
Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Le Journal de la Société pour l'étude de l'architecture au Canada



Editors' Introduction

Tanya Southcott et Michael Windover

Volume 44, numéro 1, 2019

Women and Architecture

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066278ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066278ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

SSAC-SEAC

ISSN

2563-8696 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Southcott, T. & Windover, M. (2019). Editors' Introduction. *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada / Le Journal de la Société pour l'étude de l'architecture au Canada*, 44(1), 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066278ar>

Copyright © SSAC-SEAC, 2019

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

> TANYA SOUTHCOTT AND
MICHAEL WINDOVER

This special issue of the *JSSAC/JSEAC* grew out of the conversations sparked by the double session “Is a Woman’s Work ever Done? Revisiting ‘Women and Architecture,’” of the 2018 conference held in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and chaired by Tanya Southcott. The impetus to bring together researchers engaged with the question of women’s contributions to the designed environment was inspired by an international surge of interest in uncovering the work of women architects and designers. Equity campaigns and lobby organizations continue to mobilize statistics around women’s participation in architecture, while individual stories are used to promote their visibility in the service of a more diverse and equitable profession. In Canada, groups of professional women such as Building Equality in Architecture (BEA), Women in Architecture (WIA), and Women of Architecture (WOA) have helped to bring to the foreground of public and professional debates the questions of how to rebalance the image of the male-dominated discipline, how to effectively recognize the work of women, and how to address the ongoing legacy of their discrimination. That enthusiasm filters into the public realm through heightened media exposure, books, magazines, trade journals, award programs, and documentary films to build an audience attuned to the often-overlooked contributions of women.

With its theme of “Women and Architecture,” this special issue aims to position the *JSSAC/JSEAC* within these national and international events. The journal has not engaged in such critical conversation (or the topic of gender generally) in an organized way since 1992, when Dorothy Field guest-edited the first *SSAC Bulletin* committed to “Women and Architecture.” In her introduction to that issue, Field described how significant increases in women’s enrolment in architecture schools, registration by architectural associations, and scholarship on the study of women’s roles in the production of architecture as architects, patrons, and users of space had brought historically “marginal participants” to the front and centre of their field. In the decades since, scholarship on the Canadian condition has kept pace with Field’s characterization through pioneering works such as Annmarie Adams and Peta Tancred’s *“Designing Women”: Gender and the Architectural Profession* (2000), Joan Grierson’s *For the Record: The First Women in Canadian Architecture* (2008), and Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson’s edited collection *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970* (2012).

In the spirit of Field's initiative, we invited contributors to continue to explore the overlap between the lived experiences of women professionals and the place of women in Canada's architectural histories as creators, consumers, and critics of the built environment. We believe, like Adams, Tancred, Huneault, Anderson, and many others, that revisiting and revising histories of architecture and design to account more fully for women's participation helps to enrich and complicate our understanding of and approaches to the designed environment.

This issue includes papers initially presented at the 2018 conference then revised and enlarged (by Laura O'Brien, Nicola Krantz, Ipek Mehmetoğlu, as well as Thomas Strickland and Marina Schwellnus). To these we were delighted to add an essay by Leanne Gaudet on the Wyatt Historic House as well as Dorothy Stern's 2011 Martin Eli Weil Prize-winning essay on the history of interior design education and practice in Canada through the case of the University of Manitoba's Interior Design Program, published here for the first time. Stern explores the foundations of the unique modernist design education offered through the school by drawing on both architectural and feminist theory emergent at the time. Significant to her study is the role played by Joan Harland in the program's evolution as its first female chair and professor for over forty years (from 1939 to 1980).

Finally, we invited Dorothy Field to reflect upon the papers presented here in the context of her initial inquiry into women and architecture. In her text "Across the Years: An appreciation of 'Women in Architecture' in the *SSAC Bulletin and Journal*," Field revisits her own motivations for the 1991 conference session, as well as the three papers that were published in the subsequent issue of the *SSAC Bulletin*. Significantly, she reinforces the continuity of this scholarship's agenda from the work of Erna Dominey, Maria Somjen, and Blanche Lemco van Ginkel to the other authors included here.

Given the openness of our call, the papers cover an impressive range of geographic as well as historic territory. Gaudet and O'Brien focus on buildings shaped by upper- and middle-class urban women in Summerside (Prince Edward Island) and Montreal (Quebec) respectively, at the turn of the nineteenth-century. Gaudet uses the Wyatt Historic House Museum to examine how the lives of its female inhabitants, Cecilia, Wanda, and Dorothy Wyatt, shape the building's interpretation through their personal narratives and belongings. O'Brien explores the Montreal Maternity Hospital as a site of empowerment and identity-negotiation for its all-female Committee of Management. Krantz explores the pan-Canadian influence of Toronto-centred

interior decorator Minerva Elliot through the pages of the middle-class women's magazine, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, in the interwar period. Mehmetoğlu follows Alberta-based architects Mary Imrie and Jean Wallbridge through their postwar travels to Europe, South America, Asia, and the Middle East as they reported back to Canadian audiences through articles in the *RAIC Journal*. Strickland and Schwellnus consider issues of gender inequity in architectural practice and education through a contemporary installation in the headquarters of the Ontario Association of Architects, a building originally designed by architect Ruth Cawker in Toronto in 1989.

Taken together, the papers make a compelling argument for the complicity of education and professionalization in the trajectory of women's architectural achievements (Stern, Strickland and Schwellnus, Krantz), as well as the importance of publication and narration to position oneself as a voice of authority (Krantz, Mehmetoğlu). Empowerment and oppression are common vantages through which to consider women's history. The perspectives presented here do not dwell on discriminatory practices; rather authors work to situate women's experiences historically while encouraging readers to see women as protagonists and active agents, able to make lasting marks on the built landscape and how we understand it (O'Brien, Gaudet).

Beyond their value in introducing new figures to the canon of Canadian architectural history, the papers also push scholarship in new directions through their methodologies and modes of inquiry. Renewed interest in the study of women and architecture is often fuelled by waves of feminist discourse and practice. While feminist architectural historians have used a multiplicity of approaches to address questions of gender within the built environment, what ties the approaches together is a resistance to ideas of universal and general meaning, and a critical questioning of how gender is constructed and perpetuated through architecture and its representations. In this way, feminist methods can bring new subjects to light through the way questions are structured and sources examined. While the built environment remains an important frame of reference in this volume, contributors have pushed their research (often out of necessity) to identify traces of women's influence in a creative and compelling range of materials, including travel videos, personal diaries, oral histories, home journals, and design magazines. One of the goals of this issue is to reassert the contributions of feminist research methodologies in histories of the design environment in Canada, bearing in mind that drawing attention to subjectivity presents an opportunity to shed light on gender relations in space more generally.

The SSAC/SEAC takes pride in its commitment to fostering scholars at the initial stages of their careers. The contributors to “Women and Architecture” might all be classified in this way—as current students, recent graduates, and new faculty members. In that sense, this issue represents a new generation of researchers and educators in Canada interested in the dynamics of gender, space, and architecture, who build in particular on the significant work of Annmarie Adams. Throughout her long and distinguished career as an architectural historian and a professor at McGill University, Adams has been instrumental in mapping Canadian women’s experiences and representation within, without, and outside of the architectural profession. Her work challenges traditional perspectives on women as architects and expands our understanding of who has agency in the creation of buildings and spaces. Adams inspires through example as well as directly, as mentor to several of the authors and indeed to the editors.

In closing, we wish to thank Jessica Mace, Editor in Chief of the *JSSAC/JSEAC*, for her sustained guidance, support, and encouragement in realizing this special issue.