

# Suburban Life

Lorraine McClellan editor/477-5450



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*"Without Henry's drive and enthusiasm as a spur, the family decided it was more important to find people, like the Anhuts, who would keep the Inn in the spirit of my great-grandfather's time."*

— William Clay Ford Jr.

## Botsford Inn marks 150th in grand way

By Bob Sklar  
staff writer

**I**T OPENED IN 1836, when Andrew Jackson was president and Michigan was the West. Today, the Botsford Inn is the oldest continuous lodging facility in the state. A nationally registered historic site, it retains much of its original country flair.

In celebration of the Farmington Hills Inn's 150th birthday, innkeeper John Anhut threw a "grand sesquicentennial anniversary party" Jan. 8. The day coincided with the birthday of Anhut's late father, John Nicholson Anhut, who died in 1977 and who acquired the inn 28 years earlier.

Care was taken to make the black-tie party's bill of fare — an eight-course feast featuring oyster potatoe, fennel-baked cod fillets, root vegetables, French bread twists, roast sirloin of beef, brandy-glazed parsnips, lima beans fermiere, old-fashioned custard and assorted sweetmeats — authentic.

The intent was to make the meal "like one that may well have been served at the Botsford 150 years ago," said master of ceremonies Oscar Frenette, WJR Radio public affairs director. Recipes used date back to the mid-19th century.

Each table's centerpiece was a fresh fruit pyramid, "once the rage for decorating elegant party tables" and "important because it pointed toward heaven, symbolizing something spiritual and lofty," according to the party program. The ivy circling the table candles was once "respected as a magical plant, protected against evil spirits and symbolized fidelity."

**THE NEW Old Stock** — dulcimer, fiddle and banjo equipped — played music of the 1800s.

Guests included Federal Reserve System governor Martha Seger, state Department of Commerce director Douglas Ross, Wayne County Executive William Lucas, Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols, Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, state Sen. Jack Faxon, state Rep. Wilbur Brotherton, Botsford General Hospital president Gerson Cooper and retired Farmington Public Schools superintendent Lewis Schulman. Others included Metropolitan Detroit Convention & Visitors Bureau president William McLaughlin, Auto Club of Michigan president John Avignone, Michigan State Chamber of Commerce executive director James Barrett, University of Detroit President The Rev. Robert Mitchell, Michigan Living magazine editor Len Barnes, Michigan tourism promotions coordinator John Savich, Michigan Restaurant Association president Ruth Mayhall, Anhut

family members and a host of area government, civic and business leaders.

Ralph Lorenz, president of the Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth, Farmington Hills Historical Commission chairwoman Jean Fox and Oakland County restaurateur Harris Machus arrived in a horse-drawn sleigh.

Lorenz donated an ice sculpture of a stagecoach and coachman. Carved by Chicago sculptor James Nadeau, the sculpture stood in the snowy courtyard outside Botsford's coachhouse.

ALSO ON hand was William Clay Ford Jr., representing the Ford family.

His great-grandfather, Henry Ford I, operated the former stagecoach stop from 1924 until his death in 1948. After Henry's wife, Clara, died in 1951, the Anhut family bought the inn from the Ford estate. The Fords later also sold the two other inns Henry had acquired: the Dearborn Inn near the Fairlane Estate and the Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Mass.

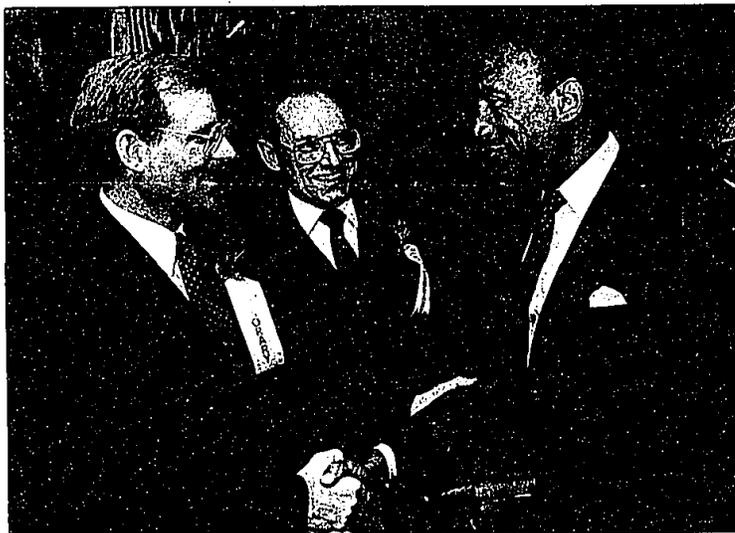
"The Botsford was one of Henry's real loves, and it would have been hard for any other family to duplicate that commitment," said Bill Ford Jr., born 10 years after his famous great-grandfather had died. "The family didn't want to maintain the inn half way. It didn't want to do an injustice to the inn."

Henry, who met his wife at a ballroom dance at the Botsford, bought the inn as a romantic gesture and also to prevent it from demolition during the widening of Grand River. Under his supervision, the inn was moved back 300 feet and scrupulously renovated.

"Without Henry's drive and enthusiasm as a spur, the family decided it was more important to find people, like the Anhuts, who would keep the inn in the spirit of my great-grandfather's time," Bill Ford said.

**HENRY HAD** a great love of Americana. "My family's history and the state's were intertwined, and that was seen in Henry's actions," Bill said. "His development of a village school system at Greenfield Village, his role in reviving square dancing in America and his purchase of the three inns exemplified that. He had a real love for the old American way of life."

While looking to the future, Henry always kept an eye to the past. "His father was a farmer and he enjoyed the agrarian way of life," said Bill, adding, "His innovation probably did more to urbanize the American way of life than anyone. And that's why



At left: Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick (left) and Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman chat with Wayne County Executive William Lucas. Wednesday night's festive sesquicentennial salute, held in the Botsford Inn's coachhouse, included a host of state, county and local dignitaries. Sesquicentennial events are scheduled throughout the year.

he was so passionate about preserving examples of the old way of life."

Anhut pointed to a major challenge he has faced during ownership of the inn: protecting a slice of Americana while trying to make his family's investment profitable.

Many of the furniture pieces at the Botsford were brought from Henry Ford's Fairlane Estate. "Most of the antiques didn't go over to Greenfield Village after Henry died. They stayed right here," said Jean Fox, whose 150-picture, 186-page book, "More Than a Tavern: 150 Years of Botsford Inn," was unveiled Wednesday night.

Calling it a panorama of early Michigan, the hard-bound book is a story "about good business and about entrepreneurship," Fox said. "One thing we tried to do was cover the entire 150 years, not just the Ford and Anhut family years."

**PARTY HIGHLIGHTS** included the Farmington Players' presentation of "Apparitions," a humorous series of vignettes based on Fox's book.

One concession Anhut said he has made resulted in putting televisions in guest rooms. "That's just good business. We've got to mix the old with the new," he said.

Party tributes came from around the country.

President Reagan sent his best wishes via a picture of he and his wife, Nancy. U.S. Rep. William Broomfield sent a letter on behalf of the U.S. House. Faxon and Brotherton presented resolutions on behalf of the Michigan Legislature. Farmington Hills Mayor Joe Alkateeb presented two resolutions on the city's behalf.

The Senate Concurrent Resolution read in part, "Today, the charm of the Botsford Inn safeguards the simple elegance of generations ago, preserving the past amid the sprawl of metro Detroit. It stands as a beautiful window to a bygone age, with changes and improvements unable to obscure the feeling of history."



Farmington Hills Mayor Joe Alkateeb (left) presents two resolutions to Botsford Inn Innkeeper John Anhut. Alkateeb proclaimed Oct. 17-23 as Botsford Inn Week. That's when the Michigan History Society will host its annual convention at the Inn.



At left: Farmington Hills Historical Commission chairwoman Jean Fox (left) greets Farmington Hills auto dealer Robert Deadman during the formal reception prior to Wednesday night's dinner and program.

Staff photos  
by  
Randy Borat



Chicago sculptor James Nadeau puts the finishing touches on his ice sculpture of a stagecoach and coachman. The sculpture, on display in the Botsford Inn courtyard Wednesday night, was a gift from the Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth.

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