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John Barrett or Barret, Impeached, Tried and Convicted, 1783-1785

This may be Vermont's first true impeachment and the process was marked by uncertainty, miscommunication, and delay.

On October 16, 1783 the General Assembly received a "Petition signed by a number of the Inhabitants of the Town of Springfield praying that John Barret Esq Justice of the Peace for the County of Windsor may be impeached before the Governor and Council for mal-administration in said Office--being read--

Resolved that the said Barret be impeached and that Stephen R. Bradley Esq be and he is hereby authorized to prosecute the said John Barret Esq by impeaching him before the Governor and Council to final Judgment--for mal-administration." ([Vermont State Papers](#), Vol. III, Part II, p. 199).

The impeachment resolution was not immediately acted upon and Barret continued in office. On March 2, 1784 the General Assembly issued an opinion that the impeachment order against Barret "virtually suspends him from officiating in his office of justice of the peace." On October 25, 1784 the General Assembly, in response to another petition about Barret, found that "no impeachment was ever made before the Governor and Council in pursuance of said order" nor had Barret had ever been officially notified of the impeachment order. The committee reporting on the matter concluded that Barret was not "virtually" suspended from "officiating in his said office" though "in case the said John Barret Esq was suspended...there is ample redress for said petitioners in the courts of common law..." ([Vermont State Papers](#), Vol. III, Part III, pp. 32, 83, 91, 108, 142, 148, 159, 205).

Four days later the General Assembly resolved that Samuel Knight prosecute the impeachment against Barret for "male administration." Finally, on June 9, 1785 Bradley laid the impeachment charges before the Governor and Council (the charges were dated May 3, 1785). Barret "has excited and encouraged many needless & vexatious Law

suits to enhance bills of Costs to the oppression of the People, to the great injury of the Common Weal and against the Peace and dignity of the freemen of the State of Vermont."

Barret, defending himself, plead not guilty. On June 11th the Governor and Council found Barret guilty of mal-administration, "Whereupon it is ordered and decreed that the said Barret be and he is hereby suspended from the exercise of his said office, as justice of the Peace, for the Term of six months from the date of this decree, and pay the cost of the Prosecution." Stephan Jacob, on behalf of Barret, asked for a review of "the cause of his impeachment before the Council," but the Council replied that it could not "without order of the Legislature."

On June 16th the General Assembly resolved that a new hearing be held by the Governor and Council and Barret acknowledged his debt to the State Treasurer of "fifty pounds Lawful Money to prosecute his action of Impeachment."

Finally after the Governor and Council reviewed his impeachment on October 20-21, 1785, Barret was again found guilty of mal-administration, suspended as justice of the peace "until the expiration of six months from 11th day of June last," and charged the cost of the prosecution. (Governor and Council, Vol. III, pp. 68-73, 88-90).