



Barn Parties in the Olive Groves

by Joseph Cowles

On April 17, 1941—a few weeks after his 40th birthday—Carl Barks purchased five acres of rural property in Riverside County, California, for \$2,300. While Carl and Clara Ovidia Barks are listed on the title deed as husband and wife, some historians contend that Carl and Clara hadn't married as of that date. It's a good bet that the cartoonist, whose income from the Disney Studios was diminished by the child support payments he was dutifully sending to his first wife, was relying on his bride-to-be for the means to make their land purchase.

Over the next several years, whenever they could spare the wartime-rationed gasoline, Carl and Clara would drive out to their private getaway spot in what was then a beautiful, romantic and peaceful San Jacinto Valley. Eventually, when the air conditioning at the Disney Studios became too discomforting for Carl's chronic and

painful sinus ailments, he quit the Studios and the couple moved from Burbank to the San Jacinto acreage to start a chicken ranch.

Raised in backcountry Oregon, Carl felt comfortable in this rural environment and enjoyed socializing with other ranchers and farmers. Carl and Clara both loved to party; he was a tall handsome man with a great gift for telling sidesplitting stories; she loved to toss back a couple of toddies and get out on the dance floor. They and their equally hard working neighbors could be counted on to express a little wildness from time to time.

The Barkses counted the movers and shakers of the community among their good friends. John Althouse was one. He owned the Soboba Hot Springs resort and one of two stately mansions built in the 1800's by San Jacinto Valley's pioneering

Estudillo families. (These brick homes provided inspiration for Don Gaspar's *rancho* in Carl's 1951 story, *Donald Duck in Old California*.) Althouse supplied libations for many of the parties, purchased wholesale through his resort.

Another friend was Don Currie, known for hosting untamed "Barn Parties." Currie's groves bore olives of extraordinary quality. Rather than being machine picked when green and chemically processed, Currie's olives were tree-ripened and picked by hand, then cured in a centuries-old family recipe. Their unique taste made Currie Ranch Olives from Hemet, California, an epicurean delight known far and wide. When the work of each year's harvest season was complete, Currie celebrated by turning his barn into a huge party hall and roasting up a barbecue feast. The Althouses and Barkses and other friends

and neighbors gathered there to stuff themselves with good food and drink, let their hair down, make merry and dance the night away.

In late 2004, when I was sleuthing out Barks artifacts to be published in Egmont's historic 30-volume *Carl Barks Collection*, someone told me that, at a recent Hemet museum association meeting, Mary Beth, a grown daughter of Don Currie, had shown the members a drawing made for her father in 1945, attributed to Carl Barks. Wanting a peek at this item, I contacted Mary Beth and invited myself to visit her the next time I was in Hemet.

A couple of weeks later, my wife Barbora and I were back in the area and stopped to meet Mary Beth. We had a delightful conversation. Mary Beth told us the story of her father's parties, and

brought out the drawing for us to see. It was made in October 1945. World War II had ended in September, and that year's party was a huge celebration. Carl drew the cartoon invitation and Currie posted it on his office bulletin board so that everyone who came and went could see it. And there it stayed. Mary Beth and her brothers and sister remember seeing it thumb-tacked to their father's bulletin board throughout all the years they were growing up. Mary Beth's brother, Don Currie, Jr., told me that as a youngster he vaguely resented the way Carl had depicted his father, but as the years passed he grew to like the drawing more and more, and now, jovially, remembers his father looking "just about like that."

Eventually, the drawing was taken down and all but forgotten. After Don Currie passed on, Mary Beth was sorting

through his belongings. In a drawer of his desk, she came across the drawing she remembered from her childhood. It had become yellowed, stained and fragile, but was still as delightfully humorous as the day it had been drawn. Seeing it brought back wonderful memories of the good times folks shared in the Forties and Fifties. This was a treasure! Mary Beth had the drawing laminated to protect it from further deterioration, and made a frame for it out of one of her father's old olive crates. Then she put the drawing back on the wall, where it has hung for many more years.

When I first saw it, I didn't immediately recognize the art as Carl's work. His comic book stories were all inked with pen. This is the only time I have seen one of his cartoons inked entirely with brush. The drawing is on plain bond paper. Carl likely



IF IT AIN'T GOOD, IT AIN'T MINE!

NO PARTY'S COMPLETE WITHOUT A SLOT MACHINE!

SIGH!

TOO OLD BUT KEEPS TRYING

JOHN ALTHOUSE

TOM NELSON

GLEN BRUBAKER

OVER 40

THE BARBECUE IS IN MY BARN!
COME AT 7:30 P.M.
EAT AT 8:30!

CURRY'S BARN!

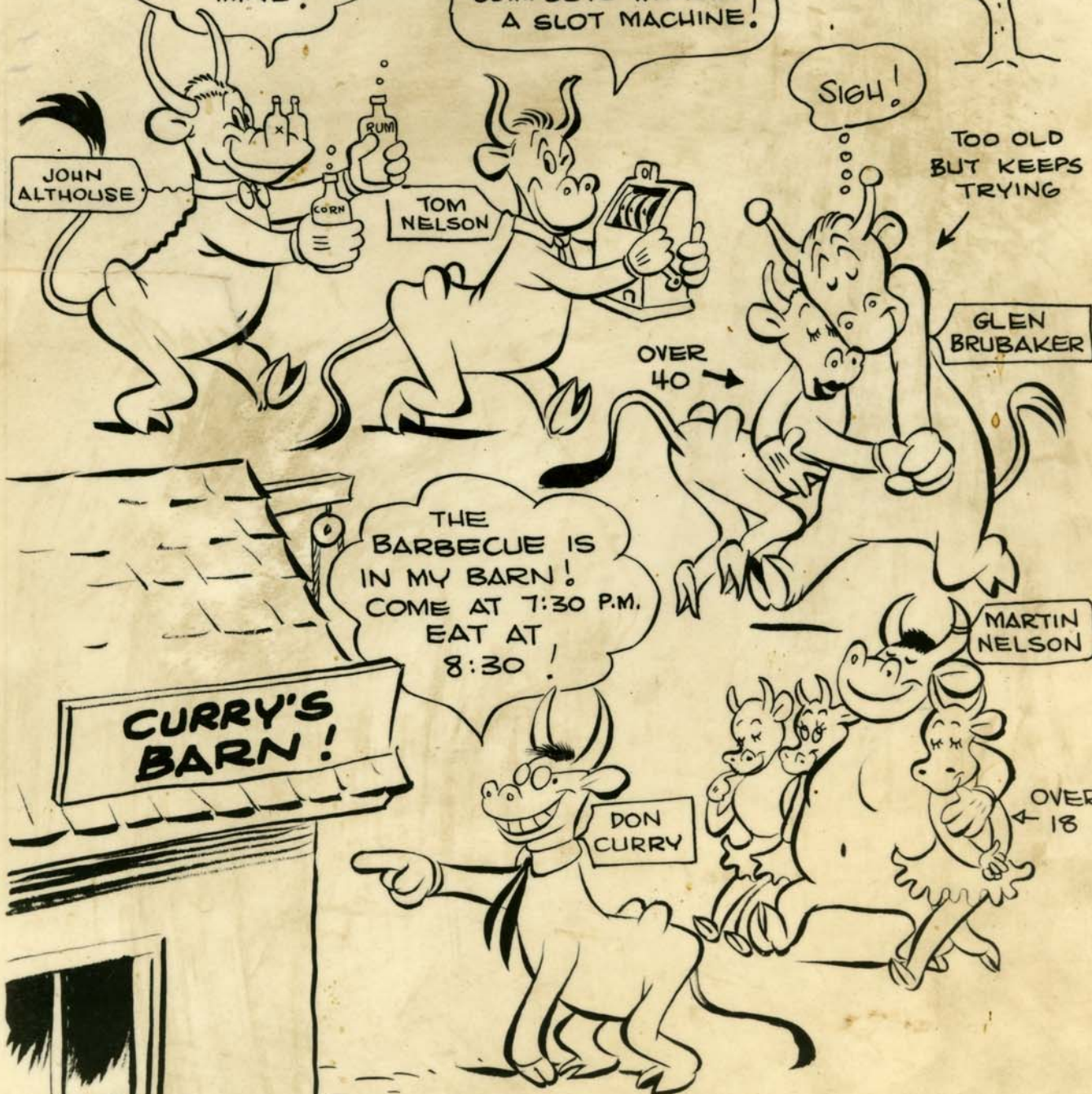
MARTIN NELSON

DON CURRY

OVER 18

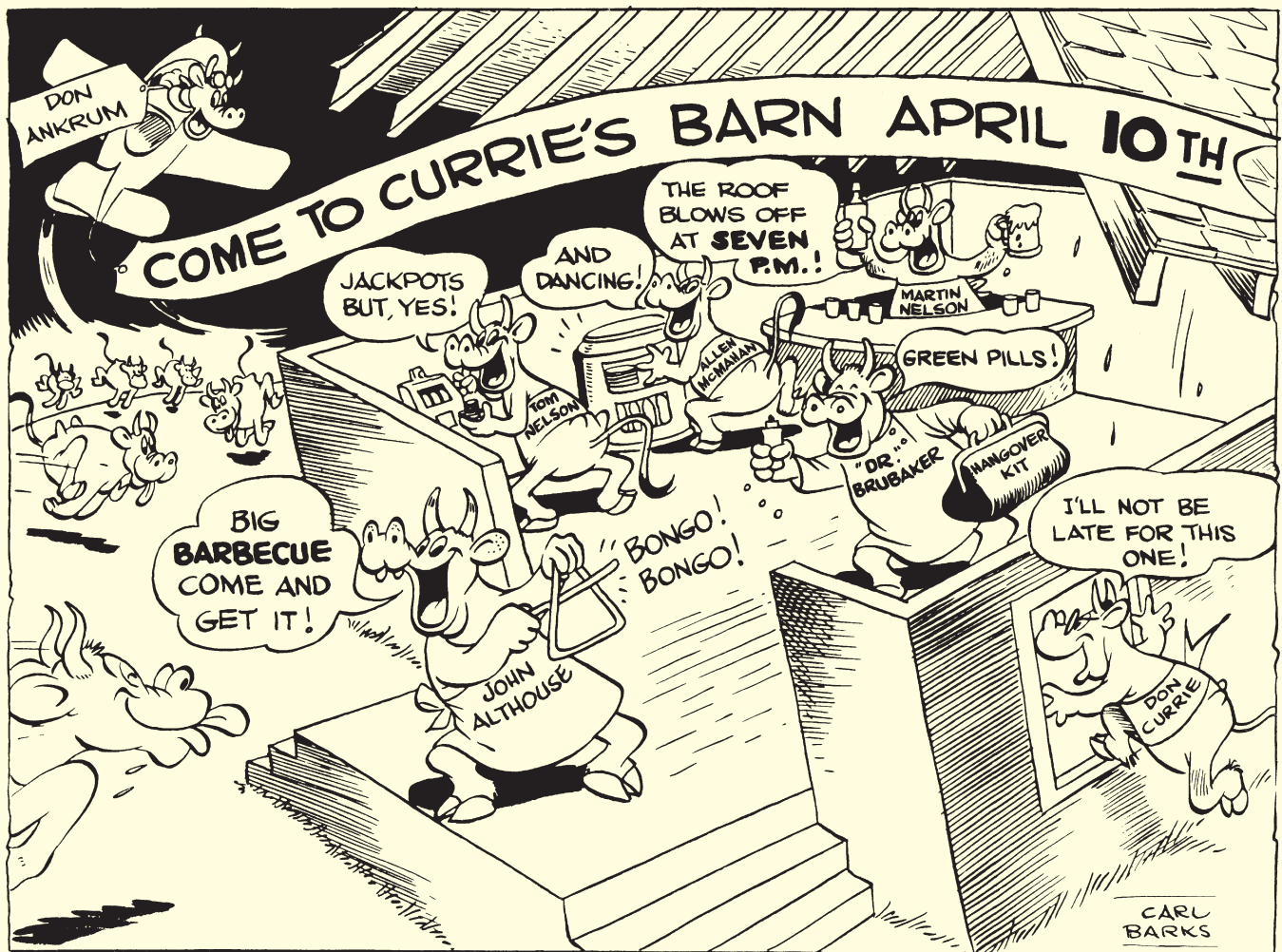
OCTOBER 12
BRING YOUR APPETITE!

R.S.V.P.



sketched it in pencil on another sheet, and then traced it with one of his fine sable brushes and India ink, using the light box built into his drawing table. The strokes are clean and crisp, quick and sure. There's something about the facial expressions that is pure Barks, along with the postures, the shadows, and the lettering. Even unsigned, there's no mistaking the sense of humor and deft hand of The Good Artist.

Thank you, Mary Beth, for kindly giving us permission to reproduce Carl's fine drawing, more than 60 years after it was created as an invitation to your father's postwar Barn Party.



Another of Carl's Barn Party cartoons turned up in 2005. In this drawing, Carl has correctly spelled the olive farmer's name as *Currie* rather than *Curry*, and has signed the artwork. It appears to have been inked with pen as well as brush, and is lacking the finesse of

the first illustration. Perhaps Carl was working against a comic book deadline, and didn't have much time to devote to the Barn Party handbill. This image was brought to my attention by author Geoffrey Blum, editor of Egmont's historic 30-volume *Carl Barks Collection*.