

**Dallas Landmark Commission  
Landmark Nomination Form**

**1. Name**

historic: Ford Assembly Plant

and/or common: Adam Hats

date: 1913-14

**2. Location**

address: 2700 Canton

location/neighborhood: Deep Ellum

blocks:

survey:

tract size:

**3. Current Zoning**

**4. Classification**

**Category**

\_\_\_ district  
 building(s)  
\_\_\_ structure  
\_\_\_ site  
\_\_\_ object

**Ownership**

\_\_\_ public  
 private  
\_\_\_ both

**Public Acquisition**

\_\_\_ in progress  
\_\_\_ being considered

**Status**

\_\_\_ occupied  
\_\_\_ unoccupied  
 work in progress

**Accessibility**

yes:restricted  
\_\_\_ yes:unrestricted  
\_\_\_ no

**Present Use**

\_\_\_ agricultural  
\_\_\_ commercial  
\_\_\_ educational  
\_\_\_ entertainment  
\_\_\_ government  
 industrial  
\_\_\_ military

\_\_\_ museum  
\_\_\_ park  
\_\_\_ residence  
\_\_\_ religious  
\_\_\_ scientific  
\_\_\_ transportation  
\_\_\_ other,specify

**5. Ownership**

Current Owner: Westdale

Contact: John Miller

Phone: 748-1999

Address: 3200 Main, Ste 1.3

**6. Form Preparation**

Date: Sept. 1996

Name & Title: Kate Singleton

Organization: KAS Consulting

Contact: Kate Singleton

Phone: 821-7533

**7. Representation on Existing Surveys**

Alexander Survey (citywide) \_\_\_ local \_\_\_ state \_\_\_ national \_\_\_ National Register

H.P.L. Survey (CBD) \_\_\_ A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

Oak Cliff \_\_\_

Recorded TX Historic Ldmk

\_\_\_ TX Archaeological Ldmk

Victorian Survey \_\_\_

Dallas Historic Resources Survey, Phase \_\_\_ high \_\_\_ medium \_\_\_ low

*For Office Use Only*

Date Rec'd: \_\_\_ Survey Verified: Y N by: \_\_\_ Field Check by: \_\_\_ Petitions Needed: Y N

Nomination: Archaeological Site Structure(s) Structure & Site District

## 8. Historic Ownership

original owner: Ford Motor Company

significant later owner(s): Peaslee-Gaulbert; Adam Hats

## 9. Construction Dates

original: 1913-14

alterations/additions:

## 10. Architect

original construction: John Graham, Sr.

alterations/additions:

## 11. Site Features

natural:

urban design:

## 12. Physical Description

Condition, check one:

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

unaltered

altered

Check one:

original site

moved (date \_\_\_\_\_)

*Describe present and original (if known) physical appearance. Include style(s) of architecture, current condition and relationship to surrounding fabric (structures, objects, etc.) elaborate on pertinent materials used and style(s) of architectural detailing, embellishments and site details.*

The Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, built in 1913-1914, is a four-story rectangular industrial building with basement. Designed by noted architect John Graham, Sr., this building is one of 31 built by Ford around the United States and Canada in the company's first period of factory building. The plant is architecturally significant as an outstanding example of modern early twentieth century industrial building and for the role it played in the evolution of industrial facilities.

John Graham designed all these buildings to be multi-story, reinforced concrete frame buildings. This design facilitated Ford's early practice of stationary assembly. Graham, as Ford probably realized, was an early specialist in reinforced concrete construction. This made him the perfect choice for architect of these buildings. The buildings are all similar because the use was the same. The exterior details have minor differences from building to building. For this building, a permit was taken out on September 10, 1913 for a cost of \$175,000. The building contained 94,000 square feet where 5,000 cars a year could be produced. The basement was for body assembly, frame painting and storage. The offices, garage, shipping and carpentry were on the first floor. The second floor had repairs, parts and stock. On the third floor was the assembly line, top building and wheel painting. Painting, enameling in an electric oven, and upholstering took place on the fourth floor.

The building is constructed of reinforced concrete and veneered with common brick, face brick, terra cotta and tile trim. It is the flat-slab reinforced concrete frame and large expanses of industrial sash windows which distinguish the building from earlier load-bearing brick late-Victorian industrial buildings. The building is divided into three sections, the base (first floor), the shaft (second, third and fourth floors) and the cornice. The north and west facades for the building are veneered with red face brick and trimmed with terra cotta and tile. The building has a granite base on these two facades. The north facade was the main entry into the building. This facade is divided into eight bays. Two of the bays were designed so cars could go in and out. The main entrance has a decorative metal canopy and

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the double door is framed by sidelights and transom windows. There are large showroom windows at the west end of the north facade and on the west facade. The west facade has five bays. The other windows on the north facade are multi-pane metal sash. On the west facade, south corner, there is another entry door. Above the first floor on the north and west facades is a decorative terra cotta string course. The windows, which cover most of the surface, are large multi-pane metal sash. The windows are operable. The north and west facades are detailed with decorative brick pilasters between the bays. At the roofline, the building is finished with terra cotta detailing and herring bone brick pattern. The cornice is denticulated terra cotta. There are terra cotta name plates on the front and west facades.

The south and east facades, the concrete frame is faced with common brick and left exposed. The pattern of industrial windows remains the same. On the first floor of the east facade, there are five loading doors with metal roll doors. Some of these have been closed in. On the south facade, there are eight bays, six of these bays have loading dock doors. Some of the multi-pane windows have been changed on these facades but it is only a section of one or two windows. The roof is flat with substantial parapet walls on the north and west facades. The parapet is capped with terra cotta tiles. The east and south parapet walls are lower. On the roof there is a water tank, the stairway to the roof, the elevator tower, electrical room and a small, one room brick and concrete work area.

The interior floors are the same except the first floor showroom area. There are rows of concrete columns with mushroom-shaped capitals that support the concrete slab floors. There are two large car (or freight) elevators with metal roll doors in the center of each floor. Between the elevators is round metal fire slide. In the northeast corner is the stairway which has plain metal pipe hand rails. Behind the stairway, on each floor is a bathroom and changing area. In the northwest corner is another stairway, probably used by visitors. Next to it is a passenger elevator with glass and wood doors. On the first floor, at the west end of the building, is the showroom. The rest of the first floor looks like the other assembly areas but this portion has some decorative elements. The entrance from the street is set down about three or four inches and covered in white and black tile. Immediately to the east of the entrance is an enclosed area with windows and a sloping floor. This area has the visitor stairway and elevator, it may also have been used as a reception area. The columns in the showroom area are finely detailed with large cartouches on the capitals. The ceiling is somewhat lower in this area. It shows signs of possibly having decorative tiles however, these have been removed. On the south wall there are three double hung two over two windows. This was probably the sales office. These walls have been removed. Between the showroom and the factory, the floor rises about six inches. There are two ramps in between the columns. There was probably a partition between the showroom and factory along this column line, however it is no longer there. Despite these minor interior changes, the building remains relatively intact. The original mechanical equipment including the elevators remain as does the early dry-pipe sprinkler system and the fire slide.

Despite minor changes, different uses and several years of neglect, this building remains an excellent example of early twentieth century industrial architecture. The initial use of the building as a Ford assembly factory signifies its importance in the evolution of industrial facilities for the automobile industry. This handsome building designed by a prominent architect, John Graham, helped to shape industrial architecture for the years to come and helped make Dallas a gateway to regional industry.

### 13. Historical Significance

*Statement of historical and cultural significance. Include: cultural influences, special events and important personages, influences on neighborhood, on the city, etc.*

The Ford Assembly Plant at 2700-2724 Canton, constructed in 1913-1914, played a significant role in the industrial and commercial development of Dallas. At one point Dallas' biggest employer, the Ford Motor Company constructed this building as a result of their decision to decentralize production facilities. Between 1912 and the outbreak of World War I, Ford constructed approximately 30 of these assembly plants around the United States and Canada. The building, designed by noted Seattle architect John Graham, Sr., is an outstanding example of early-twentieth century industrial architecture and technology.

The introduction of Henry Ford's universal car, the Model T, in 1908 lead the way for automobile assembly in Texas and other regional centers around the United States. Henry Ford's success came with the invention of the Model T, a car for the masses. In 1906, the magazine, **Nation**, declared that "as soon as a standard cheap car can be produced, of a simple type that does not require mechanical aptitude in the operator and that may be run inexpensively there will be no limit to the automobile market."

The Model T was designed with a series of standardized parts and an engine that was cast essentially in one piece. Unlike the cars built in Europe or Ford's earlier ones, the Model T was not a luxury, custom car but one his workers could afford. The standardization of parts for the Model T dictated the standardization of every other aspect of the business including the design of the assembly plants. All of these assembly plants are the same without much variation. The requirements of the automobile assembly process controlled the design of the building. There are very few modifications to the buildings; the one in Seattle is almost identical to the one in Dallas, to the one in Boston and so on.

The architect of these assembly plants was a man named John Graham. He was an Englishman, born in Liverpool in 1873, who came to Seattle in 1897. Graham received no academic training in architecture but was an apprentice. One of his early projects was the reconstruction of Trinity Episcopal Church. In 1904, he went into partnership with David J. Myers. This began a significant period of work, they designed three apartment buildings and two large homes. By 1910, Graham had gone out on his own. During this time he designed the Joshua Green Building. It is not clear how Henry Ford and Graham met but Ford hired him to design the Seattle plant in 1913. Shortly after that he became Ford's official company architect. Graham moved his family to Detroit for three years where he designed over 30 assembly plants around the United States and Canada. Graham also designed a major addition to the Detroit manufacturing plant. Ford expansion halted with the onset of World War I. At this time Graham returned to Seattle and was able to reignite his architectural practice. His subsequent work included several major Seattle buildings such as the Bon Marche Department Store, the Exchange Building, Physics Hall at the University of Washington and Frederick and Nelson Department Store. John Graham was not tied to any one style or genre although he was particularly adept in the Art Deco style. He brought to each project an inherent sense of organization and scale, an understanding of historical styles and an eye for the basics. It is these characteristics that make Graham's work special.

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The "Ford way" as described in a 1924 company brochure was to construct assembly plants in strategic trade centers throughout the country. The brochure stated that the assembly plants "...receive standard parts from the manufacturing plants and assemble them into finished cars and trucks. This calls for chassis assembly, body building and all paint trim and upholstery work...The branches all operate under the same system, use the same standard tools and build cars in the same way." The Ford policy was to manufacture near the source of supply and assemble the cars near the point of distribution. Regional assembly plants meant reduced transportation costs. Also, goods could be delivered to the consumer more expediently. A network of salesmen worked closely with the local plants, reporting their orders daily. The plant constantly ordered manufactured parts from Detroit.

By 1909, Dallas had a Ford sales, service and parts store. Ford began to spread his assembly operations away from Detroit to regional centers by 1912. It was easier and cheaper to ship parts than completed automobiles. In Dallas, assembly of cars began in 1913 in the sales, service and parts building. By September of 1913, a site on Canton Street was selected for the new assembly plant and on July 4, 1914 the new building was opened. Dallas was among the first cities to get a branch plant and became the gateway for Ford into the Texas and Southwest market.

The plant was important to the industrial growth of Dallas. A 1914 Daily Times Herald article claimed, "the eyes of the world are turned toward Dallas as the automobile center of the Southwest. ...Dallas is the distribution center for the Southwest which is fast becoming motor car country." The article went on to proclaim that the 1914 season "will break all auto trade records." The January 1914 Dallas Spirit, the Chamber of Commerce publication, proclaimed "Dallas Automobile Market Covers the Southwest!" According to this article in 1913, over 11,900 automobiles sold in Dallas for a total of \$12,341,339. With motorcycle and tire sales included, this number jumps to over \$18 million.

The significance of a Ford factory to a community can not be underestimated. This was probably the first automobile production assembly in the Southwest and it was built to supply North Texas, Western Louisiana and Southern Oklahoma. During 1915, 5,504 cars were assembled at this plant. The price to a consumer for a Model T was \$440. The demand was so great that another plant was quickly constructed in Fort Worth, however it was abandoned after only six months of operation. It was more practical to build all the cars in Dallas. By 1917, there were enough Ford dealers with repair departments that the company closed the one in the factory. The extra space was used for assembly. With moving assembly lines, cars were constructed from the wheels up. By 1921, sales were somewhat lower than in 1920 but the uptrend began again in 1922. The following year 130,000 cars were sold by Ford in Texas. The price for a Model T had dropped to around \$295. In 1924, the last year this building was used as an assembly plant, nearly 47,000 Model T cars had been assembled in Dallas and Ford had become Dallas' largest employer.

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The Ford plant was located on Canton Street next to the Houston & Texas Central Railroad tracks, now Central Expressway. Access to the railroad was essential in this situation. The trains brought in the various parts to be assembled and also distributed the finished products around the factory's trade area. This area was located in the vicinity of Deep Ellum, a Freedman's area of Dallas that developed after the Civil War. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show the plant surrounded by small one story dwellings, many which were shotgun houses. The railroads often encouraged former slaves to settle along the tracks because no one else would. After 1914 and on through the 1930's, this area became more industrialized becoming a center for manufacturing and wholesale operations in Dallas. Large companies including Continental Gin, the Murray Company, Ford and others located in and around the Deep Ellum and Fair Park area.

The building permit for the structure was taken out on September 10, 1913. The cost of the building was to be \$175,000. When the Canton Street Ford Plant opened in July of 1914, it was similar to the type of plant that would become standard for the Ford Company. It contained 94,000 square feet and employed 93 men who could produce 5,000 cars a year. The plant served as an assembly plant, sales office, and since there were not many dealerships, parts warehouse and repair shop. Each floor had a specific use. The basement was for body assembly, frame painting and storage. The offices, garage, shipping and carpentry were on the first floor. The second floor had repairs, parts and stock. On the third floor was the assembly line, top building and wheel painting. Painting, enameling in an electric oven, and upholstering took place on the fourth floor.

After the company moved into the new building, it announced a new policy of paying minimum daily wages of \$5, eight hour work days and an employees' profit-sharing plan. The profit-sharing plan helped to attract and hold many good workers to this new Texas industry.

By 1924, Ford had outgrown this plant. A new plant on East Grand in Dallas was begun. Ford continued to use this building for display and storage until 1939. A general merchandise company called Peaslee-Gaulbert Corporation moved into the building that year. They purchased the building from Ford in 1942. The company was run locally by Robert E. Peake, vice-president and manager. This building was the Southwest division where mainly electrical appliances were handled. In 1959, the building was sold to I. Benjamin Parrill, David Miller, et al. That year Adam Hats, a subsidiary of Miller Brothers Hat Company, moved into the building. This company remained in the building until 1986. After that time the building went through a series of owners and bankruptcies before it was purchased in 1996 by Westdale Properties.

The Ford Assembly Plant at 2700-2724 Canton had a significant impact on the commercial and industrial development of Dallas. Only 31 of these assembly plants were built by Ford around the United States and Canada. Ford developed these plants so the company strategy of assembly near major markets was accomplished. These plants were a prototype industrial building which changed the way goods were manufactured. The Dallas plant was probably the first automobile production assembly facility in the Southwest. This plant served as a gateway for Ford into the Texas and Southwest market. The Ford plant, which was once Dallas' largest employer, helped to establish Dallas as a regional trade center which it continues as today.

## 14. Bibliography

Blumenson, John. **Identifying American Architecture**. Nashville, Tennessee: American Association of State and Local History, 1981.

John Graham and Company. **The First 80 Years**. Seattle, Washington, n.d.

Nevins, Alan. **Ford: The Times, the Man, the Company**. New York: Charles Scribner, 1957.

Ochsner, Jeffery Karl. **Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects**. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1994.

National Register Nominations

Bradfield, Richard. "Nomination to the National Register: Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, Atlanta, Georgia." n.d

Harris, Douglas. "Nomination to the National Register: Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, Atlanta Georgia." n.d.

Johannson, Eric. "National Register Nomination: Ford Motor Company Cleveland Plant." April, 1975.

Reports

Rogers, Martha. "Home of the First Regional Automobile Assembly Plant of the Henry Ford Company Designed By John Graham, Sr." 1986.

Dallas Spirit Magazine January 1914, Vol. 2, No. 1.

Nation Magazine, 1906

City Directories 1913-1986

City Building Permits September 1913

Files at the Dallas Public Library

See: Ford Business and Industry Clipping File

Photographs

**Designation Merit**

- A. Character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City of Dallas, State of Texas or the United States. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Location as the site of a significant historical event. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural and development of the city. \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social or historical heritage of the city.   x
- E. Portrayal of the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style. \_\_\_\_\_
- F. Embodiment of distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or specimen.   x
- G. Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city.   x
- H. Embodiment of elements of architectural design, detail, material or craftsmanship which represent a significant architectural innovation.   x
- I. Relationship to other distinctive buildings, sites or areas which are eligible for preservation according to a plan based on historic, cultural or architectural motif. \_\_\_\_\_
- J. Unique location of singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar feature of a neighborhood, community or the city. \_\_\_\_\_
- K. Archaeological value in that it has produced or can be expected to produce data affecting theories or historic or prehistoric value. \_\_\_\_\_
- L. Value as an aspect of community sentiment of public pride. \_\_\_\_\_

**Recommendation**

The Designation Task Force requests the Landmark Commission to deem this nominated landmark meritorious of designation as outlined in Chapter 51 and Chapter 51A, Dallas Development Code.

Further, the Designation Task Force endorses the Preservation Criteria, policy recommendations and landmark boundary as presented by the Department of Planning and Development.

Date:

Ambrosio Villanueva  
Chair  
Neighborhood Designation Task Force

Tiffany L. Tuley  
Tiffany Tuley, Urban Planner  
Historic Preservation