Located on the south side of Tennessee Avenue, just east of the intersection with Spy Run Avenue, the Dr. Merchant W. Huxford House was built c.1854. At that time, Dr. Huxford owned a large tract of land that extended west from the St. Joseph River and crossed Spy Run Creek to include what are now Lawton Park and the former Omni Source site west of N. Clinton Street. Although its address is currently 520 Tennessee Avenue, the house was built facing Spy Run Avenue and had a deep front lawn. Huxford developed the large estate surrounding the house with extensive gardens and orchards where he experimented with growing many varieties of fruit. By 1958 the house had been converted to apartments and a garage and filling station was built in the front lawn of the property c.1960.

The Dr. Merchant W. Huxford House is one of the few remaining substantial examples of the Greek Revival architectural style in Fort Wayne. The house has a large side gable form with four bays and is a double-pile plan that is two rooms deep. It is the only example with this form and massing in Fort Wayne. The low-gabled roof has simple eaves that reflect a relatively recent rebuilding of much of the roof structure; however the house retains its wide Greek Revival frieze board. Originally, there were four end chimneys. The brick walls are common bond with projecting belt courses of brick at the second floor window sill level and above the foundation as a water table. The foundation is stone covered with stucco slurry.

There are wood lintels and sills at the window and door openings. The windows are almost entirely the original six over six double-hung sash constructed of old-growth wood. There are smaller windows at the attic level of each gable end that have segmental arches. The front entry faces west towards Spy Run and is offset to the north within the façade. The door is slightly recessed within a wide Greek Revival frame, with a transom above the door. There is evidence that there were once sidelights on each side of the door, and that the surrounding trim was removed and either cut-down or replaced to narrow the perceived size of the opening. There is one additional door on the east and south sides of the house.

The interior of the home may reflect Dr. Huxford's origins in Massachusetts since the house has a double-pile plan that was common in New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The house has no central hall; instead each of the first floor rooms has doors to enter the adjacent rooms. Upon entering the house from the front door, there is large entry hall with the stairs against the east wall of the room. The stairs and balustrade are original to the house. The parlor was likely at the southwest, the dining room to the southeast, and the kitchen in the northeast corner. Although the house plan was altered for apartments and subsequent use as offices, the house retains some original woodwork, doors, and two early fireplace mantles.

Local folklore maintains that timbers used in the construction of the house were salvaged during the demolition of the last remaining building of the final “Fort Wayne” (built 1816). Historical records show that the last remnants of the fort were demolished at about the same time the Huxford House was being constructed. At that time, Dr. Huxford was a prominent former Mayor and it was a common practice to salvage building materials. While this association with the last American Fort Wayne is undocumented, some structural elements of the house appear to be salvaged material.

Born in Conway, Massachusetts in 1798, Dr. Merchant W. Huxford and his wife Sarah Ried (Hauk) Huxford settled in Fort Wayne in 1833. He quickly established a drug store in the heart of downtown at the corner of Columbia and Barr Streets where he also practiced medicine. As the first druggist, and an early physician, Huxford quickly became a prominent member of Fort Wayne’s business and professional community and developed an interest in local politics.
Dr. Huxford was likely drawn to Fort Wayne by the opportunities and economic climate of the community in 1833. Ground had been broken for construction of the Wabash and Erie Canal in 1832, and from 1833-1835 hundreds (and often thousands) of men were employed to dig the main channel and construct locks, culverts, and aqueducts. Canals lowered transportation costs, spurring trade; they also carried thousands of passengers (many of whom were settlers) west at what seemed like effortless speed. Because of its central, strategic location on the Wabash and Erie, Fort Wayne was changing from a trading post to a bustling and growing community when Dr. Huxford was first elected to the town council in the 1830s.

Fort Wayne was incorporated as a city in 1840 and the first city charter called for mayors to hold the office for only one year terms. It was not an attractive position, and the pay was insufficient for the growing city. In the period from 1840 to 1846 four men held the position of mayor; however none served complete terms without either resigning or being forced from office. The last of these early mayors was John M. Wallace, elected in 1845. Wallace was also serving as a state representative at the time, which led to his resignation after briefly holding office.

Dr. Merchant W. Huxford became mayor after the resignation of Mayor Wallace. He served the unfinished term of Mayor Wallace, and was subsequently elected for three complete mayoral terms from 1846 to 1849, becoming Fort Wayne’s first mayor to serve a complete term without either resigning or being removed from office. Fort Wayne thrived during Huxford’s tenure. Heavy boat traffic on the canal, and the economic benefit which resulted from it, made the city the major distribution and shipping point for agricultural products in northeast Indiana. The city also began to attract artisans and small industry which produced items for shipment on the canal, or received raw materials on the canal to be sold in Fort Wayne.

With the increased ease of travel to Fort Wayne and associated growth in business and industry, the population of the city soared in the 1840s. In 1840 the population of Fort Wayne was estimated at 1,500. Ten years later the population was 4,282, an increase of 166 percent. As the canal boats shipped agricultural and manufactured goods east, they often returned from Lake Erie with loads of European immigrants. As mayor, Dr. Huxford helped manage this rapid growth through such projects as construction of a substantial new engine house for the fire department.

Just as the canal era came to a close, and the first railroad that would reach Fort Wayne was under construction, Dr. Huxford retired from local politics, built his house on Spy Run Avenue, and resided here until his death in 1878. Dr. Huxford remained active in the community while living in this home: he was a founder of the Trinity Episcopal Church; and founder of both the Allen County Agricultural Society and the Allen County Horticulture Society. He maintained gardens and orchards on his property that reflected the interest of a druggist and scientist in botany.