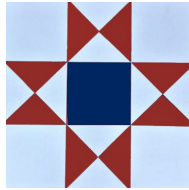


Ohio Star History

The pattern for the Ohio Star is believed to have been around since the early 1800's, and some believe it was invented in 1815. But according to [Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society](#), stars very similar were used in Martha Washington's quilt where she added a pinwheel as the center square and Dolly Madison used an Ohio Star both well before 1815.



A nine-patch block made of quarter-square triangles around a central square, the Ohio Star block is a lovely quilt block that was known by many names, depending on geographic location or time period. There are numerous Ohio Star quilt block pattern variations, and each time something is done to the Ohio Star someone gives it a new name. Variations include tilting the star, adding blocks to the corners, using a diamond or other shapes within the center square or infinite color combinations. Variations of the names include Variable Star, Eastern Star, Western Star, Texas Star and Missouri Star. But they are all basically the Ohio Star.

The multi-color variation was known as *Variable Star* in the East, and in the West during the mid-1800s when the annexation of Texas was a political issue it became known as *Lone Star*, and *Texas Star*.

Also popular with Amish quilters, the Ohio Star was frequently used as a main block within a quilt. It was also a popular border design of smaller blocks around a large center star or quilted design in a Medallion quilt.

This block was also known by the political slogan *Tippecanoe and Tyler Too*, after the 1840 presidential campaign slogan of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler. Harrison had become known for his role in the 1811 battle against the Shawnee and Winnebago Native Americans at Tippecanoe, so during the campaigning of 1839 and 1840, which was the first in American history with slogans and songs, "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" was the popular slogan associated with Harrison and Tyler.

Unfortunately, the story surfacing only as recently as 1999 that secret symbols woven into quilts to guide runaway slaves to the north has been found to be a myth.

Quilting historian Barbara Brackman shares the following story based upon facts... "The Ohio Star reminds us of the town of Oberlin and Mary Leary Langston. During the first year of the War, Union troops began marching to a tune that remains an American tradition. It begins, "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, "repeated three times, and then "His soul is marching on!" The chorus:

"Glory, glory, hallelujah! Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah! His soul is marching on!"

John Brown was hung in Virginia in 1859 for attempting to take over a Federal arsenal in Harper's Ferry. His antislavery obsession made him a hero and the song increased his renown. Arguments continue today as to whether he was a martyr or a terrorist, but few remember the others who died in this raid on Harpers Ferry.

Brown recruited two antislavery soldiers in Oberlin, Ohio. The town was an oasis of free thinking, founded in the 1830s by reformers who opened a college to women and African-Americans, a radical admissions policy at the time. Oberlin attracted fugitive slaves and free-born black families seeking educational opportunities. The Pattersons, the Learys and the Langstons were among the free blacks who moved there from the South to take advantage of the college and its preparatory school. Brown knew many Oberlin men had a commitment to the antislavery cause.

Charles Langston, one of the town's leading black men, refused to accompany Brown, realizing they needed many more men to carry out their audacious scheme. Ignoring his wisdom, two young men agreed to rendezvous for the attack on Harper's Ferry. One was Lewis Sheridan Leary who left wife Mary Patterson Leary at home with a new baby, telling her he was traveling on business.

Charles Langston was right. The U.S. Army easily defeated Brown's tiny band within hours of their assault on the arsenal. With bullets flying around him Sheridan Leary jumped into the Shenandoah River but took several shots. Nineteenth-century historians John Warner Barber and Henry Howe told of his death:

"A wretch, mortally wounded, was dragged from the river by citizens, and laid upon the bank shivering with cold and loss of blood. He begged to be taken to a fire, promising to confess everything. The bystanders carried him to an old cooper's shop hardby, where a hasty blaze was kindled... He entreated someone to write to [his family] and inform them of the manner of his death...After lingering in great agony for 12 hours he died."

Mary later told her grandson that a few weeks after she heard of her husband's death his bullet-torn shawl returned to her. That grandson, poet Langston Hughes, remembered sleeping under the tan plaid shawl as a boy and treasuring it all his life. (It's now in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society.)

Mary spent the war years living with her parents in Oberlin, working as a milliner, and raising Louisa Sheridan Leary. After the war she married Charles Langston and moved to Kansas where a son and a daughter were born.

Charles Langston had been wealthy in the years before the Civil War but spent his slaveholding family's legacy on the abolition movement. At his death he left Mary with little. Grandson Langston pictured Mary as a poor, proud woman--too proud to ask Charles's rich relatives for help. She might have sought assistance from the graying abolitionists who revered the memories of Sheridan Leary and Charles Langston but she made do in one of the few occupations open to a widow. She took in boarders.

Langston remembered Mary sitting in her rocker holding him in her lap and telling him tales in which, "life moved heroically toward an end ...Nobody ever cried in my grandmother's stories. They worked, or schemed, or fought. But no crying."

An Ohio Star quilt was reproduced in her honor, and is now in the International Quilt Museum to honor those left behind by soldiers who met their demise during the Civil War. The Ohio Star quilt reminds many of John Brown, Lewis Sheridan Leary, and others who sacrificed their life in an attempt to make our country a place where everyone could live without fear." We still pursue that dream.

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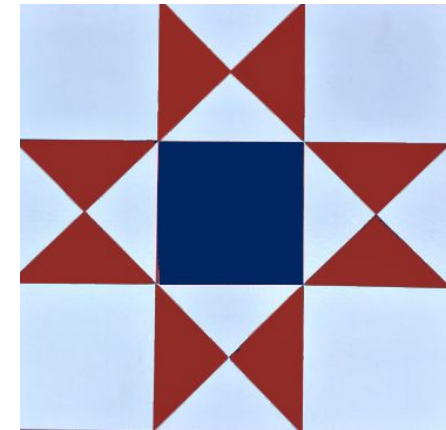
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Ohio Star Quilt Blocks
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The Ohio Star Quilt Block

*"Perhaps the mission of an artist is to
interpret beauty to people - the beauty
within themselves."*

Langston Hughes