

Braemar's first resident offers glimpse to the past

By JORDAN WILKINSON
jwilkinson@tcnewspapers.com

For 83-year-old Gloria Rykowski-Colello, an upcoming move to assisted living facility Braemar at Wallkill is less of a burden and more of a nostalgic journey to a past life. Before Braemar, there existed a dairy farm on the property, where Rykowski-Colello started a new life, raised a family and learned the homegrown lessons that can only be imparted on farmers.

For Rykowski-Colello, she's simply returning home.

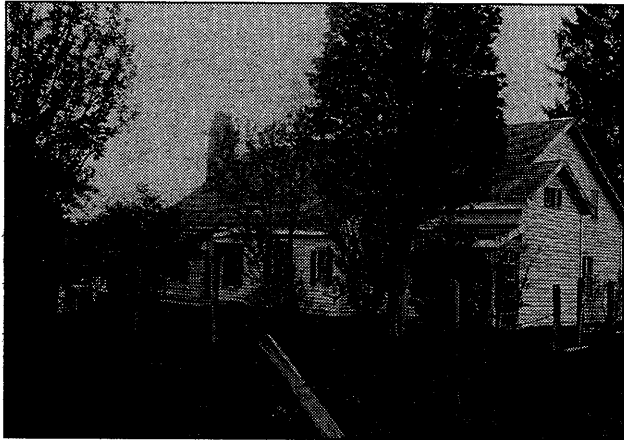
"My heart is telling me that this is where I belong, and this is where I want to be," she said. "To me, it's still the farm."

When Rykowski-Colello was just 18, she left her home in Middletown to live with her new husband on his family's farm. The move marked the beginning of her new life, one where amenities like electricity and running water were luxuries that existed well outside the duties of farm life.

"That's what probably made me stronger today," said Rykowski-Colello. "It's not like what kids have today. We would have snow up to our waists and sometimes had to wait three days before anyone came around."

And come around they did.

When snow wasn't overtaking the property, Rykowski-Colello said that the dairy farm was the family meeting spot. She described her weekends as a family affair, with cousins, kids, in-laws and grandparents finding them-



Gloria Rykowski's former home at the site of the modern-day senior living facility.

selves at the farmhouse from Friday to Sunday nights, for as long as she lived on the property.

One of the "big deal" events of her family visits were trips to a river that ran through the property. It was there that one of her sons made a canoe from a tree he dug up on the property.

"There wasn't a weekend that went by when we didn't have lots of company," she said. "Everyone would come to the farm and good times were had by everybody. I enjoyed every minute of it."

Unlike her first time living on the property, Rykowski-Colello's return will include more than the basics.

According to Halina McLean, administrator at Braemar, the new facility boasts amenities like a spa, fitness and wellness centers, a library and an outdoor putting green: a far cry from her first stint on the property.

Farm life, of course, was never luxurious and the transition proved a challenge for the new wife and mother. Once she arrived, Rykowski-Colello said that she learned to wash clothes by hand, how to care for the farm's cattle and, most importantly, how to raise her two sons, who she said always came before her own needs.

From 1949 to when her sons graduated from Goshen High School, Rykowski-Colello remained on the farm, even after her first husband suffered through a traumatic accident. For extra money, she worked as an Avon consultant for 32 years.

While the farm was operating, one of the family's main sources of income was selling milk to Borden Dairy Company. When it came time for the family to sell the farm, they found creative ways to pay the bills, one of which was selling gravel to the Town of Wallkill to construct some of the area's first roads.

"We had to make money somehow," she said. "Taxes were high and you had to do something."

Once the kids were graduated and the cows were sold, Rykowski-Colello moved and continued with her life. The farm, though, never left her.

"I don't know what it is but even before Braemar, I'd go down the road and just look around at the farm," she said. "The feelings are all still there."