“A Stagecoach Stops Here”

As barn scout Heather pulled into the driveway, directly off State Route 44, she didn’t reveal much about the surprise we were about to have. And, although the owners Chris and Tom Hopes were welcoming and anxious to show us their large bank barn, the farmhouse stole the show.

 Built in 1817 – and now over 200 years old – the structure was constructed as a tavern, The Farmer’s Inn, which became a popular stop on the stagecoach route along this dirt road between Ravenna and Painesville. In 1832 Lathop Reed left Connecticut and moved to this area as many of his neighbors did in the early 1800s. In fact in 1795, the Connecticut Land Company, a land speculation corporation made up of 57 of the most prominent men in Connecticut bought three million acres in the northeastern tip of the Ohio Country, known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. Like many postwar land speculators, the investors planned to make large profits by selling lots to settlers. However, unlike many who failed in this risky business – including Robert Morris, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the financial genius behind the American Revolution – the Connecticut company succeeded. One of their shareholders, Moses Cleaveland, founded a settlement on the banks of the Cuyahoga River, which eventually became the city of Cleveland.

 Lathop Reed bought the Farmer’s Inn, married the previous owner’s daughter, and remodeled the inn into their house. He began dairy farming. Later, the Hinman family took over the farm. Harlan Hinman was born in the farmhouse in 1864 as was his son, Ralph, in 1899. Though he graduated from Ohio State in 1923, he remained on the farm and increased the herd from 20 to 75 dairy cows. He began bottling milk, sold it in Ravenna, and met his future wife Ruth on his milk route.

 After purchasing the house in 2005 and during their rehab, the new owners found a burlap bag wrapped around a hot water pipe, not stuffed with money but full of milk bottle caps and cardboard discs for sealing glass bottles. Each was stamped with Harlan Dale Farms and traced back to the years of the Great Depression when Ralph Hinman ran this large dairy operation, apparently successful when many businesses failed during these bleak years. Their daughter Betty, the fifth generation of family ownership, sold the property to Norman Webb in 1996.

 When Chris and Tom Hopes bought the 26-acre farm in 2005, they knew that the farmhouse needed new electric and new plumbing, but they also knew that the barn would serve their horses well. Today seven of them stay inside the barn, while 19 beef cattle remain outside. Having a small farm and a farmhouse that once served as a stagecoach inn was probably enough for these two history buffs, also Civil War re-enactors, but more excitement laid ahead.

 Around 2007 the cable show, HGTV, placed an ad in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, looking for historic houses, especially ones with good stories. Chris and Tom replied, Betty Hinman Kennedy returned, and the crews began filming in 2007. The house was featured on the show, *If Walls Could Talk*, in 2008.

 Today Chris and Tom have taken good care of the home and the barn – along with the original milk house – and are happy that they decided to save the structures, even though it meant extensive repairs. No longer do enslaved people stay here as they once did on the Underground Railroad and no longer do 75 dairy cows graze the pastures, returning to the barn for milking twice a day. And, no longer do proprietors operate The Farmer’s Inn, where, two hundred years ago on this dirt trail and long before the age of the motor car, a stagecoach stopped here with its weary and thirsty travelers. Tom and Chris treasure the memories.