

Private Property and Public Virtue: Quaker Identity of Robert Barber of White Springs

(Part One)

by

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Note to Readers: This article is presented in two parts (1 and 2) in order to facilitate workable download times for the reader, while accommodating an important strength to the article: the abundant use of illustrating photographs and precise architectural drawings. Part 1 appears below; part 2 will appear in the October, 2015, issue. – ed.,

Writing in his journal in the spring of 1812, Flavel Roan described the whirl of social activity in Buffalo Valley accompanying the wedding of his favorite niece:

March 26, Thomas Barber to Betsy Clingan. Groom came with fourteen attendants; thirty-seven strangers, altogether. 27th, twenty strangers, beside the bride and groom, breakfasted at Clingan's; twenty-two of us left Clingan's with the bride and groom; four joined us at Doctor VanValzah's; went to Esquire Barber's where there was a very large party and much dancing, although Quakers.¹

Roan's journal chronicles a close-knit Scots-Irish community in the Pennsylvania back-country early in the 19th century. Weddings, balls and work frolics provide occasions for entertainment and social interaction that Flavel describes with regularity and wit, but Quakers were a rarity in his world. His bemused comment on the boisterous celebration in the Barber household and note of numerous 'strangers' attending the festivities, (presumably friends or relatives of the groom, since Roan knew the Clingans well), poses an intriguing question: what did it mean to be a Quaker in Buffalo Valley, a place which in the decades following the Revolution was unpromising ground for the Society of Friends?

Insiders and Outsiders

If Flavel Roan held certain expectations regarding Quaker behavior, it was because Quakers themselves were deeply concerned with the relationship between belief and

¹ Journal excerpt in John Blair Linn, *The Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1755-1855*. (Harrisburg, PA: Lane S Hart, 1877), p. 411.

action. The distinctive practice of their faith emerged around 1650 in the rural counties of England's North Midlands, when dissenters from the Anglican Church led by George Fox formed an organized movement—the Religious Society of Friends. Friends sought the 'inner light' of divine presence within themselves, a personal form of communion with God, to guide their outward behavior and interaction with the world. They embraced the New Testament message of God's all-inclusive love and offer of salvation to all humanity, but they rejected the clergy and established churches of their day, Anglican and Puritan alike, as unnecessary and corrupted human institutions. In place of traditional liturgy and formalized statements of faith, Friends developed a distinctive process of communal meeting for worship and modes of behavior, speech and dress which they called 'walking testimony', to communicate and advocate their faith to the surrounding community.²

Ridiculed as 'Quakers' by their detractors, Friends embraced the term with the same equanimity that they endured persecution, fines and imprisonment for their rejection of the established church and confrontational public expressions of their faith. The Quaker movement grew in spite of legal and social harassment, and within a generation of its founding, English Quakers began to relocate to the North American colonies, soon comprising a significant share of the transatlantic flow of people from Britain to the New World. As many as 23,000 Friends migrated from England and Wales to the Delaware Valley in the four decades between 1675 and 1715.³ This period also saw a change in the Quaker movement from its roots in radical dissent to active engagement with the world, as the Society of Friends became increasingly progressive, rational, moderate and political. By the start of the 18th century, Quakers embraced concepts of religious freedom and social pluralism, pacifism and tolerance, simplicity of taste, importance of the family, the sanctity of property and an ethic of work—while retaining the piety and sense of purpose which drove the movement from the start.

Historical studies of Quaker identity in America often focus on 18th Century communities located in the western New Jersey and southeast Pennsylvania region

² This article builds on an understanding of the historical development of Quakerism based on the following sources: Jane Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, (Oxford University Press, 1989); "A Brief History of Quakerism", 2005 Northern Yearly Meeting, (www.northernyearlymeeting.org).

³ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, p. 421.

centered on Philadelphia.⁴ Persecuted for their religious convictions in other parts of British America, Quakers were insiders in these communities, where the Society of Friends permeated the structure of family life, business connections and civil government. Aspiring to improve the world both through example and legislation, Pennsylvania Quakers published rules to guide their society - the *Discipline* - an ecclesiastical constitution with roots in the early years of the movement that was amended and clarified by succeeding generations of Friends.⁵ They formed a hierarchical system of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings to support and enforce these standards in their communities. While the principles of their faith advocated plainness and self-denial, their goal of transforming society led many Quakers to pursue political and material power. Quakers became successful politicians, merchants and entrepreneurs, and comprised the most affluent and influential group in Philadelphia and surrounding counties. Through much of the 18th Century, political control of Pennsylvania remained in the hands of practicing Quakers, even as their share of the total population declined.

At the advancing western edge of settlement in Pennsylvania, where Quaker households comprised a tiny minority within the society, a different dynamic prevailed. Communities established along the Susquehanna River in the mid 1700s attracted an ethnically and religiously diverse population, but the majority of the early European residents of these 'back-country' settlements were Scots Irish Presbyterians. Like the Clingans and the Roans of Buffalo Valley, most of these families were just a generation or two removed from Ulster in northern Ireland. They brought with them a shared culture and beliefs that set them apart from Pennsylvania's English Quakers. Ruinous taxation and forced removal from their ancestral lands led many Ulster Scots to harbor resentment toward the English. In this country, mid-century conflict with Indians honed mistrust into exasperated contempt for the pacifist 'Quaker oligarchy' that governed Pennsylvania. Residents of frontier settlements came to regard Quakers as a distant cosmopolitan elite, out of touch with the concerns and dismissive of the contributions of the backcountry

⁴ Studies of 18th Century Quaker identity include: Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*; Emma Lapansky and Anne Verplanck, eds. *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Gabriel Lanier, *The Delaware Valley in the Early Republic Architecture, Landscape and Regional Identity*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Liam Riordan, *Many Identities, One Nation: The Revolution and Its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁵ Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*, p.44-45.

population.⁶ “To govern is absolutely repugnant to the avowed principles of Quakers”, observed a wit looking back over Pennsylvania politics on the eve of the Revolution; “To be governed is absolutely repugnant to the avowed principles of Presbyterians”.⁷

This legacy of political and cultural animosity between colonial Pennsylvania’s Scots-Irish and Quakers provides a backdrop for exploring the Quaker identity of the family of Robert Barber, an early settler of Buffalo Valley at White Springs. Robert Barber was a man of impressive accomplishments - an entrepreneurial mill owner, successful farmer, promoter of internal improvements, and respected magistrate. He raised children who also became engaged in public life, and he remained active in business and civil affairs for decades, dying at the venerable age of 91. ‘Squire’ Barber was an effective and accomplished member of the Buffalo Valley community - a consummate insider - but he also maintained his Quaker identity throughout his long life, which made him an outsider as well.

The record of Barber’s accomplishments is drawn largely from sources external to the family: accounts of acquisition and distribution of property, tax assessments, census files, legal notices, obituaries and genealogical sources. No records from his work as a magistrate have surfaced, and he was not a diarist, but he was a prolific builder of farms, mills and houses. He built or was partner in several mills on White Springs and Penn’s Creek which attests to the scope of his commercial operations, though none of the mills has survived to the present. However, in addition to the house in which he lived until his death, Robert was involved in the construction of large stone houses for two of his sons in the early 1820s that have survived largely intact. These houses are today the most immediate and tangible record left by Robert Barber, and, combined with the documentary evidence, may help us to develop an understanding of this Quaker’s complex identity in Buffalo Valley.

⁶ 18th Century Pennsylvania Scots-Irish identity is based on the ideas discussed in the following sources: David Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, (Oxford University Press, 1989); Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland’s Ulster Scots, America’s Scots Irish, and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764*, (Princeton University Press, 2001); Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn’s Holy Experiment*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009); Liam Riordan, *Many Identities, One Nation: The Revolution and Its Legacy in the Mid-Atlantic*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁷ “Philadelphiensis.” *Remarks on the Quaker Unmask’d; Or Plain Truth Found to be Plain Falsehood*. (Philadelphia: John Morris, 1764), quoted in Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, p. 192.



Figure 1 1820 Thomas Barber (Rippon) house, White Springs, Limestone Township



Figure 2 1823 Samuel Barber (Keister) house, White Springs, Limestone Township

The houses were constructed for Robert Barber's sons Thomas and Samuel when they were in their mid 30s with growing families and their father was in his late 60s, at the peak of his public career. The house built for Thomas Barber, now owned by Thom Rippon, is located just west of White Springs, on the north side of Red Ridge Road. The house built for Samuel Barber, now owned by Brian and Donita Keister, is a half mile north of White Springs on the east side of Brethren Church Road. At the time of their construction, the two houses were among the largest in Union County. They initially appear to be very similar (figures 1 and 2). Both houses face south, toward the long ridge of Penn's Creek Mountain. Both are skillfully constructed of limestone, squared by the mason and laid in straight, level courses. Both have five-bay facades of multi-paned windows and a centered entry door. They are graceful examples of the spare Federal style architecture adopted by builders throughout the eastern United States early in the 19th Century, statements of a successful family in a prosperous and confident era.

Behind nearly identical facades, however, the two houses are dissimilar in their arrangement of interior space, reflecting two distinctly different folk traditions. Their intriguing mixture of exterior uniformity masking interior difference raises questions: Is there a reason behind the different plans of the Barber houses? In what ways are these houses different from and similar to other houses of their day in the community? Both houses do share common interior details in their finish carpentry—the most striking being a carved column and book motif that supports the mantelpieces of fireplaces in the most formal rooms. Did their shared details express a Quaker identity? If we penetrate this elegant and generic architecture, what does it reveal about Barber and his family?

We can arrive at a better understanding of the Barber houses by placing them in context. This article will provide two frames for contextual interpretation. The first is temporal. Looking at the process of house building as an act repeated by successive generations of the Barber family will exhibit patterns of continuity and change over time. The second context is regional, examining how the Barber houses compare to other dwellings in Buffalo Valley built in the same era. The first approach is genealogical; the second is geographic. Examining the Barber family houses in these two contexts will help us understand the journey of a Quaker family living in the backcountry of central Pennsylvania, as it adapted to shifting social conditions of the young nation.

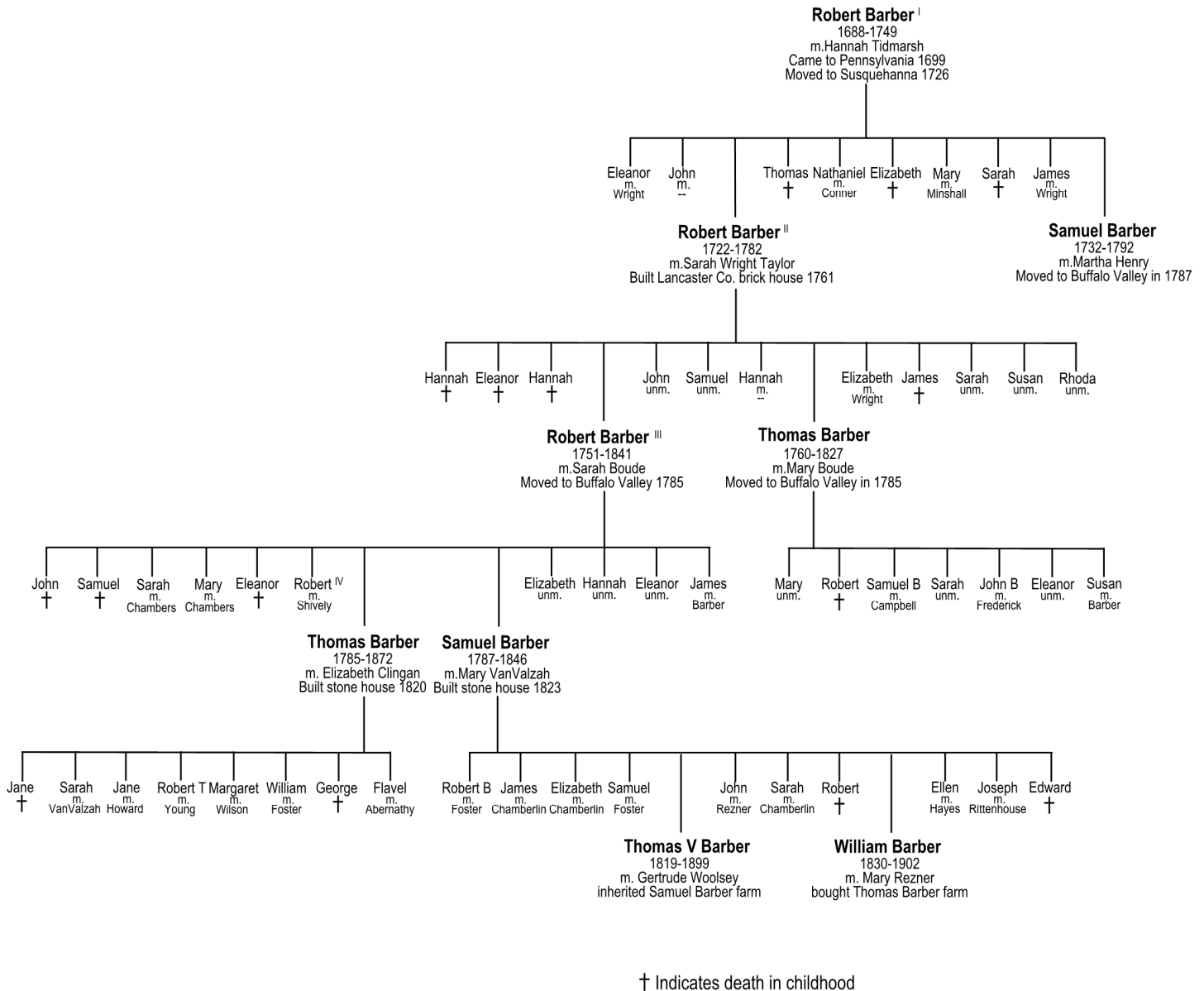


Figure 3 Family Tree of Robert Barber and Hannah Tidmarsh, tracing Buffalo Valley descendants. Information from Edwin A Barber, *Genealogy of the Barber Family: the Descendants of Robert Barber, of Lancaster County, PA*, (Fell & Co, Philadelphia, 1890).

Large family size and high incidence of child mortality is immediately evident, as is the repetition of a few given names. Scrutiny of marital alliances reveals the transition from mostly Quaker spouses for the progeny of Robert Barber I, to mostly Scots-Irish Presbyterian spouses of the Buffalo Valley Barbers three generations later. The large number of unmarried daughters in the two intervening generations may indicate the lack of suitable Quaker suitors.

A Quaker Family on the Frontier

The Barbers were an English Quaker family, rooted for three generations in Pennsylvania before their arrival in Buffalo Valley. A Robert Barber I⁸ from Yorkshire in northern England came to America in 1699 as a boy to join his uncle in the young town of Chester, apprenticing as a shoemaker. When he was 26, Robert inherited a large portion of his uncle's estate and married Hannah Tidmarsh in 1718. He began to pursue political office and in 1724 was elected member of the Board of Assessors of Chester County, which at the time extended west to the Susquehanna River. After assessing property in western Chester county in 1726, he purchased from the proprietors of Pennsylvania a 500 acre tract at a fording point on the east bank of the Susquehanna, and subsequently sold portions of the property to John and Susanna Wright, fellow members of the Chester Monthly Meeting. Robert Barber moved his family to the Susquehanna property in 1728 when he was 39 and founded a Quaker community with the Wrights and Blunstons which was initially called Wright's Ferry and later named Columbia.⁹

Robert and Hannah Barber had ten children, of whom five sons and two daughters lived into adulthood and married within the Quaker faith, forming the branches of an extensive family tree in Pennsylvania (see figure 3). Robert built a sawmill and cleared fields on his large property using the labor of slaves and indentured servants. He was appointed the first sheriff of the newly created Lancaster County and was subsequently elected a Commissioner of the county. While not from an aristocratic background he became a wealthy property owner, in the upper fifth of the Hempfield Township tax rolls. When he died in 1749, Robert Barber I¹ left to his widow a 250-acre plantation in Wright's Ferry and an estate of £496 plus four negro slaves.¹⁰

Located on the western edge of European settlement in the 1720s (see map, figure 4), Wright's Ferry was an outpost of Quaker authority on the unruly and rapidly expanding Pennsylvania frontier. James Logan, agent of the Penn family and a political force within the proprietary government, encouraged the founding of the community to help bring

⁸ The names Robert, Thomas and Samuel were used in successive generations of the Barber family. To keep the numerous Robert Barbers straight, the generation is indicated after the name, starting with the head of the Lancaster County branch.

⁹ Genealogical information on the Barber family is from Edwin A Barber, *Genealogy of the Barber Family: the Descendants of Robert Barber, of Lancaster County, PA*, (Wm F Fell & Co, Philadelphia, 1890).

¹⁰ Willis Shirk Jr, "Wright's Ferry: A Glimpse into the Susquehanna Backcountry", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 120, No.1 (Jan 1996), p 70.

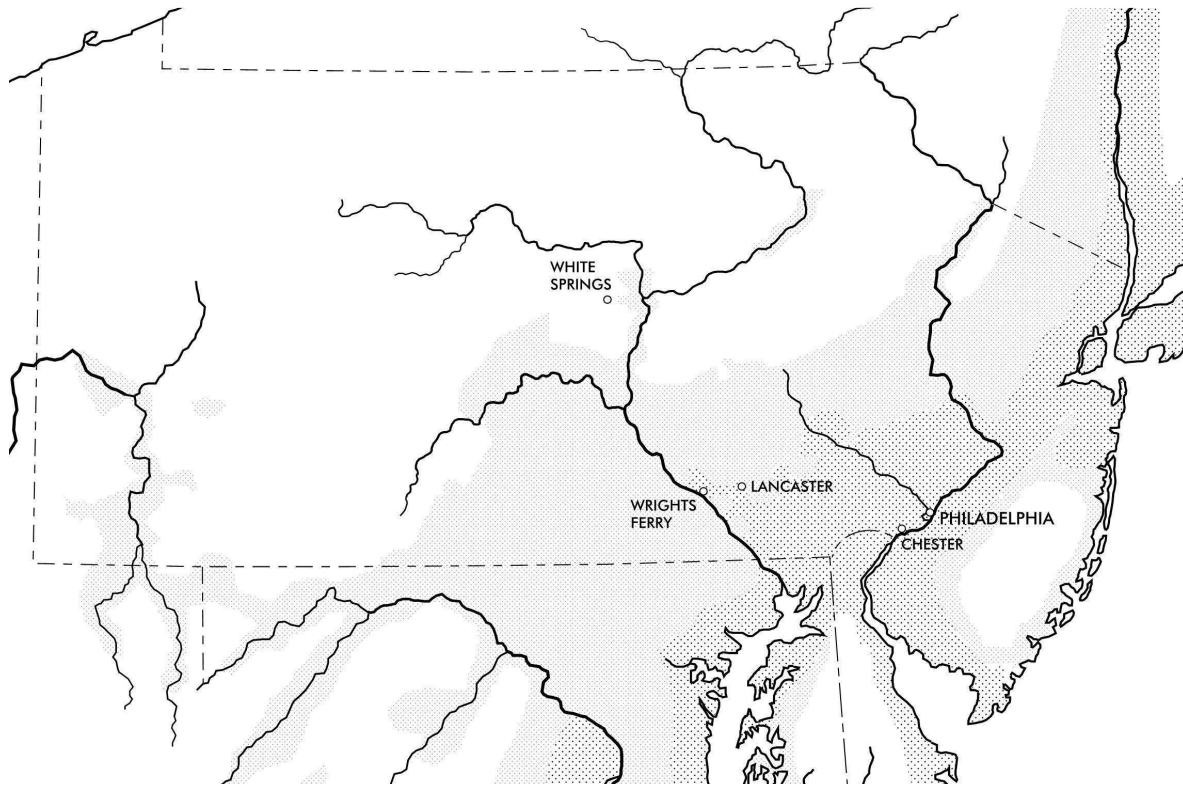


Figure 4 Map of Pennsylvania showing migration of the Barber family. Darker tone indicates approximate extent of European settlement in the 1720s when Robert Barber I moved to Wright's Ferry. Lighter tone indicates extent of settled area in 1770, when the Barbers purchased property in White Springs.

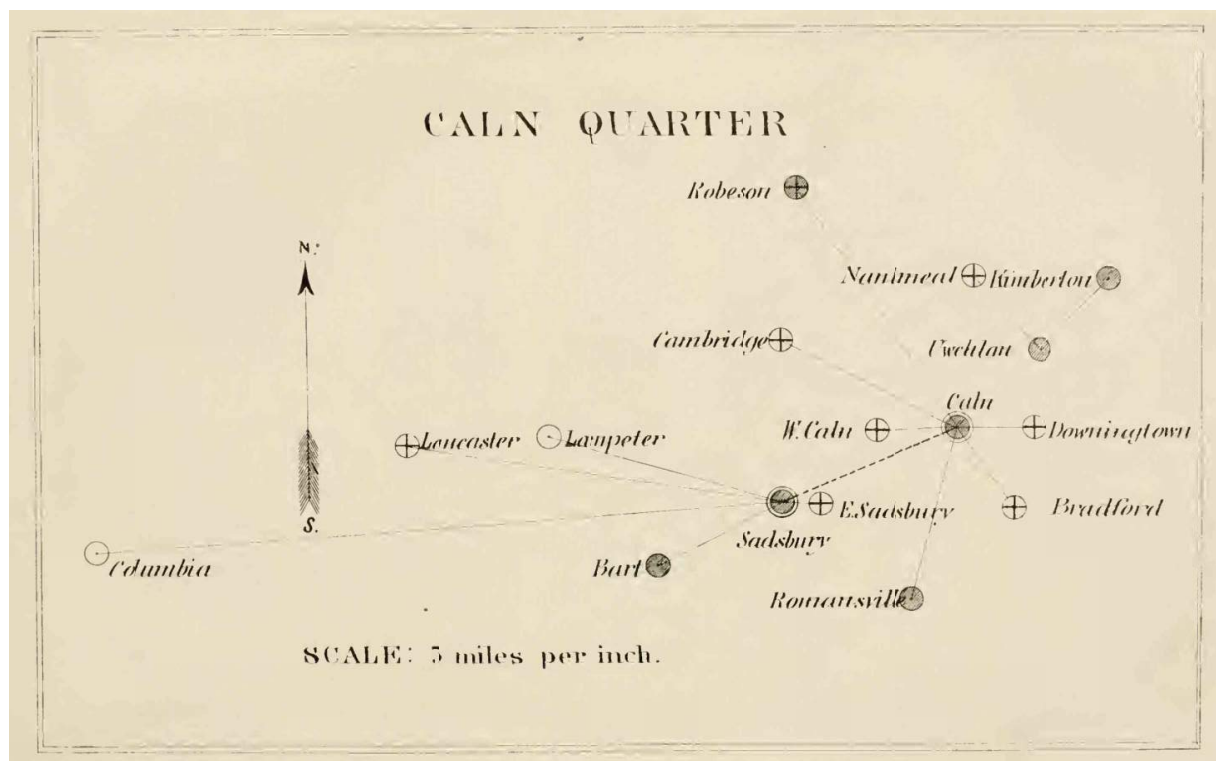


Figure 5 Caln Quarter District showing remoteness of Columbia (Hempfield) Meeting. From Ezra Michener, *Retrospect of Early Quakerism*, (Elwood Zell, Philadelphia, 1860)

order to Pennsylvania's back country after a decade when litigation over William Penn's estate prevented granting of clear land titles. Administrators of the colony were concerned about the growing number of German and Scots-Irish "foreigners", especially those who squatted on un-purchased land in the Susquehanna River valley beyond the effective control of the seat of government in Philadelphia. The Barbers, Wrights and a few other Quaker families in Lancaster County supported Logan's efforts to keep local government offices and representation in the colonial Assembly under the influence of the Society of Friends. They proved to be remarkably competent politicians in this chaotic environment, working with their neighbors to evict squatters and protect proprietary interests.¹¹ They established the Hempfield Township meeting house and school, expanded farms and rooted a small but vital Quaker community, the only one of its day located on the frontier of the colony.

The Quaker families of Wright's Ferry used land ownership, marital ties, personal connections and commercial networks to achieve elevated social status and consolidate political power. At the outset they possessed sufficient financial resources to purchase both land and bound labor - slaves and indentured servants - to clear the land for farming.¹² Because Quaker discipline included rules regarding approval of marriage partners and prohibition of marital unions outside of the faith, these families became tightly bonded by marriage. The Barbers intermarried with Wrights, Taylors and Minshalls - all Friends - who were in turn related to Quaker families of Philadelphia and eastern Pennsylvania communities, creating an extensive kinship network that linked the Barbers to other Quaker elite families throughout the colony. A granddaughter of Robert and Hannah Barber recalled Sunday social gatherings in her home:

"the first proprietors being all connected or related to each other, there was an harmony and friendship among them beautiful to behold and pleasing to recollect. I well remember their being at my father's house in the first day afternoon. Their entertainment was apples and cider, bread and butter and smoked beef".¹³

¹¹ Shirk, "Wright's Ferry", p. 66-68.

¹² Shirk, "Wright's Ferry", p. 62. Rules prohibiting Quakers from owning slaves were not adopted by most of the Society until 1758. Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*, p. 40.

¹³ Rhoda Barber Journal, quoted in Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, p. 464.

The bonds of kinship that connected these Lancaster Quaker families reflected spatial networks between Friends Meetings. Meetings for worship were initially held in private houses and later in a meetinghouse located at the center of a community. Several local meetings were joined in affiliation with a Monthly Meeting in a larger neighboring community, which in turn was subordinate to a regional Quarterly Meeting, and through it to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Conducted separately from the weekly meetings for worship, the monthly, quarterly and yearly ‘meetings for business’ were at pains to create consensus on matters of Quaker discipline. Meetings monitored each other’s conduct, “that Friends take care to keep to truth and plainness, in language, habit, deportment and behavior: that the simplicity of truth in these things may not wear out or be lost.”¹⁴ The regular correspondence and travel between these meetings facilitated marital unions that further bonded them. It also created a network of channels along which business and administrative transactions flowed. Intended to maintain discipline and consistency of religious practice throughout the Society, these channels of intercourse also facilitated the commercial connections and political alliances for which Quakers were known.

The Hempfield Meeting at Wright’s Ferry (Columbia) was located at the western extremity of the Caln Quarter, ‘under the care’ of the Sadsbury Monthly meeting (see figure 5). However its remote location afforded it a degree of autonomy from the discipline that the meeting system was intended to impart. The membership of Hempfield meeting was “lax in discipline” and stubbornly independent, conducting meetings in their own way and refusing to subordinate themselves by reporting to their Monthly and Quarterly meetings. Minutes of a 1754 Sadsbury Monthly Meeting admonish “let Hempfield Friends know that we expect them to come under our care”, and four years later report “they (Hempfield) are not willing to be accountable to any meeting, except the widow Barber.”¹⁵ Infractions committed by the wayward Wright’s Ferry Quakers included “marrying out” and being married by a “priest” (an ordained minister), entering military service, and participating in “the chase and field sports”.¹⁶

¹⁴ From Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Epistle of 1691, quoted in William Frost, “Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture”, in Lapansky and Verplanck, *Quaker Aesthetics*, p 23.

¹⁵ Ezra Michener, *Retrospect of Early Quakerism, Being Extracts from the Records of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the Meetings Composing It*, (Ellwood Zell, Philadelphia, 1860), p 129. The ‘widow Barber’ was Hannah Tidmarsh, wife of Robert Barber I. Quaker women led meetings at a time when this role was impossible in most other denominations.

¹⁶ Franklin Ellis, Samuel Evans, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania: With Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men*, (Philadelphia, Everts & Peck, 1883), p 552.

Did these transgressions of Quaker Discipline indicate that the families of Wright's Ferry were bad Quakers? Answering this question requires consideration of Quaker *polity*, the process of civil government that emerged from their religious beliefs. A fundamental premise of Quaker faith required individuals to look quietly inward to discern the divine spirit - God's Light - within their conscience. Quakers believed the capacity to experience inner Light resided in all people but that individuals received only their "measure of the spirit", so they met in silent meditation as a community to seek and collectively share in the divine presence. Scripture, custom and their own rules of Discipline, while useful guides, were understood by Quakers to be works of man and therefore corruptible, contradictory and fallible. Direct communal experience of God's spirit formed the bond that made each meeting community an entity unto itself and this inevitably led to difference and dissent among the Quaker meeting communities. Quaker theology accepted a gradual and cumulative revealing of God's truth throughout all of its communities, not only tolerating but encouraging a worship process that acknowledged difference and permitted dissent.¹⁷

While the families of Wright's Ferry resisted the jurisdiction of Sadsbury Monthly Meeting, they still worshipped as a Quaker community. However, the cohesive identity they developed as a Society of Friends served as much to consolidate property rights within the community as to protect religious convictions. While landless laborers and artisans in the settlement worked on the Quaker farms and mills, Quaker families retained ownership of the land, ferry, and grist and saw mills.¹⁸ When the Barber's German-speaking indentured servants completed terms of service, some remained on the farm as tenants, permitted to build small cabins but not to purchase property. Rhoda Barber recalled that tenant farmers "seldom left the place but contrived to get a little dwelling in the neighborhood, often on the land of their former master. They had a little garden and potato patch, their rent was so many day's work in harvest."¹⁹ In this manner, over the span of sixty years, the isolated and independent-minded families of Wright's Ferry created a distinctive back-country version of the Pennsylvania Quaker oligarchy, structured to preserve social privilege and the rights of property owners.

¹⁷ Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*, pp 28-30.

¹⁸ Shirk, "Wright's Ferry", p. 75.

¹⁹ Rhoda Barber Journal, quoted in Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, p. 571.

In 1760, Robert and Hannah Barber's 39 year old son Robert ^{II} built the first brick house in Wright's Ferry. His formal Georgian 'great house' on the bank of the Susquehanna replaced his father's log house. This was a large and imposing house for its time and place, in a community where most dwellings of the day were much smaller and constructed of log. The house is still standing, just south of the town of Columbia (see figure 6). It has four rooms per floor, each originally warmed by a corner fireplace, with a central stair hall to separate the parlor side of the house from the kitchen side (see figure 7). Windows on the front of the house are arranged to create a balanced, symmetrical façade. The 'common room' or kitchen, originally occupying a prominent location at the south front side of the house, was later moved back into a connected brick outbuilding.

The Barber's house in Wright's Ferry is a fusion of current architectural fashion and traditional north English and Quaker cultural influences. Compared to the scattered log houses and tenant cabins of the community, the primary impression conveyed by Robert Barber^{II}'s house was one of refinement and gentility. This early example of a brick central hall house in western Lancaster County was intended to convey the authority of its owners, and demonstrate their connection to the cosmopolitan society of Philadelphia. While the Barbers were isolated on their remote Susquehanna farm, they utilized the Quaker social network to maintain connections with Friends in eastern communities. In 1756, four years before building his house, Robert Barber temporarily moved his family to Philadelphia to avoid hostilities during the French and Indian War.²⁰ Streets lined with red brick houses, precise and regular in appearance, would have made a strong impression, as would the urban practice of entering into a stair hall that separated private interior chambers from the exterior public realm, while also enabling many rooms to be interconnected. Like the fashionable practice of tea drinking with its attendant silver and chinaware accoutrements, the Georgian house form was a high culture import from England, used by affluent families the length of the Atlantic seaboard to display their position in the top tier of a class-structured society. Set on a bluff with a commanding view of the Susquehanna river, Barber's house was a visual statement of wealth and family stature, the estate of a prosperous gentleman in a community organized to preserve the privileges of a landed class.

²⁰ Shirk, "Wright's Ferry", p. 77.



Figure 6 Robert Barber house near Wright's Ferry, Lancaster County, b. 1760, showing evidence of removed pent roof.

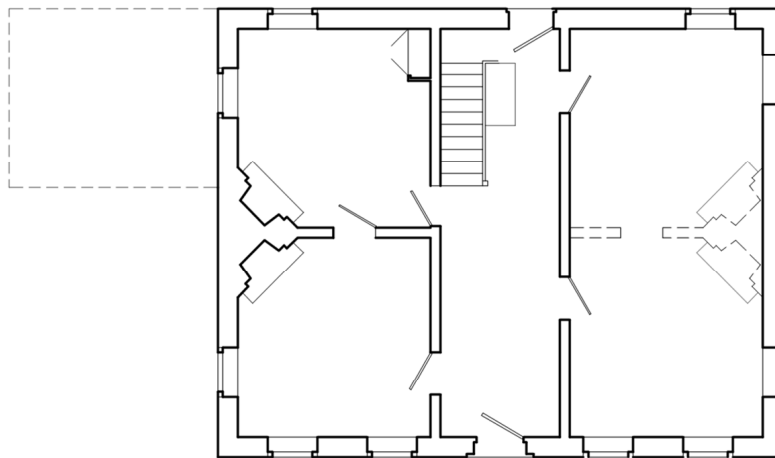


Figure 7 First floor plan of the Robert Barber house. Dash lines indicate original fireplaces which have been removed and outline of early 19th century kitchen addition.



Figure 8 Robert Barber house in Wright's Ferry, reconstruction of original west facing front and north gable elevations, showing pent roof over first floor windows and steep slope of the original roof.

Viewed from a different perspective, however, Robert Barber's fashionable house shares characteristics with eastern Pennsylvania Quaker dwellings that perpetuate older building patterns from the north of England, homeland of the Barber family and the majority English Quakers. The 'pent roof' that originally projected over first floor windows of the house to protect the brick walls (see Figure 8) was a distinctive Yorkshire traditional construction practice. Yorkshire builders preferred masonry construction to wood frame, with brick replacing the use of fieldstone masonry by the late seventeenth century. Even the large size of the house is a discernable north English and Pennsylvania Quaker trait. Quaker houses "tended to be larger and more comfortable than homes built by Anglicans or Congregationalists", cultural historian David Fischer writes, citing research that "the homes of Quakers had more bedrooms (and beds) in proportion to living spaces" and "gave more attention to privacy and domesticity" than did houses of affluent non-Quaker English residents of Pennsylvania.²¹

Despite their advocacy and practice of 'plain' manners, dress, and speech, the houses of well-to-do Quaker families in colonial Pennsylvania were not notably 'plainer' than those of non-Quaker families. Bernard Herman's study of Delaware Valley Quaker houses finds the opposite to be the case, that Quaker houses were "characterized by their durability, monumentality, and elaboration".²² Outwardly, these dwellings assert the achievement of Quaker families and the prominence of the Friends community, with the dignity that the Quakers expected of themselves. Within their houses, the larger number of rooms compared to one- or two-room houses typical of the time testifies to a culture which valued privacy and individual identity. Yet in spite of the size of affluent Quaker houses, internal hierarchy is less evident in them than in the Georgian houses of non-Quaker aristocratic families. The common room or kitchen workspace is integrated with more social rooms, rather than isolated in a wing or tucked down in the basement. Interiors of Quaker homes were clean, well lit and spacious, but with the exception of a few Philadelphia mansions, tended to be sparsely furnished.²³ Robert and Sarah raised thirteen children in their fine house, nine of whom survived childhood to become adults.

²¹ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, p. 479-480.

²² Bernard L Herman, "Eighteenth-Century Quaker Houses in the Delaware Valley and the Aesthetics of Practice", in Lapansky and Verplanck, *Quaker Aesthetics*, p. 189.

²³ Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, p. 480.

The image of social order and control implied by the Barber house was at odds with the turbulent times, however. By the late 1760s, the Quaker establishment that the Barbers represented was losing its grip on political power.²⁴ Reluctance to endorse separation from Britain caused a split in Quaker society in the decade leading up to the American Revolution. Most prominent Quakers withdrew from politics, adhering to the pacifist principle “that we may live a peaceable and quiet life, in all godliness and honesty; under the government which God is pleased to set over us.”²⁵ A majority of the ‘Withdrawing Friends’, opposed to militant rebellion and fearing damage to Pennsylvania’s economy, strongly favored the moderate course steered by the Pennsylvania Assembly and urged restraint, mediation and loyalty to English rule. A minority of Quakers more swayed by democratic arguments sided with the separatist cause, even to the point of rejecting pacifism.

The Barbers, with a history of dissent and censure from their Quarterly Meeting, were among these ‘radical Quakers’. In 1775 at age 53, Robert Barber ^{II}, with brothers James and Samuel helped organize the Hempfield township militia, in which James was captain and Robert served as first lieutenant. Robert Barber took an oath of allegiance to the fledgling state of Pennsylvania in 1777, as did his sons Robert ^{III} and John. The Hempfield militia was mobilized during the war to guard flour stored at Wright’s Ferry and to accompany the transport of British prisoners from Lancaster to York, but dangerous military action remained distant from the community.²⁶ Robert Barber ^{II}’s son John who served in a Pennsylvania company at the Battle of Long Island, reported in a letter to his father that “all the river boys are well”.²⁷

²⁴ Violent challenge to Pennsylvania government touched the Barber family directly in December 1763, when a group of Scots-Irish vigilantes known as the ‘Paxton Boys’ stopped at Robert Barber’s new house to warm themselves by the fire, concealing that they were returning from burning nearby Conestoga Indian Town and murdering several of its inhabitants. The Paxton Boys subsequently broke into the Lancaster Town poorhouse to slaughter surviving Indian families gathered under provincial protection, then marched on Philadelphia with intention of overthrowing the Quaker regime. A detailed account of the incident is contained in Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, p. 130-146. Further information on the Paxton Boys’ rampage is found in *The Susquehannocks* by David Minderhout, ACCOUNTS Vol 4, No. 2, (2013), pp. 4-17.

²⁵ Religious Society of Friends, *The Ancient Testimony and Principals of the People called Quakers; Renewed, with respect to the King and Government; Touching the Commotions now prevailing in these and other Parts of America*, (Philadelphia, 1776), quoted in Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism*, p. 235.

²⁶ In a Pension Declaration made in 1832, Robert Barber ^{III} claimed three month tours in 1778 and 1779, both served in Lancaster County. Pennsylvania Pension Records, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

²⁷ Letter of 23 September 1776 from John Barber to Robert Barber, Sr. in Hempfield, in Barber, *Genealogy of the Barber Family*, p 152.

Esquire Barber of White Springs

As they approached maturity, Robert Barber ^{II} sought to establish a suitable patrimony for his four sons, Robert ^{III}, John, Samuel and Thomas. Options for providing farms in the vicinity of Wright's Ferry were limited, as the original Barber estate was already subdivided and land in Hempfield Township had become expensive due to increasing settlement. When the "New Purchase" of 1768 opened lands on the West Branch of the Susquehanna for purchase, Robert negotiated with Reuben Haines, a fellow Friend, to purchase land on the central Pennsylvania frontier. Haines assembled three adjacent tracts on the north side of Penn's Creek at the head of White Springs, which he sold to Barber in August 1772 (see figure 9). Haines appears to have been working as an agent for the family as early as 1769, since the survey of one of the tracts was registered at the Land Office in that year under the name 'Barborton'. The two adjacent tracts, 'Beaufont', which contained the springs, and 'Maiden's Grove', together comprised 789 acres, from which Haines sold 580 acres to Robert Barber. Containing a year-round spring-fed stream of sufficient volume to power a mill and fertile limestone-based soils on gently rising, south-facing slopes, the property was a promising setting to recreate the Wright's Ferry plantation.

Robert Barber ^{III} built a log cabin on the White Springs property in the fall of 1772 that he then leased for seven years to a tenant, John Scott, who began the arduous task of clearing trees and brush to make tillable fields. Several other tenants appear in early tax records working improvements 'on Robert Barber's land'. Robert married Sarah Boude, daughter of a wealthy Lancaster doctor - Anglican rather than Quaker - and his brother Thomas married Sarah's sister Mary. In 1785, Robert and Thomas moved their families from Lancaster County to Buffalo Valley and divided the White Springs tract, with Robert taking 300 acres north and west of White Springs run. Robert expanded his property to 412 acres by 1802, and 597 acres by 1808, encompassing several farms. Robert had mills built on his property - a sawmill in 1791, a distillery in 1793 and a gristmill in 1797. Seven years later he purchased property on Penn's Creek two miles west of White Springs which contained a third mill. Robert formed a business partnership with Solomon Heise, a wealthy farmer from near Wright's Ferry (renamed Columbia in 1789), to build the largest

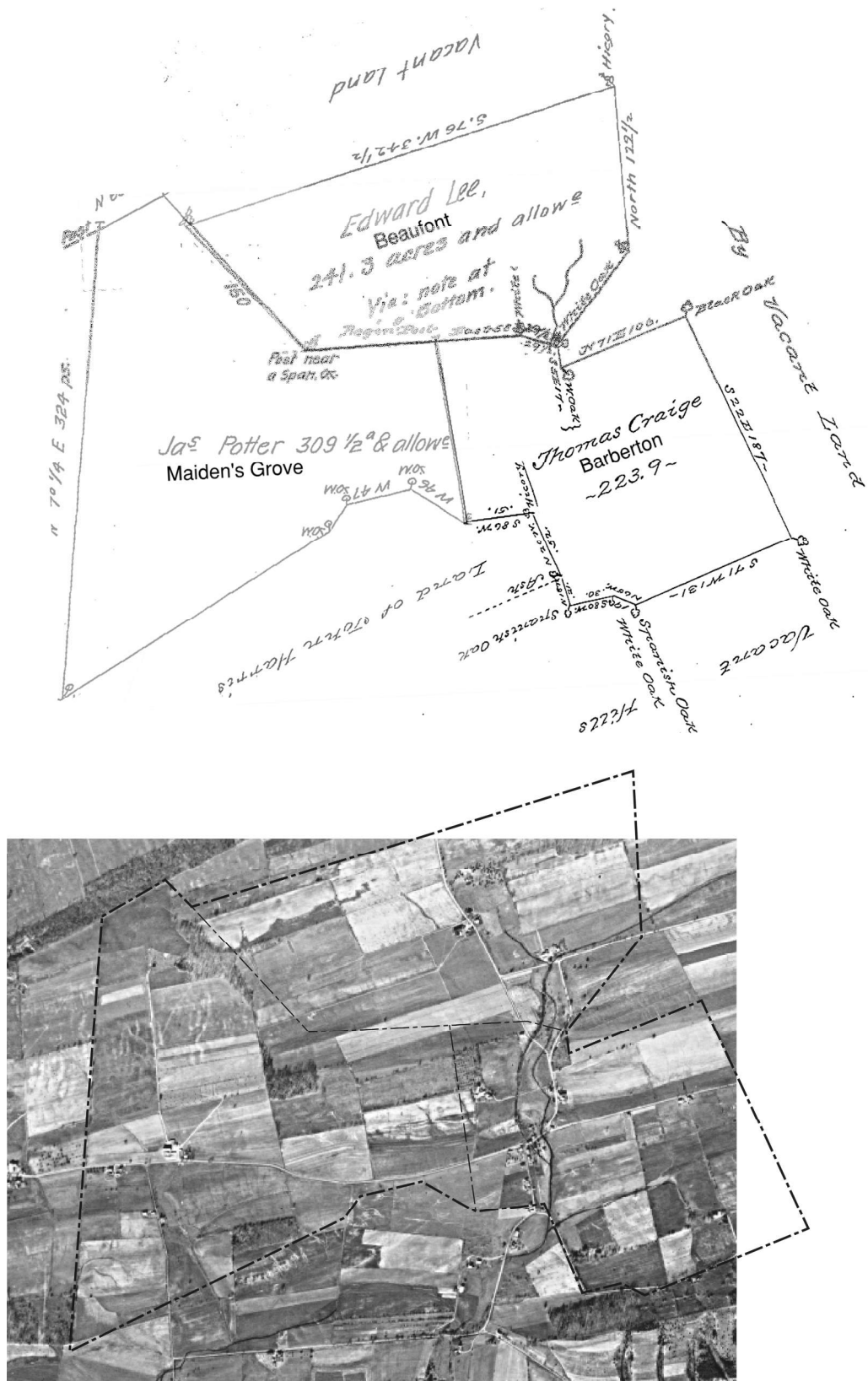


Figure 9 Three original warrants composing the Barber property in Buffalo Valley, superimposed on an aerial photo of the vicinity of White Springs. Warrant boundaries are clearly discernable in the tree lines and field divisions of the current landscape.

flour mill in the county, as well as a second saw mill and a second distillery.²⁸ Robert Barber's mills served the west end of Buffalo Valley. Located on the 'navigable' portion of Penn's Creek, they also had water access via the Susquehanna to markets in Harrisburg and Columbia.

Robert Barber ^{III} led an active public life in Buffalo Valley while building his milling empire, interacting with farmers, teamsters, millwrights, lawyers, and politicians. His involvement with the flour trade benefited from business connections with relatives and friends in Columbia, which was becoming an important depot for transferring Susquehanna river traffic overland to Philadelphia markets. Following the course set by his grandfather, Robert was appointed county Magistrate, or Justice of the Peace, for Northumberland County in 1792. Serving in this capacity for many years, he became known as Squire (esquire) Barber. He sat with future Governor Simon Snyder and other local political leaders on a state commission to improve 'navigation' on Penn's Creek for transporting agricultural products to downstream markets. Robert's network connected him to tenants on his farms, farmers throughout Buffalo Valley, petitioners in civil cases, the larger legal community, and business connections that extended to Harrisburg and Columbia.

Barber's identity as a Quaker colored his service as a magistrate. While he lacked formal legal training, his Quaker education stressed the necessity of fair laws and impartial judgment for a just society. Justice occupied a central position in early Quaker political and religious thought. Personal rights of belief and property had been abused during the persecution of Friends in England and America before the founding of Pennsylvania. Quakers maintained that man-made laws, inherently imperfect, should be open to improvement. Allowing people to share in making and revising their own laws in exchange for agreeing to submit to judicial authority that enforced them, was basic to the Quaker Discipline. Serving Quakers as an ecclesiastical constitution, the Discipline was printed, circulated, amended and expanded for a more than a century before the creation of the U.S. Constitution. Quaker political thought influenced English Law in the proprietary government of Pennsylvania from the start--from William Penn's insistence on a "virtuous

²⁸ Barber, *Genealogy of the Barber Family*, p 38.

magistracy” to administer laws and settle disputes fairly.²⁹ Wrights and Barbers served in this capacity in the early years of Lancaster County, and two generations later, Robert^{III} saw himself in the same role in the young community of Buffalo Valley, in a new nation.

In his business and public life Squire Robert Barber^{III} succeeded in recreating many aspects of the Wright’s Ferry plantation established by his Quaker parents and grandparents, but now within the altered context of a secular society. Spiritually and in his family life, Robert continued to identify as a Quaker, but he did so completely outside of the formal organizational structure of the Society of Friends. No Quaker meeting was ever established in Buffalo Valley, and there is no indication that the Barbers ever sought affiliation with the closest meetings in Pennsdale or Catawissa, both over 40 miles from White Springs. However patterns of the Quaker social structure permeate Robert Barber’s life - fueling his personal ethic of hard work and economic success, his extensive networks of business and association linking his family to distant communities, his acquisition and control of property and county judicial office, and his efforts to reinforce and perpetuate this structure in the lives of his children.

Robert Barber held high expectations for his children, and placed demands on them which shaped their lives. His two youngest daughters remained unmarried in his household to care for him through old age, but the focus of his hopes and frustrations lay upon his sons. In 1813, Squire Robert set up his oldest son, Robert^{IV} age 30, as operator of the large mill on Penn’s Creek. Robert appears on tax lists with the occupation of ‘miller’ but not ‘owner’ of the mill until 1834, apparently as an employee of his father, who owned the mill in partnership with other investors until that year. In 1834 Robert purchased his father’s half interest in the mill, and in 1838 was full owner of the enterprise.³⁰ However he sold the mill in the same year to John and Anna Ruhl, breaking the Barber custom of keeping property ownership within the family, and at age 54 moved his large family west, in the vanguard of a contingent of Buffalo Valley farmers who relocated to Stephenson County, Illinois.³¹ Robert seems to have had a falling out with his father, to whom he owed

²⁹ Alfred L. Brophy, “You that sit at the stern: Quaker Thought on Law and Magistrates in the Age of Fox, Penn and Pastorius”, paper presented at *The Industrious Bee Conference*, University of Pennsylvania, October 23-24, 2009.

³⁰ Rich and Del Testa, *Water-powered Grist Mills of Union County, PA*, p. 129. At 83, Squire Barber was retired from mill ownership altogether, having transferred title for the White Springs grist mill to his youngest son James in 1830.

³¹ Further information on this migration of Union Countians is found in two ACCOUNTS articles: Timothy Ryan, *Emigration of Union County, Pennsylvania, Families to Stephenson County, Illinois and Green County, Wisconsin 1837-*

money from purchase of the mill. Squire Robert excluded his namesake's entire family from his 1841 will, declaring "my son Robert nor his children shall have no share till my claim against him shall be paid in full".³²

Squire Robert established his two middle sons on farms carved from his large White Springs property. Thomas and Samuel first appear on township tax rolls as single taxpayers in their father's household, then as married tenants on their father's farm. Thomas married Elizabeth, daughter of William Clingan, Esquire, an influential member of the Buffalo Valley Scotch-Irish community, while Samuel married Mary VanValzah, daughter of Dr. Robert VanValzah of Buffalo Crossroads. In 1817 the Squire transferred 60 acres each to Thomas and Samuel, and an additional 20 in 1823, although these transactions were not recorded for another 12 years. Ownership of the land is in question during this period, since in 1823 and 1826 both sons appear in tax records as tenants renting farms owned by their father. In 1829, the Squire transferred 45 additional acres to each brother, and in the same year recorded transfer of title to Samuel's farm at the county courthouse. So by 1829, Thomas (age 44) and Samuel (age 42) both owned 125-acre farms situated within the original 1772 Barber property purchase, while their father retained the original 'mansion farm' at the head of White Springs, where he resided with his two unmarried daughters and hired help, his wife Sarah having died in 1818.

Our 'genealogical' account of the Barber family fortunes traces a pattern of Quaker identity through four generations, against the backdrop of Pennsylvania's transition from proprietary colony to commonwealth state in a new nation. Looking back allows us to understand the settlement of White Springs in context of the Barbers' involvement with an earlier Lancaster County community. This journey was not unique to the Barbers. Other Quaker families established modest commercial and industrial dynasties centered on stores, iron furnaces and mills in communities scattered throughout central and western Pennsylvania. The picture of frontier Quakerism that emerges reveals structures of social relationship and business enterprise as much as of religious faith. With benefit of this context, we shall now turn to the material evidence provided by the White Springs Barber houses.

1847 Vol. 2 No. 1 (2012), and Carl Catherman, *More Union Countians who moved to Illinois, Wisconsin and Beyond* Vol 2, No. 2 (2012).

³² *Testament and Last Will of Robert Barber*, 23 November, 1841, Register of Wills, Union County Courthouse

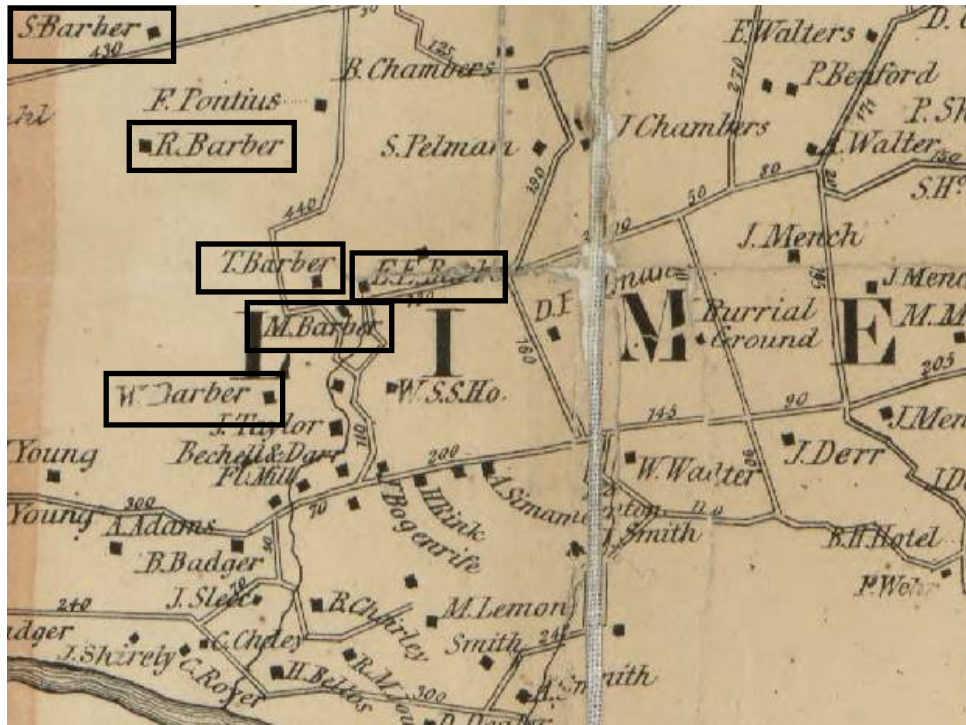


Figure 10 Barber properties near White Springs in 1856.

This ends Part 1 of this two-part article. The second half, analyzing the historically important buildings built by the Barbers in the White Springs area, will appear in the next issue of ACCOUNTS (Vol 5, No. 2) scheduled for October.

