

DONALD HERSHEY

The post-World War II years saw the expansion of the middle class as service men re-entered the work force and utilized their G.I. Bill benefits for college educations. The ability to purchase automobiles meant workers no longer were dependent on public transportation or proximity to their employment. A private, single-family home in the suburbs was now within their reach. The Federal Housing Administration in 1934 had created an accessible mortgage program for civilians and, in 1944, the Veterans Administration established a similar program for returning veterans.

One of the architects that designed housing for returning veterans was Donald Hershey who designed multi-family and single-family houses in Brighton and the Rochester area.

Born January 5, 1904 in Dayton, Ohio, Donald Hershey moved to Rochester after graduating from Cornell University in 1927 with a bachelor's degree in architecture. During his years at Cornell, Frank Lloyd Wright visited Ithaca to lecture at the college and the young architecture student became interested in modern design. Toward the end of his career, he said this about the experience: *"Frank Lloyd Wright was my inspiration. I didn't imitate him but I've always been fascinated by the strength of his designs, his hip roofs, open plans, and his use of stone...I was greatly inspired by Wright. I wondered what I could do to achieve a 'soft, modern' design. I wanted to do something that would maybe reflect a little bit of Wright, and would still look contemporary 30 years later."*

His own house, under construction only three years after he established his architectural firm during the Depression, followed Hershey design principles: the placement of large windows on the rear of the house overlooking the garden, the main entrance at the central core of the house and most rooms opening off that central core, a curved concrete fireplace poured in place, a curving staircase, and the use of Medina sandstone. Don Hershey didn't plan to use stone on his own house in 1939 – it was too expensive – so the house was designed with a stucco exterior. As he related years later, one day *"a truck pulled up loaded with stone. I knew the company dealt in building materials, and the driver jumped down, introduced himself, and complemented me on my design. Then he said (he was a good salesman), 'Mr. Hershey, I've been watching you build, and I think this house calls for stone.' His truck was loaded with Medina stone which he had procured free by removing it from where it was stockpiled near the canal in Medina. He took a hammer and hit a piece; it split clean and level. He sold me ten loads for \$40 a load."* (Eldercraft Newsletter, n.d.)

The Hershey house was compromised with the construction of the Eastern Expressway in 1968, coming within fourteen feet of the back of the house, but it was the enlargement of the highway in 1988 that did the most damage to the environs of the house. The sound barrier is only three feet from the dining room window. Nonetheless, this unique house on Landing Road South is a designated Town of Brighton landmark.

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian
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