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# Thomas Barton's November 8, 1756 Report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

## **Abstract**

This is a transcript of Thomas Barton's report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1756,

"It gives me a real concern that I have never been able to send you any Account since I enter'd upon my Mission till now. Our Distresses Here have been such, that in short, I knew not what to write or what to do: These Considerations will I hope still support me in your Esteem, & incline the Honorable Society to Pardon me. - As I intend to be the more particular now, to atone for my past Silence; I foresee a long Letter, & must therefore bespeak your Indulgence.-

After a short & very agreeable Passage, I arriv'd at Philadelphia about the 16th of April 1755; And immediately wrote to the People of Huntington, who came generously with their Waggon, & brought away my Effects.- As soon as I settled my Affairs & visited my Friends, I set out for this Place about the latter End of May; where I was receiv'd with a hearty Welcome; and was much pleas'd to find the poor People fill'd with Gratitude, under a due Sense of the weighty Obligations they were under to the Honorable Society for the Favours confer'd upon them.- And what pleas'd me still more, was, to hear that they had struggled hard to keep alive some Sense of Religion among their Children, by meeting every Sunday & getting one of the Members to read Prayers to them.-" [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Adams County Historical Society, ACHS, Adams County, Pennsylvania History

*Thomas Barton's  
8 November 1756 Report to  
the Society for the Propagation of the  
Gospel in Foreign Parts*

Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir,<sup>1</sup>

It gives me a real Concern that I have never been able to send you any Account since I enter'd upon my Mission till now. Our Distresses Here have been such, that in short, I knew not what to write or what to do: These Considerations will I hope still support me in your Esteem, & incline the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society to Pardon me.— As I intend to be the more particular now, to atone for my past Silence; I foresee a long Letter, & must therefore bespeak your Indulgence.—

After a short & very agreeable Passage, I arriv'd at Philadelphia about the 16<sup>th</sup>. of April 1755; And immediately wrote to the People of Huntington,<sup>2</sup> who came generously with their Waggons, & brought away my Effects.— As soon as I settled my Affairs & visited my Friends, I set out for this Place about the latter End of May; where I was receiv'd with a hearty Welcome; and was much pleas'd to find the poor People fill'd with Gratitude, under a due Sense of the weighty Obligations they were under to the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society for the Favours confer'd upon them.— And what pleas'd me still more, was, to hear that they had struggled hard to keep alive some Sense of Religion among their Children, by meeting every Sunday & getting one of the Members to read Prayers to them.—

<sup>1</sup>Philip Bearcroft, secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG).

<sup>2</sup>Huntington township, site of Christ Church.

My first Business was to visit & make myself acquainted with the State & Numbers of the three Congregations at York, Huntington, & Carlisle. And having settled Wardens & Vestry-Men in each, they all met & according to their Numbers agreed mutually that I should officiate three Sundays in Six at Huntington, two at Carlisle, & one at York.— Upon hearing that within the Limits of my Mission, there were large Numbers of the Communion of the Church of England, in the Settlements of Canogochieg, Shippensburg, Sheerman's-Valley, West-Penn's-Borough, & Marsh Creek; —I determin'd to visit each of these Places four Times a year to prepare them for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, & to baptize their Children.—

I had the Pleasure to see my Hearers encrease daily; which amounted to such a Number in a few Weeks at Huntington, that I have been sometimes oblig'd to preach to them under the Covert of the Trees .— And when it was my Turn at Carlisle, I am told that People came 40, 50, & some 60 Miles.— The Dissenters also (who are very numerous in these Parts) attended constantly; & seem'd well dispos'd; always behaving themselves decently & devoutly.— The more rational Part of them appear well reconcil'd with our Church; & some of the Principal of them offer'd generously to subscribe to me.—

I now Began to consider myself (as the Rev<sup>d</sup>. M<sup>r</sup>. Provost Smith<sup>3</sup> expresses it in a Letter to me) "As One who had advanc'd to the very Frontiers of the Messiah's Kingdom, & among the first who had unfolded his everlasting Banners in the remotest Parts of the West."<sup>4</sup>

From the Advantage of my Situation bordering upon Nations of Savages, I entertain'd strong Hopes that it might please the Lord to make me a happy Instrument to subject some of these poor ignorant Creatures to the Kingdom of God, & of Jesus Christ. And hearing that a Number of them were come down from the Ohio to Carlisle, to dispose of their Furr & Deer-Skins, I made it my Business to go among them, & endeavour as much as possible to ingratiate myself into their good Opinion. Next Morning I invited them to Church; & such of them as understood any English came, & seem'd very attentive the whole Time.— When I came to visit them in the Afternoon, those that had been at Church, brought all their Brethren to shake Hands with me;— And pointing often upwards discours'd with one another some Time in their own Language. I imagine they were telling them what they had heard; & indeed I observ'd them to be pleas'd with the Relation.—

This gave me Reason to think that the Indians were willing to be instructed, & were susceptible of good Impressions: And if they found Missionaries divested of sinister & selfish Motives, they could easily be prevail'd upon to exchange their Savage Barbarity for the pure & peaceable Religion of Jesus. Just when I was big with the Hopes of being able to do Service among

<sup>3</sup>The Reverend William Smith, provost of the Philadelphia Academy, later the College of Philadelphia.

<sup>4</sup>Barton published William Smith's letter in full in his *Unanimity and Public Spirit: a Sermon Preached at Carlisle and Some Other Episcopal Churches in the Counties of York and Cumberland soon after General Braddock's Defeat* (Philadelphia, 1755). The passage quoted may be found on p. xvi.

Jesus. Just when I was big with the Hopes of being able to do Service among these tawny People,—we receiv'd the melancholy News, that our Forces under the Command of General Braddock, were defeated on the 9<sup>th</sup>. of July, as they were marching to take Duquesne, a French Fort upon the Ohio.— This was soon succeeded by an Alienation of the Indians in our Interest:—And from that Day to this, poor Pennsylvania has felt incessantly the sad Effects of Popish Tyranny, & Savage Cruelty!— A great Part of five of her Counties have been depopulated & laid waste; & some Hundreds of her sturdiest Sons either murder'd, or carried into barbarous Captivity!—

At a Time of such publick Calamity & Distress, you may easily conceive, Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir, what must be my Situation, whose Fortune it was, to have my Residence in a Place, when these Grievances were felt most.— I repine not however at my Lot in being plac'd here; but rather esteem it a Happiness, since I hope I may say, God has enabled me to do some Service to our pure Protestant Religion, in Spite of its most inveterate Enemies.—

Tho' my Churches, are Churches militant indeed, subject to Dangers & Trials of the most alarming Kind; yet I have the Pleasure every Sunday (even at the worst of Times) to see my People coming crowding with their Muskets on their Shoulders; declaring that they will dye Protestants & Freemen, sooner than live Idolaters & Slaves.— The French King has rather serv'd than injur'd the Protestant Cause in these Parts: for the People have seen so much of the cruel Barbarities of those, who call themselves the Subjects & Allies of his Most Christian Majesty, that they detest the very Name of Popery.—

Among a People thus dispos'd, I should think myself extremely happy, were they barely able to keep me above Want; which at present indeed they are not.— It is but a little Time since these Counties were erected. They were chiefly settled by poor People who not being able to purchase Lands in the interior Parts of the Country, came back where they were cheap.— Many of them were so low at first, that two Families were generally oblig'd to join in fitting out one Plough; And before they could raise a Subsistence, were necessitated to run in Debt for a Stock, & for what maintain'd them in the Interim.— As soon as they became industrious, the fertile Soil gave them an Hundred-fold, & in a little Time rais'd them to Affluence & Plenty.— When they were just beginning to feel the Comforts, & taste the Fruits of their Industry, a barbarous & cruel Enemy came, & ruin'd them!— The County of Cumberland has suffer'd particularly, & the Condition of its remaining shatter'd Inhabitants is truly deplorable!— Many of them are reduc'd to real Poverty & Distress;—groaning under a Burden of Calamities; some having lost their Husbands; some their Wives, some their Children,—And all the Labour of many Years! In this Condition (my Heart bleeds in relating what I am an Eye Witness to) they now wander about, without Bread of their own to eat, or a House to shelter themselves in from the Inclemency of the approaching Winter!— They have left many thousand Bushels of Wheat & other Grain behind them in their Barns & Store-houses; which must become a Spoil to the Enemy, while the just Owners of it must either beg or starve! Since I sat down to write this Letter, I have receiv'd Accounts, that a poor Family had fled for Refuge into this County above six Months ago, where they

have remain'd ever since; but finding they could not subsist,—chose a few days ago to run the Risque of returning Home to enjoy the Fruits of their Labour, where they had not Time to unlode their Cart, before they were seiz'd by Indians, & murder'd!—

Carlisle is the only Remains of that once populous County;— They have a Garrison of about 100 Men; but how long they will be able to defend themselves is very uncertain, as the Enemy have threaten'd that Place in particular.— They still have their Share of my Ministrations, & seem extremely thankful to the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society upon whose Bounty I am chiefly supported.

By the Reduction of Cumberland, the County of York is become the Frontier:—And should the Enemy carry their Ravages this far, I shall be a considerable Sufferer; for upon my Arrival at Huntington, I found the Glebe still under its Native woods, & the People not able to make any Improvement upon it.— This put me under a Necessity of purchasing a small Plantation, & building on it at my own Expense<sup>5</sup>; by which Means I embarrass'd myself in Debt, in Hopes the People would assist me in paying for it, which indeed they promis'd to do: But this dismal Turn in our Affairs renders it impracticable.— From York I have still less to expect, as the Town is chiefly inhabited by Dutch, & not many of our Communion among them.— Upon the whole, I believe the People will be able to do very little for me, till we have some favourable Change.— I do not design, Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir; by any Thing I have said, to derogate from the Merit of my good Parishoners;— That would be ungrateful, as I have Reason to think that they are a worthy, well-dispos'd, & kind Sort of People, who profess the greatest Friendship & Esteem for me, & am persuaded would willingly do any thing in their Power to afford me an easy Support & Maintenance.—

This Mission in a few Years would have vyed with the ablest in this Province, As it was in a flourishing State, and could not contain less [than] 2,000 Persons, Members of the Church of England. But so melancholy is the Transition, that it cannot afford to build one Church; So that I officiate sometimes in a Barn, sometimes in a Wastehouse; or wherever else Convenience offers.—

I have baptized since my Arrival 160 Infants, 10 Adults, & an Indian Girl who has been brought up in a Christian Family since her Infancy; after due Examination & Instruction. The Number of my Communicants is 58, which I have but little Expectation of encreasing, till this Storm is blown over.— But I assure you, Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir, no Endeavours of mine shall be wanting to bring many to Righteousness.— Whatever Hardships or Discouragements may attend my Ministry, I hope I shall ever keep in View the Importance of my Undertaking; and always strive to answer the pious & laudable Designs of the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society in appointing me their Missionary; by doing all in my Power to promote the Glory of Almighty God, & the Salvation of Mankind.— I receiv'd lately from the Hands of D<sup>r</sup>. Jenney<sup>6</sup> the Society's Instructions to their Missionaries in North America, which are very seasonable & justly adapted by our present

<sup>5</sup> In Reading township, near Mud Run.

<sup>6</sup> The Reverend Doctor Robert Jenny was rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia.

et al.: Report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts  
Circumstances; &, if duly observ'd, & properly enforc'd, may do infinite Service  
to our bleeding Country.—

I have often observ'd, & indeed regreted it as a Misfortune, that our Missionaries in this Part of the World are so little acquainted with one another:— And though in the 12<sup>th</sup>. Instruction of the Society's Collection of Papers, it is recommended to them to "keep up a Brotherly Correspondence, by meeting together at certain Times, as shall be most convenient for mutual Advice & Assistance"; yet no such Thing is observ'd, & I dare affirm that many of them have never had an Opportunity of conversing with four of their Brethren since they left England.— How many Advantages we shall lose by such a Neglect at this Time of publick & eminent Danger, I shall submit to the Judgment of the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society.—

M<sup>r</sup>. Provost Smith has been lately up here to settle Free-Schools<sup>7</sup>, who is the only Episcopal Clergyman, beside M<sup>r</sup>. Secretary Peters,<sup>8</sup> that I have had the Happiness of seeing in these Counties since I came into them.— M<sup>r</sup>. Smith has been pleas'd to communicate to me the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society's Designs to extend their Care to the Instruction of Indian Children at the Academy in Philad<sup>a</sup>.—<sup>9</sup> Which good Scheme I believe M<sup>r</sup>. Smith will heartily endeavour to put into Execution, & do every Thing in his Power to make it answer the glorious Ends propos'd by it. If I can assist him in any Part of it, he shall always find me ready & willing to do it.— Happy had it been for us had this Scheme been resolv'd upon many Years ago: For it is probably from the Neglect of this necessary Duty of instructing the Indians, that these Colonies derive the greater Part of the Miseries they now sadly groan under.—

While the French were industrious in sending Priests & Jesuits among them, to convert them to Popery, we did nothing but send a Set of abandon'd profligate Men to trade with them, who defrauded & cheated them; And practic'd every Vice among them that can be nam'd, which set the English & the Protestant Religion in such a disadvantageous Light, that we have Reason to fear they detest the Name of both.—

It is said by some of our Brethren who have lately escap'd from Captivity, that they heard the Indians say, they thought it no Sin to murder the English, but rather a meritorious Act; And if it was a Sin, the French had old Men among them who could forgive all Sins.— Others observe that they cross'd themselves every Night & Morning, & went to Prayers regularly:— That they often murmur'd & said, the English it was true had often made them trifling Presents, but that they took Care they should never carry them many Miles before the Traders came after them to cheat them, giving them only a little Rum in Return.— Whereas the French always paid them well for their Skins &C<sup>a</sup>., built Houses for them, instructed their Children, & took Care of their Wives when they went to War.

<sup>7</sup> That is, missionary schools to serve Native American children.

<sup>8</sup> The Reverend Richard Peters, Pennsylvania provincial secretary.

<sup>9</sup> That is, the Philadelphia Academy.

By such Neglect & such Treatment have we forfeited an Alliance that would, in all Probability, have secur'd to us a quiet Enjoyment of our Possessions, & prevented the dreadful Consequences of a Savage War.—

Several Sachims or Indian Kings, in their Treaties formerly with this Government, earnestly solicited that no Europeans should be permitted to carry Rum to their Towns;— Upon which an Act was pass'd by the Governor & Assembly of this Province, prohibiting any Person under a Penalty of Ten Pounds, to sell, barter, or give in Exchange, any Rum or other Spirits, to or with any Indian within the Province:— But the Difficulty of producing Proof against Offenders, as they were chiefly far back in the woods, where they could deal clandestinely, out of the View of any but themselves;— made this Act not answer for the good Intentions of the Legislature.— So that the Traders still continued to sell strong Liquors to the Indians, whereby they were often cheated & debauch'd, to the great Dishonour of Almighty God, Scandal of the Christian Faith, & Hindrance of propagating true Religion among them.— Yet I don't despair but some Methods may be fallen upon to reclaim them;—And make them sensible that their Attachment to the English will be their truest Interest & greatest Happiness.

And indeed (in my humble Opinion) Nothing can promise fairer to produce these happy Effects, than this Scheme propos'd by the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society.— In the Conversion of Indians, many Difficulties & Impediments will occur, which European Missionaries will never be able to remove. Their Customs & Manner of Living are so opposite to the Genius & Constitution of our People that they could never become familiar to them.— Few of the Indians have any settled Place of Habitation, but wander about, where they can meet with most Success in Hunting:—And whatever Beasts or Reptiles they chance to take, are Food to them.— Bears, Foxes, Wolves, Raccoons, Pole-Cats, & even Snakes, they can eat with as much Cheerfulness as Englishmen to their best Beef & Mutton.— But such Hardships are easily surmounted, & such an austere Life made agreeable, by such as from their Infancy have been accustom'd to them.— So that Indian Boys educated at the Academy under the care of able Masters,— Where they can be visited by their Relations, & taught every Thing necessary for them to learn, at an easier Expence than in any of the Universities in Europe, will be the fittest to be employ'd in this grand & glorious Work, & the most likely to succeed in it.—

However defective these Thoughts may be, I have ventur'd, Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir, to communicate them freely; And if I have luckily dropt any Hint that can be improv'd to the Advantage of this important Scheme, I shall esteem it a Happiness; As I shall always think it my Duty to pay the highest Regards to the Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Society's Directions.

I might justly incur the Censure of Ingratitude, did I conclude this Letter without presenting my most hearty Thanks, which I sincerely do, to that Hon<sup>ble</sup>. Body for appointing me their Missionary.— And I shall ever retain a grateful Sense of the many Friendships & Favours wherewith I was honour'd when in London, by particular Members of it.— I am, Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sir, with all possible Duty & Esteem,



et al.: Report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts  
Your most oblig'd &  
affectionate Brother,  
Friend & Serv<sup>t</sup>

Tho Barton

Huntington in Pennsylv<sup>a</sup>.  
November 8<sup>th</sup>. 1756

The Rev.<sup>d</sup> D.<sup>r</sup> Bearcroft