

# Changing times: corn replaced by housing

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

Oakland Township's high taxes forced Henry Axford Jr. to sell his family's centennial dairy farm almost 20 years ago and take up farming near Gaylord instead.

The Homestead Spring 1992 site Meadows at Oakland Farms subdivision on Gunn Road, just west of Rochester Road, in northeast Oakland County, was once part of the more than 600 acres owned by the Oakland Township-pioneering Axford family.

"We couldn't make enough from the land to pay for the taxes," said Beatrice Axford, Henry Jr.'s wife. The Axfords now raise beef and hogs on a farm, called the Pansage ranch, 12 miles northeast of Gaylord, on the Pigeon River. Sons Jeffrey and William are also involved with farming, Beatrice said.

"We were not to be farming there (Oakland Township)," Beatrice said. "People (new residents) didn't appreciate the smells."

In 1832, William M. Axford, the family patriarch, came from New Jersey and settled in Oakland Township.

"He was a man of great influence among his neighbors and was Oakland's first supervisor," according to the Oakland County Book of History, by Arthur A. Hayman. The book was written on the county's sesquicentennial celebration, in 1970.



This photo shows the farmland looking from Snell Road toward Gunn Road where new houses are now.

HENRY AXFORD SR., a general probate attorney, who was schooled at the University of Michigan, lived in Rochester but hired a farm manager to care for the land.

"When Henry Sr. was going to college at the University of Michigan, he put together a family history book to the Mayflower," Beatrice said. "He (Henry Sr.) helped organize the Rochester National Bank and started the Rochester Library."

"I came along rather late in his life, when he was 55," said Henry Jr. "My sister (Helen Oswald, now a Vicksburg resident) was born two years later. At 55, he was just getting going. He was quite energetic."

Henry Jr. said he "was always interested in farming and grew up working on the farm and living in town (Rochester)."

Henry Sr., who died at age 92, continued to work daily from his home on University Drive in Rochester out to the farm — four miles one way, Beatrice said.

HENRY JR. went to work on the farm full-time after he graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in agricultural economics.

He and wife, Beatrice, met in high school. They were married in 1907. In addition to their two sons, the Axfords also have two daughters, Jennifer Olmanowski, a registered nurse, and Amy Kelson, a teacher.

Today, Henry Jr. is a 12-year member of the Johannesburg Intermediate school board.

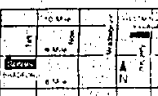
He continues his simple, uncluttered lifestyle and returns home for lunch between noon and 1 p.m. daily, except on Mondays and Wednesdays, when he's at livestock sales.



Henry W. Axford holds son Henry Jr. at the Gunn Road farm in 1935.

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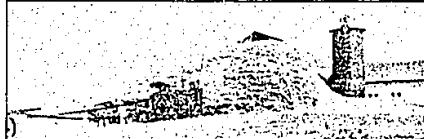
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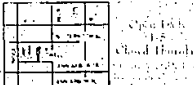


Wheat was threshed near the barn that was located just west of what is now Dennis Fogler's house on West Gunn Road.

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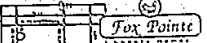
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