

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

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Hard work and heritage

It has been said the things you do for yourself will one day be gone, but the things you do for others will remain as your legacy. Many do not realize when that legacy is being created; Maxine Haydon certainly did not realize what would transpire over the next 66 years when she married Paul Haydon on September 24, 1949. It was the beginning of a lifetime of agricultural stewardship, education, and rewarding hard work.

Maxine's eyes filled with tears as she began to reflect on the life's work of her and her late husband Paul—the dream they built together, the successes they have had, and most of all the love that made it all possible.

“We walked hand-in-hand through everything,” Maxine said. “My strengths were his weaknesses, his strengths were my weaknesses.

“It wasn't shoulder to shoulder,” Maxine laughed, “He was too tall for that.”

Maxine was raised on a farm and is no stranger to the hardships of agricultural life. She and her family struggled to survive the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, and the difficult times war brought to the nation. She learned at a very young age how to be a fighter and how to look for the light at the end of the tunnel, but all the while appreciating what you have.

Though Paul grew up just miles from Maxine, the two did not meet until they were in college at Oklahoma A&M attending a Thanksgiving Day football game against the University of Oklahoma. They were married the following year in the Haydon family home, built in 1936 by Paul's father Grover Haydon. It was in that same home where they eventually raised their two daughters Paula Deanne Haydon Garrett and Susan Lynn Raybourn.

Not long after the two were married, Paul took out a loan on 580 acres of his father's 1,600-acre farm which contained a beautiful 450-acre native pecan grove with another 100 acres of papershell pecan trees.

“When I met Paul Haydon he said ‘This is all I’m ever going to do is be a farmer,’” said Maxine. “He had been to South Korea for a year in service. So I had to make my decision, it was the hardest one I ever made in my life—to be a farmer.”

Together, Maxine and Paul set the goal to improve their recently acquired farm. They lived by their motto to leave the land better than you found it. It took hard manual labor to clear debris and brush, survey the land, and build ditches and levees to control the flooding of the Deep Fork River which runs along their property. The result of their efforts is an impressive, beautifully-kept pecan orchard with sunshine peeking through the trees and into the grove.

“You have to have sun on all sides of the tree for it to be healthy,” said a proud Maxine as she looked at the result of their years of hard work.

For years Maxine maintained the ledger that Paul’s father began for record keeping in 1929 and is only just now transferring the record-keeping duties of the farm over to her daughters Paula and Susan.

In addition to meticulously managing records, Maxine takes great pride in being knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the daily farm operations as well as the equipment used. She works closely with the OSU Extension and other farm-related organizations and took advantage of any workshops offered on pasture improvement, soil conservation, pecan production, cattle performance testing, estate planning, or any other topic she thinks would be of benefit to their farm.

It is because of her desire to continually educate herself of the best management practices that she was introduced to the micro-cost finder record system by Robert Hemphill in 1969. This systematic way of record keeping improved and modernized their farm records taking it from hand-written to electronic.

Whatever information or experiences Maxine gains, she is quick to share that knowledge with others. Whether it is through the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program that she and Paul participated in, or sharing life lessons with a neighbor, such as the importance of a woman being active in the financial side of the business as well as the production side, Maxine always has time to teach those around her.

“Maxine is the perfect example of what every lady in agriculture should strive to become,” said Karen Brewer of Okemah. “She has worked in the fields, pecan groves, home and community with intelligence and grace.”

Many have recognized the contributions of Maxine and Paul to the agriculture industry and specifically the pecan industry through innovative production techniques. In 1990, Pecan Growers Association honored Maxine as the Distinguished Grower of the Year, just seven years after Paul was recognized. In 1994, OSU Horticulture Department honored them with Distinguished Service Award. In 2000, they were named the Farm Family of the year by the Okfuskee County Cattlemen’s Association for their outstanding contributions to agriculture community.

Maxine has served her community as a volunteer through 4-H, on numerous boards, through education, and as a friend to everyone she meets.

Because Maxine was born into farming, she has seen the incredible progression of technology, management practices, and numerous other aspects of the industry change throughout the years. “You can’t even imagine how different it is today,” said Maxine. “My daddy was a farmer, and he didn’t have a tractor. When he was 40 years old and he sold all his horses and bought himself a little John Deere Tractor.

The addition of electricity, computers and other modern technology has revolutionized farming operations. Today, technology has advanced far beyond what farmers in the 1930s could have even dreamed about—from GPS tractors and pecan picker equipment to herbicide resistant crops and livestock traceability.

“My mother and daddy built a house in about 1939,” said Maxine. “It had no electricity, no running water, not even propane gas. It had gas lights because there was gas on the farm.” There is no denying that Maxine treasures the heritage she and Paul came from, that is evident from the numerous trinkets and mementos in the kitchen and the original garage. Each of these keepsakes, found on the farm, tells the story of the years of hard work poured into making Haydon Farms what it is today. They serve as a reminder to never forget the heritage.

“They aren’t collectibles,” said Maxine, “they are our memories.”

A truly remarkable legacy that is still being created, and will be carried on by the next generations of Haydon Farms.

“Maxine personifies the pioneering spirit of Oklahoma’s agriculture-involved women of our state’s proud history,” said Doris Johnston, an Oklahoma rancher and friend of the Haydon family. “Oklahoma was cultivated by pioneer women who brought grace and culture to the rugged landscape nurturing families and small communities into impressive maturity and successes.”

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Photo Caption Maxine Haydon.jpg: Maxine Haydon sitting on the original well in front of the 1936 Haydon family home.



Photo Caption IMG_1014: Maxine and late husband Paul Haydon pictured on Haydon Farms in 2003.

