



Aerial of Fair Lane's Mansion and Power House overlooking the River Rouge. Photo by Michael Shuster, June 2024, courtesy of The Henry Ford Estate.

Name of Property: Fair Lane (Henry Ford Estate)
City, State: Dearborn, Michigan
Period of Significance: 1909-1947
NHL Criteria: 2, 4
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Landscape architecture
V. Developing the American Economy
3. Transportation and communication
VI. Expanding Science and Technology
1. Experimentation and invention

Previous Recognition: National Historic Landmark 1966 (NRIS 66000399)
Historic American Buildings Survey No. MI-422
Historic American Landscapes Survey No. MI-3

National Historic Context: Twentieth-Century Landscape Architecture in the United States
Country Place Era
Commerce and Industry (1966)

NHL Significance:

- Fair Lane served as the primary residence of Henry and Clara Ford from 1915 until their respective deaths in 1947 and 1950. Under NHL Criterion 2, Fair Lane is nationally significant for its association with Henry Ford, a complex public figure and seminal American inventor, businessman, industrialist, and conservationist, for the period 1909 to 1947.



- Henry Ford revolutionized transportation by mass-producing an inexpensive and reliable automobile. That car, the Model T, ushered in the age of the automobile and played a key role in transforming the United States from a largely rural to an increasingly urban landscape.
- Under NHL Criterion 4 Fair Lane is nationally significant for the design contribution of noted landscape architect Jens Jensen during the period 1914 to 1922. The Fair Lane landscape was designed to provide a natural retreat for the Fords and their guests, while also serving as a wildlife refuge.
- Jens Jensen was a preeminent American landscape architect in the period from the late nineteenth century through 1950. A key proponent of the “prairie style of landscape gardening,” Jensen’s work emphasized regional landscape patterns, native flora, naturalistic forms and spaces, horizontal lines, seasonal change, use of sunlight and shadow, and conservation.
- Fair Lane is one of the best surviving examples of Jensen’s large estate designs and is the most complete of his mid-career period. Fair Lane served as a laboratory for Jensen to experiment with and perfect design ideas that he had been considering up to that point in his career. Many of the design themes he used at Fair Lane became important elements of the prairie style and would be repeated in his later work.

Integrity:

- Fair Lane's built environment and landscape retain an exceptionally high level of historic integrity.
- Much of the gardens, grounds, and Mansion have been restored by skilled professionals, artisans, and craftspeople following Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Their work authentically reflects the original look and feel of the home as Clara and Henry Ford knew it.
- Extensive restoration of decorative elements within the Mansion began in 2016 and is ongoing.
- Despite the loss of some smaller buildings and structures since the Fords’ passing, the primary resources and nearby associated gardens appear largely as they did at the time of the Fords’ residence at Fair Lane. The visitor shares what the Fords would have experienced moving through this landscape.

Owners of Property: Private, University of Dearborn-Michigan, Wayne County Parks

Acreage of Property: approx. 311 acres

Origins of Nomination: A contract updated the 1966 Fair Lane NHL designation and 1976 documentation to provide a more thorough description of Fair Lane’s historic resources, present a more nuanced understanding of Henry and Clara Ford, and recognize the national significance of Jens Jensen’s landscape design.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- The update provides a detailed description and inventory of all contributing and non-



contributing resources, facilitating a better understanding of how Fair Lane was designed and used.

- A revised statement of significance offers additional recognition of the complexity of Henry Ford, reflecting recent scholarship. It also establishes the national significance of Jens Jensen within American landscape architecture.
- The update precedes the much-anticipated reopening of the Fair Lane Mansion to the public, providing a level of access and interpretation not currently available at the property.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: Low

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Advisory Board Recommendation: