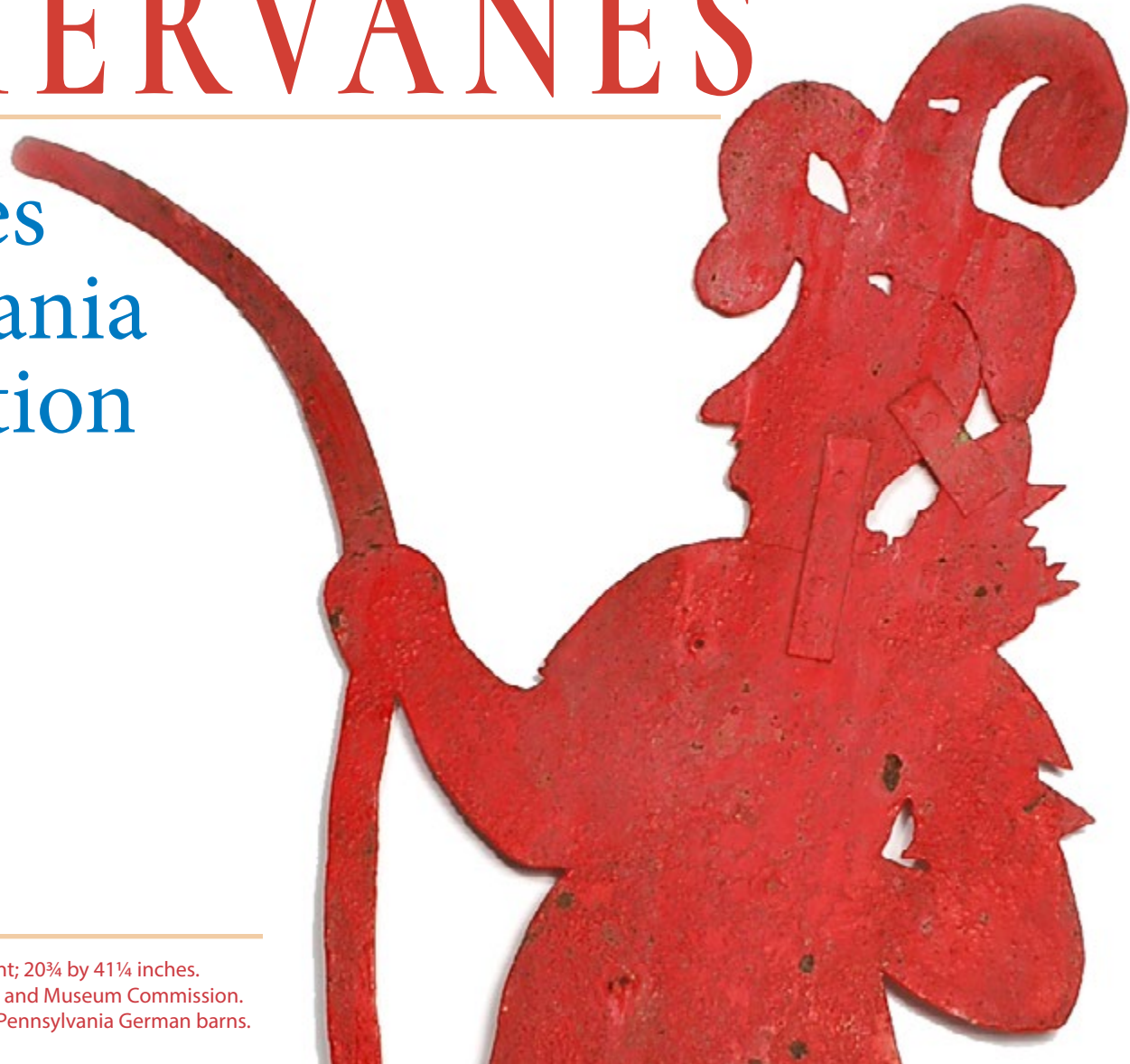


WEATHERVANES

Three Centuries Of A Pennsylvania Folk Art Tradition

By Laura Beach



American Indian weathervane, circa 1880–1900. Sheet iron, paint; 20¾ by 41¼ inches.
Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
Indian weathervanes, considered good luck, were common on Pennsylvania German barns.

LANCASTER, PENN. — Much is known about the commercially manufactured weathervanes of A.L. Jewell & Company, Cushing & White, J. Harris, J.W. Fiske and other late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century makers. As fond as we are of these familiar forms, there is something irresistible about the one-off vanes, quirky and often primitive, that began appearing atop American barns, churches and public buildings soon after Europeans arrived on these shores.

Working with curators Bruce Bomberger and Jennifer Royer, collector, dealer and researcher John Kolar set out to gather 50 weathervanes, most of them unique, with documented histories in southeastern Pennsylvania. Kolar and Royer's findings are gathered in the exhibition "Weathervanes: Three Centuries of a Pennsylvania Folk Art Tradition" at the Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum through December 31 and in a companion catalog accompanying the show. The weathervanes on view are drawn from notable private collections, museums, historical societies, heritage centers, churches, libraries and fire companies. Their survival, often with their history intact, is remarkable.

The Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum began as a private



Fish weathervane, 1831. Sheet iron, 88 by 20½ inches. Lebanon County Historical Society. This massive weathervane topped the bell tower of the Tabor Reformed Church, today the Tabor United Church of Christ, in Lebanon County, Penn.



Fireman's Speaking Trumpet weathervane, Nineteenth Century. Sheet iron, paint; 8½ by 34½ inches. Mercer Museum. Speaking trumpets were used by fire chiefs and engineers to communicate over the commotion of a fire scene. Presentation speaking trumpets were awarded in honor of service or between fire companies. This vane likely topped a fire company engine house.



concern founded by brothers Henry and George Landis in 1925. The steward of a 100,000-object collection, ranging from fraktur to Conestoga wagons, the museum, now administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, sits on 100 acres in Lancaster. Its mission, says director James Lewars, is to interpret the history and material culture of the surrounding Pennsylvania German community from 1740 to 1940.

Kolar, an Ohio resident who organized “American Engraved Powder Horns” at the Hudson Library & Historical Society in Hudson, Ohio, in 2015 and co-wrote *The Lancaster Long Rifle*, published in 2012 to accompany an exhibit of the same name for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, said the weathervane project began in 2014 with a discussion among Lewars, Bomberger, Royer and himself.

“No one had done a comprehensive exhibit of this kind. Fortunately, we had many documented weathervanes to

Cow or steer weathervane, Nineteenth Century. Sheet iron, paint; 23½ by 19 inches. Mercer Museum. Weathervanes often celebrated the professions of their owners; in this case most likely a farmer.

choose from. For instance, we knew of the great 1699 banner vane from the Philadelphia History Museum at the Atwater Kent and of important early vanes at the Mercer Museum.” Initialed WP, SC and CP for partners William Penn, Samuel Carpenter and Caleb Pusey, the wrought sheet-iron example, on loan to the show, once topped a gristmill in Chester Creek, south of Philadelphia.

The team vetted their choices carefully, at times referring to published research by conservator Jennifer Mass and the collector and dealer Julie Lindberg. Kolar, a mechanical engineer with a master’s degree in business administration, says, “Without detailed analysis of the paint and the physical structure it can be hard to tell a weathervane’s age. We had examples we knew were old because they were donated to institutions over a century ago. Some of these vanes have been painted or gilded half a dozen times in their lifetime, and had repairs, too. We hope to do paint analysis on some of these vanes.”

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Blacksmith and Horseshoer weathervane, Nineteenth Century. Sheet iron, 28½ by 33 inches. This vane was a sign for W. Gerfin’s blacksmith shop in Petersburg, Penn. Landis Valley Village and Farm Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

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