



“Farmer’s Daughter” quilt block, farm of Richard and Carol Raynor, 29117 Highway 240, Marshall

[MISSOURI ARTS COUNCIL](#) • AUGUST 2012

## The Boonslick’s Patchwork of Roadside “Quilts”

by *Barbara MacRobie*

You will spot them as you drive the back roads around the western end of the Boone’s Lick Trail: weathered, stately barns that sport a new adornment, an 8-foot square of a traditional quilt pattern.

Barns and quilts, two American icons, are coming together across the nation to create works of art, promote agricultural tourism, and celebrate the traditions of American rural life. Says Lisa Higgins, director of the Missouri Arts Council’s Missouri Folk Arts Program, “Barn quilts are like a projection of folk arts up on the big screen.”

In Missouri, the pioneer of the barn quilt movement is the Boonslick Area Tourism Council.

“It’s amazing how it catches on,” said Connie Shay, secretary and treasurer of the Tourism Council and one of the prime movers of the barn quilts of the Boonslick. The Council started the project in 2009 and now has 35 barns in a “necklace” of roads throughout Cooper, Howard, and Saline Counties. “When we started we had just a few. Now we get calls from people all the time—‘how do I get a quilt block?’”

The Boonslick barn quilts are a 100 percent grassroots project by the dozen dedicated volunteers of the Boonslick Area Tourism Council. They do everything: scout out appropriate barns, draw and paint the blocks, and get them installed on the barn walls.

“When we started,” Connie recalled, “we got instructions from an Iowa quilt barn group to build frames of treated lumber and cover them with marine plywood. That sounded well and good. But we immediately discovered they were so heavy that it took six men and two boys to move them. We had to prime them and use oil-based paints. The cost was prohibitive,” she said.



Maryellen McVicker, vice president of the Boonslick Area Tourism Council, with “Wedding Ring” for Mark and Linda Mellor on Highway 5 near Boonville

"We were painting our third one in the workshop area of a sign shop in Marshall when the owner asked us, 'What are you ladies doing?!? Why don't you use the same material I use as a professional sign company? I positively guarantee it will hold up.' Heavy-gauge aluminum and latex paints! It revolutionized the whole process for us. I'm no spring chicken, but I can pick up a four by eight sheet and carry it myself."



Installing "The Trails" for Willie Mae Viertel-Grissum/Karla & Russell Lang at Highway 41 and Springs Road, Lamine

To install the quilt blocks, "we prevail on the goodness of people around," Connie said. "D.C. Tree Company in Marshall and Jim Hackman Electric in Boonville have big boom trucks. We use regular barn screws to put the blocks directly on the barn."

Because one goal of the project is to bring tourism to the area, the Council requires that the barn be visible from a hard surface road. "We don't think tourists are interested in driving down gravel roads, and we do not want anyone trespassing on someone's property. They'd go off in a field and run over some beans."

Sometimes farmers approach the Council and ask for a block. Sometimes the Council spots a barn they'd like and talks with the owner.

"We let them select the block," Connie said. "I'm an avid quilter and I have a book I share with them that has 55,000 patchwork blocks. Or they'll say, 'My grandmother made me a quilt and that's what I want.' In that case, absolutely that's what we go with. We're going to walk away after the quilt block is up, but they're going to wake up every morning and live with it, so it has to be something they really enjoy."

The way that Connie works with the families "to think about which patterns are significant to their lives, their history, and their communities," said Lisa Higgins, "is one of the keys that makes this project so interesting. The Boonslick Area Tourism Council have consciously incorporated folk arts because they have this master quilter as an advisor."

A barn just east of Marshall on Highway 240 (top photo) has a quilt block called 'The Farmer's Daughter.' Carol Raynor, the owner, is an only child, who inherited it from her mother, who was an only daughter. Carol told the *Columbia Missourian* that the barn would be inherited one of her four adult daughters—the fourth generation.

"I grew up when that barn was used for every imaginable thing," she said. "When I was a kid, I stayed in that barn all the time. It was just a wonderful part of my growing up years."

#### Why "Boonslick"?

The Boonslick region takes its name from the salt lick operated by Nathan and Daniel Morgan Boone, sons of famed frontiersman Daniel, in the early 1800s, wrote Maryellen McVicker, vice president of the Boonslick Area Tourism Council, in the council's barn quilt brochure. The Boones produced salt by boiling water from a saltwater spring. They shipped it by keelboat along the Missouri River to St. Louis. "People would say they were going to the Boonslick but they would not necessarily end up at the Salt Lick," Maryellen said. "They used the term to indicate the general direction of heading west along the Missouri."

## Ancient art, new craze

The technique of quilting—sandwiching a layer of batting between a top fabric and a backing, and stitching through all three to keep them together—goes back at least 5,000 years. The earliest evidence is from circa 3400 B.C., on a carved ivory figure of an Egyptian pharaoh in the British Museum; he's wearing what looks like a quilted cape. A Chinese tomb dated about 195 B.C. contained a quilted silk jacket. Medieval European warriors wore quilted padding under their armor.

Though the top layer of a quilt can be a whole sheet of a solid color, what we usually think of as a blanket quilt has a top design. This can be created by embroidery; or appliqué, where pieces of fabric are stitched on the surface of another layer; or piecing, where small bits of fabric are stitched together like a mosaic, often in a geometric pattern. A quilt block is one unit, usually a square, of one pattern. Many squares of the same pattern can be put together to create an entire quilt. This block style of making a quilt top is a distinctively American tradition, and it is reflected in the patchwork designs on most of the Boonslick barns.

Quilting came to the United States with the first European settlers. According to Emporia State University's Center for Great Plains Studies, the first reference to blanket quilts in America is in the household inventory of a 17th-century Massachusetts sea captain. The earliest surviving American quilts are from the 18th century.

Compared with this ancient history, barn quilts are very much the new kids on the block. The first-ever barn quilt was created in Ohio in 2001 by Donna Sue Groves to honor her late mother, a master quilter. But when Suzi Parron wrote her book *Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement*, published this past February by the Ohio University Press, she found 100 trails with more than 3,000 quilt squares in 29 states and two Canadian provinces.



"Santa Fe Wagon Tracks," Robert Thompson, Highway AC, Arrow Rock

A St. Louis-area artist, Karen Parrish, makes barn quilts from exterior grade plywood, framed in cedar, in sizes from 2' x 2' to 8' x 8' like the ones that hang on the Boonslick barns. Though she started her [Heritage Barn Quilts](#) business just this year, she told us she had orders backed up. She has not yet sold any quilt blocks for barns in Missouri, but she has made barn quilts for people in Iowa, Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Many of her creations end up not on rural barns but on homes, fences, sheds, and garages. "People see quilt blocks on barns on the trails, and they decide they want one. People see them on someone's house, and they decide to go drive a trail," she said.

## Burgeoning movement has many benefits

"The barn quilts are definitely making an impact," Lisa Higgins said. "People are now mentioning them to me. I'm hoping that more visits will drive more installations, events, and educational opportunities."

As well as bringing tourists to rural areas, barn quilt trails are helping to draw attention to the unique and beautiful qualities of American barns at a time that these icons of rural life are becoming endangered by neglect as they age, the loss of farmland to urban sprawl, and changes in farm technology and the overall farm economy.

"In the early stages of the project," Lisa remembers, "the Tourism Council drove our staff around and showed us their first squares and the new locations they were thinking about. Because of that, even today when I'm driving for work or pleasure and I see a barn, I find myself thinking, 'That would be a great one for a barn quilt...I wonder if it's still in use...does it still have its original purpose?' To be thinking that way instead of just driving past is a real shift—part of the engaging learning process of the barn quilt project."

Quilt barns are popping up elsewhere in Missouri. The Barn Quilt Trail in Callaway County east of Columbia started in 2009 when author, teacher, and farmer Margot McMillen put a quilt square on her barn at her Terra Bella Farm in Auxvasse. The trail now boasts nine squares, on barns and other buildings such as a restored church that has been repurposed as the headquarters for a vintage seed company.

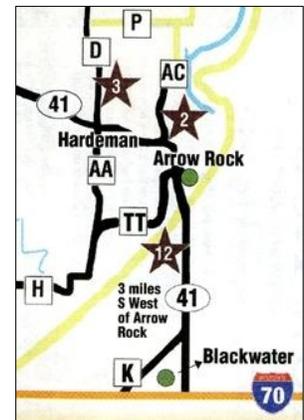
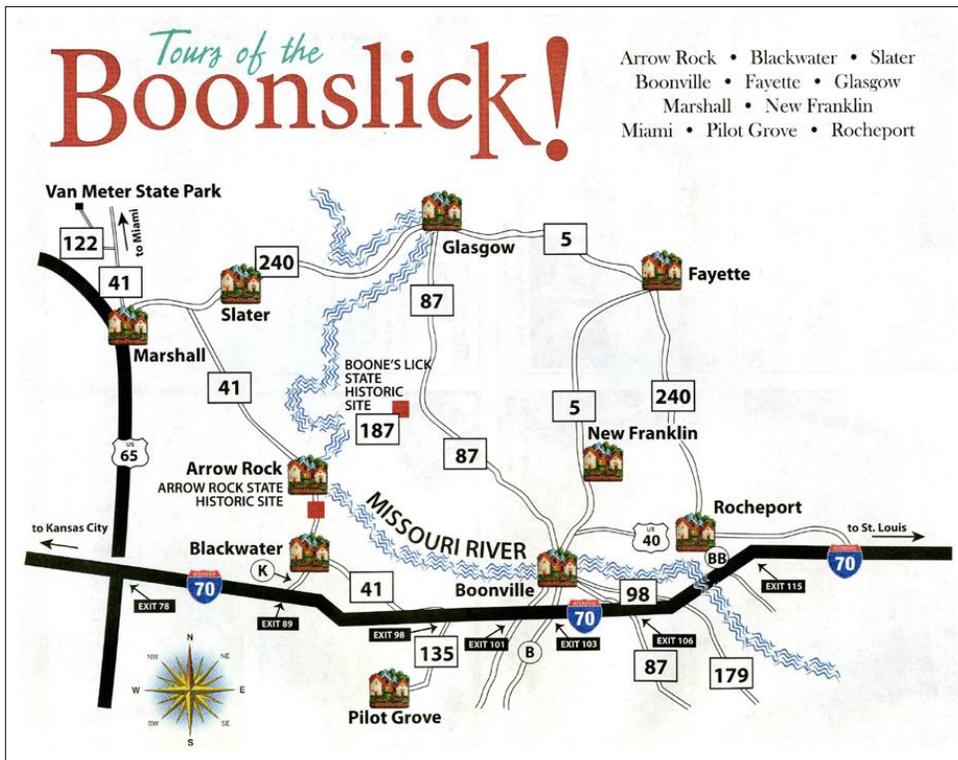
The Boonslick Area Tourism Council is eager both to spread the word—“We’ve got a nice Power Point program we give to quilt guilds all over the state”—and to add more barns in the Boonslick every year.

“We owe a great deal of our success to the Missouri Arts Council,” Connie said. “Some of the people with the barns have made a donation, but without the funding we have obtained, we would not have been able to be as successful as we have.” The program is supported by the Missouri Arts Council through the [Missouri Folk Arts Program](#).

“Barn quilts are about our roots,” said Lisa. “Barns are vernacular architecture. They are built for a purpose, but there are artistic qualities to them as well. Their purpose can change over the years; they can morph into something that’s still functional and aesthetically pleasing. Folklore and folk arts aren’t stagnant—they are dynamic.”

### Learn more about barn quilts

- [Barn Quilt Info](#) – The website of Suzi Parron, author of *Barn Quilts and the American Quilt Trail Movement*, features a wealth of up-to-date information about barn quilts nationwide, including links to [barn quilts on YouTube](#).
- [Boonslick Area Tourism Council](#) – Detailed information on the Boonslick barn locations and quilt block patterns and barn locations as well as updates on the council’s other projects. The website features four “tour maps”: an overall map of the Boonslick area (below) and three individual maps of Cooper, Howard, and Saline Counties that show the locations of the barn quilts. On the Boonslick area map, click on individual towns for information about their attractions and links to their websites. On the county maps, click on a numbered star to learn about the barn quilt at that location.



Detail of the barn quilt map for Saline County

### Enjoy annual summer folk art events in the Boonslick

- [Fayette Festival of the Arts](#) at Fayette Courthouse Square, first Saturday in August – Annual art show, craft demonstrations, music from Dixieland to light opera, and the Peacemakers Quilting Group Quilt Show.
- [Boonslick Folk Festival](#) at [Boone's Lick State Historic Site](#) (660-837-3330), near Arrow Rock on Highway 187, Labor Day Monday – Created by the Boonslick Area Tourism Council and Missouri State Parks, this annual celebration of what rural Howard County was like in the late 1800s features period crafts and music.

## See Missouri (fabric) quilts

- [Missouri State Quilters Guild](#) – With members from all over the state, this nonprofit group runs an annual fall retreat with classes and workshops at the Lake of the Ozarks.
- [Quilter's Travel Companion](#) – The Missouri section of this website lists quilt shows all over the state. The site is created by Chalet Publishing, the brainchild of quilter Audrey Swales Anderson of Colorado Springs, who prints an annual guide to quilting resources in North America.
- [QuiltGuilds.com](#) – This guide to quilt shows and quilt guilds worldwide, with information supplied by the local guilds themselves, includes a Missouri section.

## Save old barns

According to a 2007 survey by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Missouri ranks second only to Texas in the number of barns built before 1960—about 36,000. There are several resources in the state and nation dedicated to their preservation.



"Star and Pinwheel," Herbert and Alice Gerke, Highway 35, Pilot Grove

- [The Missouri Barn Alliance and Rural Network](#) (Mo BARN) – A nonprofit group for the preservation, documentation, and re-use of historic barns and farmsteads in our state.
- [Missouri State Historic Preservation Office](#) – Part of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, partnering with Mo BARN to collect information about Missouri historic barns and farmsteads still in existence.
- [Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation](#) – Missouri's statewide grassroots preservation network.
- [National Barn Alliance](#) – Nationwide nonprofit organization coordinating preservation efforts to save historic barns.
- [Old Barns, Mills, Buildings, and Structures of Missouri](#) – A Facebook Group started by Mark Karpinski, whose Mark Karpinski Signature Photography gallery in Branson features Ozark and Western landscape photography. The group, which is open to anyone, is devoted to the historical beauty of old rural Missouri structures, and has posted many photos of Missouri barns.

*All photos are courtesy of the Boonslick Area Tourism Council.*

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