

Losing the Barnes Is Not an Option

Robert Zaller

The plan to steal the Barnes from its rightful home in Lower Merion is built on three fallacies. The first is that it is a done deal, and that all further resistance--or even discussion--is fruitless. The lie is that the Barnes' neighbors are hostile to it, and that local opinion is resigned or indifferent. The third is that the Barnes has no choice but to move because its financial problems can be solved only by relocation to the Ben Franklin Parkway.

Let's examine these fallacies in turn. Last spring, Rebecca Rimel of the Pew Charitable Trusts, the principal in the heist, announced that the Pew had reached its goal of raising \$150 million to support moving the Barnes, and that the project was now "rounding third base" and heading for home. But moving the Barnes will cost not the \$150 million advertised, but at least \$200 million, a figure conceded by the Barnes' former Director, Kimberly Camp. The Pew has left it to the Barnes Board of Trustees to raise the additional \$50 million. If the trustees could pull that off, especially in competition with the Philadelphia Museum of Art's new capital campaign for \$500 million, they wouldn't have to leave Merion in the first place.

Rounding third? The Barnes is stuck on second, with two out, the bench empty, and the pitcher at bat.

The second fallacy is the supposed animus of the Barnes' Latches Lane neighbors. It's true, Richard Glanton did his best to smear the good name not only of the neighbors but of our entire community. But the neighbors can distinguish the great treasure in their midst from those whose mismanagement left it vulnerable to hostile takeover. They have publicly declared their opposition to the move and have forcefully repudiated any "suggestion that the Barnes Foundation is not welcome in our community and on our street" (Petition of June 12, 2006).

The third fallacy is that the Barnes can't survive in Merion. Lower Merion's Township Commission has already endorsed plans that would close the Barnes' current operating deficit.

What the move's backers aren't telling you is that their plan, as stated in court, would quadruple the deficit, and actually wreck the Barnes. It's hard to believe that isn't their real intention, with the Philadelphia Museum of Art as the intended beneficiary. In fact, the Barnes can *only* survive in Merion. It would certainly fail in Philadelphia under the movers' plan, to the bitter loss of both communities.

What can be done? The Friends of the Barnes Foundation (contact at www.barnesfriends.org), organized twenty months ago to keep the Barnes in Merion, has raised local and national support to stop the move. Two months ago, it cosponsored a forum with the Merion Civic Association at which both our Congressman, Jim Gerlach, and his opponent, Lois Murphy, declared their opposition to the move before an overflow crowd. Rep. Gerlach is preparing legislation that would help to block it. The Lower Merion Township Commission has called for plans to move the Barnes to be "abandoned forever," and for a cooperative partnership with Philadelphia to ensure its future.

That partnership is the right solution. It can save the Barnes, and promote the welfare of both communities. I invite Derek Gillman, the newly appointed Director of the Barnes and a Lower Merion resident, to sit down with this community and discuss the means to keep the Foundation in its historic home. I hope he will respond positively, and work with us constructively.

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