



The House That Barden Gore Built

A recollection by Benson Parker one of Barden Gore's grandsons written in 2013.

When they were young Barden Lee Gore and Cobia Pearl Stanley lived a few miles apart on the east coast where North Carolina and South Carolina border; he lived in North Carolina and she lived in South Carolina. Gores still live in Sunset Beach and Shallotte, North Carolina. One day in the early 1900's Barden drove his horse drawn wagon south to his girlfriend Pearl's house, she came out, looked at all his belongings

in the wagon and asked where he was going. He replied that he was going to Florida and asked if she wanted to go with him. She said, “Yes, but only if we’re married first”. He said, “Okay, go get your stuff”. They drove the wagon a little farther south to a preacher’s house where the preacher came out and married them as they sat there in the wagon. Then they drove the wagon south to Central Florida where Barden’s brother, John, lived.

The land they bought in Hillsborough County between Plant City and Tampa was made up of scrub oak, pine trees, and palmettos. Barden cleared the land, and hauled the logs to a saw mill where they cut the logs into boards which Barden used to build the house and barn. There was a hall down the middle of the house with rooms on each side, the ceilings were over ten feet high, and there was a fireplace that connected two of the rooms. Barden and Pearl’s three children Woodrow, Nita and Sadie, grew up there, and Nita’s daughter Bobbie, was born in the second room on the left. Bobbie is now 82 years old, lives in Tampa, and shared many of her memories with me about growing up in the house.

Barden Lee (1887-1960), or B.L. Gore, was “Granddaddy” to many of us. And Pearl (1885-1973) was “Granny”. Granny was short, had a limp from a childhood accident, and spent most of her time cooking, cleaning and raising children; she was an excellent home maker. Barden was for a

while known as “Bell” Gore because he grew a crop of Bell Peppers when no one thought they would survive at that time of year. Everyone told him it couldn’t be done until he showed up at the Plant City Farmers Market with a truck load of peppers when no one else had any.

Originally the farm, pasture and orange grove that Barden created went from Gore Road on the north, to Newsome Road on the south, and from McIntosh Road on the west to Gallagher Road on the east (most of the roads were not named when they first got there). On weekends for entertainment they raced horses on those dirt roads.

It wasn’t just generations of our family who lived there for almost a hundred years and loved that place. In the 1920’s, ‘30’s and ‘40’s there were sometimes up to five families of sharecroppers living in five separate houses on the property. It was a community. Barden once painted “Goresville” on the rear bumper of his car, and Gore Road on the north side of Interstate 4 is named after him. At one time there was talk in the County of naming the area Goresville.

The farm was seven miles west of Plant City and not many people lived out there. Barden’s brother, John, owned a nearby (almost adjoining) farm and grove at Gallagher Road and Highway 92. (This was the brother who later owned Gore’s Dairy on Highway 301 in Zephyrhills.)

It bears repeating, it was more than just our family – it was a community.

For decades it was also a tropical paradise. There were several varieties of orange trees in the yard and in the six acre grove in front of the house. There were half a dozen grapefruit trees in the back yard, pepper bushes, two varieties of Guavas, an Australian Lime tree, rare and delicious Honey Murcotts, tangerines, Palm trees, Eucalyptus Trees, and Oak Trees. There was a chicken coop with chickens, a barn with a milk cow, and a large garden in back of the house where Pearl grew a variety of vegetables.

Several times a year Barden along with his son Woodrow (b. 1914 d. 1974), and other friends and relatives, would go to Tampa Bay, about 20 miles away, and come home with mackerel, mullet, crabs, and oysters. The farm was so self-sufficient they only went to Plant City about once a month for coffee, flour and Railroad Snuff. Every Sunday afternoon relatives came to the house for dinner, and every winter relatives from North Carolina came down and stayed with us for weeks at a time.

For decades it was a thriving truck farm where Barden would sit in a rocking chair on the front porch after breakfast and sharecroppers would walk up, stand in the yard, take their hats off, and ask Mr. Gore what he

wanted them to do that day. Barden always wore a Fedora and glasses with one of the lenses tinted green because he had a glass eye, but often didn't have it in. He was a benevolent and much loved employer.

Barden's youngest daughter Sadie Lee Gore (1923-2007), married Paul Benson Parker (1923-1999) and for five years (1946-1951) they lived on Davis Monthon Air Base in Tucson, Arizona where Paul was stationed. He was as a fighter pilot instructor who taught air men to fly P-51 Mustangs. At least once a year they drove back to Dover to visit family, and to stay in the house where Sadie grew up. They both loved the old Gore Place.

Unfortunately we are not alone in having lost our ancestral home, the same thing has happened to families all across the country. A number of things contributed to the downfall of what was once our thriving family farm and agricultural community. For example, in 1960 Hurricane Donna wiped out most of the orange grove, and at about the same time the state took the middle portion of the property through Imminent Domain for Interstate 4.

After Interstate 4 opened untold thousands of people driving west toward Tampa in the morning looked south just before McIntosh Road exit and saw the big, white house a little over a hundred yards away,

facing east, the front porch brilliant in the morning sun. Thousands of commuters looked forward to seeing that stately Southern home on their way to work every morning.

Barden and Pearl didn't have health insurance and every time he or Pearl came out of the hospital he would sell a piece of land to pay medical bills. He often said he was "land poor".

Barden's only son, Woodrow Gore, lived a few miles away in Mulberry with his wife Evelyn, sons Jerry, Charlie, Corky and daughter Janice. Charlie Gore and Corky Gore still live in Lakeland about ten miles from Plant City. When Barden passed away he left what was left of the farm (the house and two acres) to his daughter Sadie because she had lived there for years and had taken care of Barden and Pearl in their old age.

Sadie gave the place to her daughter Princess Ann Parker Rodriguez. It was never explained why Benson didn't inherit part of the two acres. In 1996 Princess signed over the property to her kids, Steve and Tina.

Dennis (Duck) Newsome (Joe Newsome's father) started out as a sharecropper for Barden Gore. Over the years Barden sold Duck land to build up his farm near Newsome Road and Gallagher Road. In his old age Duck Newsome told Benson that "Mr. Gore" had wanted the farm to

go to Princess and Benson equally, and that a lot of people were surprised when they learned that Sadie had given it all to her daughter.

Although Ann's children, Steve and Tina Rodriguez, spent most of their lives there, and five generations of our family had lived there for almost one hundred years... in August 2004 Steve signed off on it, and Tina sold our home. She sold the place without letting Benson know, he and his wife Michelle, lived fifteen miles away in Tampa at the time. Tina must have known that Benson would have tried to keep the property in the family, and that she would have to give him a deal on it. So Tina and Princess kept the sale a secret, and a couple of strangers bought the place, lived there for a few years then sold it to the state. Strawberry Crest School was built just across the dirt road in front of the house.

The heart pine walls of the house were so hard that pictures were never hung because it was almost impossible to drive a nail into the walls. Barden had soaked the boards in creosote before building the house, it was never tented and never had termites. The house was still solid as a rock when in 2011 the state tore it down rather than spend the money to bring it up to code with fire sprinklers, ramps, etc. Nothing was ever built where the house once stood.

Shortly before the house was torn down John Sprague and I went there and had one last look. John was a friend of mine who lived with us in the house for a year or so when we were attending Plant City High School. He is one of the many people for whom the house was home. The house was used as a construction office while Strawberry Crest School was being built. The construction company office employees who were in the house the day we went there, a young man and woman, were very nice and in talking with them I could tell that they cared about the house and hated that it was going to be demolished.

It's all gone now so I guess it's a good thing I took this picture. I have given copies of the picture and this remembrance to friends and relatives who loved and now miss the house that Barden Gore built.