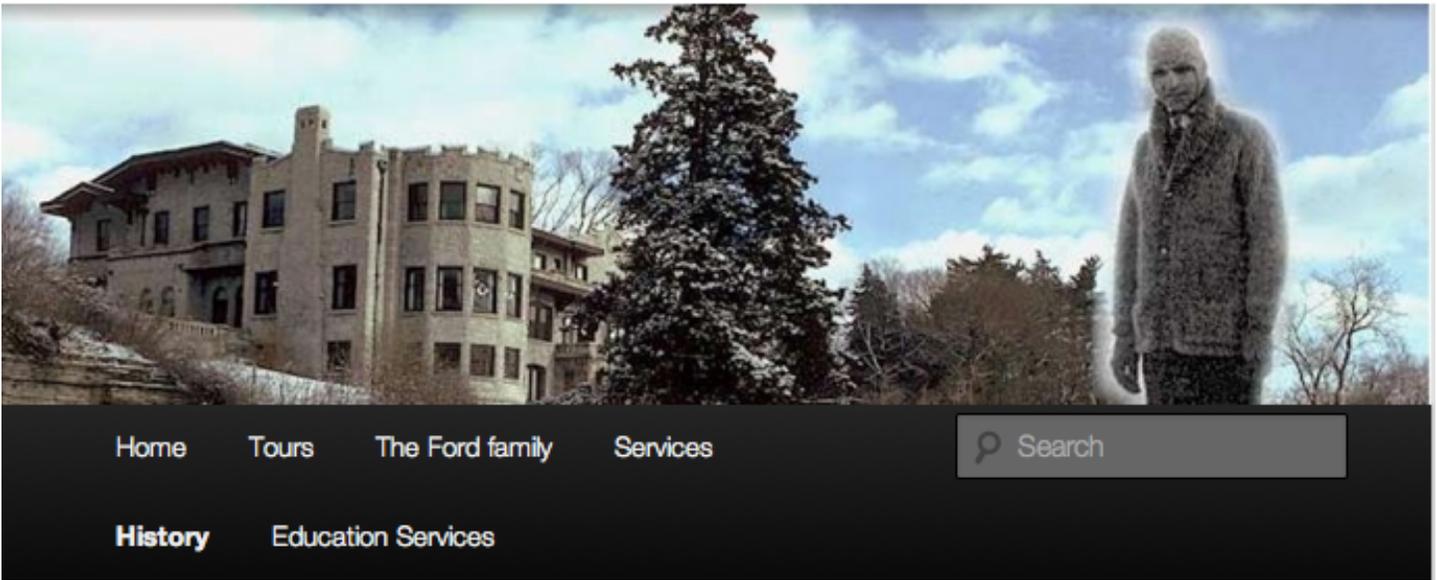


Fairlane – Henry Ford's Estate

<http://www.henryfordestate.com/history/>



History

In 1909, with the success of the Model "T," Henry Ford began building his Highland Park Complex. The automobile industry was quickly becoming America's largest and this growth was led by the Ford Motor Company. To bring the price of the Model "T" within the grasp of the average man, Ford introduced the assembly line to the automobile industry in 1913. Production jumped to 1,000 cars per day in 1914 and then to 2,000 cars per day in 1916. With this rise in productivity, Henry Ford found it possible to make his workers customers as well, announcing a \$5.00 day in January 1914. This unprecedented step, more than doubling wages overnight, also proved to be a great public relations move, driving sales still higher and turning Mr. Ford into a worldwide celebrity.

Such success brought a stream of uninvited callers to the doors of Clara and Henry Ford's Edison Avenue, Detroit mansion. Reporters, salesmen, and job seekers deprived the family of the privacy they desired. They soon wished to build a new home, one removed from the rapidly expanding city, where they could satisfy their love of nature, gardening and bird watching, in particular. Never comfortable with the boisterous lifestyle of Detroit society, the Fords abandoned plans to follow the migration of the city's wealthy to the eastern suburbs, and instead chose to build on a 1,300-acre tract of land approximately two miles from Mr. Ford's birthplace. The new fifty-six room residence and estate were named "Fair Lane" after an area in County Cork, Ireland, the birthplace of Mr. Ford's foster grandfather, Patrick Ahern.

In February 1914, work began on what would be the couple's final home. Between 500 and 800 masons, wood carvers, and artisans worked year round to complete the estate as quickly as possible. In keeping with the Ford's love of nature, the residence was built with rough-hewn Ohio limestone to harmonize with the surrounding countryside. The grounds, designed by noted landscape architect Jens Jensen, were transformed from farmland into a natural, native landscape.

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Fair Lane is neither the largest nor the most opulent house of its era. Mr. Ford was proud of his simple tastes and felt no need to flaunt his substantial wealth. He cautioned the architects against building lavishly; the residence's total cost was not to exceed \$250,000. Despite this directive, at the time of completion the building cost \$1,875,000. Interior decorating cost an additional \$175,000 with property development and landscaping adding another \$370,000 to the final bill. By January 1916, the Fords were completely settled into their new home. During the Fords' residency, Fair Lane bustled with activity. In addition to the residence and its powerhouse, the estate included a summer house, man-made lake, staff cottages, gatehouse, pony barn, skating house, greenhouse, root cellar, vegetable garden, thousand-plant peony garden, ten thousand plant rose garden, a "Santa's Workshop" for Christmas celebrations, maple sugar shack, working farm for the Ford grandchildren built to their scale, agricultural research facilities, and five hundred birdhouses to satisfy Mr. Ford's interest in ornithology.

Because the Fords designed the residence to be so private and self-contained, it is uncertain how large of a staff was retained to run the estate. About a half-dozen people worked in the residence, and technicians, stokers, and electricians were always on duty in the estate's powerhouse. A considerably larger staff was needed to maintain the extensive gardens of the estate. Up to twenty-five men tended the grounds on a seasonal basis, but exact numbers are difficult to determine due to Mr. Ford's practice of augmenting the staff with people temporarily pulled from his assembly lines.

Henry Ford enjoyed Fair Lane for over thirty years until his death in 1947. When Mrs. Ford died three years later, her grandchildren commissioned Parke-Bernet Galleries of New York to conduct an auction of the home's furnishings.

In 1952, the Ford Motor Company purchased the estate from the heirs and, after renovating parts of the interior, established its corporate archives in the residence. Ford Archives stayed until 1957, when the company donated the residence, powerhouse, 210 acres, and \$6.5 million to the University of Michigan for the creation of the Dearborn campus. In 1963 a local group, the "Women of Fair Lane," persuaded university officials to allow tours of the home, which lasted for three years, when Ford Motor Company and the University of Michigan reacquired some of the rooms for administrative purposes. The Henry Ford Estate, including 72 of the original 1,300 acres, was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966. Public tours of the historic home were re-introduced in the 1970s. Since then, a limited staff, generous contributors, and approximately 250 volunteers successfully continue the process of rebuilding the estate and reviving its former splendor.

Work has been undertaken to preserve and protect the site for future generations. Interior rooms and five acres of gardens and grounds have been renewed and restored. Critical infrastructure repairs have been completed. Just recently, the 1915 Powerhouse began generating electricity again. The tremendous strides that have been made are significant and, in large measure, are driven by the importance of the Henry Ford Estate, as a National Historic Landmark, to the local and world community.

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