

A Case Study in the Attributions of Two Important Kingston Villas

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Article abstract

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A Case Study in the Attributions of Two Important Kingston Villas

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RÉSUMÉ

L'auteur étudie les attributions de deux importantes villas de Kingston, The Folly (commencée en 1861 et terminée vers 1890) et Edgewater (commencée en 1858). On ne dispose pas de documentation sur les auteurs de ces maisons, attribuées toutes les deux à John Power (1816-1882). L'auteur présente des éléments de comparaison stylistique lui permettant d'affirmer que seulement The Folly fut conçue par Power, tandis qu'Edgewater serait l'oeuvre de William Coverdale

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This paper examines two stone villas, The Folly (329 Division Street; Fig. 89) and Edgewater (1-3 Emily Street; Fig. 90) in Kingston, Ontario, in order to determine who built them.¹ In recent years, both have been attributed to John Power (1816-82).² However, on viewing the disparity in the appearance of these two buildings, an observer might well feel that there were two architects involved—an impression this article will confirm.

Power was born near Exeter, South Devonshire, and trained by his father, Joseph Power, a master builder and architect. In 1846, at the age of 30, John Power sailed to Canada with some members of the Horsey family, who had many connections

with the building trade. They settled in Kingston, where other immigrants from Devonshire had been living since the 1830s, and Power began his career as a contractor, perhaps bidding on projects designed by such resident architects as Edward Horsey (1806-69) and William Coverdale (1801-65). In 1850 he announced his independence as an architect and building surveyor and four years later was able to cite prestigious references among the local establishment.³

Power did not pick an auspicious moment to move to Kingston. The city was still trying to recover from the disappointment of being abandoned as the capital of the united Province of Canada. The city's ambitions were at their peak from 1841 to 1844, although rumours about the capital site had been in circulation since the late 1830s. The speculation resulted in a burst of building activity, since government buildings and housing were needed for the sudden influx of civil servants. Architects such as George Browne (1811-85) were attracted to the city and temporarily swelled the ranks of local architects. Browne won the competition for the Kingston City Hall, a

1 This paper was presented in February 1987 at a conference, Recent Research in Canadian Architecture, held at the University of Toronto and York University.

2 The Folly was attributed to John Power in my unpublished MA thesis (Queen's University, 1984), "Aspects of Domestic Architecture in South-Eastern Ontario: Siting, Interiors and Selected Furnishings of Frontenac, Lennox & Addington Counties, 1820-1850," 69 n. 18, and I elaborated on the argument in my unpublished MPhil research paper (University of Toronto, 1986), "Selected Architectural Drawings and Buildings of John and Joseph Power of Kingston, Ontario, 1850-1900," 55-56. Edgewater is said to have been built by Power in *City of Kingston, Buildings of Architectural and Historic Significance* (Kingston, 1980), v, 50-52. The authors offer no historical evidence or stylistic analysis to justify this claim.

3 For the biography and career of John Power, see McKendry, "Selected Architectural Drawings," especially 10-16.

classical structure of national architectural significance. Many important structures, built from the local grey limestone, left natural or rough-cut, were erected or altered around this time, mainly in the classical style—among them, the front of St. George's Cathedral (rebuilt), the main entrance to the Provincial Penitentiary, Roselawn, Rockwood, St. Andrew's Manse, and Bellevue House. Therefore, in spite of financial concerns over the city's decline in importance after losing its bid to remain the capital, Power would have observed in 1846 a number of appealing and well-built structures, making Kingston reminiscent of, and yet subtly distinct from, the small cities of his homeland.

By the time *The Folly* was being contemplated around 1860, Power had designed many buildings in Gothic Revival and classical styles. Among these are McIntosh Castle, an attractive stone villa, built in 1852 in a picturesque medieval style; the Hotel Frontenac (originally Irons Hotel), a four-storey, brick and stone structure built in 1852-53, with a flat arcade spanning the top three storeys; and the winning entry in the 1858 competition for the new Medical Hall of Queen's University.

The city tax assessment rolls can be used to establish the building date and patron of *The Folly*. In the report of 1859, the Reverend George Stuart was assessed £90 for an acre of land at Division, York, and Main Streets. Two years later the assessment was increased to £300, with the notation that the house thereon was not finished. Stuart, who died in 1862, was an important local figure as a United Empire Loyalist, member of the Family Compact and minister of St. George's Cathedral. The "late Dean Stuart's new mansion" was referred to in an 1864 advertisement for the sale of neighbouring building lots that commanded a fine view of Cataraqui Bay, the Citadel, and other points of interest.⁴ This is significant because the area today is so heavily built up with a mixture of commercial, residential, and industrial structures that it is hard to imagine why Stuart, who in 1859 was 83 and owned several properties, was attracted to this site. But the house, apparently not held to be desirable, was sold for as little as \$100 in 1876, and a decade later it was described as still being unfinished, even though Stuart had nearly completed it before his death.⁵

Attribution of *The Folly* to John Power is based on comparison with a number of stone buildings,

documented as designed by him between the mid-1850s and the mid-1860s. The *Folly's* main façade, now unfortunately obscured under a later ungainly porch, resembles that of 5 Emily Street (Fig. 91), built by Power in 1854.⁶ Both houses have classical, symmetrical street façades with central bays projecting forward and surmounted by pediments ornamented by pronounced curved brackets. On the hipped roofs there are symmetrically positioned, prominent chimneys placed parallel to the front walls. The *Folly* continues the Palladian tradition of a formal entrance wall in combination with a less formal garden façade on the opposite side of the house—in this case a two-storey curved bow projecting into the garden in the direction of Lake Ontario (Fig. 92). As a result of the peculiarities of the site of 5 Emily Street, its curved, bowed two-storey wall is at right angles to the street façade but does stretch towards the lake. In both houses the cornices of the main blocks are moulded outward to become a continuation of the cornices of the bows.

The pediment of *The Folly* is pierced by a round opening decorated by a plain stone border interrupted by four regularly placed keystones. This device is also found on the Lennox and Addington County Court House (Fig. 93), designed by Power in 1863 in Napanee.⁷ Both buildings use a pair of brackets under the sills of the windows.

The most convincing architectural feature supporting an attribution to Power is the incorporation on both *The Folly* and *Parkview House* (31 King Street West, built in 1854 by Power; Fig. 94) of paired chimney stacks of smoothly worked stone, bound at the top by a course of stone decorated by roundels in relief.⁸ In *Parkview House*, roundels are also found on the window lintels and on the fascia boards under the cornice.

The city tax assessments provide us with the patronage and building date of *Edgewater*, a double stone house, splendidly situated on the shores of Lake Ontario in what was then the suburbs of Kingston. In 1858, Clark Hamilton and his brother-in-law John Paton were assessed £400 and £300 respectively for their "two unfinished houses." Fortunately, preliminary elevations and floor plans have survived, although they are not identified in any manner (Fig. 95).⁹ They were

4 *Kingston Daily News*, 23 October 1864.

5 On 4 September 1876, Thomas Parke sold "Archdeacon Stuart's house" for \$100 to William Allen (Instrument M1350, Frontenac County Registry Office). In the special December issue of 1886, the *Kingston British Whig Supplement* described "the *Folly*," built by Archdeacon Stuart, as being unfinished (5).

6 *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 21 April 1855.

7 Minutes of Provisional Council, Lennox and Addington County, 10 September 1863.

8 *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 21 April 1855. The source of the chimney design may be a detail from plate xviii of S. H. Brooks, *Designs for Cottage and Villa Architecture* (London, 1839).

9 Newlands Collection, Queen's University Archives, Kingston, #241 and #256.

drawn in pencil on paper that is watermarked 1855. The neutral character of the draftsmanship presents difficulties in attribution, especially in light of the paucity of architectural drawings of that period in Kingston (for example, many later Power drawings exist, but only one, a floor plan from the chamber storey of a house, survives from before the mid-1860s).¹⁰

The drawings for Edgewater contain a number of features that do not appear in the finished building, but do provide assistance in determining its author who, I believe, was William Coverdale (1801-65).¹¹ Coverdale emigrated around 1810 from York to a farming area along the Richelieu River south of Montreal. He moved to Kingston in the early 1830s, probably attracted by the activity in the building trade, with the construction of Fort Henry and the Provincial Penitentiary. The latter was designed in 1832 by two Americans, William Powers and John Mills, in a radial plan influenced by reform ideas in penitentiary designs.¹² One of the four arms of the plan was under construction in 1834 when Coverdale was hired as master builder and architect to replace Mills. Coverdale immediately made drawings to improve the aesthetic aspects of the original scheme and, in 1840, contributed the plan for the outer walls and gateways. A victim of political intrigue, he resigned under duress in 1846. He designed and supervised many houses and commercial buildings in brick or stone or a combination during the 1840s, and continued to do so in the 1850s and in the first half of the 1860s, while he was city architect. John Power, also skilled in working with these materials, was his main competitor during this time, and outlived him by 17 years.

Coverdale's final work was the Lunatic Asylum (Fig. 96), now known as Penrose on the grounds of the Kingston Psychiatric Hospital and designed in 1857.¹³ It displays a number of features found in the drawings for Edgewater: for example, the

main doorway has piers banded by emphasized blocks that are not found this early elsewhere in Kingston. The same type of round-arched window, the surround of which is heavily moulded with an accentuated keystone, is found on the asylum and in the drawings. In addition, there is the same use of rustication to distinguish keystones, quoins, and sills. This textured stonework climaxes on the asylum in the distinctive chimneys, and in the drawings for Edgewater as parapets over the doorway porticoes.

These parapets are in the form of *stelai* in the drawings, but were either not executed or have been replaced by the present iron railing. A parapet in the form of a rectangular panel does appear on the porch of Elmhurst (26 Centre Street; Fig. 97), built in 1852 by Coverdale.¹⁴ There, the porch closely resembles the ones built at Edgewater—note the use of the Tuscan order, rounded arch, and piers composed of channelled blocks. One of Elmhurst's south upper windows has a distinctive glazing pattern of off-centre glazing bars, drawn as an alternative suggestion on the lower right windows of Edgewater's main façade.

I have elsewhere attributed a coloured presentation drawing of the Medical Hall for Queen's University to Coverdale, who lost this 1858 competition to John Power.¹⁵ In the competition drawing, the chimney stacks are the same as those proposed for Edgewater. We also know that at this time Coverdale was interested in the incorporation of one-storey angled bay windows (90 Johnson Street, Baiden House, 165-167 King Street West, the rectory for St. John's Church), which were proposed and accepted for Edgewater.

The Folly and Edgewater present problems familiar to architectural historians. Despite the lack of documentation, publications may boldly state that certain buildings were built according to the designs of certain architects. One is then left in the position of being a revisionist—attacking the position taken by the author of the publication without knowing the reasons for his or her conclusions. But we all know how quickly published assumptions become established facts. The gravest danger is that we build an image of the characteristics of the style of an architect on unreliable foundations and go on to make further attributions. Documentation, in the form of architectural drawings, account books, building contracts, and tenders, is the key to secure knowledge of an architect's *oeuvre*, but without knowledge of how to date materials and construction techniques, it

10 The majority of drawings by the Power firm are in the collection of the National Archives of Canada.

11 Coverdale's career is discussed in Mary Fraser, "William Coverdale, Kingston Architect 1801?-1865," *Historic Kingston*, xxvi (1978), 71-80. I am in the process of analyzing his work, including the Provincial Penitentiary, in my doctoral dissertation for the University of Toronto.

12 Recorded in the Penitentiary documents in the Kingston Penitentiary Museum and in the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada and the Province of Canada, 1832 to 1849.

13 *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 12 December 1857. The foundations for the asylum were being dug in 1859 and, although partly occupied by patients, the structure was not yet finished when Coverdale died in 1865. His son, William Coverdale, Jr. (who had been acting as his clerk of the works), in partnership with John Power, finished the project five years later.

14 Recorded in the account books of Coverdale in the possession of Mary Fraser, Kingston.

15 McKendry, "Selected Architectural Drawings," 53.

can be a trap. There have been instances when a document cites the designer and date of a building that was replaced because of fire or demolition. The later structure on the site is then credited with the original building date and designer. However, when the documentation of a building tallies with the date of construction, we can then use that structure, through the technique of comparison, to establish the attributions of undocumented buildings.

By identifying the authors of Edgewater and The Folly, we can now paint a picture of the equal success of the two key architects of the late 1850s and early 1860s in Kingston. Both Coverdale and Power worked for influential clients—Coverdale for the Hamilton family, successful bankers, and Power for George Stuart, the venerable arch-deacon of the local Church of England. Both men were capable designers of suburban villas, which

fully exploited the local limestone, and both understood how to produce attractive classical designs, appropriate to their sites. Since few drawings by Coverdale exist, the identification of his sketch of Edgewater is an important document in understanding how he considered alternative ideas in the same drawing and matured the scheme in the finished house. As built, both residences exude the confidence and status of the upper middle classes—Loyalist families who weathered the various political and personal crises, class rebellions, and economic depressions of the nineteenth century. Continuity with the history of Kingston, settled in 1784 by United Empire Loyalists who included the older generations of Stuarts and Hamiltons, was maintained through the skilful manipulation of local material and the elements of classicism, so strongly entrenched in this region.

*1 Baiden Street
Kingston, Ontario K7M 2J7*



FIGURE 89. John Power, north façade of The Folly, 1860-62, 329 Division Street, Kingston (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 90. William Coverdale, Edgewater, 1858, 1-3 Emily Street, Kingston (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 91. John Power, 5 Emily Street, 1854, Kingston (Photo: Author).

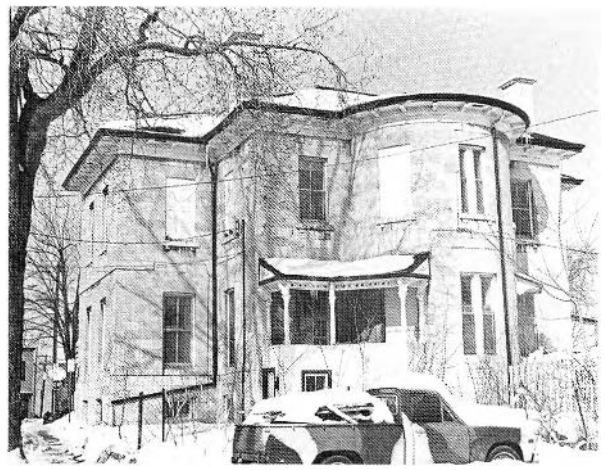


FIGURE 92. John Power, south façade of The Folly, 1860-62, 329 Division Street, Kingston (Photo: Author).

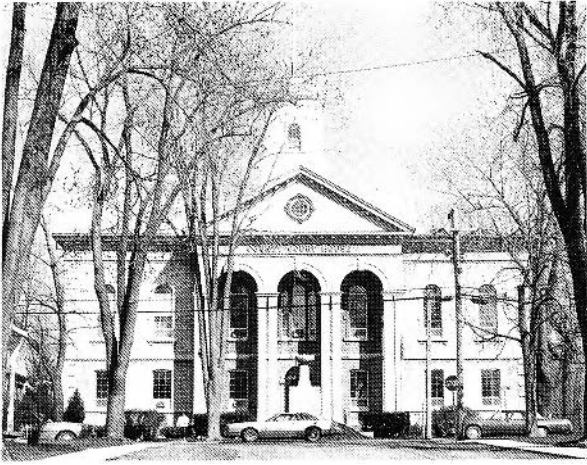


FIGURE 93. John Power. Lennox and Addington County Court House, 1863. Napanee (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 94. John Power, west side-view of Parkview House, 1854, 31 King Street West, Kingston (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 96. William Coverdale, centre pavilion of the Lunatic Asylum, begun 1859, King Street West, Kingston (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 97. William Coverdale, Elmhurst, 1852, 26 Centre Street, Kingston (Photo: Author).

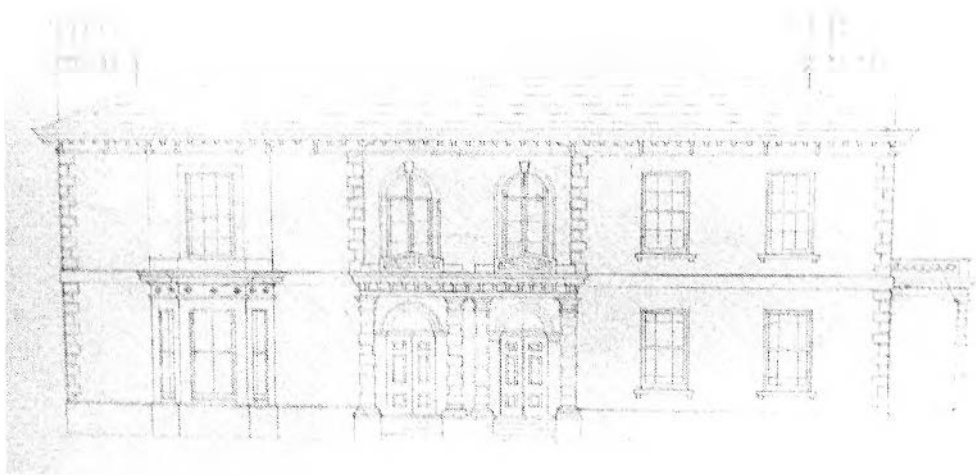


FIGURE 95. William Coverdale, unidentified drawings for Edgewater: elevation of the main façade, watermarked 1855. Kingston, Queen's University Archives, #256 (Photo: Author).



FIGURE 98. Leonora Carrington, *Self Portrait*, 1937 (Photo: Courtesy of Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York).