



Rex Dobson

October 20, 2011

BINGHAM TOWNSHIP — A mighty oak has fallen. Rex Dobson, 87, passed away at Munson Medical Center on Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011. His last days were spent much like many former days, greeting friends and neighbors, talking of farming and the weather, inquiring about family members and wishing visitors well. Rex always thought of others before himself. Rex was born in Muskegon on March 7, 1924, to Suttons Bay Township born father, Harvey Dobson, and Bingham Township born mother, Ruby Ellen (Core) Dobson. Just short of his third birthday, he moved to Bingham when Harvey and Ruby returned to purchase and operate the farmland originally homesteaded in 1865 by Ruby's grandfather, William Core following his discharge from the Union Army. After attending the Bingham Schoolhouse through the eighth grade, Rex attended, and graduated from, Central High School in Traverse City. Among the many skills he learned while growing up and assisting his dad on the farm was carpentry, and he worked with a local builder for several years during the non-growing season. In 1969, upon the death of his dad, Rex assumed responsibility for all management decisions at Ruby Ellen Farm and continued the farming operations until this spring — thus terminating 146 years of one family lineage continuously farming the same piece of land. Rex was a modest, unassuming, gracious man whose patience and devotion to his profession brought out the best not only in his land, but also in the people whose lives he touched. Over the years he mentored over four dozen teenagers who worked summers at the farm, many grumbling about the long hours and hard work. In their maturity however, they all returned to thank Rex for the valuable lessons learned under his tutelage. With Rex's careful supervision, the farm prospered and became a mecca for not only family and friends but also university graduate students and professors, journalists and film makers, musicians and artists, all in search of the magic that is Ruby Ellen Farm. Much of that magic was manifested in and through the artist that was Rex, from the painted wood cutout images on the buildings, to the autumn 'pumpkin tree', to the sunflower stalk 'candy cane' that sprouted near the granary each Christmas season. Rex's artistic talents extended to photography as well. Rarely did visitors escape his camera lens, and more often than not, greeting cards included a photo or two. After his love for the land, Rex loved to read, which he enjoyed while waiting for the sunset in his peaceful cottage overlooking Lake Leelanau. This humble, honest,

hardworking Farm Bureau member farmer of many facets eventually received well-deserved recognition for his quietly executed lifetime achievements. Although he was very reluctant to be in the limelight, he was twice bestowed the title of Conservationist of the Year by the Leelanau County Conservation District, was honored with the Cherry Industry Life Time Achievement Award, and just recently, on Oct. 6, was presented with a Historic Place Preservation Award by the History Center of Traverse City for his efforts to preserve his property and farm artifacts, which he loved to collect and display in his personal museums. To that end, Rex worked with the Leelanau Conservancy to be the first in the county to preserve his property as farmland through the State of Michigan's Purchase Development Rights Program. Further, in the spring of 2000, Rex gathered family members and friends to create The Rex Dobson Ruby Ellen Farm Foundation, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization designed to preserve the land and its structures, serving both as an example of the past and an educational facility for the future. Rex is survived by several cousins, plus countless friends and neighbors who will acutely miss this fallen mighty oak. He was a man of the land; it was his cathedral. The earth was the foundation, the sunrise and sunset were the walls, the trees were the spires. Rainbows were the stained glass windows, showers and songbirds were the choir. Now, the clouds above Rex's cathedral have called him home. Visitation will be at the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home in Traverse City on Wednesday, Oct. 26, from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Memorial services will be Thursday, Oct. 27, at 10:30 a.m., at Keswick United Methodist Church, followed by burial at the Bingham Township Cemetery. Pastor Patti Haas will officiate. Friends are invited to return for a luncheon at the Keswick Church Community Room. In lieu of flowers, please direct donations to The Rex Dobson Ruby Ellen Farm Foundation, PO Box 492, Suttons Bay, MI 49682 or to the Northwest Michigan Horticultural Research Station, 6686 S. Center Hwy., Traverse City, MI 49684. You are invited to share memories of Rex by way of his online guest book at www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com. The family is being served by the Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home.