

# SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY

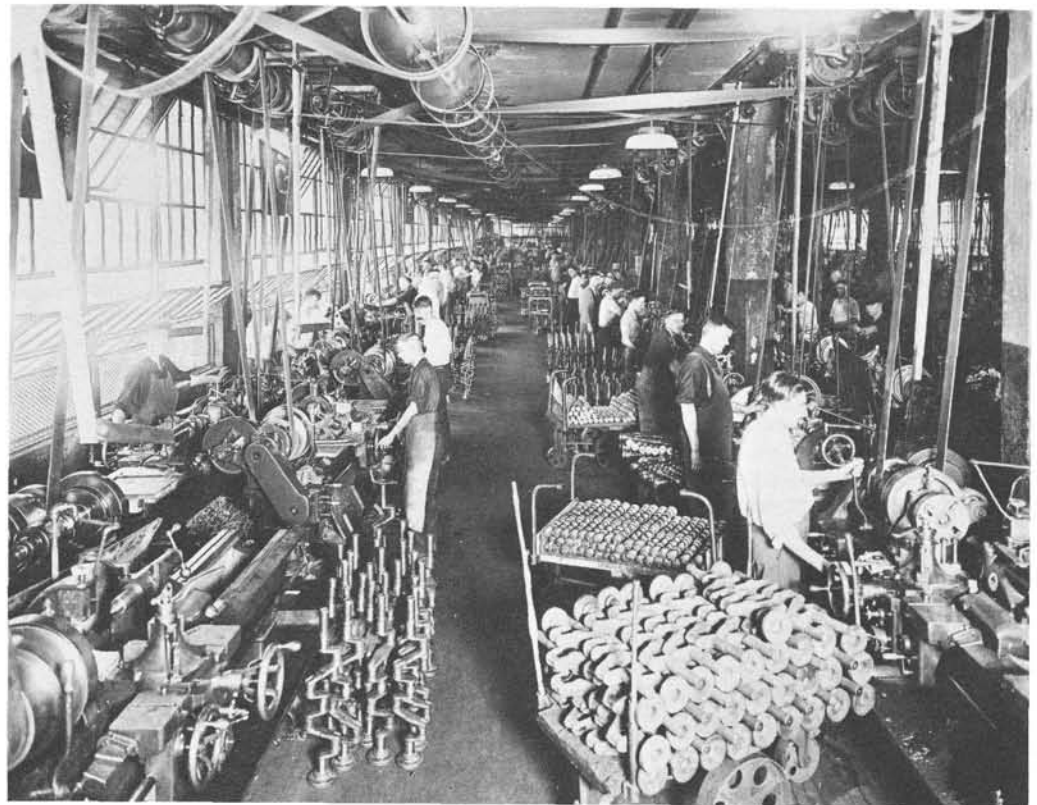
## NEWSLETTER

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### LESSONS FROM DODGE MAIN

*In Jan. 1980, SIAN reported the closing of Chrysler Corp.'s "Dodge Main" Assembly Plant, a four-story complex of reinforced concrete designed by Albert Kahn. At its peak Dodge Main employed 40,000 workers, many of these Poles living in a neighborhood adjacent to the plant. In a series of rapid developments beginning last summer, the City of Detroit acquired the plant and demolished it to prepare a site for a new \$500-million Cadillac assembly plant. "Poletown," the neighborhood embracing the former Dodge Main plant, also is scheduled for demolition. The facts surrounding this project provide an instructive case study in the use of public and private money for the purpose of industrial revitalization in a decaying central city. The story of Dodge Main illustrates the significant social and cultural costs of such a project, the least of which, perhaps, is the destruction of a historic factory. Ed.*



Machine shop, crankshaft and camshaft manufacture, Dodge Main, 1915. Chrysler Corp. photograph.

Last spring, General Motors Corp. approached the City of Detroit with a proposal: GM planned to abandon its Clark Ave. Cadillac assembly plant (1920) and the nearby Fleetwood plant (1917-22), which builds Cadillac bodies; GM would construct a replacement facility to open in Sept. 1983 and provide about 6,000 jobs if the city could furnish a 500-acre parcel with good rail and highway connections, sell the (cleared) site to GM for \$6.8 million, and give the automaker a tax break of \$120 million over twelve years. The City of Detroit considered half a dozen sites, but settled on one straddling the Detroit-Hamtramck border which included the site of Dodge Main. The project area, dubbed the Central Industrial Park (CIP), comprises 1,600 parcels, including nearly 1,200 homes for 3,500 residents. Under Mich.'s "quick take" condemnation laws, the City of Detroit may take the land by eminent domain, clear the buildings, and then turn the parcel over to GM. The cost of land acquisition and site preparation, a tidy \$200 million, will come mostly from federal grants and loans. Including the tax breaks, the city will spend at least \$300 million to induce GM to build its plant in Detroit.

All has not gone smoothly since the plan first was made public last Sept. 2nd. Residents of the doomed "Poletown" neighborhood at the southern edge of the project area launched a court challenge to the land-taking, which was rejected by a circuit court judge in Dec. They next appealed to the Mich. Supreme Court, which in Mar. ruled that Detroit acted legally in taking property for the plant site. In early Feb. several attorneys from Ralph Nader's Center for the Study of Responsive Law visited Detroit and offered to help Poletown residents. Their battle to avert demolition of this old ethnic neighborhood with its churches, shops, and schools was futile.

The flow of federal dollars began during the last days of the presidential election. HUD approved a \$60-million loan under its Section 108 program in Oct., and the Council on Environmental Quality simultaneously granted Detroit an emergency waiver allowing the city to spend the funds on land acquisition before environmental impact studies were completed. The city, the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Mich. State Historic Preservation Officer signed a Memorandum of Agreement