

Barns 101

Welcome to your first class in Barns 101! We begin our lesson on the types of barns that are native to Bucks County.

You might notice that most of the barns you see along the tour were constructed mainly of stone with some timber. Many 18th century barns were undoubtedly constructed of log, but none have survived in this area. Upper Makefield is the only central Bucks County municipality that has an 18th century tax list that includes construction material. In 1795, there were 79 barns in Upper Makefield. 35 were described as frame barns; 29 barns were log; and just 12 barns were noted as stone barns. There was also one frame and stone barn and two barns with no material noted.

The standard Pennsylvania barn is a blend of English and German barn-building traditions. As a general rule, German-influenced barns and English Lake District barns were built as two-level structures. In order to reach the upper level, they were built into a hillside; otherwise, a ramp was constructed to reach the upper level. This process resulted in the adoption of the term “Pennsylvania Bank Barn.” Unlike the German barn, many barns in Central Bucks County have a closed forebay, which is a recessed stable wall under the barn superstructure rather than a projecting upper level over the barnyard.

There is little standardization of barn typology terminology. The following terms are often used, and in some cases, are used interchangeably.

English Barns

Central Bucks County has one of the largest collections of stone, English-influenced, single-level barns. The interior of the average English barn was divided into three bays. Solebury Township is the epicenter of the majority of these early barns. It's considered the grandfather of the American barn due to its construction dating back to the 1770s.

Pennsylvania Bank Barn or Forebay Bank Barn

Defining characteristics of this barn are a ramp leading to the upper level of the barn and a forebay, or projecting upper level over the barnyard, on the opposite side from the ramp. In

early Pennsylvania German examples, the presence of an extended forebay gives the barn a saltbox appearance from the side. The Pennsylvania Germans often referred to these as **Sweitzer** (Swiss) barns.

Stone Barns

Stone barns were the barns of choice for wealthier farmers. In the 1795 tax list of Upper Makefield, seven of the 12 stone barns were on properties of over 200 acres in size.

Frame Barns

Most early frame barns were not built completely of wood. “Frame barn, stone stable high” is how most 19th century barns are described. These are barns built with a stone first floor and a frame superstructure above.

Gambrel Roof Barns

Engineering research led to the development of framing for gambrel roofs in the late 19th century. The shape of the gambrel roof allowed a larger loft space to store hay.

Gothic Roof barns

By the 1930s, barn roof technology entered the last phase of its evolution. Improved materials allowed builders to construct barns with curved rafters. The rafters came to a point at the top, which was reminiscent of a Gothic arch.

As you embark on this barn expedition, here are a few architectural features that you might encounter in your travels.

Bay—A bay is a section or compartment within a barn. A common type of barn is the three-bay barn, which has three separate rooms within the barn.

Gable--A gable is the triangular portion of a wall beneath the edges of a pitched roof. They are often called A-shaped roofs.

Gambrel--A gambrel roof is usually a symmetrical two-sided roof with two slopes on each side. The shape is reminiscent of an arch created using four lines.

Haymow—The haymow is a part of a barn where hay is stored. Imagine that!

Lintels—A lintel is a piece of stone or wood that can be a load-bearing building component or a decorative architectural element. It is often found over portals, doors, windows, and fireplaces.

Louver—A louver is a framed opening, such as a window, that is fitted with movable horizontal slats that admit air and light and shed rain.

Quoins—A quoin is made of stone, brick, cement, or sometimes even timber. Quoins are blocks at the corner of a wall. They exist in some cases to provide actual strength for a wall and in other cases just for aesthetics.

Saltbox configuration--A saltbox structure has just one story in the back and two stories in the front. It takes its name from its resemblance to a wooden lidded box in which salt was once kept.