

Johnny Claypool  
1999

This uniquely American "fancy" folk art is the best-known symbol of the Pennsylvania Germans.



The quiet charm and dignity of the landscape is symbolic of the people whose farmsteads founded these historic communities.



Just for nice...

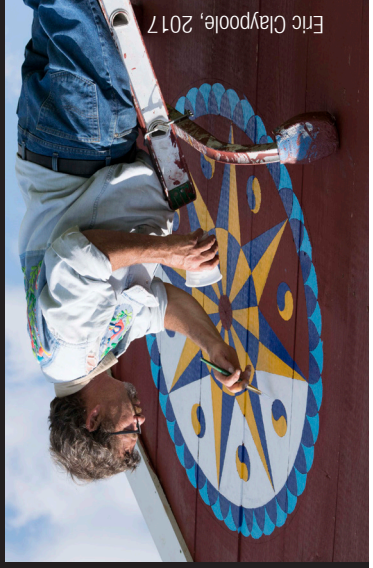


Milton Hill ca. 1950

The region's "Plain" people, the Amish and Mennonites, are sometimes thought to be the source of the barn stars — not so, as their religion strictly prohibits such "fancy" ornamentation. The origin of the hex sign is best explained by the barn star artist Milton Hill (1887-1972) of Berks County who, when asked why he decorated his barn, replied, "Oh, just for nice." Barn stars are simply about pride, heritage, and tradition—and, admittedly, a little showing off. Why else would the stars be placed facing the road than to best attract the admiring gaze of neighbors and passersby.



Take a Ride and tickle your "fancy" as you chart a course through the cultural heritage of Pennsylvania's Americana Region... Tucked deep in the heart of Berks County's farm country, you'll discover barn stars—or "hex signs"—a uniquely American art form and the best-known symbol of the Pennsylvania Dutch. These simple star patterns trace their lineage to the area's German ancestors. Along with their barns, the Pennsylvania Dutch—or Pennsylvania Germans—similarly adorned blanket chests, quilts, tombstones, folk art, which can still be found in many shops and scenes along the way. Though Berks County claims bragging rights to the origin of this distinctive art form, its roots are actually as deep as the artistry and symbolism of medieval Europe. Inaccurately dubbed superstitious "hexafoss" by Wallace Nutting in his 1924 book "Pennsylvania, the Beautiful," the misnomer took hold and eventually became "hex sign."



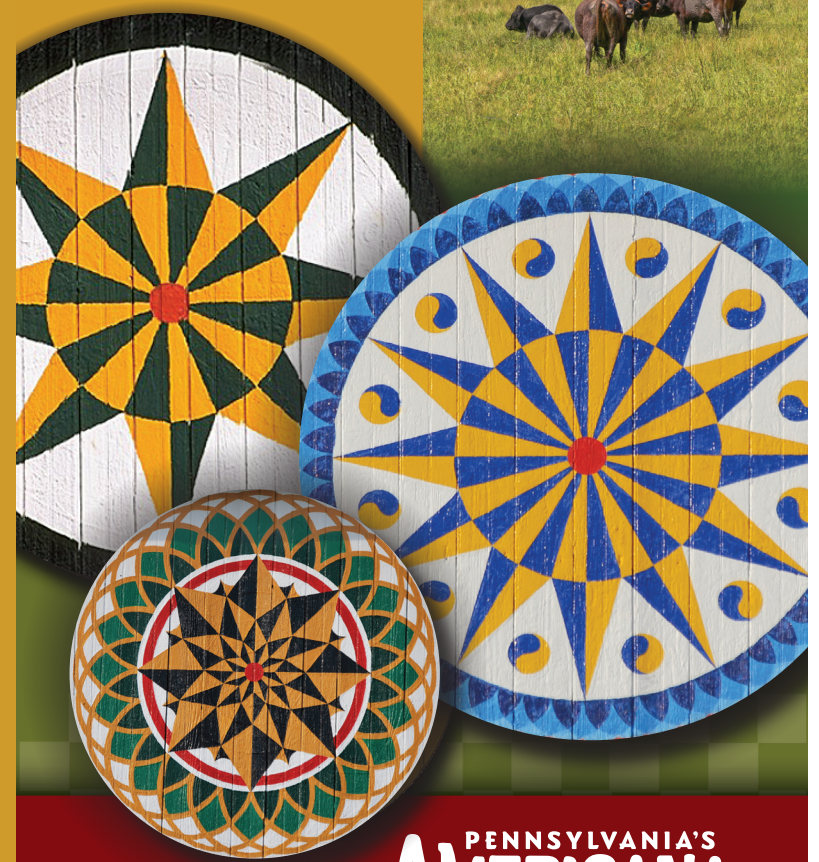
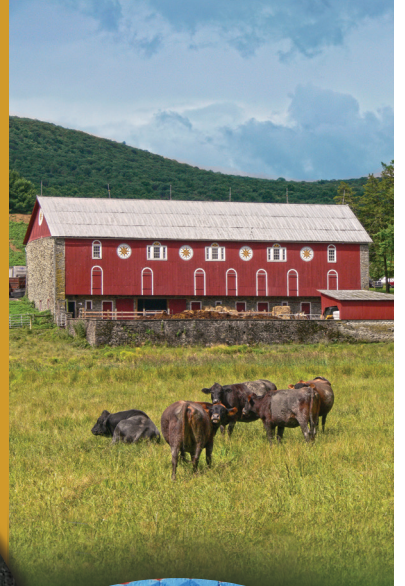
Eric Claypool, 2017

## BARN STAR ART TOUR

Take a Ride for a spell & tickle your fancy!

Enjoy a self-guided tour through northern Berks County & discover the unique American folk art known as

Barn Stars & Hex Signs!

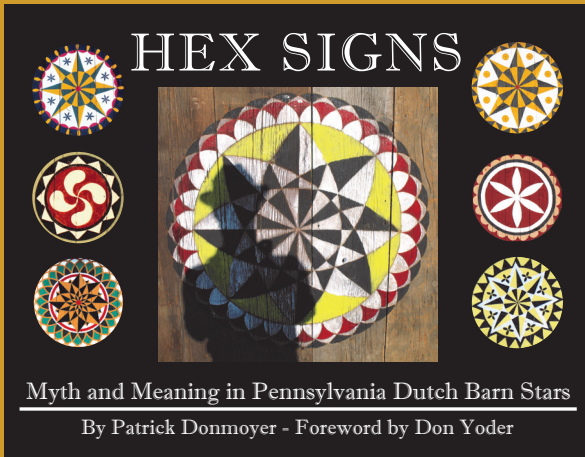


## Take a Ride for a "spell"

Make a day of it! Follow the hex signs — whether Samschdaag or Sunndaag (Saturday or Sunday) or any day of the week. Joy ride through acres of ancestry dotted with the distinctive design of the hex signs on Berks County's winding Barn Star Art Tour. Explore the open-air gallery of our countryside and detour for adventure at nature's main attractions including Crystal Cave, Blue Rocks Family Campground, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, and others. If the weather agrees, put your windows down and engage all your senses as landmarks give way to landscapes. From fertile fields and front-porch swings, to swift creeks, shade trees, and laundry flapping in the breeze, brake here and there to rest and reflect. The quiet charm and dignity of the landscape is symbolic of the people whose farmsteads founded communities, whose art and idealism shaped a culture, and whose progress and traditions wove the very fabric of Pennsylvania's Americana Region itself. Enjoy the ride!



## Want to learn more about Hex Signs?



**\$35.00 includes postage**

Enjoy a closer look at Pennsylvania Dutch decorated barns, in this ground-breaking work on the history, mythology, and cultural significance of these captivating local icons of regional folk art, known as Hex Signs or Barn Stars. With special emphasis on Berks and Lehigh Counties, the current, local landscape is depicted in over 200 color illustrations.

Available for purchase at the **Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center Kutztown University**

**22 Luckenbill Road, Kutztown, PA 19530**

For mail order, send check made payable to "KU" or order online at [Masthof.com](http://Masthof.com)

Call to schedule a tour of the **Heritage Center Museum (610) 683-1589** - [www.kutztown.edu/pgchc](http://www.kutztown.edu/pgchc)

Are you a barn owner? Are you looking to have your original barn stars restored or repainted? Contact the **Dutch Hex Tour Association 1-800-HEX-TOUR or (610) 683-1597**



610.375.4085 • 800.443.6610 • [VisitPaAmericana.com](http://VisitPaAmericana.com)

Special thanks to the County of Berks for their help in sponsoring this brochure. Produced in cooperation with the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center, Kutztown University.

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# Hex Barn Art Tour

A Self-driving Tour of Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Star Art

We recommend starting early, as the tour will take much of the day, if you choose to enjoy the attractions along the way.

- | Miles to | Location   |
|----------|--|
| -1.0     | <b>PA German Cultural Heritage Center</b> , 22 Luckenbill Road, Kutztown PA 19530, <a href="http://www.kutztown.edu/community/pgchc">www.kutztown.edu/community/pgchc</a>  |
| 0.0      | Kutztown Road and Crystal Cave Road, <b>TOUR START</b> — zero you odometer.  |
| 0.6      | On right   |
| 0.9      | On right - facing Sharidin Road  |
| 1.7      | Bear right onto Crystal Cave Road  |
| 1.8      | On right   |
| 3.3      | * <b>Crystal Cave</b> <a href="http://www.crystalcavepa.com">www.crystalcavepa.com</a>   |
| 5.0      | Stutzman Farm (on right)   |
| 5.4      | Dreibelbis Farm (on left, rear)  |
| 6.0      | Turn left on Rt 143 S  |
| 6.6      | On left, rear  |
| 7.1      | On right   |
| 8.3      | Turn right on Rt 662 N   |
| 8.6      | On right, facing Gift Road   |
| 9.7      | On left  |
| 12.4     | On left  |
| 12.5     | Turn right onto Windsor Castle Road  |
| 12.6     | Christman Farm (on right and left)   |
| 14.2     | On right onto Virginville Road   |
| 14.2     | On left at intersection  |
| 14.4     | Epting Farm (on left)  |
| 14.5     | Adam Farm (on left)  |
| 15.1     | Adam Farm (on left)  |
| 15.3     | Miller Farm (on left)  |
| 15.5     | Miller Farm (on left)  |
| 17.0     | Turn left onto Rt 143 N  |
| 17.3     | Sunday Farm (on left)  |
| 17.8     | Leiby Farm (on left)   |
| 19.0     | <b>Dreibelbis Covered Bridge</b> (on left)   |
| 20.6     | Turn left onto Old Rt 22 (Hex Highway)   |
| 20.8     | Deitsch Eck Restarant (at corner),   |
| 20.8     | Turn right onto Rt 143 N   |
| 21.0     | On left, continue on Rt 143, past Rt I-78  |
| 21.8     | * <b>Blue Rocks</b> —glacier boulder deposit. Follow signs to the <b>Blue Rocks Family Campground</b> , 610-756-6366, <a href="http://www.bluerockscampground.com">www.bluerockscampground.com</a> continue tour by returning to Rt. 143 N |
| 22.1     | Kistler/Snyder Farm (on left)  |
| 23.7     | Ida Bond/Shane Farm (on left)  |
| 24.0     | Turn left onto Pine Creek Road   |
| 24.9     | Hawk Valley Farm (on left)   |
| 25.8     | Sicher Farm, (on left)   |
| 26.0     | Turn right onto Hawk Mountain Road   |
| 26.2     | Turn left onto New Bethel Church Road  |
| 26.5     | Wessner Farm (on right)  |
| 26.9     | Turn left onto Old Philly Pike   |
| 27.0     | Longenecker/Country Seat (on right)<br>Make u-turn and return to New Bethel Church Road and turn left  |
| 27.9     | Lutz Farm (on left)  |
| 28.1     | Hilbert Farm (on right)  |
| 28.5     | Turn left onto Mountain Road   |
| 28.9     | Lutz Farm (on right and left)  |
| 30.8     | Turn left onto Hawk Mountain Road  |
| 31.0     | Robertsons Renovations (on left)   |
| 34.6     | Albany Farm (on left)  |
| 34.9     | Dietrich Farm (on left)  |
| 35.1     | Cross Rt 143 to Stoney Run Valley Road   |
| 35.5     | Ontelaunee Dairy Farm (on left)  |
| 37.3     | Wiesner Farm (on left)   |
| 38.7     | Turn left onto Rt 737 S  |
| 39.5     | Bauscher Farm (on left)  |
| 41.1     | TOUR END at Rt I-78  |
| 46.1     | Alternate ending at Rt 222   |
| 47.0     | Alternate ending at Main Street, Kutztown  |

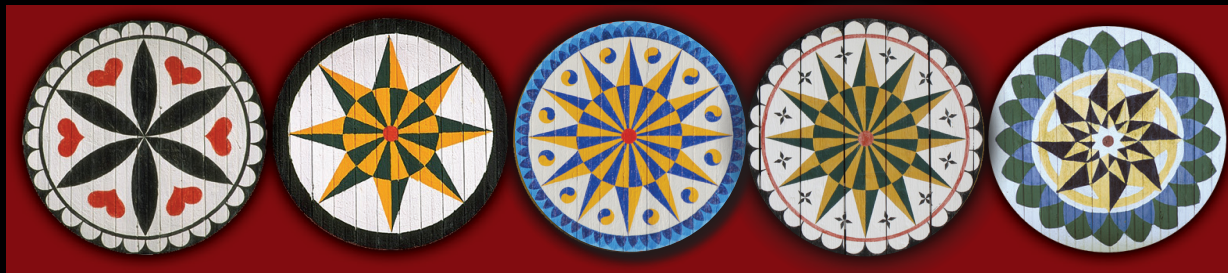
## Get lost in history...

The birth of the hex sign was long believed to be the mid-1800s when the affordability of paint gave a green light to farmers' creative sides; however, new research suggests hex signs existed even earlier. Historians have discovered four foot wooden stars set into stone wall on the gable ends of barns as far back as the late 1700s. In a not-so-distant past, barn stars saturated the rural landscape of southeastern Pennsylvania, but only a fraction have survived to the present time. It is no wonder those remaining today are protected and celebrated not only as Berks County treasures but as American treasures as well.



## Interpreting barn star and hex sign art...

In the 1950s, with the rise of regional tourism, the art form changed from the strictly geometric designs found on barns to include other folk art motifs such as hearts, flowers, and birds which were painted on commercial sign board. It also became popular to attribute meanings to the stars painted on barns. Many of these explanations can be traced to the 20th century forms of the art. In fact, many of the design interpretations can be directly linked to folk art painters like Johnny Ott, Jacob Zook, and Johnny Claypoole. Popular or tourist meanings of hex barn art include:



**6-pointed Rosette**  
Good Luck, the flower of life, the Morning Star, 6 Biblical Days of Creation

**8-pointed Star**  
The most popular barn star in Berks County, Sun, Fertility, the Compass rose

**12-pointed Star**  
the 12 Months, or 12 Apostles  
**Scallop Border**  
Tranquility, Smooth Sailing

**16-pointed Star**  
Success, Prosperity, Fertility, the Sun

**The Hill Star**  
Classic pattern by artist Milton Hill, painted "just for nice"

Despite the ambiguity of their meanings, the geometric nature of barn star art is no coincidence. Geometric art is some of humanity's earliest art, and has held a variety of meanings, especially among agrarian folk cultures like the Pennsylvania Dutch. The geometric images of barn stars are celestial, and their symbolism reflects a reverence for the forces of nature and the heavens above. Historically, Pennsylvania Dutch farmers used the farmer's almanac and were attentive to the significance of celestial activity and the progression of the year. This idea of cosmic order is central to Pennsylvania folk belief, and profoundly affected the arts, religion, folk medicine, agricultural process, foodways, and many other important facets of Pennsylvania German life.

The **DISTELFINK** is the good luck bird of the Pennsylvania Germans and is a stylized version of the finch. The finch eats thistle seed and uses thistle down for its nest. The Pennsylvania Dutch language word "distelfink" means "thistle-finch." Since the 1950s, the distelfink has become of the most popular commercially produced hex sign designs, but it was not originally found on historic barns. Instead, it was formerly found on historic folk art, such as baptismal certificates, redware, and tinware.



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