



*Manor house of the late Senator James Couzens for sale at \$350,000*

# Wabeek beauty is monumental

By JODY HEADLEE  
Lifestyle Staff Writer

Wabeek, the Indian word for "beautiful place," says it all.

The former residence of the late Senator James Couzens and his wife, Margaret, is, and made even more so by its setting of towering trees, rolling greensward and spring-fed lake.

Standing as a monument to the architectural genius of its designer, Albert Kahn, the manor house is now owned by Chrysler Realty Corp. and offered for sale for \$350,000.

Though the setting has dwindled from its original 800 acres to five, it does not diminish the beauty of the structure.

Started in 1924 and completed in 1927, the seven-bedroom mansion cost approximately \$1.5 million to build, according to Robin Eldridge of Wabeek Sales Associates, Inc.

Couzens, who was not always wealthy, had a native talent for practical business. He invested \$2,500 to help launch the budding Ford Motor Co. In 1903 and became the firm's financial organizer and sales executive, working his way up to vice president and treasurer, according to "Centennial History of Michigan."

To buy out Couzens' interest in the business, Ford paid nearly \$30 million in 1919. Couzens was chiefly responsible for the company's revolutionary move establishing the basic wage of \$5 a day.

He went on to serve other facets of business and was appointed U.S. Senator to fill the vacancy created by Truman H. Newberry's resignation in November 1922. Reelected, he was the mover behind behind what became known as the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camps which employed 3 million young men in forestry work, road building and flood control during the recovery period following the Great Depression.

Devoted to his country, Couzens was equally devoted to his family. The Couzenses had six children, three boys, James (who died in infancy), Homer (who died at 14) and Frank, and three girls, Madeleine, Margo and Edith.

It was while the Couzenses lived in Detroit that they acquired the Wabeek property, building the summer house where they frequently vacationed. The lure of the land was strong and Kahn was commissioned to design the manor house so they could enjoy the beauty year-round.

Overlooking what was Cranberry Lake but is now known as Wabeek Lake, the residence is constructed of brick with limestone accents at windows, arches and entrances.

paneling throughout the spacious library, living and dining rooms.

Doors to the coat closet, the men's room and the powder room are cleverly concealed in the walnut paneling. Kahn's forethought, ever evident, a light pops on automatically as each closet in the mansion is opened.

The parquet floors, used throughout the downstairs, have withstood the test of time and add to impressiveness of the wood treatment.

Kahn created a unique canopy-type ceiling in the library and the east bedroom. Downstairs ceilings are decorated with beautiful sculptured plaster relief, typical of the English manor houses reflecting the artistry of Grinling Gibbons.

No details were overlooked as the delicately filigreed door handles, escutcheons and decorative door knobs attest.

Lead-paned glass windows in blues, reds, yellows and golds highlight the curved landing of the stairwell leading to the bedrooms. Each bedroom has its own bath (some with built-in weight scales) and walk-in closet and interconnects with its neighboring rooms.

And all the attention to detail wasn't concentrated in the areas that show. The basement is finished in glazed white tile — even the coal bin though it's drifted to a rather smoky gray.

Many ships would be proud to have the boilers that heat the Couzens' mansion. One is still hooked up to its original stoker though the other one has been converted to oil.

"The coal one still works," said Raymond King, a former employee of Couzens who now works for Chrysler Realty.

"When the oil one went down and had to be fixed just a short time ago, I used the coal.

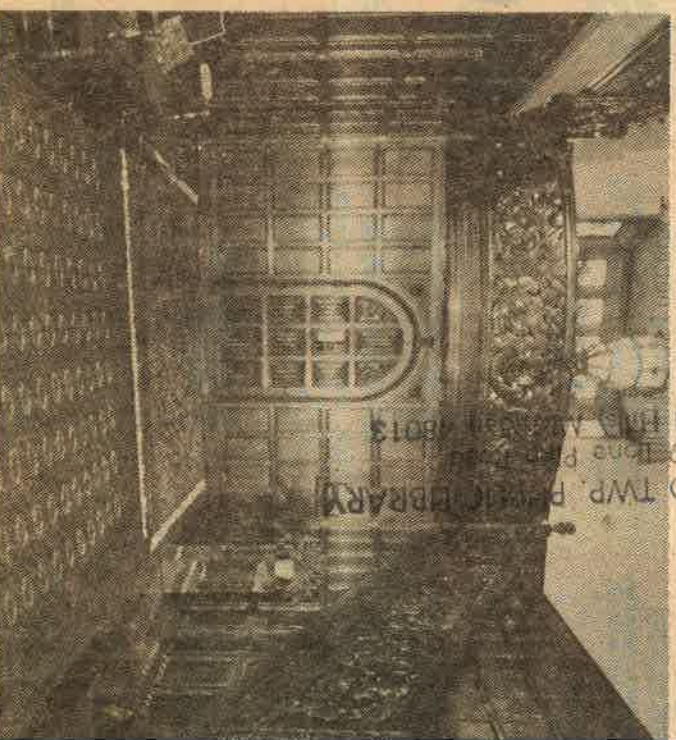
"I never knew the Senator," says the man, who came to work on the grounds at Wabeek when he was just 17 years old. "But Mrs. Couzens was a wonderful person to work for. She never bothered you. As long as the place looked nice, she was satisfied."

He chuckles as he remembers the stages the grandchildren went through. First they wanted to help weed, then ride the power mower as he maneuvered it around the rolling hills. Then, even that got tame, and they wanted wheels of their own — motor bikes, go-carts.

"Then they were here all the time — wanting me to fix 'em. And I did," said King, better-known to the family as Bibbs.



CLOSE-UP Richly carved staircase done by artist-craftsman Youngworth reveals an art almost impossible to duplicate today.



ENTRANCE Walnut paneling and oak parquet flooring mark mansion's foyer. Doors to powder room, men's room and coat closet cleverly concealed in the pattern of the paneling. Front door features hand-carved accents to tie it with carvings of solid walnut staircase

Oakland Press Photos by  
Eddie Vandervorp

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The entrance hall with its richly-carved walnut staircase displays the craftsmanship of an earlier day. Executed by the artist craftsman Youngworth, the carvings with their slightly Nordic flavor become more traditional when used to frame each doorway, each fireplace and to accent the

delicately filigreed door handles, escutcheons and decorative door knobs attest.

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"It was a close family," he said, and a note of longing for the good old days crept in.

"But it's got to be sold. It just can't sit there." And you knew, he was thinking, it needed another family and another generation of eager weeders.

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Close-up view of the pattern of the carvings. The door features hand-carved accents to tie it with carvings solid walnut staircase

