

# Edsel and Eleanor Fords' Former Haven Hill Estate Highland State Recreation Area, Michigan



## Motorcities Wayside Signs

Friends of Highland Recreation Area

[www.fohravolunteers.org](http://www.fohravolunteers.org)

Highland/White Lake, Michigan

**From the MotorCities.org website:**

**“Wayside Exhibit Program:** MotorCities was the proud recipient of a grant from the Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation through the Michigan Department of Transportation . The grant was for the creation of a Wayside Exhibit program across the MotorCities region.

Over the course of the grant, the Wayside Exhibit program created a comprehensive system of outdoor exhibits in communities throughout central and southeastern Michigan. Each sign commemorates Michigan’s automotive heritage to increase public awareness on a community and regional level.

To date, almost 300 exhibits have been installed across the region including Detroit, Flint, Ypsilanti, Lansing, Middle Rouge, Macomb County, Flint, and many cities in between. If you have an idea for panels in your community and would be interested in being involved in upcoming cycles, contact Brian Yopp at (313) 259-3425 x307, [byopp@motorcities.org](mailto:byopp@motorcities.org)”



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# THE DODGE BROTHERS' GIFT

## State Parks and Roadside Development



This pavilion was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The pavilion has offered shelter, bathrooms, and views of the natural scenery to visitors for generations.

### Everyone cheered roadside development

of travel facilities and destinations in the early 1900s as more and more people “hit the road” in automobiles. High wages and work-free weekends introduced by car companies helped make this possible. Some of Michigan’s first state parks were created in the 1920s when the Dodge Brothers Motor Company donated land to the state for the creation of parks. This park – once labeled Dodge Brothers Site No. 10 – was one of these gifts. In the 1930s the stone shelter was built here, and in the 1940s this park was merged with the state’s purchase of the Edsel Ford family estate at Haven Hill, eventually creating the Highland State Recreation Area.



## YOU AUTO KNOW

A motor vehicle fee for entrance into state parks began in 1960 to help support the park system.



Dodge automobiles in the countryside, about 1918. Early automobiles gave people mobility to explore rural areas, and spurred the development of roadside destinations. Photo courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall Archives, Oakland University



John Dodge, left, and Horace Dodge. They founded Dodge Brothers Motor Company in 1914 and both died in 1920. This land was donated by the company in the 1920s to honor their memory. Photo courtesy of Meadow Brook Hall Archives, Oakland University

# EDSEL FORD'S LEADERSHIP and His "Nerve Retreat" at Haven Hill



The Ford family, about 1930. From left to right: Benson, William Clay, Edsel, Josephine, Thomas, Henry Ford II. Photo courtesy of "Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan."



Henry Ford and Edsel Ford, about 1940. Photo courtesy of friends of Highland Recreation Area.



Edsel Ford, 1930s. Photography was one of Edsel's special interests. Photo courtesy of "Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan."



The Lodge at Haven Hill estate. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

He was a man of vision and achievement, and he called Haven Hill his "nerve retreat," his restful refuge. The only child of Henry and Clara Ford, Edsel Ford was born in 1893 and became the youngest president of Ford Motor Company in 1919. Despite difficulties with his father, he successfully led plant expansions and the operation of the Willow Run Bomber Plant during World War II. His sense for art and design was expressed in his major support for the Detroit Institute of Arts and in his design leadership for the Model A and Lincoln Continental automobiles.



Above, Edsel B. Ford, Diego A. Rivera, 1932. Oil on canvas, mounted on mosaic. Diego Rivera honored Edsel Ford in this painting, including drafting tools as symbols of Edsel's creative talents. Right, Detroit Industry, north wall, Diego Rivera, 1932-33. Fresco. Edsel Ford funded Rivera's murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts, and Ford shielded them from the controversy they created. Images courtesy of the Detroit Institute of Arts.



## YOU AUTO KNOW

Edsel Ford's Lincoln Continental was hailed by renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright as "the most beautiful car in the world."

# HAVEN HILL GATEHOUSE

## Crossing the Threshold to the Estate



The Gatehouse was the formal entryway into the 2,422 acre Haven Hill Estate, Edsel Ford's chosen "weekend getaway." While Edsel gathered property for his country estate in the 1920s, Packard Motor Car Company and General Motors bought large parcels of land in the area for development. Packard eventually sold its land to a farmer, but General Motors established its 4,000 acre proving grounds in the hilly, rural landscape.



At approximately 1,800 square feet, the 1927 Gatehouse was a 3-bedroom home that served as the living quarters for the Farm Superintendent and Family. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



The German Shepherd dogs that once patrolled the estate were not simply family pets. They were also part of the security network of the estate. Photo courtesy of Friends of Highland Recreation Area.



The drive from the Gatehouse into the estate property. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

### The Gatehouse was security for the Fords and their guests.

Security was heightened in the 1920s and 1930s for such prominent families, arising from stresses including the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, gangsterism during Prohibition, and labor unrest in Flint and Detroit.



The Gatehouse in 2009, near the entrance to the Highland State Recreation Area.

# YOU AUTO KNOW

The Gatehouse was built in 1927, and housed the Haven Hill farm administrator and family.

# GENEVIEVE GILLETTE and the Treasures of Nature



## HER LIVING LEGACY

Highland State Recreation Area

Michigan Natural Areas Council

Haven Hill Natural Area

Porcupine Mountains  
Wilderness Area

Pictured Rocks  
National Lakeshore

Ludington State Park

Michigan Wildflower Association

Wilderness State Park

Hartwick Pines State Park

Michigan Parks Association

Thompson's Harbor State Park

Huron-Clinton  
Metropark Authority

Michigan Horticultural Society

Sleeping Bear Dunes  
National Lakeshore

P.J. Hoffmaster State Park



In the early 1900s, automobiles gave many city residents the freedom to explore nature in Michigan state parks. Image courtesy of Highland County.

## Michigan state parks welcomed the newly-mobile drivers

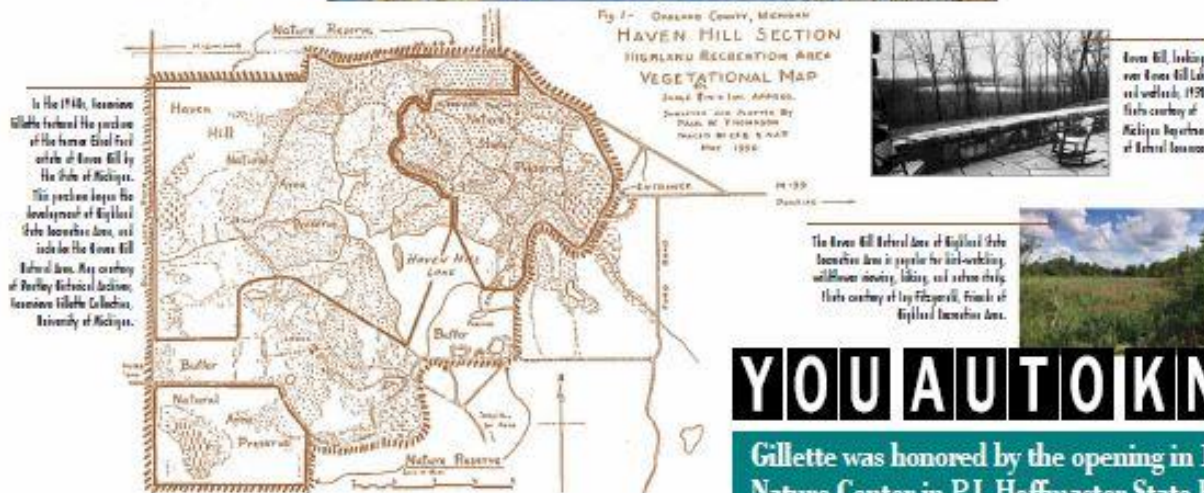
of automobiles in the early 1900s. Genevieve Gillette made it her life's work to preserve precious natural settings and make them available to the travelling public. In 1920 she began her landscape architecture career working in Chicago with noted landscape designer Jens Jensen, whose naturalistic designs included the Edsel Ford estate at Haven Hill. Over decades, her career supported her enduring volunteer efforts in raising awareness of Michigan's natural wonders and their value to society. She established important conservation groups, gained funding for Michigan state parks, and even advised President Lyndon Johnson on recreation and nature.



The Haven Hill Natural Area has been named a National Natural Landmark as one of the finest examples of its biological communities in the country. Genevieve Gillette noted that it includes all types of Michigan forest - hardwood, oak, hemlock, maple, red-birch and mixed hardwood. Photo courtesy of Jay Fitzgerald, Friends of Highland Recreation Area.



Genevieve Gillette (1874-1946) credited her childhood as a farm in Lansing for her life-long love of nature. She maintained a landscape architecture practice in Ann Arbor as the influential her mentor by Michigan's natural heritage. Photo courtesy of Beverly Historical Archives; Genevieve Gillette Collection, University of Michigan.



## YOU AUTO KNOW

Gillette was honored by the opening in 1976 of the Genevieve Gillette Nature Center in P.J. Hoffmaster State Park near Muskegon.

# HAVEN HILL CARRIAGE HOUSE

## The Lodge's "Little Brother"



The Carriage House in the woods near the Lodge, with the garage doors of the Loft. The Carriage House was often called the "Little Brother of the Lodge," sharing the same cedar log construction. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

### It was a garage and a playhouse.

The Carriage House was planned to be the chauffeur's home and to shelter Ford family vehicles. But the chauffeur moved into the Lodge, and the Carriage House became a playhouse for the Ford children – Henry II, Benson, William Clay, and Josephine. Self-sufficiency was important at the estate, as it was in Ford's automobile factories. Building logs came from the same northern Michigan timber holdings used for early Ford vehicle bodies. Model T parts were used in pulling logs up the hill and in a backup power generation system near the Carriage House.



The Carriage House along the ridge of the hill, below the Lodge to the left. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



The chimney of the Carriage House, like all fireplaces and chimneys of the Lodge, was made of Vermont stone.



Log construction of the corner of the Carriage House. Zigzag wires were wrapped around the ends of the logs to minimize peeling of the wood and bark.

## YOU AUTO KNOW

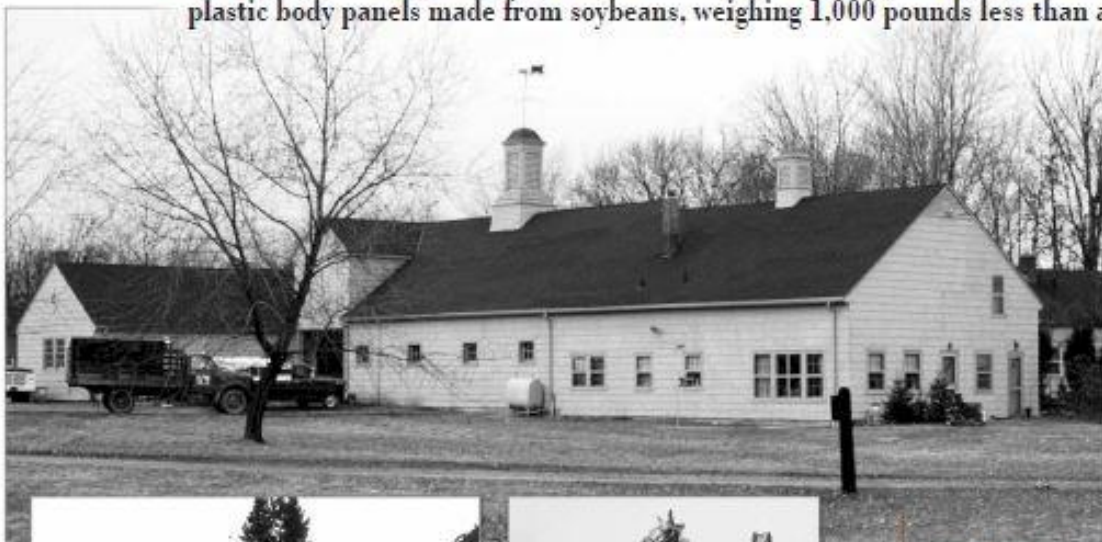
The electrical power system at Haven Hill was placed underground to maintain the natural appearance throughout the estate.

# HAVEN HILL FARM

## Exploring a New World of Agriculture



An expression of deep respect for the land, this complex was called the Farm Group Buildings. Edsel Ford learned from his father Henry Ford who wrote in 1932 that “with one foot in industry and another foot in the land, human society is firmly balanced...” In 1941 Henry Ford displayed a car with plastic body panels made from soybeans, weighing 1,000 pounds less than a steel car.



Haven Hill Lake, one of the scenic lake features designed by Jens Jensen (right).



Viewed from the west side of the Farm Group Buildings.



The building was used for storing hay and milking cows. The stable was also used here.

The Farm Group Buildings, shown here in 1973, are now used as the Michigan Zoo (by the Michigan State University Zoo) for public access. All listed-vehicle photos courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The attractive cupola, still present on the building, provided draft-free ventilation.

Jens Jensen’s design for Haven Hill included road plans, Haven Hill Lake, and a waterfowl sanctuary. The Danish landscape designer’s work focused on naturalistic features and native plants. In Michigan, he also designed the landscapes at the Edsel & Eleanor Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores and at Henry Ford’s Fair Lane estate in Dearborn.

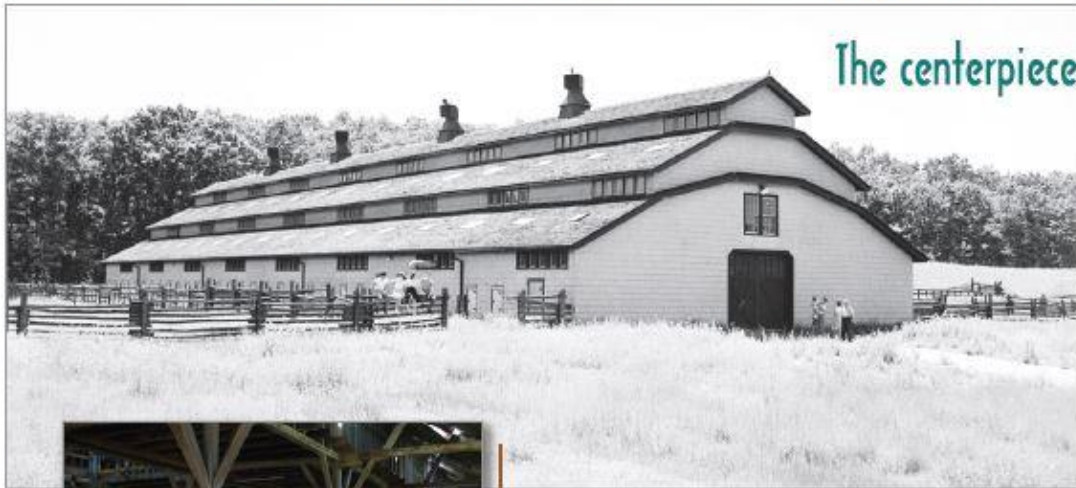
### YOU AUTOKNOW

Edsel Ford established the farm complex for the support of the entire Haven Hill Estate, with the goal to be self sufficient.



# HAVEN HILL FARM

## A Working World of Agriculture



The centerpiece of Edsel Ford's working farm at Haven Hill

was this barn, built in the early 1930s and partially blown down by high winds in 2008. Edsel's father, Henry Ford, was a strong advocate of partnering between agriculture and industry, once proclaiming, "With one foot in industry and one foot in agriculture, America is safe." Henry Ford explored the use of soybeans and other farm products as materials for automobile parts, and Edsel joined other early-20th century automotive industrialists in establishing farms. This huge barn at first housed 1,500 sheep, later replaced by horses and cattle.



The barn at Haven Hill's scale and natural lighting, through windows and skylights, were similar to early Ford automobile manufacturing facilities. Photo courtesy of Miller Neuhar Library, Wayne State University.

Interior spaces in the barn were divided by a hallway that led into the overhead area. Photo courtesy of Friends of Highland Recreation Area.



Horses and riders in a corral at the working farm of Haven Hill. Horseback riding was common at Haven Hill and throughout western Oakland County. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



Haven Hill's working farm buildings have been converted to state park work buildings. The cupola on the roof identifies this building as the one in the background of the photo to the left.

"We are witnessing the beginning of THE AGRINDUSTRIAL AGE!"

Dallas Dispatch &  
Dallas Times-Herald  
June 7, 1936

### YOU AUTO KNOW

Enclosing 15,000 square feet of space, this was one of the largest barns east of the Mississippi River.

# THE HAVEN HILL GETAWAY

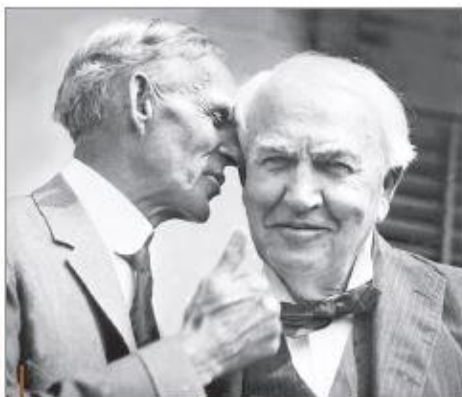
## Celebrities Come to Visit



The Prince of Wales was one of the first visitors to Haven Hill. Photo courtesy of Friends of Highland Recreation Area.



Edsel Ford invited Admiral Richard Byrd to Haven Hill. Admiral Byrd was world captain for his air explorations of the North and South Poles. Photo courtesy of Friends of Highland Recreation Area.



Henry Ford and Thomas Edison were good friends and visitors to Haven Hill. Photo courtesy of Waller Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

### They came from around the world.

In the early 1920s, “weekend jaunts” in automobiles and on new roads brought day travelers to this countryside like never before, and also brought prominent people from around the world. The world of Edsel Ford included relationships with many leaders and explorers of the era and he invited them to his wooded hilltop refuge. These visitors included his father, Henry Ford, legendary inventor Thomas Edison, aviation explorers Charles Lindbergh and Admiral Richard Byrd, the Prince of Wales, Tarzan author Edgar Rice Burroughs, and movie actor Jackie Cooper.



The Lodge at Haven Hill. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



Charles Lindbergh and his aircraft, “The Spirit of St. Louis,” in which he made the world’s first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927. Lindbergh became a friend of Edsel Ford and a visitor to Haven Hill. Photo courtesy of Waller Reuther Library, Wayne State University.



Charles Lindbergh on a test flight of Ford’s “Flower” aircraft later in 1927. The tiny aircraft was an attempt to make airplanes as accessible and useful to people as the Model T automobile. Photo courtesy of Waller Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

## YOU AUTO KNOW

In 1923, local people gathered along Highland Road to glimpse the visit by British royal visitor, the Prince of Wales.

# HAVEN HILL LODGE

## Finding a Retreat in the Countryside



The Lodge occupied the highest elevation in Oakland County, and provided spectacular views in all directions. It was given a rustic look by the use of rough timber and stone in its construction. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.

**It was an expression of new wealth and mobility** created by the early automobile industry. Twenty years after his father founded Ford Motor Company in 1904, Edsel Ford began buying the hilly property that became his family's rural retreat at Haven Hill. At the 6,900 square foot hilltop Lodge, the Fords and their guests enjoyed a swimming pool, tennis courts, motorized toboggan run, and spectacular views of the rolling scenery all around. In the early 1900s, automobiles made isolated rural settings like this more accessible to the wealthy and to people escaping the city for day-trips in the countryside.



In 1999, the empty Lodge burned to the ground. Remaining traces of the Lodge include this fireplace mantel and many foundations of rooms and terraces. After Eleanor Ford sold Haven Hill to the state of Michigan in 1946, the lodge became a state park conference center and environmental learning center until it was closed in 1980.



The inviting and rustic interior of the Lodge included stone fireplaces and plank flooring. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



Recreational sites near the Lodge included this swimming pool, tennis courts, a four-wheeled toboggan run, and horse stables. Photo courtesy of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment.



Henry Ford II and Benson Ford, circa 1920s. The Haven Hill estate offered many natural adventures to the Ford children. Photo courtesy of friends of Highland Recreation Area.



William Clay Ford and Josephine Ford at the Lodge, about 1940. Photo courtesy of friends of Highland Recreation Area.

## YOU AUTOKNOW

Robert O. Derrick, the architect of the Lodge, also designed Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.