

The Landscape Architecture of Frederick Todd
Frederick G. Todd: Landscape Architecture for Urban Canada, 1900-1940. An exhibition held at the McCord Museum, Montréal, 9 July – 21 September 1980. No catalogue

John Bland

Volume 7, Number 1-2, 1980

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076884ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076884ar>

[See table of contents](#)

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

Bland, J. (1980). Review of [The Landscape Architecture of Frederick Todd / *Frederick G. Todd: Landscape Architecture for Urban Canada, 1900-1940. An exhibition held at the McCord Museum, Montréal, 9 July – 21 September 1980. No catalogue*]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 7(1-2), 111–113. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076884ar>

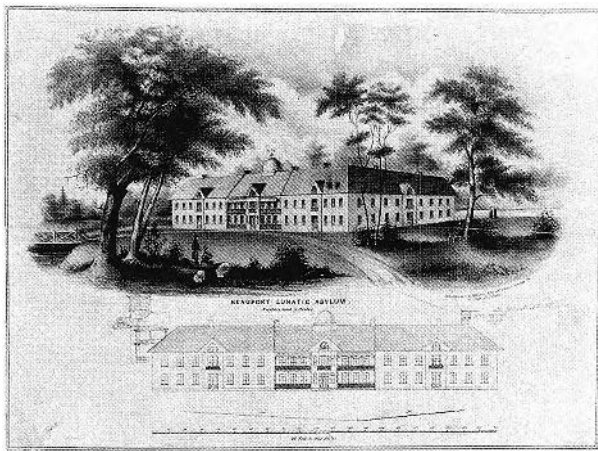


FIGURE 4. *Beauport Lunatic Asylum. Neighbourhood of Quebec.* Lithographed by G. Matthews, Montréal, from a drawing by R.C. Todd. Cat. 101. Ottawa, Public Archives of Canada (Photo: Public Archives of Canada).

on printmaking in Canada prior to 1850 (Fig. 4), Allodi is ploughing new and exciting ground. The catalogue is a 'steal' at \$5.00 (better that copies sell than collect dust) and is an invaluable reference for ongoing research, inviting comparison to parallel trends in Europe and the United States. Her study will put collectors, curators, and other interested parties on the alert for other early views and portraits, and no doubt will result in the modification of statistics concerning rarity. Allodi was delighted with the extension of the activity dates of John Gillespie as a result of my locating an uncoloured lithographic portrait inscribed *Duncan McNab of Islay Esq' [Toronto C.W. 1860] J. Gillespie del. [Drawn by Jno Ellis Lith' Toronto (Daly House Museum, Brandon, Manitoba).* New discoveries could well lead to a sequel to the present exhibition. If Allodi ever had reservations about the timeliness of this event, she should lay them to rest and be justly proud of her achievement.

W. MARTHA E. COOKE
Winnipeg

The Landscape Architecture of Frederick Todd

Frederick G. Todd: Landscape Architecture for Urban Canada, 1900-1940. An exhibition held at the McCord Museum, Montréal, 9 July–21 September 1980. No catalogue.

Frederick Todd was Canada's first resident landscape architect. He was born in Concord, New Hampshire, on 11 March 1876, and died in Montréal in 1948. He was one of a notable group of professional men from the United States who came to Canada about the turn of the century. The exhibition is the first major one to be devoted to his work. It has been organized by Peter Jacobs of the School of Landscape Architecture of the Université de Montréal. Above all, it presents a picture of a humanist concerned with people and their relationship to nature. It tells the story of a young New Englander, with late-nineteenth-century schooling and four years' apprenticeship with the Olmstedes, who came to Montréal and spent a lifetime developing pleasant places for people to live and visit from British Columbia to Newfoundland.

Frederick Law Olmsted was 64 and his son was 26 when, in 1896, Todd began to work in their office in Brookline, Massachusetts, as a man of 20. By then all of their great parks had been completed and town planning was their interest. In four years Todd learned their landscape and planning principles, particularly

the idea of achieving works of beauty and utility with 'nature herself as partner.' It also seems likely he learned a good deal from old Olmsted the writer and social reformer. For example, in the comments he makes upon the park movement near the beginning of his career in Canada, Todd stresses that 'people whose lives are lived among the bustle and strife of a large city require some place where they can rest after the day's exertion: mothers with little ones, whose life in the narrow tenements is ill-suited to fit them for life's battle: to all these what a boon are the public parks where the air at least is more pure than on the street and the children can romp on the grass or roam through the woods.' And, towards the end of his career, he explains that 'St. Helens Island Park [Fig. 1] will provide Montreal's underprivileged citizens with a much needed rest and recreation centre. Within walking distance of the homes of 100,000 people, it is also readily accessible to others who live further away.' And in describing the execution of the work, he expresses his 'satisfaction of seeing men who had been out of work and on the dole for years, "finding" themselves again through honest toil. For over a year and a half more than 1,000 men, representing almost every trade and including ordinary laborers as well, have been at work on the island. They have received standard wages and of course, have been expected to



FIGURE 1. Frederick Todd, Bathing Beach, St. Helen's Island Park, Montréal. From *The McGill News*, Summer 1938 (Photo: McCord Museum).

do a regular day's work. Fresh from the relief rolls many of them at first presented a discouraged, under-nourished appearance and found it difficult to do a full day's work, but after two or three weeks their discouraged and beaten aspect disappeared.'

While the exhibition is primarily an assemblage of architectural drawings, site plans, and documentary photographs both vintage and contemporary, it includes an impressive amount of text, which illustrates more explicitly than other items the depth and consistency of Todd's concerns. It appears to have been well selected from his own writing, culled from published articles, announcements of projects, letters to clients, and from reviews written by others which so nicely capture his point of view – the words might well be his. Part of this text accompanies photo portraits showing a sensitive and alert face gradually maturing and giving a feeling of time to the exhibition (Fig. 2), which is otherwise organized into four groups representing key facets of Todd's professional career. These are Urban Parks, Site Planning, Town Planning, and Public Works. In each group a set of projects has been selected to highlight particular social conditions in Canada. Under Urban Parks we find Wascana at Regina (the setting of the provincial legislature), Assiniboine at Winnipeg (a park in a city residential area), Mount Royal at Montréal (proposals for the 'look-out'), Battlefields at Québec (where a portion of the Plains of Abraham is reserved to represent the scene of the historic encounter), and Bowring (a city park) at St. John's. (In the area of the exhibition where Todd's proposal for the 'look-out' on Mount Royal is presented, a superb Notman photograph of the 'look-out' as built gives the impression that it was his design. It ought to have been attributed to Edward and W.S. Maxwell and J.O. Marchand, who were its designers.) Under Site Planning there are the grounds of old Trinity College at Toronto (Todd's first commission in Canada, for which he was recommended by Olmsted), the Sewell Garden (a private garden) at Montebello, Bowling Green (a sub-division) at Pointe Claire,



FIGURE 2. Frederick Todd, (left) and M.N. Bourdeau. From *L'Oratoire*, April 1948 (Photo: McCord Museum).

Memorial Park (a garden cemetery without tombstones) at Ville Saint-Laurent, and the Way of the Cross (a devotional garden for pilgrims visiting Saint Joseph's Oratory) at Montréal. The Town Planning group includes proposals made for the Ottawa Improvement Commission in 1903 (which comprised many of the features of later Ottawa plans), Shaughnessy Heights, Point Grey, and Port Mann in Vancouver, and the Town of Mount Royal at Montréal. The Public Works group includes St. Helens Island, Maisonneuve Park, Morgan Park, and Beaver Lake (a pond in Mount Royal Park originally proposed by Olmsted to make use of marshy ground that was otherwise of little value). All of the public works were Montréal make-work projects of the depression period, basically humanitarian and American in concept. One can imagine it was not an accident that Todd was commissioned to supervise their execution. He probably conceived them in the first place.

FIGURE 3. Frederick Todd, Wascana Park, Regina, with the Legislative Building in the background (Photo: McCord Museum).





FIGURE 4. Frederick G. Todd. View of installation (Photo: McCord Museum).

While many of the photographs in the exhibition are early views of works and are interesting in themselves – such as the Garden City Press at Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue, which shows an industrial building in a garden setting, with tennis courts and a boulevard leading to ideal workers' housing – a few modern photographs show some of his works as they are now – the fulfilment of the plans. They provide convincing evidence of foresight and technical skill. None are more impressive in this respect than the modern views of Wascana Park showing the great parliamentary

building 'floating' above trees, and the huge pond in a woodland setting (Fig. 3). Comparing them with the bleak scenes of 1911, none could fail to appreciate the quality and extent of Todd's imagination.

The plans and drawings in the exhibition show Todd's way of creating spaces and hiding roads and other ugly items, related to parks and living spaces, by trees; they show his fundamental natural and romantic approach but they are not impressive drawings. Since parks are largely visual experiences – megasculpture – plans are inadequate to describe them. The drawings in the exhibition give the impression of being instructions to planters, or skimpy illustrations for reports for people interested in areas used. They are poor pictures of imaginative intention.

Todd was fortunate in being an articulate writer and the organizer of the exhibition is to be complimented upon his selection and courage in using so much text, particularly as every word of it is in two languages. The idea of presenting a good deal of the text on horizontal surfaces provided by the tops of numerous pedestals so as not to overburden the wall compositions of drawings and photographs, themselves discretely labeled for precise information, is brilliant (Fig. 4). One wonders whether the grave markers which Todd sank in the grass of the Memorial Park Cemetery to avoid the clutter of tombstones may have suggested it.

JOHN BLAND
Ste.-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec

Two Looks at the Art Press

The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines. An exhibition organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 10 February–25 March 1979.

The Art and Pictorial Press in Canada. An exhibition organized by and held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 10 February–25 March 1979

Related publications: Trevor Fawcett and Clive Phillpot, eds., *The Art Press: Two Centuries of Art Magazines.* London, The Art Book Company, 1976. (Art Documents, No. 1) 63 pp., 9 illus., \$29.95 (cloth), \$9.95 (paper). Karen McKenzie and Mary F. Williamson, eds., *The Art and Pictorial Press in Canada: Two Centuries of Art Magazines.* Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1979. 71 pp., 13 illus., \$7.50 (paper).

Art history, like any science, could scarcely exist without periodical publications. Journals provide the principal means for spreading scholarship, activities,

and opinion. The art press, fairly well taken for granted, has now been promoted to a subject worthy of study in its own right. To adapt McLuhan's tired aphorism, the medium has become the message.

Two separate ventures made up the exhibition under review. *The Art Press* is a critical outline of the development of the art periodical in Europe and, to a lesser extent, America. The show was organized in 1976 by Anthony Burton of the Victoria and Albert Museum's library, with assistance from the Art Book Company of London. Toronto's was its first showing since then. Canadian content was supplied by the Art Gallery of Ontario, which supplemented the exhibition with *The Art and Pictorial Press in Canada*. Each section was accompanied by a collection of essays on art periodicals rather than by a catalogue.

The Art Press was presented by means of photostatic reproductions of periodicals mounted on free-standing screens and accompanied by concise commentary. A selection of original periodicals culled from the E.P. Taylor Reference Library of the Art Gallery of Ontario