

# West Virginia Quilt Trails

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## Educational Objectives

1. Define a barn quilt and discover the quilt trails that dot the byways and highways of West Virginia.
2. Learn how to construct and paint a quilt block.
3. Learn how to start a quilt trail.

The inspiration for this lesson stems from a group of dedicated 4-H members: the Wayne County 4-H Ambassadors Team. Since 2013, they have embarked on a remarkable journey to create a 4-H Heritage Quilt Trail as a means to beautify Wayne County – the western gate to the Mountain State! The quilt trail in Wayne County is one of nine that dot the byways and highways of West Virginia.

## Definition of a Barn Quilt Trail

*By Erin Ferry and Brettina Jeffers*

A barn quilt trail is a number of barn quilt locations to which people can travel in succession from one quilt block to another. The barn quilts that make up the trails can vary greatly – no barn quilt is limited to a specific size, and the same applies to the barn quilt trails they make up. It is merely the ability, ambition and resources of the people who construct the barn quilts and form the quilt trails that determines the size of either.

Individual barn quilts are essentially wooden squares with a quilt block pattern painted on top. Sizes can range from 4 feet by 4 feet to 8 feet by 8 feet or even more; it all just depends. The same goes for the patterns and paint colors; it is all up to the creativity of the creator as to what the design looks like. Once they are hung (on anything from barns to business buildings), it takes the dedication of several people to go out and compile the trail. Through organization, outreach and advertisement, anyone can help to establish a trail.

From there, the quilt trail becomes more than a metaphorical map of wooden quilt blocks; it becomes a benefit to the community. Not only does it serve as a method of beautification, but it is an attraction that can bring in travelers from all over the country. A barn quilt trail is an art movement that can reach even the smallest of communities.

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## History of the American Quilt Trail Movement

*By Ashlee Smith and Chase Smith*

The creation of barn quilt trails is currently the largest public arts movement in our country. The first quilt trail was started by Donna Sue Groves, who was originally from West Virginia but moved to Adams County, Ohio. Donna promised her mother that she would paint a quilt square on an ugly tobacco barn on the property they shared. The promise would not be fulfilled until several years later in January 2001.

With the encouragement of a friend and an offer of help, Donna was filled with enthusiasm for the project. She felt that they should invite others in their county to paint quilts and create a driving tour of the quilts. They formed a committee, received enough funding and painted 20 barn quilts including Donna's quilt for her mother. The project reveals Donna's deep love of Appalachia, her rich heritage, her love for art and the desire to honor her mother. Donna hoped to preserve the stories about those that built the barns and the family farm by



placing an importance of the quilts in the families and the stories that go along with them. Reflecting on these stories will help us to understand the strength, energy, focus, dedication and hardship that our foremothers and forefathers experienced so we could be where we are today.

Barn quilts are now spread across the nation in more than 30 states, as well as Canada. Additional colorful quilts continue to be added to old barns and buildings across our country to add beauty and history to our countryside. Barn quilts have

economic potential, bring communities together and add culture to the area.

## West Virginia Quilt Trails

*By Ethan Cade and Zane Smith*

Since Ohio is our neighboring state, the idea of barn quilts quickly spread into West Virginia, where it found a healthy foothold amid our state's love and appreciation of cultural tradition. Currently, there are ten counties with



quilt trails: Clay, Doddridge, Hampshire, Lincoln, Roane, Monroe, Pocahontas, Mason, Putnam and Wayne. Each quilt trail is unique; some with features that go the extra step into today's modern times to connect with visitors.

Mason County is home to West Virginia's first quilt trail having been founded in 2004. It boasts five different quilt trails, each having its own theme. Monroe County's quilt trail is of equal historical relevance but with a modern twist: the trail is enhanced with modern technology that enables visitors to obtain quilt trail information through a smartphone application.

Quilt trails also vary in size and barn quilt placements: Monroe County has more than 60 quilts on its trail, Roane County has 37 and Wayne County has 25 and counting. The quilt trail in Old Central City is unique in the fact that the quilt blocks appear on the buildings of Huntington in Cabell County instead of barns. In Pocahontas County, the quilt squares selected for the 2013 Sesquicentennial-themed trail have designs painted with Civil War history.

As the youngest thus far, the nationally recognized Wayne County 4-H Heritage Quilt began as a community service project. These quilt trails



illustrate the versatility and potential to commemorate West Virginia's history and cultural characteristics and differences through efforts of community members.

## How to Develop a Quilt Trail

*By Zoe Harold and Zara Harold*

Developing a quilt trail requires time and research. The research may include resources, such as books and the internet, as well as personal contacts with experience in barn quilts and quilt trail.

Suzi Parron, co-author of the *Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement*, was a tremendous



asset in providing the inspiration and direction for the quilt trail in Wayne County. Parron's input came in the form of questions and suggestions, such as:

- What direction will your trail take – utilize pre-existing barn/building quilts, create new ones or develop both?
- What patterns will the quilts have – traditional or custom designs?
- How will you market the quilt trail – word of mouth, brochures or traditional and social media outlets?
- How will you financially support the trail – via commissions or grants?
- What will your budget look like for one barn, building quilt or the entire project?
- What paperwork will be required for someone to join your trail?

In addition to the book mentioned above, the internet has several resources that are useful for towns, communities or counties interested in starting a quilt trail.

## Constructing and Painting a Barn Quilt

*By Collin Dodgion and Lucas Dodgion*

To construct a barn quilt one needs a variety of materials and tools. The required materials include:

- treated ½-foot plywood
- 2-by-4s
- screws
- lag bolts for an 8-by-8
- wood filler
- glue
- sandpaper

The tools include:

- drill
- sander
- putty knives
- chop saw
- table saw
- Kreg Jig®

The first step in constructing a barn quilt involves cutting three of the 2-by-4s with 45 degree angles for the sides and top of the frame. Next, cut two



2-by-4s for the mid and lower cross supports. Use the Kreg Jig® to drill the holes in the frame pieces. It is important to secure the frame pieces using 2½-inch Kreg Blue-Kote™ screws.

Next, sand the frame and prepare it for the face of the block. Cut the plywood (if making a 4-by-4 block) and glue and screw it onto the 2-by-4 frame. Sand the block and fill the holes with wood filler. Let the filler dry and sand the block smooth.





The next step would involve applying a base coat to your block (preferably two coats of Kilz® primer and three coats of Valspar® exterior gloss paint for the background color).

A few final tips:

- An easy quilt pattern is recommended for those constructing their first barn quilt.
- Colors and placement of the barn quilt are also critical factors. Play with the choice of colors to get the best effect. Furthermore, if your barn quilt will be in direct sunlight, lighter colors are recommended.
- Mark off your pattern using a pencil and fill in with the colors of your choice. It takes approximately three coats of each color.

## Club Activities

Group activities are an easy way to explore the art of barn quilts and quilt trails. Why not plan a trip to a county with a designated quilt trail? Or travel anytime from June 1 through early September to see the Annual Quilts & Wall Hangings Exhibition at the Great Hall in the Cultural Center in Charleston. Quilts also play a central role in many county fairs and festivals, including the State Fair

of West Virginia. One could even consider the idea of starting your own quilt trail in your county or city.

If these ideas do not seem feasible, members could brainstorm and share their favorite quilt block or a favorite quilt they made or received from someone.



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