

Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada
Report of the 1981 Annual Meeting Victoria, British Columbia,
1-4 April 1981
Société pour l'étude de l'architecture au Canada

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Victoria, British Columbia, 1-4 April 1981

The annual meeting of ssac/seac was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of its American counterpart, the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH). Papers and panel discussions examined a wide variety of subjects concerning the study and preservation of Canadian architecture. The programme was coordinated by ssac Vice-President, John C. Lehr, University of Winnipeg. Responsible for local arrangements was ssac Director, Martin Segger, University of Victoria.

'Canadian' Architecture – Myth or Reality?/L'architecture «canadienne» – mythe ou réalité? CHRISTINA CAMERON, Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, Parks Canada, Ottawa, Chairperson.

Geoffrey Hunt of Toronto opened the session with a discussion of the growing consciousness of a national architecture in the early 20th century. In his paper on *John M. Lyle: Toward a Canadian Architecture*, he cited passages from Lyle's speeches and articles which demonstrated Lyle's strong commitment to a Canadian style, and then showed buildings designed by Lyle which consciously adopted typical Canadian building forms or incorporated Canadian flora and fauna in the decorative schemes.

Alan Gowans of the University of Victoria turned back to the 19th century to examine the *Style and Social Function in the Railroad Hotels*. He investigated the stylistic and functional antecedents, from French châteaux on the Loire to Scottish baronial manors, of Canada's railway hotels, in particular the Château Frontenac in Québec City and the Empress Hotel in Victoria, and concluded that these buildings were conscious symbols of British imperialism.

Yvon Provost of the Université du Québec à Montréal presented a survey of circular and octagonal barns in the province of Québec in *Les granges-étables circulaires et octogonales au Québec*. The form was adopted in the 19th century from American agricultural magazines and pattern books. While Québec farmers, especially in the Eastern Townships, readily followed the exterior form, they persisted in clinging to the traditional interior arrangement of the more familiar rectangular barn, thereby losing the purported advantages of the circular or octagonal form.

George Sawicki of Parks Canada, Ottawa, discussed construction technology and building forms north of the 60th parallel in *The Evolution of Buildings in the Canadian North*. Having set forth the climatic and socio-economic limitations of building in arctic and subarctic regions, he showed a series of northern structures ranging from the traditional igloo to ordinary bungalows to a prefabricated fibreglass laboratory which incorporated the most recent advances in construction technology.

George Baird of Toronto, editor of *Trace* magazine, summed up the issues of 'Canadian' architecture raised by the previous speakers and spoke of factors affecting the contemporary scene in *A View from 1981*. He pointed out that national and regional cultures as well as climatic conditions served to influence – and make identifiably Canadian – current architectural production in Canada, and suggested that increased emphasis on contextual relationships and reinterpretation of traditional building types might well reinforce the national character of Canadian design.

The Profession of Architecture in Canada/L'architecture et sa profession au Canada MICHAEL MCMORDIE, University of Calgary, Chairperson

Robert Hill of Toronto gave a progress report on his project, *The Biographical Dictionary of Architecture in Canada*. Since its inception in 1976, the dictionary has grown to include 1,300 names; approximately 40% of the data has been collected and a publication date of 1983 is anticipated. The author presented five representative entries which illustrated the breadth of published and manuscript sources from which the dictionary will be compiled. Each entry will include standard

biographical data as well as a list of buildings designed by the architect.

Jacques Robert of Université Laval, Québec City, explained the gradual evolution of *Jean-Thomas Nadeau's* influence on religious architecture in Québec in the early 20th century. Nadeau, a Catholic priest who taught high school, wrote articles in *L'Action catholique* on the subject of religious architecture, with special interest in late 19th century churches in Québec. He advocated a more sombre and functional architecture, logical in its form and honest in its use of materials. In the 1920s, Nadeau moved from theory to practice when he collaborated in the design of the churches of Saint-Sacrement, Saint-Pascal and Notre-Dame-de-Grâces, all in Québec City.

Ronald Webster, architect from Ottawa, gave a first-person account of the problems encountered in setting up and operating a small practice in *The Ontario Architect*. He predicted increasing polarization between the large corporate architectural firms and the small office, with a trend favouring a proliferation of small practices because of the high level of direct service to clients and the satisfaction of achieving continuity from conception to realization. However, in order to survive financially, small practices will have to become more versatile, collaborating more closely with allied trades like builders, developers and engineers, and undertaking a greater variety of projects including municipal board work, research and market value studies, graphic work and even land development.

André Thauvette, a lawyer from Montreal, gave a detailed explanation of the organization and responsibilities of the *Québec Order of Architects and the Professions Board*. In 1974, a new act was passed by the province concerning all the professional groups operating in Québec. While upholding the principle of self-management of the professions, the act made provision for external members to sit on the boards with the objective of achieving greater protection of the public. Mr. Thauvette went on to explain how such external appointments affect the operation of the various committees in the Québec Order of Architects.

David Hambleton, an architect from Victoria and the current president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, gave an update on the evolving situation in that group in a paper entitled *the RAIC and the Profession*. He sketched the historical background from the founding of the RAIC in 1909 to Québec's withdrawal in the 1970s. In seeking ways to make it a national organization once again, the RAIC was restructured, with voluntary membership, new categories of members, and regional, not provincial, representation. Québec rejoined this rejuvenated body at its annual meeting at Jasper, Alberta, in 1980.

Art in Architecture in Canada/L'art dans l'architecture canadienne GEORGE KAPELOS, Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, Toronto, Chairperson

(1) *An Historical Perspective/La perspective historique*

Douglas S. Richardson of the University of Toronto opened the session with a paper on *Architectural Ornament in the Colonial Period*. He presented examples from both the French and English colonial eras to illustrate the variety of architectural decoration created in Canada and its stylistic antecedents, and attributed the relative simplicity of some of the forms to the difficult nature of the building materials in the new world.

Laurier Lacroix of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Concordia University examined a later period of architectural ornament in *The Development of Mural Painting in Canada*. After a brief outline of the various techniques available for wall murals, the speaker traced the history of this art form from the earliest manifestations 150 years ago, when the architect controlled the physical space, light sources and colour schemes, to current examples of murals on blank exterior walls, in which the architect plays no significant role.

In his presentation on *The Architectural Design of John M. Lyle (1872-1945)*, Geoffrey Hunt of Toronto illustrated how the architect adapted his training in the European École des Beaux-Arts system to the needs of Canadian nationalism. Lyle deliberately substituted Canadian regional images for the standard classical vocabulary of the Beaux-Arts tradition. Thus, his early designs include carved sheaves of wheat, Indians, arrows and other recognizably Canadian devices, intended to make his work truly 'Canadian'.

Robert D. Watt of the Vancouver Centennial Museum presented another aspect of architectural ornamentation in his paper on *The Stained Glass Art of James Blomfield (1898-1931)*. Born in England and raised in Canada, Blomfield apprenticed as an architectural draftsman before establishing the first art glass business in British Columbia at New Westminster. Lord Aberdeen later sponsored a four-year training trip in the best glass factories of North America and Europe. Influenced by the vogue for mediaeval form and craftsmanship in the late 19th century, Blomfield favoured natural forms, rich colours and simple designs.

The session ended with a survey of mid-20th century mural and mosaic work in a talk by Melva Dwyer of the University of British Columbia entitled *Colour and Art in the Architecture of Vancouver - The Work of B.C. Binning, Lionel Thomas and Jack Shadbolt*. The speaker gave examples of Binning's geometric forms on high rise structures, Shadbolt's symbolic imagery of animals and organic forms, as illustrated in the Queen Elizabeth Theatre mural, and Thomas' experimentation with mosaics and other media.

(2) *The Contemporary Scene/L'art dans l'architecture canadienne*

To deal with the question of the relationship between contemporary architecture and works of art, a panel discussion format was adopted. Each of the four panelists made an opening statement and a discussion, moderated by the Chairperson, ensued. Architect Paul Merrick and artist Glen Lewis, both of Vancouver, presented their different perspectives and described their experiences in attempting to integrate works of art in contemporary buildings, both at the conceptual stage and at the virtual completion of the building. William J.S. Boyle, from Visual Arts, Ontario, described his province's attempts at bringing artists and architects together through the Art in Architecture Index. He also illustrated the successful collaboration of the two disciplines in the recent extension to the Toronto Subway. The fourth panelist, Donald W. Thalacker, is an American architect working for the General Services Administration. As the person responsible for the purchase of art for federal government buildings, he describes the successes, failures and controversies implicit in his role.

Architectural Conservation in Canada/La conservation de l'architecture du Canada, HAROLD KALMAN, Ottawa, Chairperson

This session was organized by the SAH, but, given its pertinence to the Canadian scene, a brief summary is given here.

Regional experiences in the application of existing heritage legislation were recounted by William J. Huot of the British Columbia Heritage Conservation

Branch, who spoke on *Municipal Protection and Assistance for Privately-Owned Heritage Buildings*, by Penina Coopersmith of the City of Calgary, who described the effects of a boom economy in *Oil Boom Precipitates Heritage Bust: Conservation in Calgary*, and by Shane O'Dea of Memorial University, who described the erosion of support for conservation with the discovery of oil off the coast of Newfoundland in a paper entitled *The Politics of Conservation: The St. John's Heritage Conservation Area*.

George Kapelos of the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation described the Ontario conservation thrust and emphasized the need for community planning in the heritage field in *Planning and Conservation: Mixing Forward Thought with Backward Glances*.

Describing a new recording method for heritage structures was Pierre Bureau of the ministère des Affaires culturelles in Québec. He recounted his first-hand experiences and showed examples of the results of his work in *Oblique Aerial Photography: A Technique for Architectural Surveys*, an overview method designed to serve as a planning tool in heritage conservation.

Barbara A. Humphreys of Parks Canada, Ottawa, directed her remarks to criticism that the federal government has not played a sufficiently active role in conservation in a paper entitled *The Federal Heritage Programme: New Techniques*. She outlined the contribution already made by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and its support programme, the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, and described new federal initiatives to be taken in heritage conservation of federally-owned buildings.

The meeting was followed by post convention tours in Victoria and Vancouver.

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