“Butterworth New”

Although I limit my running to various races throughout the U.S. and, locally, to my neighborhood and Sharon Woods park, in April, 2020, thanks to the pandemic closing the real race, I ran a virtual half marathon, far, far away from its scheduled venue in Toledo. Two friends and I started in downtown Loveland and headed west on the Loveland bike trail – the same location where the railroad was built in 1843 – towards the Peters Cartridge Factory, about six and a half miles away. Then we returned down the bike trail, finishing the 13.1 mile race where we started in downtown Loveland. Both times we passed a lovely old barn composition – a white barn sitting on a ridge above a corn field and next to an old stone farmhouse. I was intrigued.

One of my friends, who had run on this trail for decades, explained that the family had donated land for a Girl Scout camp, though he didn’t know much about the barn. I made a mental note to return.

Later in the summer I did return and this time I read the Ohio historical marker, leading me to do some research on the Butterworth family and their picturesque old barn. Online, I found a link to Dr. Karen Dinsmore, who spearheaded the marker, and chatted with her about the possibility of me making a visit. She told me that owners Phil and Gretchen Stone would probably allow me to look inside the barn. I assembled notes from Internet sources and called a number that Karen gave me, hoping to schedule a visit. But no response.

A few months later, when on a run on the trail, I met a runner, a fellow author and historian, and asked him about the Butterworth barn. Though a resident of Maineville, he didn’t know much about it. Regardless – and despite having lost (well, maybe misplaced) my notes and contact information, we stopped in to see this hillside farmstead, after a run in early December.

I felt safer with Pete, as my fellow explorer, since one never knows when one will face a shotgun or big, vicious dog. Fortunately we encountered neither, parked our cars, his nearer the top of the hill and mine in front of the stone house. While Pete surveyed his area, I knocked on the door of this 200-year-old fortress, as solid now as when it was built in 1820. No answer. But when Pete told me that there was a car in the driveway further up the hill, we returned, knocked on the door a few times until finally an older fellow opened the door. This was Armand Re.

While we chatted, I glanced up at several old hand-hewn beams protruding from the wall of the barn, now converted to a residence. *Old, old beams mean it’s an old, old barn*, I thought. Discovering this barn, of course, was completely unexpected, and, as such, a delightful surprise – since the chicken barn, near the farmhouse, was the composition that drew me here. Armand told us a bit about the barn – he owned five acres of the property – and explained that it would be better if we visited later. Since he said he had old photos of the original barn – before restoration – I agreed to return. Pete, wanting to do more running and sensing the scene was safe, left. I returned to the farmhouse and knocked again.

This time I met Phil Stone and his wife Gretchen, a seventh generation Butterworth descendant. As we sat on this porch – on a pleasantly crisp December morning – I explained what I do and how the painting might go into a fundraiser for the Warren County Historical Society later next year, once the pandemic subsides. Then it was my turn to learn about them.

Though both went to college in Minnesota – Gretchen was in medical school at the University of Minnesota and Phil attended a small private college in St. Paul –

they hailed from different backgrounds. Phil’s family has roots that trace back to early 19th century California and Gretchen is from the Ohio Butterworths. Phil, an educator, and Gretchen, a family practice physician, met in California’s Monterey Peninsula, fell in love, married, and raised three children.

Phil gave me the largest geneaology chart I’ve ever seen – seven generations of over 200 descendants of Clarkson (Rachel) Butterworth. He also gave me the booklet printed for the 2015 dedication ceremony of the Ohio historical marker, which listed dates of the births and deaths of Benjamin, his wife Rachel, and their 11 children (Isaac died in 1801, before their move to Ohio).

I returned the next weekend for a tour of the chicken barn, built into a bank but on a fairly level plateau overlooking the harvested corn field and the bike trail, the scene that inspired me months ago. Before we inspected the barn, Phil showed me the stone spring house as well as a few other springs in the hillside, one of which flowed under the barn. Cleverly, since the Peters Cartridge Factory, located a few miles up the Little Miami River, had polluted the water, the Butterworths used one of the natural springs to feed a large swimming pool, which today remains filled to the brim. No EPA in those days.

Gretchen told me that her great-grandfather, Eugene Hiawatha Foster, principal of the Terrace Park high school, owned the farm in the 1920s when this barn was built, apparently to augment the family chicken production, which had to involve thousands of birds. Eventually her fifth cousin, Harrison Butterworth, purchased the farm to keep it in the family. While he lived in Vermont and rented out the house and fields, the buildings suffered from lack of maintenance. In 1985 Gretchen and her brother, Paul Neumann, seventh generation descendants, purchased the old stone house. They lease 52 arable acres to a farmer, who raises corn and soybeans.

The chicken barn, despite the hillside spring, is in good shape, thanks to a metal roof and intact lightning rods. And, with a barrier of nearby tall trees, it’s protected from high winds, often a problem for old barns. Phil, a historical preservationist as well, told me that the barn is his work in progress and he plans to continue to maintain it. These days, with no chickens to house, the barn provides room for a truck and for storage of equipment. Although its paint has weathered – giving it a charming, rustic flavor – its sawcut beams still hold strong and the hand-laid stones on the bank are another memory of the early barn builders. Phil also gave me some wood planks for framing the painting, which will remember this barn, the Butterworths, and, of course, its former residents, plenty of chickens.