

# Barns 101

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

Conventional wisdom is that the overwhelming majority of historic barns in Bucks County, and particularly upper Bucks County with its strong Pennsylvania German heritage, are “Pennsylvania German” forebay bank barns. As this tour will demonstrate, upper Bucks County has many examples of this type of barn, but it also demonstrates a large sampling of two-level bank barns without a forebay. This type of barn is said to have its roots in the Lake District of northern England.

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.”

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

## **Pennsylvania Standard 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.

## **English Lake District Barn**

This type of barn is similar in function to Pennsylvania barns. In both barns, the bottom is used to house animals while the top can be used to store hay and straw, as well as allow for the threshing of grains.

However, "English Lake District" barns differ from Pennsylvania barns in several ways. First they are not always banked; they may just have a ramp. Second, they are commonly made

from stone. Finally, they do not have forebays; instead, they contain pent roofs that shelter the entrance doors to the stables below. It is believed that these barns derive their name from those found in the northwestern section of England known as the English Lake District.

### **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 19<sup>th</sup> century. The shape of the gambrel roof allowed for 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.

**Board and batten siding**—This siding is described as a type of exterior siding or interior paneling that has alternating wide boards and narrow wooden strips, called battens.

**Cupola**—A cupola is a small tower or dome-like feature projecting from the top of a barn roof.

Gable--A gable is the triangular portion of a wall beneath the slopes 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 upper slope is positioned at a shallow angle, while the lower slope is steep. 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!

Hipped roof—A hipped roof is a type of roof where all sides slope downwards to the walls, usually with a fairly gentle slope. Thus, it is a house with no gables or other vertical sides to the roof. A square hip roof is shaped like a pyramid.

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.

*Peiler eck*—*Peiler eck* is Pennsylvania Dutch for “pier corner.” A pier corner is an alcove that is located at basement level of a barn.

Winnowing door—Winnowing is the process of separating out the chaff and dust from threshed grain by means of a current of air. A barn was ventilated to allow for this process. By having smaller (winnowing) doors opposite the wagon entry doors, it created airflow