

THE BARN DOOR

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About The Star Barn Complex (current)

The Star Barn Complex is located in Lower Swatara Township, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania on Nissley Drive at Interstate-283, in Middletown, Pennsylvania. It is situated on 3.6 acres. The 1872 complex consists of a large barn (The Star Barn), a pig barn, corn crib, chicken coop, pond, and stone fence. The existing milk house and grain silo were constructed in the 1920's.

The Star Barn is a large frame bank barn constructed on a limestone foundation. This three-story structure is approximately 67'-6" wide by 105'-6" long. It is estimated to be 65 feet in height (to the cupola). Except for the milk house and silo, the exterior of the buildings consist of beveled clapboard painted siding. The roofs still have wooden shingles; however, they have been covered by sheet metal roofing. The Gothic Revival five-bay barn has a centered cross gable and square cupola rising above the gabled roof. A metal cap in the shape of a fleur-de-lis tops the octagonal spire. The barn has tall pointed-arch ventilators along all four elevations. There are also prominent star-shaped ventilators centered within each gable end and cross-gable. The ground floor interior of The Star Barn was altered in the early twentieth century to accommodate dairy cattle and contains several concrete troughs running almost the entire width of the barn. There is also a vaulted stone cellar to the north over which the earth bank leading to the threshing floor was constructed.

There are two upper floors divided into five separate stalls of beaded pine boards. The upper portion of the barn is constructed of heavy timber framing. Immediately south of the barn is a barnyard. A stone and wood fence encloses the barnyard with both the barn and a smaller pig barn along its perimeter. In addition to post and beam construction, a few artifacts are still in place from The Star Barn's early design and use. The first use of the barn was to keep horses. There is one remaining spindle horse stall divider from that period. Two very interesting artifacts include hand-forged star-shaped water cup plungers. These are extremely rare.

There are several smaller frame outbuildings scattered around the property including a pig barn, corn crib, and chicken coop, each mimicking the Gothic Revival detailing of the main barn, but on a smaller scale. The outbuildings have trefoil wooden brackets, star-shaped ventilators, and cupolas with octagonal spires. Also present on the property are more utilitarian-styled outbuildings including a concrete block milk house and a concrete silo.

The complex retains good architectural integrity since the majority of features, both exterior and interior, are intact. The barn and its historic outbuildings are in sound condition; however, the structures are threatened by ongoing deterioration and encroaching development.

Note: Segments of the above narrative were taken from the *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* and supplemental pages. We appreciate Karen Arnold, Program Director of Historic York, Inc. of York, Pennsylvania, her staff, and other contributors for their extensive and comprehensive research and documentation on the history of The Star Barn Complex and agriculture in America and Pennsylvania.

Photo Gallery

The best way to appreciate The Star Barn is to see it in person ([see map](#)) from one of its access roads (Nissley Drive, Interstate-283, or Woodridge Drive). For the protection of this historic complex, no public entry into the buildings is permitted until further notice.

It has been said that The Star Barn is one of the most photogenic historic buildings in North America; therefore, we have assembled a few images for your enjoyment.

Please [contact us](#) if you would like to submit any photographs you have taken of The Star Barn (stills or video) for our consideration in adding to this gallery. You will be given credit for anything we publish.

Future Plans for The Star Barn at Agrarian Country

The Plan - Use of The Star Barn and its Ancillary Buildings

Agrarian Country is committed to preserving the historical architecture of The Star Barn and its ancillary buildings. The Star Barn will be used as an Agricultural Exhibition Center, promoting agricultural awareness and providing agricultural business seminars and career exploration programs. Additional plans for use of The Star Barn and its ancillary buildings include housing a Heritage Farm Museum, Farm Toy Museum, and Rural Art Exhibition. The center will also be used for seasonal festivals, agricultural-related shows, auctions, dinners, concerts, community theater, etc.

The Plan - Where and When

Feasibility studies were conducted about the use of The Star Barn at its present location. Due to its limited acreage, location near Interstate-283, and being situated near a residential community, it was determined that the current site would not be feasible for carrying out the activities planned for The Star Barn. Therefore, Agrarian Country has tentative plans for The Barn Saver to dismantle the barn and its ancillary buildings and prepare it for its new location (to be announced).

Following is the procedure for relocating The Star Barn and its ancillary buildings:

- A professional architect will prepare architectural drawings, identifying each part and labeling each log and beam.
- The Star Barn and its ancillary buildings will be carefully dismantled and transported to the new site.

- The stone foundation, limestone walls, windows, doors, and silo will be dismantled and transported to the new site.
- The cupolas will be removed intact and individually restored in preparation for transport.
- The giant stars and louvered windows will be braced, kept intact, and moved in one piece.
- When the barn arrives at its new site, it will be rebuilt on a new foundation, faced with the original stone, and reassembled as it was built in 1872.
- Planning is underway for a barn raising festival at its new location, with the aid of the Timber Framers Guild. The Guild would reassemble, raise, and erect the barn using the same techniques that were used in the 1870's. This includes the use of draft horses, mules, and oxen. Detailed plans will be announced. Agrarian Country also plans to hold a food festival at the time of the barn raising.

The Future Site of The Star Barn at Agrarian Country

The future site of The Star Barn at Agrarian Country will be in South-Central Pennsylvania. It is expected that the new site will be announced by April 2008. At that time, we will also announce the schedule for moving and raising of The Star Barn and its ancillary buildings.

About Us

About Agrarian Country, *The Ultimate Agricultural Educational Experience*

Agrarian Country, temporarily located in Middletown, Pennsylvania, is a nonprofit organization, and was established in 2006 for the purpose of preserving Pennsylvania farmland and farm buildings and to provide a place where people of all ages can visit and/or participate in the operation of numerous agricultural enterprises in a real-life farm setting. Through farmland preservation and hands-on agricultural educational activities, Agrarian Country hopes to rekindle interest in America's agricultural heritage and a self-sufficient way of life, to promote wholesome and healthy living, and provide a refreshing escape from everyday stresses. Agrarian Country is investing today for the future and appreciation of our agricultural heritage. Agrarian Country will have three centers:

1. Center for Agricultural Enterprises

This center will promote animal production, plant production (organic and non-organic), and agri-business. The following educational production areas are being developed:

Animal Farm Enterprises

- Dairy Farm
- Beef Farm
- Alpaca Farm
- Sheep and Goat Farm
- Swine Farm
- Equine Farm
- Poultry Farm
- Deer and Elk Farm
- Bison Farm
- Fish Farm

Plant Farm Enterprises

- Agronomic Crops
- Hydroponics
- Greenhouse
- Landscape
- Horticultural Nursery
- Christmas Tree
- Horticultural Fruit
- Mushroom
- Forest Management
- Grape Vineyard

Agri-Business Enterprises

- Conference Center
- Farm Market
- Retirement Village
- Animal Hospital
- Lodge
- Membership
- Food Services
- Products Manufacturing
- Antiques
- Biogreen Production Center

2. Center for Agricultural Education

The Star Barn will be the icon for Agrarian Country's conference and educational center. In addition to promoting agricultural awareness, the center will also provide facilities for festivals, shows, auctions, dinners, community theater, etc. The following initiatives are being developed:

- The Star Barn at Agrarian Country Conference Center
- Educational Programs (agricultural history through to today's technology)
- Agricultural Career Exploration Camp
- Soil and Water Conservation Center
- Wildlife Conservation Center
- Biogreen Educational Center

3. Center for Agricultural Tourism

Experience Agrarian Country by staying on the farm in a private farm cottage, exploring numerous agricultural enterprises in operation, being part of a host farm family experience, helping with farm chores, helping to plant, fertilize, and harvest crops, etc.

The following tourism facilities are being developed:

- Heritage Farm Museum and Gift Shop
- Farm Toy Museum and Gift Shop
- Campground, Resort, and Park
- Rural Art Gallery and Museum and Gift Shop
- Faith, Farm, and Family Museum and Gift Shop
- Country Chapel and Botanical Gardens
- Travel Agency

Planned Festivals and Events

- The Star Barn 1872-Style Barn Raising
- Christmas Show and Pageant
- Old-Time Days and Toy Show
- Farm Life Art Show
- Natural Resources Preservation Show
- Fall Harvest Festival
- Music Festivals
- Auctions and Antique Shows

About Agrarian Country's President

The President of Agrarian Country is Robert S. Barr, a graduate of The Pennsylvania State University with a doctorate in Agricultural Education and School Administration. He is an educator, author, speaker, publisher, real estate appraiser, and business entrepreneur. Dr. Barr has traveled internationally, and has been responsible for establishing numerous successful organizations and businesses. In 1960, Robert Barr was honored by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy as "Top 4-H Youth" in America. A year later, he was honored by the National Holstein Association as "National Holstein Boy." Dr. Barr has been a high school educator, taught at The Pennsylvania State University, served as Assistant Executive Director of Intermediate Unit 17, served two terms on the Board of Directors for The Pennsylvania State University's College of Agriculture Alumni Association, founded a two-year vocational and Bible school, and published a travel guide.

He is a strong proponent of farmland preservation and has provided expert testimony on appraisal, tax reform, *Clean and Green* (agricultural land preservation), and

conservation easement programs. His other professional interests include the agricultural industry, real estate land development, and Christian ministries.

Ownership History of The Star Barn

The earliest documented owner of the land on which The Star Barn Complex currently occupies was Benjamin Brown. Colonel James Crouch, a Revolutionary War soldier purchased the farm from Mr. Brown in 1778. "Walnut Hill" is the earliest known name of the farm – so named for a reference of a walnut tree that served as a boundary marker for the property. Upon Colonel Crouch's death, the property was willed to his son, Edward Crouch, who was also a veteran of the Revolutionary War and served as a member of the House of Representatives, an associate judge of Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, and a member of the thirteenth United States Congress. After Edward Crouch's death in 1827, his only daughter, Mary, and her husband, Benjamin Jordan inherited the Walnut Hill farm estate. Mr. Jordan represented the Dauphin district in the Pennsylvania State Senate. The farm remained in the Jordan family until 1872 when John Motter purchased the 164-acre Walnut Hill farm at auction for \$19,310.34.

John Motter was born in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania in 1822. His father, Philip Motter (Matter) ran a hotel in Palmyra for many years. John Motter was a self-made man, beginning work as a saddler in Palmyra. In 1840, he moved to Harrisburg and began raising horses. He became a large shipper of stock to the western states. For many years, his sale stables were headquarters for dealers in fine horses and his upright business methods and principles gained him a large patronage. During the Civil War, Mr. Motter furnished the United States army with thousands of mounts as well as mules for a baggage train service. After the war, he widened the scope of his business enterprises. He was president of the Farmer's Bank as well as a member of the Board of Trustees. He also invested heavily in other agricultural pursuits. Following the trend of other gentleman farmers, he diversified his interest in horses to include several other types of animal husbandry as well as many types of crops. Each farm John Motter purchased was transformed into a model of late nineteenth century progressive farming. At the time he purchased the Walnut Hill farm, it consisted of 164 acres with a large stone farmhouse and minor outbuildings. Motter hired Daniel Reichert, a mortician as well as a master carpenter, to transform the farm. Reichert designed and constructed a rear ell addition to the farmhouse, a summer kitchen, chicken coop, carriage house/corncrib, pig barn, and the main barn structure. In addition to remodeling the farmhouse, Mr. Reichert also built a summer kitchen, a wood frame structure with four gables. It contained a stylized belfry with pointed arches centrally located on the roof. The summer kitchen was badly damaged by a 1980's fire and was subsequently demolished. The John Motter Farm was the last known surviving barn constructed by Mr. Reichert. He also built the Hetrick and Neil Funeral Parlors in Progress, Pennsylvania.

Motter's new barn and all the outbuildings were constructed in the Gothic Revival style. Each of the buildings had characteristics of that style including cross gables, pointed arch ventilators, trefoil brackets, and spired cupolas. The stars on The Star Barn served an important function other than decoration. The stars were made of wood louvers that

provided additional light and important air circulation for the drying of hay and other grains.

The early nineteenth century stone house located on the property at the time of Mr. Motter's purchase was significantly remodeled to also include many of the trappings of the Victorian era. After several alterations, including a 1986 two-story rear ell, constructed on the rear or north elevation, the building bears little resemblance to an early farmhouse. W. W. Jennings, a skilled ironworker from Harrisburg, completed the ironwork for the house, including the cast iron lions that were placed at the entrance walk to the house. Although the house was extensively remodeled, Mr. Motter never lived at the farm. Franklin Wolf and his family, manager of the farm, resided at the farmhouse.

After Mr. Motter died in 1901, the estate was passed onto his wife, Annie, and later to his oldest daughter, Elizabeth Motter Fletcher. The farm eventually passed onto the Nissley Family in 1925 and was converted to dairy farming. The change in farming production brought several changes to the farm. The lower level of the barn was dramatically altered to accommodate cattle. Additionally, a cement block milk house was constructed just east of the barn. Two cast cement silos were constructed to the northeast of the main barn. The dairy cows needed additional food which could be stored in the silos. The installation of electrical wiring and minor repair and alterations were also completed. However, with the process of raising a specialized farm product, many of the secondary buildings were no longer used for animals. The outbuildings were used primarily for storage of equipment. This neglect eventually caused severe decay to the small frame outbuildings because they were no longer integral components of the working twentieth century farm.

In 1940, ownership of the farm passed to Aaron J. Hoffer. Four generations of the Hoffer Family continued to work the land until 1986. The large farm property was subdivided in March, 1994. At that time, the farmhouse and the majority of the farm east of Nissley Drive became part of one parcel. The barn and remaining outbuildings (carriage house, pig barn, milk house, silo, and equipment shed) were separated to a parcel of 3.6 acres.

On February 29, 2000, the Millport Conservancy and Preservation Pennsylvania joined forces and funds to purchase The Star Barn Complex. The two organizations shared common goals in moving to save this endangered property: to preserve The Star Barn complex as a symbol of the region's agricultural heritage and to insure its future survival by making it a part of the life of the communities that now surround it.

In December, 2007, Agrarian Country, a non-profit corporation from Middletown, Pennsylvania, assumed ownership of The Star Barn.

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Agriculture in America and Pennsylvania in the 1870's

The farming industry dramatically changed in Pennsylvania after the Civil War. Prior to the conflict, farmers were considered to be little more than self-sufficient, growing and producing only enough food stuffs to feed their families with a little left over to be sold. The western expansion movement, brought on by the railroad, gave the Pennsylvania farmer an opportunity for great fortune in new markets. The introduction of refrigerated railroad cars boosted the distribution of agricultural products. The demand for farm products increased and prices skyrocketed. However, there were several obstacles impeding a farmer from immediate success. The loss of human lives during the Civil War left a terrible labor shortage for farmers and many remaining laborers left the farm for more profitable work in factories. The Pennsylvania farmer needed guidance to attract laborers and combat other concerns. Through education, the farmer was able to expand production and increase the value of their products. Organizations such as the Grange and Farmer's Alliance encouraged farmers to exchange technical experience and ideas with more of their successful peers. Agricultural societies promoted not only the education of farmers, but advanced their social well-being, political causes, and economic comfort. A way agricultural reformers saw to attract or retain farmers was constructing new and elaborate farm buildings. By constructing new farms or rebuilding existing farms utilizing more modern agrarian practices, the farming industry became more efficient and more productive. Barns were enlarged to increase both storage and stabling capacity as the farm became more successful. The basic form of the Pennsylvania barn was not only adapted for its size. The length of the barn was increased, adding more stable room in the ground level and more threshing floors and hay mows above.

Modern farm practices also dictated barnyards with a south orientation for optimum efficiency. Not only does this orientation allow the forebay and barnyard to receive the maximum amount of sunshine throughout the day, but also allowed farmers to extend their workday from early morning to late evening. During the winter months, the southerly exposed barnyard was not as cold or damp, allowing snow to melt faster for better access year-round. The orientation of the house to the barn was important for farm layouts. Visibility of the barn's forebay from the farmhouse was considered essential for the safety and protection of the livestock.

A group of secondary buildings evolved in farming to serve additional purposes and their placement around the farm is consistent among other local farms. Historically, these secondary buildings were devised only to provide basic shelter for animals with perhaps some additional storage space. However, late nineteenth century farmers began improving these secondary structures as well to increase production. Chicken coops were constructed with additional windows to admit needed sunlight and ventilation. The pig barn with its odor and flies are often oriented as far as possible from the farmhouse. Additionally, pig barns were located off the barnyard so the animals could root through the manure, hastening its rotting. Increasing demands for pork in city markets led to better management in pork production. The animals were given as much dry space, light, and ventilation as possible. The addition of silos onto the dairy farm offered several advantages. First, higher quantities of corn could be stored and fed to the cattle at a higher profit margin than stocking hay and other grains.

Second, dairy cattle fed with corn produced milk year-round even during the winter months. The milk house, dating from the early twentieth century when government standards forced improvements in dairy production standards, was located as close as possible to the barn. Changes in farming methods and increases of mechanization within the industry made it possible to operate several farms at one time.

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