

# John Bartram (1699 – 1777)

John Bartram was born in Darby in the Colony of Pennsylvania on 23 March 1699. His parents William Bartram and Elizabeth Hunt were among the early Quaker settlers who had arrived in 1681 from Derbyshire, England.

Although he described himself as a simple farmer with no formal education beyond that of the small Quaker school, John was an avid reader with a lifelong interest in natural history. In 1728 he purchased 107 acres of land on which he built his home. He devoted eight acres of it to the growing of plants he found interesting or medicinally useful, and explored and collected extensively in the eastern American colonies, sometimes assisted by other colonists, and later by his son William.

He sent plants for identification to his fellow Quaker friend, English merchant Peter Collinson, and he in turn sent them on to Daniel Solander at the British Museum. Bartram soon began consigning seeds, bulbs and cuttings to England, and his hobby developed into a thriving business. Collinson was a member of the Royal Society and acquainted with its president Sir Hans Sloane. He shared Bartram's new plants with his friends and fellow gardeners, and thereafter became his chief London agent. Bartram's Boxes, as they came to be known, were sent regularly each autumn, and in 1765 Bartram was rewarded with a pension of £50 per year for life, as King's Botanist for North America. With the position, his seeds and plants were also destined for Kew and other botanic gardens. Many specimens were sent on to Linnaeus, Dillenius and Gronovius in Europe, and they supplied him with books and apparatus. Botanists in Europe named most of his plant discoveries. Sometimes called the "father of American botany", John Bartram was one of the first Linnean botanists in North America, and he assisted Linnaeus's student Pehr Kalm during his collecting expedition in 1748–1750. An account of Bartram's last trip, to Florida in the south, was published with his journal in 1766. In 1769 he was elected a foreign member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm. Aging, and with failing sight, he spent his remaining years at Kingsessing with family and friends, tending his garden and receiving visitors.

James Bartram married twice: in 1723 Mary Maris, who bore him two sons, and two years after her death in 1727, Ann Mendenhall, who gave birth to five boys and two girls. His sons Isaac and Moses became apothecaries, John inherited the farm and garden, and William achieved fame as a botanist, ornithologist and natural history artist. The historic Bartram's Garden near Philadelphia is frequently cited as the oldest surviving botanical collection in North America.

*Bartramia*, a genus of mosses, was first described by Johann Hedwig in 1801, in honour of the pioneer American botanist John Bartram, who was regarded by Linnaeus as the world's greatest natural botanist.



John Bartram

## *Bartramia* sp.

*Bartramia* is a large genus of mosses with a worldwide distribution, usually in alpine or subalpine situations. About 72 species are now recognised, five of which are found in New Zealand. Mosses in the genus *Bartramia* form robust green tufts or cushions on soil or rock, and are sometimes known as "apple mosses" because of their erect or nearly erect globose red capsules, which are large and conspicuous.

IMAGE: Howard Pyle (1853–1911)