

SELF-GUIDED
OUTDOOR WALKS

FAIR LANE
HOME OF CLARA & HENRY FORD
EST. 1915



A National Historic Landmark



FAIR LANE
HOME OF CLARA & HENRY FORD
EST. 1915

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LONG WALK
~1.4 miles

- Fair Lane Property Boundary
- Rouge River Gateway Trail
- Point of Interest (keyed to descriptive text)
- Interpretive Sign
- Emergency Phone
- Restroom

LONG WALK



JENS JENSEN
In the early 1900s, Jens Jensen was an innovative and highly sought-after landscape architect. At Fair Lane, Jensen created an idealized natural environment with amenities accommodating a variety of recreational pursuits. The Fords and their many guests enjoyed hiking and sleighing on the trails, bird watching, gardening, and skating on the pond.

The Meadow's orientation creates a beautiful vista of dappled light in the late afternoon, especially during the summer solstice when the sun sets over the pond at the far end. Jensen labeled the meadow on his landscape plan "The Path of the Setting Sun-Summer."

A. GREAT MEADOW
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B. THE POND
One of the Fords' favorite outdoor activities was ice skating. Today, only the foundation of the log skating house, designed by Leonard B. Willeke, remains on the bank of the pond. The skating house was always stocked with skates of various sizes for skating parties which ran late into the night, lit by the headlights of Model Ts.



C. WOODS
Below the bluff are some of the largest and oldest trees in Michigan. Henry Ford and his friends, such as John Burroughs, made maple syrup in his sugar house each spring in the woods.

D. ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETIVE CENTER
UM-Dearborn's Environmental Interpretive Center (EIC) offers educational programs for school groups and the broader community on former Fair Lane estate grounds. Learn about the EIC and its programs and sustainability initiatives at umdearborn.edu/eic.



E. ROSE GARDEN RUINS
Mrs. Ford's love of roses led her to convert one of Jens Jensen's meadows into a 2.5-acre rose garden. Landscape architect Herbert Kellaway and rosarian Harriet Foote designed the "keyhole rose garden" with a summerhouse, reflecting pools, and pergola. The garden is now a ruin.

F. JENSEN'S LINKING MEADOWS
Jensen's artistry and knowledge of ecological principles transformed farmland to a native woodland landscape with linking meadow openings. The Trail Garden leads to the first large meadow opening, which connects to a smaller opening around the bend and The Great Meadow.

G. BIRD HOUSES
Henry Ford used his political influence to support the Migratory Bird Act of 1913. As a member of the Michigan Audubon Society, Ford also advocated for the Weeks-McLean Act and the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada. The Fords provided bird feeders, warm water in winter, and 500 bird houses in the spring for their feathered friends. Mrs. Ford also enjoyed exotic birds such as peacocks, which were free to roam the grounds.

Some areas may be temporarily closed due to restoration activities.



Welcome to
FAIR LANE
Home of Clara and Henry Ford

In 1915, Clara and Henry Ford, with son Edsel, moved into their country estate, Fair Lane, named after the birthplace of Henry's adoptive grandfather in County Cork, Ireland. The Fords initially retained Marion Mahony Griffin to design their home, later replacing her with William H. Van Tine. Well-known landscape architect Jens Jensen designed the expansive landscape. The original Estate encompassed approximately 1,300 acres of gardens, orchards, woods, and farm fields.

Henry passed away in 1947 and Clara in 1950, after which Ford Motor Company (FMC) took ownership of the Estate for use as a conference and archival center. In 1956, FMC gave 210 acres of the Estate to the University of Michigan for construction of a campus in Dearborn.

Fair Lane was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1966. Ownership of 17 acres of the original Estate transferred, in June 2013, from the University to the Henry Ford Estate, Inc., a newly incorporated 501(c)(3) dedicated to restoring, reimagining, and preparing to reopen Fair Lane to the public. The University and other entities continue to own the remainder of the former estate property.

The grounds are open year-round for exploration and discovery. Experience the Jens Jensen landscape by strolling through the gardens and grounds and learn more about Clara and Henry and their love of nature.

Stay connected with Fair Lane by becoming a member and by visiting the Fair Lane website: henryfordfairlane.org

SHORT WALK

1. RESIDENCE

In 1915, Henry and Clara, and their son Edsel, moved into their new home, Fair Lane, named after the birthplace of Henry's adoptive grandfather, in County Cork, Ireland. The Fords first retained Marion Mahony Griffin, who worked for Von Holst & Fyfe, and later William H. Van Tine to design the home, and Jens Jensen to design the expansive landscape.

2. GREAT MEADOW

Jens Jensen created this beautiful view on what was once open farmland (see "A" on other side).

3. TRAIL GARDEN

The Trail Garden is full of surprises as it winds through the woodland. The unexpected turns, often marked by hawthorn trees, lead to open spaces with seasonal floral displays. Spring-time is particularly striking, with thousands of daffodils in bloom.

4. SPRINKLER SYSTEM

One of the first major installations of an automatic lawn sprinkler system was in the Great Meadow. The pop-up brass sprinkler heads were patented and installed by Detroit's J.A. Brooks Co. If you look closely, you can find the original sprinkler heads in the grass.

5. BOATHOUSE / ROCK GARDEN

The Boathouse, designed by Jens Jensen and built in 1916, gives the appearance of an exposed limestone bedrock valley. Jensen designed the adjacent rock garden to reflect the boathouse's horizontal stonework. The lily pond below once contained blue lilies and received water from the spring-fed cascade set into the hillside.

6. RIVER WALK

Walking along the terraced River Walk, Henry Ford sometimes encountered young people exploring the Rouge on homemade rafts. For their own excursions, the Fords used an electric boat, the Callie B. Callie was Henry's nickname for Clara and the "B" was for Bryant, Clara's maiden name.

7. CASCADE DAM

The waterfall and stone ledge work along the banks of the Rouge River are beautiful examples of Jens Jensen's design skill. Beneath this natural-looking waterfall is a concrete dam, an important component of the nearby hydro-electric Powerhouse.

8. BURROUGHS' GROTTO

As a lifelong field naturalist, Henry Ford greatly admired his close friend, John Burroughs, and his essays on nature. The Grotto, designed by Jensen as a tribute to Burroughs, was built with stones brought from Burroughs' home.



9. POWERHOUSE CORNERSTONE

The cornerstone at the base of the curved stone stairwell on the river side of the Powerhouse was laid by Thomas Edison on October 28, 1914, at Henry Ford's invitation. The six-level complex still holds the original machinery, which provided power, heat, light, and even ice to Fair Lane, resulting in complete energy self-sufficiency.

10. FISHWAY

Wayne County, with state and federal partners, constructed a new stream around the dam with pools and riffles to assist migrating fish gain access to upstream reaches of the Rouge River.

11. COMPOST BINS

Ready for use all year, compost was hoisted by bushel baskets from the lower level into the Greenhouse and used in the gardens.

12. BUR OAK

Trees held a special place in the Fords' hearts. One of the large bur oaks still stands in the middle of the former vegetable garden.

13. TREE HOUSE

Ford built a Tree House in an old oak near the original entrance to Fair Lane Drive, sometimes spending the night there with his grandchildren. The Tree House that you see today is a recreation of what might have been here originally.

14. ROOT CELLAR

Apples, potatoes, and other items were stored in the Root Cellar, just as they were on the farms of Henry and Clara Ford's youth. Like the well, the Root Cellar predates the Estate and is a remnant of the farms and mill that were on this site around 1830.

15. HAND-DUG WELL

The hand-dug fieldstone well was preserved by Henry Ford. The well stones, dating from the 1880s, start at ground level. The wooden structure was added by the Fords.

16. POTTING SHED / GREENHOUSE

The Fords' head gardener, Alfons De Caluwe, and a staff of about 25 gardeners maintained the grounds and used the Greenhouse for plant propagation. Some of the plants grown in the greenhouse included carnations, chrysanthemums, lilies, orchids, poinsettias, other tropical plants, and a variety of vegetables.

17. CUTTING GARDEN

Six planting beds provided space for the head gardener to grow perennials and annuals for cut-flower arrangements in the home and to experiment with growing new plant varieties.

Some areas may be temporarily closed due to restoration activities.

18. GARDEN DOOR

Mrs. Ford transformed the Early Rose Garden in the early 1920s, in collaboration with landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman, into an English garden with mixed flowering annuals and perennials. The Tea House, stone walls, heavy wood door, slate paths, raised terrace, and lily pond date to that era.

19. BLUE GARDEN

Blue flowers were Mrs. Ford's favorites. Today, the Blue Garden contains many of the same varieties of flowers originally planted such as bellflower, delphiniums, heliotrope, iris, and lavender. While most of the flowers in this garden are shades of blue, Mrs. Ford included white and yellow flowering plants as accents.

20. EARLY ROSE GARDEN

The small, Early Rose Garden is a restored interpretation of the first rose garden at Fair Lane. In the late 1920s the roses were relocated to a second, larger Rose Garden located near the Great Meadow. Today's garden is planted with many historic varieties of shrub roses in shades of pink and cream, based on the landscape plans of Jens Jensen.

21. GARDEN GATES

The wrought iron gates stand between the twin lilac hedges of the Bowling Green and Early Rose Garden. Mr. Ford purchased these gates in England for Mrs. Ford. They are rumored to have been one of her favorite photographic backgrounds.

22. THE BOWLING GREEN

Edsel Ford and his friends used the Bowling Green area to play bocce ball. The irises at the entrance date from the later use of this area as an iris garden.

23. DONOR WALL

This dramatic donor wall was constructed in 2018 to recognize the many individuals, groups, companies, and foundations who have supported the restoration, stewardship, and interpretive programming at Fair Lane. The design of the walls resembles the fender of a Model T, the seating and firepit evoke the wheel. The materials used reflect the natural and built environment of the estate.

24. FAIR LANE DRIVE

Today, access to the Estate is along Fair Lane Drive. However, the original entrance through the Fair Lane gatehouse was located near Michigan Avenue. The workers' cottages and pony barn/garage located on Fair Lane Drive across from the Trail Garden, were built in 1920 and designed by Leonard B. Willeke.

25. ORCHARDS

The Fords had numerous fruit-tree orchards throughout the Estate grounds. The Estate parking lot, for example, was once a cherry orchard.

26. BUTTERFLY PEONY GARDEN

A one-acre Butterfly Peony Garden, thought to look like a butterfly from a bird's-eye view, was planted in 1922 at the north end of the orchard. The current, smaller, Peony Garden was designed to reflect the original.

27. MINIATURE FARMHOUSE

Built for the 1924 Michigan State Fair, this tiny farmhouse included a miniature steam engine and threshing machine, which are now at The Henry Ford.

