



The Fair Lane Legacy Composition Competition for Young Composers

Memories of a Family Home

A life story written in stone, steel, and blossom, Fair Lane was home to Clara and Henry Ford for over thirty years. Fair Lane, named after the birthplace of Henry's step-grandfather, Patrick Ahern, in County Cork, Ireland, and neither the largest nor most opulent house of its time, clearly reflected the simple tastes of its owners. More than just a domestic haven, Fair Lane was the site of lifelong learning, and friendships. It nurtured the partnership and broad interests of Clara and Henry and was at once a place of work, a salon for conversation, a model for native landscapes, and an avian sanctuary with more than five hundred birdhouses. The estate was also the launching pad for a remarkable scope of activities including engineering experiments, agricultural production, civic pursuits, horticultural initiatives, camping ventures, vegetarian practices, and the development of Greenfield Village, a school conceived by the Ford's to celebrate American ingenuity and invention.

A typical evening at home might find the Fords sharing a modest meal and quiet evening by the fire. But, at times, Fair Lane was bustling with activity as the Fords entertained friends, enjoyed moments with family, or hosted gatherings that included notable figures such as Charles Lindbergh, President Herbert Hoover, and the Prince of Wales.

From her study, Clara directed her civic and humanitarian contributions. Many of her projects focused on making a difference in women's lives, from advocating women's suffrage to providing support for unwed mothers and unskilled girls who needed medical care and skills training. Her passion for horticulture extended to her leadership of the Women's National Farm and Garden Association and her promotion of roadside markets where farm families could supplement their income with sales of fresh produce. She shared many interests with her husband, from a committed antiwar stance to a deep love of nature, music and dance.

Henry could frequently be found in Fair Lane's powerhouse, with its state-of-the-art hydroelectric generators—a facility manifesting the self-reliance he advocated. Here, in his third floor laboratory, he repaired watches; experimented with soybeans to produce oil, fibers, and plastics; and, tested tractors. In 1918, when the vagabonds – Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, John Burroughs and Henry Ford – were planning a motor camping trip, Henry arranged for the tents to be assembled around the estate to test their reliability. The security, stability, and inspiration at Fair Lane provided a springboard for Henry's many endeavors in the outside world, from outdoor adventure to industry to politics.

Clara and Henry were happiest when their only child, Edsel, his wife Eleanor, and their four children—Henry II, Benson, Josephine, and William—came to visit. They made Fair Lane the location for family memories, from making maple syrup to dancing and playing music to spending time in the playhouse and miniature barn with its small-scale farm machinery. It was Fair Lane that a deep love of family, an appreciation of the natural environment, and the encouragement to be curious and to try new things came together to form values that still echo in the halls of Fair Lane and define beliefs of the Ford Family.