“Grandeur in Ghent”

This octagonal bee house (theoretically, it should be called a bee barn since it houses agricultural stock and farm products) is located in Ghent in Bath Township, one of nine townships in Summit County. The unincorporated community was founded in 1815 and, at the time, several mills existed here along the Yellow Creek. It was named, most likely, after Ghent, Belgium, whose roots trace back much earlier – to 630 AD when St. Amandus built an abbey at the confluence of two rivers.

A year before the Ohio community chose its name, officials from Great Britain and the young United States signed convened at this city in Belgium and signed the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812 and established peace between the two countries. Great Britain relinquished claims to the Northwest Territory and both countries pledged to end the slave trade, which, despite lame political rhetoric, continued to flourish until the Civil War. A few months before the treaty was signed, Fort McHenry, located in Baltimore’s harbor, successfully withstood a frightful 25-hour British bombardment and inspired a local lawyer, Francis Scott Key, to write a song, which was eventually named “Star-Spangled Banner,” and officially became the national anthem in 1931. Ironically, though he ended the song with the words, “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” Key was a slave owner.

Ohio, on the other hand was a free state and many trails led through the state on the Underground Railroad, including several through this area, used by runaway slaves on their way to Canada – long before this bee house was built.

Barn scout Leianne told me about it as we visited the Ghent Bake Shop, owned by Nancy Fay, who also owns a historic barn that we saw on our tour. Her sister Maryann owns the bee house and allowed us to take a look. Though I’ve seen and written about many round barns, which were touted by their proponents for several reasons, I can’t imagine why anyone would want to build an octagonal bee house. While it’s true that a polygonal structure offers more space than a rectangular one – with the same outside measurements, is the extra labor worth it? Regardless, it’s in great shape, and, though it no longer houses bees, it still serves as a bit of grandeur in Ghent.