

***Town Halls of Canada.* Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1987. Pp. 343. 281 black and white photos and drawings. \$21.95**

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double vision that may be emulated to the profit of urban and women's historians alike.

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One might well ask whether the subject of town halls in Canada is worthy of a generic publication. Perhaps this review will answer that question. *Town Halls in Canada* has the subtitle "A Collection of Essays on Pre-1930 Town Hall Buildings." The essays were written by five architectural historians on the staff of the National Historic Parks and Sites Branch of Environment Canada, publisher of the volume.

The first of the six essays, "Types and Trends: An Introduction to the Study of Early Canadian Town Halls," by Margaret Carter, describes the methodology of the original research on town halls conducted between 1978 and 1981 by the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building. Carter also attempts to draw together the themes and conclusions of the other five essays. She describes the taxonomy developed for early town halls, reducing the population to 3 types of structures: simple, intermediate and monumental. Such an exercise might be useful, but in the practice of heritage preservation, it can also be hazardous. For instance, Carter refers to an entire class of intermediates as having exteriors that are "relatively undistinguished." Once in print, such an observation may come to be used as an argument against preserving particular structures.

Each of the five essays that follows develops a particular theme in the history of town halls in Canada. The first two, both by G.E. Mills, address antecedents and Canadian high-

style town halls respectively. Mills discusses the origins of European city halls and the emergence of the civic centre, and then links these with the succession of prominent city halls in Canada: Victoria Hall, Cobourg, Montreal's Bonsecours Market, Kingston City Hall and the majestic Toronto City Hall of 1887, among others. Mills' work is solid and his sources are extensive. His two essays could easily be expanded into a discrete publication.

The fourth essay, C.A. Hale's "Rural, Village and Town Halls in Canada" provides a quintessential example of the difficult task of drawing together coherent themes in architectural history embracing all regions of Canada. Hale does it well, both in her selection of characteristic types, from utilitarian to high-style, and in revealing vernacular variations. She concludes that all regions can boast noteworthy surviving examples of several types.

In his essay entitled "With Our Tax Money": The Thorny Problem of Town Hall Construction", Marc de Caraffe addresses the legal issues surrounding the building of early town halls in Canada. Region by region, he explores the dynamics of municipal rates and civic aspirations, which were, in the 19th century as today, often at odds. His essay is packed with references to legislation and taxation practices, as well as important historic dates, facts and statistics. Those interested in municipal history will find the essay useful.

The final essay in the series is entitled "For Generations to Come: The Town Hall as a Symbol of Continuity." Written by Dana Johnson, this essay discusses the fundamental question of the relationship between town hall architecture and the society that produced it. Johnson's focus is the symbolic value of civic architecture. His interpretation draws upon information presented by his colleagues, and he does a commendable job in weaving together their themes. He argues that the architecture of

historic town halls, perhaps more than any other type of public building, needs to be understood on the basis of what it did in and for the society that produced it. He illustrates his argument by discussing the commissioning and building of Kingston City Hall and Montreal's Bonsecours Market. Both structures were deliberately conceived to be imposing, both emulated British Classical Revival antecedents, both were planned to serve as visual centre-pieces in their communities, and both were executed at a huge cost disproportionate to their municipal treasuries. Still, most citizens saw ample merit in their construction because these buildings were not merely central to utilitarian needs, but also to aspirations of civic virtue with their communities.

Johnson's essay is thus central to the entire volume and, ideally, it have served as the introduction to the other essays. Carter's essay might have made a better conclusion to the study. There are other indications that the publisher should have given higher priority to editing. For example, reference to the important work by Asa Briggs on the subject of Victorian cities is conspicuously absent. Another shortcoming is the lack of references to architectural city planning and the emphasis it placed on the civic centre in the earlier part of this century.

Returning to the original question posed, I believe that someone should indeed write a definitive study of town hall architecture in Canada. The collection of essays in *Town Halls of Canada* provides an important prototype for such a work.

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