“Caesar’s Freedom”

This is yet another barn tracing to the Spahr family. One must wonder why, in 1749, that Hans Ulrich Spahr left Basil, Switzerland with his wife Margaret Seyler Spahr and 12 children to immigrate to America, then mostly a British colony, though the French and Spanish both had their hooks in the new land. But, like so many Europeans, they might have felt they’d have a better life in the new country.

They settled in Virginia and raised their children, one of whom, Philip Spahr, son of Hans Ulrich Spahr II, got married in 1803 and, after his father died in 1814, moved with his entire family to Greene County, Ohio. Again, why? Perhaps, like many of the early Ohio pioneers, they became disillusioned with slavery, freed their slaves, and moved north. They settled in Greene County and farmed. Phillip Spahr and Mary Shook were the parents of eleven children, one of whom was William Spahr. He was born in 1805 in Hampshire Co., Virginia (now West Virginia), married Sarah Smith in 1828 in Greene County, and died in 1891. William and Sarah are the ones who built this barn – probably in the early 1800s, judging from the barn’s eight-inch hand-hewn beams and the adjacent old brick farm house. Tax records show that the farm house was built in 1850.

Over the years the farm passed through varied families, ending with Jean Stuck-Monger who purchased the farm in 1981 and still owns it. Her daughter Karen married Walter Borda, an attorney, and, together, they converted part of what had become a grain and cattle farm into a vineyard, first planting vines on the farm’s 200 acres in 2005. In 2011 the winery operation began and in 2013 Caesar Creek Vineyard had its first public tasting. Unfortunately Mrs. Borda, Dr. Karen Stuck, could not attend – she passed away in 2008. Walter runs the winery now, though corn and soybeans grow on most of the acreage. Winemaker Tricia Chalfant has already won awards for this new vineyard.

As stewards of history, Karen and Walter, named their enterprise, Caesar Creek Vineyards, after an African slave named Caesar, who had escaped from his masters in Kentucky. Legend has it that the Shawnees adopted him into their tribe in the late 1700s and that he remained with them the rest of his life, fighting with them in many battles against encroaching white settlers. I can imagine the joy that this slave had when, freed from the bondage of slavery, he lived with a people that respected him.

The creek that runs to the south of the vineyard bears Caesar’s name and has long been a dwelling area of Native American tribes. Walter told me that evidence of the “mound builder” tribes exists on the property and along the creek, and an actual axe-head, found on the property while Walter and Karen were digging a retention pond for vine irrigation, has been estimated by anthropologists at The Ohio State University to have an origin of approximately of 5000 BC. Numerous pre-Columbian relics have been found up and down the Caesar Creek watershed over the years. So, it’s fitting that Caesar Creek Vineyards still keeps the memory alive – of that African slave who became a Shawnee warrior – reminding all that races of varied colors can get along.