
Kate MacFarlane
same details as both meaningless and useless, and caused me so much grief in my first year.

When completed, University College was received by the public of Toronto with an enthusiasm that no modern work has come anywhere near equalling. Not even Revell’s City Hall gained quite the same level of public adulation. University College was declared “perfect,” “the finest structure in Canada,” and “the finest … in the New World.” Today, we long for such acceptance of innovative work, but rarely get it. Yet Storm ardently followed the Puginian theory that “every building that is treated naturally, without disguise or concealment, cannot fail to look well”—another mainstay of orthodox modernism. Somehow, 20th-century pursuit of this ideal has taken serious architecture so far away from cultural norms that the most ambitious work appeals to a small minority.

I rather suspect that both our rejection of eclecticism and our superficial return to it in Postmodernism are strongly influenced by a general lack of appreciation for the professionalism, dedication, and competence of the best nineteenth century architects. Richardson’s account of University College well exemplifies the task of the critic: he provides access to the substance of the architecture, ideas and issues at levels not accessible to most observers. Reading Chapter Five, one can not see how the best 20th-century architects are clearly superior to Cumberland and Storm, either in the handling of technical details or in the understanding of and dedication to architectural ideals.

Richardson’s treatment of University College enables us to understand this well loved building much better, both as an outstanding contribution to our discipline, and as a major event in the urban history of Toronto; certainly not as merely the work of an “easy going pasticheur.” The book is a handsome, well-designed volume, profusely illustrated in colour as well as black and white, and a real bargain. University College, as it stands today, comes through in many fine photographs by John C. Wilson. Richardson’s craftsman-like prose reads smoothly, like a well-told tale, or a fond reminiscence. After all, it is the content that counts, in writing as in building.

Stan Loten
Department of Architecture
Carleton University


Conservation Today accompanied a major exhibition of the same name, launched in the spring of 1989 by the Royal Fine Art Commission at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The author (and Deputy Director of the exhibition), David Pearce, had played a significant role in the conservation of Britain’s architectural heritage as a co-founder and Vice Chairman of SAVE Britain’s Heritage and as Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

The book is primarily a collection of case studies of the projects illustrated in the exhibition, but it is prefaced by a discussion of their legal, political and historical context. Together, this constitutes a thorough and well-documented history of heritage conservation in Britain since 1975.

In his introduction, Pearce identifies the mid-1970s as a time of fundamental change in attitude toward architectural conservation and cites 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY), as a milestone in this early development. EAHY caught the imagination of a public disappointed with the results of post-war planning and housing policies, and it showed “a gentler way forward” which incorporated the preservation of historic buildings, conservation and adaptive reuse. Since that time, groups such as SAVE Britain’s Heritage have campaigned to change legislation as well as attitudes. There is increasing awareness that monies spent on heritage more than pay for themselves in terms of tourism, job creation and other stimuli to the economy. There has been a shift in emphasis away from high style to “the charm of the nearly ordinary,” and a corresponding fashion for nostalgia has evolved. There is also an increasing interest in conservation as a means of preserving and documenting social history. Changes in public opinion have been reflected in changing governmental and corporate attitudes, and the results—some successful and some not—are illustrated in the case studies which comprise the main body of the book.

Conservation Today is quite pointedly not addressed to a specifically professional audience but, according to the author, to any and all who have an interest in protecting and maintaining the built environment. His stated aim is to reinforce the current general approval of the retention and reuse of old buildings and to “remove … the remaining sense of mystery about the shaping and reshaping of the familiar environment.” His audience, while broadly based, is nonetheless geographically quite specific. Pearce details the history of architectural conservation and adaptive reuse in Britain and illustrates it with home-grown examples. There is no attempt to place this information in an international context, yet it can easily be appreciated for the context it provides the Canadian reader who is involved...
the principle of multiple use for its remain­
the potential of tourism; and accepted
for design standardization; recognized
flexible approach to the sale of surplus
cerns. It has since adopted a more
also reflected public opinion and con­
tion of attitude during the 1980s which
with, or interested in, heritage preserva­
property; rid itself of a corporate mania
charge, underwent a radical transforma­
Governor in Council. A railway company
control without the authorization of the
Heritage Trust was created with a BR
ing stations. In 1985 the Railway
large number of listed buildings in its
author's own flexible and creative ap­
formative (if specific), and well written
listed buildings within its portfolio.

Conservation Today is an interesting, in­
informative (if specific), and well written
book. The case studies clearly reflect the
author’s own flexible and creative ap­
proach toward adaptive re-use which ac­
knowledges the architectural merit and
integrity of a building and respects its
defining characteristics, both aesthetic
and functional. They also reflect, how­
ever, a pragmatic recognition of the
changing functional, setting, and
economic realities of the current context
in which these projects were and are con­
tinuing to be carried out.

Kate MacFarlane
Architectural Historian
Architectural History Branch
Environment Canada’s Parks Service

Mahoney, Timothy R. River Towns in the
Great West: The Structure of Provincial
Urbanization in the midwestern United States,
1820-1870. Cambridge: Cambridge
Figures, tables, maps, appendices, index. $39.50.

Timothy R. Mahoney’s new scholarly
book, River Towns in the Great West, is
an important contribution to under­
standing the structure and dynamics of
nineteenth-century sub-regional urbaniza­
tion in the midwestern United States.
With that said, it is important to note that
regions of the United States are based
more on economic relations than on
geography. At present, most people in
the United States accept that the nation
has four sections, the Northeast, the
South, the Midwest, and the West. Yet,
few people would agree in total with the
boundaries of these regions. Some
would, for example, place the old
southern cities of Baltimore and
Washington in the Northeast. Where the
West begins has generally been ac­
cepted as the Mississippi River, but a
good case can be made for the Rocky
Mountains. And, it can be argued that
the present American West will—over the
next several decades—either break up
into a number of new sections, or merge
with the South to form a super-region
called the Sunbelt that will challenge the
rest of the nation for supremacy.

The biggest gainer in population in the
1990 census were Florida, Texas and
California. A few years ago, a geog­
rapher said in a review about a book that
I wrote on the rise of the urban South that
I did not understand geography. I sup­
pose he was right in a geographical
sense, but his review failed to recognize
how the American version of westward
settlement—technically the concept of
the “Moving Frontier” as advanced a
hundred years ago by Frederick Jackson
Turner—has constantly redefined the
nation’s regions. A hundred years ago
the Great Plains would have been
defined as part of the West. Now, the
force of economic relationships, the
power of the regional centres of Chicago,
St. Louis, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Kansas
City, and even Omaha, has shifted North
Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and
Kansas to the Midwest. A theme of
American history has been the hewing
out of hinterlands through economic rival­
ries by successful regional metropolises.

What popular magazines of the
nineteenth-century called “urban im­
perialism” played a major role in mid­
western settlement, with St. Louis losing
a “Great Urban Rivalry” to Chicago. As
was to be expected in a great battle for
regional domination there were losing
cities, some innocent victims and others
forced by circumstances to drastically
scale down their urban aspirations, com­
ning to terms with and joining and accept­
ing subservience to a new emerging
economic order.

Mahoney considers what happened from
1820 to 1870, in the western parts of a
distinctive topographical area of the
Prairie Peninsula. This district, embracing
eastern Iowa, northeastern Missouri, and
northwestern Illinois, geographically
resembled southern Manitoba. So, there
were all sorts of sites for cities. By the
middle of the nineteenth-century, a num­
ber of localities had emerged as market­
ing towns, including Cedar Rapids and