“Pride of Swarthmore”

When Mary, my barn scout, her son Eric, and I visited Kathryn Kirn, we saw her perched high on a ladder painting her barn white, next to another painter standing on a second ladder. She said she wanted her barn to look good for my photos and painting. Kathryn has a sense of humor.

Spry, thin, and full of life, Kathryn Kirn was happy to see that we found her, busily painting this barn, located about a quarter mile from the main barn and farm house. We had to ford a swollen creek and meander through a meadow, and, apparently passing the outdoor survival test, we finally found her and her contractor. She told us that, in the old days, the farmers used horses and mules to cross this creek. This Ohio Sesquicentennial Farm is loaded with history.

Kathryn’s roots on this farm go back to pre-Civil war days. The Long family built the farmhouse in 1850 and they sold the farm to John Fichthorn in 1867. John was Kathryn’s great, great grandfather. John’s wife was a Clemens, related to Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. In addition to the connection to this well loved writer, Kathryn’s ancestors, the Adams family, are descendants of a cousin of President John Quincy Adams.

The farm passed down through the family to Mary Fichthorn Adams who left the farm to her son and daughter. Since the daughter lived in California, she sold her half to her brother Ivan, who worked in Columbus. That’s where Kathryn, Ivan’s daughter, entered the picture.

Since the family had a Quaker heritage, Kathryn ended up at Swarthmore College in Philadlephia, well-regarded for its academics and founded in 1864 by Quakers who were strong abolitionists. Not only did Kathryn earn a degree here, she also excelled in athletics. She was a three-meter diver. Later, like her parents, she lived in Columbus where she raised her own family. Now in her golden years, she doesn’t dive competitively anymore but she does do ballroom dancing – with partners much younger. The moss doesn’t grow under Kathryn’s feet.

A tornado in 2013 damaged the barn, which has since been repaired. That probably wasn’t the first catastrophe the barn endured. “They built this barn so far away from the farm house because, when the creek ran high, they could still do spring plowing without having to move farm machines across it,” Kathryn told us. It now stores hay.