“Kindleberger New”

To drive the narrow, winding roads of Monroe County is like riding a roller coaster. There’s nothing flat about it. They call this part of Ohio “Little Switzerland” and the school district is officially – The Switzerland of Ohio Local School District. From an artist’s perspective, this lively terrain isn’t boring, especially compared to flat topography: a beautiful scene pops up nearly everywhere. And one of those scenes is at the farm of Marjorie and Gary Baumberger. I call it “Kindelberger New,” as opposed to “Kindelberger Old,” which was the original barn built by these Ohio pioneers.

Barns and farms that pass from one or two generations are fairly common, but one that has passed to the fifth generation – Marge – qualifies as unique. In fact, I met their daughter Beverly who may own this farm someday. But let’s go back to the beginning.

The Kindelberger family emigrated here from Bavaria, as many Germans and Swiss did in that era. In fact, this is now called Switzerland Township. When he arrived in 1846, the patriarch, Frederick Kindelberger, paid $950 for a farm from John Lapp who was the original pioneer, starting the farm in 1831. This deed, recorded in the Marietta land office, Ohio’s first, was signed by President Andrew Jackson – the presidential signature was required for all land deeds in those years.

Frederick was a stone mason and used his skills to build the “old” barn’s (1855 is etched inside the barn) stone foundation – the rest of the barn is wooden – and a log cabin. They farmed the land and eventually acquired 200 acres. His son, Frederick, Jr., was 11 years old when they arrived and “junior” learned stone work from his father. He bought the farm from his father for $2,400 in 1872. And these Kindelbergers must have been productive farmers since Frederick, Jr., decided to build a stone house in 1872 and another barn, a larger one, also in stone, in 1883. And what grand buildings these are!

In 1872, “junior” was 37 and had a family of his own that needed a larger home, which he built in stone – high on a hill above where his barn sits. He insulated the tin roof with sawdust and he used sand under the floor, making it soundproof, warmer in winter, and nearly fireproof. Clever.

When he started building the barn in 1883, “junior” had enough foresight to use stone from top to bottom, realizing that weather and wind aren’t kind to wood. He wanted his to last, not fall apart in 50 years. He quarried huge blocks of sandstone from a hillside on their property and hauled these huge pieces – via horse and wagon – about a quarter of mile to the building site. That in itself was an accomplishment. Two Kindelberger teenagers, William and his sister Mary, did most of the hauling.

The next phase was to choose a solid foundation, one that wouldn’t allow the barn to tilt or sink over the years. That required engineering knowledge. Frederick chose a site of solid flint rock, 65-feet thick, and wide enough to support the structure. The barn hasn’t budged and, barring a massive earthquake, it should stay put for centuries to come.

He hired stonemasons and used his own masonry skills to shape each piece to fit exactly. These blocks, four to seven feet long, are 25-inches thick at the bottom and decrease gradually to the top, where they measure 12-inches wide. This gradual tapering required the use of an off-square guide to give each stone the proper shape. The stones, 150 years later, look as if they were placed yesterday. Yes, “junior” was light-years ahead of his time.

The third part of this process was to place the heavy sandstone blocks into position, each of which weighed hundreds of pounds or more. Now, for the lower levels, that wasn’t too difficult. But how about the higher levels? There are approximately 20 rows of stones in the barn, from top to bottom, stretching about 35-feet high. According to a 1945 newspaper report in *The Spirit of Democracy*, published in Woodsfield, Ohio, the workers used a 40-foot long hickory log as a boom and pulleys to raise the blocks into position. Imagine these men – and teenager Mary, sweating and using every ounce of strength. No modern cranes in those days. Just manual labor and German ingenuity. They finished the house in 1873 and the barn in 1886.

The farm passed to the next generation of Kindelbergers in 1906 when “junior” sold it to his son, William, who, in the 1940s, lived with his daughter and her husband, Marjorie’s grandfather, J.D. Caldwell, who was next in line to buy the farm. J.D. must have been a renaissance man. He had imagination and thirsted for knowledge. A beekeeper and a horticulturalist, he planted walnut trees on the farm in the early 20th century. He developed hybrid corn and raised honey. And, he lived a long time, selling the farm to Marjorie and her husband Gary, whose roots also go back a long way in this county. Gary’s great grandparents owned a home that had the date prominently displayed in the slate roof, commonly done in the late 1800s in eastern Ohio. He grew up a farmer.

One day after they bought the farm in 1976, while rummaging through the barn, they discovered the tools that “junior” and his dad used to cut, shape, and move the sandstone blocks. One of them, a “crandall,” had a long handle with serrated metal teeth on one end and probably weighed ten pounds. As I held it – with some difficulty, I tried to imagine those sturdy stonemasons carefully shaping each piece, being careful not to chisel off too much stone. Scattered on a hillside near the barn are some stone blocks that didn’t cooperate: so they were rejected.

Another fascinating tool was a pair of stone-lifting iron tongs, a device with two curved ends that fit into small holes in each side of a sandstone block. When the tongs locked into the block, a rope, connected to the top end of the tongs, was used to hoist the block in position. That must have been a sight to see. In fact, Kindelberger must have been so impressed with this tool that he etched a figure of it in stone, along with the date of 1884, on the rear of the barn. The date of 1883 is on the front. Yes, this took time to build. He finished it completely in 1886.

Gary took me on a tour of the barn, which could serve as Monroe County’s historical museum: stone working tools, an old wooden sled, an old wooden wagon, and a ladder made from hand-cut wood, all from two centuries ago. Four 45-foot hand-hewn beams, each 12-inches square, support the rafters and roof. The 1945 newspaper article reports how they were assembled, “… the raising of which must have been an engineering feat in itself … [the beams] are said to have been raised two at once, with 60 men using poles under the direction of Frederick Kindelberger, who bossed the job of building the barn.” Wisely, “junior” left rectangular slit openings in between the stone blocks, which allowed air to pass into the barn, providing much-needed ventilation. He also used saw dust to insulate the tin roof; so the barn had “air conditioning” in the summer and a warm roof for wintertime. Gary also showed me a 20-foot brine trough, hand-hewn from a log that these early settlers used to preserve meat by placing it in salted water.

These days Gary and Marjorie still work the farm. After decades of raising dairy cows, they now tend to chickens (a buyer stops by every day to pick up eggs), 40 beef cattle, a dozen dairy goats, and three horses. Gary takes care of the hay business – taking some to the silos and some to the main barn, which sounds simple. But it’s not. On the first day, he cuts the hay. On the next, he picks up the day in a “chopper” that blows it into a wagon, which Gary unhitches and takes to the silo. This continues until the silo is full. But, there’s more hay on the land. So Gary cuts this hay, allows it to cure in the field, rakes it and round bales it, and then hauls it to the barn the same day for storage until winter feeding. Whew! Meanwhile, not to be outdone, Marge drives their ATV back and forth to milk the goats every day. They’re both 74. Hard, physical work keeps them young. Kindelberger farming continues.

In 1980 the National Register of Historic Places listed this unusual barn, an honor it deserves not only because of its unique architecture but also because it has stood the test of time. The Baumbergers were kind to give me original barn wood to frame the painting. And, to add more historical flavor, there’s a fragment of an old cut nail from the wood on the back of the frame. Ohio is lucky to still have this important building, which it will have for many more years to come.