

## Historical Marker - L2210 - Auto Tourist Camps / John Gurney Park (Marker ID#:L2210)



### Front - Title/Description

#### **Auto Tourist Camps**

With the introduction of the Model T by the Ford Motor Company in 1908, the automobile – previously a luxury – became something the working class could afford. Taking a drive soon became a source of recreation. Since no services were yet available, travelers who took long trips to scenic areas had to camp overnight, often on private land. In 1919 the Michigan State Park Commission was founded to create a state park system that offered public access to lakes and beaches and free camping to auto tourists. Before long camping became a national phenomenon. To meet demand the Michigan Tourist and Resort Association proposed that five camps be built in 1920 along the West Michigan Pike, one of the state's first improved continuous highways. By 1923 Michigan had some 300 free auto tourist camps.

#### **Significant Date:**

Two World Wars and the Depression (1915-1945)

**Registry Year:** 2009    **Erected Date:** 2009

### Marker Location

**Address:** 300 Griswold Street

**City:** Hart

**State:** MI    **ZipCode:** 49420

**County:** Oceana

**Township:** Hart

**Lat:** 43.69632910 / **Long:** -86.35771120

**Web URL:**

### Back - Title/Description

#### **John Gurney Park**

Former state senator Theron Gurney and his wife, Helen, donated land to the Village of Hart in 1912 for a park to honor their son. Lieutenant John Gurney (1871-1898), a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, had died at the Battle of Santiago de Cuba during the Spanish American War. In 1914 the Progressive Park Association erected the entrance arch as a memorial. John Gurney Park was one of several auto tourist camps developed along the West Michigan Pike during the 1920s. In 1921 the pavilion was built and the park was improved with water and other amenities. A 1921 Hart Journal called it "one of the most beautiful and spacious parks that any town in Western Michigan can boast." Hart Lake was created in 1925 when the