

THE FULL STORY OF THE AREA, THE ESTATE AND THE FORD FAMILY

1600 - 1803 : Prior to the first permanent settlers, Native Americans (Ojibwa, Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi) roamed along the Saginaw Trail and camped at Saginaw Plains, Apple Island and various other beautiful spots. Much of the original settlement of the county was around three major native American trails; the Saginaw Trail (now Woodward Avenue), the Shiawassee Trail (which followed the current Orchard Lake Road) and Grand River Trail.

1803 - 1818 : The United States acquired the area now known as Oakland County, from France, in 1803, as part of a 800,000 square mile agreement, and the area was given the name "Old Northwest". The Territory of Michigan was formed by Congress on June 30th 1805, with statehood on January 26, 1837.

In 1818, the Pontiac Company was organized by a group enterprising Detroit and Macomb County men for the purpose of purchasing land and laying a town.

Oakland county was officially organized on January 12, 1819. Governor Cass issued a proclamation that laid out the boundaries of the county. The Pontiac Company offered to contribute both property and money if the county seat was established in Pontiac. The county was divided into two townships on June 28, 1820. The northern section was proclaimed Oakland Township, the southern section was named Bloomfield Township. Subsequently, on April 27, 1827, the legislative council of the Territory of Michigan divided Oakland county into five townships: Farmington, Bloomfield, Troy, Oakland, and Pontiac. In 1820 Governor Cass set the county seat in Pontiac--a central location no more than a day's journey from any point in the county.

The first official census of the county was taken in 1820, and the final count was 330 persons. Within 10 years the population grew to 4,911. By 1840 it was 23,646, and by 1870 it had reached 40,867, being surpassed only by Wayne, Kent, Lenawee and Washtenaw Counties, in that order.

1818 - 1872 : The first public-domain land was purchased by settlers in Michigan in 1818. The Ordinance of 1785 had provided the methods for dividing and selling the recently ceded regions. The land was first surveyed into six-mile-square townships, each containing thirty-six sections. These public domain lands were offered, at the first land office, in Detroit, for \$2 per acre, with a minimum purchase required. "Installment plans" were available. In 1820 the cost per acre was lowered to \$1.25, with "cash only" and a minimum purchase of eighty acres. A "patent," usually signed by a clerk, for the U.S. president, would be sent to the landowner, giving title to the previously federal property. A "pre-emption law" in 1841 gave the "squatters" the right to purchase 160 acres at a minimum price.

1872 - 1908 : The J. Teeple family, William Beatty, the Skarritt family, and Wescott & Hannan Co. owned most of what was a big chunk of Highland Recreation Area. These were some of the early settlers to Oakland county in this region. At that time Haven Hill Lake did not exist, and was just an undammed Cedar Creek, meandering through the area. One of the highest points in Oakland county was then known as "Heaven Hill", the now named Haven Hill. The present day lake know as Teeple lake was originally Steeples Lake, and was changed during Fords time, as was the Hill's name itself.

1908 – 1923 : Some of the properties that make up the present Highland Recreation area changed hands from 1908-1923. The William Beatty family continued to own lands in the area, as well as the Skarrit family. The large parcel that included Cedar creek was sold to J.M. Dodge as an investment during this time. The W.C. Holcomb family also continued to be present in the area.

1923 – 1946 : While living in the "Indian Village" section of downtown Detroit, Edsel became disenchanted with the lack of privacy in what was a growing Detroit city. Starting in 1923, Edsel & Eleanor started to buy up property in the now Highland Recreation area of Oakland county. Total land purchases topped 2,422 acres. In 1924 ground was broke on the construction of the Lodge that sits on top of one of Oakland counties highest points,

Heaven Hill. Edsel renamed the hill, "Haven Hill", to reflect what he felt he was creating there for his family, a Haven. His "Nerve Retreat". By 1931 the Estate was complete, although the family moved there in 1926. Additions and further security renovations continued for almost 5 years after the Fords moved in. Much of that extra work and security precautions were due to the rising tensions with Union talks that were getting heated, the kidnapping and death of Charles Linburgh's son, a close family friend to the Fords, and just the way many successful large business owners were being perceived in America and through out the world. The Estate was self sufficient with two vegetable gardens, a working Farm, with 11,000 square foot Barn, containing 1,500 sheep, cows, chickens and horses. The Estate was comprised of 5 main structures: the Gate house greeted people upon entry to the grounds: the Horse-Riding stables was located on the private road leading you to the Lodge at the top of Haven Hill. You had to drive right past the Stables to get to the top of the hill. Right before you reached the Ford families Home at the Lodge, you passed the Carriage-house/garage. This is where the family kept their autos and where the chauffeur lived. A short distance past the Carriage house and you would arrive at the Lodge. The road circles in front of the Fords home, and you were greeted by the now infamous "Archway". The wooden Archway led you up a lovely stone path and staircase, to the front entry of the Lodge. The Lodge was where the family lived and entertained. It was their home. (Edsel & Eleanor, and their sons, Henry II, Benson and William Clay, and daughter, Josephine) The Lodge was a beautiful log constructed dwelling, with 6 bedrooms. 5 massive Vermont fireplaces and covered over 6,100 square feet. Logs were hauled in from the upper peninsula to construct the Lodge. Pine needles were also shipped in and spread around the grounds to give that "Up-North" feeling and aroma. Besides the 5 main buildings there were the amenities such as the fish stocked lake, the Pool and Pool house, Clay Tennis court and an over 3,000 foot long (1/4 of a mile) Toboggan run with a motorized Tow return. The Estate also included a Horse riding track, a number of nature ponds and trails. Something Edsel and Eleanor loved to do was ride and hike. Near Edsel's death in 1943 the family was using the Estate only as a vacation lodge get-a-way & weekend retreat. In 1943 Edsel Ford passed away at his Gaukler Pointe home, in Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan. The "Dream Home" Edsel & Eleanor had built while living at their Haven Hill estate.

1946 – 1972 : In 1946 Eleanor sold the Haven Hill Estate property to the State's Department of Conservation. The state created a Conference center and dormitory of the Estate's Lodge and Carriage house. This lasted for over 12 years. The State continued purchasing other lands in the area that would all end up becoming part of the Highland Recreation area.

1972 – 1980 : In 1972 the Conference Center and Dormitory (Carriage house) became a Nature Center for the State's MDNR. The Conference Center, Carriage house and the entire Ford Estate was transferred over to the State's now Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), who created Highland Recreation area by pulling together all of the Department of Conservation's lands in this part of Oakland county that had been purchased since 1947 onward. The Nature Center lasted until 1980, when budget cuts and the costs of maintaining the buildings and Estate within the Recreation area, rose above the states abilities to cover. The Estate's buildings were all boarded up and left alone, except for the Horse Stables, which the DNR turned into a park maintenance facility. In 1991, a preservation study put the cost of restoring the Lodge itself at 1 million dollars and the DNR put the deteriorating Lodge on the states demolition list.

1980 – 2009 : The Lodge was burned down in 1999 by an arson fire, and the remains of the estate have been left untouched & abandoned since then.

The Haven Hill history is an excerpt from the book, "HAVEN HILL" The study of the Edsel & Eleanor Ford estate at Highland Recreation area, Oakland county, Michigan. The complete and detailed History is located in this book.