

# Henry Ford brought industry to country

BY RENEE M. SKOGLUND  
SPECIAL WRITER

The Henry Ford who conceived the huge Rouge Plant also created "village industries," small factories in the countryside that tapped into the power of nearby streams. Ford intended to harmonize rural life and industry by exporting his small-parts manufacturing into the country. By using the under-employed rural labor force, he could preserve farming and benefit industry. By 1914, over 20 village industries dotted the banks of country rivers, including several along the Rouge River.

## Nankin Mills

Henry Ford visited Nankin Mills, on Ann Arbor Trail in Westland, often in his childhood when it was the heart of a community known as Pike's Peak. He bought it in 1918. Shortly after it opened in 1920, the restored mill produced stencils for making Ford parts. Nankin Mills, with its beautiful 12-inch-thick sycamore beams, is now the picturesque headquarters of the Wayne County Parks Department.

## Newburgh Mill

Built on the site of an old cider mill in 1935, Newburgh Mill — on Hines Drive in Livonia — was started by employees from the Rouge Plant and completed by farmers. Thirty-one men worked at the mill, including the farmers who helped build it. They produced 95 percent of the twist drills used by Ford. During World War II, the

plant made several parts for the Pratt and Whitney airplane engine. Production ceased in 1947. Currently, the building is used as a mini sheriff station.

## Wilcox (Plymouth) Mill

Production began at Wilcox, on Wilcox Road in Plymouth, in 1923. It employed 35 men who made \$6 a day.

The mill, originally the site of the Wilcox grist mill, produced 95 percent of all taps used to make screws used by Ford. During World War II, 60 men worked in two shifts to manufacture aircraft engine parts in addition to the taps. All production ceased after the war.

## Phoenix Mill

Built in 1922, Phoenix Mill — on Northville Road in Northville Township — employed between 50 and 100 women who made small parts for the electrical systems.

They received \$5 a day and two rest periods. During World War II, the women made ID badges and electrical wiring for the M-7 gun director. The mill closed after the war and now serves as a maintenance yard.

## Northville plant

In 1920, the Northville plant opened on the Main Street site of a former sawmill.

Eventually, the plant employed 250 local people, many of them farmers, who made valves for Model T's being assembled at the Rouge Plant.

Information from "Ford Village Industries," Wayne County Parks and recreation.



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM SAWYER

Botsford Inn: Creon Smith stands in the famous dance hall at the Botsford Inn.

## Legacy of dance lives on at the Botsford Inn

"The square dances are rapidly returning to their original popularity... The modern dances with their lesser demand for skill and spirit, their tuneless music, their tendency to jazz, their essential unsociability, are losing vogue everywhere."

— from "Good Morning" a book on early American square dancing published by Henry Ford in 1926

Ford loved country dancing, and folklore has it he purchased the 160-year-old Botsford Inn on Grand River in Farmington because he met and courted his wife, Clara, on the inn's huge dance floor.

Shortly after buying the inn in 1924, Ford began making restorations, which included moving the inn 200 feet back from the road and lengthening the upstairs ballroom to 30

by 80 feet. He renovated the original dance floor by installing special gaskets under each wooden peg, making sure dancers would always enjoy a good "bounce."

Current owner Creon Smith has revived a Ford tradition by opening the ballroom to country dancing every Friday night. About the dance floor, Smith said, "It's a dancer's dream. Your ankles never get tired."

## Canton factory offered spot for disabled veterans

Henry Ford built a factory in Canton's Cherry Hill Village just for disabled World War II veterans, according to Melissa McLaughlin, a member of the Canton Historic Commission. The factory, one of Ford's "village industries," was located on the corner of Ridge and Cherry

Hill roads, still very much a rural area. The site has been expanded, and is now occupied by DE-STA-CO Cylinders.

The old creamery that Ford converted into a dormitory for the men stands empty nearby.

In addition to physical limitations, some of the veterans were

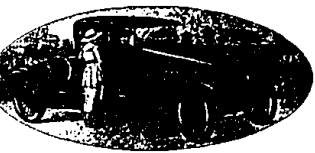
shell-shocked. Ford chose the site for its quiet and hired managers for their patience. He also made sure the men ate well.

"Henry Ford brought his chef out from Fair Lane. He used to come out and have breakfast with the men," said McLaughlin.

Because there was a moratorium on building supplies at the time, Ford built the factory on the sly. "People sent in their dinner bells off the farm to be melted into bullets," she said.

The factory manufactured ignition and door locks, keys, and hinges. It closed in 1961.

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## Museum showcases history of racing

BY RENEE M. SKOGLUND  
SPECIAL WRITER

If you're a "speed freak," rev your engines and head for the Motorsports Hall of Fame in Novi. Opened just three years ago, the 19,000-square-foot museum features over 75 new and vintage racing machines, from Indy cars and dragsters to motorcycles and boats.

Holding special place in the exhibit is the "Novi Special," the city's namesake, whose supercharged Novi V-8 rattled eardrums for almost 20 years.

From 1946 to 1965, the Novi became legendary in the world of motor sports due to local industrialist Lee Welch's quest to win the Indianapolis 500. Welch produced a series of race cars that led races, broke records, did everything a legend should do — except win.

"No car made a sound like a Novi Special," said Ron Watson, president of the Motorsports Hall of Fame. "They would fire

up and the crowd would stand up in awe. A mystique grew about it. Something would always go wrong. It would set the pace, then maybe its wheels would wear down. It never won."

But legends have little to do with love, Watson said. "The Novi Special is America's most popular racing car."

The Motorsports Hall of Fame also pays tribute to the men and women who laid their hearts and souls on the track. Their portraits make up the museum's "Heroes of Horsepower" gallery.

Watson is very proud of the museum's educational mission. Docents teach the children about safety features, technological advances in crash endurance, and wonders of aerodynamics.

"Motor sports is the most colorful use of science and technology," Watson said.



The Novi Special

There are plenty of hands-on attractions at the museum: driver uniforms, memorabilia, videos, driving simulation games and a 1/24-scale slot-car track.

Watson encourages everyone who loves cars to come out and visit the Motorsports Hall of Fame during the American Automobile Centennial celebration week. "It's not only for gear heads," he said. "There's a lot of good human stories here."

The Motorsports Hall of Fame is located in the Novi Expo Center on Novi Road just south of I-96 (exit 182). It's open seven days a week, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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## Quiz: TV cops and cars

BY MARY QUINLEY  
SPECIAL WRITER

Match the television crime fighters with their cars:

1. The Saint
2. Colombo
3. Magnum, P.I.
4. Cannon
5. Sonny Crockett
6. Knight Rider
7. Viper
8. Starsky and Hutch
9. The Persuaders
10. Jim Rockford

- A. Pontiac Firebird
- B. Volvo
- C. Ferrari Dino 246
- D. Peugeot
- E. Ford Torino
- F. Lincoln Mark III
- G. Ferrari Testarossa, Ferrari Daytona
- H. Pontiac Firebird Trans Am
- I. Dodge Viper
- J. Ferrari 308

Answers: 1B, 2D, 3J, 4F, 5G, 6H, 7I, 8E, 9C, 10A

## CREDITS

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