

Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada
Report on the 1979 Annual Meeting Saskatoon, Saskatchewan,
25-28 May 1979
Société pour l'étude de l'architecture au Canada

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Volume 6, Number 2, 1979–1980

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076930ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076930ar>

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Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Sarjeant, W. A. (1979). Review of [Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada: Report on the 1979 Annual Meeting Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 25-28 May 1979]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 6(2), 116–120. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076930ar>

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

Report on the 1979 Annual Meeting Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, 25-28 May 1979

The fifth annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada was co-ordinated by George Kapelos (Heritage Administration Branch, Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation). Donald C. Kerr (University of Saskatchewan) was local chairman.

The first Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada took place when the Learned Societies conference was staged in Edmonton, Alberta, in 1975. When the Society met in May 1979 for the second time in Western Canada and for the first time in Saskatchewan, only four persons who attended that first meeting were able to be again present. Nevertheless, the meeting was very well attended, by both Society members and Saskatchewan citizens-at-large. The sessions were held on the attractive campus of the University of Saskatchewan, the clean white of its Tyndall stone buildings (not, as some easterners thought, recently cleaned; they have simply stayed clean in the pure western air!) contrasting attractively with the varied greens of a late spring burgeoning.

Research Resources DOROTHY AHLGREN,
Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa,
and CHRISTINA CAMERON,
Parks Canada, Ottawa, Co-Chairpersons.

The session commenced with an account by Garry Shutlak, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, of *The Architectural Collections of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia*. He noted that his personal interest in architecture had occasioned him to try to enlarge this component of the Archives. In 1976, an Architectural Committee had been struck and it was decided to try to collect sketches, building plans, correspondence and photographs relating to Nova Scotian architecture. Four groups of architects responded by turning over their records to the Archives and others may follow. The Provincial Public Records Disposal Act was rather slow and complicated in operation and relatively few relevant government documents had yet been received. Municipalities were in general more responsive, that of Halifax particularly so, and over 5,000 project designs had been received from this source. The Archives were publishing articles on the work of the architects who had responded and were mounting exhibitions to show how the materials (even tissue-paper tracings) could be preserved.

Annalise Walker, Canadian Architectural Archives, Calgary, then described *The Canadian Architectural Archives at the University of Calgary*. These were brought into being in 1974 through the joint initiative of the University Library and the Faculty of Environmental Design. The prime aim was to collect and preserve the work of twentieth-century architects (and members of related professions) who were of national, regional, or local importance. Protection of copyright and rights of continued access to the documents were guaranteed. The first gift was received from John B. Parkin Associates of Toronto; subsequently, other major architectural firms have passed over materials to the Archives.

Ernest Ingles, Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions, Ottawa, gave a brief account of the *Microfilming and Distribution of Historical Materials* and outlined proposals for a retrospective bibliography of Canadian architectural materials.

Robin Letellier, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, then described the sophisticated technique of *Architectural Photogrammetry applied to Heritage Recording*. The need by Parks Canada for precise measurements and detail of natural historic buildings, monuments, and sites had originally caused teams to be sent out to obtain these particulars by field drawing and hand measurement; this new approach is very much quicker, less arduous, and more precise.

Architect Phyllis Lambert of Montreal, who is associated with the Research Group on Stone Buildings in Montreal and with Heritage Montreal, gave an account of the conception and inception of *The Architecture Centre in Montreal*. This institution, since renamed the Canadian Centre for Architecture/Centre Canadien d'Architecture, is now under active development. It contains a library of books, photographs, and drawings; serves as an archival clearing-house; and sponsors exhibitions, publications and a study programme for scholars and students of architecture and the history of art. Its holdings (largely derived from the Lambert collection) include European architectural books and drawings, ranging in date from the sixteenth century to the present.

Dorothy Ahlgren then described at length *The Architectural Collections of the Public Archives of Canada*. Despite budgetary restrictions making the purchase of collections impossible, the Public Archives' collection is extensive, comprising some 50,000 items (37,000 from federal government sources and 13,000 from the private section).

Building Materials MELVYN MALKIN, Past President, Saskatchewan Association of Architects, Chairman.

The Indian Dwellings of the Northwest Coast – their Design and Restoration was the topic of a paper prepared jointly by Peter W. Perrin, Forintek, Vancouver, and J.N.R. Ruddick and presented by the former. Though the Tlingit used Sitka spruce and hemlock, the prime constructional material was western red cedar. The contrasting styles of Tlingit, Tsimshyan, Kwakiutl, Bella Coola, Nootka, and Coastal Salish house construction were successively described and illustrated. The problems of restoration were recounted in relation to two Haida 'six-beam' houses recently reconstructed on concrete foundations on the University of British Columbia campus. Logs had been curfed – a slit cut through them – to allow for expansion or shrinkage during the drying-out of the wood. Chromated copper arsenate type 'c' wood preservative had been found most effective in combating the effects of biodeterioration.

Michel Soucy, Parks Canada, Prairie Region, discussed *The 'Red River Frame' and its Origins*. This designation should strictly be applied only to houses with a bottom sill, frame corner posts, and a top plate; the frame was built first and then infilled with logs. This constructional style derived from French houses of Brittany and Normandy. It was adapted to suit available materials, and the harsher climate, in Québec

during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further modifications occurred when the style was transferred to the Canadian West; and indeed, the modifications quickly became so great that the name ceased to be appropriate.

John Carey's topic, *The Care, Maintenance and Protection of Masonry Exterior Façades*, seemed to promise solid data but little stimulation; in fact, his sense of humour and frank comments made his talk one of the most entertaining of the whole meeting. Much of it was devoted to cleaning techniques. A knowledge of the character of the masonry is an essential prerequisite to the choice of technique. Polished surfaces should never be treated with chemicals or sandblasted. Water under pressure should only be used for very dense materials, such as precast concrete or granite; and then, only after the sealing of all moisture avenues. Chemical cleaning should never be attempted on porous stonework, such as New Brunswick sandstone or marble. Prior wetting should be a preliminary to treatment with hydrofluoric acid; the acid should only be used at high dilution and should be washed off before the stone dries out. Sandblasting should be used only for sandstone structures. Attempts have been made to prevent the decay of exterior stonework by shallow impregnation with epoxies and silicone resins, but the results are most disappointing.

Concrete structures are rarely viewed with any enthusiasm by enthusiasts for architectural conservation; but Ann Gillespie, Parks Canada, Ottawa, showed that they may indeed merit our attention. Her talk on *The 'Artistic' Possibilities of Concrete Block: The Boyd Brothers' Houses (Ottawa) 1910-1920* showed that the imitation of stone in concrete block had produced houses of real artistic merit. The original nineteenth-century 'one-composition' blocks did not give good facing. However, the introduction of side-face machines after 1900 allowed the use of a facing

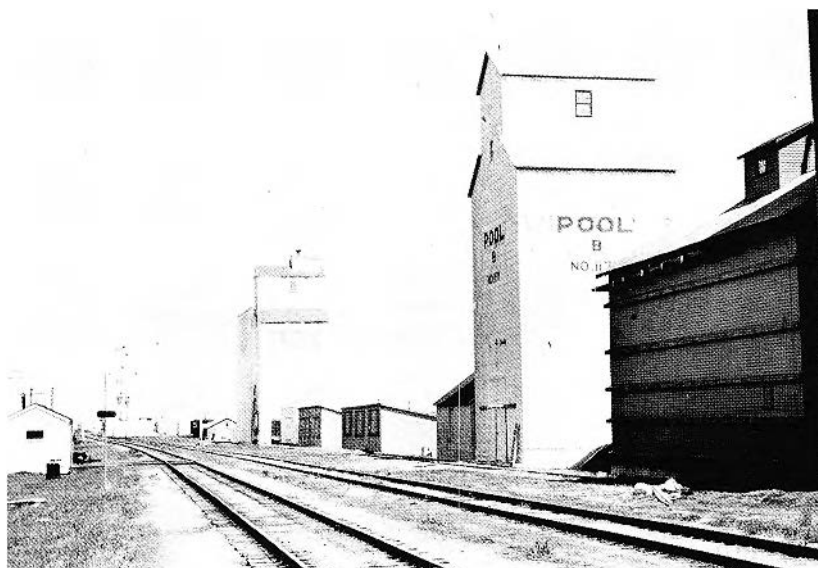


FIGURE 1. Grain elevators, Rosthern, Saskatchewan (Photo: W.A.S. Sarjeant).

material different from that of the rest of the block and produced a better result. Boyd Brothers of Osgoode was perhaps the first Canadian company to purchase such a machine, doing so around 1907; machines producing a block with a flat face and an exposed aggregate finish were substituted in 1914. Many fine buildings were constructed in the Ottawa region; since declining demand caused an eventual cessation of the production of concrete blocks in the mid-'60s, such buildings are now very definitely a 'vanishing species.'

Robert Dumont, University of Saskatchewan, concluded the session with a highly technical account of *Energy-Conserving Solar Buildings in Saskatchewan*. He noted that good insulation is an essential condition, but said that the results can be highly profitable, with a reduction of the heating bill to around fifty dollars per year, even in Saskatchewan!

Townscape WALTER JAMIESON,
University of Calgary, Chairman.

Five different western townscapes, actual or as envisaged by early-twentieth-century architects, were the focus of attention in this session. The first three speakers concentrated on cities that might have been. Edward M. Gibson, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, in *Townscape as Metaphor: New Westminster, British Columbia*, showed that city as it was planned by Clement Moody, Queen Victoria's chief military designer. His design was derived from the plans of New Orleans formulated by French architects. It was an expression of Imperialist views on social hierarchy and function, focusing on the Anglican cathedral and reflecting, in the choice of names, the concepts of British patriotism and colonial hierarchy prevalent at the turn of the century. The plans never came to fruition; changing ideals caused the substitution instead of the standard unimaginative North American grid pattern and street numbering.

The Characteristics of the City Beautiful Planning Movement, Vancouver – 1900-1930 were outlined by Douglas Franklin, University of Victoria. At the beginning of the century, the concepts expressed in the construction of the Chicago World's Fair were influential not only in the United States but also in Canada. Between 1902 and 1912, Vancouver purchased sixteen sites for parks. A lecture by landscape architect and planner Thomas H. Mawson, during which he expressed his view that horticulture was the symbol of high civilization, greatly impressed civic officials. Mawson's designs for Stanley Park and the Civic Centre Plan of his nephew Robert H. Mattocks and Theo Korner well expressed the 'City Beautiful' concepts; but the bitter frosts of the real-estate collapse and World War I caused them to wither before fruition.

The Work of Thomas H. Mawson in Calgary, outlined by E. Joyce Morrow, University of Calgary, produced plans that were even more grandiose and visionary. In some ways, the thinking expressed was very modern:

traffic flow was a major consideration and the use, as parks, of steep sites unsuitable for construction made good economic sense. However, the proposed site for art galleries and a museum on St. George's Island would have been unfortunate, since that island is liable to flooding; and the plans as a whole showed little consideration for the severe regional climate. For the same reasons as in Vancouver, the plans were never carried out.

The most forceful speech of the meeting was by Kent Gerecke, University of Manitoba, on *The Effects of Corporate Architecture on Canadian Urban Form*. Corporate buildings, he maintained, are almost wholly malign. They are shaped and dominated by large corporations interested only in the maximization of profits; city planners are their witting – or unwitting – accomplices. Large private land banks have a grip on Canadian suburbia, and franchises have imposed a blandness and uniformity of design. Peripheral shopping centres and street layout have combined to force people living in suburbia into a circuit that often does not extend downtown. The downtown shopping centres have a 'lobster-trap' design which lets you in, won't easily let you out, and makes you race around and consume. The street, with its individual culture, is being destroyed and replaced by the controlled mall; city design emphasizes, not enjoyment, but *consumption*; there is a reduction of diversity, a loss of aesthetics, and a trivialization of personal experience. The remedies are available – zoning for mixed uses, user input into design, the 'repatriation' of our cities by people – but they need to be applied soon if they are to take effect in time.

The beneficial effects of citizen action in steering urban development were made evident in the last speech of this session. *The Saskatchewan River Project*, as outlined by its architect, Raymond Moriyama of Toronto, developed as a response to such action. Some 415 square kilometres of land, along 80 kilometres of the South Saskatchewan River through the city of Saskatoon and the surrounding municipality of Corman Park, are included in a 100-year master plan to be enacted under the auspices of the new Meewasin Valley Authority. This will be controlled by a joint civic, provincial and University committee. The Meewasin scheme proposes a complex of park areas, interpretative and recreational centres, controlled satellite communities, and industrial parks. A 'buffer zone' in downtown Saskatoon will, it is hoped, shield the river area at least from succumbing to corporate pressures.

Western Architecture MARTIN SEGGER,
University of Victoria, Chairman.

Ukrainian settlement has been a major factor in the history of western Canada; and the first two papers of this last session were appropriately devoted to it. John C. Lehr, University of Winnipeg, spoke on *Transfer, Discard, and Survival: Ukrainian Architecture in Western*



FIGURE 2. SSAC members visiting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, St. Julien, Saskatchewan (Photo: W.A.S. Sarjeant).

Canada. The truly Ukrainian buildings of the western provinces stemmed essentially from the first phase of settlement, between 1891 and 1914. The settlers were Galician and Bukovinan peasants coming not from the steppes, as popularly supposed, but from wooded areas: they consequently avoided the open prairie and settled instead in the aspen parklands belt. 'Frame-and-fill' construction techniques used in the Ukraine, where good timber was expensive, were appropriate also in western Canada, where such timber was simply not available. Vertical lumbering, a new feature, was employed where the timber was particularly poor. The Bukovinians belonged to the Greek Orthodox church; they built houses that were thatched, with hipped gables, two roof vents, a central chimney, and flared eave-brackets, and they preferred greens in their colour scheme. The Galicians belonged to the Greek Catholic church; they built smaller houses with gables and a central chimney, less characteristic and more Germanic in appearance, emphasizing blue colours.

The account by Gerald Luciuk, Regina, of *The Ukrainian Church Architecture of Saskatchewan* was an appropriate follow-up to Lehr's paper. The type and nature of churches varied greatly, according to the characteristics of the particular settlement – its size and economic structure, its degree of involvement in religious turmoils, the availability of architects, and the frequency of services. The earlier churches accorded with designs traditional in various regions of the Ukraine, but with time there was a steady shrinkage of traditional elements, so that some of the modern churches seem only the parodies or caricatures of classic Ukrainian styles.

In a presentation prepared by Lyle Dick, Parks Canada, Prairie Region, and Jean-Claude Lebeuf and

presented by the former, an analysis was made of *Social History in Architecture: The Stone House of W.R. Motherwell, Abernethy, Saskatchewan*. When stone houses were built on the Prairies to replace frame houses, the Italianate style of eastern Canada and the United States was widely adopted. Lanark Place, the Hon. W.R. Motherwell's farmhouse near Abernethy, accords closely to a design for 'A Cheap Farmhouse' published in the *Canada Farmer*. The structure of the house, with its separation of the formal from the living areas and of the latter from the servants' quarters, is a clear reflection of contemporary mores.

Walter Hildebrandt, Parks Canada, Winnipeg, also stressed the influence of Victorian social influences in *Architecture of the North-West Mounted Police: Fort Battleford, A Case Study*. Though the design showed simplification to allow for the lack of skilled labour on the frontier, it was essentially very much an imperial style.

Those who are concerned to see the best Canadian architecture of the past preserved for posterity count *Winnipeg's Warehouse District* among the greatest of (present and potential) successes; though, in his account, C.I. Brook, City of Winnipeg, noted that some victories have yet to be won. The warehouse district came into being around 1878, with the construction of the market building, grain exchange, and major hotels in this area. In 1975, Heritage Canada commissioned William Thompson of the University of Manitoba to examine the area as a potential heritage conservation district. Thereafter, Heritage Canada and the Province of Manitoba each offered substantial contributions (\$500,000 each) to the City of Winnipeg, subject to matching city funds being made available and design control and designation bylaws being passed. These

involve control of uses (with the encouragement of residential use), restrictions on building height, specification of building materials to be used, and control of signs. The result has been the preservation and the revitalization of the district; a singular success that is justly admired.

Though attempts are being made to protect the architecture of the period just before World War 1, there is little recognition of the need to protect architecture of more recent date. Yet the changes in style during the last fifty years have been profound, changing from a traditional classical style to the glass-and-steel structures of today, and examples of some of the stages of this transition are already becoming few. This point was stressed by Trevor Boddy, University of Calgary, in his lengthy account of *Modern Architecture in Alberta from 1925*. In general, Alberta architecture lagged behind world trends until the late 'sixties. Peter Hemingway's design of 1968 for the Stanley building in Edmonton initiated a more rapid response to world concepts. Douglas Cardinal of Edmonton was indeed a trend-setter; his curvilinear design for St. Mary's Church in Red Deer and his other buildings can almost be characterised as 'post-modern.'

The Saskatoon Region

The last presentation of the meeting bridged the lecture-theatre sessions and the excursions. John

Duerkop, Saskatoon, gave *An Introduction to Saskatoon* that was an immediate preliminary to a coach tour of the city conducted by Donald C. Kerr and himself. The crucial surviving historic buildings from the days of the original Temperance Colony and the later phases of Saskatoon's growth were pointed out.

A tour on the final day of the meeting (Figs. 1-3) allowed participants to see many buildings and sites. These included energy-conserving solar houses in the Lawson Heights development in northwest Saskatoon, the 'strassendorf' Mennonite village of Neudorf, the Letkeman house-barn (the last of its kind to survive), the old Rosthern experimental farm (now a Mennonite nursing home), and a tour of Rosthern that included a dusty visit to a grain elevator and a delving among blueprints in the opera house on the second floor of the old City Hall. The tour continued past the first Mennonite church in the region at Eigenheim to reconstructed Fort Carlton, over the St. Laurent Ferry to visit Batoche and the battlefield site of the Riel Rebellion, and to see surviving Métis log buildings. The beautiful Ukrainian Orthodox Church at St. Julien was followed by an excellent Ukrainian meal in the community hall at Alvena. Finally the group returned to Saskatoon under an orange sunset that gave final brightness to an excellent excursion.

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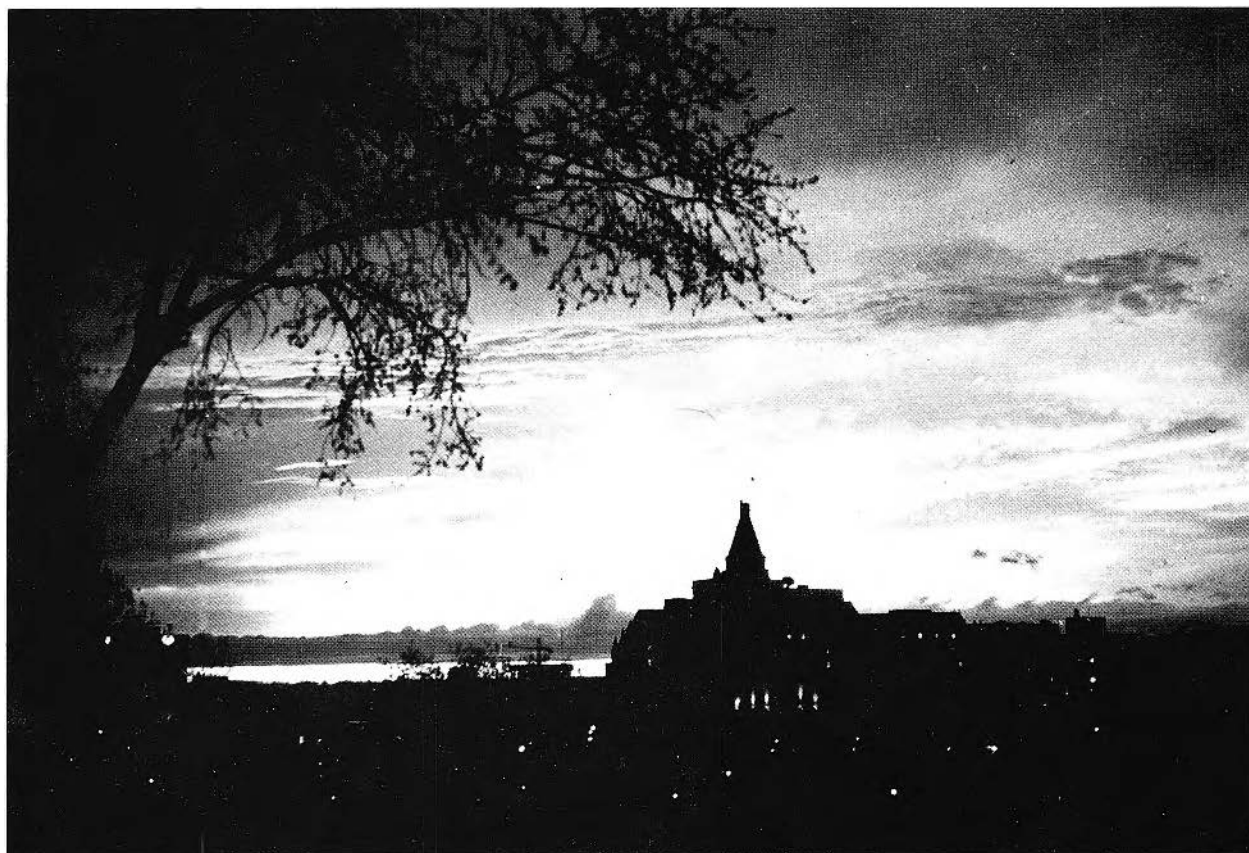


FIGURE 3. Sunset over the Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon (Photo: W.A.S. Sarjeant).