

Architecture and Building History in Atlantic Canada

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identity must temper provincial xenophobia. In these circumstances, he and other premiers would do well to examine the Australian constitution of 1901. It was designed in a democratic age to cope with the common problems of a society that had strong local loyalties but whose members felt themselves Australian. The British North America Act, developed to meet the needs of central Canada in a pre-democratic period, has proved remarkably flexible; but if substantial alteration is now needed, Australia provides an instructive and apposite model.

J.K. HILLER

Architecture and Building History in Atlantic Canada

Most of what has been written on architecture in Atlantic Canada has been written with the intent of preserving the buildings, not of analyzing the architecture. The literature is, generally speaking, a popular literature consisting of building histories reinforced by illustrations. This is certainly true of the three volumes produced by the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia — *Founded Upon a Rock* (Halifax, 1967), *Seasoned Timbers 1* (Halifax, 1972) and *South Shore, Seasoned Timbers 2* (Halifax, 1974). These are well-researched, well-written building histories for the Halifax area, Western Nova Scotia and the South Shore. While the layout and printing (particularly of photographs) are merely efficient, the style and the information provided are good. There is a vitality in the writing and an element of critical commentary that raises these books, as texts, well above the level of more popular works such as those illustrated by L.B. Jenson — *Vanishing Halifax* (Halifax, Petheric Press, 1968), *Wood and Stone* (Halifax, Petheric Press, 1972) and *Country Roads* (Halifax, Petheric Press, 1974). Jenson himself did the text for the Halifax book, the Pictou Heritage Society for the other two.

Vanishing Halifax appears to have grown out of one man's affection for his adopted city, a fondness augmented by a sense of its fragility — an awareness that what he is looking at today may be gone tomorrow. For that reason it is the best of the three books. The text is detailed, the comments personal, the sense of place well-conveyed. The pen-and-ink sketches are a very effective medium for preservation education and, while good in the Halifax book, they are sharpened, made more precise in the Pictou books. *Vanishing Halifax* includes a good collection of small drawings of architectural detail — keystones, figures, railings, capitals — which serve to make the reader more observant of the lesser aspects of buildings, aware of more than the mass of the facade. One of its most striking and effective illustrations is the panorama of Brunswick Street. This makes a powerful argument for streetscape preservation by presenting what

neither the eye nor the camera can capture in a single image. This sense that the city is more than the architecture of its monumental buildings is also conveyed by Jenson's inclusion of a typical corner store among his drawings. With it the reader moves from architecture and buildings, from aesthetics and engineering to social factors, to the humanity that occupies the buildings. This element of personal selection, of individual prejudice is missing in the Pictou books. The text of *Wood and Stone* is slight, a failing not found in *Country Roads*. That book, however, is marred by a decision, presumably motivated by economy, to place the text of the pictures at the back of the book. This practice presupposes one of two types of purchaser — an illiterate who can only digest pictures or a reader adept at two-finger reading. In one case the practice is an insult, in the other an annoyance.

Another particularly useful book from Nova Scotia is Arthur Wallace's *An Album of Drawings of Early Buildings in Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1976) which was published as a joint project by the Heritage Trust and the Nova Scotia Museum. A large, folio volume, it consists of a series of architectural drawings done mostly in the 1920s and 1930s of significant Nova Scotian buildings. As Wallace makes clear, it is a selected group of buildings — selected by virtue of the fact that he was either working on or attracted to them. They represent the range of domestic, commercial and public buildings of the Georgian era in Nova Scotia. Wallace's text reaches more into the realm of architectural judgement than the works discussed above but is still really only limited commentary attached to building history. What distinguishes this book is that it is a celebration of the buildings shown because most were not threatened when the drawings were done. The drawings aside, the publication of the book is clearly a response to a threat to some of the buildings, an elegy for many of the others.

Of all the maritime building histories the lengthiest and most detailed is Louise Hill's *Fredericton, New Brunswick, British North America* (Fredericton, n.p., 1968). Its greatest virtue — its detail — is also its greatest weakness because it lowers the book from the category of a history to that of a data bank. It contains, in its five hundred pages, a wealth of information about the buildings and families of Fredericton and in a sense is really as much a local history as a building record. Valuable though it is for information, it is not an easy book for the reader unfamiliar with Fredericton to use because it suffers from a lack of editing and of proper organization of material.

When we move across to Newfoundland the influence of the work in Nova Scotia becomes apparent. *A Gift of Heritage* (St. John's, Valhalla Press, 1975) and *Ten Historic Towns* (St. John's, Valhalla Press, 1978) are children of the Nova Scotia books in that, in looking for a format, the Newfoundland Historic Trust chose to use sketches in the manner of the Jenson books and text in the manner of the Heritage Trust books. *A Gift of Heritage* covers a selection of the buildings of St. John's; its text is the work of a committee of the Historic Trust; its drawings the work of Jean Ball. There is a departure from the Nova Scotian

pattern in that the book includes one brief introductory essay on the history of St. John's and another on the architecture. Although short, these do give a contextual backdrop to the buildings and reinforce the educative aspect of the book so that not only the buildings shown but also others like them are seen as important or worthy of preservation. *Ten Historic Towns* deals with buildings found in those larger outport communities which had been settled by the middle of the eighteenth century and while the buildings' histories in this work are slighter than those in *A Gift of Heritage*, the book does provide a good general view of Newfoundland architecture in the nineteenth century. The drawings, like Jenson's for Pictou County, have become sharper, the buildings better defined as if they were being treated more as architecture than as picture.

All these books take proper account of the range of architecture. There is no tendency to consider only monumental or high-style architecture while ignoring the vernacular. In part this is because most heritage organizations in the Atlantic region are aware of the whole of the traditional culture and see their role as a reinforcer of that culture. They also recognize the value of such buildings as part of the general environment and as a source of low-income housing. To preserve them then is to serve both a cultural and a social function. As architectural history the books are useful only as preliminary essays, as sources of information. As pleas for preservation they are of much greater value for, by sensitizing the public to the sacredness of particular buildings, they make it a dangerous public matter to destroy those buildings. There are, of course, other problems. The buildings not included may be considered valueless or are rejected. This point is best illustrated by the case of a prominent St. John's man who, reportedly out of spite, tore down his ancestral cottage for a parking lot because the Historic Trust had not included it in *A Gift of Heritage*.

There are also few general essays on architectural history. Eric Arthur and James Acland's "The Maritimes" was published in *Journal RAIC*, XL, no. 7 (1963), pp. 29-44 and contains most of the text of their photographic study, *Building by the Sea* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1963). (The book itself, produced in a very limited edition, was not available for review, the Newfoundland copy having, presumably, disappeared into the Library of some previous premier.) Superbly illustrated with photographs, the essay is, as Arthur says, a study in townscape. But he sees it as going beyond this to take in the affect of buildings in their settings. The existing provincial studies are also quite sweeping. W.W. Alward's "Architecture in New Brunswick" and Yvon LeBlanc's "Architecture in Eastern New Brunswick" were published in *Arts in New Brunswick*, ed. R.A. Tweedie, *et al.* (Fredericton, University Press of New Brunswick, 1967). Stuart Smith's "Architecture in New Brunswick: An historical survey" appeared in *Canadian Collector*, X, no. 3 (1975), pp. 37-42 and Irene Rogers' "Heritage in Building" in *Canadian Collector*, VIII, no. 1 (1973), pp. 26-30. Essentially only surveys of a selection of significant buildings, none of these essays is very satisfactory as architectural history because they do

not evaluate, they do not convey any sense of development. Stuart Smith's essay is the best of the group but because it, like the others, was written for a general rather than a scholarly audience, it cannot explore the niceties of the interaction of style and society.

Indeed, there are only four publications which can properly be considered architectural history. The first is Robert Tuck's *Gothic Dreams* (Toronto, Dundurn Press, 1978), a full-length study of the life and work of William Critchlow Harris. Having some of the idleness of his father and lacking the discipline of his brother, Harris lived a somewhat isolated existence designing churches and houses in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. An architect of competence and integrity with an awareness (somewhat limited by his isolation from professional colleagues) of contemporary trends, he was nonetheless quite representative of Atlantic architects and of Atlantic architecture: cautious, conservative, always a little *retardataire*. This conservatism is an aspect of Harris' work that Tuck might have done well to consider in greater depth. It might have helped explain Harris' various disappointments (including the greatest — the loss of the design commission for All Saints, Halifax, which was followed by the ignominious job of superintending his rival's design on the cathedral and finally, after his death, having his superintendance questioned, his integrity doubted). Unfortunately Tuck's approach to Harris' work is uncritical; his attraction to it and to the man leads him to suspend judgement. As an example of this one need only look at the illustration (p. 163) of the Maritime Business College whose long, cylindrical turrets and whose buttresses look like some mindless joke about the pencils and erasers used by the students of the college. Tuck had the opportunity of blaming this graceless design on Harris' partner but instead found a means of attributing it to Harris himself.

In terms of architectural history, Newfoundland has done better than the Maritimes in that it has produced three useful and quite thorough essays. The first of these, Dr. Louise Whiteway's "Towards an Art of Architecture in Newfoundland", *Winning Entries in the Newfoundland Government Arts and Letters Competition 1957-58* (St. John's, n.p., 1958), pp. 5-28, involves a very full examination of primary and secondary sources to produce a clear overview of Newfoundland architecture. The second, Shane O'Dea's *The Domestic Architecture of Old St. John's* (St. John's, Newfoundland Historical Society, 1974), quite clearly builds on Whiteway's work and does an interesting job of linking the development of the town to the development of its architecture. While fraught with problems of style terminology (a problem as much for the professional as for the amateur), the essay attempts to convey a sense of the steady process of architectural development in the city — of the appearance of popular styles and the persistence of vernacular forms. David Mills' essay "The Development of Folk Architecture in Trinity Bay" in John Mannion, ed., *The Peopling of Newfoundland* (St. John's, Memorial University, 1977) is based on field work done from the point of view of the cultural geographer, not from that

of the architectural historian. Mills' approach is totally different from that of the other writers considered in this review; he sees buildings as manifestations of people's response to their needs and the situation in which they find themselves rather than as compositions of facade, decoration and appearance. His study starts at a point I suspect it will take Newfoundland architectural studies a generation to catch up with. By a detailed examination of folk architecture in one area and by careful use of available statistical data as well as oral history, he documents the process of change and survival in house form and, to a lesser degree, in building technique. This study is not the fairly standard cursory dash-through-the-town, camera-in-hand, secondary-materials-accessible approach. It is clear that his field work involved documenting each house and each community, and seeing them, not against some externally determined framework, but in the context of their own time and place. It is regrettable that this approach, essential to the proper study of vernacular architecture, is not always the one chosen by students of the subject.

Although Mills' essay is in distinct contrast to Douglas Richardson's "Hyporborean Gothic; or, wilderness Ecclesiology and the wood Churches of Edward Medley", *Architectura*, II, no. 1 (1972), pp. 48-74, they are similar in terms of depth and quality. Richardson's article, which deals with an architect who brought a new and very self-conscious style to New Brunswick in the middle of the nineteenth century, is a celebration of architecture written by a scholar who has a clear sense of his own aesthetic. Carefully introducing the topic by putting Medley in the context of the Gothic Revival, Richardson provides a good background to the whole period for even the general reader. The material is high-style — churches in the High Victorian manner — and yet is regional because it is a Maritime interpretation in wood of an international style in masonry.

Richardson's article, like Mills', is distinctive in that it points the subject in the direction it needs to move. The assembling of facts has been carried out by the heritage groups and by other scholars. What is needed now is a deeper analysis and fuller synthesis of such facts to produce a book of essays that constitute the architectural history of the region. But architectural history in the Atlantic region is still very limited while building history, a less academic but no less important pursuit, is quite strong. Architectural history is weak because buildings and their forms have never been considered as much more than functions. While historical and learned societies flourished, few ever thought their surroundings, the surroundings which they themselves had built, to be of note. It has taken an awareness of environment and a redirected sense of conservation and society to produce a positive reaction to the region's architecture. It is for this reason that much of the energy has gone into the popular literature of preservation — there has not been the leisure to study the niceties of a bargeboard or a studded wall. With the data base laid by the preservationists, it is possible that the profounder studies that constitute architectural history will

begin and will, in their turn, reinforce the preservation movement on whose work they will have drawn.

SHANE O'DEA

Nativism — Or Just Plain Prejudice?

The books reviewed here are only a few of the many that have appeared of late which deal with manifestations of prejudice in Canadian history. A host of recent ethnic and labour histories, for example, have broached the same subject. Of the four books being considered here, one deals with assaults on the rights of French-speaking and Roman Catholic Canadians and the other three with the treatment meted out to Asian immigrants in British Columbia. Two of the books are mainly factual narratives; the others are chiefly concerned to analyze or explain the prejudice involved.

Professor J.R. Miller's *Equal Rights: the Jesuit Estates Act Controversy* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979) takes us back to Honoré Mercier's legislation of 1888. Although this concerned only the province of Quebec and passed both houses of the legislature without a single dissenting Protestant vote, it aroused a furore among the Protestants of Ontario and resulted in the formation of the Equal Rights Association which attacked the language and school rights of French Canadians and Roman Catholics. Most people have regarded the Equal Rights movement much as Sir John A. Macdonald did — as "one of those insane crazes" on the part of the "ultra Protestants which can only be compared to the Popish Plot". While recognizing that "dislike of the French" had much to do with the agitation, Macdonald also attributed it to a revival of the "demon of religious animosity which I had hoped had been buried in the grave of George Brown" (p. 176). Professor Miller is not satisfied with this simple explanation. He has a grab-bag of causes, ranging from English Protestant fears about the aggressive character of Roman Catholicism and French Canadian nationalism to disappointment over the National Policy and the hard times. This multitude of causes 'explains' the Equal Rights movement, making it ineluctable as it were: "Rather than being an aberration, the work of a lunatic fringe, it was the logical if unfortunate product of the times and circumstances" (p. 198).

Considering the intellectual basis of the movement — a mixture of half-truth and fantasy, myth and prejudice — one would assume that its leaders could only be rabble-rousers and demagogues, not to say plain bigots. But Professor Miller will not have it. The 'Noble Thirteen' who emerged from the Parliamentary debate of 1889 and the movement they helped to found are not to be dismissed in this way. "Could one dismiss a movement that included the moral righteousness of a John Charlton, the Orange fervour of a Colonel O'Brien, and the bril-