

## Blue Mountain Renaissance Man

Pat Garrett gains notoriety as singer, songwriter, businessman and entrepreneur

by Stephanie Kalina-Metzger

**I**f you've traveled down Interstate 78 through the Blue Mountains of southeastern Pennsylvania, then you have surely seen the billboards advertising Pat Garrett and his sheepskin products and western wear. Just who is this man with a larger-than-life presence on a major stretch of highway?

I set off to find out, following the signs to his base of operations, Pat Garrett's Sheepskin Outlet, in Strausstown, Berks County. Upon entering the store, I am greeted by friendly staff members who quickly summon "Mr. G," as they affectionately call him, by phone. Within a few minutes, I am face to face with Garrett wearing his signature sheepskin vest and cowboy hat and looking as if he stepped right off one of his billboards.

He leads me through a maze of rooms to his cluttered office where I learn a little about this industrious man, who has become a singer, songwriter, businessman, craftsman and entrepreneur, all rolled up into one big Pennsylvania package.

### **Musician to Mechanic to Sheepskin Salesman**

**Born Patrick Henry Sickafus in Lebanon County,** Garrett graduated from Kutztown University and worked as an art teacher for about one year before he realized that teaching wasn't for him. A singer and guitar player, he decided to run the family-owned gas station while performing on nights and weekends in bands at college parties and area clubs.

Garrett explains that he stumbled into the sheepskin business while changing a tire on a customer's car one frosty morning. The woman who owned the car was inside the gas station keeping warm when she noticed the pile of sheepskins that local sheepskin vendor Ed Stambaugh had persuaded Garrett to display and sell. She ended up leaving with the whole pile of hides.

"I charged her \$1.25 for changing the tire and \$5 for the skins," Garrett says, laughing. "In a flash, I realized that selling sheepskin would be a lot easier than changing tires and painting cars."

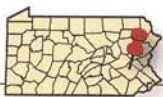
He quickly went from selling hides to creating and marketing a full range of leather and sheepskin products. But Garrett had always enjoyed singing and performing, and having already recorded a few albums and written dozens of songs, he decided to move to Nashville to pursue music in earnest. He soon was signed by Polygram Records and achieved success with six Billboard-charted songs, including "Jumpin' John," "I Want a Sexy Ol' Lady" and "Cruisin'."

After five years in Nashville, Garrett returned to Strausstown, where he decided to bring Nashville back to Pennsylvania with

**While his sheepskin outlet along I-78 is well known, Pat Garrett (second from right below) has been involved in singing and performing for 20 years. He recently recorded *CountryVersial Tunes* and taped a music video in Oley for his song *Wild Hog*.**



SUZY DALTON



him by opening the Pat Garrett Amphitheater in 1994. This open-air theater that held about 5,000 fans has hosted a number of famous entertainers over the years, including Johnny Cash, the Oak Ridge Boys, Charlie Daniels, Loretta Lynn, Tanya Tucker, George Jones, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard. Although the amphitheater is currently closed, Garrett doesn't rule out the possibility of reopening it in the future.

## Musician and Songwriter

Meanwhile, he continues to operate his sheepskin business, overseeing the manufacturing and selling of coats, slippers, boots, vests, hats, and auto and motorcycle seat covers from start to finish. On any given day, a staff of 10 employees are hard at work stamping leather into dies on huge, aged machines they call "clickers," or at sewing machines crafting slippers.

Always the entrepreneur, Garrett purchased a restaurant, motel and roadhouse, all within a stone's throw of his house. The Pat Garrett Roadhouse held its own acclaim as the site where country music singer Taylor Swift, a Berks County native, started on the road to stardom. During one of the karaoke contests held by Garrett, an 11-year-old Swift won an opportunity to sing with his band.

When her father approached him for advice on breaking into the music industry, Garrett says he told him, "In Detroit they make cars, in Hershey they make bars, and in Nashville they make stars." Not long afterwards, Garrett says, Swift's father showed up to announce that they were moving to Nashville, where she quickly became one of country music's top stars.

Today, when he's not at the sheepskin shop, Garrett performs with his five-piece band and hones his craft as a prolific songwriter. His songs have been covered by artists as diverse as polka king Jimmy Sturr, comedian Charlie Prose, Grammy award-winning songwriter Hoyte Axton and the United Kingdom's punk rock group the Arctic Monkeys.

Most recently he gained notoriety for writing a tribute song, "Moose Shootin' Mama," to Sarah Palin during the 2008 presidential campaign. After the then-governor of Alaska heard the song, he ended up on the campaign trail with the vice presidential hopeful. "It was a great ride . . . until November 4," Garrett likes to say.

Not one to worry about political correctness, Garrett has released his most recent CD, *Country Versial Times*, featuring this song. He and his band, including his wife and cowriter Suzy Dalton who plays bass and sings, will soon be releasing a new tune called "The Tea Party Song." ♦

— Stephanie Kalina-Metzger  
writes from Camp Hill.

## When You Go

Pat Garrett's Sheepskin Outlet is located off exit 19 of Interstate 78 in Strausstown, Berks County. It is open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday. For more information, go to [sheepcoat.com](http://sheepcoat.com).

Garrett performs regularly with his band as part of the Pat Garrett Country Jubilee musical variety show and at other venues. For more information, visit [patgarrett.com](http://patgarrett.com).

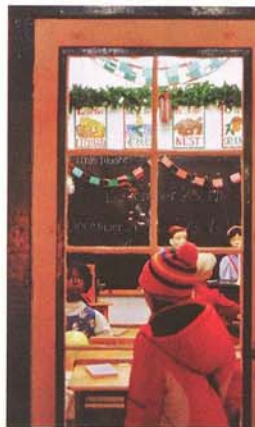
# A Super-Sized Christmas Display

For 62 years, Koziars' Christmas Village has been making it bigger and brighter

by Rebecca VanderMeulen

**I**n 1948, Bill and Grace Koziar decided to adorn their stone farmhouse with what was an unusual outdoor decoration at the time—Christmas lights.

"My dad and mom started by doing the windows and the porch, and every year they just added more," says daughter Sonia Koziar.



As the number of lights strung on the house and barn at the Koziars' dairy farm near Bernville, Berks County, increased, so did the visitors who came to look, tramping through the family's fields to have a closer view.

As the years passed, Bill turned a field into a parking lot so visitors would stop blocking the road. Intricate displays of holiday scenes took over chicken coops and equipment sheds. The couple and their four children—Beverly, Billy, June and Sonia—

began to charge admission of one dollar per car.

"I think my father was surprised that it grew so big so fast," says Sonia.

What began as a simple holiday decoration eventually turned into a year-round job for the family. Today, visitors to the seasonal display at the Koziars' Christmas Village see a panorama of more than half a million lights as they crest the hill on Christmas Village Road.

Street signs labeled with such names as Snowdrift Drive and Holly Wreath Lane guide visitors past wooden cutouts of cartoon characters in seasonal attire. Holiday tunes play over the speakers, and shops along the path through the village offer toys, hot chocolate and a chance to visit with Santa Claus. Even the walls in the women's restroom are decorated with fake Christmas trees covered with bows and beads.

## Recalling Christmas Past

For Sonia and her two sisters, who now operate the property, the personal touch behind the displays is most important. For example, on the porch of the old family home, an eternal Christmas dinner is set with their mother's china, and the fire truck and airplane next to the tree were once presents for the Koziar children.

"So many people say how the village brings back childhood memories," Sonia explains. "They recall having a sled or a doll like the ones on display."