Saving the Farm

The Anna Dean Farm was the final enterprise of Ohio Columbus Barber (1841-1920), founder of the city of Barberton, Ohio. The 3,500-acre farm featured the Main Cattle Barn (above, also called Barn No. 3), which was the longest barn in the world and featured two 90-foot, 1,000-ton capacity silos topped with 20,000-gallon water tanks and conical tile roofs.

By **Bob Bissler** '88

UA alumni are protecting the dream of Barberton founder and Buchtel College supporter O.C. Barber

A vision is coming back into focus in Barberton, Ohio, due to the dreams of the late industrialist Ohio Columbus Barber and the work of the Barberton Historical Society and UA alumnus Stephen Kelleher '75, founder and president.

At the turn of the last century, Barber's dream was to build an experimental farm of the future. At the turn of this century, the Historical Society's board, which includes five UA alumni, is realizing the dream of saving what's left of it.

What remains of Barber's final enterprise, the Anna Dean Farm, is a collection of eight stately structures that comprise the largest group of historical buildings in Northeast Ohio. While Kelleher and the Society preserve the remaining structures, the group is also ensuring that people don't forget what has been lost to time.

"We founded the Barberton Historical Society when I was a UA student in 1974," Kelleher explained. "Our Society was, and is, an active preservation effort."

In addition to Kelleher, other UA alumni on the Society's board include: Bob Snyder '75, vice president; John Vancse '80, treasurer; Christine Kelleher '75, secretary; and Tom Clark '75, trustee.

Part of the Society's efforts include spreading awareness of Barber's accomplishments. Barber was one of the original contributors to Buchtel College when it was founded in 1870. He continued to support the University after it became known as The Municipal University of Akron under the leadership of his friend, UA

The Dairy Barn is also called Barn No. 1, and was restored in 1985 by international horticulturists Yoder Brothers. Slated for destruction in the 1970s, Barn No. 1 was the inspiration for the formation of the Barberton Historical Society.

president and founder Parke R. Kolbe (1913-1925). Barber remained a supporter of the University until his death in 1920.

The Anna Dean Farm was an experimental agribusiness that Barber built at the age of 69. It employed 400 workers and operated from 1909 until 1920. Named for his daughter and son-in-law, the Anna Dean Farm covered 3,500 acres and included 102 buildings. The 52-room Barber Mansion and 35 stately buildings clustered in its vicinity were constructed in the French Renaissance Revival style of architecture – red brick, white concrete block, royal blue trim and red terra cotta tile roofs.

The buildings looked more like castles and villas rather than barns, sheds and offices. The Main Cattle Barn (Barn No. 3), the Horse Barn (Barn No. 2) and the Dairy Barn (Barn No. 1) all featured towering silos resembling castle spires, topped with arched columns and capped with red conical tile roofs. Barber had the buildings constructed of concrete, brick and steel framing, and they were meant to last.

Unfortunately, the farm didn't last. It ceased operations after Barber's death, and over the years it was sold off. Some of the buildings were put to use, others were demolished. The Main Cattle Barn was destroyed by fire in the 1950s; the Barber Mansion was demolished in 1965; the Horse Barn burned in 1967. By the 1970s, appreciation for Barber and the Anna Dean Farm was at a low point.

Then in 1974, when Kelleher was a junior at UA, a developer announced plans to demolish the Dairy Barn. Kelleher was stirred into action. The Dairy Barn was one of the most beautiful structures on the farm and it had the last remaining castle-like silo. Kelleher simply couldn't let it be destroyed.

"When we founded the Society there was a Cleveland developer who was going to tear down Barn No. 1 and build a nursing home," Kelleher explained. "Initially it was just me, my wife Christine and Bob Snyder. We were talking about it upstairs in the Hilltop Lounge in Gardner Student Center over lunch. That was the seed of the idea for the Barberton Historical Society. We called a public meeting and started the organization. We fought the developer's efforts and stopped Barn No. 1 from being torn down. Then we worked to get Yoder Brothers in there and renovate the building."

Barber opened the Anna Dean Farm to the public every Sunday, when guests picnicked and enjoyed the farm, including the Horse Barn (left, also called Barn No. 2). The U-shaped structure housed Barber's herd of 140 thoroughbred Belgian work horses.

Kelleher has always had a deep appreciation for history. As he continued to discover the story of O.C. Barber at UA, he enlisted the aid of University historian John Miller, director of archival services.

"I took a lot of history courses at The University of Akron, and I minored in history," said Kelleher. "John Miller was a big influence on me. He was just starting out at the University when I was a student. He would get excited about history no matter what the subject was."

"Stephen Kelleher and his wife Christine were very active with researching and preserving the Anna Dean Farm," said Miller. "Stephen is very energetic. Another person involved with the Society is Bernie Gnap, who is very knowledgeable about the history of the farm, the Barber Mansion and Barber himself."

Born in Akron in 1841, Barber went from selling homemade matches door-to-door as a boy to heading up the Diamond Match Co., the American Strawboard Co., National Sewer Pipe and the Stirling Boiler Co., among other industrial concerns. He founded the city of Barberton in 1890, and by 1901 at the age of 60 Barber cornered the world market as a manufacturer of matches.

Barber always believed that farming and agriculture were the real foundations of our nation's prosperity and power. He also believed that farm buildings should be pleasing to the eye and built to last, and that farming should focus on rejuvenating the soil, rather than depleting it. He wanted to prove that with a strong business sense and effective procedures, a farm could be run as efficiently and profitably as any industrial business.

The Anna Dean Farm was a dream come true for Barber. He opened it to the public on Sundays when guests picnicked and enjoyed the grounds. Barber's vision was to eventually turn the farm into an agricultural college, but when he died in 1920 the financing of this endeavor had not been finalized. He willed the farm to the Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve University), but the college could not operate or maintain it, so the farm was sold off. What's left standing today is a true legacy.

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Then... and now: the Creamery, the Colt Barn, the Piggery and the Barber Dam.

"Today there are eight of the original French Renaissance Revival buildings remaining," Kelleher explained. "We have the Colt Barn, the Dairy Barn, the Creamery, the Brooder Barn is four, the Poultry Manager's Office is five, the Feed Barn is six, the Heating House is seven and the Piggery is eight."

The Barberton Historical Society owns the Heating House, located near the intersection of Robinson Ave. and 5th St. in Barberton. The Society also owns the Colt Barn at the intersection of Austin Dr. and Shenandoah Dr., and the Brooder Barn on 2nd St. at Quincy Ave. The Society recently received grants totaling $250,000 from the Barberton Community Foundation, and combined with its own funds and help from the city, more than $500,000 has been spent restoring the exterior of the buildings. Recent projects have included construction of a caretaker's apartment in the Brooder Barn, and the installation of nighttime lighting around the Colt Barn and the Brooder Barn; the Heating House will be lighted soon.

Thanks to the Society's efforts, the other five buildings have bright futures. Barn. No. 1 at 3rd St. and Portsmouth Dr. underwent a $2 million restoration by international horticulturists Yoder Brothers, which has occupied it since 1985. The Creamery next door is a private residence. The Piggery, on Robinson Ave. near 2nd St., is owned by retired attorney Alex Naumoff, and restoration of the structure is nearing completion. Naumoff plans to convert it into a restaurant. The Poultry Manager's Office and Feed Barn are private residences that stand next to each other on 2nd St. across from the Brooder Barn.

Other features of the farm are being uncovered as well. Paul Testa Builders spent $300,000 to restore Barber's 1910 140-foot-long stone dam, which had been half-buried and overgrown. The dam and a new pond will be a focal point of Barberton Citizens Hospital's new medical office complex. In August, the dam's original date stone was put back in place exactly 23 years to the day that the Society rescued it from young vandals. The hospital plans to build an amphitheater near the dam.

For anyone interested in seeing the remaining structures and hearing about O.C. Barber and the Anna Dean Farm, Kelleher and the society lead free walking tours of the farm. Annual tours take place every May on the Sunday after Mother's Day, and other tours are scheduled as well. The most recent tour took place October 7, and the Society has conducted the tours for the past 11 years.

Another project the Society is working on is a website (www.annadeanfarm.com) that features a virtual walking tour of the Barber Mansion. For this project the group has drawn upon its collection of thousands of photos. Visitors can click on the Barber Mansion, see a floor plan and tour the rooms. They also can view the entire farm, click on a site map and see where the buildings stood in relation to what is there today.

The University of Akron and the Society are involved with another construction project – the Barberton Kiwanis Club's restoration of the Chief Hopocan statue at the corner of Wooster Road North and Norton Ave. Named for a leader of the Delaware Indians, the statue was erected in 1911 on a nine-foot concrete pedestal. Today a new pedestal has been created by UA College of Engineering student Peter Neugebauer, and

the University's construction technology department built the concrete forms for the pedestal. The statue itself has been restored by the Barberton Kiwanis Club.

With so many projects and activities taking place, it's obvious that the Society's message is spreading. While the Society continues to make great strides with its cause of historic preservation, Kelleher doesn't forget where the seeds of the group first sprouted.

"The University of Akron is where I learned to reason a problem out and follow through to its solution," Kelleher revealed. "These are the skills used by all five UA alumni on the board, and they are the skills that have helped the Society turn Barberton into a completely reversed city in the mindset of preservation." ■

The biggest barns at the Anna Dean Farm featured towering silos resembling castle spires, topped with arched columns and capped with red conical tile roofs. Today, the last remaining silo can be found at Barn No. 1, the renovated headquarters of horticulturists Yoder Brothers. It stands as a true symbol of the legacy of O.C. Barber, the Anna Dean Farm and the Barberton Historical Society.

A visit to the Anna Dean Farm

During its years of operation from 1909 to 1920, O.C. Barber opened the Anna Dean Farm to the public every Sunday. From almost any point on the farmscape, guests could see towering silos topped with arched columns and capped with red conical tile roofs. Concrete post fencing surrounded the entire 3,500-acre enterprise.

Guests to the farm could visit the longest barn in the world, Barn No. 3. Also called the Main Cattle Barn, Barn No. 3 was where Barber's herd of 600 purebred Guernsey cattle were housed. At 762 feet long and 40 feet wide, Barn No. 3 had two floors above-ground and two floors below-ground throughout its two massive wings, with two more stories at the center section. The sprawling red tile roof was enhanced by 40 dormer windows and nine ornate ventilator cupolas. The two 90-foot, 1,000-ton capacity silos, topped with arched observatory balconies built around 20,000-gallon emergency water tanks, were capped with pointed red tile conical roofs.

The dairy operation included Barn No. 1, a 25,000-sq.-ft. structure built to the same 300-foot length as the Barber Mansion and situated in a direct line from it. Inside 400 Holstein-Friesian, Brown Swiss and Hereford dairy cows were housed in stalls with cork brick flooring, special lighting and temperature-controlled ventilation. Next door in the shadow of Barn No. 1's 60-foot tower-like silo, diary products were processed in the Creamery.

Barn No. 2 was the Horse Barn, a U-shaped structure with three-story wings and a four-story center section guarded by two more 90-foot tall silos. Barn No. 2 housed Barber's herd of 140 thoroughbred Belgian work horses. Nearby was the Colt Barn, and a shed behind Barn No. 2 housed blacksmith, machine and wagon-construction shops.

The Piggery housed thoroughbred Berkshire and Chester White hogs. Nicknamed "The Pork Palace", Barber chose these breeds because they were known to be well-adapted to Ohio conditions. The Brooder Barn nearby housed the largest incubator in the world and was home to 50,000 chickens raised with the "free range" concept, put out to field daily to eat insects.

And there was the Barber Mansion itself, a four-story, 52-room French Renaissance Revival structure situated at the top of a hill overlooking a 40-acre landscaped private park, and the farm. Barber did not like crowds and would leave his estate when it was open to the public on Sundays. Curious visitors could often be seen strolling around the Barber Mansion and peering through its windows.

Other animals raised on the Anna Dean Farm included sheep, ducks, squabs (pigeons), pheasants, guinea hens, turkeys and dogs. The farm's Grist Mill produced 200 barrels of flour per day. The Apiary provided bees to pollinate fruit and flowers while producing 6,000 pounds of honey annually.

The farm also featured the largest set of greenhouses in the world, covering twelve acres. The steel-framed greenhouses were heated by the Heating House, and the farm's heating and pumping operation consisted of four Stirling boilers which used 100 train carloads of coal each season. Fruit greenhouses produced grapes, peaches, figs, nectarines and melons. The flower greenhouses could produce in a single day's cutting 1,800 chrysanthemums, 3,000 roses, 8,000 carnations and 1,200 orchids. In one season the vegetable greenhouses could produce 150 tons of lettuce, 300 tons of tomatoes and more than 1.2 million cucumbers.

A visit to the Anna Dean Farm was truly a journey to a place of awe and progress. It was also a trip to a place of the future, and the forward-thinking actions of O.C. Barber. ■