

# Barton Ranch on path to be destroyed



The multiple buildings that once were the Barton Ranch are slated to be demolished. Photo/LTN

**By Linda Fine Conaboy**

Sometime soon, if family members have their way, the iconic cluster of buildings at the South Lake Tahoe Y known as the Barton Ranch will become nothing more than a heap of historic rubble. Slated for demolition are the barn, ranch house, guesthouses, cabin, cottage and shed.

Even though the property is on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's list of historic sites, family members maintain that they are subjected to risk and liability from trespassers, graffiti, abandoned cars, mold, mildew and lead-based paint.

The process to clear the property, which started several years

ago but has stalled along the way, may now be moving along a smoother path, as the family has jumped successfully through myriad obstacles along the destruction path.

People have until April 25 to comment on the negative declaration. There will be a public hearing before the Planning Commission on May 8 at 3pm at Lake Tahoe Airport, with the panel being asked to approve the negative declaration and plans for demolition of all of the remaining structures associated with the old Barton dairy ranch located at 1080 Emerald Bay Road.

Gary Midkiff, a land use and permitting consultant, is the spokesman for the Ledbetter and Mosher families. They are the property owners and descendants of the Bartons. He explained that the request for removal and destruction of the structures began close to three years ago.

“We’ve been working with the city of South Lake Tahoe to address the issues that city staff was anticipating would be raised by the community,” he said.

“So far, we haven’t gotten any comments. The notice was published at the California State Clearing House, where all environmental documents are sent under CEQA. But we’re expecting comments from the Clearing House after the comment period closes. If there are questions we need to address, we will address them,” Midkiff told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Midkiff said he contacted the Lake Tahoe Historical Society three or four years ago and offered them the buildings for removal or relocation, however, he said he hasn’t talked to them lately.

He added, “There is no rule that says because it’s a historical site the buildings have to be retained.”

South Lake Tahoe is an important player in this continuing story, too. Judy Finn, associate planner for the city, said

there are problems such as black mold, asbestos, graffiti and people breaking in and attempting to live in the buildings; generally reiterating the owners' list of grievances.

"The family wants to restore and revegetate the property, and may want to look at more viable uses in the future," Finn told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The buildings in question, with their green roofs and white exteriors, were once stately. Boarded windows make it look like a forlorn relic waiting for whatever the fates have in mind. The property looks abandoned, even though it's nestled into an idyllic setting amid tall trees on 4 acres of land next to the Raley's shopping center.

The history of the legendary Barton family is important to Lake Tahoe. According to a fall 1972 Lake Tahoe Historical Society newsletter, more than a century ago the Bartons spent their summers ranching their property in Hope Valley and on land they homesteaded in Meyers.

In 1915, they moved to the South Shore and settled in an area that is now the Lake Tahoe Airport. There they established a dairy known as Meadow's Edge. They ran a milk route to Echo Lakes, Camp Sacramento, Twin Bridges, Tahoe Meadow and Beecher's Country Club, where Harrah's is now located.

Several years later the property at the Y was developed, when this region was wide-open and the only road in the basin was Pioneer Trail. Through the years South Lake Tahoe has been the beneficiary of the Barton family generosity, including a gift of land upon which now stands Barton Memorial Hospital.

Although clearing of the land is not a foregone conclusion, there are those individuals and entities that are feeling the crush of an important part of history coming to an end and the need for its preservation.

Lake Tahoe Historical Society spokesperson and board member

Lee Vestal is one of those interested parties.

“All I personally want to see with the Barton Ranch is that it gets a fair shake to survive,” he said. “If all the environmental reviews, including hazmat remediation for the suspected contamination, say knock it down, then knock it down. But the ranch needs a fair review and the involvement of the community. If the community wants it saved, it needs to step up and provide financial and emotional support.”

Vestal said the historical society has been working quietly behind the scenes to find out what the property owners really want and to see what options are available to save the ranch.

“We’ve sent letters to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and to City Manager Nancy Kerry,” he said. However, he said, to date there have been no replies.

At the very least, Vestal said that everything at the ranch will be photographed and the story will be captured by the historical society.

Catherine Whelan, who is president of the historical society, said the family has a right to sell the land.

“But you would think the city would want to preserve it. There are so few old buildings left. The ranches were big here before the casinos went in. This could show the history of the Tahoe basin,” Whelan told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The city has a perfect opportunity to turn this property into a cultural center showcasing the ranching period of South Lake Tahoe. I think they’re missing a huge opportunity to make money.”

*Lake Tahoe News* was unable to make contact with the property owners – the Mosher family and members of the Ledbetter family; however, Jessica Ledbetter, a cousin, had this to say: “I’ve worked with Gary Midkiff in the past and I think he is an outstanding representative for my Aunt Melba Mosher and my cousins, William Mosher, Faye Krull and Ouida Garms.

“Whatever decisions my aunt and my cousins have come to, I know it hasn’t been easy. It’s been an extremely emotional decision for them. We’ve recently talked about all the wonderful times we’ve spent on the property and all the wonderful memories. I support any decision they make.”

Midkiff added, “They are not a development family.”

But the question remains, where will the final journey take the old Barton site?

“There are no plans for use of the property at this time,” Midkiff said. “They’re watching the area plan that is being drawn up by the city and TRPA closely to see the outcome. Based on that, based on the economy, and based on interest by any commercial entity, they may make future plans.”