

**NORTHVILLE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
STUDY REPORT
NORTHVILLE, WAYNE COUNTY, MICHIGAN**

VOLUME II – FULL INVENTORY

FINAL REPORT

Prepared for

**CITY OF NORTHVILLE
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Additional materials on Ford Field and adjoining properties to the south of Ford Field provided by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society

R-1320

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Figure 1-1. Local Historic District Boundary: Northville Historic District, Northville, Wayne County, Michigan



Figure 1-2. Local Historic District Boundary: Northville Historic District, Northville, Wayne County, Michigan

1.8 Griswold Street

NVA #14 Griswold Street, Ford Field East Park (Contributing)

Description

This property is an irregularly shaped parcel that extends north from East Main Street and wraps around to Griswold Street, north of the Ford Valve Plant at 235 East Main Street. A sidewalk spans the southern portion of the property than fronts East Main Street and the western portion that front Griswold Street. A dirt two-track runs along the northern boundary of the parcel. The property consists of greenspace that surrounds a pond on the Rouge River that is formed by a dam, which is located near the southeastern portion of the parcel. A small channel leads from a second pond, at the base of the dam, to the waterwheel on the east side of the Ford Valve Plant and is likely a remnant of the mill race.

The dam is a concrete structure that extends across the river. Two concrete walls flank the dam to each side. Metal railings top the walls, and the western wall extends outward above the dam, forming a small platform.

History

See the history for 235 East Main Street, the Ford Valve Plant, and the Industrial context of this report.

Evaluation

The property at NVA #14 Griswold Street is significant under National Register Criterion A for commerce, industry, and its role in Northville's community development. The dam, pond, and mill race remnant are historically associated with the Ford Valve Plant at 235 East Main Street. These features retain integrity of design, location, feeling, and association. It is recommended as a contributing resource to the Northville Historic District.

151 N. Griswold Street - No Visible Address (NVA) #15 – Ford Field (Contributing) **(Information provided by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society)**

Description

This property is an open field located north of East Main Street, south of Mill Race Village, east of Hutton Street, and west of Griswold Street. Ford Field is situated due south of the property where the historic Northville Mills once operated in the 1800s near the banks of the Middle Rouge River. This six-acre parcel provides open space for events and community gatherings, is home to the Fort Griswold playscape, and a lighted baseball diamond. It contains a ¼ mile asphalt walking path, a bridge connecting it to Mill Race Village, picnic tables for outdoor dining, and a parking lot conveniently located on the east side of the property. A well-maintained stairway makes the space accessible from Hutton Street.

History

Henry Ford was enamored with Northville. As early as 1888 proof of his interest in the area was shown when he brought his bride, Clara, by horse and buggy on their honeymoon trip.¹ As a result of his early connection to the area, he chose Northville as one of the sites for his village industries and purchased property in 1919.² The parcel now known as Ford Field was part of Henry Ford's property acquisition.³

Henry Ford liked to beautify the properties that he owned for the enjoyment of the entire community. An editorial by Richard T. Baldwin described Henry Ford's commitment to Northville: "Not only has he given us a marvelous industrial plant, helping to bring prosperity to hundreds of our community, but he has given us a vision of beauty and the spiritual values of life which will endure long after he is gone. Probably the sum spent in beautification of the Ford properties here would run into an amazing figure."⁴

The open field, west of Griswold Street across from the Ford Valve Plant, was an asset to the community and served as a hub for recreation and social activity. In the early 1940s Fourth of July celebrations were held there and hundreds attended.⁵ These celebrations included concerts⁶, games, and sporting events for people of all ages.

By July 1946 the Village Commission, led by President Forrest Doren, had officially secured the use of the property from the Ford Motor Company. Efforts to improve the field and develop it into a site for school and community recreation began in earnest with the Exchange Club sponsoring the project. The vision was to "improve and light Ford Field for a Community Recreation Center. A No. 1 ball diamond and a gridiron will be laid out...and many other items necessary to turn this natural amphitheater into a beautiful and useful contribution to the civic pride of the village."⁷ Ford Motor Company was proud of its involvement in "providing an opportunity for civic cooperation."⁸

A recreation committee was formed and was responsible for raising money to fund the project and coordinate the contracts necessary to develop the vision. The committee's goal was to be ready in time for the start of the high school football season.⁹ Prior to this time the Northville high school football team did not have a home field.

On Friday, November 15, 1946 Henry Ford Field was officially dedicated. An estimated 3500 people were in attendance. The program began with a performance of the national anthem by

¹ Northville Record, April 15, 1938, 2.

² "Ford's Interests Have 60 Men Employed." Northville Record, September 12, 1919, 1.

³ Village of Northville Tax Assessment Records, 1920, 46.

⁴ Northville Record, April 15, 1938, 2.

⁵ "Young and Old, 500 Strong Enjoy July 4th Field Day." Northville Record, July 9, 1943, 1.

⁶ "Children and Adults Invited to Ford Field." Northville Record, July 5, 1946, 1.

⁷ "Seek Funds to Light and Fence Ford Field." Northville Record, July 12, 1946, 1.

⁸ "Ford News Boosts Local Recreation." Northville Record, September 27, 1946, 1.

⁹ "Ford News Boosts Local Recreation." Northville Record, September 27, 1946, 1.

Charles Strautz accompanied by the Northville and Plymouth bands. The invocation was delivered by Methodist minister Rev. W. Leslie Williams – “we dedicate this Henry Ford Field as a memorial to those who have been benefactors to our surrounding community for several decades. And we also dedicate this field to those who will use it, that it may be the instrument to help build good clean recreational opportunities for our people, so that they may grow strong in body, mind and spirit. May the use of this field bring to us more clearly the lessons and rules of the game of life...May this field be a credit and a real benefit to this community.”¹⁰ Although the Northville football team lost their game to Plymouth that night those in attendance witnessed an historic event which “put Northville’s athletic facilities in the class with big cities.”¹¹ The village was entering a new era as their recreation committee was now developing into something more substantial as “high school and community recreation takes a new and more significant place in the village. As added improvements are brought into the picture, townspeople will realize the great value of this project to our community.”¹²

Work continued on the field with the installation of concrete bleachers and the addition of a softball diamond in 1947.¹³ The new ball diamond provided a home for the Northville Recreational League¹⁴ and a softball league for boys and girls.¹⁵

As the recreation department developed, Ford Field was used for a variety of activities. The summer of 1948 saw about 1000 Northville youths participate in the village recreation program at the field.¹⁶ In 1949 a summer tether tennis tournament was held.¹⁷ Donkey Ball came to Ford Field in May 1950. This gimmicky softball game was played with participants rounding the bases astride donkeys and proved quite popular as a fundraiser in Northville.¹⁸ In 1951 The game made a repeat appearance and was billed as “America’s Funniest Sport.”¹⁹ In June 1950 school children put on a program at Ford Field in which a flag and flagpole were dedicated.²⁰ A field day was held that year for members of the Junior Police. Activities of the day included tether tennis, a BB gun tournament, and a baseball target throw.²¹ By the end of 1950 a scoreboard was added to the southeast corner of the field after an aggressive fundraising campaign began in 1949.²² The Northville High School class of 1948 was the first to contribute (\$204.47) thus providing inspiration for others to donate.²³ The campaign was successful and provided approximately \$1600 to turn the dream into reality.²⁴ The space was not just used for recreation

¹⁰ “Crowd of 3500 at Dedication of Henry Ford Field.” *Northville Record*, November 22, 1946, 1.

¹¹ “Crowd of 3500 at Dedication of Henry Ford Field.” *Northville Record*, November 22, 1946, 1.

¹² “Crowd of 3500 at Dedication of Henry Ford Field.” *Northville Record*, November 22, 1946, 1.

¹³ “Ford Field Nears Completion.” *Northville Record*, July 4, 1947, 1.

¹⁴ “Double Header at Ford Field Tonite.” *Northville Record*, August 8, 1947, 1.

¹⁵ “Baseball Team Defeats Plymouth.” *Northville Record*, July 9, 1948, 1.

¹⁶ “Brader’s Team Loses in Class F Finals.” *Northville Record*, August 27, 1948, 1.

¹⁷ “Recreation Program to Begin Tourneys.” *Northville Record*, July 7, 1949, 1.

¹⁸ “Donkey Ball Game Planned for May 21.” *Northville Record*, May 18, 1950, 1.

¹⁹ *Northville Record*, August 2, 1951, 11.

²⁰ “Dedicate New Flag, Pole at Ford Field.” *Northville Record*, June 15, 1950, 1.

²¹ “Field Day Planned for Junior Police.” *Northville Record*, June 1, 1950, 1.

²² “\$800.00 Collected for Score Board.” *Northville Record*, November 3, 1949, 1.

²³ “Scoreboard Proves Popular at Field.” *Northville Record*, September 28, 1950, 1.

²⁴ “Scoreboard Proves Popular at Field.” *Northville Record*, September 28, 1950, 1.

but was also a location in which large crowds could congregate. Governor G. Mennen Williams scheduled a visit to Ford Field to speak on November 3, 1950 as part of his campaign for reelection.²⁵

Even though the village did not formally own the property, improvements were still being made. In 1953 a new entrance was constructed on the north end of Ford Field.²⁶ In February 1954, Ford Motor Company offered to sell the property to the village of Northville for \$5500.²⁷ The transaction did not take place at that time; forty years would pass before ownership was transferred.

As the years progressed, the site continued to play an important role in serving the needs of the community from a cultural and recreational perspective. A Pet and Doll Show was organized by the children of Northville and held at Ford Field on August 1, 1956.²⁸ In 1960 Ford Field was used for the Northville summer recreation day camp. This program was not just for athletic pursuits; arts, crafts, and games were offered as well as an archery tournament and golf.²⁹ In 1961 the National Football League established the national Punt, Pass, and Kick competition. The local contest was sponsored by John Mach Ford Sales of Northville.³⁰ Ford Field was naturally chosen as the local venue for the competition which would take place annually for many years.³¹

By 1962 the new high school athletic field was dedicated and Ford Field was no longer used for high school football games.³² Even though the high school football games were now being played at another location, Ford Field was being utilized as much as ever. Throughout the 1960s the community enjoyed the circus³³, carnivals³⁴, and chicken barbeques.³⁵ Prior to the summer season of 1967, volunteers came out in force to help prepare Ford Field for recreation activities.³⁶ In 1969 Northville hosted a BB-gun tournament at the field and saw six of the participants earning a spot at the state competition.³⁷

The issue of ownership arose again in 1970. There was concern about spending taxpayer dollars to improve property that was not publicly owned. Ford Field was important to the success of the recreation department and the culture of the city so expenditures for improvements were

²⁵ "Governor to Speak at Ford Field." *Northville Record*, November 2, 1950, 1.

²⁶ "Start Work on New Entrance to Ford Field." *Northville Record*, October 15, 1953, 12.

²⁷ "Ford Motor Offers Ford Field to Village for \$5500." *Northville Record*, February 18, 1954, 1.

²⁸ "Pet and Doll Show Slated August 1 at Ford Field." *Northville Record*, July 19, 1956, 11.

²⁹ "Recreation Registration Starts Monday." *Northville Record*, June 16, 1960, 11.

³⁰ "Mach Sponsors Contest for Kids." *Northville Record*, September 28, 1961, 5.

³¹ "Punt, Pass & Kick." *Northville Record*, September 10, 1986, 16-A.

³² "Field Dedication, Choosing of Queen Mark Homecoming." *Northville Record*, October 25, 1962, 1.

³³ Advertisement, "The Famous Cole 3 Ring Circus." *Northville Record*, June 18, 1964, 2-3.

³⁴ "Jaycees Plan 'Bang Up' July Fourth." *Northville Record*, July 3, 1963, 1.

³⁵ "A Day for Food, Fun and Fellowship." *Northville Record*, June 18, 1964, 1.

³⁶ "Face Lifting." *Northville Record*, April 13, 1967, 7-A.

³⁷ "Six Boys Show Way into Finals." *Northville Record*, May 8, 1969, 15-A.

approved anyway.³⁸ As programs were expanding in 1970-71 season, this site provided the necessary space to accommodate the growing popularity of baseball, softball, and soccer.³⁹ The Jaycees worked diligently in 1970 to refresh Ford Field with lighting upgrades, removal of the old bleachers, and tidying up the landscape.⁴⁰ Later that year an outdoor ice rink was installed at the site providing the community with year-round activity opportunities with skating and hockey skill instruction as part of the recreation department program offerings.⁴¹

The 1980s saw further improvements with a new wooden stairway installation made possible by a federal grant.⁴² In 1984 Tom Rice's Folk and Bluegrass Festival celebrated its eighth anniversary at Ford Field thus providing the community yet another culturally stimulating way to spend time together in this historic space.⁴³

By 1990 the question of ownership of the land came up yet again as the city sought to gain control of the site.⁴⁴ The city of Northville finally took official ownership of the property four years later when the parcel was donated by Ford Motor Company.⁴⁵ The summer clean up in 1994 was especially meaningful now that the community was sprucing up property that was legally their own.⁴⁶ The Friends of the Northville Parks and Recreation group, founded in 1992, was instrumental in coordinating the clean up process and later would participate in the community wide fundraising efforts for improvements like the Fort Griswold playscape.⁴⁷ The playscape was a picture perfect example of what can happen when a community dedicates itself to a worthwhile project. In June 1997 after a year of planning and fundraising the Fort Griswold playscape became a reality. A team of over 900 volunteers⁴⁸ descended upon Ford Field for the massive multiple day undertaking of constructing the \$90,000 playscape⁴⁹ thus further enhancing the site's desirability for family outings and community gatherings.

Ford Field experienced a monumental overhaul in 2001. The project cost \$600,000 and was slated to include a parking lot, pavilion, gazebo, new pathways, a walking bridge connecting to Mill Race Village, as well as relocation of the baseball and soccer fields. Mayor Chris Johnson commented that "the renovation project is an exciting thing for the community of Northville...once completed residents and visitors will have the opportunity to fully enjoy this historical field and all it has to offer."⁵⁰

³⁸ "City Trims, Oks Budget For Recreation Program." *Northville Record*, February 26, 1970, 14-A.

³⁹ "Recreation Squeeze Seen." *Northville Record*, January 22, 1970, 14-1.

⁴⁰ "Jaycees Add Four to Membership." *Northville Record*, April 2, 1970, 4-A.

⁴¹ "Hockey Clinic Schedule Here." *Northville Record*, January 28, 1971, 11-A.

⁴² "Ford Field's new look." *Northville Record*, April 29, 1981, 6-D.

⁴³ Kevin Wilson, "Busy downtown activity schedule this weekend." *Northville Record*, July 25, 1984, 1.

⁴⁴ Stephen Kellman, "City seeks terms to acquire Ford Valve Plant." *Northville Record*, November 29, 1990, 15-A.

⁴⁵ "Township firm takes ownership of Ford plant." *Northville Record*, March 10, 1994, 7-A.

⁴⁶ "Pitch in to spruce up Ford Field." *Northville Record*, July 14, 1994, 6-A.

⁴⁷ Melanie Plenda, "Friends of parks and rec raise big money." *Northville Record*, August 3, 2001, 15-A.

⁴⁸ Randy Coble, "Pizza, pasta and porta-johns sustained legions of volunteers." *Northville Record*, June 12, 1997, 64.

⁴⁹ Coble, "Donations big and small provided resources to finish the project." *Northville Record*, June 12, 1997, 64.

⁵⁰ Lon Huhman, "Massive park improvement begins." *Northville Record*, May 3, 2001, 1.

The years following the improvement project were bustling with activity. The Suburban Kids Rockin' Under Ford Field (SKRUFF) concerts debuted in 2003 as a way to engage the youth of the community.⁵¹ The Northville Eclipse Baseball Club was also formed that year brought vintage baseball to Ford Field.⁵² The American Cancer Society's fundraiser, Relay for Life found a home at Ford Field in 2003 as well.⁵³

Memories shared by generations have been formed at Ford Field. In June 2004 when Dean Hubbert took to the field for his pre-tee ball game, he was the third generation of his family to play there.⁵⁴ Later in 2004, the Howl-O-Ween Pet Festival and Parade provided residents an opportunity to come to Ford Field and showcase their pets, reminiscent of similar events that took place during the 1950s.⁵⁵

The 22nd Annual Victorian Festival in 2010 brought a tethered hot air balloon, vintage baseball, and the world-famous Flying Wallendas to Ford Field.⁵⁶

The stairway was once again refreshed in 2012 when Jared Myers chose it as the focus of his Eagle Scout project. The rails and deck were repaired and stained. There were more than 25 volunteers present to assist and an excess of 50 gallons of stain were used to complete the project.⁵⁷

The Northville Chamber of Commerce hosted the fourth annual Ford Field Festival in 2016. This celebration of "food, beer, and fun"⁵⁸ included live music performances and further exemplified the necessity of this open space for the continued development of community recreation and culture.

Evaluation

According to the Local Historic Districts Act 169 of 1970, (399.201a) an *historic resource* is defined as "a publicly or privately owned building, structure, site, object, feature, or **open space** that is significant in the history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or **culture** of this state or a community within this state, or of the United States."

The property is an open space that is a significant historic resource under National Register Criterion A⁵⁹ for its contribution to the culture of the community and its role in the development

⁵¹ Grace Blum, "Music acts hit Ford Field this weekend." *Northville Record*, May 29, 2003, 15-A.

⁵² Pauline Lupercio and Sam Eggleston, "Step up to the plate." *Northville Record*, March 27, 2003, 1-B.

⁵³ Jennifer Norris, "Relay for Life moves to Northville's Ford Field." *Northville Record*, April 24, 2003, 3-A.

⁵⁴ *Northville Record*, June 10, 2004, 14-A.

⁵⁵ "Pets on Parade is planned." *Northville Record*, October 28, 2004, 7-B.

⁵⁶ "Victorian Festival attracts large crowds." *Northville Record*, September 23, 2010, A10.

⁵⁷ "Three scouts of Troop 755 achieve Eagle rank." *Northville Record*, April 26, 2012, A18.

⁵⁸ "Ford Field Fest rolls in Aug 20." *Northville Record*, August 4, 2016, 1.

⁵⁹ Advisory Council for Historic Preservation. *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.).

of Northville’s recreation department. It is also significant in a broader sense to the state and the nation due to the connection to world-renowned industrialist Henry Ford and thus should be included as a contributing resource in the Northville Historic District.

This parcel of land honors the memory of Henry Ford and all of the citizens who worked tirelessly to develop and maintain Ford Field as a hub for cultural activity and a vibrant recreation department.

[No other changes are proposed to this section]

1.14 Main Street – East

1.14.1 Main Street, East, North Side

[Insert the following after the citation for NVA #12]

201 East Main Street (Non-Contributing) (Information to be evaluated by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society)

Description

The property at 201 East Main Street is located in a commercial district in the eastern end of downtown Northville, Michigan, on the north side of the road. A public sidewalk is located along the south edge of the property. A paved parking lot is located east and north of the structure, which can be accessed from two driveways, one on the east side of Hutton Street, and one on the north side of East Main Street. This parking lot is shared with the property to the east (215 East Main Street). The parking lot abuts Ford Field to the north. The south and west elevations of the building are decorated with a planting bed edged with decorative fieldstone. The building currently contains three separate commercial uses.

This single-story brick commercial building occupies the northeast corner of East Main Street and Hutton Street. The street facades feature gable-end rooflines over entry doors to retail units, and the walk-up banking machine facing Hutton Street. The entire building is capped with a pitched roof. A corner tower is placed over the main entry door at the southwest corner of the building, which is presented in a curved façade to allow the door to directly face the street intersection. The tower structure contains a decorative etched window featuring the occupant’s logo. The main entry door is served by a barrier-free access ramp that is flanked by a decorative wrought-iron fence.

History

This commercial building was erected in 1988^{XX}.

Evaluation

The property at 201 East Main Street is not significant under any of the National Register Criteria. The commercial building was constructed in 1988 and falls outside the period of significance for the district. It is recommended as a non-contributing resource to the Northville Historic District.

215 - 269 East Main Street (Non-Contributing) (Information evaluated by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society)

Description

The property at 215 - 269 East Main Street is located in a commercial district in the eastern end of downtown Northville, Michigan, on the north side of the road. The building currently contains two separate commercial uses, each having its own address. A public sidewalk is located along the south edge of the property, and private sidewalk is located along the west side of the building. A paved parking lot is located west of the structure, which can be accessed from two driveways, one on the east side of Hutton Street, and one on the north side of East Main Street. This parking lot is shared with the property to the west (201 East Main Street). The parking lot abuts Ford Field to the north. The main entryway into the building faces the parking lot (west). The south elevation of the building is decorated with a planting bed edged with decorative fieldstone.

This two-story commercial building has large upper story rectangular windows, and smaller windows on the main floor. The façade is faced with brick up to the bottom of the second floor windows, and then with a smooth composite material above that is painted a subdued white. A brick band, in complimentary colors, decorates the brick fascia approximately one-third up the facade. The second story windows are flanked with masonry piers. A frieze board above the second story windows is decorated with truncated square pyramids in a regular horizontal pattern. Vertical brackets also decorate the frieze board at the corners of the building and corners of the westerly dormer. The building features a pitched roof, with the gable ends facing the north and south elevations, each containing circular ornaments. A gabled dormer occupies the western façade and is placed over the main entry door accessed from the parking lot.

History

This commercial building was erected in 1973^{XX}.

Evaluation

The property at 215 - 269 East Main Street is not significant under any of the National Register Criteria. The commercial building was constructed in 1973 and falls outside the period of significance for the district. It is recommended as a non-contributing resource to the Northville Historic District.

295 - 311 East Main Street (Non-Contributing) (Information to be evaluated by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society)

Description

The property at 295 - 311 East Main Street is located in a commercial district in the eastern end of downtown Northville, Michigan, on the north side of the road. This building directly abuts the building to the west (215 – 269 East Main Street), and wraps around this neighboring building at the rear. This building also abuts the building to the east (333 East Main Street). The property abuts Ford Field to the north. The ground floor of the building contains two retail units, as well as a recessed carriage-style garage door into an underground parking lot. The two ground floor retail units are accessed via separate recessed doorways flanked by large storefront windows. The second story also contains commercial space.

The façade of this two-story commercial building is faced with mitered block on the ground floor, and brick on the upper floor. The running-bond brick body pattern is interrupted by two brick “columns” and corbelling the brick at the bottom of the cornice. The brick “columns” are capped with square light-colored stone capitals. The upper cornice is decorated with vertical molding. The upper floor windows are rectangular, double-hung windows surrounded by a decorative masonry hood a sill made of a brick header course.

History

This commercial building was erected in 2008^{XX}.

Evaluation

The property at 295 - 311 East Main Street is not significant under any of the National Register Criteria. The commercial building was constructed in 2008 and falls outside the period of significance for the district. It is recommended as a non-contributing resource to the Northville Historic District.

333 East Main Street (Non-Contributing) (Information to be evaluated by Ellen Elliot, Assistant to the Archivist, Northville Historical Society)

Description

The property at 333 East Main Street is located in a commercial district in the eastern end of downtown Northville, Michigan, on the north side of the road. This building directly abuts the building to the west (295 - 311 East Main Street), and a parking lot to the east. The property abuts Ford Field to the north. This is a single-use building, with its main entrance oriented to the parking lot to the east.

The façade of this one-story commercial building is faced with brick below a row of rectangular windows. This horizontal brick/window configuration spans the entire south façade, and most of the eastern façade. The building features a shallow-pitched hip roof with a wide overhang. The

parking lot east of the building is accessed via one driveway on the north side of East Main Street.

History

This commercial building was erected in 1970^{XX}.

Evaluation

The property at 333 East Main Street is not significant under any of the National Register Criteria. The commercial building was constructed in 2008 and falls outside the period of significance for the district. It is recommended as a non-contributing resource to the Northville Historic District.

[No other changes are proposed to this section]

2.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

[This section will be updated when the changes are inserted into the full document.]

Appendix A

Photographs of All Surveyed Resources within the Northville Local Historic District

[This section will be updated when the changes are inserted into the full document.]

Appendix B

List of Contributing and Non-Contributing Resources in the Northville Local Historic District

[This section will be updated when the changes are inserted into the full document.]