



Henry Ford (1863 – 1947)

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New York Times April 1947

The Henry Ford Story

Henry Ford, founder of Ford Motor Company, was born in Springwells Township, Wayne Count, Michigan, July 30 1863, son of William and Mary (Litgogot) Ford. He was the eldest of six children in a family of four boys and two girls. His father was a native Gandon, County Cork, Ireland, who came to America in 1847 and settled on a Wayne County farm.

Here during his boyhood Henry Ford developed traits that remained with him all his life: love of nature, self-discipline, independence of thought, mechanical genius – and distaste for the drudgery of farming. Here he was given the task of caring for the horses, a chore he disliked above all others but forced himself to master. Here he was presented with his first watch; as a result he devised a set of hand-made tool and became, by the time he was fifteen, the accepted watch repairman of the vicinity. Near Here, at the age of twelve, he saw his first self-propelled vehicle, a Nichols & Shepard steam road-engine, which the engineer explained in full to the eager boy. The experience had epochal effects. “It was that engine,” Ford later wrote, “which took me into automotive transportation.”

Driven by his obsession with mechanical things, Henry Ford left his father's farm on December 1, 1879, and walked to Detroit to become an apprentice in a factory. Years later he remarked to a friend, “From the time I left that front gate as a boy until now my only interest in a farm has been to lighten its labours. To take the load off the backs of men and put it onto metal and machines has been my dream.

Thus in the birthplace of Henry Ford was born the impetus toward the mechanisation of agriculture and the revolution in industry that would transform a nation. The world would never be the same again.

Mr. Ford showed an early and keen interest in mechanics. Beginning at the

age of 12, he spent most of his spare time in a small machine shop which he had equipped himself. There, at 15, he constructed his first steam engine. Later, he became a machinist's apprentice in Detroit in the shops of James F Flower and Bros. and in the plant of the Detroit Dry Dock Co. Accomplished as amateur watch repairing, he at one time formulated a plan for the manufacture of inexpensive watches on a large scale.

After completing his apprenticeship in 1882, he spent a year setting up and repairing Westinghouse steam engines in South Michigan. In July 1891, he was employed as an engineer by the Edison Illuminating Company of Detroit, and became chief engineer on November 1, 1893.

He was married to Clara J Bryant of Greenfield, Michigan, April 11, 1888. Mrs. Ford, the daughter of Melvin Bryant, a Wayne County farmer, died on September 29, 1950, at the age of 84. They had one son, Edsel Bryant Ford, born November 6, 1893.

Mr. Ford's career as a builder of automobiles dated from the winter of 1893, when his interest in internal combustion engines led him to construct a small one-cylinder gasoline model. This first Ford engine sputtered its way into history on a wooden table in the kitchen of the Ford home, at 58 Bagley Avenue in Detroit. From that he designed an engine which, mounted on a frame fitted with four bicycle wheels, became his first automobile. This first Ford car was completed in June 1896.

On August 19, 1899, he resigned from the Edison Illuminating Company and with others, organised the Detroit Automobile Company, taking one-sixth of its stock and becoming its chief engineer. The company was forced into bankruptcy a year and a half later. Meanwhile, he designed and built several racing cars, with one of which he defeated Alexander Winton in a notable race on the Brosse Pointe, 1999, he established a world record for the mile, covering the distance in 39-2/5 seconds on January 12, 1904, on the winter ice of Lake St. Clair.

On June 16, 1903, he helped organise Ford Motor Company, capitalised at \$150,000 of which only \$28,000 in cash was paid. The first car built by the company was sold on July 23, 1903. Henry Ford owned 25.5 percent of the stock in the new organisation. He became president and controlling owner in 1906. Then, in 1919, Mr. Ford and his son, Edsel, acquired the interest of all minority stockholders for \$105,568,858, thus becoming sole owners of the company. Edsel, who succeeded his father as president earlier that year, continued to occupy that position until his death in 1943, at which time Henry Ford returned to the active direction of the company.

In September 1945, when he resigned the presidency for the second time, Henry Ford recommended that his eldest grandson, Henry Ford II, be elected to that position. The Board of directors followed this recommendation.

In May and June, 1946, Mr. Ford was lauded at the Automotive Golden Jubilee for his Major contributions to the automotive industry and, in July of the same year, 50,000 persons cheered him at Ford Field in Dearborn as guest of honor at his 83rd birthday party. That same year, the American Petroleum Institute awarded him its first gold Medal annual award for outstanding contributions to the welfare of humanity.

A member of the Society of Automotive Engineers, Automobile Club of America and the Detroit Board of commerce, Mr. Ford was also trustee and president of a school district in Dearborn. In collaboration with Samuel Crowther, he wrote "my life and Work" (1922), "Today



and Tomorrow" (1926), and "Moving Forward" (1930), which described the development of Ford Motor Company and outlined his industrial and social theories.

He also published "Edison, As I Know Him" (1930), with the same collaborator. Both the University of Michigan and Michigan State College conferred the degree of Doctor of Engineering on him, and he received an honorary LL.D from Colgate University in 1935.

Henry Ford died at his residence, Fair Lane in Dearborn, on Monday night, April 7 1947, at 11:40pm, following a cerebral hemorrhage. He was 83. At the time of his death, recent floods on the Rouge River, which flows through the grounds at Fair Lane, had cut local power. The only light available in the house was by means of old-fashioned kerosene lamps and candles, creating a scene similar to that of his birth in the same county 83 years earlier.

He was buried in Addison Ford Cemetery in Dearborn in a small private family plot. Funeral services were held from St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in Detroit.

More than 100,000 persons paid their respects as Mr. Ford's body lay in state in Greenfield Village, the historical Dearborn shrine where he had recreated important milestones in the development of the industrial age of American in which he played a dominant part.

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Henry Ford 1863 – 1947

1. Using this article prepare a timeline of Henry Ford's life.
2. Briefly explain the major events in Henry Ford's life, making reference to the timeline you made in Question 1.
3. Identify the personal traits that Henry Ford displayed during his life. How did these personal traits assist him in his endeavors to provide vehicles for the multitudes and lighten farm labour?
4. The New York Times in 1947 said, "... The world was horse-drawn when he entered it. When he departed, it was a world on powered wheels. He built for the 'great multitude' and the were both directly and by accident the beneficiaries of Henry Ford, master mechanic." Discuss how influential Henry Ford was to the Industrial Age.