“The Legacy”

Mary Spahr, my Greene County barn scout, contacted me in the summer of 2016 when she discovered, by pure chance, that an essay of mine about a barn and farm in Highland County had some incorrect information. I won’t go into detail about this – since it’s involved – but it acquainted Mary with my work and prompted her to ask me to paint barns in her county – for a fundraiser. And Mary’s lineage and that of her husband Jim goes back a long way. Mary’s kin trace back to when her ancestors came to Highland County in the late 1700s but Jim’s roots run deep in Greene County, evidenced by the road where they live that bears the Spahr name.

Behind their barn, which I painted, was an even older barn, built by Isaac Taylor around 1840, the year he built his brick farm house. Mary gave me wood from that old barn, now dismantled due to the high winds of 2008, for the painting’s picture frame.

Mary shared with me that an 1881 archive reported that Givens Lackey built their house and their present barn, probably around 1870. This farmer, born in 1826, came to Ohio from Rockbridge County, Virginia, and married Margaret Ann Turnbull in 1855. Jim and Mary now own it.

They raise corn and soybeans on the farm, but, more interesting to me were their sheep, a rare breed called Jacob sheep. These sheep, with their delightfully curved horns, thrive here in Ohio and they’re rugged, sometimes giving birth in cold winters. I also included in the painting the four unique square corn cribs, neatly lined up about 30 yards from the barn.

The Spahr family first came to Greene County in the early 1800s. John Spahr, the great-great grandfather of Jim, built two other barns on Spahr Road, ones that I have painted and will be in the 4-H fundraiser. On the maternal side, Jim’s great grandmother, Delilah Townsley, grew up on Forest Grove Farm on Townsley Road, also in Greene County.

But, despite this impressive ancestry, the star of the show was “Honky,” the Spahr’s Buff goose, who patiently posed for me while I took his photo. While I usually include a few chickens in my barn paintings, I decided that they didn’t merit sharing the spotlight with Honky. Even a goose with a blind eye deserves a day in the sun.