

Take a ride through an open-air gallery of folk art

Make a day of it! Explore the rolling hills and quiet valleys of Northern Berks County, where a cultural treasure lies hidden in plain sight! Experience the vibrant living folk art traditions of the region with the Barn Star Art Tour, an open-air art gallery of the agrarian countryside. 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 cultural landscape is symbolic of the farming communities whose art and values both shaped and were shaped by Pennsylvania's Americana Region.



BARN STAR ART TOUR

Enjoy a self-guided tour through northern Berks County & discover the unique American folk art known as Barn Stars & Hex Signs!



Chart a course through the cultural heritage of Pennsylvania's Americana Region...

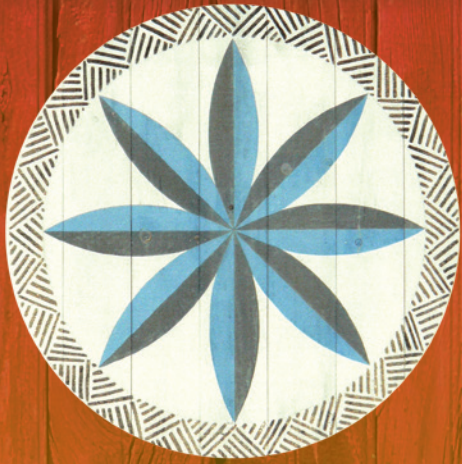


Eric Claypoole, 2017

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-speaking immigrant communities. Along with their barns, the Pennsylvania Dutch—or Pennsylvania Germans—similarly adorned blanket chests, quilts, tombstones, and more with this distinctive folk art, which continues to be a living tradition in the region today. Berks County is home to the highest concentration of barn star art in Pennsylvania. Inaccurately associated with protection from the supernatural, the term "hex sign" was first introduced to the area following the release of travel writer Wallace Nutting's book *Pennsylvania Beautiful* in 1924, and this magical misperception continues to this day.



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REGION



The quiet charm and dignity of the cultural landscape is symbolic of the communities whose art and values both shaped and were shaped by Pennsylvania's Americana Region.



Just for nice...

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 discourages such outward displays of ornamentation. The origin of the barn star is best explained by the barn star artist Milton Hill (1887-1972) of Berks County who, when asked why he decorated his barn, replied, "They're just for nice." Hill was a third-generation barn star painter and a native speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch language, who always referred to them as "Schtanne" (stars) in his mother tongue. Barn stars are simply part of the community's identity and artistic traditions—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?



Milton Hill ca. 1950




Johnny Claypoole 1999

This uniquely American folk art has become symbolic of the region's culture.

Want to learn more about Barn Stars?
Visit our newly created Barn Star Art Tour gallery to view the barns featured on the tour:
www.pagerman.org/barn-star-art-tour

HEX SIGNS



Myth and Meaning in Pennsylvania Dutch Barn Stars
By Patrick Donmoyer - Foreword by Don Yoder

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 cultural landscape of the Pennsylvania Dutch is depicted in over 200 color illustrations of historic barns and the artists that decorate them. Order online at <https://www.masthof.com/>

Are you a barn owner? Are you looking to have your original barn stars restored or repainted? Funding is available through the Barn Star Restoration Fund. Contact us for more information:
The Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center
Kutztown University
15155 Kutztown Road, Kutztown, PA 19530
(610) 683-1589 • www.kutztown.edu/pgchc

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610.375.4085 • 800.443.6610 • 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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We recommend starting early. The tour will take much of the day, if you choose to enjoy attractions along the way.

- Miles to Location
- 0.0
- 0.2
- 1.2
- 1.8
- 2.1
- 2.8
- 3.0
- 4.4
- 6.1
- 6.5
- 7.1
- 7.3
- 7.4
- 7.5
- 8.8
- 9.3
- 9.9
- 10.0
- 10.2
- 10.2
- 11.8
- 11.9
- 12.0
- 14.6
- 15.7
- 16.1
- 17.3
- 17.8
- 17.9
- 18.7
- 19.1
- 20.8
- 22.5
- 22.5
- 23.6
- 23.8
- 25.4
- 25.7
- 26.6
- 27.6
- 27.7
- 28.4
- 30.1
- 30.4
- 31.5
- 31.7
- 32.7
- 33.6
- 33.7
- 34.1
- 34.4
- 35.3
- 35.7
- 35.8
- 36.2
- 36.3
- 37.0
- 37.4
- 38.3
- 39.2
- 39.2
- 39.6
- 39.8
- 40.4
- 40.6
- 40.7
- 44.5
- 44.6
- 44.7
- 49.3
- 50.1
- Location
- ✱ Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center
22 Luckenbill Road, Kutztown PA 19530
TOUR START — zero your odometer
- Turn Right on Kutztown Road
- Turn right on Crystal Cave Road
- ✱ Barn stars on right
- ✱ Barn stars on right, facing Sharadin Road
- Bear right onto Crystal Cave Road
- ✱ Barn stars (on right)
- (✧ Optional: Crystal Cave www.crystalcavepa.com)
- ✱ Stutzman Farm (on right)
- ✱ Dreibelbis Farm (on left, rear)
- Turn Right on Rt 143 N
- ✱ Barn stars, visible through trees on left
- ✱ Barn stars (on left)
- Turn Left onto Virginville Road at stop sign
- ✱ Miller Farm Cattle Murals (on left)
- ✱ Adam Farm (on right)
- ✱ Adam Farm (on right)
- ✱ Adam Farm (on right)
- ✱ Barn stars (on right at intersection)
- Turn left on Windsor Castle Road
- ✱ Barn stars (on left)
- Turn left on Rt 662 Moselem Springs Road
- ✱ Barn stars (on right)
- ✱ Barn stars (on right)
- ✱ Barn stars (on left, facing Gift Road)
- Turn left on 143 N, Hard Hill Road
- ✱ Barn stars (on left)
- ✱ Barn stars (on left)
- Continue on Rt 143 North (keep left)
- Bear right at stop sign to stay on 143 North
- ✱ Sunday Farm (on left)
- ✱ Dreibelbis Station Covered Bridge
- ✱ Deitsch Eck Restaurant (Johnny Ott murals inside)
- Turn right to stay on Rt 143 North
- (✧ Optional: Blue Rocks glacier boulder deposit
Follow signs to the Blue Rocks Family Campground
610-756-6366, www.bluerockscampground.com
Continue tour by returning to Rt. 143 N)
- ✱ Kistler-Snyder Farm (on left)
- ✱ Ida Bond – Shane Farm (on left)
- Turn left on Pine Creek Road
- ✱ Hawk Valley Farm (on left)
- ✱ Sicher Farm (on left)
- Turn left on Hawk Mountain Road
- ✱ Barn Stars (on left)
- ✱ Robertson's Renovations
(✧ Optional: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in 2.8 Miles
1700 Hawk Mountain Road; www.hawkmountain.org)
- Turn right on Mountain Road
- Turn right on Old Philly Pike
- ✱ Barn Stars (on left)
- ✱ Barn Stars (on left)
- ✱ Longenecker Barn & Country Seat (on right)
- Turn right on New Bethel Church Road
- ✱ Wessner Farm (on right)
- Turn left on Hawk Mountain Road
- ✱ Albany Farm (on left)
- ✱ Dietrich Farm (on left)
- (✧ Optional: left on Rt 143, Wannamaker's General Store
In 2 miles, 8888 Kings Highway, Kempton;
<http://www.wanamakersgeneralstore.com/>)
- Cross Rt 143, go straight on Stony Run Valley Road
- ✱ Ontelaunee Dairy Farm (on left)
- Take next right on Kirk Road
- Continue straight on Kirk Road
- Continue straight on Little Round Top Road
- ✱ Barn Stars (on left)
- ✱ Barn Stars (on right)
- Take next right on Saddle Road
- Keep right to stay on Saddle Road
- ✱ Barn Stars (on right)
- Keep right to stay on Saddle Road
- Turn left on Old Route 22
- ✱ Winterside Farm (on right)
- (✧ Optional: Dietrich's Meats & Country Store
660 Old U.S. 22. www.dietrichsmeats.com)
- Turn right on Rt 737
- TOUR END at Rt I-78
- Alternate ending at Rt 222
- Alternate ending at Main Street, Kutztown

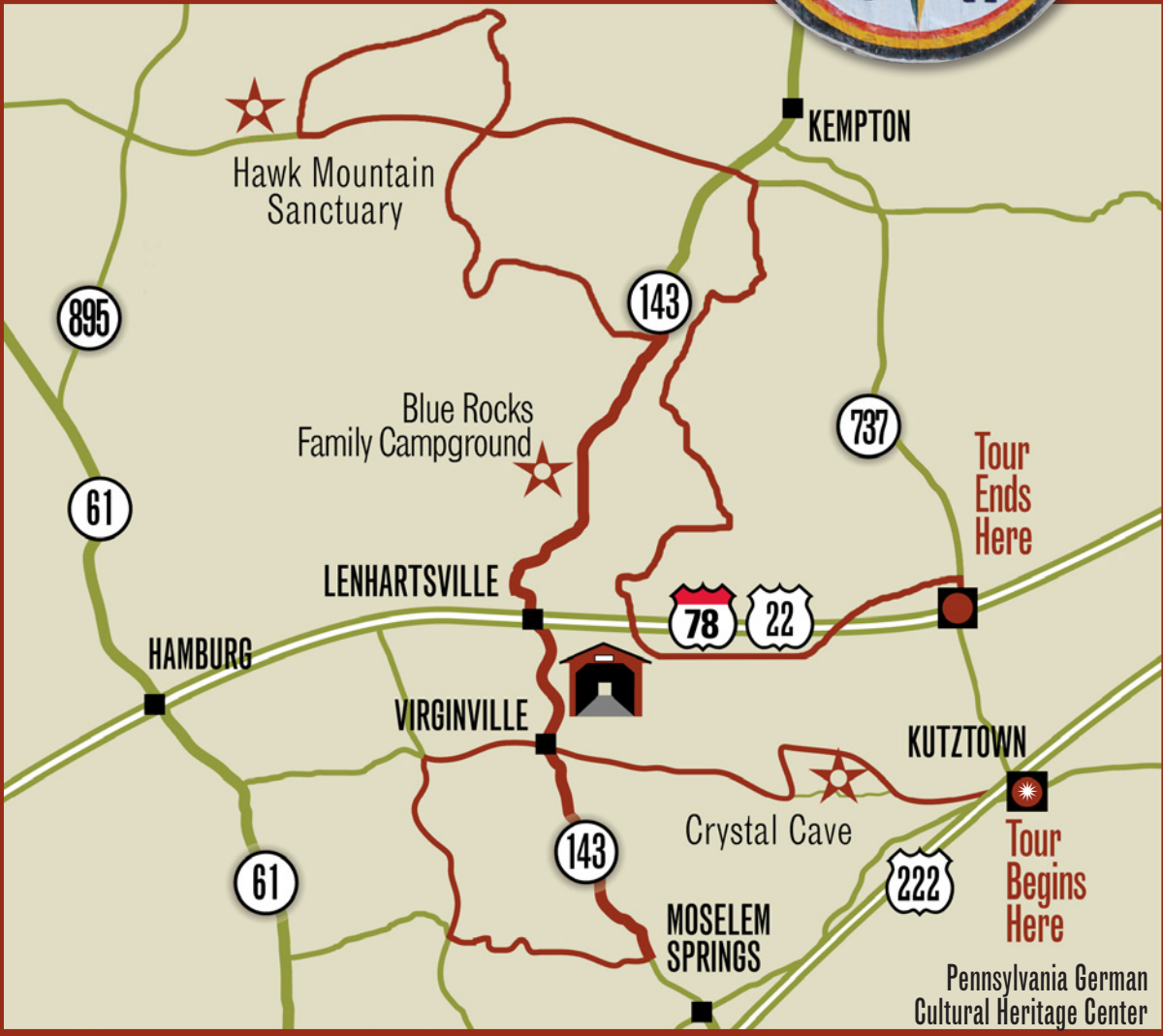
BARN STAR ART TOUR

A Self-Guided Tour of a Living Tradition of Regional Folk Art



Get Lost in History...

The birth of barn star art 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 barn stars existed even earlier. Historians have discovered stars painted on date boards set into the stone gable ends of barns and houses 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 as cultural treasures of American folk art.



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 specific meanings to the star patterns 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 of Lenhartsville, Jacob Zook of Lancaster, and Johnny Claypoole of Lenhartsville. Some basic interpretations of barn star 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 (1887-1972), painted his stars "just for nice"

Although barn star painters consider their work primarily artistic, the geometric nature of barn star art is part of what makes it meaningful. Geometric art is some of humanity's earliest art and images of the stars were particularly popular, 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. The idea of cosmic order is central to many folk regional beliefs, and profoundly affected the culture's traditions in the arts, foodways, religion, folk medicine, agriculture, and many other essential facets of Pennsylvania Dutch folklore.

The **DISTELFINK** is the good luck bird of the Pennsylvania Dutch and is a stylized version of the golden finch. The finch eats thistle seed and uses thistledown to line its nest. The Pennsylvania Dutch language word *Distelfink* means "thistle-finch." Since the 1950s, the distelfink has become one of the most popular designs featured in the commercial hex sign art originally developed and popularized by the artist Johnny Ott of Lenhartsville (1890-1864). Prior to this, the distelfink was not originally part of the art painted on historic barns. Instead, the distelfink was featured in other forms of historic folk art, such as manuscript art, redware pottery, and painted tinware.



Courtesy of
Eric Claypoole

Disclaimer - To All Drivers & Passengers:

Please be courteous while enjoying the Barn Star Art Tour. Although the tour route uses only public roadways, the barns included in this tour are located on private property. Please respect the privacy and rights of property owners, and as well as other motorists. Do not trespass, and carefully follow all traffic laws while navigating this tour route. Please remain with your vehicle at all times while enjoying the tour. Pennsylvania's Americana Region will not be held liable for any injury or unlawful behavior resulting from the misuse of this tour guide.

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