RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

RACAR
Revue d'art canadienne | Canadian Art Review

Ralph Greenhill, Ken Macpherson, and Douglas Richardson, *Ontario Towns*, [Ottawa] Oberon Press, 1974. Not paginated; 99 photos and 23 ills. in text. $25.00

William Paul Thompson with photographs by Henry Kalen, *Winnipeg Architecture: 100 Years*, Winnipeg, Queenston House, 1975. 72 pages; 80 photos and 6 sketches. $3.50

City of Victoria Heritage Advisory Committee, *Heritage Conservation Report*, Victoria, City of Victoria, 1975. 90 pages; 131 photos, 11 sketches, and 8 maps. Not priced

Harold Kalman

Volume 2, Number 2, 1975

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077396ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1077396ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Kalman, H. (1975). Review of [Ralph Greenhill, Ken Macpherson, and Douglas Richardson, *Ontario Towns*, [Ottawa] Oberon Press, 1974. Not paginated; 99 photos and 23 ills. in text. $25.00 / William Paul Thompson with photographs by Henry Kalen, *Winnipeg Architecture: 100 Years*, Winnipeg, Queenston House, 1975. 72 pages; 80 photos and 6 sketches. $3.50 / City of Victoria Heritage Advisory Committee, *Heritage Conservation Report*, Victoria, City of Victoria, 1975. 90 pages; 131 photos, 11 sketches, and 8 maps. Not priced]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *2*(2), 65–68. https://doi.org/10.7202/1077396ar

books
livres

Ralph GREENHILL, Ken MACPHERSON, and Douglas RICHARDSON, *Ontario Towns*, [Ottawa] Oberon Press, 1974. Not paginated; 99 photos and 23 ills. in text. $25.00.

William Paul THOMPSON with photographs by Henry KALEN, *Winnipeg Architecture: 100 Years*, Winnipeg, Queenston House, 1975. 72 pages; 80 photos and 6 sketches. $3.50.

City of Victoria Heritage Advisory Committee, *Heritage Conservation Report*, Victoria, City of Victoria, 1975. 90 pages; 131 photos, 11 sketches, and 8 maps. Not priced.

A flood of publications in the past few years has filled the collector's bookshelf with volumes on Canadian architecture. One reason for the outflow is the maturing of a generation of younger architectural historians who have trained abroad and returned — or come — to Canada within the past decade. The writers of the three new collaborative books here under consideration are all of this breed: Douglas Scott Richardson, a Yale-educated art historian who has made numerous valuable contributions to the discipline since his return to the University of Toronto; William Paul Thompson, who came to the University of Manitoba after having done graduate work in architecture at Cornell; and Martin J. Segger, a product of the University of Victoria who is back at that institution after a sojourn at the Warburg Institute. Teachers such as these have injected new life into art and architecture departments and made Canadian architectural history an important part of their curricula. It is indeed through the energies of such men that we now boast a Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada dedicated to the propagation of knowledge in the field.

The three books all follow the recent tendency in scholarship to consider buildings within restricted geographical areas. Beyond this similarity, however, the volumes differ much in format, purpose, and quality.

First to be considered is *Ontario Towns*. This big, beautiful, and (accordingly) expensive book was conceived as a sequel to *Rural Ontario*, a collaboration between historian Verschoyle Benson Blake and veteran Toronto photographer Ralph Greenhill (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1969). Blake died in 1971, and his rôle has been taken here by former research associate Ken Macpherson and by Richardson. A different publishing house, Ottawa's Oberon Press, handled production.

Ontario Towns offers "a survey of the better surviving examples of nineteenth-century buildings and streetscapes in the smaller towns of southern Ontario." The authors might better have repeated the phraseology of *Rural Ontario*: "a sampling of what has pleased us;" for a "survey" of "better" buildings from so vast and fresh a field (albeit one limited to towns located at a covenient distance from home base Toronto) must of necessity be arbitrary and largely personal. The authors' tastes evidently lean toward buildings of respectable classical design. We find relatively few examples of High Victorian excess, and for the most part the classical modes are abandoned only for the decorous Tory Gothic Revival. Yet whether chosen by taste or for quality — or both — the selection is an excellent one.

The book features two complementary parts: 99 full-page black-and-white plates of buildings and vistas, each accompanied by a capsule description, and an introductory text that discusses the nature and development of buildings in the province. Like *Rural Ontario*, this volume is intended by its size and visual appeal primarily for the coffee table; also like its predecessor, the erudition renders it equally at home in the study.

The distinguished architectural photography of Ralph Greenhill reaches new levels of excellence. His pictures are carefully and consistently composed portraits of buildings, generally taken from an angle yet strongly emphasizing the façade. The building customarily occupies the middle ground, leaving a provocatively inviting space between the observer and the structure. All

is carefully studied and posed; Greenhill's style is one of classical perfection befitting the style of building that he likes best.[1]

Camden East. Ontario Towns, pl. 67.

The ordering of the plates produces some superb contrasts. One of the best is the juxtaposition of Cobourg's Victoria Hall with Camden East's humble general store. (Fig. 1) Each is the most impressive building in town.

Author Richardson faced a tough challenge: he sought to elucidate the development of architecture in a manner consistent with his own expertise while never losing sight of the fine illustrations. This he realized with a considerable degree of success. The division of text into sections (treating the buildings by usage) avoids a straight historical survey. With impeccable scholarship, Richardson explains stylistic patterns as they relate to geography, society, and time, consistently illustrating the points with Greenhill's plates. He demonstrates the relationship of Ontario buildings to sources in the U.S. and Britain, constantly referring to pattern books and other publications available to (and used by) our own designers. Many of these are reproduced in the text figures. Although references to the interiors of buildings, plans, and internal views are absent, this is consistent with Greenhill's style of portraiture.

The book is chock full of information, much of it new. The one-and-one-half-storey Ontario house is, following Blake, related to tax laws; school design to the philosophy of Egerton Ryerson; mill building to British architectural theory. The reader will find it hard to drive through another Ontario town without seeing its architecture in a very new light.

---

1. For a penetrating and sensitive review of Greenhill's photography in *Ontario Towns*, *Rural Ontario*, and in his earlier *The Face of Toronto* (introduction by Alan Gowans; Toronto, 1960), see George Baird, "Ralph Greenhill: Photographing Ontario," *City Magazine*, 1:4 (May-June 1975), 15–27.

If there be any inconsistency in the text, it is between the predominant "vernacular" qualities of so much Ontario town building and the writer's evident personal preference for "high" architecture associated with name designers. Richardson properly notes that "the concept of a consistent, let alone homogeneous approach to style, surface treatment, or detailing is almost irrelevant in the context of basically vernacular material." Yet elsewhere he attempts to define this indefinable style, calling it "plain to the point of austerity." And he obviously takes special delight in presenting the stylish buildings designed by Kivas Tully, Thomas Fuller, and other famous and urbane architects. But Tully's grandiose Victoria Hall in Cobourg is an anomaly among the buildings in Ontario towns; it is, as the description points out, the vain attempt by upstart Cobourg to emulate the sophisticated finery of Toronto. The building was too big for the town from the start; in our own time it has become a magnificent albatross whose restoration the entire province is hard pressed to afford.

Ontario Towns is a fine book, the three-star gourmet dinner of its trade. The only aspect that deserves a knuckle-rapping is the work of its editor and publisher. The book offers no pagination, no table of contents, no index, and no city of publication. Copyright data appears on the last page instead of behind the title page. Text figures 23 and 7 precede that numbered 1. The footnotes are located at the end of each unnumbered and unpaginated section and are difficult to find. A map would have been helpful. The design is handsome, but this is because it follows the outstanding example of *Rural Ontario*, designed by Allan Fleming with the help of Laurie Lewis — yet credit for the design is taken by Oberon Press's owner Michael Macklem. And as a final insult, Oberon saw fit to put its own name and not those of the authors on the spine.

Winnipeg Architecture: 100 Years also suffers from lapses in editing and design, but these are more easily forgiven in this short-order snack of the book trade. Queenston House, a young Winnipeg publisher, apparently strove to keep the price of the booklet at $3.50 (or could afford no more). The book's 72 pages are securely stapled inside a soft cover to help achieve this end. In these inflationary days one can only be grateful.

It must be stated frankly at the outset, however, that the book is a disappointment. Responsibility must be shared by author Thompson, photographer Henry Kalen, and Queenston House's editorial staff. The book never quite explains its purpose — whether it is intended for the pocket, the desk, or the night table (its destination is clearly not the coffee table). The publisher's blurb that accompanied this reviewer's copy describes it as a "guide to Winnipeg design and building over the years." Being the author of a guidebook to another Canadian city, and well aware of the fragility of glass houses, I nevertheless tried to use the book on the road. It didn't work.

The volume's 66 buildings (spanning 140, not 100, years) are, like those in the text of *Ontario Towns*, separated into building types, and one or more

photographs of each is accompanied by a brief description and keyed to a map. The numbers, however, refer not to the order of the text nor to location, but to the "photo exhibit *The Architecture of Manitoba*" — which is neither explained nor mentioned beyond the one citation on the final page. The 66th building is numbered 54 or 113, depending on whether one refers to text or to map. If the reader heads towards a particular part of town, as I did, and uses the map to see what goodies may lie in that direction, he or she can get only as far as the name of the building. To jump from the list of names to the actual photos and descriptions requires frantic searching through the pages — impossible even at a long traffic light. And if the description be found, the building is frequently hard to identify in the flesh because of no exterior photograph, an occasional deceptive archival photo, or because it may have been demolished.

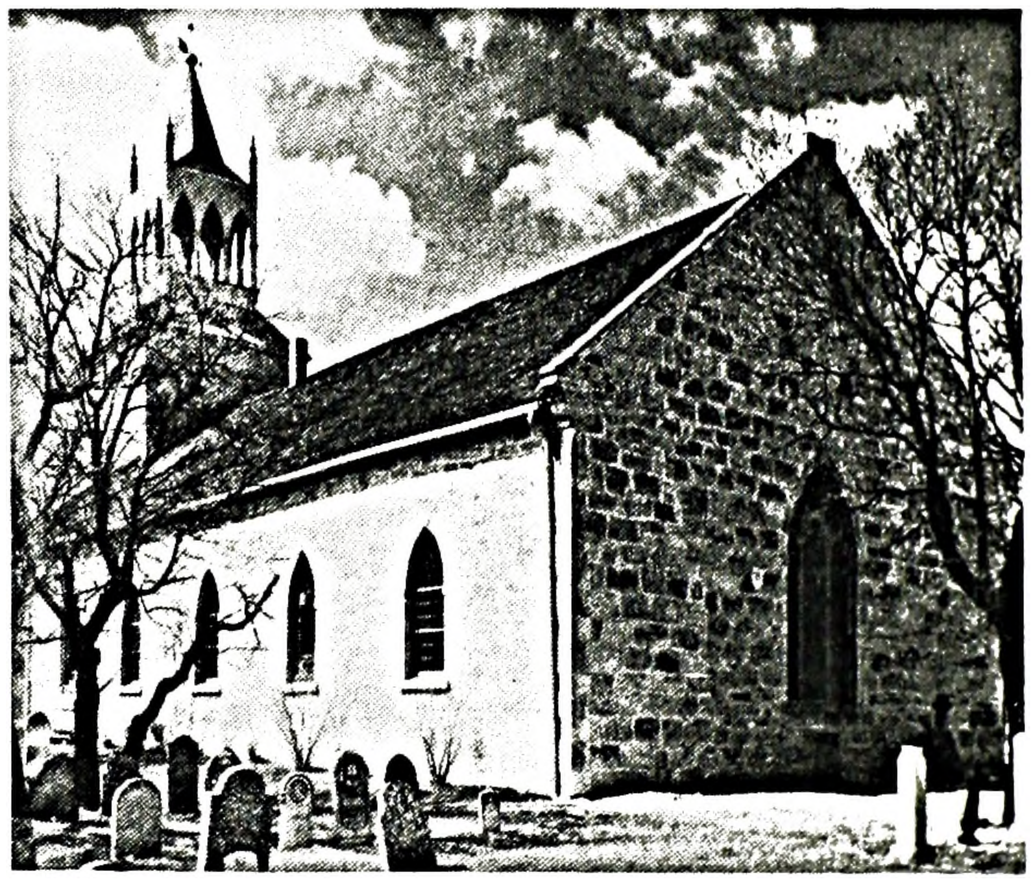
Another obstacle to the book's success as a guide is the omission of several downtown landmarks in a text that emphasizes monumental "high" architecture. In a city dependent upon the railroad for its wealth, one looks in vain for the impressive station of either the CNR (by Warren and Wetmore of Grand Central Station fame) or the CPR (by the Maxwells); missing is the beautiful old Royal Bank Building (by Darling and Pearson), perhaps Canada's first bank tower; also absent is the superb art deco Federal Building by Northwood and Chivers, Winnipeg's leading firm in the '20s and '30s — a partnership (and two decades) all but missing from the book.

If not a guidebook, the book perhaps demands more careful sedentary study. And here a number of other weaknesses become evident. The pages are dominated by the photographs of Henry Kalen who, we are told by that same blurb, is "Winnipeg's finest photographer." Many of the illustrations are very fine indeed, carefully and sensitively composed and printed. Unlike Greenhill, however, Kalen evinces no "style." He mixes straight-on views, worm's-eye shots, close-up and wide-angle interiors, and even one fish-eye exposure. This lack of consistency, combined with the inclusion of some photographs of lesser quality by other photographers, all put together in a helter-skelter layout, produces visual chaos. The layout sometimes creates the impression that a photograph goes with the wrong description. The only way to be certain that the interior of the Canadian Bank of Commerce is not the Drummer Boy Lounge at the Fort Garry Hotel is to go into the latter and order a drink.

The text likewise lacks consistency. Whereas some of the descriptions are fascinating and zesty, others are dry and confusingly interspersed with quotations. The introduction is barely literate, offering such meaningless convolutions as "These pieces of superstructure [i.e. 'great public monuments'] would exist in the splendid isolation of the earliest parts of the architectural legacy only if history were reversed."

A reader puts down the book having learned little about the history or nature of Winnipeg architecture. The architects do not come alive as designers, the development of style is barely touched upon, the fascinating histories are often glossed over. Outside architects are brought in at the wrong times — as by citing H. H. Richardson in the description of the pre-Richardsonian church of St. Andrew's-on-the-Red (1845–49) — with the effect of denigrating the Manitoba products. (Fig. 2) When outsiders are actually involved — as they were so often in a city with the aspirations and affluence of a major metropolis but, in earlier years, with no trained body of architects — they are rarely introduced as such. We never learn that Darling and Pearson were the corporate darlings of Toronto, nor that McKim, Mead and White were the same in New York.

Indeed, in terms of historical architecture, *Winnipeg Architecture* introduces the reader to few new buildings and little new material. Of the 37 buildings in the book that were standing when John W. Graham published *A Guide to the Architecture of Greater Winnipeg* (Winnipeg, 1960), some 22 appeared in Graham's book — several with virtually the same description. (Compare, for example the texts to the Claude Heubach Residence.)



St. Andrew's-on-the-Red. Winnipeg Architecture, p. 37.

Of the 15 not treated by Graham, 7 were featured in the more recent *Early Buildings of Manitoba* (Winnipeg, 1973) and 3 others were demolished or gutted a while ago. That leaves only 5 extant historical buildings making their published debut in the present study. *Winnipeg Architecture* does make a significant contribution in the area of newer architecture. The 29 buildings in the book that were erected in the past decade and a half form an impressive corpus. Since Winnipeg architecture receives little space in *The Canadian Architect* and was all but ignored in Carol Moore Ede's *Canadian Architecture 1960/70* (Toronto, 1971), we should be sincerely thankful to Thompson and Kalen for this sampling.

Many of the problems could have been averted with proper editing. But, as with the editors of *Ontario Towns*, homework was left undone. Besides the serious problems of layout and numeration, there are countless incon-

sistencies, errors in grammar and spelling, and questionable metaphors that should have been corrected. How, for example, is the Winnipeg Convention Centre "a gigantic ice flow [floe?] of a building"?

The third volume under consideration, *Heritage Conservation Report*, comes from ice-less Victoria. It is not a trade book at all (although available upon request from the City of Victoria), but rather the first formal statement by that city's Heritage Advisory Committee. The six-person board was appointed by city council in November 1973 in response to new provincial legislation enabling municipalities to designate and protect heritage structures. The actual research and writing are the work of the indefatigable Martin Segger — who teaches art history at the University of Victoria, sits on the staff of the B.C. Provincial Museum, and is himself a member of the Heritage Advisory Committee. Segger was aided by Victoria planner Les D. Mazer.

Heritage Conservation Report reflects the committee's sincere interest in Victoria's older architecture as well as its realization that a programme of conservation in the city's central area is not only possible, but necessary. The volume begins with a twelve-page section entitled "Planning for Heritage Conservation." Besides the clichéd motherhood statement in defense of preservation, the chapter offers a succinct explanation of the private and public economic benefits of preservation. One recognizes here input from Alderman Samuel Bawlf, the chairman of the committee and himself a successful developer with expertise in good restoration work.[2] The section concludes with a sensible discussion of how provincial and municipal laws and programmes might better assist preservation.

The heart of the book is an inventory of 133 buildings in the central area that the committee recommends for protection, supplemented by a list of 88 others of some heritage value. In other cities, so large a number might seem absurd; in Victoria it makes eminently good sense. The city threw up buildings at a frantic pace during the boom periods before the first world war. When the war was over, Victorians finally recognized that they had been left far behind by parvenu Vancouver. Little pressure for redevelopment followed, and to this day Victoria is overstocked with older commercial structures that give the central city an early flavour. (Fig. 3) As shown by a map insert, much of the limited new construction has been happily compatible with the old. The only new tall office building, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce tower, is an incongruous eyesore.

Each of the 133 buildings recommended for designation is photographed (some in groups) and accompanied by a concise discussion of the history of its erection and occupants, the architect (if known), and the style. The stylistic comments, and the arrangement in chronological order (again separated into building types), enable the reader to gain a real feeling for the essence of Victoria's architectural development. A great deal of architectural history has been tightly compressed into a restricted format and the material is almost all new.

Victoria City Hall. Heritage Conservation Report, p. 18.

Although *Heritage Conservation Report* was never conceived as a guidebook — Segger is, however, currently working on one — the book can be put to work quite effectively on the street. Its secret is an index that enumerates each building on both lists alphabetically by street address, gives its date, and refers to the page on which (if it be on the primary list) may be found its description and picture.

The photographs are disappointingly poor. Cameraman Doug Bodanski evidently was poorly equipped and in a hurry. The resulting perspective distortions, unflattering light, interfering autos and pedestrians, uneven printing, and poor cropping (caused by the uniform square format) rarely transcend the level of a planning department's reference snapshots.

The same rushed quality is evident in the production. No editor appears to have worked on the manuscript, the consequence being many inconsistencies and errors. The book does not even have a title page.

In this respect *Heritage Conservation Report* takes its place alongside the other two books under consideration. All three treat Canadian architecture in a regional or local setting. Yet they represent very different kinds of products of the publishing trade. All three suffer from innumerable editorial problems that do injustice to their contents. This reviewer can only get cross and mutter that if our ever-complaining Canadian publishers want to gain the respect they demand, then they had best buy — and use — a copy of some established manual of style — even if it be published in Chicago.

Harold KALMAN
Ottawa

2. Brief financial statements from two of Bawlf's projects are contained in *Investing in the Past: A Report on the Profitability of Heritage Conservation*, the naive pamphlet prepared by George Galt for Heritage Canada (Ottawa, 1974).