

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 699

H. WALTER DAMON

Interviewed

by

Joseph Rochette

on

October 18, 1985

HERBERT WALTER DAMON

H. Walter Damon was born on April 13, 1901 in Price, Utah, the son of Herbert W. and Agnus Hunten Damon. Eventually, making their way to Ohio, Damon's family settled first with his father's mother in the Kirtland home on Chillicothe Road. After two and a half years, in 1912, they moved to Cleveland. Damon was in the fifth grade. He graduated from East High in Cleveland in 1920. After high school Mr. Damon attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology, receiving an A.B. degree in architecture in 1925.

On his sixteenth birthday (1917), Damon went to work for A. D. Taylor in Cleveland as an office clerk where he remained until the Fall of 1927. Between 1928 and 1933, Damon worked on various projects under the auspices of Charles Schneider in Cleveland and others in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County in Pennsylvania where he was the park's architect. During the Depression, projects included: Supervisor and field architect for the International Highway built across the border at Cornwall, Ontario, and park architect for the National Park Service in Georgia and Tennessee in connection with the N.P.S.'s assistance in developing parks in rural areas. From 1937 to 1940 Damon was an associate with Myron Goodwin as an architect in Youngstown. With the coming of World War II he was involved in work related to the war effort during the period 1940 to 1945. Finally in 1947 Damon formed his own company as a partner with Damon-Worley where he retired on April 13, 1972.

Mr. Damon has received many awards throughout his career. These include being the president of the Guild for Religious

Architecture (1959-1960), East Ohio Historic Preservation Coordinator since 1969, chairman of the East Ohio chapter of the A.I.A. Community Design Center since 1972, gold medals from the A.I.A. Architects' Society of Ohio (1977) and the A.I.A. East Ohio chapter (1981), Youngstown Chamber of Commerce Man of the Year Award (1973), Carnegie Mellon University Service Award (1969), the Ohio District Key Club Appreciation Award (1980), and the Organization of Protestant Men's Man of the Year Award (1973). Damon has been a member of the Uptown Kiwanis since 1947 where he was also president from 1959 to 1960, and the Youngstown chapter of the United Nations Association since 1965, serving as its president from 1971 to 1973. He was also UNICEF chairman in this area for many years as well as for the United Nations booth at the Canfield Fair, which he still assists.

Damon was married to Mary Rutledge Wilson on February 14, 1927 until her death on July 16, 1983. He has two sons, Walter Alexander and Craig Wilson who live in the Chicago area. Mr. Damon is still active, planning and assisting where his talents permit, and a kibitzer for anything that might be improved.

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

INTERVIEWEE: H. WALTER DAMON

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Rochette

SUBJECT: architecture, projects, area architects,
19th-20th Century Architecture

DATE: October 18, 1985

R: This is an interview with Walter Damon for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Joe Rochette, on October 18, 1985, at 471 Ferndale Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio, at approximately 10:00 a.m.

Tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were born and where you went to school, that kind of thing.

D: My father was out in Utah when I was born. He was working for the Quartermaster Corps. They took care of the Indians. I was born in 1901. After my sister was born in 1902 when she was only a year old or so, we came back to Kirtland, Ohio where my grandmother lived. My grandfather came to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1837 when the Mormons were there.

R: With Joseph Smith?

D: Yes.

R: Out where your father was at and where you were born, was that like a reservation?

D: No, it was in Price, Utah. Price was the county seat of Carbon County. It was right in the mountains there, more or less. There were coal mines there too. Then we moved to Omaha and lived there for six years. I started school there. Then for the last two years of my grandmother's life, we lived with her in Kirtland. When she got sick, we moved to Cleveland. There were too many of us; there were four of us children then. We had a nurse taking care of her. She died shortly after. Then we moved to Cleveland and we lived there from then on until . . . Of course, they are

still living in Cleveland. I have one brother in Lakewood and one in Berea, so they are still living there.

I went to East High School in Cleveland. When I graduated, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I went back to East High School for a fifth year. I took all of the art that I could. On my sixteenth birthday in 1917 I got a job. This was before we got into the First World War. I was employed by A. D. Taylor as an office file clerk and trainee in Landscape Architecture & Town Planning. I worked for him during summers and when I wasn't in school like on Saturdays in the mornings. I have been in the planning profession for sixty-eight years.

R: You said that you took a lot of art courses.

D: Yes, I took all of the art courses I could in high school. One of the men in A. D. Taylor's office was a graduate of Carnegie Institute of Technology. He was an architect in the planning office. I decided to go to Carnegie in the middle of 1920 and 1921. I started out in painting and illustrating. After the first term I decided to be an architect, so I shifted to architecture. I got a scholarship for my second year.

R: How many years did you spend at Carnegie?

D: Four years.

R: In those days after you got your degree would you be sort of like an apprentice?

D: When you go into architecture?

R: Yes, after you graduated.

D: I had been working for this landscape architect, so I worked for him for a year. Then I got a job with Charles Schneider who was one of the leading architects, mostly residential, in Cleveland, so my apprenticeship was well advanced.

I got married in 1927 to a girl I had met when I was in school there. I graduated in 1925. We lived in Cleveland. Her mother and father lived in Pittsburgh. She developed heart trouble. Mary went down to live with her mother, and I moved down and got a job there as soon as I could. That must have been in 1929.

When the Depression hit, I had worked with two architects there. I got a job with the county parks as a county park

architect. I was Allegheny County Park's architect. North Park and South Park were the two big parks they had. When the next election came, I was out. My job was eliminated. Then I got a job with my wife's uncle who was with the Booth and Flynn Company. It was the head office of the George H. Flynn Corporation which started in Pittsburgh as Booth and Flynn. Her uncle was the head of the New York office.

Myron Goodwin, who was on the football squad at Carnegie, was from Youngstown. He took architecture. He had called me in January of 1937 and asked me to come up and work for him. I said, "Sure, I'm getting tired of this work down here." I came up on February 1, 1937. I have been there ever since. At that time I was thirty-five. (My birthday is in April). Next February I will have been here for forty-nine years in Youngstown, my sixtieth anniversary from Carnegie in 1985. It has been fun to do architecture all of these years.

I am always making drawings. I still am making drawings for people, mostly for churches. I did about two hundred churches. One of the first ones I worked on in Youngstown was Trinity Methodist Church, addition and remodeling.

R: Where is that at?

D: That's on Front Street right behind the courthouse. That has an interesting history. It was formed in 1803. Supposedly, they brought a log cabin from Deerfield, presumably on a log sled. There weren't any roads around. There were paths, but there weren't any built roads to get out into the country.

It was on the square. Then in a few years they built a church over on Front Street. Then in 1826 or so they built a Greek revival little church on the corner opposite of where the Trinity is now on the other side of Phelps Street. In 1856 they built a Sunday school underneath it by raising it up. In 1880 they decided that they had to have a new church. So they built this new church. They put the church part on the second floor. There were twenty-four or twenty-six steps from the street up to get to it.

If you have been in that church, you will notice that there are a couple of bands. Those are stone walls. They start out about two and a half feet thick down in the basement. Then, of course, the stones, the wall, is offset and thinner on each floor to support floor joists. Today you put a concrete footing in, but in those days they used pieces of stone about three or four feet wide. They started the course on that, and that acted as a footing. So that went on up there. When you got to the first floor line, I think it was about twenty-two inches or so, the thickness of the walls. They

cut them down to seventeen inches or something above the church floor and from there up. This remains even higher.

Where the floor sat, there was the offset. If you ever get in there, you will see on these two side wings a band, a stone band there that sets on that offset. We had symbols there. I added the symbols of the works of Christian mercy carved in the stone on each side. That thing is full of symbolism because I lent my book on symbolism to the minister who was crazy about getting symbols and getting the church history in the windows, Dr. Garth. So all of those windows were redone, except there is one up in the attic room and two up in the crossing gables which are still there, still in wood sash. They are circular windows, but all of the others are new ones. We worked it out. I made the drawings for the carving that goes above the door. We had a sculptor in Cleveland do that. It was an interesting job.

I have a book upstairs dated 1860 which I think is a French book. It has a lot of these French Gothic details in it. I used a pattern similar to what they used on the ceiling of the children's chapel. I used a brown, soft board which is used for insulation on the ceiling. I put this pattern on it with a stencil. As soon as you take your stencil down, you just finish off the spots where the stencil was. That worked out pretty nice, and that has been on there for forty years now. Well, it is about forty-four years now that it has been on there. It was in 1941 when we put it on.

R: During that period did you work on a lot of churches?

D: Yes. Since then I have worked with my partners on over two hundred churches. We remodeled a lot of churches. We either remodeled or made additions to or built new churches. Of the churches in my career, most of them were within the twenty-five years when I was with my partnership firm. We had an office first on the south side over here. Then we moved it to the north side on Lincoln. Then we finally moved it to the Home Savings & Loan. We did all of the Home Savings & Loan work for about twenty years.

R: Would that be just remodeling?

D: Mostly the new buildings like the one out here in Boardman and the one in Canfield and the one remodeled in Poland.

In Poland we remodeled an old store there and made it into a Greek Revival building. There was an Isaly's in it, and the Isaly's is still there. It was in the corner. The bank took half and Isaly's took the other half. I don't know whether they are still there or not. That was right in the trend of architecture there.

I did the Methodist church there and put an addition onto the Presbyterian church and remodeled the interior of it, the old church.

Then we built the Methodist church in Boardman in 1939. We were going to do it in stone because the minister liked one that was up near Lakeside. It was a beautiful, little, stone church. The bids came in too high. Boardman was just a farming community then. It was a rural community, not exactly farming. There were a lot of nice homes and churches and things all along, especially south of 224.

I remember three or four churches there. One of them was moved over to Boardman Park. That was the Episcopal church. That was Boardman's church. Boardman came from New England, and they even have glass in that church from New England. It was done like a church that he went to in Connecticut. They asked me to put it on the national register. I turned it in, and they turned it down and said that it had been remodeled. Today when you turn in a building, the quality of the work, the remodeling, doesn't ruin the original building or add to it. So it was accepted, but then Ohio State Historical Commission or whatever it is called, wouldn't accept it. Later on they did accept it even though we had moved it clear over to a new site, but that site is a beautiful site there in the park.

I made the first layout for the park too.

R: The Boardman Park?

D: Boardman Park and the highways and going around and making that loop through the woods.

R: When did they set that park up? It wasn't that long ago, was it?

D: I retired in 1972. That would be fourteen years ago. That was when I was seventy-one years old. I did it before that, so it would be before 1960.

An architect and engineer, Chester Long out in Boardman, took it from my drawings and developed it from there on. He developed the various shelters for eating out there. Then, of course, somebody else has been developing the ones recently.

About three years ago or so, maybe it is going on four now, archeologist John White's department at Youngstown State University has turned in a lot of things for the national register. They were turning in the Jones Hall. A girl gave it to Mr. White, and he said, "You better get the

right terms here. Go out and see Mr. Damon." She came out and I gave her the information and that got through all right. John White has done more than anyone else to nominate historic sites and places to the national register by teaching his pupils how to prepare them. He sends them to me for the details, data needed.

One of the early things we did here on the register was to put Wick Avenue, Wick Oval, and the street behind it on there. Bryson Street beyond Spring got wiped out by YSU except for that building on the corner which was originally a Christian Science Church--that little chapel out there on the corner of Wick and Phillips.

R: I didn't know that was what that was.

D: Yes, that had been. The other building which was the office for the maintenance department . . . I don't know what it is now. I think it has changed. It was done in a classic style, and that is a pretty old building. Of course, those two are on the national register with that district. It got so nearly wiped out. Wick Oval is still on there.

About a year and a half ago they decided that they wanted to tear down the buildings. They bought a bunch of the buildings down in Wick Oval. They wanted to tear them down. This was the historic district. I don't know if you noticed or not, but there was quite a talk about it. I couldn't get to the engineer there in charge of the grounds. I forget his name now. I called his office, and he wouldn't call me back.

Richley was mayor of Youngstown a few years back. He was chief engineer and under him was this other fellow who became chief engineer. When Richley was there, I was working with the commission on a new code for Youngstown. We spent four years working on that. When we got through, the state passed a new law that you had to use the state building code. If you wanted to add things to it, you could. All of that work went for nothing. That's the way things go.

Anyway, two years ago when they bought that property, they said that they were going to tear down those houses. That would have ruined the whole oval. They bought about five or six houses. I tried to get them to stop that. Instead of that I thought they should build a new dormitory because they needed dormitories. They said that it wasn't suitable for dorms. There were a lot of students living down there all the time. They were renting rooms. Some of them were built just to be rooming houses for the

students. The owners had changed and so forth and they were used for that purpose. Did they get those buildings torn down?

R: I don't think they have been torn down yet.

D: I think that was a year and a half ago. Anyway, a year ago last Fall I met with some of the committee there. We had made a filmstrip about the age of that and also the house on the corner.

R: Pollock house?

D: Pollock house. Do you know when that was built?

R: No.

D: 1896. I think Wick was dead when it was built, but he started on it in 1892. I think he died, but I think his wife built it. Their daughter married Pollock and so they were the first ones to live in it. That is where they got the name. The funny thing about that is if you look at the Spring Street side of it--that faces south--all of those windows are especially big on the south side to get the sun. Today we use special solar glass and things to use the heat as well. Here they were using it back then just to enjoy the sun.

R: Do you know anything about that building . . . It is a campus building now. It is a little further up on Spring Street. It is right on the corner of Spring and . . . It is where . . . Well, there is that girls' dormitory, Buechner Hall, on Bryson Street. Then there is that little building on the corner.

D: Yes, that is Bryson Street.

R: It looks like an old building. I didn't know what that originally was.

D: Isn't that the chapel? Is it on the northwest corner?

R: Yes.

D: That is that chapel. That was the Christian Science Church.

R: Now all they use it for is . . .

D: Recital Hall, yes, that is what they use it for.

R: I thought that was the one you were talking about.

D: Yes, that's the one.

R: During the late 1930's or during the Depression and that time when you were in Youngstown here, did you notice if the jobs were any less than they normally were? Did you notice any hardship as far as in your field?

D: Do you mean like fifty years ago?

R: Yes.

D: Things were going pretty good in the 1930's. Of course, this was still the Depression, so there were a lot of people who didn't . . . You know what you could do then? You could go to Isaly's, which was a little store in the Realty Building. I think you could get a sandwich for 8¢ and coffee for 3¢ and pie. Maybe the sandwich was 10¢; I don't remember. I think you could get pie for 8¢. So for less than 25¢ that could get you lunch.

At that time I used to go to . . . It's not part of the bank there, the Mahoning National Bank. In the back there is another wing that was originally the Baptist church. Downstairs there was a restaurant, Raver's. They moved from there. Anyway, the restaurant there would have lunch. It was a 40¢ lunch. You got a sandwich and whatever you wanted to drink and dessert for 40¢. Can you imagine that? And that was a good restaurant. I went there for years.

R: That is the thing. Now it is hard for somebody my age to think of Youngstown as a bustling kind of place.

D: In 1890 it was still a small town, but by 1900 it doubled, I think. It kept on going. In 1930 there were 170,000. Since then, it has gone down. During the war, of course, this was a really bustling place. Then after the Second World War it still kept going good. Then came the take-over of Sheet & Tube. When was that, in the 1960's?

R: Yes.

D: They took over Sheet & Tube. I see they are going broke now, whoever took it over. Now they are taking over Republic Steel. They are the third largest steel company in the country. They didn't understand that when you made a lot of money in the steel mill, you had to keep that for remodeling to keep the firm up-to-date. They did pretty good there in the 1960's. They were going to put money into developing, and then the bottom dropped out of steel. That was something in the 1970's. It was 1973 when the oil prices went up in the OPEC countries.

R: A lot of the buildings downtown, even the courthouse and the older ones, when were they built?

D: The courthouse was built in 1915. I think that was when it was finished. In the courthouse they had an artist who did the murals up in the corners of the dome. Did you ever look at those?

R: Yes.

D: That should be on the register because of that.

R: That is around the period when a lot of those old bank buildings down there . . .

D: Yes, a lot of the old bank buildings were built in the same period. In the 1920's it wasn't the Union Bank that was built because the Union Bank went broke during the Depression. But it was built there in the 1920's. Then at the end of the 1920's, the modern building where the Savings & Loan Bank . . . What is the name of the bank there? It is opposite from the Union Bank on the southwest corner of the square in the tall building. That is a modern building. Then the Mahoning Bank Building was built by Scheibel. Scheibel was in also on the courthouse.

R: I didn't know that.

D: Yes, he was in on the courthouse. I don't know if he was associated with someone else or not. Scheibel built the Realty building, and he had his office there as long as he lived. Charles Ousley's father was one of the early architects here. Of course, he is gone and his children are still living. I'm trying to think of the name of the other architect who worked with Ousley. It might have been Paul Baucherle. He was one of the architects too. Another was OttoKling; his last office was called Kling & Frost. The office that is now in Columbiana and run by George T. and Ed Smith . . . Those were the early and mid-twentieth century architects here. They are all gone, of course.

R: It is that group who is pretty much responsible for building downtown Youngstown.

D: Yes, but you will find that some of the bigger buildings were designed for . . . I don't know who did the Union Bank. I think that was done by someone from out of town. For instance, the art museum . . . Do you have the name of the architect on that?

R: No.

D: You can get that from the man who is head of that now. He was a professor and I think is still a professor in the fine arts department at YSU, Lou Zona. He was head of the

art department, fine arts department or the painting part of it or something. He left that job to go and become the director of the museum. He is doing a good job. I see that they got \$3 million or so. Their drive went way over that. When you consider that we are in rough times, that is really something. Apparently, the people they had working for them knew the right people. They were able to get the money for them.

R: A lot of the big theaters that were downtown, were they done by outside people like the old Palace and those?

D: Yes, the old Palace . . . I don't remember who did that.

The Warner Theater which is now the symphony hall, we remodeled that for the symphony. The man who we got as the consultant on the acoustics . . . They built a new symphony hall in New York. When they got finished . . . The acoustical engineers on that were the biggest ones in the country and some of the biggest in the world who did that.

They had all kinds of trouble with that. They developed reflecting units over the orchestra. The orchestra uses the stage part when you have a symphony concert. These units were fine except the low tones of the drums went right through it and never got pushed out. It was getting only the high tones, whereas the old Carnegie Hall would resound those booms. That really tickles your ears when you listen to that. Then they got the acoustical engineer from the telephone company to try to do it. I don't know how much they spent, but he couldn't do it. They finally got the guy who we had for the symphony hall here.

We developed the work and built here in the symphony hall for much less than anybody else did. For instance, I don't remember how much was spent, but the symphony hall in St. Louis was another movie theater and they spent over \$1 million. Also Pittsburgh spent I think over \$1 million converting a movie theater into a symphony hall.

I think we were lucky we got the right man for the acoustics. All they did was they made some sort of balloon things in those recesses to keep it from whatever it does. Then they had special things that they put around it like the drapes and things. I think they did something on the ceiling too. There are bags up there to hold the sound from getting stuck in it. I think the sound is good there. Have you been there to any symphony concerts?

R: Yes. When you go in there now, does it look now pretty much how it probably originally looked?

D: It looks mostly like that. There is one thing we changed. We put a ramp in the lobby to get rid of some of those steps.

R: That is that middle part that you walk up?

D: Yes, that middle part when you are walking up there. We veneered the outside. From the point of view of historic architecture, that would keep that from being on the register for fifty years.

R: Okay. Thank you very much. You have been a great help.

D: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW