

F R I E N D S of the B A R N E S F O U N D A T I O N

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Historic Significance Makes Barnes Foundation a Candidate for Esteemed National Landmark Status

(GLADWYNE, PA – Dec. 13, 2007) The extraordinary historical significance of the Barnes Foundation and new initiatives for its historic preservation were presented by Friends of the Barnes Foundation at a meeting of the Lower Merion Conservancy on Thursday. The speakers were Bill Bolger, National Historic Landmarks program manager for the National Park Service in Philadelphia, historian Robert Zaller, and Lower Merion Township Commissioner Brian Gordon.

Speaking on the topic “Historic Preservation and the Barnes Foundation: An American Ideal,” Drexel University Professor of History Robert Zaller said that Americans “should pay (Albert Barnes) the kind of honor we do to Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Martin Luther King” and preserve the Barnes Foundation in Merion as a site as worthy as Jefferson’s Monticello.

Addressing the issue of National Historic Landmark status for the Barnes Foundation, Bill Bolger said that only the combination of the buildings, grounds, and the collections as an inter-related, indivisible complex make the Barnes Foundation eligible to apply for status as a National Historic Landmark, making a persuasive argument for preservation of the Barnes Foundation in its historic Merion site. Landmark designation must ultimately be bestowed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior following a lengthy staff review process and approval by a national committee of experts. When asked about the implications of Landmark designation, Mr. Bolger also said that, although there is no legal authority to prevent such an institution from being destroyed, once recognized, moral and ethical

concerns usually prevail to keep such treasures intact. Because of its enormous historical significance to the nation, removing the art collection from the Merion site would constitute destruction of an officially recognized national treasure.

A preliminary assessment of the Barnes Foundation conducted by Dr. Emily Cooperman concluded that the Barnes Foundation is eligible to apply for National Historic Landmark status. The overview assessment was commissioned by Friends of the Barnes Foundation, the citizens' organization dedicated to preservation of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania. The process of nomination and review for National Historic Landmark status requires the property owner's support and Friends of the Barnes Foundation have encouraged the Barnes Foundation Board of Trustees to move forward, offering to fund the application process on behalf of the Barnes Foundation, if necessary.

Speaking about the historic preservation process, Bill Bolger explained that as he reviews the cases for National Historic Landmark status, he applies what he described as a "traffic light" approach. Most cases get the red light because they do not have the level of historic significance required. Many cases get an orange light, meaning that they might be worthwhile for further investigation. The Barnes Foundation is such an extraordinary case for National Historic Landmark status that it receives a "huge, very green light, about as green as it gets."

Friends of the Barnes Foundation member Sandy Gross Bressler said, "National Historic Landmark status is the highest level of cultural and historical significance conferred by the United States government. It carries the clear message that this site is important to all Americans. We hope that the Trustees of the Barnes Foundation will embrace this opportunity to preserve a national treasure. The Barnes is much more than an art collection. It is a site-specific historic and cultural monument as well." For further information, please visit the Friends of the Barnes Foundation website at <http://www.barnesfriends.org>

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