

4Square: An introduction to the Sharon Temple National Historic Site, to the Children of Peace who made it, and to their place in the history of Canada before Canada. By Mark Fram and Albert Schrauwers

Marcus R. Létourneau

Volume 98, Number 1, Spring 2006

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065846ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065846ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Létourneau, M. R. (2006). Review of [*4Square: An introduction to the Sharon Temple National Historic Site, to the Children of Peace who made it, and to their place in the history of Canada before Canada.* By Mark Fram and Albert Schrauwers]. *Ontario History*, 98(1), 122–124. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065846ar>

personal way of the quality and richness of his own antecedents. A thoroughly anglicized Franco-American, he was born in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He heard his educated, middle-class parents speak French only when they did not want the children to understand. Marchand opines “that it would have seemed vaguely un-American for them to have taught us French at home.” (p. 355) Only during his own meanderings, the recounting of which has resulted in this book, did he actually learn what “tourtière” was. In the Marchand family that dish had long given way to the New England staple of baked beans.

If an important part of true historical sensitivity be memory, then both Marchand’s deeply emotional search for

his past and his profound dismay at its loss should be considered the most admirable and essential contribution of these pages. His book can most certainly be judged a worthy if imperfect enterprise. Read it and weep!

Stephen Kenny
University of Regina

Bibliography:

Brault, Gerard. *The French-Canadian heritage in New England*. Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986.

Roby, Yves. *The Franco-Americans of New England: dreams and realities*. Translated by Mary Picard. Sillery, Quebec: Septentrion, 2004.

4Square

An introduction to the Sharon Temple National Historic Site, to the Children of Peace who made it, and to their place in the history of Canada before Canada.

By Mark Fram and Albert Schrauwers. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2005. 64 pp. Illustrations. \$10.00 softcover. ISBN 1-55245-164-X.

4*SQUARE* is more than a story about a religious building; it is an account of a religious community and its interaction with place. A collaborative effort, this monograph combines the theoretical expertise of Albert Schrauwers (*Awaiting the Millennium*) and the architectural knowledge of Mark Fram (*Well Preserved*). Both authors’ works are landmarks in their respective fields and I would recommend each as worthy reading. *4SQUARE* outlines the history of the Children of Peace, a Quaker offshoot community, and the temple they built in Sharon, Ontario, south of Lake Simcoe.

The Sharon Temple is now a National Historical Site and one of the most remarkable pre-Confederation structures in Ontario. This book also speaks to the larger societal context in which the community and the Temple existed. As Fram and Schrauwers write, “the Temple sits at the intersection of two axes of history – a commonplace local society of the early nineteenth century in Upper Canada, intersecting a three-thousand-year struggle to recover the myth of a paradise lost, a dream of heaven on earth, a perfect place in an imperfect world.” (p. 5)

Illustrated with many excellent imag-

es, the book is noteworthy for its use of short vignettes to present the important elements of the Children of Peace and their community. These sketches, each one or two pages long, focus upon such topics as the community's origins, the site of the Sharon Temple, the role of music, the societal context, and the relationship between the Children of Peace and the social movements of nineteenth century Upper Canada. In particular, I enjoyed

the presentation of the revitalization of the site after 1917. The work also resonates in its illustration of the connection between communal belief and physical form. Beyond the authors' assertion that the Sharon Temple was "the most conspicuous architectural embodiment of the beliefs and practices of the Children of Peace," (p. 8) this work provides a precedent for others who seek to study any community. If one takes nothing else from *4SQUARE*, one should note that understanding a community's narratives is essential to understanding its places, identity,

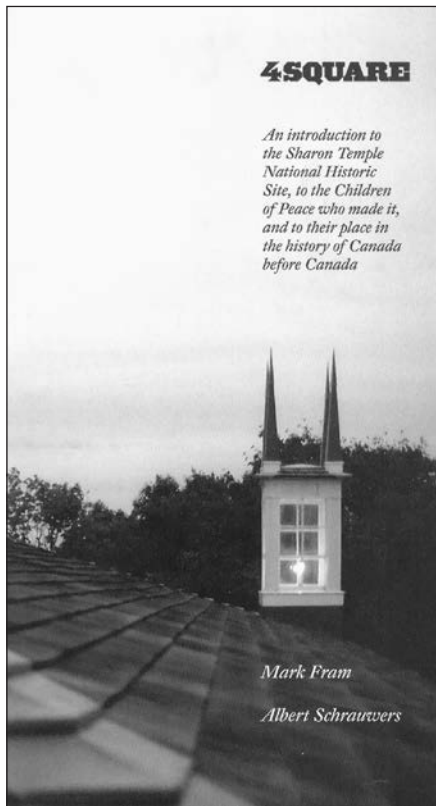
and development. As Malpas argues, people are inseparable from the places that they inhabit.

However, these vignettes, which generally work well independently, do not always serve to impart a coherent overall narrative structure. I found some ideas disjointed, and while the book is suitable

as a guide to the site itself, as a stand-alone document some of the interrelationships between the vignettes and the site are not readily apparent. Undoubtedly this is the result of collapsing an immense amount of material on religious beliefs, history, and context into a comprehensive work meant to cover all aspects of the community. To an uninitiated reader, recognizing these interrelationships may, however, prove challenging. For example, the authors do not sufficiently discuss the leader of the community, David Willson, until several pages after they introduce him.

I was also disappointed in the treatment of the relationship between the Sharon Temple and Solomon's Temple. In particular, more explanation is necessary concerning the various depictions provided of Solomon's temple. Fram and Schrauwers need to identify what the reader should take away from these images. Additionally, the authors should have examined two theoretical concepts related to the idea of

Solomon's Temple: sacred geometry and social hierarchies based upon the model of the inner and outer courts of Jewish temples. Sacred geometry, which finds its expression in the construction of many places of worship including gothic cathedrals, is a physical representation of the belief that geometric shapes are symbols



of heaven's perfect nature. Beyond the Sharon Temple, such ideas of geometric symmetry and uniformity in built form can be found in other religious and utopian communities such as the Shakers, the Mormons, and Fourier's Phalanxes. Solomon's Temple was also a structure of social hierarchy; as one moved closer to the Temple's core, fewer and fewer people were permitted entrance. Some religious and utopian communities espoused similar social/spatial models in which the holiest structures were reserved for the 'Chosen People of God.' For example, both Shakers and Mormons have endeavored to express the notion of inner and outer courts spatially. If Willson intended the Sharon Temple to represent Solomon's Temple, the question remains, 'Was there a reciprocal social/spatial hierarchy?' Both sacred geometry and social hierarchy are arguably integral to the authors' discussion of Solomon's Temple, and merit additional exploration concerning their relevance to the Children of Peace and the Sharon Temple.

Lastly, while the images in this work are generally excellent, I was dissatisfied with the image of the Sharon Temple's timber framework. (pp. 40-41) It is heavily shadowed (which only serves to distort the shape of the Temple) and does not adequately show the symmetrical nature of the building. I would recommend using two traditional line drawings, a side view and an aerial view, to supplement the drawing provided.

While I personally found many of the issues discussed interesting, I was left unfulfilled at the end of *4SQUARE*. As someone with a keen interest in the Children of Peace and other religious communities, I am unhappy with some

of the vignettes and explanations, and *4SQUARE* also does not adequately demonstrate the skill and ability both authors bring to their other works. However, as a supplement to an onsite tour, or as a motivation to take one, this little book is invaluable; it will certainly become a critical tool for understanding the Sharon Temple. Indeed, if one aim of *4SQUARE* is to pique the reader's interest and to spur discourse and debate, I would argue that it is undeniably a success.

Marcus R. Létourneau
Queen's University, Kingston

Bibliography:

- Andrew, Laurel. *Early Temples of the Mormons: the Architecture of the Millennial Kingdom in the American West*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978.
- Fram, Mark. *Well-Preserved: The Ontario Heritage Foundation's Manual of Principles and Practices for Architectural Conservation*. Erin: Boston Mills Press, 1988.
- Hayden, Dolores. *Seven American Utopias: the Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976.
- Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Mandelker, Ira. *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-century America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.
- Pitzer, Donald, ed. *America's Communal Utopias*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Schrauwers, Albert. *Awaiting the Millennium: The Children of Peace and the Village of Hope*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.
- Stein, Stephen. *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.