

Bickford's Combines and the Ceiling at Stafford Country Club

by Lynne Belluscio

Shelia Furr brought in some great photographs and newspaper articles from the Bickford Farm Equipment Store on East Main Road. Frank Bickford was born in New Hampshire in 1911 and when he was six the family moved to a farm in West Bloomfield. They only stayed there two years before they moved to Upton, south of West Batavia. Frank went to school in East Pembroke and in 1925, the family purchased a farm on the east side of LeRoy.

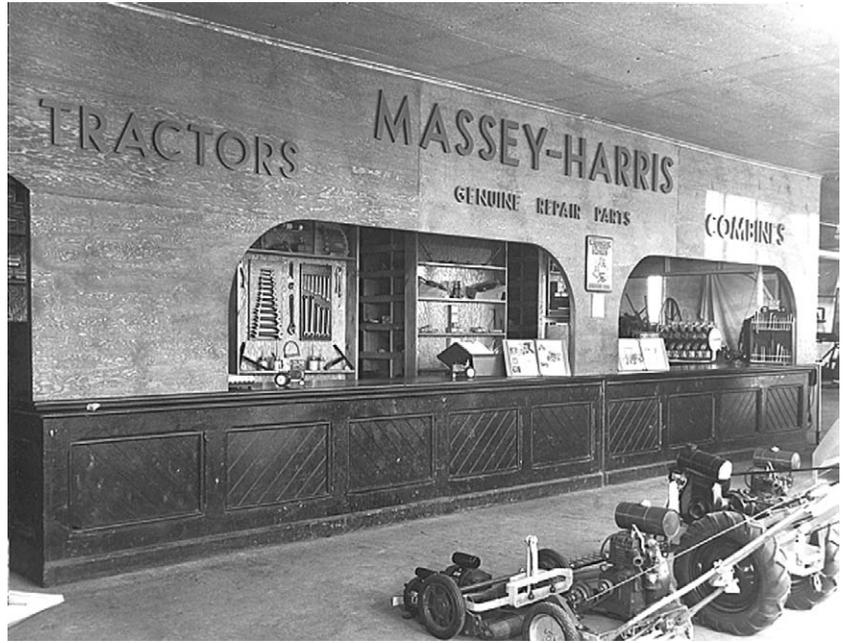
Frank went to high school in LeRoy until he was 15 but he later wrote ... "The school closed because of measles or mumps. I went home, took out working papers and never returned to school." He remained in farming until 1931 when he went to work as a mechanic in a garage.

When his father died in 1938, Frank returned to work the farm with his brother Carroll. His doctor suggested that he slow down so he went to Batavia and applied for a Massey-Harris partnership. It was 1944, and the war was still affecting business. He was turned down. Nevertheless, a few weeks later when the end of the war seemed eminent,

a representative from Massey approached him and the deal was finalized. The first piece of machinery that he sold was a tractor to Louis Cavey in the spring of 1945, for \$1,200.

Massey-Harris began in 1847 in Newcastle, Ontario, Canada. They manufactured some of the first mechanical threshers. In 1910, they acquired the Johnston Harvester Company in Batavia. Massey revolutionized the grain harvesting process by developing the first self-propelled combine. The first design was too heavy, but they went back to the drawing board and introduced the #21.

These huge machines were used mostly on the plains, but Frank Bickford told that his biggest thrill was when he sold the first self-propelled combine in the East. He sold the combine to Robert Metcalf in 1946 and it wasn't delivered until a year later.



It was manufactured in Canada, and it could only come as far as the Peace Bridge in Buffalo. Bickford went to Buffalo and drove the machine back to LeRoy. Frank also sold John Deere equipment in partnership with his brother Roland. Their business was located between Scottsville and Mumford and operated between 1947 and 1952.

Frank was quick to point out that their business in LeRoy was greatly improved with the

addition of two-way radios in the spring of 1953. He installed a 90 foot aluminum radio tower that could cover a radius of 65 miles. Bob Platt cleared calls through the Bickford office. The radio service resulted in a huge savings of time and money. Bickford figured that he saved half the cost of gas and mileage with the radio service.

Midst all the information about the agricultural equipment business, I found a little kernel of interest about the Stafford Country Club. The article about the Bickford implement store was written by Edward Perkins of the *LeRoy Gazette*. It seems that two men connected with the Massey-Harris plant in Batavia, Percy Verity and Guy Lown were members of the Stafford Country Club. They mentioned to Perkins, that at the end of World War I, the Massey-Harris plant in Batavia had a large quantity of special lumber that they had been using for making propeller blades for airplanes. When the Stafford Country Club was building its club house, the architect thought that the propeller lumber would make a neat ceiling for the raftered lounge room "and there it is."

