



Oddities at Boothe Memorial Park Designed to Arouse Curiosities of Passers-by

By DICK ZANDER

There is method in the madness of the Boothe Memorial Park.

With the return of warm weather, the park—32 acres of well-kept land overlooking the Housatonic River In Putney Gardens—has again attracted curiosity seekers, historians, and people who want to find out the who-what-when questions behind the strange estate.

David and Stephen Boothe are described by most persons who knew them as eccentric.

They built a garden-full of "white elephants" to shock people into remembrance.

According to Joseph Melnick caretaker of the park, David Boothe—the "brains" of the brothers — explained his reason this way.

"In the old days people used to travel anywhere to find something that was beautiful. Then it got so any man could go out and buy something beautiful . . . and people wouldn't go out of their way to see beautiful things.

"So, the Bootes decided the way to attract people was to build oddities. These strange objects draw a person's curiosity and bring them to the memorial," Melnick said.

The caretaker listed the chronology of the buildings as follows:

The Coliseum (the dining hall) built in 1932. The building is constructed in the form of a ship. David built it for his younger brother while Stephen was

taking a boat ride around the world. Most unusual thing about the buildings are the "no smoking" signs. It is impossible to look anywhere in the building without seeing a "no smoking" sign.

The sunken garden or symposium basilica was built 1933. At the basilica, Easter Sunrise services are held. They were discontinued during the lives of the Bootes because David got mad at citizens' lack of enthusiasm.

The Redwood Building or monument to the depression was built in 1935. Also termed the "technocratic cathedral" by David, all the materials in the building lie flat. The Redwood was used to remind people that the country was in the red.

The Bell Tower was built in 1937. According to David it is "neither round, square nor plumb."

The Blacksmith Shop was constructed in 1935. It is reportedly one of the finest and most complete examples of a blacksmith shop now in existence.

Melnick said Henry Ford once offered to buy the shop but David retorted, "If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for me!"

Melnick recalls the tale of his first meeting with the Bootes in the early 1940s.

SUNDAY

FINAL

No Fear--No Favor



HERALD

The People's Paper

Vol. LXX, No. 9

299 Lafayette St.
Tel. FO. 6-2211

BRIDGEPORT 1, CONN., FEB. 26, 1956

Entered as Second Class Matter
Post Office, Bridgeport, Conn.

20 CENTS

Melnick was looking for a place to live and he was told that the Boothes owned many apartments.

"When I arrived, the brothers were trying to carry a desk upstairs. Stephen was the weaker of the two and they weren't doing too well. I offered to help and we got the desk upstairs," Melnick recalled.

After finding out Melnick's purpose, David Boothe asked Melnick if he'd like a cigaret. Not knowing the Boothes abhorred smoking, Melnick said he didn't smoke.

Then Boothe asked Melnick if he'd like a drink. No. Melnick replied. "I don't drink." This pleased the brothers.

More interesting and more shocking than the Boothe buildings are stories of the two men.

Melnick remembers the story about David Boothe's dealings when he attempted to buy an apartment house at Fairfield Av. and Hancock St.

Boothe won the bid with \$75,000. He wrote out a check for the amount and handed it to the proper official who refused it.

"Mr. Boothe, we can only take cash or a certified check," the official said.

Boothe told him to check his balance or do anything he wished because the check for \$75,000 was good. The agent refused.

An angry David Boothe went to his bank and withdrew \$75,000 in cash. He pointedly got the sum in one-dollar bills.

"David said they counted them until 2 in the morning

while he kept saying, 'I think you forgot one'," Melnick said.

When the Boothes died in 1948 and 1949, Connecticut lost two of its most colorful figures.

If they were crazy, they succeeded in their aim. Certainly anyone who drives by the park will pause to look at the strange looking buildings. Probably the Boothes were right; the odd things in life are remembered while the beautiful ones are forgotten.