

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Brooke Barbier

JVN: Hey, curious people. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome to Getting Curious. Lately on my algorithms. I have been seeing these like figure skating videos from the 19 nineties where there is this like big John Hancock sign. So that was the first thing. Who is this John Hancock? I feel like I loosely heard about him and maybe like the patriot or like maybe school when I was in like fourth grade. But who was this gorgeous John Hancock? I know that John Hancock has a famous signature. I know that he's a very well known founding father. But other than that, I don't know very much about him. So who was John Hancock to find out about that? We are bringing in Brooke Barbier, who is a public historian who received her phd, come on doctor in American history from Boston College, specifically researching Boston's social and cultural life during and after the American revolution. Two of Brooke's favorite things are history and beer. So in 2013, she founded yield tavern tours which offers tours of Boston's historic sites and taverns. Beer included. Honey. Get Me there right now. She is the author of two books about revolutionary Boston, including King Hancock, the radical influence of a moderate founding father. And she's been interviewed by the New York Times, the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald Brooke. Welcome to getting curates and how are you?

BROOKE BARBIER: Hi, Jonathan. I am so excited to be here talking about colonial and revolutionary Boston.

JVN: So who, who was John Hancock to Boston? Like why did he become a big like person in Boston? And at the same time, what was the vibes in Boston pre like we learned from our episode that we did about like um like poop and like the history of like sewers and poop and like trash collection and like, you know, like because I was like, was it, how real was the gilded age? And our historian was like, it's pretty good except for the streets like the streets would have been covered in like pig guts, cow guts shit blood poop like fucking, it was nasty because there was no public sanitation. So it was just like, so is that true? Like it just was like fucking nasty out in there just like real poopy, shit, nasty?

BROOKE BARBIER: if we could go back in time to 1768 Boston. The first thing that would happen, Jonathan is we would probably pass out from the smell. We have to recover ourselves to take a look around but it's, it's animal waste. It's human waste. There is the smell of burning uh wood. There's the smell of brewing beer. And then Boston was sort of almost an island. It's on a peninsula. And so it's surrounded by the sea. So you would smell literally the sea. But all of the uh see creatures that are caught and gutted right there in Boston, you would smell tar, the smells would be overwhelming.

JVN: Why would you smell tar again? Just because they were building

BROOKE BARBIER: roads. Um For the ships, when they are constructing the ship, there would be, um, tar that you might smell. And then if you needed to and feather too, you'd have some tar.

JVN: What was the deal with the tarring and feathering? What was that again?

BROOKE BARBIER: So that was really think about it more like shaming. It was a way to shame someone. So you did put hot tar if we think of asphalt on streets today, it wasn't like that. It wasn't like hot tar. It was more like pine tar and it was really sticky and you would put it on, over clothes or sometimes they'd strip them from the waist up. And so then just on your bare chest and then cover you in feathers. And typically, what happened next was they would put you in a cart and you'd be rolled through the town so everyone could see your shame.

JVN: Just like, was it about like chicken like we, because like you weren't like you weren't strong enough or something or it could be a punishment for anything,

BROOKE BARBIER: Uh There was one time where it was so severe because this man was tarred and feathered because he had assaulted this young boy. And he kind of been offensive to Boston for quite some time. And he, he got tarred and feathered in January when it's so cold in Boston and chunks of his skin flaked off after the event and he sent them back to England to say, look at what happened. And in another case in Boston, they tarred and feathered someone and they set the feathers on fire so the skin underneath would burn. So they were pretty creative with

JVN: their torture honey. OK? Also it is kind of giving me John Hancock was like, tell me if this is fair to say or not. Um It's almost like he was giving the original white privilege like man, just like honey, I'm taking my fucking I ain't declaring this shit like I'm taking what I want. You don't even represent me, right? So I'm taking what I want because you weren't like I'm taking it. I'm not asking I'm taking it was giving those vibes he's giving like Karen with, with England but fuck England because they weren't representing because we didn't get no representatives. Yes. So

BROOKE BARBIER: part of it is very much um feeling entitled to something saying, but part of it is that I'm entitled to these rights. This is what's so interesting because I'm a British subject and so you can't do this to me because we don't have representatives in parliament. But certainly Hancock as the wealthiest man in Boston has an enormous amount of privilege. And you were asking who he was, he was a leader in town. And that's partly because in the 18th century, there was a, there was a social order that most people accepted and abided and that put white men at the top of the social order, wealthy white men were at the very top of the pyramid. And so Hancock was their perfect uh was the perfect man to lead them. But just because you are wealthy, didn't mean you were popular. So Hancock had these other skills that allowed him to become an icon in Boston. One of the ways he did this was by entertaining people with lavish parties, lots of alcohol. He treated people there account after account says that he would treat people with kindness, cheerfulness like he was talking to a brother or relative. So even though he looked so above everyone and and was so above everyone by this 18th century social order standards, he had this gift for connecting with people and and making them feel like he was one of them?

JVN: And do we know like how he made his money? Like what industry was he in?

BROOKE BARBIER: So he was a merchant which meant he sell, he sold goods, bought and sold goods back and forth from England and throughout the Atlantic world. But

what's interesting about Hancock is that when he is seven years old, his dad dies, he died, his dad, excuse me was a minister named John Hancock. And John Hancock's dad was the son of a minister named John Hancock. So it would seem like the John Hancock we know would go on to become a minister. But when his dad died, when he was seven, he went to live with his wealthy paternal uncle, name a man named Thomas in Boston. And here's what's extraordinary in Uncle Thomas's lifetime. He amassed one of the largest fortunes in Massachusetts. And that is unusual at this time. The idea of sort of pulling yourself up by the bootstraps to rise above your class didn't really happen that much in the 18th century, but Thomas did it and that he adopted John.

JVN: IWho are ike some of the other major players in Boston besides the Hancocks.

BROOKE BARBIER: So one name you would know for sure would be Samuel Adams and you wouldn't know him for the beer. He was a rabble rouser in Boston at this time. And so you would know him from riling people up at town meetings. Another person that was a player at this time that you'd probably sitting alongside a tavern in would be Paul Revere. He was a silversmith, but he was also an artist and he depicted many of these revolutionary events in his art that became uh distributed around Massachusetts. Another person, another family that you would know but was who was on the other. Ultimately, on the other side is a man named Thomas Hutchinson. He was lieutenant governor and then governor of Massachusetts Bay colony. And the name Hutchinson might be familiar to you because he was the great great grandson. There might be one more grade in there of Anne Hutchinson, the religious dissident who got banned from Massachusetts Bay colony for because she was a woman and she was daring to uh to hold Bible studies in her home. So the Hutchinson had been in, in Boston and Massachusetts literally since its founding, the the decade that Boston was founded. But what's so interesting is Anne Hutchinson gets banished. She annoys the colonists and Thomas Hutchinson, he allies with the British Crown and that annoys the colonists a century and a half later. And ultimately he gets banished to England.

JVN: Oh, so like their family had like a long history with like, OK, so like, oh, I have so many questions. What was the, was there any other like um rivalries between like, say a Boston and a Manhattan or like Boston and Philly? Like was there like big families from those three cities that were like vying for notoriety or like business like ventures or anything like that?

BROOKE BARBIER: Not exactly big families, but you'll love this because in 1773 when the Tea Act was passed, every colony knew that they didn't like the Tea Act and Pennsylvania and New York rebel to enforce their Tea Act collectors to resign. Boston had tried to do that but the T act collectors were determined and they were not going to resign. And what happens is, uh New York and Philadelphia write a taunt in a Boston newspaper and they say we've gotten our stand back. Uh, excuse me, our T A collectors to resign. You haven't done that in Boston. You better not shrink. That's a direct quote. You better not shrink meaning step up. Boston, you've got to rebel against the Tea Act, get your Tea Act collectors to resign. Of course, Boston doesn't do that. They come up with something far more creative with the Boston tea party. But so I would say there's um something a little more, it's more maybe city rivalry and, and this makes sense because they are 13 independent colonies. It, it, we would be mistaken to think of them as all

having the same interests and the same reasons to rebel against the crown. So uh it's, it's more that the, the cities or the towns are finding their way within themselves.

JVN: And then as relates to other towns, then Philly and New York say, look, we made our tea people resign so they aren't collecting no fucking tea taxes over here without no taxation without representation. So you better fucking stand up and not shrink. And then Boston was like, bitch, we'll fucking raise you one better. And so they took all the tea and they fucking set it on fire in the harbor and just like destroyed it. They're like, oh, you think we're going to pass it up? Take pay taxes on this? We'll fucking destroy your shit and we're not paying you for it. Is that what the Boston tea party was?

BROOKE BARBIER: So almost exactly that except they don't burn the tea. They smash open the chest of tea and dump the tea overboard. So think loose tea, not, not like a tea bag. Uh but they, they smash open the chest of tea and they dump it over but they didn't shrink in Boston.

JVN: So what's like the economic fuck you of that to England? So had England sent the tea and they thought that America would pay for it like they like, like, ok, here's your tea. You gotta pay us for it. But so they just not only didn't pay it, they just like set it on fire. Yes. Or they just dumped it over the edge. Yeah.

BROOKE BARBIER: So the idea was that you had to import tea now, from what was called the British British East India Company tea and you had to pay a tax on it. But parliament weren't total dummies. They reduced the tax so much that if you bought the British East India Company tea and complied with the tax, the tea would be cheaper than the tea that people were smuggling in. But colonists weren't dummies either. And they said if we comply with this tax and we buy only your tea, eventually you're gonna raise the price because you're gonna have a monopoly. So it was rejecting both the tax and the idea that we have to buy it from this one entity.

JVN: And so just one more time just because I, but I think we might, I think this is just like me being dumb because you totally just explained it. But my brain so like, what did England think? They, so when they sent that thing, a tea and then they dumped it into the water, did they think they were owed like the like the tax? Like, what did they think they were owed from that ship?

BROOKE BARBIER: The colonists during? It's a really good question. So when the colonists destroyed the tea in the Boston tea party, it, they destroyed about \$1.7 million worth of tea in today's value. And then they passed those coercive acts and one of them was the shutting down of the Boston Harbor. They said we're no ships in or out anymore. And that's gonna devastate Boston's economy. And they said we're not going to reopen the harbor until you pay for the value of the tea destroyed. So it was, it was more a way to say we, you can destroy the tea. I mean, they didn't want you to, but you're going to pay for that. Literally.

JVN: Is that because the tax would have been collected for the crown based off the sales of that tea like in all the places in Massachusetts or would they have paid the taxes like just from the shipment of that ship or like with the tax have been collected from like little tea shops and like coffee shops selling the tea?

BROOKE BARBIER: Yeah, so it happened the tax happens when you bring in the goods there, uh bring the goods into port. But this affected the Tea Act affected all 13 colonies. And so it wasn't just Boston who rebelled. Uh as I said, New York and Philadelphia also were rejecting this responsibility. South Carolina also destroys tea. So it's not just Boston, it's just that Boston has the most explosive reaction and they've had a history of explosive reactions in the years leading up to the tea party.

JVN: What was going on with like the native Americans in the northeast? Like was there just like a lot of fighting like did it was were they already like trying to move people into like reservations and stuff at that time? Like what happened to the Native Americans?

BROOKE BARBIER: So the Native Peoples at this time and they were a very diverse group, but many of them by 1760 1770 had been pushed somewhat west. And right before we get that no taxation without representation. Timeline, a war ends in 1763. And it was called the French and Indian War because it was also known as the seven years war and it meant that the British and their colonial allies. So people like colonists in Massachusetts fought together against the French and their native peoples allies because they were essentially fighting for control of the, of the western part of the North American continent and the British win the French and Indian war in 1763. And while the native peoples didn't necessarily side with the French, they, they side with the French on the war, but they didn't necessarily side with them ideologically. They really wanted to, they wanted the least worst European power to win. And in their mind, the French were better traders. That is Tar Ad er they were more generous with their trading. So they allied with the French when the Revolutionary War comes about, you see, these diverse native peoples make certain dis different decisions. Some sided with the British Empire this time, some sided with the colonists, mostly to side with who they thought they would be better treated under.

JVN: What would John Hancock have thought about like all of these people that were owned and operated but had like what would he have thought of Puerto Rico or what would he have thought about? Like Guam, like people who are American territories that have no voting powder power and are still taxed in, in so many ways? Like would he have thought that was cool or would that have been totally against his ideological perspective?

BROOKE BARBIER: Here's what we know, for sure, John Hancock lived in a world of hierarchy and he sat at the top. What's different about him is that he cared about the people below him. And later in his life, he you can see that many of his policies favor the people who aren't wealthy. He has a turn, for example, with enslaved peoples, his family had benefited from enslaving black women and men for decades, Uncle Thomas enslaved several and passed them to his wife when he died. When Aunt Lydia died.

JVN: So people were enslaved in the North. Like I feel like we always think like, oh, like that didn't happen in like the northern colonies. Like I certainly thought that coming from Illinois was like, oh sorry, we didn't do that. That was like those people, but we didn't do that. Yes, it did. Like there was Jim Crow and there was, you know, enslaved peoples before that all up in the north. So this wasn't some thing that was like only relegated to Southern states.

BROOKE BARBIER: Absolutely. All the states had enslavement was legal and permitted. And what's different about Massachusetts. So when Aunt Lydia inherits the enslaved peoples in 1776 she has conditional manumission for some of them in her will. She says I'm passing you down to John. That is John Hancock, but you can be free in a year if you behave yourself or whatever she had decided. And then we know that John Hancock manumitted all of the enslaved people by the end of the 17 seventies that had been enslaved that had been passed down to him.

JVN: Does manu mean like set free or something?

BROOKE BARBIER: Yes, set free. Exactly. Now Massachusetts in 1780 passes their state constitution that says all men are created equal. And then you see by 1790 Massachusetts in their census had no enslaved peoples. So certainly slavery had been a part of Massachusetts since at the beginning. But by 1790 there are no recorded enslaved peoples in Massachusetts.

JVN: So what was John Hancock's deal then? Like overall? Like what type of politician was he like? What party was he in? He ebbed and flowed on what he thought was correct and proper with owning people. Like what was, what was his, he didn't really care. He was more of like a politician in that sense, like he was like trying to do the popular thing like what was his deal? Tell us about him?

BROOKE BARBIER: So John Hancock is specifically at this time, there are no political parties and political parties don't start to be formed really until the 17 eighties, 17 nineties. But in Massachusetts specifically, the political party is Hancock really? He is running the state. I mean, it is, he is so popular that he can't be unseated essentially.

JVN: But was he the governor?

BROOKE BARBIER: Yes, he was the first elected governor of Massachusetts and he served. Yes. Yes. And he served several one year terms. But Uh for example, when you asking about the enslaved people, Hancock change, changes his mind. And I think this is really worth calling attention to that Hancock had benefited from the institution of slavery. He himself for decades. He was in this position because of, of, of enslaved people working unpaid for his uncle for decades. Yeah, exactly. So then he goes on to emancipate them by the end of the 17 seventies. And then as governor, he takes a few steps to weaken the institution of slavery further. And here's the thing, Jonathan by 1792 he hosts a party in his house for black women and men and he does so in the name of liberty and equality. This is extraordinary. This is somebody who has clearly changed their mind on at least enslavement critics called this party of John Hancocks in Quality Ball. And that was meant as an insult that they couldn't believe that the governor of Massachusetts would host black women and men in his home, much less in the name of liberty and equality. But he was a man who changed his mind. And so while he wasn't an ideas man, as I said earlier, he was someone who took cues from people around him and then made decisions. And one way that Hancock, I mentioned this earlier was able to get people on his side. And so popular was through his hosting was through treating people to food and drink and he did that also with the black women and men of Boston.

JVN: Do we know like who was working on him on that change of heart? Was it like a partner? Was it friends? Like there's no writing or is there any theories that suggest, like who moved his heart? There is mine.

BROOKE BARBIER: Unfortunately, there's really, we don't have anything from Hancock about this. And as a historian, this is the the worst when you find something that you want to explore more. But there just aren't the sources for, to, to, to indicate why. So the best that I can say is what he, what we know is that his mind changed and he did what he did best, which was throwing a party. So he threw a party for black women and men and uh and, and, and, and hosted them in his home and that was one way that he could help influence. So we don't know who got him to, to, to do. We don't, we don't have any idea really. And it, but frankly, it could have been the changes that were happening in Massachusetts that the 1780 constitution declaring all men equal that, that might have resonated with him. Just the, the sheer barbarity of enslaving people would have would have likely resonated with him. Some black men were free black men were kidnapped in Boston. And in this is in the 17 eighties and intending to be sold down to the Caribbean and slavery. There was particularly brutal. And he wrote a letter to the governor saying these are free men, you can't enslave them. So I think just the sheer unfairness. Yes. So in South Carol, there was an instance where a ship coming from South Carolina that held enslaved peoples docked in Boston and Hancock hired those people to work in his home. And the governor of South Carolina said, wrote to the Governor of Massachusetts Hancock and said, you have to send these enslaved peoples back. The the slaver wants them back. And Hancock said, no, it's

JVN: And Hancock said, no, it's against our constitution.

BROOKE BARBIER: We don't have that. We just know that he said, no.

JVN: Is there a letter like, do we have the letter that he sent back?

BROOKE BARBIER: No. So um there's a, a man called Prince Hall. Prince Hall was a free black man who founded the first Black Masonic lodge in, in the country, but it was in Boston. And we know that Prince Hall worked with Hancock on this, letting him know that these people were unjustly that they shouldn't be sent back to Sarah South Carolina. So we see these moments where Hancock is taking these small steps to um to weaken the institution of slavery. And again, this is a man who's clearly changed his mind because his whole family fortune had been aided by the work of enslaved peoples.

JVN: Hey, so then where did because we read about it? I mean your book, it's like King Hancock What? So how does he come up with this name? What is the, what happens with this King Hancock nickname?

BROOKE BARBIER: You're gonna love this story. So after the Boston tea party, remember they passed those coercive acts in 1774 they also sent these British soldiers into Boston to occupy the town. And British officers held captive, a Bostonian and they demanded to know from him who ordered the destruction of the tea. That's what they called the Boston tea party at the time. And this guy says nobody. And the British officer yells in his face. You're a damned liar. It was King Hancock and the damned sons of Liberty. Now, this nickname is so clever because it captures Hancock's enormous

popularity in town but make no mistake. It is an insult. It is saying that the best the colonists can do for a king is this guy John Hancock, while the real monarch George the third sits on the throne in Great Britain. But then something amazing happens on April 19th, 1775. That is the day the Revolutionary war begins with the battles of Lexington and Concord. British troops are retreating out of Concord and they need to retreat back to Boston and it's a 20 mile retreat and they're getting fired on the whole way home. Then their humiliation continues because as they're being fired on, the British soldiers can hear colonists crying out King Hancock forever. What had been an insult was appropriated to become a rallying cry on the day the revolutionary war began.

JVN: Wow. Wow. Yeah. Was John Hancock married? Did we like his wife? What was her story?

BROOKE BARBIER: Well, she didn't like Hancock that much. He gets married very late, Jonathan, very late. Um And in his life, most men were married in their mid twenties, his wife was a woman named Dorothy Quincy, but known as Dolly and Jolly and Tim Jolly. He liked being married to Jolly more than Dolly liked being married to him. And uh she, they have two Children, both of whom die in before the age of 10. So they have no surviving heirs. And when their first daughter dies, Dolly finds no comfort in her husband. In fact, she leaves Philadelphia to move away from Hancock and she goes back to Boston. So Hancock seemed to love the domestic life and love having someone there who he could talk to. But she didn't seem to feel the same way about him,

JVN: but she didn't get all of his stuff when he died with the no will like it didn't just automatically go to her.

BROOKE BARBIER: He got of it and she started selling stuff off pretty soon. Within a few weeks of his death, she started selling stuff off and she stayed in that house for a little bit longer. Then she remarried, which isn't unusual at the time, but she remarried one of Hancock's former captains and there were family members of hers who said you can't go from the governor of Massachusetts to the a ship captain. And that's what she did.

JVN: Was she happy with him?

BROOKE BARBIER: So we just don't know that much about her. Um but they moved out of them, they moved out of the mansion too. And so presumably she was happier with him than Hancock now with Hancock or was John or?

JVN: Well, how did, and then how does like the John Hancock signature thing become such a thing? Like give me your John Hancock, what was the deal

BROOKE BARBIER: with that? Isn't that great? So he was the president of the Second Continental Congress and he was the only man to authorize the Declaration of Independence. So once all of once Congress approved it, it went to the president for his authorization, which he does then a month after there is a what they called an engrossed copy. So printed on a large piece of parchment paper written out and all 56 signatures are on there, Hancock signed first because he was president and he signed in the center. And it is the biggest signature. It's not as big as we popularly remember. We think

of it taking up as the whole page, but it's really not that big, but it's bigger than everybody else's. And it's, this is a scientific but it is certainly, I think the finest signature. What's interesting is it isn't until 1818 when Americans see that signature because the declaration of independence. There was only one copy of it and it wasn't out on public display and it wasn't until 1818, when they decided to make copies of it that Americans saw the signature. And that's when that legend of, oh, I put, I signed it so big. So King George the third wouldn't have to see it without his spectacles. That's when those sorts of things start to crop up in the 18 twenties. And that's when he becomes known for his signature at

JVN: this time in 17 or like when the world or Jesus Christ, when the revolutionary war starts, this is just kind of out of the blue. What was like, what was like the disease you did not want to get or was there like several that was killing people? Like at the time,

BROOKE BARBIER: smallpox was deadly. And Hancock does something very interesting in that he clearly had either had suffered smallpox because once you got it, you had it for life, you had immunity for life. But Hancock had either gotten it or he got inoculated, inoculated is different than vaccinated, but they implanted a live virus usually into your arm to prevent so that you broke out in smallpox. And you just hoped you didn't die from that breakout because it was usually milder than if you contracted it from somebody else. And Hancock actually proposes uh that other people stay with him in his home during their inoculation downtime. So he understood the threat of smallpox to, to others or not just to the population but to them to the, during the inoculation period, you were symptomatic and you needed to be cared for. And Hancock offered several people including Martha Washington to stay with him during this period. So smallpox was deadly, but there was an imperfect treatment. Yeah. And imperfect as it was that if you, you were privileged to be inoculated because it was expensive and you had all that downtime and not everyone could afford that.

JVN: And yellow fever is like rampant at this time in like New Orleans in the South. I learned that from the, from an episode that we did on the history of New Orleans like last year. I'm pretty sure. So like, but, but yellow fever didn't really go north as much because it was like, kind of endemic to the, like, um, like, it was like mosquitoes and it was like that area.

BROOKE BARBIER: Yes, exactly. The, the temperate climate. Do you know one of the things that you might get at this time? Not, not syphilis? Yes, syphilis for sure. But also you would suffer from people, not you Jonathan, but people suffered from

JVN: gout my fucking husband. It's really funny that you say this Brooke because everybody that I've been around for these last three days because I came to Vegas and I was minding my own business and I became obsessed with crab legs and I found I'm full of Bethany Frankel in this bitch. I'm I found this delivered place that delivers crab legs. I am eating crab legs out of a plastic bag for dinner like three nights a week. I'm obsessed with crab legs. I went to the Wynn yesterday for their fucking buffet of crab legs. And now my husband and my friends and my makeup artist and all my friends are like you're going to get gout and I'm like, fuck you just because I've been eating crab legs for five days. You think I'm going to get gout? Everyone keeps accusing me of getting gout.

BROOKE BARBIER: So it's gonna take, it's gonna take a lot more than that. It's gonna take a lot more than that. So um Benjamin Franklin suffered from gout, John Hancock suffered from gout, but that's partly too because they ate very rich foods. They drank a lot of alcohol and they didn't move that much. They didn't move their bodies that much. So your crab leg binge is not, you can, that's not give you go. I mean,

JVN: I can't wait to tell Mark because this fucker is telling me every three seconds, I'm gonna contract gout from my fucking crab leg obsession. But I

BROOKE BARBIER: will say you don't want it. It's not something you want. It was incredibly painful. Hancock couldn't hold a quill at certain points. He couldn't and he couldn't. Is that what killed him? Yeah, I it's, they think so. I mean, I'm not um a historian of medicine, but it was devastating. He, he couldn't walk at certain points in his life. He was in a wheelchair or he had his servants move him around. He had to, he was a man who wore this fine clothing during his lifetime, gold embroidered clothing. And by the end of his life, he's drops dressed in flannels because the gout had swelled, his legs, swelled his hands. So your husband's looking out for you by saying that he doesn't want you to get gout because you don't want it. But it's gonna take more than some crab legs. What

JVN: are some of the lessons that we can learn from the politics of that time and how it, it could apply to this time?

BROOKE BARBIER: Specifically, what we can take from Hancock is the willingness to change your mind and to do so publicly to decide that what worked before? Is it going to work for you going forward? We saw that with the way he changed his mind about enslavement and we saw that with independence. He had been a man reluctant to declare independence and then he ultimately comes around, but he wasn't making rash decisions. So that's one thing that I think is difficult for people to change their minds. But when Hancock knew better, he, he seemed to sometimes do better. I'm not, I'm not giving him full credit, but he, he was a man who was willing to divert from what had benefited him for decades. The other thing is the importance of moderation and radicals and their ideas are so important and necessary. But oftentimes they aren't able to get those ideas to the finish line because they lack popular support or support falls away as they grow so radical. So Hancock is another one who shows that middle path, for example, with Shay's rebellion when he pardoned those rebels or the US constitution, when he said fine, I'll support it. But I want these changes. So finding that path that appeals to many people in the middle. And you wouldn't think that when we're talking about a revolution and we're talking about the importance of moderation. But, but that's exactly what Hancock helps show us about politics in the 18th century and today.

JVN: Wow, wow, Brooke Barbier. I am, I think I would be like in a non scary way. I would be remiss to say that I'm not obsessed with you. I learned so much today and I am just so grateful that you are so generous with your research and your literal like academic work teaching us all of this so patiently and kindly, please tell us about your book because if you had just if you've been like just titillated beyond your heart's desire today from this conversation, I know there's more where this came from. So Brooke, where can people find you? Where can people find more of your work? What's next for you? What are you super curious about um where can we follow

BROOKE BARBIER: along, first of all? Thank you. It's so generous of you to say that uh you enjoyed learning for me. That's like the most gratifying thing that I can hear. So I really appreciate your curiosity and um your willingness to go down these different paths to learn more. And it was, it's so fun for me. Uh So King Hancock is um out now, you can get it wherever books are sold. And it's, it explores more about Hancock's personality and politics, but also tells the story of the American revolution as a whole. So exactly, like you said, the stuff that we're touching on today, we go much deeper in, but it's meant to be um a fun and, and pretty easy read. Um You, if you are in Boston, you should definitely come join us for some history and beer on yield tavern tours. That is a really fun way to learn more about revolutionary history because we go in historic taverns and we drink beer and it's fun. And uh the other thing is you, if you wanted to find me specifically, I'm online at Brook hyphen Barbier and.com. And uh yeah, we just uh really loved having this conversation

JVN: with you. I would follow the shit out you on Tik Tok if you were just like doing cool, like telling people about like historical stuff. Like you could do like as the green screen like this is how people shit or poop or peed or like this is how people ate or went to the doctor. This is like, how people, which also Brooke, I'm kind of freaked out at myself. Like this is so unusual. I need to go to the doctor that I didn't ask this already. Gay stuff. Did you run across any cool gay stuff? Like lesbian, gay, bi pan anal, any sort of cool gay stuff in your research in Boston? Like, did Jen, did John Hancock ever say, like I saw these two blokes do with kisses or

BROOKE BARBIER: something? So you probably know that the construction of like gay or homosexual didn't exist. OK. So not specifically in Boston, but I'll tell you two examples of it, I have two examples. One is this guy called Baron Von Steuben. He was a Prussian general and most historians believe that he was homosexual. Um There isn't direct evidence, but there's a lot of circumstantial evidence that that sort of point to that. And he was actually critical to the revolutionary war efforts because the Continental Army was kind of in disarray and they didn't have a lot of order or discipline. And he was brought in and taught the troops how to drill and exercise and get information. And so he really contributed this Prussian General to the success of the Continental Army. So that's one person. But again, we don't have any direct evidence

JVN: of it. But what was the ancillary stuff like he had like, uh, like, uh, like what seemed like modern day douche. But at the time he said this is my little balloon or like, how, what's the circumstantial evidence? He,

BROOKE BARBIER: he would throw parties for the, the members of this troop? Yes, for the troops. And there's one instance where maybe they, they could come without a shirt on something like that. Um, he also lived with, um, uh, a man through his life and, and one way to sort of get around that was to adopt them as your son so that they might, and so that, that was the, the reason that those two were living together and then if you died, you, he might get those um, any benefits.

JVN: But those 18 hundreds, honey. Ok. Really quick question though. Um, that shirts off thing. Was there like an invitation? Was there like an invitation that exists from this party? It's like ye soldiers want to come to not burying your shirts and Raffo

BROOKE BARBIER: no, this is, this is where it's, it's pretty sketchy. But um, drinking during the army was, was a part of everyday life in the army. You would get a rum ration. So the idea of enjoying yourself with alcohol wasn't unusual. But no, we don't have any sort of formal invitation from. I

JVN: wish there was some formal gay shit. I want us to find some formal archaeological gay stuff. And

BROOKE BARBIER: that's the exciting thing about history is what we tend to think. Oh, it's in the past, it's already happened. New discoveries are made all the time as letters and accounts are uncovered. So, what we know today may not be what we know a year from

JVN: now. So if you live in Boston, go to the woods and like, dig for some boxes of, of, of letter,

BROOKE BARBIER: please do. Actually, this is, that is a good tip. Yeah. Look in your, look in your archaeological attics, things like that. Um Brooke,

JVN: I had so much fun. Thanks for coming and getting curious. You're just

BROOKE BARBIER: simply the best. You're the best. Thank you.

JVN: Who was John Hancock? Well, we definitely learned that um he was the first elected governor of the state of Massachusetts. He also was the first person to unseat an incumbent governor in Massachusetts. Uh He went by the nickname King Hancock. He was like very well known. That was a really interesting story. Um Boston was very wild. It, it, it was rough and tumble, there was violence, there was a lot of smells um which, you know, no, I mean, I love Boston, but it's giving me like you can feel that that was, you know, Boston's legacy even today. Um But in a cute way, uh John Hancock was not biologically sturdy. I thought he was super opinionated, but actually he kind of wavered and kind of let the vibes of Massachusetts inform what his opinion should be. But I think the most important thing was that he was willing to change his mind publicly, which I think is a very hard thing to do. And it's cool that he did that he did change his heart and mind. But at the cost of what, and it also kind of gives me like, understanding like what one person's role is in like a larger system and it's like he did his best, but that still makes the system kind of gross. Um Things that I'm super curious about now, what was going on in America from the 14 hundreds to the 16 hundreds? How did people get elected into office like before the popular vote generally? Like, what was the experience of voting like in like the late 17 hundreds in the United States? Super, super interesting. Um Also, I think I'm really curious about what was like the native American diaspora and what was their experience of like centering their experience in, in, in their land in this time? Like who were the major native American leaders? What do we know of their history? And I, I think that's really interesting and, and more important for us to know. And then also how could I forget Baron Von Steuben, assumed homosexual press in general. Who's d I probably would have gladly sucked even though it probably smelled like tripe and innards from local fish. Um He had topless circuit parties in Massachusetts, which fuck me. That's fun. Can some gay archaeologists please go discover some hot gay stuff, but I just don't know how to, how hot it could be like before plumbing. Maybe it

was more sideways. Anyway, what a fun episode of getting curious. Uh We hope you come back next time and we'll see you. Then you've been listening to getting curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and their area of expertise in the episode description and follow us on Instagram at Curious with JB N. You can catch us here every Wednesday and make sure to tune in every Monday for episodes of Pretty Curious which we love. It's our podcast on all things beauty. Get into it still can't get enough and you want to get a little spicy with us. You can subscribe to extra curious on Apple podcast for commercial free listening and our subscription only show, ask JB N where we're talking sex, relationships are really just whatever is on my mind. That week, our theme music is Freak by Quinn. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. Our editor and engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Getting Curious is produced by me Chris McClure and Julia Melfi with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Currie and Chad Hall.