The Village / Town of
Ford City
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Windsor Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee 1996-1997
Ford City

The area known as Ford City developed out of a French parish, Notre Dame du Lac, founded in 1884 on land donated by Francois Drouillard. The church, now named Our Lady of the Rosary (a.k.a. Holy Rosary), was built in 1908 to replace the original structure which had burned a year earlier.

William McGregor (1836-1903) began his business life as a horse dealer supplying the Union Army in the Civil War. He owned the street railway, real estate, a bank, a mill, a fence company and the Walkerville Wagon Works. He was warden of Essex County, a reeve of Windsor, a member of Parliament between 1874 and 1896, and Collector of Customs. His son, Gordon Morton McGregor, became the Wagon Works president and, thanks to Henry Ford's vision, became head of the fledgling Ford Motor Company of Canada in 1904.

As Ford Motor Company grew, the surrounding area became a boom town. The Wagon Works was augmented in 1910 with a new building as it was absorbed by Ford. By 1913, there were 1400 employees earning $4. per hour. That year, the village was incorporated. In 1915, it achieved town status. Charles Montreuil, one of the farmers whose land was acquired by the company, became the first mayor of the Town of Ford City - one of the Border Cities (Windsor, Sandwich, Walkerville and Ford).
Unlike its orderly neighbour, Walkerville, Ford City grew haphazardly with little regard for planning. In 1928-29, with 16,000 residents, many of whom came from central European countries to join the Ford work force, Ford City was incorporated as East Windsor.

Ford City had grown too fast, and lacked the dictatorial leadership which had directed the Town of Walkerville. The town was wallowing in bank debts. Also unlike Walkerville, its prosperous neighbour, Ford City welcomed Windsor's amalgamation of the Border Cities in 1935.

Ford Motor Company flourished throughout World War II, producing heavy trucks for the European theatre. But the end of the war brought labour unrest and, in the fall of 1945, a major strike stilled the auto plant for what has become the legendary '99 Days'. The resulting agreement, called the Rand Formula after the arbitrator who designed it, was less than universally welcomed, but it set the tone for future development of trade unions and the role of management - a cool partnership, but one that has proven workable.

The removal of the Ford head office and assembly plant to Oakville, near Toronto, occurred in 1953-54. Ford City declined as the population dispersed, and little is left now of the town that Ford built.

Ford Motor Company's landmark power plant was designed by the great industrial architect, Albert Kahn, in 1922. It is an outstanding example of Kahn's use of ornamental brick and tile detail. Unfortunately, his Ford office buildings (1910-18) and engine plan (1923) have been demolished or defaced. This massive building is an architectural prize worth conserving.
Ford Power Plant, 1922
3001 Riverside Dr. E.

Ford Town Hall c. 1920  (Demolished)

Gordon McGregor School, 1924
1646 Alexis

Ford City School, 1917
3177 Riverside Dr. E.
(Demolished)
Ford City's places of worship include the twin-towered Roman Catholic church named Our Lady of the Rosary, built in 1908 following a fire, caused by wind-borne sparks from the nearby railroad, which destroyed Notre Dame du Lac church.
Four Byzantine-styled Orthodox churches were built by immigrants from eastern Europe. St. John the Divine (1946) and Holy Trinity (1947) (both Russian), Descent of the Holy Ghost (Romanian) and St. Dimitrijc (Serbian) all exhibit picturesque forms referred to as "onion" or flame-shaped domes.
Except for "Edgemere," Wallace Campbell's Walkerville house, few of the
great houses survive which once lined Riverside Drive (Sandwich Street),
built for the wealthy families of the Border Cities. The Walter McGregor
house fell to parkland development; Henry Ling's tudoresque house was lost
to fire; Robert Henkel's classical mansion was last seen adorned with a
massive Polish flag -a veterans' home; and that of lumberman E. L.
Thompson left the scene decades ago. Nothing remains but faded photos in a
1913 publication promoting the Border Cities' attractions
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Border Cities Star
Municipal Archives
Windsor's Community Museum Don Wilson Post Card Collection Ford Motor Co., Oakville, Archives Windsor Regional Hospital
Windsor-1913
Ninety-nine Days -the Ford Strike in Windsor, 1945; CoIl Ing, Herb, 1995
Strike! 99 Days on the Line; Walsh, Mark and Baruth, Mary, 1995
Garden Gateway to Canada; Morrison, Neil, 1954
The Township of Sandwich, Past and Present; Neil, Frederick, 1909
Windsor 1892-1992; Price, Trevor and Kulisek, Larry, 1992