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GSU View

University Newsletters

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8-10-2015

## GSU View, 2015-08-10

Office of Marketing and Communications

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### Recommended Citation

Governors State University Office of Marketing and Communications, GSU View (2015, August 10). <http://opus.govst.edu/gsvview/768>

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**From:** [GSUView](#)  
**Subject:** GSU View, August 10, 2015: Special Edition  
**Date:** Monday, August 10, 2015 5:12:04 PM  
**Attachments:** [image009.png](#)

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A newsletter for students, faculty & staff

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August 10, 2015 SPECIAL EDITION

## Fire Destroys Iconic Hantack Barn



GSU's historic Hantack Barn

On Friday, August 7, GSU lost a treasured piece of its history when the Hantack Barn [burned](#) to the ground. Seven area fire departments responded to the blaze, which began around 3 p.m. Unfortunately, despite the first responders' best efforts, the barn was a total loss.

"I will miss seeing this emblem of Illinois rural history. I am grateful, however, that no one was injured and that the items stored in the barn are replaceable. We owe a debt of gratitude to all emergency responders, including our own Department of Public Safety," said President Elaine P. Maimon.

Indeed, the response from the university's police and local fire agencies was excellent. "We are very grateful to [University Park](#), [Steger](#), [Crete](#), [Monee](#), [Peotone](#), [Matteson](#), and [Frankfort](#) Fire Departments for responding promptly and containing the massive fire within a very short period of time, while

ensuring the public's safety," said GSU Chief of Police James McGee.



Images of the Hantack Barn fire. Firefighters from seven fire departments came to contain the fire.

Located on University Drive, just past the main entrance, the barn served as a touchstone to another, less hurried time for the students, staff, and visitors who passed it on their way to school or work each day.

The barn was a combination of Gable/Gothic architecture. The older Gable barn was built in 1870 and the Gothic style, with its tall, distinctly pitched roof, dated to the early 1900s. It was included in land purchased in 1969 from the Hantack Family by the state on behalf of GSU. The barn underwent a \$150,000 renovation in 1999, which made the building more structurally sound while keeping the original form preserved.

Although the barn was being used for storing snow removal equipment and other items, what it represented to the GSU community went far beyond its function. GSU's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) sites displayed an outpouring of emotions over the loss of the Hantack Barn even as the fire raged and [news crews](#) hovered over the campus:

**Jessie Specht:** Unbelievable. That was a beautiful barn. So sad!

**America Rocha:** I am going to miss this barn, as every time I drove from or to GSU, I always passed the barn and I thought it was so BEAUTIFUL. I am very saddened by the thought of not seeing it again!!!

**Constance Cook:** The barn gave atmosphere. The College in the Cornfield (my name for it).

**Dave Erickson:** Real sad; such an iconic landmark on campus.

**Karen Caesar-Smith:** So sorry about the loss...Its presence felt peaceful coming onto or leaving campus...rounding the curve by the barn!!! Its presence will be greatly missed.

**Laur Walsh Owens:** I too enjoyed driving past it every morning...!d imagine an earlier time when all that was there was the house and barn with animals and family working the land....and children running about, I'll miss it.

**Julie Anderson:** Beautiful piece of campus gone. It will be missed.

### Hantack Barn Was More than a Building for MILE Director



Alicia McCray, director of the

Metropolitan Institute for  
Leadership in Education.

Alicia McCray, director of the Metropolitan Institute for Leadership in Education ([MILE](#)) program at GSU, looked out at the Hantack Barn from the MILE offices in nearby Hantack House every day. For McCray, the barn held an even more personal meaning:

"I learned last week with it's tragic burning that the barn was erected in 1870, which also happened to be the year that my great-grandfather was forced to leave his rural Alabama home and family.

That was a census year, and the first one in which people of African heritage were counted as people, rather than property. My great-grandfather saw this as an important opportunity to shift the balance of years of not being considered as human beings. But, others saw it as an affront to their place in society," she said. (See pages 4-5 for her story.)

As of now, no cause of the fire is known. GSU Chief Operating Engineer Michael S. Sullivan said the area around the fire site is being fenced off for safety and so the area can be cleaned of debris and nails.

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**Do you have a story or event you want to submit for the GSU View?**  
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**Governors State University**

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Content from the GSU website follows.

## Hantack Barn Was More than a Building for MILE Director

August 10, 2015



Alicia McCray, director of the Metropolitan Institute for Leadership in Education.

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That was a census year, and the first one in which people of African heritage were counted as people, rather than property. My great-grandfather saw this as an important opportunity to shift the balance of years of not being considered as human beings. But, others saw it as an affront to their place in society,” she said.

“Another connection between the barn and my family is the former Illinois Central Rail Road, (now owned by Canadian National RR), which to this day runs from the south to the north just yards west of the barn. In the early part of the 20th century, it was the primary means of transit from the rural south to the budding industrial work opportunities in Chicago.



GSU's historic Hantack Barn

Missing his family and discomforted by the Illinois winter, my great-grandfather attempted to return home to Alabama, but was pulled off the train and murdered before the train reached Birmingham. We repeat this story at family gatherings, while adding in recognition of the loss and suffering of the native peoples who originally settled this region, and whose presence today is only recognized by street names, such as Somonauk, Nauvee, Nokomis, and Mantua," she said.

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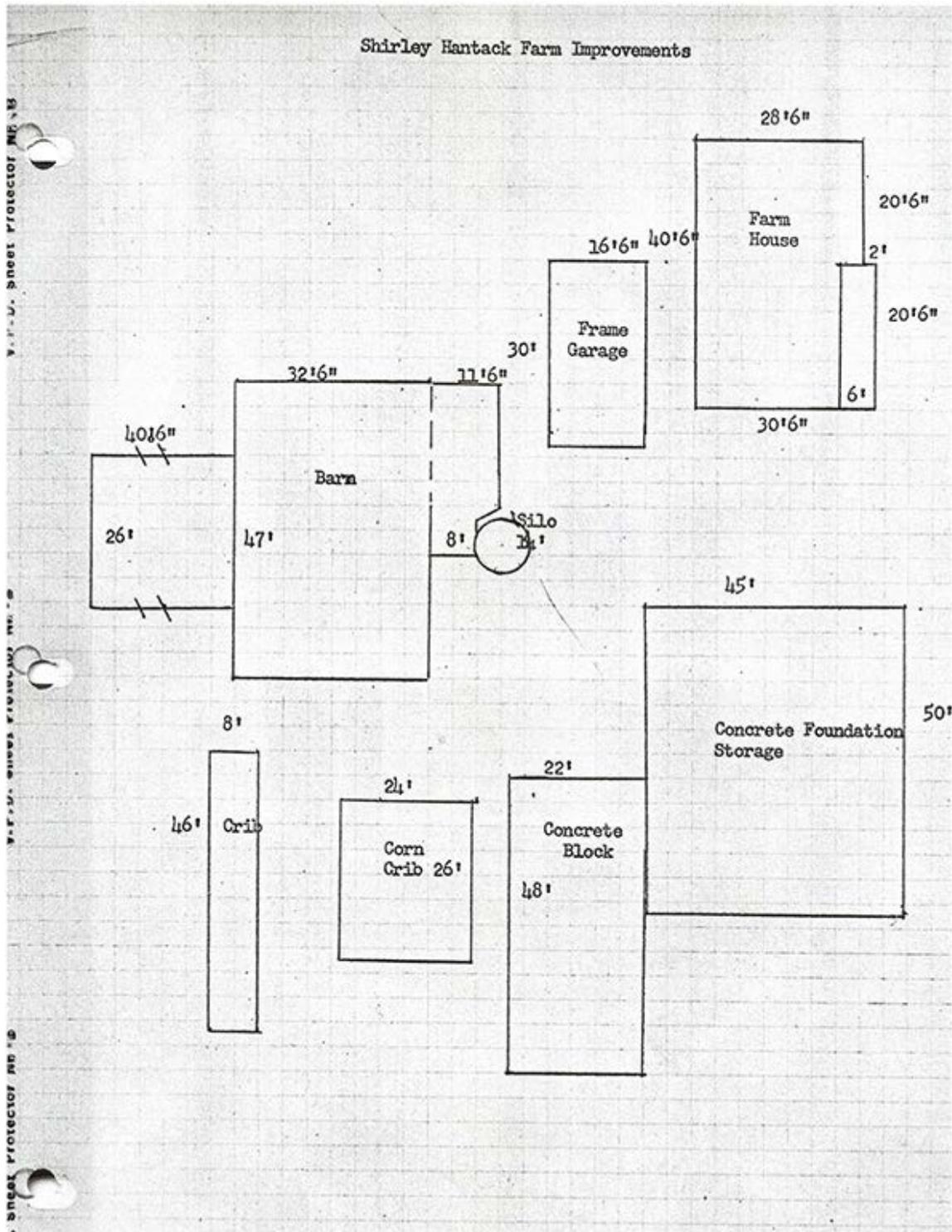


SHIRLEY J. HANTACK FARM  
STORAGE AND CRIBS



SHIRLEY J. HANTACK FARM  
BARN AND SILO

Some images of the Hantack Barn showing its history



Plans for the renovation of the Hantack Barn