

'The Buildings of Detroit'

A treat to the eye and the aesthetic senses

By JEANNE WHITTAKER

Whether a lifelong resident or a total newcomer to the metropolitan Detroit community, the reader of W. Hawkins Ferry's revised edition of the 1968 publication "The Buildings of Detroit — A History" is in for an experience as enjoyable as sipping mulled wine on a rainy afternoon.

This magnificent publication contains just under 500 pages, which are jam packed with photographs, diagrams, maps, and historical vignettes of the men and women who dreamed, copied, nudged and pushed Detroit into the forefront of American industry and the arts.

The work is the product of an essentially shy but brilliant architectural historian and art collector, W. Hawkins Ferry. Ferry is the son of the late Dexter M. Ferry Sr., founder of the Ferry-Morse Seed Co., whose fortune W. Hawkins and his brother Dexter M.

Jr. have put to good use in such projects as the Detroit Science Center.

Incidentally, though the original seed company headquarters are no longer standing, Ferry has preserved them with amusing candor for generations to come in the #40 book.

Not only is the book a treat to the eye, but to the aesthetic senses as well. The historically curious will revel in its commentary on the lives and activities of the men and women who commissioned the building of the city's landmark homes, cultural centers, private clubs and businesses.

Though weighty, it is also well laid out, with easy reference markings, which lead the reader quickly to the information.

The book also contains a large, clearly marked map that tempts the reader to begin planning excursions to the sites of buildings designed by such architects as Albert Kahn, Louis Kamper and Elliot Saarinen and Minoru Yamasaki.

FERRY WAS honored for his work on the revised edition earlier this month during a joint celebration of the publication and the 25th anniversary of the Wayne State Press, which published the collector's quality book, at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

One has to be grateful to the city's renaissance movement for prompting Ferry to revise and augment his original manuscript.

First issued in 1968, the original work has long since been snapped up and closed under lock and key by an appreciative public.

The fact was frequently mentioned during the recent festivities surrounding the publication and anniversary at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Specially invited friends, guests and dignitaries crowded around the author to extend their congratulations and the new edition for his autograph.

new and revised edition, because Ferry notes, "In the 12 years since this book was first published, there has been an accelerated exodus to the suburbs, and much of the building activity in the area has taken place in the satellite cities of Dearborn, Southfield and Troy."

To trace the movement, Ferry has devoted much of newest text to the north end of the city, including photographs and explanatory material devoted to Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, Troy, Farmington and Rochester.

Few of Oakland County's newer landmarks seem to have escaped his perceptive eye. Of interest are the S. Brooks Barron and Hilbert DeLaurier homes in Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham's Temple Beth El, and the extension of the city along Lodge Freeway.

The historically inclined reader, of which I am one, will find Ferry's writing style eminently readable. The book is filled with information both intriguing and clarifying about the forefathers

of the city's civic and cultural life. Of particular interest is his explanation of the evolution of Meadow Brook Hall, the stately mansion which now plays host to seminars and educational activities at Oakland University, which is built on 1,200 acres of the original Matilda Dodge Wilson estate.

Notes Ferry, "The fabulous automotive fortunes of Detroit gave birth to some of the city's most overwhelming demonstrations of architectural virtuosity. In the magnificence of their domiciles few could hope to rival the Dodge family. When John F. Dodge decided to build a house on Lake Shore road in Grosse Pointe, no expenditure of money was considered too great to assure the maximum in quality. The walls were to be of solid stone. Granite was shipped in from quarries in Weymouth, Massachusetts. From Scotland came 110 stone-cutters. Some of them worked for days, even weeks, on a single piece of granite. The mansion was to contain 110 rooms and 24 baths. In

the basement there was to be a ballroom and a swimming pool. Since John Dodge was a lover of flowers, formal gardens and a greenhouse were to contain rare specimens gathered from all over the world. A small artificial peninsula was built, which was to lead to a private dock for the splendid Dodge yacht.

"Then in 1920, as the work was nearing completion, John Dodge unexpectedly died. For 20 years the house stood unfinished and neglected. Finally in 1941 it was torn down and the property subdivided.

"Matilda R. Dodge, the widow of John F. Dodge, did not give up the idea of a grand mansion. By 1929 the sprawling baronial mansion was completed in the quiet hills of Rochester."

Ferry's descriptions of splendid plans, their execution and their influence on modern-day design will add immeasurably to the enjoyment of anyone who decides to use this work as a handbook during a tour of Detroit.

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