

# Lifestyle Magazine

August 2007

## Will the Barnes Foundation Stay Put?

Barnes Foundation Update

*As the Barnes prepares to relocate its priceless art collection to Philadelphia, the fight to keep it in Merion continues.*

By Maryanna S. Phinn

A quote attributed to acclaimed cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, appears as a subtle message on every page of the Friends of the Barnes Foundation's Web site ([www.barnesfriends.org](http://www.barnesfriends.org)) that reads: "Never doubt that a small group of caring, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

As the Barnes Foundation moves forward with its plans to move the institution's priceless art collection and art education program to Philadelphia, this small but growing citizens' group vows to prevent the change, calling the move "unnecessary, willfully destructive and terribly wrong."

"There are a zillion art museums in the world, but there is only one Barnes Foundation," notes Jay Raymond, a member of the citizens' group, a current student and former faculty member.

Friends of the Barnes Foundation formed shortly after the December 2004 landmark ruling in Orphans' Court of Montgomery County. The court's decision broke the will of the institution's founder, Dr. Albert C. Barnes, which prohibited the permanent art and horticultural collections from ever being moved from Merion. The Barnes' trustees petitioned the court for permission to move citing financial hardship after years of legal problems.

Raymond unsuccessfully tried to appeal the court's ruling on behalf of some of the institution's students. "Ultimately, there was no appeal or review of the Orphans' Court decision," notes Raymond. Nevertheless, the Friends of the Barnes Foundation's mission is to keep the Barnes Foundation of Merion preserved and intact at its present site, where it has been for 85 years.

*Done deal? Not so, says the Friends of the Barnes*

"We feel that the circumstances are different now since the ruling," says Raymond. The Friends of the Barnes, therefore, will not accept the move as a "done deal."

Although facing an uphill battle, the group remains optimistic. It recently received a vote of confidence and renewed support from Montgomery County's commissioners, who

unanimously agreed to hire local attorney Mark Schwartz to investigate additional legal avenues to keep the renowned institution in Lower Merion Township.

At issue, for example, is a bill introduced in the state legislature in 2001 and approved in 2002. The bill appropriated \$107 million in capital budget funds for the “design and construction of a museum facility to house the Barnes art collection.” This allocation happened well before the institution made any public announcements about a possible move. The Friends of the Barnes and Montgomery County contend that the court was not informed and was unaware that the bill existed during the 2004 proceedings.

In addition, a preliminary report released earlier this summer by a consultant hired by the Friends of the Barnes found that the Barnes Foundation is “eligible for listing as a National Historic Landmark.” This designation would apply to the entire site as a whole on North Latches Lane in Merion, including the artwork and other collections, the arboretum and all of the buildings. However, institutions are not obligated or legally bound to pursue this designation.

U.S. Congressman Jim Gerlach (R-Pa.) has legislation currently pending before the House Ways and Means Committee, which, if approved, would prevent the move to Philadelphia. In a statement, Congressman Gerlach said: “Moving it to Philadelphia would literally destroy the trust Barnes put in place and make a mockery of his wishes, and an end to Pennsylvania’s reputation as a place where estate and property rights are vigorously defended.”

In June, Montgomery County submitted a new proposal to the Barnes’ board of trustees to purchase the institution’s property and buildings, including Ker Feal, the founder’s 137-acre Chester County estate, using tax-exempt bonds. In turn, the county would set up a lease-back agreement with the foundation, keep the properties and their contents intact. The county pointed out that the institution would meet its \$50 million endowment goal and profits from the sale could be reinvested. The Barnes’ board immediately rejected the proposal due to binding commitments with the city and \$150 million in funds already raised from private donors and philanthropic institutions, most pledged or donated contingent on the move. Some of these donors include the region’s most powerful and influential institutions, including the Annenberg Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, Lenfest Foundation, Neubaurer Family Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.

Nevertheless, the Friends of the Barnes and Montgomery County aim to keep up their fight. Their position is supported nationally by leading art critics, curators and historians in blogs and commentaries in *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune Magazine*, *TIME Magazine*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and many others. Locally, the Friends have kept the issue alive through essays in *The Main Line Times*, coverage in *The Evening Bulletin*, and through public forums and debates. In May, a debate was held at Drexel University between Robert Zaller, professor of history at Drexel and Gresham Riley, former president of the Pennsylvania Academy of fine Arts. Zaller vehemently opposes the move, while Riley supports it. Their commentaries have

frequently appeared on the Broad Street Review, an arts and culture opinion-based Web site.

### *A Tale of Two Cities*

While Merion struggles to save its historic treasure, Philadelphia prepared to welcome it.

A Philadelphia City Council committee and the Fairmount Park Commission approved a 99-year lease agreement on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway near 21<sup>st</sup> Street at the site of the current Youth Study Center, a juvenile detention facility. Philadelphia wants to replace the Youth Study Center with a new building, at an estimate cost of \$55 million, but a new location has not been selected yet. Philadelphia may need to find a temporary location for 100 juveniles at an estimate cost of \$10 million.

The City is also under time constraints. Under the lease agreement, the Youth Study Center must be vacated by May 2008 or the Barnes has the option of breaking the lease.

In April, the Barnes Foundation announced it will select an architect for this high profile project by the end of this summer. Six architectural firms are in the running to design the 120,000 square foot building including: Tadao Ando of Japan, Diller Scofidio & Renfro of New York, Kengo Kuma of Japan, Rafael Moneo of Spain, Thom Mayne/Morphosis of Los Angeles and Tod Williams and Bille Tsien of New York. According to a Barnes spokesperson, the main gallery's design will be strictly interpreted according to how the art is arranged in the existing space. The new building is expected to open in Philadelphia in 2009.

### *The History of the Barnes Foundation*

The Barnes Foundation, founded in 1922, is home to one of the world's finest and most extensive private art collections.

Dr. Barnes, a Philadelphia native, established it as a nonprofit, charitable institution promoting the advancement of education and appreciation of fine arts and the study of horticulture. Since 1925, the foundation has offered comprehensive courses in art and aesthetics to students of all ages and backgrounds. The art program is based on the educational theories and democratic principles of the teachings of Professor John Dewey, a renowned philosopher of education and the institution's first director.

Dr. Barnes was particularly interested in providing access to the arts to common or "plain people" or those "who gain their livelihood by daily toil in shops, factories and schools, stores and similar place."

Born in 1872, Dr. Barnes grew up in Kensington in an average, working class family. Dr. Barnes developed an appreciation for art, creative expression and African American culture by attending religious retreats and revivals with his mother, a devoted Methodist/

He attended Central High School and received this medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. Dr. Barnes became a wealthy entrepreneur after developing, patenting, and manufacturing an antiseptic in the early part of the twentieth century.

After welling his business in 1929, Dr. Barnes devoted his time to collecting French Impressionist, post-Impressionist and Early Modern art as well as American folk art and antique furniture, decorative objects, sculpture and ceramics. He also had a vast collection of African art, something considered highly unusual for his time. He became disillusioned with Philadelphia's art and cultural establishments and disdained elitists and wealthy socialites.

Until his death in 1951 at age 78, Dr. Barnes traveled worldwide collecting hundreds of works by Renoir, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Soutine, Modigliani, Rousseau, van Gogh, Monet, Manet, Degas, El Greco, Rembrandt and many others. Most of this artwork is housed in a two-story gallery built in 1925. Paul Cret, a French American architect known for designing the Benjamin Franklin Bridge and the Rodin Museum, designed the building.

Another unique component of The Barnes Foundation is its setting on a 13-acre arboretum that serves, in part, as a classroom for the horticultural school. Laura Leggett Barnes established the Arboretum School in 1940. It offers an accredited program in botanical sciences, horticultural practices, garden design and aesthetics, using classroom lectures and hands-on experience. The arboretum offers over 2,500 varieties of trees and plants from all over the world. Students use the unique setting of the arboretum, herbarium and greenhouse to practice what they learn. The arboretum and the horticultural school will remain in Merion.

### *Plan to Visit*

The move of this priceless art collection from Merion to Philadelphia will be debated for years to come. The best way to formulate your own opinion about the pending move is to visit the gallery and the arboretum before changes occur.

Reservations are required for all visits. The gallery's regular hours are Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 pm. During July and August, the gallery is open Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Admission fee is \$10 per person, including a tour of the arboretum. An audio tour of the gallery is available for \$7 per person, cash or check only. The parking fee is \$10 for individual cars or vans. Other parking arrangements must be made for larger vehicles or shuttles.