

Book collection donated to LIT

By Carol Anahid Azizian
staff writer

Lawrence Institute of Technology has acquired a rare treasure — the personal library of the late Albert Kahn, who has been called "the world's number one industrial architect."

The library, which houses some 3,000 books, was once the place where such giants of industry as Henry Ford, the Dodge brothers and the Fishers, met with Kahn to discuss architectural designs for their factories and buildings.

All the library books and fixtures — Tudor-style walnut wood paneling and leaded-glass windows — have been preserved and moved from the Albert Kahn offices in Detroit's New Center Building to the Southfield college.

"The library represents one of the last and most complete collections of resources of any architectural firm in the country," said Karl H. Greimel, dean of the school of architecture at LIT.

"It's one of a handful of such libraries in the country which has remained intact."

"MOST FIRMS gave up their libraries in the 1950s and 1960s," Greimel explained. "The resources were either destroyed or given away to colleges and scholars after the modern movement in architecture."

Greimel was instrumental in making sure the library would be preserved.

According to Greimel, the library was to be dismantled and the books given away when the Kahn offices were moved to a different floor of the New Center Building.

"I called some friends at the Kahn offices and told them 'we'd love to give this library a home.' The board of directors agreed to give it to us."

Not only books but cabinets, paneling, leaded-glass windows, doors, hinges, even screws from the original library were taken down and stored until construction of the college's new Buell Building was completed.

The walnut paneling — worth more than \$24,000 — and hundreds of pieces of leaded glass were restored.

During the past couple months, carpenters have been busy putting the pieces together to resemble the original 1929 design. The project is expect-

ed to be completed by Christmas.

When it's finished, the library will be open to architecture students interested in tapping valuable resources, Greimel said.

Among the rare books housed in the library is a 1930 edition by Erich Mendelsohn, who Greimel describes as "one of the great pioneers in modern architecture." The book is no longer in print.

A TREATISE on industrial architecture, written in German, and another work entitled "Specimens of Gothic Architecture," published in 1923, are other examples of rare books Kahn collected.

"Kahn was not only an architect but a scholar and an artist," said Earl W. Pellerin, one of the founders and a former dean of LIT's school of architecture. Pellerin worked as a draftsman for Albert Kahn in the late 1920s.

"Kahn was a dynamic, lively individual. He had a great awareness of architecture — past and present."

Kahn was the first architect to take on the task of designing factories, Pellerin said. Previously, professional architects wanted nothing to do with industrial architecture.

Pellerin recalls that great decisions on the future of modern industrial design were made in the Kahn library.

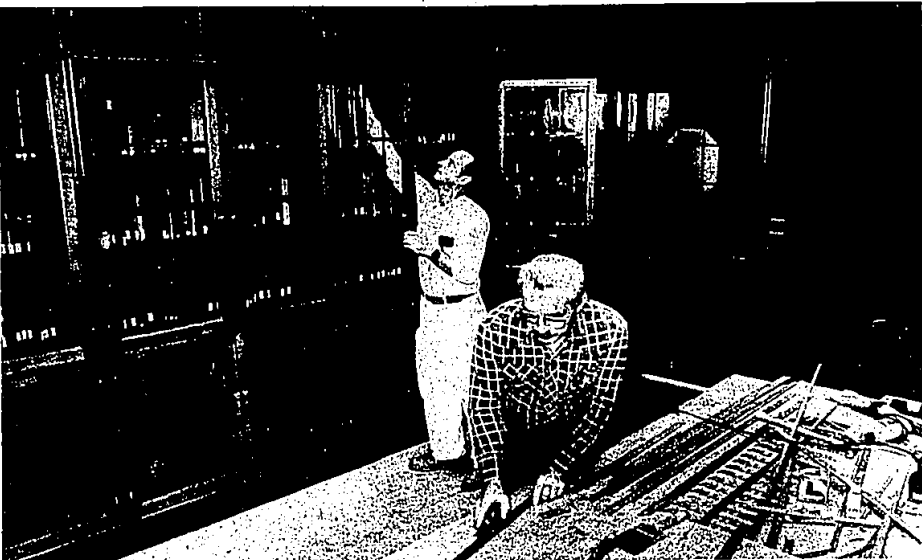
"I remember when Kahn's staff was going to Russia to design industrial plants. He asked me to go. I turned down the offer."

But 25 Kahn engineers and architects did go to Moscow to design and build more than 225 factories, worth an estimated \$4 billion.

In the late 1920s, Kahn's company also designed an office building for Fisher Brothers of Detroit. The design was recognized by the Architectural League of New York as the year's outstanding contribution to commercial architecture.

"When Kahn and his staff (first) presented designs for the Fisher Building, the Fisher brothers told them they admired the design, but wanted something more elegant," Pellerin recalled. "The result is what's there today."

Pellerin said the history of the Kahn library is fascinating. He said he hopes architecture students will be equally intrigued by the room's significance and treasures.



Albert Kahn's library is being carefully reconstructed at LIT, hinge-by-hinge and panel-by-panel. At work here are LIT painter Gene Manis (left) and carpenter Ralph Woodcock.

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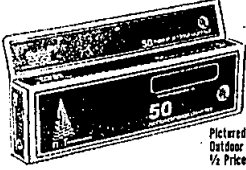


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