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Article abstract

Thomas Adams (1871-1940), a leading British planning pioneer, became planning adviser to the Commission of Conservation in 1914. Galvanizing the infant Canadian planning movement, he gave it a comprehensive legislative, institutional and professional structure by 1919. Like his hosts, he was a utilitarian, a meliorist and a functionalist. His system broke down in the 1920s when the atmosphere was not congenial for planning and Canadian society too immature to accept his message. Little of his actual structure now survives but Canadian planning philosophy remains essentially utilitarian. This article discusses Adams's British background, his aims and policies in Canada, his successes and failures and his significance in Canadian planning history.

Thomas Adams in Canada, 1914-1930*

Michael Simpson

Résumé/Abstract

Un des principaux pionniers en aménagement urbain, le Britannique Thomas Adams (1871-1940) devint conseiller en urbanisme à la Commission de conservation en 1914. Il impulsa le mouvement canadien d'urbanisme en le dotant dès 1919 d'une structure juridique, institutionnelle et professionnelle. Tout comme les gens de son pays d'adoption, il avait une vision du monde pragmatique, «mélioriste» et fonctionnaliste. Au cours des années 1920, son système s'effondra, car la mentalité n'était pas prête à accepter l'urbanisme et la société canadienne n'avait pas acquis la maturité nécessaire pour accueillir son message. Il reste peu de chose de ses réalisations, mais la philosophie canadienne dans le domaine de l'urbanisme demeure essentiellement utilitaire. Cet article examine la carrière britannique d'Adams, les objectifs qu'il visa et les principes qu'il défendit au Canada, ses réalisations et ses échecs ainsi que l'importance de son rôle dans l'histoire de l'urbanisme au Canada.

Thomas Adams (1871-1940), a leading British planning pioneer, became planning adviser to the Commission of Conservation in 1914. Galvanizing the infant Canadian planning movement, he gave it a comprehensive legislative, institutional and professional structure by 1919. Like his hosts, he was a utilitarian, a meliorist and a functionalist. His system broke down in the 1920s when the atmosphere was not congenial for planning and Canadian society too immature to accept his message. Little of his actual structure now survives but Canadian planning philosophy remains essentially utilitarian. This article discusses Adams's British background, his aims and policies in Canada, his successes and failures and his significance in Canadian planning history.

The formative years of modern Canadian planning with its utilitarian philosophy and practice were between 1910 and 1930. The major influence was that of the pioneer British planner Thomas Adams (1871-1940), who spent much of his time between 1914 and 1930 in Canada.

Thomas Adams: The Shaping of a Career, 1871-1914

Born in 1871 in the outskirts of Edinburgh, the eldest son of a dairyman, Thomas Adams was essentially self-educated. Successively a law clerk, an assistant in the family business and a local tenant farmer, he went into journalism and Liberal politics in 1897.¹ Migrating to London in 1900, he sought his destiny as a writer and found it as a planner.

Adams was appointed secretary of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Association in 1901 by its new chairman, Ralph Neville, and his journalistic, political and environmental experience and a talent for dynamic, practical organization enabled him to recruit thousands to the association, including leading figures, and to attract widespread publicity. Through Neville's cool realism, Howard's passionate evangelism and Adams's shrewd, aggressive organizing, they were able to found Letchworth

Garden City in 1903. Adams became the secretary-manager, charged with providing the infrastructure and decent housing for the workers, attracting industry and publicity and resolving conflicts. Howard and Adams felt it equally important to solve rural as well as urban problems. Adams hoped for "a democratic city of self-reliant citizens – surrounded by a sturdy and independent yeomanry."² Made the scapegoat for Letchworth's failure to achieve instant profitability – never a realistic hope – Adams lost the managership in August 1905, but remained as secretary for another year.

As a result of his struggles at the grossly under-capitalized Letchworth, Adams concluded that garden cities were not viable propositions in the foreseeable future and he therefore expanded the Garden City Association's objectives, effectively creating the basis for the present Town and Country Planning Association. He proposed that it should "give general encouragement to manufacturers to move out of crowded centres, stimulate interest in and promote the scientific development of towns, and encourage the erection of sanitary and beautiful dwellings with adequate space for gardens and recreation."³ Adams thus coaxed the association into the mainstream of the emerging British planning movement, which married some of the design features of the garden city with German ideas on development control.⁴ The garden city philosophy, effectively backwatered by 1906, became the core of the alternative planning strategy nursed by Howard and Osborn and realized in part in 1946 in the New Towns programme.

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When he resigned from Garden City service in October 1906, Adams became a “consulting surveyor and land agent” – in effect, the first British full-time town planner, designing garden suburbs on the outskirts of major cities. His plans, though small and limited in their realization, emphasized low-density, single-family cottages, tree-lined roads, ample gardens and recreation space, excellent community facilities and neat integration into the landscape. He encouraged co-operation between landowners and municipalities, co-partnership housing and management of communities by their residents. Among the most interesting of his many related activities was service as a smallholdings commissioner and as spokesman for the Midland Towns Association. The latter was a consortium of twenty-six municipalities around Birmingham, formed to co-ordinate highway and utility construction, reclaim industrial wasteland and improve municipal efficiency; it represented Adams’s introduction to metropolitan regional planning.

At the time the Town Planning Act was passed in 1909, Adams ranked with Raymond Unwin and Thomas Mawson at the head of British planning, and his stature, experience, personality and Liberal connections led to his appointment as town planning inspector at the Local Government Board. The act itself was a tortuous, timid, permissive instrument of development control.⁵ More flexible and intelligent in working it than is sometimes supposed, Adams and the board stimulated regional planning, notably in the London Arterial Roads Conferences, regarded by Adams as preparations for a thirty-year outline Greater London plan, co-ordinating local plans dealing with transportation, utilities, amenities and zoning.⁶ It was during this time that Adams first visited Germany and the United States. Though he felt that there was little to be learned from Germany, he made many lifelong friendships with American planners such as the younger Olmsted and John Nolen and adopted the emerging “City Practical” gospel which arose with the foundation of the National Conference on City Planning in 1909.

Having achieved renown without professional qualifications, Adams became a fellow of the Surveyors’ Institution in 1913, largely to satisfy the membership requirement of the new Town Planning Institute, founded principally on his initiative. A major step in the formation of a distinct discipline of town planning, it served as an inter-professional forum, reconciling potentially hostile interests. It was to instruct architects, engineers and surveyors in planning techniques, enabling them to operate the new legislation, and Adams intended it to act also as a research centre. “Looked up to as the head of the profession in this country,” inevitably he became the first president.⁷ It was characteristic that Adams should be the founder of the institute, for he alone lacked particular professional prejudices; he was well suited by nature to act as a conciliator and synthesizer and he was developing already a scientific and academic approach to the new subject.

By 1914, Adams was a planner of wide experience with a well-honed philosophy and technique which changed little in subsequent years. He drew his ideology from three principal sources. His yeoman ancestry and experience, allied to a youthful acquaintance with the writings of the populist ploughman-poet Robert Burns, led him to agrarian radicalism. It was the promise of a fair deal for country folk that attracted him to the garden city movement, with its idea of combining the advantages of town and country without the disadvantages of either. As much a townsman as a countryman, he was deeply influenced by Edinburgh’s well-known Whiggism, in which the resolute defence of individual liberty was matched by an equally profound distrust of government. He was aware that major economic and social problems were not soluble by *laissez-faire* means, but he feared the loss of individual liberty seemingly inherent in collectivism. A *via media* had to be found which would reverse society’s drift towards hostile camps of capital and labour, restore its natural harmony and vanquish domestic ills without increasing the authority, cost and scale of government.⁸

The garden city and co-partnership housing represented for Adams and his fellow Liberals a final desperate attempt to answer society’s problems by a blend of philanthropy, self-help and co-operation. Adams’s own version of this was “associated individualism,” the voluntary co-operation of individuals to achieve those ends beyond their capacity to attain alone. Adams subscribed also to an unquestioning faith in utilitarianism. Believing in the inherent benevolence of science, he felt that it was possible to allocate resources equitably to answer the various demands of society by means of an impartial and systematic planning procedure of investigation, analysis, recommendation and implementation. In this “scientific town planning,” he argued that “the general objective to be kept in mind should be to do that which is best for the general welfare.”⁹ Finally, Adams was a pragmatist and a possibilist, remarking characteristically that “it is a waste of time to set up idealistic utopias of what we would like to do but cannot.”¹⁰ He was a meliorist and a functionalist, too. The ideas of balance and interdependence between city and country, of the state as the moderator of private initiative, of voluntarism as the organizing principle of society, of society itself as a seamless robe and of the professional planner as the disinterested rationalist dominated Adams’s conception of planning throughout his career.

The Canadian Quest for Adams

It was at the time of Adams’s arrival at the top of the planning tree in Britain that his path crossed that of the Canadian planning movement. This movement originated in the urban boom which accompanied the opening of “Canada’s century.” During the mushroom growth of cities between 1898 and 1913, there was “a mass hysteria of real estate speculation in paper fortunes” and “the wildest ideas prevailed as to their future growth.”¹¹ Private

aggrandisement now begat public misery on an unprecedented scale. The unacceptable face of unbridled capitalism was portrayed by W.F. Burditt of Saint John, New Brunswick, a businessman with a social conscience:

For a quarter of a century or so preceding the outbreak of war, so rapid was the development of Canada, so great were the opportunities for gain, that as individuals we became almost wholly absorbed in the acquisition of wealth and, as communities, in the increase of population and the expansion of our commerce and industry, while the amenities of life, health and happiness of the masses received scant consideration.¹²

By 1921 half of Canada's people lived in urban districts. The unregulated transformation of towns into cities increased social problems, especially in congested urban centres although the suburban fringe also had difficulties.¹³ Speculative subdivision had proceeded over an extravagant distance and at a low density, sterilizing farmland, forcing uneconomic extensions of public utilities and setting in motion a spiral of tax delinquency, abandonment, sequestration and ultimately the threat of municipal bankruptcy. Costs were high and public regulation conspicuously absent, while many families dwelt in insanitary, ugly, scattered shacks.¹⁴

In response to these problems, there developed an urban progressivism, one manifestation of which was "City Beautiful" planning, initiated by architects and boosterish élites. Extravagant proposals of Renaissance grandeur were published and "City Beautiful" exercises marked an urban coming of age and a response to the competitive milieu of North American cities. "We do not always want to remain a wooden backwoods place with narrow provincial ideas," remarked a Torontonians.¹⁵ The movement yielded no results, however, for realtors discerned unacceptable regulation of their activities, taxpayers crippling assessments and chauvinists old world fripperies.

There was little more than a difference of emphasis between the flamboyant "City Beautiful" and its sober successor, the "City Practical," a means of long-term trend amelioration and development control, paramount from about 1910, when North Atlantic planners achieved something of a consensus, a utilitarian scientific rationalism whose watchwords were health and efficiency.¹⁶ Led by engineers, clergymen, journalists, doctors, social workers and academics, it identified with the British tradition of public health and housing reform. Between 1910 and 1914, British ideas on environmental reform swept across Canada, encouraged by successive governors general and carried by such proselytizers as Thomas Adams, Raymond Unwin, Thomas Mawson and Henry Vivian, emphasizing "the right of each [person] to secure the decencies and necessities of shelter."¹⁷ Their

Canadian converts argued that "we must use as our ideal Garden Cities," described as being "perhaps the greatest contribution of modern times to the well-being of urban populations."¹⁸ Noulan Cauchon, an engineer and the one outstanding Canadian planner of his generation, re-ordered planning priorities to "health, economics and beautification in that order."¹⁹ British influences were to be seen in the adoption, almost without amendment, of British planning law by Alberta, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.²⁰ In practical terms, however, Canadian planning had made no more than the most modest of beginnings before the war.

The British connection was reinforced by the work of the Commission of Conservation, an autonomous federal-provincial body established in 1909 whose functions were "to investigate, enquire, advise and inform" the nation on the scientific farming of its natural resources, including human life.²¹ Headed by the enigmatic Clifford Sifton, it refined the "doctrine of usefulness," marrying it to twentieth-century scientific management. Its medical adviser, Dr. Charles Hodgetts, a Canadian Edwin Chadwick, attacked "the army of speculators and jerry builders" and pleaded for planning and housing reform in "the belief that every man ... is entitled to a decent home." Well-travelled, with a comprehensive view of planning, Hodgetts propagandized ceaselessly, starting the broadsheet *Conservation of Life* in 1914 and helping to draw up a model planning act on the basis of "efficiency, economy and vision."²² Since Canada lacked planners of stature and experience, Hodgetts sought an overseas expert to shape Canadian planning; he settled quickly on Thomas Adams, whom he had encountered at the National Conference on City Planning at Philadelphia in 1911. Describing him as "having very sound and businesslike ideas on the subject of housing and town planning," Hodgetts determined to obtain Adams's secondment for "two or three months" to advise Canadians. He persuaded major organizations together with "a very large number of the most prominent citizens of Canada" and the prime minister, Robert Borden, to support his request, proclaiming with some exaggeration that "Mr. Adams is the one man in England who has had to meet and grapple with the difficulties that we have today.... I am satisfied ... that he ... will make suggestions and recommendations ... that will be far more practical than those of any other man." Unfortunately, "the Local Government Board was unable to spare Mr. Adams."²³ Hodgetts, undaunted, was probably the inspiration behind the commission's sponsorship of the 1914 National Conference on City Planning in Toronto, "with the object of strengthening and advancing the movement in favour of more scientific town planning and more vigorous attention to the housing requirements of Canadians" and, incidentally, of securing Adams's presence. Confirming Hodgetts's assessment of him as both practical and comprehensive, Adams advised Canadians: "Do not let us underrate how extensive and how broad-based town

planning is," adding that "town planning is no mere dream of a few sentimentalists but is a practical proposition for saving money."²⁴

At home, Adams was becoming increasingly frustrated at "the routine of planning control ... the lack of opportunity to do constructive work on planning ... [and] the subordination of the technical to the administrative branch of the civil service."²⁵ This left him open to the offer of a three-year appointment as town planning adviser to the Commission of Conservation. In July 1914, James White, the commission's secretary, was able to telegraph Sifton from London:

Can get Thomas Adams man we requested come Canada last year best man in England come three years fee \$7500 and \$1000 travelling expenses to Canada.²⁶

The Canadian response to the announcement of Adams's appointment was enthusiastic. Hodgetts described him as "one who is considered as the highest authority upon the subject, perhaps in the world," while White told a member of the commission "that Mr. Adams stands at the head of his profession." Similar eulogies emanated from more independent sources but the question might be asked, Was Adams really "peculiarly fitted" for the post?²⁷ It would have been impolitic to have appointed an American, and in any case American planning was felt (wrongly) to be still in the hands of the despised "City Beautiful" practitioners. Moreover, the whole trend of Canadian planning after 1910 was towards the British model, and Hodgetts was its guiding influence. Of the possible British nominees, Adams was the best man for the job. He had a genial personality and a reputation for inspired advocacy and irrepressible energy. Experienced in dealing with politicians, fellow professionals, municipal officials and educated laymen, he was at home in the North American environment and at one with the commission's dedication to the conservation of life and the efficient and scientific management of resources. Crossing the Atlantic compelled no philosophic adjustment. More significantly, for four years he had held successfully a national post similar to that which he was invited to fill in Canada.

The Adams Strategy, 1914-19

October 1914 was hardly the most propitious moment to begin an evangelical mission and the early departure of Hodgetts for war service robbed Adams of invaluable guidance. Familiarizing himself with local conditions and leaders, he found that Canadian planning was already settled in the utilitarian mould characteristic not only of Canadian society but also of its cultural mentors, Britain and the United States. He considered his established Anglo-American "City Practical" approach to have a universal validity and made little but institutional conces-

sions to the Canadian situation. He kept in touch with American and British developments and there is no evidence that his Canadian experience had any significant effect on either his philosophy or his technique. His aim in Canada was to establish planning as a central function of government, buttressed by an integrated structure of legislation, administration, public support and professional expertise, organization and education. The fragile and rudimentary state of Canadian planning left him with only one feasible strategy – the more or less simultaneous promotion of legislation, propaganda, advice, demonstrations, research and professionalization.

Much of Adams's time during these years was spent in campaigning for planning legislation. His object was the universal adoption of his model statute of January 1916, which followed the British act of 1909 with the important difference that Adams made planning mandatory. The embodiment of the new professionalism in planning, Adams gave considerable scope to expert initiative, calling for provincial planning controllers and local planning surveyors. In keeping with both traditional British practice and current trends in Canadian reformism, he placed provincial departments of municipal affairs in the overlord role of the Local Government Board. Local planning boards were related only indirectly to municipalities, probably as result of a progressive distrust of politicians. The act included zoning, subdivision control, public space reservation and the encouragement of co-operation between landowners and municipalities, but it unaccountably reproduced the fussy British procedure for long-term town-planning schemes.²⁸ The act reflected Adams belief that "the most urgent need is to safeguard future growth" and confined itself to the control of new development. The development process, as in Britain, was left largely in the hands of the private sector, subject to monitoring by public authority within an outline plan designed to make the urban community more healthy and efficient. Public intervention was therefore negative rather than positive and favoured existing economic interests rather than a redistribution of resources. The measure thus fitted Adams's Liberal, utilitarian preconceptions, underlining his assumptions that "all human interests are harmonious" and that planning was a routine scientific exercise in identifying and satisfying them.²⁹ By the end of the war, Adams had persuaded Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to pass legislation on these lines.

In November 1915, announcing that "an organization is required to stimulate public interest in municipal affairs, with special regard to public health, town planning and housing and to encourage the study and advancement of the best principles of town planning and urban growth," he founded – and dominated – the national Civic Improvement League. It was given a wide remit, partly because of Adams's own broad conception of planning and

partly to maximize support, and it was based upon existing Canadian, British and American urban reform lobbies. The widespread enthusiasm with which it was greeted prompted Adams to conclude that "it seems difficult to anticipate anything but great success."³⁰ Despite the war, it attracted leading political, business and social figures and staged national conventions. In addition, Adams drummed up support by speaking twice weekly to organizations all over the country and took over Hodgetts's broadsheet, renaming it *Town Planning and Conservation of Life*.

Adams came from the Chadwick tradition of scientific social investigation and had an academic cast of mind. These influences, combined with the investigatory responsibilities of the Commission of Conservation, led him to initiate three research projects, two of which – on housing and urban conditions – were never completed owing to the pressure of other work. The third was *Rural Planning and Development*.³¹ According to this study, rural Canada was experiencing severe and accelerating depopulation. Too many small farms suffered from high indebtedness and poor returns. The scattered population lacked many of the benefits of modern life – decent services, adequate communications, education, non-farm occupations and social intercourse. Bad farming practices eroded the soil, there were great fire risks and the rectangular survey pattern of much of the country encouraged wasteful settlement, costly development and baneful speculation, depleting capital "which should have been devoted to production."³² Lamenting that "the necessarily crude methods of the pioneer stage ... still prevail," Adams proposed new policies which, though still based upon the individual homestead, envisaged a dramatically expanded role for government – the prior planning of settlement, compact and harmonizing with the landscape, cheap loans for homesteaders and small new towns, the promotion of rural industries and vastly improved agricultural and vocational education.³³ More significantly, government was to police private enterprise in the interests of the settlers, strictly controlling railways, licensing real estate operators, compelling landowners to pay improvement costs and forcing speculators to disgorge land held for profiteering.³⁴ *Rural Planning and Development*, the distillation of over twenty years' study of rural life in Britain, western Europe and North America, represented his vision of a co-operative yeoman commonwealth and a programme for equality between town and country.³⁵ It was a most courageous challenge to Canada's rural past, yet in the reform atmosphere of the times it was well received, at home and abroad.³⁶ Wide-ranging, lucid and authoritative, it matched the commission's established high standards of scientific enquiry.

Adams condemned the universal urban grid as "a crime against both nature and society and an economic blunder of the worst kind." He was critical particularly of "land

gambling, the overcrowding of buildings and the inefficiency of our schemes of land settlement in the past."³⁷ His entrenched functionalism led him to frown also on the aesthetic and costly proposals of the "City Beautiful." Aware of the acute financial embarrassment of many municipalities and the need to enlist business support, he stressed the cost-effectiveness of the "City Practical." "The exercise of forethought" meant "no real increase in cost over what will have to be spent in any case."³⁸ Cost, along with vested interests and the exigencies of war, ruled out both urban renewal and garden cities (though Adams espoused garden city standards of housing and design in conventional plans). The bulk of his Canadian work concentrated therefore on urban development control planning designed to curb speculation and avoid congestion. He regarded the city as primarily an economic organism in which "the first concern of a town plan should be to provide for the proper and efficient carrying on of business." Mindful, however, of his reformist background, he added that "complementary to the business side of a city is the provision of satisfactory and healthy living conditions for the people."³⁹ It was in these terms that Adams advised dozens of Canadian cities. His assistance at Saint John and Halifax was typical; here, Adams co-operated with the city engineers on surveys, zoning, boundaries and building lines, urging them to take long views and associate with neighbouring rural areas likely to be developed over a generation. By 1917, he was overwhelmed by the demand for advice and, apart from demonstration projects, he had assessed a civic centre competition in Vancouver, advised on additions to Mawson's plan for the national park town of Banff and recommended Canadian planners for specific jobs, for example, Cauchon for a general development plan at London and for railway improvements in Hamilton.⁴⁰

Adams had little opportunity to design new communities but he was asked to comment on plans by others, notably on the new steel town of Ojibway in Ontario; in 1917 he was called upon to help plan a resource town at Kipawa (now Témiskaming) in Quebec. Adams made an outline plan which was a skilful resolution of a difficult hillside site problem, sympathetic to the topography, economical, efficient, convenient and attractive. By winding streets along the contours, he achieved an average grade of no more than 5 per cent compared with 18 per cent on a grid system. Low-density single-family housing was set on tree-lined grass-verged roads. Provided with a full range of community facilities, Kipawa was designed to garden city standards though a closer comparison could be made with the small company towns in the United States laid out by Adams's friends John Nolen and the younger Olmsted. Like other contemporary Canadian projects, Kipawa was an expression of welfare capitalism and the need to make resource communities more attractive at a time of labour scarcity. "It is recognised by the promoters," noted Adams approvingly, "that healthy and

agreeable housing and social conditions are of vital importance in securing the efficiency of the workers." Kipawa was a pleasant and successful example of its genre and Adams publicized the plan widely as a model for company towns.⁴¹

His one chance at urban renewal came in December 1917 when an explosion in Halifax harbour wrecked the adjacent Richmond district, 325 acres of hillside working-class and waterfront industrial land. Drafted in to re-plan it, Adams was determined that "a serious effort should be made to prepare a sound scheme of development worthy of the city" and insisted on plenary powers to acquire and zone land and plan for thirty years ahead. The combination of a war situation and a disaster emergency freed him from the normal restraints on redevelopment and, in a successful technocratic exercise in the destruction of the standard grid, he used diagonals, swinging some roads along contours, reducing grades, avoiding awkward junctions, providing a central square, park and playgrounds, increasing industrial space, reducing housing densities, establishing firm building lines and improving access. He revelled in the uninhibited scope for his professional expertise, confident that he was acting impartially in the best interests of the community.⁴²

Adams had developed his basic concept of metropolitan regional planning in pre-war Britain. He was aware that the cultural and economic hinterland of a metropolitan city extended far beyond its boundaries and felt that it was essential to secure centralized planning control over this territory, effectively subjugating it to the interests of the core city. With a keen eye for economic and social trends, he noted the growing tendency for both industry and population to quit the urban core for the outskirts. He welcomed this decentralization, for it reduced congestion in the centre, but deplored its unregulated nature which led to similar problems on the metropolitan fringe.⁴³ Arguing that "the more widespread the population is the more healthy it will be," he called for outline communications and land-use planning for metropolitan regions linked to detailed local plans for the constituent municipalities.⁴⁴

The centralizing effects of the war, his extensive travels in the vast interior of Canada and the fact that he held a federal appointment encouraged Adams to think in national terms. He made an early attempt to describe the Canadian urban system, identifying sixteen major industrial regions and a number of lesser ones of mixed industrial-agricultural character. Though he never believed in more than the most general form of national planning, he advocated federal policies leading to evenly distributed concentrations of population and economic activity without congestion, the fuller development of the nation's resources and a systematic search for new ones. Population should be built up in the west and maintained in the east

while measures should be taken to halt rural depopulation and the heavy drain of migration to the United States.⁴⁵

The approach of peace brought agitation by the public for government-sponsored low-cost housing of an acceptable standard at prices affordable by working people. The war forced up rents and costs, and Adams noted that "the dearth and scarcity of money ... have prevented private builders from erecting small houses.... The situation may gradually right itself, but it will take many years and meanwhile much hardship and injury will be caused and serious discontent and dissension may be created."⁴⁶ Others also feared for economic efficiency and fragile social stability and proposed schemes coloured by patriotic fervour, bourgeois paternalism and hopes of social reconstruction. Asked to report on the matter to the cabinet, Adams pointed out "the danger of treating housing as an isolated problem of reconstruction" and seized the opportunity to suggest a programme of national outline planning, arguing that "no real success can be attained unless housing, local transportation and land development are dealt with together.... Any scheme to ameliorate present housing conditions should be part of a scheme of general reconstruction."⁴⁷ Recommending a minimum investment of \$40 million, he called for an independent, expert federal development board to co-operate with the provinces and municipalities in a comprehensive programme of new towns, compact development, national highways, railway extensions, veterans' farm settlements, training farms in Britain, agricultural education and expansion and the production of materials for European reconstruction.⁴⁸ Adams, the apotheosis of the disinterested scientific manager rationally apportioning national resources to the benefit of the whole community, found that his proposals made no appeal to a conservative cabinet.

The federal government, however, felt under pressure to make a gesture in the direction of housing the veterans and the lower paid. Adams was appointed adviser to a cabinet housing committee charged with disbursing a \$26-million loan. Envisaging a property-owning democracy, long a basic Canadian aim, the programme called for planned schemes and the sale of houses at cost, preferably to veterans.⁴⁹ Adams was delighted since the programme approximated to his "co-operative individualism." It began in 1919, and he thought it "completely successful" for "it stimulated building at a time of great shortage and when money was difficult to obtain"; moreover "the class of building is better because of the example afforded by the houses erected under Government auspices."⁵⁰ Adams himself designed a demonstration housing project at Lindenlea, Ottawa, regarding it as "an exceptional opportunity to create an ideal suburb." On a bosky, rocky, accessible but countrified twenty-two acre site, he displayed his usual skill, turning ruggedness into a scenic asset; he made it a miniature garden suburb "having full regard to the need for pleasant surroundings to the homes and for

the provision of social life and recreation." Intending it to be as much an example of social possibilities as of housing and planning, Adams hoped for co-operative management by the residents on British co-partnership lines.⁵¹

With the coming of peace urban development was expected to resume, perhaps on the basis of mandatory planning, and Adams wished to create "a trained class of professional men" to extend his beachhead. At the same time, engineers and surveyors, poorly remunerated and underemployed, sought to diversify; thus, in the spring of 1918, Adams headed a committee from these professions which led, a year later, to the creation of the Town Planning Institute of Canada, of which he was the two-term inaugural president. Like its British model, the TPIC balanced the constituent professions, seeking the interchange of knowledge, the establishment of high professional standards, the encouragement of research and good public relations. Quickly gaining over a hundred members, a journal and active branches, it enjoyed an early prosperity. Its initial domination by Adams is apparent from its strictly utilitarian definition of planning:

The scientific and orderly disposition of land and buildings in use and development with a view to obviating congestion and securing economic and social efficiency, health and well-being in urban and rural communities.⁵²

Since he was a founder of similar bodies in Britain and America, it was always likely that Adams would wish to cap his Canadian planning structure with a professional organization.

Adams had come to regard planning not only as an independent profession but also as a distinct academic discipline, one in need of scholarly respectability. The *Journal of the Town Planning Institute of Canada* declared that "it is part of the object of the Canadian Town Planning Institute to promote educational courses in Canadian universities and to make town planning a branch of applied science with the imprimatur of a university."⁵³ The academic link would provide a base for research into environmental questions and confer prestige on the new profession and discipline. Adams himself gave lectures at most Canadian universities in 1919 and 1920 and they were urged "to have a school of town and rural planning and development, open for social, engineering and architectural studies and embracing as a field of study the science of municipal administration."⁵⁴

With the inauguration of the housing programme and the TPIC, Adams completed the outline of his planning structure and reached the apogee of his influence in Canada. He had offered Canadians a vision of a comprehensive, integrated planning system which took into account economic and social as well as physical factors to a degree that few, if any, planners matched at that time.

His system reflected his belief that planning was a science and must therefore be structured in a logical fashion, with a strong, academically trained professional backbone, a hierarchy of supervisory and advisory agencies and a definite procedure.

Having got through a prodigious amount of work during the war, the "grand seigneur" of Canadian planning was able to say that "probably in no country was there more activity than there was in Canada during the critical years 1914-19."⁵⁵ He seemed convinced that he had attained his goal, that planning had become an established feature of Canadian life:

The most significant result of this activity is that a widespread public sentiment in favour of city planning has been created throughout the Dominion. The town planning work of the Commission of Conservation is now beginning to produce substantial results. One result has been that Provincial Governments and officials throughout the country have been educated to appreciate the importance of the more scientific development of urban areas.⁵⁶

The commission had no regrets about appointing him. Observing that "there is hardly a part of the country where his wisdom and experience has not made itself felt," Sifton offered him a second three-year contract in 1917, which he accepted readily, there being much unfinished work and nowhere else to go.⁵⁷ Adams had advanced substantially Canada's infant planning movement and his arrival at the outbreak of war was probably opportune. It was an extraordinary solo effort and at the end of 1919, the future of Canadian planning seemed bright.

Years of Trial and Disappointment, 1919-30

A dozen years after the war, however, Adams's edifice was virtually in ruins. Though he argued that the war offered a respite from boom-time frenzy and an opportunity to plan, it was in fact a mixed blessing. On the positive side, it loosened traditional restraints on government activity, united the greater part of the population in a common cause, strengthened federal authority and influence and stimulated emerging concerns with race survival, economic efficiency and good labour relations. As it ended, interest in post-war reconstruction sharpened. On the whole, however, the war worked against Adams. Especially after 1916, it diverted attention, resources and professional manpower from planning. Municipal finances, already straitened by the effects of the boom, were driven to the point of collapse. Transport and industrial bottlenecks were thrown into sharper focus. The cessation of house building exacerbated shortages, congestion and exploitation, while the end of urban growth made planning seem irrelevant. Deprived at the outset of Hodgetts's advice, Adams had no professional assistance until 1918; he was thus unable to train a successor and the workload

was limited to his own, albeit phenomenal, capacity. He was unable to integrate planning into the Canadian war effort in the British manner – probably because he started with the war already under way. Adams laboured also under the disadvantage “of undertaking the creation of a stronger public opinion in favour of town planning and housing in Canada, when the whole energies of the nation were occupied in the great and imperative duty of national defence.”⁵⁸

During the war, “a nation of comrade workers” had looked forward to “nothing less than complete social reconstruction.” Adams, sharing this euphoria, exclaimed: “We are at the opening of a new era of social construction and national expansion.” However, the new era was swept aside in 1919 and replaced by “normalcy,” recession, unrest, business dominance and fragmented politics presided over in the years that followed by either the frigidly negative Arthur Meighen or the cunningly vague Mackenzie King.⁵⁹ One of the earliest casualties of the post-war social bleakness was Adams’s Civic Improvement League. “Never properly constituted owing to the war,” Adams had “expected that now that the war is over, it will be thoroughly organized and become a powerful educational factor in the Dominion.”⁶⁰ The downswing in the reform cycle and his own preoccupations elsewhere precluded that. Moreover, the progressive recommendations of *Rural Planning and Development* were too far removed from the individualism of the Canadian frontier to be politically acceptable, and post-war rural policies remained much as before. “The desire for the improvement of social and economic conditions in Canada and the spirit in doing things for the public good during those [war-time] years,” observed Adams ruefully, “unfortunately does not seem to have been maintained during the period of reconstruction since 1919.”⁶¹ The mood of the twenties was not auspicious for his kind of planning.

Even as Adams completed his system, his position was crumbling. In 1918, Sifton retired from the chairmanship of the Commission of Conservation. Thereafter, Adams “seemed to sense the steam going out of the Federal leadership in the town planning field.”⁶² Thus he sought gradually to disengage himself from Canada. From 1920, he spent eight months a year on official duties and four as chief planning consultant for American City Consultants, a consortium of his friends in the American planning movement. His decision was received with regret in Canada, though it was conceded that he “could earn several times the amount Canada has been paying him” and that he was “so eminent in his profession that the undertakings for which his services are solicited must at times be of such character as to make irresistible appeal to his professional ambition.”⁶³ From 1920 until his contract ran out in August 1923, he appeared to spend less time in Canada each year. There is no doubt that he felt he had achieved all he could in Canada and he confessed that

he had little hope of some of the provinces doing much in housing and planning.⁶⁴ Moreover, the aura of omniscience surrounding him was beginning to disappear: several Canadian planners had begun to find their feet professionally, American methods were starting to offer a real alternative to British ways and few concrete results had appeared from his five years of effort. His approach was called increasingly into question and some resented what they felt was his patronage.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, his departure robbed Canadian planning of prestige, confidence, experience, comprehensiveness, focus and leadership.

Adams’s impact was further reduced by the abolition of the Commission of Conservation in January 1921, the victim of intra-government jealousies, policy conflicts and parsimony. Transferred to the National Parks Division, Adams told Burditt “we will not have the same freedom as before in advising municipalities.”⁶⁶ Most of his time between 1920 and 1923 was spent on small-scale federal projects, notably a skillfully landscaped design for the Jasper National Park headquarters town.⁶⁷ As he rightly lamented, it was “a great misfortune ... that the Commission of Conservation, which endeavoured to give the country a lead in regional and city planning ... should have been destroyed at the very time its activities were most needed.” The demise of the commission removed the pressure on recalcitrant provinces and ended the possibility of an integrated national resources management policy.⁶⁸

The waning of Adams’s influence in the twenties was demonstrated most markedly by the increasing criticism of the planning acts which, with their lengthy, irksome and expensive procedure, were, as Burditt complained, ill suited to a relatively raw society like Canada.⁶⁹ The tedious British process merely sapped support for planning in a society that liked to see quick results. Cauchon, always one of Adams’s covert critics, referred to “the rather wheezy band of Canadian provincial planning acts,” and they were castigated as “difficult to understand, cumbersome as to procedure for action thereunder with control too greatly centralized in the Minister.” Moreover, “exception was taken to the compulsory features,” everywhere unenforceable. The procedure regulations were “exceedingly hard to understand,” and they and the statutes remained either “inoperative and well-nigh useless” or were drastically revised.⁷⁰ Canada, which was far more closely related to American than to English social and settlement patterns, especially in the west, needed simple enabling legislation of the type developed in the United States after 1913. Nowhere was the affinity with America plainer than in British Columbia, whose planning legislation of December 1925 was “based largely upon similar legislation now in force in a majority of states of the United States.” Drafted by the Vancouver branch of the TPIC, it was “largely disembowelled in its passage through the legislature” by real estate interests, but it still permitted comprehensive master planning. In 1928, Sas-

katchewan also threw off Adams's declining influence and passed a similar measure which, reported Adams's former assistant A.G. Dalzell, led to more town-planning by-laws being passed in one year than in the whole life of the old act; it was a hopeful stimulus to other provinces to remove dead legislation by acts better suited to Canada. Adams's other former assistant, H.L. Seymour, then planning director in Alberta, drafted a new act in 1929 which was similarly modelled on American practice.⁷¹ While the new acts remained attached to utilitarian "scientific town planning," they were undoubtedly better adapted to Canadian needs.

In fact, Adams never succeeded in establishing his legislation in all the provinces. Despite an apparently favourable public opinion and government in each case, he failed to persuade British Columbia and Quebec of the urgency of planning legislation, but his greatest disappointment was in Ontario, "the most important province of all, with the greatest population and the largest number of municipalities able to undertake this work." Adams had hoped to make Ontario a glittering showcase of planning but, although some token improvements were made to the planning powers of 1913, he dismissed them as "of little value" and lobbied hard for his own measure, pointing out that "opinion in support of the bill is practically unanimous." The Ontario law officers, however, persuaded the government to resist his proposals as neither necessary nor constitutional.⁷² Few provinces made much use of the acts. Only Saskatchewan, Manitoba and, at the end of the decade, Alberta appointed planning directors. Although Saskatchewan dealt with numerous applications, "it cannot be said that the rate of progress has been sensational," and in Manitoba the director resigned in frustration at the lack of activity. In Alberta Seymour and the provincial planning structure became early casualties of depression economies.⁷³

Even at the local level, there were few bright spots. Toronto and Montreal failed to produce the comprehensive regional plans advocated by Adams and planning schemes in several other cities atrophied after promising starts. Among the few major achievements were the Essex border scheme, "the most significant example of regional planning in Eastern Canada before World War II;" the Ontario government's "new town" at Kapuskasing; Mackenzie King's Federal District Commission of 1927, a partial consummation of Cauchon's patient work to get planning going in Ottawa; and the Vancouver master plan, initiated by the local TPIC branch, designed by the dean of American planners, Harland Bartholomew, and carried out between 1926 and 1931 with "dispatch and energy."⁷⁴ It was a poignant commentary on the insignificance of the Canadian planning profession that this prize job went to an American – though Seymour was appointed resident engineer.

Adams's schemes were slow to come to fruition. Both

Halifax and Saint John were virtually stagnant and, Burditt noted, "Saint John is growing so slowly that most people seem to be more interested in improving what we have than in planning for future development."⁷⁵ Adams had indifferent success, too, with the plans he made as a private consultant in the twenties. He turned out development control plans for Welland, London, Kitchener and Windsor and he was associated with Seymour at Waterloo. Because of his appointment as director of the regional plan of New York in October 1923,⁷⁶ he had to turn over to Seymour the final stages of the Kitchener plan; at London, his work was interrupted by an economy drive and Seymour had to take over when the plan was revived. At Windsor, he was unfortunate to be caught by the onset of the Great Depression as he was about to start the final stage in 1930. All of the plans were conceived on possibilist lines; as Adams told the burghers of Welland, "I have not attempted to put forward any idealistic scheme that is unattainable." Flexible outline plans for periods of about thirty years, with hierarchies of highways according to functions, integrated park systems and elaborate zoning, they were preceded by thorough surveys and by campaigns to sell planning to the general public and to woo local interests. Though they were essentially land use allocation plans designed to improve urban efficiency, eliminate potential slums and speculation and render the towns attractive, they attempted to take a regional view and make the political and planning boundaries of the core city coincide with its economic and social ambit.⁷⁷ Thus they differed little from contemporary master planning exercises in other parts of the English-speaking world.

These were the high points. Most Canadian planning in the twenties was far less ambitious. As in America, zoning was a favourite substitute for comprehensive planning and was often carried out by laymen with the sole intention of preserving residential class segregation and property values. When professionals were employed, generally it was to lay out residential subdivisions in the suburbs; as Seymour told Cauchon dolefully, "nearly every surveyor in town advertises himself as a town planner. Practically all of the work we have done connected with this has been in the layout of subdivisions."⁷⁸ There was, too, a good deal of highway planning in a feverish bid to cope with the motoring explosion by widenings and radial and circumferential roads. Alternative strategies were not considered for "not one Canadian planner sought to reverse the increasing use of the automobile." Adams articulated the universal view: "The needs of motor traffic demand the construction of new and improved highways" and advocated the extensive introduction of the virtually self-financing American parkway.⁷⁹

The federal housing programme was a dismal failure. It was wound down after 1921, when Meighen judged it politically safe to do so, replying brusquely to the chorus of demands from civic and veterans' leaders for its con-

tinuance that “the matter of house construction is not one with which the Federal Government has really any responsibility.”⁸⁰ Apart from the evident lack of commitment of the federal and provincial authorities, there were basic faults in the programme’s conception and execution. The extent of the housing shortage was unknown, rural areas were ignored, costs were forced up by a building materials ring, control mechanisms were inadequate and house prices were beyond the reach of most of the veterans and low-paid workers who were the intended beneficiaries. Building was in general not in planned estates, as Adams had wished, but on individual plots, “most of which were taken by civilians.” Its contribution to building output and the accommodation crisis was negligible – 6,244 houses in 179 municipalities at a total cost of \$23.5 million. The short post-war building boom was followed by a slump from 1923, and in 1926 it was stated that “practically no homes are being built in Canada for the low-paid wage-earner other than shacks.”⁸¹ The perceptive Burditt summed up the programme’s shortcomings:

The general feeling seems to be that at the present excessive cost of building, the proffered loan by Government will be of little or no advantage as it will not be possible, even with capital at 5%, to build houses that could be rented at any figure which it is possible for workmen to pay, and unless the Government can do something in the way of reducing the cost I fear but little will be accomplished.⁸²

Adams and the government were dealing with a problem which had causes far deeper than a wartime upset of the free market. Since they had rejected subsidies, their only alternatives were a significant rise in real wages or stringent rent and cost controls, neither of them feasible. The federal government’s guiding principles were essentially negative – a short-term programme at negligible cost which would avert serious discontent, offer a modicum of stimulation to the private sector and the labour market and avoid the taint of collectivism. Adams’s housing policy more than any other revealed his essential conservatism.

Even his project at Lindenlea, Ottawa, was not an unalloyed triumph for Adams. High building costs delayed completion and the houses were badly located without reference to Adams. The design was lambasted as “a crazy quilt” and Adams himself as “a faddist.” Responding vigorously, he asserted correctly that “as a town planning project, Lindenlea was completely successful” and insisted that “Ottawa had an opportunity to make Lindenlea a model scheme of national importance”; others had degraded it to “an ordinary real estate development.”⁸³

Adams had hoped that a self-sustaining planning profession would consolidate his system, but indigenous planners, lacking political clout, self-confidence and an

assured professional standing, failed to measure up to the task. Though all were meliorists, they had no other common perspective. Most members of the TPIC felt only a marginal commitment to planning; it was simply a source of additional income. Many of the leaders of the profession came increasingly to dissociate themselves from Adams’s system. Adams’s proposals for university planning schools also came to naught. The TPIC reported in 1931 that “in one or two Canadian universities, town planning has been recognised in Cinderella fashion but there is no recognition of it, so far as we know, as a vital subject in applied social science which cannot be neglected.”⁸⁴ The planners were unable to convince the universities of either the intellectual weight of their subject or of the demand for trained planners. It was a disappointing outcome for Adams, an academic by inclination. At the time that Canada’s dons were turning a cold shoulder towards him, however, Massachusetts Institute of Technology called upon him to present a course there and he went on to play a major part in the establishment of American planning education. Canada lagged far behind her neighbour and Britain in academic preparation for a planning career.⁸⁵

Canadian planning was an ailing infant throughout the twenties. Yet planners did their utmost to accommodate themselves to current social attitudes, for “Canadian planning did not go beyond dealing with symptoms to basic changes in the social structure.” Planners sought not to buck trends but to harness them, not to transform society but to maximize the efficiency of the existing structure. In the twenties, the reformist tinge plainly visible in the Adams era was bleached clean as planners identified with a business-dominated world. “Modern town planning is fundamentally and all the time a ‘business proposition’,” stated one apologist, and a Toronto realtor announced bluntly that “all planning must be judged by marketable results.” It seemed at times that planning had prostituted itself to real estate: the Regina Town Planning Association declared blandly that “the object of a town planning scheme or by-law is primarily protective. They are intended to ensure the permanency of investment in real property.”⁸⁶ Even this degree of abasement was insufficient to establish planning as a normal public function. By 1927, the TPIC was complaining that “since the close of the Great War the town planning movement has not advanced in our Dominion at a rate comparable with Canada’s importance as a nation or with progress in other countries.”⁸⁷ Manufacturers failed to appreciate the beneficial effects on productivity and labour relations of good housing and efficient communities while labour dismissed planning as “a fad of the rich.” To Adams and to more radical planners such as Buckley and Dalzell, however, it was clear that “the last citadel of opposition to town planning in Canada is the real estate operator.”⁸⁸ Summing up the failure to establish planning as an indispensable arm of government, Adams placed the blame squarely on real estate speculators:

The greatest difficulty in Canada was the strength of the resistance to the ... proper use of land for healthful community use, even to the point of causing unhealthful conditions in town and country. This resistance is strong in other countries, but in Canada, still being exploited as a new country, it was exceptionally strong ... the resistance came from real estate interests optimistically holding on to excessive land prices and wanting larger cities; unwilling that their profits should be lessened even when necessary for the public good.⁸⁹

In terms of his own objective, therefore, Adams's mission must be judged a failure. For this defeat, the ill-effects of the war, the unfavourable post-war atmosphere, the loss of federal leadership, and the deficiencies of native planners as well as the general immaturity of Canadian society and Adams's own shortcomings must all bear some responsibility. It was Adams's misfortune to be pitted at once against so mighty an adversary as the Great War and it is a tribute to his qualities that he sustained and even advanced Canadian planning during those bleak years. Indeed, had wartime solidarity continued and had the "new era" taken root, it is possible that Adams's mildly progressive and technocratic gospel would have gained general acceptance. Instead, the harsh climate of the twenties forced planners into an uncomfortable and ultimately fruitless accommodation to the prevailing wind. Adams cannot be faulted on strategic grounds, for he had little choice but to try to advance on several fronts at once. His principal error was in persisting with a sophisticated British legislative and institutional framework which was far too complex for a relatively primitive society. However, what principally defeated the first attempt to establish planning as part of the governmental and developmental process in Canada was simply the enmity and indifference of a "frontier" society to resource management and environmental planning.

Adams's system was thus collapsing before the Great Depression administered the *coup de grâce*. But the cold wind of the twenties bore no comparison with the icy blast of the thirties. Earlier views that "Canadian planning came to an abrupt and disastrous end in 1930, when Canada was crippled by economic depression" are exaggerated.⁹⁰ Toronto, Edmonton and Calgary, for example, were probably more involved in planning in the thirties than in the twenties, chiefly in the areas of highways and zoning. Nevertheless, it is incontrovertible that the Depression dealt a final blow to Adams's hopes and his system. Provincial planning agencies, many town-planning commissions, the TPIC and its journal, all folded in the early thirties, and a return to the level of activity of the Adams years came about only after 1945.⁹¹

What, then, was the significance of the Adams era in Canadian planning history? Philosophically, he brought nothing new; indeed, he was invited because he identified

with the aspirations of the Canadian establishment, giving practical and institutional form to an already entrenched utilitarianism. Though he hurried along Canada's apprenticeship in planning, Adams did not fashion a uniquely Canadian style of planning, nor did his native contemporaries. Rather, he and they saw Canadian problems as essentially those of all modern industrial societies, susceptible of the same general solutions. Canada was a "borrowing" nation and thus Canadian planning ultimately "represented the British mode moderated by American influence."⁹² In its modern phase, Canadian planning owes little to Adams in a formal, institutional sense. His spell in Canada, for all its dazzling and purposeful activity, was ill timed and ill starred and his legacy is spiritual rather than a matter of substance.

NOTES

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6. Thomas Adams, "Town Planning in Greater London," *Town Planning Institute Papers and Discussions*, Vol. 1 (1914-15), pp.i-xi.
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FIGURE 1. "Dakota Boat" by Lynn Frank, 1872

SOURCE: Art Gallery of Winnipeg