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END OF THE LINE FOR DODGE MAIN



Aerial view (c. 1960) of Dodge Main. Forster Studio photograph, courtesy of Albert Kahn Assoc., Architects and Engineers, Detroit, Michigan.

On Fri., Jan. 4, Chrysler Corp. closed its "Dodge Main" Assembly Plant in Hamtramck, Mich., laying off 5,000 hourly workers. The company offered the usual argument that the vintage multi-story complex was too inefficient to meet the requirements of the modern automobile industry. Given the state of the American auto industry, and Chrysler Corp. in particular, the plant probably will not produce automobiles again and likely faces demolition. The boys with the wrecking balls will have fun because most of the complex's six million square feet of floorspace are encased in reinforced "Kahncrete" buildings from four to eight stories high.

John F. and Horace E. Dodge were among the original stockholders in the Ford Motor Co. in 1903, and were Henry Ford's most important parts suppliers (transmissions and engines) during his early years. As Ford grew and prospered, so did the Dodge Bros. Corp., requiring a move to larger quarters. They built an engine plant in Hamtramck (adjacent to Detroit) in 1910, but after several feuds with Ford began producing their own Dodge automobile in 1914. It proved an immediate success. By 1917, they had over 15,000 employees at the Hamtramck plant, which included stamping, transmission, and assembly operations, as well as a foundry. Chrysler, which acquired the Dodge properties in 1928, gradually phased out manufacturing operations at Dodge Main. By the early 1960s, only assembly operations remained. Many of the other buildings were scrapped for parking lots.

Dodge Main played a vital role in the history of the United Auto Workers. It was the first major plant they organized (1936), and U.A.W. Local No. 3, with 26,000 members in 1937, was reported to have been the largest union local in the country. Employment at Dodge Main peaked at about 40,000 during World War II.

Dodge Main, designed by Albert Kahn, was the second major automobile manufacturing complex to be built of concrete. (Ford's Highland Park Plant was first.) The four-story Assembly Plant (1914) is 1,100 ft. long and consists of several 60-ft. segments separated by open courts. The rest of the complex includes an office building (1915), a large eight-story concrete building added in 1917 for the assembly of howitzer components, and an enormous powerhouse built in 1920. Since most of the Highland Park plant has been demolished, this is the only surviving example of a massive multi-story concrete automobile plant from the 1910s, at least in the Detroit area. Naturally, it will be a tour stop during this spring's SIA Annual Conference in Detroit. *C.K.H.*

TROUBLE FOR INDUSTRIAL LANDMARKS

There is news on the legislative front that holds serious implications for the IA movement in the U.S. President Carter recently signed into law the 1980 Appropriations for the Dept. of the Interior. Of greatest interest to preservationists was the \$55 million appropriation for the National Historic Preservation Fund. Of grave concern to industrial archeologists, however, was an

NEW EDITORIAL ADDRESS

The bottom of this page to the contrary, *Newsletter* correspondence should now be directed to: Carol Poh Miller, Editor, SIAN, 1260 Granger Ave., Cleveland, O. 44107. (We are economizing by using up old (ie. pre-printed) stock.)