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THE BAD, THE GOOD, THE FUTURE

MOTOWN REVIEW

Five years have passed since Detroit hosted the SIA Ninth Annual Conference and, sadly, many of the sites we visited are gone, while the future of many others seems gloomy. Several significant Tax Act rehabilitation projects using industrial buildings are under way, with several more planned; but overall the years have not been kind to Detroit's aging industrial buildings. The continued decline of the auto industry, arrested only in the last two years, has been the principal culprit, but urban renewal, Detroit style, has taken a toll as well.

THE BAD

Dodge Main (1910), which lived to the not so ripe old age of 70, was demolished in the first six months of 1981, along with nearby auto-related plants built in the 1910s and 1920s. General Motors' new Poletown plant opened on the site in August with 6,000 employees and several hundred robots. A year earlier, the nearby Briggs Manufacturing Co. plant (1914), which supplied auto bodies to Dodge and Ford, burned to the ground in a spectacular fire started by a youth playing with matches.

The list of closings of auto-related plants is long: GM phased out three small Fisher Body plants (1920s) in late 1982; Chrysler abandoned its enormous Plymouth Motor Corporation plant (Albert Kahn, 1928), two stamping plants and a foundry, all built in the 1920s; and GM has temporarily extended the lives of its Clark Avenue Cadillac plant (1921) and Fisher Body Fleetwood plant (1917) through 1989, preserving about 4,000 jobs. Finally, the giant Uniroyal plant (1905-c1920), closed in Jan. 1980, recently fell to the

wrecker's ball, a HUD block grant of \$3 million paying the bill. The City of Detroit, which owns the site, may turn it into a park.

Several additional distressing developments have occurred recently. The Stroh Brewing Company permanently closed its Detroit plant last June, costing the area economy another 1,000 jobs. Stroh announced on Nov. 1 that they will begin demolishing the entire complex where they have "fire-brewed" beer since 1912 and where they hosted an SIA process tour in 1980. The company rejected several rehabilitation options as impractical, but intends to redevelop this prime urban property as a mixed-use industrial park.

Conrail announced last May, that it will close the Michigan

Continued on next page



Below: Uniroyal plant. Uniroyal photograph. Above left & right: Stroh Brewery Co. Stroh Co. photograph.

