In 1821 Missouri finally was admitted to the Union as the 23rd state. One of the main men involved in this process was David Barton who chaired the Constitutional Convention and who wrote the Constitution which was submitted to Congress for the admission of Missouri. Barton County in southwestern Missouri is named for him. He then became the first Senator and represented the new state in the U.S. Congress. When he died, he was buried in Boonville, Missouri. The restoration of his tombstone, lot, and adjacent horse watering trough is an appropriate Missouri Bicentennial Project and was undertaken by the Walnut Grove Cemetery Board and the Hannah Cole Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution.

BACKGROUND ON BARTON

David Barton was born December 14, 1783 near what is now Greenville, Tennessee. At the time of his birth it was part of North Carolina. About 1809 he moved to St. Charles, Missouri, where he taught school and studied law. An elementary school in Boonville is named for him. Barton joined Nathan Boone’s company of mounted rangers. He rose quickly in politics and in 1813 was elected Attorney General for the new Territory of Missouri. On July 8, 1816 Barton presided at the first Circuit Court in Howard County in the central section of Missouri. At that time the Boonville region was part of Howard County. Court was held inside Cole’s Fort on the eastern edge of what is now Boonville, Missouri. No Courthouse had yet been constructed. A humorous incident occurred during the term of this court. Major Stephen Cole was fined $1.00 by Judge Barton for smoking in the court. Cole objected to paying the fine. After all, he lived in the fort. Reluctantly he came up with the money. That afternoon, Cole, who was a justice of the peace, organized his court on a log in front of the fort where the legal proceedings were taking place. Judge Barton was headed back to the court from eating lunch. He stopped and leaned against a tree to watch the proceedings and smoked his pipe. Stephen Cole upon seeing Barton smoking fined him $1.00 for smoking in court even though they were outside under trees. Barton laughed, paid his fine and said he had been beaten at his own game.

In 1818 David Barton was named a delegate and soon after became speaker of the Missouri Territorial Legislature which framed the document petitioning Congress for permission to organize as a
state. He was then elected President of the state’s Constitutional Convention with the document sent to Congress referred to verbally as the “Barton Constitution.” Once Missouri was admitted to the Union following the Missouri Compromise, Barton was unanimously elected Missouri’s first Senator. He was instrumental in having Thomas Hart Benton chosen as his senate colleague. He served in Congress from 1821 to 1831. As often happens, good friends can become political enemies and Barton and Benton became enemies. The resulting feud forced Barton out of office. He returned to Missouri and in 1834 and 1835 he served as a member of the Missouri State Senate.

By this time Barton was in poor health and in 1836 he moved to Boonville where he owned property. Barton never married so he had no immediate family to care for him. Dr. William and Mary Gibson (maternal grandparents of future Missouri governor, Lon Vest Stephens) were old friends and took care of David Barton until he died. By the end he suffered from both physical and mental illness. Barton died on September 28, 1837 penniless at the age of 53. The Gibson family and the citizens of Boonville held a fund-raising drive to place a suitable tombstone over his grave after his burial in what was then called the City Cemetery. Today the name has been changed to Sunset Hills Cemetery. This was accomplished with the erection of an obelisk embellished with all his accomplishments.

In 1853 Boonville citizens established Walnut Grove Cemetery, a privately owned rural park cemetery located on the east edge of town south of Cole’s Fort where David Barton had held court. The area contained a large grove of walnut trees and local promoters had obtained the ground where Cole’s Fort was located and were turning it into the First State Fair in Missouri. Cemeteries were the largest tourist attractions in the United States at the time and the founders of Walnut Grove realized they could capitalize on the cemetery location and attract large crowds if only they had somebody of national prominence buried on the ground. Thus, the remains of David Barton were moved from Sunset Hills to Walnut Grove Cemetery in March 1853. The cemetery investors decided a new tombstone was needed and so political strings were pulled. On December 8, 1855 the Missouri legislature authorized $400 to erect a new marble gravestone and build an iron fence around the circular lot. The inscription on this new stone repeated exactly the inscription on the earlier tombstone which was left in place in Sunset Hills Cemetery. The new tombstone was over 20 feet tall and was ornamented by an intricately carved torch shown being extinguished by being turned upside down. The dousing of an eternal flame was intended to symbolize how the death of Barton caused knowledge to be extinguished.

The first gravestone remained in Sunset Hills Cemetery until 1899. The University of Missouri acquired the original Thomas Jefferson Tombstone and displayed it on the Frances Quadrangle near the
recently completed Jesse Hall. A member of an MU fraternity was visiting family in Boonville and wondered about the Barton tombstone. When told the details, he determined his fraternity would move the stone to MU and place it near the Jefferson monument as a visible reminder of another person interested in Missouri education. The fraternity raised enough money to accomplish the goal and the tombstone is still on the Francis Quadrangle at the University of Missouri.

The State Fair was not a financial success and the honor was soon passed to Sedalia, Missouri, about 50 miles southwest of Boonville. But the David Barton monument, fence, and lot graced by walnut trees remained in place. A horse watering trough was placed immediately to the north of the lot so that the horses pulling hearses in funeral processions could drink. In 1901 nationally known landscape architect, George Kessler, was hired to develop a landscaping scheme for the cemetery which he successfully did. He later designed Forest Park in St. Louis for the 1904 World Fair and was the architect for the boulevard and parkways in Kansas City.

Suddenly it was the 21st century and the Missouri Bicentennial Commemoration was just around the corner. Although the Kessler plan was still in place, inevitable changes had occurred. The walnut trees on the Barton lot had died of old age. The iron fence was removed during a scrap metal drive. Horses no longer pulled hearses to the cemetery so the trough was dry. Not having any descendants, nothing had been done on the Barton lot since he was buried there so long ago. The Hannah Cole Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, wanted to commemorate the Missouri Bicentennial with a project that would have a lasting positive impact in the community. Restoration of the David Barton tombstone, replacement of the fence, repair of the watering trough and replacing walnut trees became the goal. Happily, the National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution has a competitive national competition for grants that are used for historic projects. The Hannah Cole Chapter DAR and Cole’s Fort Chapter Children of the American Revolution (CAR) applied for one of these grants. CAR members measured how much fence would be required and decided to undertake the watering trough as their project, intending to plant it with flowers each year. Needless to say, all were thrilled when this project was granted the entire amount of requested funds.

The first thing done was to clean the tombstone with D/2 chemical solution. The entire stone was also checked from top to bottom for cracks and fissures. Amazingly, the stone was still perfectly level after 164 years. The watering trough was also thoroughly cleaned and all cracks were repaired. Refilled with dirt, the trough was turned into a beautiful flower bed. Cole’s Fort members, Children of the
American Revolution (CAR) planted the watering trough one Sunday evening just before Memorial Day weekend so it would look nice for that holiday.

Originally, the iron fence posts had been set in the circular foundation stones going around the lot. When the replacement fence arrived, the installation crew found the stones to be too fragile to withstand post holes drilled into them. With supervision from the cemetery superintendent, the fence was placed in the grass in the lot in the best position for weed eating, creating a win-win project where the fence was replaced and the original stones were kept.

The final phase is to plant walnut trees again on the lot. This will be done in Fall 2020. A dedication ceremony will be held in October 2021. Hopefully the pandemic will have subsided by then. His lot and the items placed on it should survive and be in good condition when Missouri celebrates its Tricentennial in 2120.
Figure 1 - David Barton

Figure 2 - David Barton Tombstone in Sunset Hills Cemetery—photo taken in the 1890’s.
Figure 3 - Earliest known photo of David Barton Tombstone in Walnut Grove Cemetery shows fence posts for the iron fence around the lot and tombstone.

Figure 4 - Original Tombstone now located on the Francis Quadrangle at the University of Missouri in Columbia.
Figure 5 - Cole’s Fort CAR member Abbie Wax looking at tape measure after measuring the size of a lot foundation stone at the David Barton tombstone (behind her)—Walnut Grove Cemetery, Boonville, Missouri, in November 2019.

Figure 6 - The watering trough on the north side of the David Barton lot with his tombstone in the background behind CAR member Abbie Wax. Stone, circular foundation blocks are visible.
Figure 7 - The finished product!! August 2020.

Figure 8 - Cole’s Fort CAR Members plant the watering trough—May 2020 Left to right: DAR member Vanessa Melton and daughter, CAR member Victoria Melton, DAR member Carol Norman and her granddaughter, CAR member Violet Hermann.