

Thomas Barton Family Overview

by

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To better understand the Thomas Barton and Sarah Wilson family, perhaps we should look at the period of history in which they lived. For that purpose we will use our best known historical figure as a focal point of the period. George Washington was a contemporary of our Thomas Barton. Both were born in the early 1730s in Virginia and died before the turn of the century.

George Washington was involved in surveying the Shenandoah Valley around 1750, and during the next decade was appointed Lieutenant Colonel in the Continental Army. He fought skirmishes in the French and Indian War. By 1760 George Washington had settled down to family life as a planter managing his lands around Mount Vernon, Virginia. During this same time frame, little is known of the activities of the young man, Thomas Barton. According to family tradition he married Sarah Wilson to whom several children were born. Their sons were Thomas, Jr., Joseph, David, Benjamin, and William.

Then began a series of taxations and restrictive acts imposed on America by King George and the English Parliament. Active resistance to the actions of the Crown began. Thomas Barton's family moved to Tryon County, North Carolina, onto a site later to be a part of Spartanburg County, South Carolina.

They settled on the Pacolet River on land owned by Thomas Williamson and his wife Rebecca. The Williamsons owned 150 acres on both sides of the Pacolet River "near the forks" surrounded by vacant land in Indian hunting territory. The home site stood on a knoll overlooking beautiful Pacolet River, bordered by fertile bottom lands along the river and creeks. Nearby was a free-flowing spring. Indeed, the site stood "near the forks" of the North Pacolet River and the South Pacolet River, and included the confluence of the Pacolet with a medium-sized creek later to become known as Barton Creek, and another small creek to become known as Barton Branch. We know that Thomas Barton bought this land on which he was already living which included an improvement made earlier by James Green. He bought it from the Williamsons in 1769, about two years after they had purchased it.

Because hostile Indians harassed people who had settled in the territory, a series of simple log forts had been built to provide a place where settlers could retreat for temporary protection. We know that Thomas Barton in 1771 was part of a force that went out against the Cherokee Indians. Whether this was Thomas Sr. or Thomas Jr. is a matter of speculation. George Washington, meanwhile, was among those who moderately but firmly voiced objections to the heavy-handed restrictions imposed by the British. In 1775, at the Second Continental Congress, Washington was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, in which position he was serving at the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

As the Revolutionary War was beginning in earnest against the British, turmoil among the settlers boiled as families took sides as Tories or Patriots. Increasingly, harassments occurred between those loyal to the Crown and those who wanted complete separation from England. Dangers lurked everywhere. Besides the Indian threat, there were murderous bands of outlaws

roaming the Carolina backcountry where there was practically no law. “Bloody Bill” Bates roamed the territory freely, robbing and murdering families indiscriminately, while “Bloody Bill” Cunningham, a notorious Tory with his partisan group, went about harassing and murdering Patriots in the area.

The sons of Thomas and Sarah joined the Patriots by serving in the Militia. Historical records document the participation of Thomas, Benjamin and William, and family traditions says that the others participated also. The Battle of Cowpens, a recognized important victory of the Patriots, was fought within a short distance of the Barton home site. During the 1770s, Barton weddings took place. We know that Thomas Jr. married Bethire Williamson, and we wonder was she daughter of the previous land owner? David married Nancy Barrett, sister of a Revolutionary War soldier. Benjamin married Dorcas Anderson whom he had met at Earle’s Fort during an Indian uprising. They were married at Dorcas’ home which was about a mile up the Pacolet River from the Barton home. Dorcas was daughter of neighbors John and Sarah Anderson. Joseph married Indiana Rebecca Anderson, and we wonder was she related to Dorcas. The younger son, William, married Elizabeth Loftis.

After the British surrender in 1781, the Barton family began a more normal life and the children began rearing their own families. In 1784 a land office opened in Greenville County, South Carolina, and the Bartons received a number of land grants. Several moved westward to the foot of Glassy Mountain, settling along South Tyger River tributaries, including the one known as Barton’s Fork.

All of this took place before the United States of America was formed. George Washington presided over the First Constitutional Convention in 1787, wherein the Constitution of America was drafted. In that same year Thomas Barton received a land grant of 674 acres adjacent to his original 150 acres along Pacolet River. Two years later Washington was elected President of the (eleven) United States.

In 1790, all of the land was sold to William Barton, presumed to be son of Thomas Sr. and Sarah Wilson. Family tradition holds that Thomas Sr. and Sarah moved with their family to the Pacolet in 1769. However, without documents discerning Thomas Sr. from Thomas Jr., it is difficult to determine which Thomas was the principal. We know that Thomas Jr. sold Caswell County land in 1778 and that the land was previously owned by his father, Thomas Sr. Since there is no record of the Caswell land being granted to Thomas Jr, some would speculate that the land was sold by the son as a result of the father’s death. This was just two years after the start of the war. The land grant of 674 acres on the Pacolet was made in 1787, nine years after the sale of the Caswell County property and possible death of the father, Thomas Sr. Documents show that the person who got this land grant was the same person who purchased the original 150 acres. Following this scenario one would conclude that Thomas Jr. acquired the Pacolet River property, and not his father, Thomas, Sr.