

around town

By Carol Kalos, St. Andrews Resident Writer

The Colossus Across the Street



These phrases from various reviews describe the spectacular barn at Normandy Farm Hotel and Conference Center, now a venue for weddings and corporate meetings:

- “...Oldest restored barn in the country”
- “...An agricultural wonder of its day”
- “...Cork floors to protect the horses’ and cows’ hooves”
- “...Biggest barn on the East Coast”
- “...Visited by President Grover Cleveland”
- “...Sitting on [what was once] the biggest farm in the county”
- “... One of the best stock farms in the entire country”
- “...Used the newest methods”
- “...A massive brick and frame barn”
- “...An elaborate ventilation system”
- “...Historic 18th-century landmark, with exposed wood beams, original brick archways, and unique architecture”
- “...Today retains its historic integrity with minor changes in the Norman style”
- “...Appears on the National Register of Historic Places”

This wonderful, historic structure stands within sight of Blue Bell County Club.

The Barn’s Owners

The big barn was built in 1879 by William Singerly, then the owner of what was called The Record Farm (after *The Philadelphia Record*, a Democratic newspaper), to house his herd of “the finest” Holstein dairy cattle. The barn was built in a T shape, about 200 feet across with a stem about 200 feet long. Singerly inherited money from his father then became wealthy as a newspaper owner, businessman, and politician (running for governor).

When he had financial troubles, he sold to Dr. William P. Wilson, a professor from Penn. Then Wilson sold to Ralph Strassburger, another extremely wealthy man, who owned newspapers, businesses, and Thoroughbred racehorses.

He shipped his horses to his estate in Europe and switched to a herd of 300 Ayrshire cattle, called the “Whitpain herd.” (Imagine 300 cows, each weighing 1,200 pounds, grazing on your fairway!)

The Barn Today:

Today, the bottom of the barn is brick, painted white, and the top is white vertical boards with red trim. The roof is metal, also painted red. This red and white pattern, seen throughout Normandy Farm, follows the scheme the Strassburgers saw on their honeymoon in France.

Carol Kalos, a resident of Saint Andrews Place, is president of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society (WVHS), which is preserving the Franklinville School, once part of Normandy Farm. Owned by the WVHS, an all-volunteer organization, Franklinville School is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Donations for its renovation are welcome!



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