of leaving the school and going into orders. The Board consented to his dismissal in a month or two, agreeably to his request.

"The Church of England having, up to this present time, established no Bishoprics in America, young Barton was compelled to go abroad for his ordination. He returned to England having recommendations from the College Professors and the Clergy of the Province of Pennsylvania, with an earnest petition from the people of Huntingdon that he might be appointed their missionary. He was ordained January 29, 1755. The Bishop of London officiating upon the very interesting occasion.

Returning to Philadelphia in April 10, 1755; he came back as missionary for the counties of York and Cumberland and with some of the leading men of his Mission, who sent a number of wagons for his effects, reached the field of his labors the last of May. His first duty was to make himself acquainted with the members of his three congregations in York, Carlisle and Huntingdon.

In this service he was representing the "Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts" which had charge of the work of the Church of England in America.

The labor developed upon him in attending these three congregations, the distance of 148 miles can be easily considered, and just as he began his work he learned of the wretched condition of the Indians, some residing not far from his Mission. The country where he had established himself being

exceedingly wild, and sparsely settled, almost beyond the bounds of civilization. The Indians were upon the warpath and the homes and families of the settlers were in constant danger of attack. Women and children hanging about their husbands and fathers necks imploring them to escape for their lives.

He met the Indians at Carlisle, some became interested in him, and he had great hopes of Christianity, being a saving power to them. Hoped that religious training would be their safety. Just at this time the forces under command of General Braddock had been defeated at Fort Duquesne, and this was soon followed by the alienation of the Indians, so all hopes of a successful Mission among them was put to an end.

He writes "I repine not however at my lot in being placed here, but esteem it a happiness since I hope God has enabled me to do some service for our pure protestant religion in spite of its enemies. I have the pleasure every Sunday to see my people crowding the church's with their muskets on their shoulders, declaring that they will die Protestants and Freedmen, sooner than live Idolaters and Slaves."

Also, in the same letter he reports "I have baptized 160 infants and 10 adults." He always strove to answer the pious and laudable designs of the Honorable Society in appointing him their faithful Missionary.

At this time numerous companies were organized and took the field with courageous men in command. We find among the list of Captains engaged the Rev. Thomas Barton. Three years later finding himself exposed to the French and Indians, young men of his Mission offered to join the army, if the Rev. Thomas Barton would lead them. He offered himself to General Forbes, as Chaplain of the troops and was accepted.

The new Chaplain encountered many difficulties at the very inception of his services, due doubtless to the fact that he represented the "Church of England," while many of the officers and soldiers were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and nearly all the settlers were of that denomination. For years the Presbyterian Church of Pennsylvania was looked upon as a political party. They had borne the brunt in the fight against the Quakers in favor of appropriations for the defense of the frontier.

These men so keen were religious antagonists at the time and did not take kindly to the appointment of a Church of England Chaplain. He was offered his commission from General Forbes, but at the last moment declined the commission and went as a volunteer Chaplain, acting under General Forbes personal appointment, remaining with the troops in his capacity as a volunteer until after the forces of General Forbes with Washington in command of a large contingent had taken possession of Fort Duquesne on November 25, 1758.

Rev. Mr. Barton returned home and 1759 founded St. James Church, Lancaster, and was the first rector of St. James Parish, and Missionary for the Congregation of Paquea and Caernarvon. This position he filled for twenty years, and in addition to these three charges he officiated at the churches of New London and White Clay Creek, the former distant thirty-five miles, and the latter fifty miles from his residence.

In 1760 he received the degree of A. M. from the College of Philadelphia and received the same honor in 1770 from Kings College, New York, now Columbia University. He was a member of the American Philosophical Society, one of the greatest scientific honors that can be conferred on any man. He was a great pioneer in Botany—an ardent student of nature. His children acquired taste for natural history and plants.

With the advent of the Revolution came the greatest crisis in the life of the Rev. Mr. Barton and all other clergymen of the Church of England in America. In their ordination vows they had sworn allegiance to the King, and to use the liturgy of the above church which included prayers for the

King. Mindful of his vows his conscience would not permit him to deviate from the prescribed liturgy, cost what it may.

In 1773 St. James Church was boarded shut—being no longer permitted to hold public services. The Rev. Mr. Barton devoted his time to visiting the sick and baptizing children of the Parish until his departure.

He was compelled to abandon his three churches, his friends and his home to whom he was bound by duty, gratitude and affection, and to seek an asylum within the British lines in New York, or to withdraw to England. Such was Mr. Barton's fate. He remained at his post of duty in Lancaster until 1777, then at the close of the year he and his wife removing to New York, then in control of the British. The new government of Pennsylvania not allowing his return, his withdrawal was due to his refusal to subscribe to the oath of allegiance to the State and Continental authorities which would have been contrary to his ordination vows, which was the only reason for his refusal to subscribe as he never was commissioned by the English authorities. All his children except one remained in Pennsylvania. For two years he was not permitted to see them. When his son returned from England through the influence of friends, Mr. Barton was permitted by General Washington to visit his family at Elizabethtown, N. J., in April, 1780.

Finally bidding adieu to his children, he left them never to see them again. He paid passage on a vessel sailing for England, but being very broken in spirit, he died three days before the vessel sailed, of a broken heart, the following month May 25, 1780, in N. Y. City, and was buried within the Chancel in front of the altar in the old St. George's Church. This is another proof that he was never commissioned, as he could not have been buried there holding a commission against the Americans. When the Church was condemned and demolished, the body was removed to Trinity Cemetery at 158th Street, overlooking the beautiful and picturesque Hudson. By some oversight the marker was lost and his last resting place remains unmarked.

Only two of his literary productions were published. One a patriotic sermon preached in Carlisle in 1755 following the news of Braddock's defeat, the full title of the pamphlet is "Unanimity and Public Spirit." A sermon preached at Carlisle and some other Episcopal Churches in the counties of York and Cumberland was published by request, by the Rev. Mr. Barton who was missionary to these three churches." There was, also, published a book of "Family Prayers" by Thomas Barton.

Being a young clergyman, he sent the sermon to Rev. William Smith, D.D., head of the College of Philadelphia, now the University of Pennsylvania, asking his opinions on "the office and duty of Protestant Ministers and the right of exercising their public liberty in the handling and treating of civil and religious affairs, especially in times of public danger and calamity." Provost Smith suggested a few verbal changes, but approved the production, saying in a letter of August 21, 1755, that he thought the "subject well chosen and highly seasonable, the thoughts you dwell on are very interesting."

The sermon was printed in York, Lancaster and Philadelphia and Dr. Smith's letter to Mr. Barton was incorporated in the publication, in October 22, 1755, it was transmitted by the Provost to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Rev. Mr. Barton was twice married, first, December 8, 1753, at Old Swedes' Church, Philadelphia, to Esther Rittenhouse, a daughter of Matthias and Elizabeth Rittenhouse, as already stated, she was a sister of the famous savant and scientist, David Rittenhouse. She was born in 1731 and died in June 18, 1774, and was buried at St. James' Church, Lancaster.

His second marriage was in 1776 to Mrs DeNormandie who survived him many years.

He had eight children by his first wife as follows: William, Esther, Ben-

jamin Smith, Matthias, David Rittenhouse, Thomas, Juliana Susanna, and Richard Peters, all of whom were born in your beautiful and historic city of Lancaster, the Garden Spot of the United States. All reached maturity and married.

Such is the record of Thomas Barton, one of the heroic pioneers in the history of Pennsylvania.

A devoted servant of his Master, a loyal son of the Church he loved, distinguished for zeal, and devotion, and ability, in the Propagation of the Gospel. Always faithful to his convictions, even when fidelity to the same involved supreme sacrifice.

A man, "The Servant of Jesus Christ called to be an apostle separated unto the Gospel of God."

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Read before the Lancaster County Historical Society by Frederick Marx Barton, a direct descendant of the Rev. Thomas Barton through his youngest son, Richard Peters Barton, who, when a young man, removed to Virginia, purchasing "Springdale"—an old plantation—and was in the Barton name for years, being the home of Joseph Marx Barton, father of the reader of this paper.

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