

# Barton's "Moving Road" captures Harrisburg history

By Sharon DePalma

So you think Harrisburg is a boring place without much culture. Well WKBO says "it's a special place to be," and for Associate Professor of American Studies Michael Barton, Harrisburg is a kaleidoscope of beauty -- both historical and environmental.

Barton says even more in his new book **Life by the Moving Road: An Illustrated History of Greater Harrisburg**, distributed by Windsor Publications of California, which specializes in publishing local histories.

The book, which is a composite of essays, explores Harrisburg's history as far back as 1733, concluding with recent highlights between 1946 and 1981.

The style is "different (for a history book) in that it hadn't been done before," Barton said.

**Life by the Moving Road** summarizes the essence of each era via a particular episode. For instance, in Barton's chapter "The Start of Stopping By," eastern traveler Miss Margaret Dwight describes Harrisburg men as "drunken, swearing wretches." The traveler goes on to say that taverns and cockfights are disgusting--like most were in those days in Harrisburg and other towns.

Barton further explains in his book that he tried to capture a "feel for place" when writing **Life by the Moving Road**. He exemplifies his fiction writing talents in a later chapter via the composition of the late M. Harvey Taylor's would-be diary. In that chapter, Barton--through Taylor's eyes--recounts and comments on Harrisburg's recent events, such as the '72 flood and TMI.

At present, Barton said Windsor had distributed 3,400 copies to Harrisburg bookstores, most of which have been sold.

Barton's **Life by the Moving Road** is fascinating in another sense, too. Normally, book publishers accept book manuscripts from writers or their agents. In Barton's case, Windsor contacted the Harrisburg Chamber of Commerce, which in turn contacted the Dauphin County Historical Society where Barton is president.

Capitol Campus has two other connections to Barton's book. Primary pictorial research for the volume was done by Dr. Irwin Richman, American Studies Graduate Coordinator. Mark Dorfman, the free-lance writer who served as Business Historian on the project, is a former teacher of American studies, history and communications here.

When asked how students at Capitol Campus could benefit from his book, Barton replied that he hoped they'd learn that "every town has a rich history and interesting people . . . with purposeful and meaningful events."

"Kids don't take local history seriously," Barton added, "because they think important things happen elsewhere."

"Harrisburg has a distinctive personality," he said, referring to the 19th century architecture, such as Victorian homes and row houses.

Moreover, it's the river which lends beauty and landscape to Harrisburg, Barton said. **Life by the Moving Road** reinforces this ideal via dozens of lithographs and colorful pictures.

Barton said, however, that he

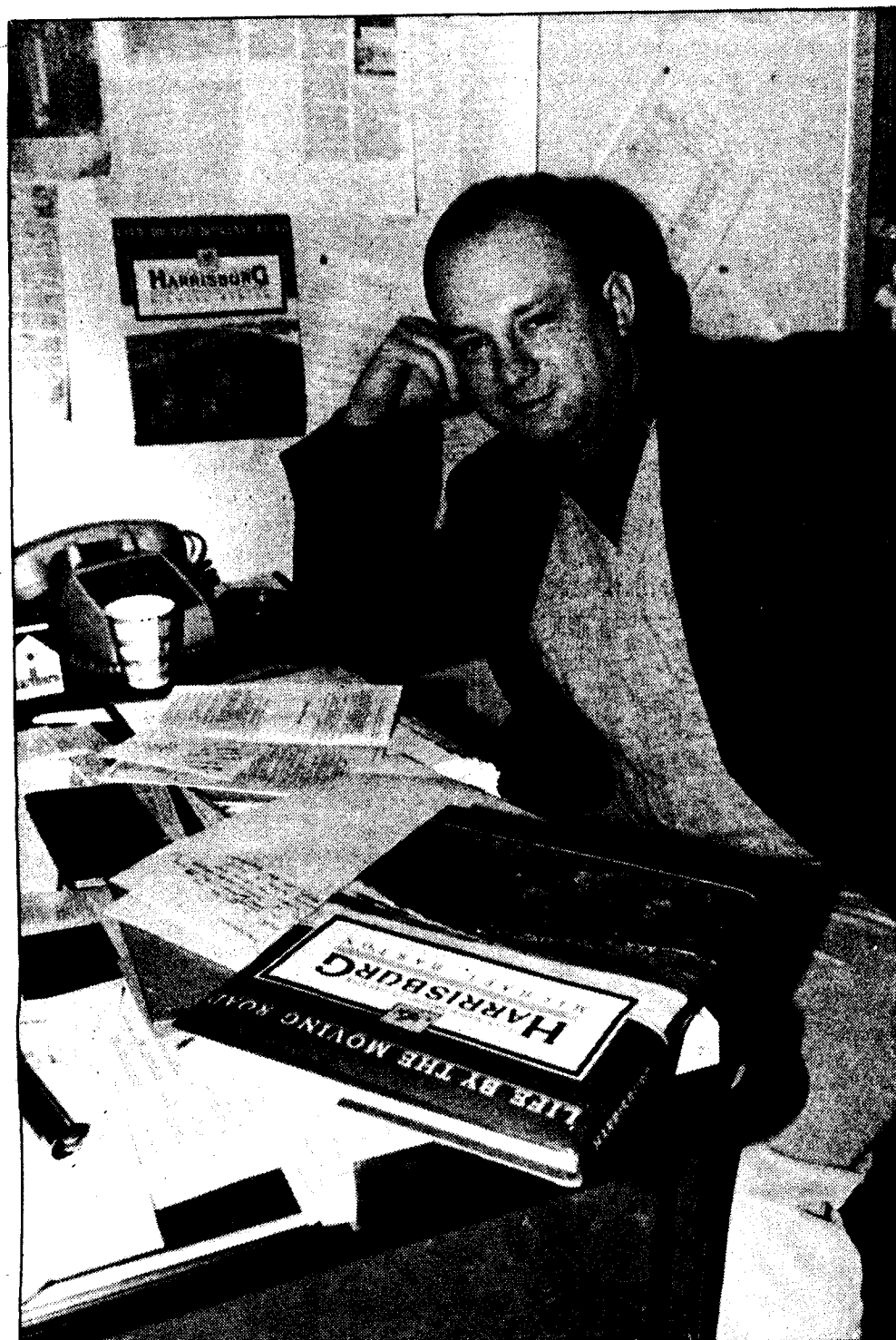


Photo by Jeffrey G. Shatzer

Associate professor of American Studies Michael Barton ponders impact of his latest book, *Life by the Moving Road: An Illustrated History of Greater Harrisburg*.

wishes people would actually read his book and not just look at the pictures.

"The book looks nice, but I would like to talk to people about what they read," he concluded.

Barton's next book is titled **Middletimes: American Everyday**

**Life, 1840 to 1876**, which is being published by Harper and Row.

In addition to teaching and writing, Barton is an editor of **American Quarterly**, while producing **Capitol Conversations**, a weekly half-hour interview program.

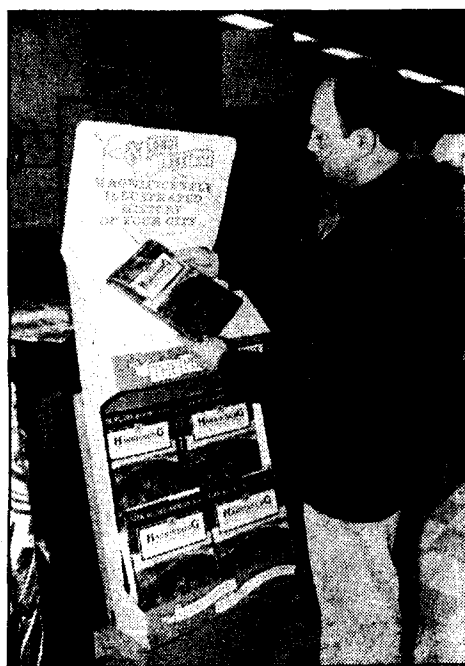



Photo by Jeffrey G. Shatzer

Dr. Barton checks display of his book in Capitol's book store.



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