

Reconstruction Reconsidered: Thomas Adams's Role in Rebuilding the "Devastated Area" after the 1917 Halifax Disaster

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Article abstract

Though English urban planner Thomas Adams's connection with reconstruction after the 1917 Halifax Disaster ("Halifax Explosion") is well known, the precise nature and extent of his involvement has not been subject to rigorous research or informed analysis and, as a result, is neither known nor understood. Perhaps least-known is Adams's crucial working relationship with the Halifax Relief Commission, the federal government body set up seven weeks after the disaster to take complete charge of emergency management. This article addresses a significant lacuna in early Canadian planning history as well as in the history of recovery from the Halifax Disaster. The history of reconstruction itself, which has yet to be written, can ill-afford to magnify or misrepresent Adams's significant contribution to it.

Reconstruction Reconsidered: Thomas Adams's Role in Rebuilding the "Devastated Area" after the 1917 Halifax Disaster^I

Barry Cabill

Though English urban planner Thomas Adams's connection with reconstruction after the 1917 Halifax Disaster ("Halifax Explosion") is well known, the precise nature and extent of his involvement has not been subject to rigorous research or informed analysis and, as a result, is neither known nor understood. Perhaps least-known is Adams's crucial working relationship with the Halifax Relief Commission, the federal government body set up seven weeks after the disaster to take complete charge of emergency management. This article addresses a significant lacuna in early Canadian planning history as well as in the history of recovery from the Halifax Disaster. The history of reconstruction itself, which has yet to be written, can ill-afford to magnify or misrepresent Adams's significant contribution to it.

Bien que le lien de l'urbaniste anglais Thomas Adam avec la reconstruction suivant l'« Explosion de Halifax » de 1917 soit connu, la nature précise et l'ampleur de sa contribution n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une recherche rigoureuse ou d'une analyse méthodique. Elle n'est par conséquent ni bien comprise, ni même bien connue. Ce que l'on connaît probablement le moins consiste en sa relation de travail cruciale avec la Halifax Relief Commission, instance du gouvernement fédéral qui a été établie sept semaines après le désastre afin d'assumer complètement la gestion des mesures d'urgence. Cet article aborde une lacune significative des débuts de l'histoire canadienne de l'urbanisme, ainsi que de l'histoire du rétablissement de Halifax suivant l'explosion de 1917. L'histoire même de la reconstruction, qui est encore à faire, peut difficilement amplifier ou déformer la contribution significative d'Adams.

Introduction

The catastrophic Halifax Disaster² of 6 December 1917 saw 132 hectares of the densely populated and heavily industrialized North End of Halifax destroyed or badly damaged as the result of the explosion of a munitions vessel in Halifax Harbour. Though the disaster and its enduring impact have been much written about,³ the work of reconstructing the Devastated Area

has barely been studied.⁴ This article makes a contribution to redressing that omission.

One aspect of the reconstruction that does seem widely known—it is mentioned by virtually all chroniclers of the disaster—is that it involved the celebrated British town planner Thomas Adams (1871–1940).⁵ Yet with so little research done into the reconstruction, let alone into what Adams actually did, historians tend to offer rather vague descriptions of his role, such as that the Devastated Area was “turned over to city planners and Thomas Adams.”⁶ Such assertions leave much unsaid. Examining this reconstruction project as an episode of planning history, one wants to know more. What, precisely, was in Adams's plan? How readily was it accepted, and implemented? More generally, how much of present-day North End Halifax is the product of Thomas Adams's hand? As Richard White observes in his analysis of Jane Jacobs's impact on Toronto planning, locals can exaggerate the significance of internationally celebrated individuals living or working among them.⁷ So while the primary objective here is to recount, as accurately as possible from primary material, the process of planning the reconstruction of Halifax's Devastated Area, and thus to add some planning history to our understanding of this tragic but iconic event, a second, more specific objective is to determine what Thomas Adams contributed to that process.

Thomas Adams and Halifax

Adams was in Ottawa when the disaster occurred, on 6 December 1917, although as it happened he was working, quite by chance, on Halifax affairs at that time, serving as an adviser to the Halifax Planning Board. This coincidence has confused and misled more than one historian's recounting of these events. Adams had been in Canada for three years by then, working full time as the town planning adviser to the Canadian government's Commission of Conservation.⁸ He was already an accomplished planner when the government hired him, internationally recognized for his work with the English Garden City movement. His job was to advise not only the Commission of Conservation,

his employer, but to advocate and promote planning generally, advising cities and provinces across the dominion on planning legislation, planning boards, and planning itself. In this latter capacity he had visited Halifax on several occasions. He had been there in February 1915, addressing meetings and speaking to anyone who would listen about how town planning would benefit a distinctly unplanned conurbation like metropolitan Halifax.⁹ One of the fruits of his proselytizing was Nova Scotia's new Town Planning Act, passed in April 1915.¹⁰ Unmistakably Adams's brainchild, considerably more muscular than the 1912 Act it superseded, the new act required municipal governments to set up planning boards and enact planning bylaws. By this time Adams was also actively advising no fewer than ten other urban centres in the province, from Pictou to Yarmouth, on the subject of town planning.¹¹

The City of Halifax had formed its planning board early in 1916, a few months after the new act requiring it to do so was passed, and the board had then called upon Adams to devise a plan for them.¹² He began studying the city and its environs with a view to preparing a series of town planning schemes for areas both within the city and in the surrounding municipality of the county of Halifax. He worked at this for the better part of a year, and by late 1917 he was close to submitting reports to the planning boards of both municipal jurisdictions. Then disaster struck.

Within a few hours of the disaster, a citizens' committee was formed to manage response to the disaster, and on 10 December—a mere four days later—the Halifax Relief Committee, acting on advice from its reconstruction subcommittee, agreed to ask Thomas Adams to come to Halifax "at once" to assist them.¹³ Committee Secretary Ralph P. Bell telegraphed Adams, who complied, the federal Cabinet having by then already directed the Commission of Conservation to make his services available if asked. The next day Adams wrote the secretary of the city's planning board, which was still awaiting his report, not yet sure just what he was going to do: "Of course, I am willing to come to Halifax at short notice and render any assistance I can, but I do not think it is wise for anybody to visit the city just now unless he has a definite piece of work to engage in. The question of reconstruction is overshadowed for the moment by those which deal with the immediate questions of relief and medical treatment but I hope you will call on me as soon as these questions become less absorbing and the matter of reconstruction reaches a stage when I can be of service."¹⁴

In fact he did come at once, arriving on 13 December, but to meet the Halifax Relief Committee that had summoned him, not the planning board. The official record of the meeting reports Adams, clearly experienced in administrative matters, seeking to ensure "an understanding with the Managing Committee [Halifax Relief Committee], Reconstruction Committee [a subcommittee of the HRC] and Board of Control [city council's executive committee] as to the policy to be adopted in regard to the work of reconstruction."¹⁵

Following this discussion the committee asked Adams to prepare a brief report recommending how to proceed, which he did, and he presented that report the next day to an emergency meeting of the city's board of control.¹⁶ It was essentially a "next steps" document setting forth specifically how to prepare for reconstruction rather than how to undertake it. He reported that although he had made just a "hurried inspection of the Devastated Area," it had been enough to show him the magnitude and severity of the situation. "In my judgment the problems to be dealt with are so important and far-reaching that I think it may ultimately be necessary to appoint a small special commission representative of the federal, provincial and city governments to execute the plan and control the expenditure, other than the ordinary revenues of the city, that may be available to deal with the larger problems of reconstruction." The board of control, for its part, was sufficiently impressed that a week later it approved a resolution passed by the city's planning board that called on the city to ask the Commission of Conservation to grant Adams a formal leave of absence to enable him to devote his full time to Halifax.¹⁷

The Halifax Relief Commission

The "special commission" that Adams called for was created a month later—the Halifax Relief Commission, established by the Canadian government on 22 January 1918 by order-in-council under the War Measures Act. It was put in full charge of disaster relief, superseding the private citizens' Relief Committee set up right after the disaster. Reporting directly to Prime Minister Borden, the commission comprised Tecumseh Sherman Rogers, a Halifax corporate lawyer, as chair, Judge William Bernard Wallace, judge of the County Court, and Frederick Luther Fowke, a former mayor of Oshawa, as members. The commission was responsible for relief and rehabilitation, not for reconstruction.¹⁸

Adams made regular visits to the city and followed events closely. When the new commission's initial terms of reference became known in mid-January,¹⁹ he telegraphed R.T. MacIreith, chair of the Halifax Relief Committee, expressing dismay: "Published terms of reference to [sic] proposed commission seem inadequate to enable reconstruction and replanning to be properly done. Should commission not have this work definitely assigned to it, ... planning must proceed at same time as settlement of claims if to be effective."²⁰ Adams was a planner, and like planners before and since, he believed, above all, in a *comprehensive* approach to solving problems. He was also a town planning adviser, in fact a *senior* adviser, to government at all levels, and as such he felt entitled, even obliged, to speak out.

Before long the Halifax Relief Commission decided that Adams should come to Halifax to advise it now as well. Chairman Rogers, concerned as any conscientious lawyer would be about protocol, wrote Halifax's MP, A.K. MacLean, then acting minister of finance in the Borden government: "We think that he should be asked to come by the government rather than by the commission as he is now practically in the government employ,

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and at a suggestion from the premier [Prime Minister Borden] he will no doubt come to Halifax to confer with us. No matter what the ultimate government policy may be, Mr. Adams's services will be of use to us, and we think he should come at the earliest possible date."²¹

Arrangements were promptly made, and within a week Adams was in Halifax, by now having been formally seconded by his employer to work full time for the Halifax Relief Commission.

Adams met the commission on 1 March 1918.²² The main subject of discussion was the commission's role in reconstruction, which, as things stood, its mandate did not include. Adams believed it should include this, but it is not clear from the official record how successful he was at convincing members of the commission at this point. One other important matter raised was how the City of Halifax and its planning board—which Adams had been advising prior to the Disaster—would be involved, and it was accepted that, notwithstanding the value of a co-ordinated approach, the planning board would continue along its own path, without Adams, devising a city-wide planning scheme, perhaps drawing upon some of the Relief Commission's funds if it needed to purchase property. Adams expressed disappointment that the railway companies were not being brought into the planning process, for their waterfront lines and equipment had all been damaged and needed to be rebuilt, but he seems to have had no success changing minds on this. Yet the general tenor of the meeting must have been congenial, despite the fact that the new Relief Commission did not have the powers or breadth of responsibility Adams thought it should; the official record reports that "Mr Adams left expressing great satisfaction at the attitude assumed by the commission."

But Adams had not given up. He presented his views in Halifax's *Evening Mail* on 4 March 1918, decrying the commission's limited mandate and offering a six-point agenda for effective reconstruction. "The Relief Commission has no responsibility to deal with permanent housing or reconstruction as such, and it has no funds in sight for that purpose. The province and the city will have to take on a large part of the burden if anything is to be done."²³ Instead, Adams asserted, the new commission should:

- Set out a policy for reconstruction and be organized for that purpose
- Include in its mandate architectural and engineering supervision of all construction
- Coordinate its plans with those of the city and the naval, military, and railway authorities
- See that the provincial government appoints a town planning and housing controller²⁴
- Encourage government and local authorities to provide a special fund for housing as an investment necessitated by war conditions
- Cooperate with the town planning board in the preparation of a scheme worthy of Halifax

Here again is the voice of the planner. Adams was viewing the situation holistically, as he had earlier, drawing on his experience

as a planner and as an advisor to governments of all levels. But he was also attempting to impress on the authorities that reconstruction of the Devastated Area was a providential opportunity for civic improvement, for remaking a part of the city, which had not been properly built or efficiently laid out in the first place and had already begun to decline. The district could be made better. Moreover this planning should be conceived beyond the district level: properly planned reconstruction of the Devastated Area would make Halifax better overall.

A few days later, on the very day Ottawa granted the Halifax Relief Commission \$7 million more than the \$5 million it had already committed, Adams published a more elaborate assessment of the situation on the front page of the magazine section of Toronto's *Daily News*, making similar points.²⁵ It began, "There are two problems to be dealt with at Halifax in connection with restoration. One is the restoration of the property of individual owners and the relief of those who have suffered from the disaster, and the other is the structural restoration or reconstruction of the devastated and injured parts of the city. It is necessary to keep these two matters distinct in order to understand what can be done to improve the city under any scheme of reconstruction."

Adams went on to say that if reconstruction were not properly carried out, if millions were spent on just relief and rehabilitation, Halifax as a city might actually be worse off than before the disaster. These ideas may have been gaining appeal among members of the Relief Commission, but not among the surviving victims. Survivors, for the most part, desired not only full compensation for their losses but also, essentially, a resumption of the status quo ante: old Richmond redux. They wanted their old lives back. Adams, the planner, wanted to give them new, better lives.

Adams was not yet finished. He was, one should not forget, an accomplished writer who had begun his professional career as a journalist—he is said to have published as many as 139 articles and books during his seven years with the Commission of Conservation²⁶—and he would remain a relentless commentator and defender of his positions throughout his career. On 21 March 1918 he published an article in the fifty-six-page reconstruction number of Halifax's *Evening Mail* ("How Halifax May Gain Thru' the Disaster"), which sheds further light on his objectives for reconstruction: "The main duty of the Relief Commission will be very hard to fulfill—The question of real gain or loss will depend partly on the spirit of Halifax—Expert skill in architecture and engineering problems of rebuilding is vitally necessary—Replanning apparently not a question for the Halifax Relief Commission—It will be a misfortune if replanning should be left in abeyance—A historical example for Halifax taken from London 251 years ago—An example of what might have been is furnished also in the fire in Ottawa and Hull [1900]."²⁷

Citing James Elmes's biography of Sir Christopher Wren,²⁸ who devised a plan for rebuilding London—unrealized, it turned out—after the Great Fire of 1666, Adams warned of the

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"insurmountable difficulty" posed by the "obstinate adverseness of a great part of the citizens to alter their own properties and to recede from building their own houses on the old ground and foundations." Here Adams is observing and lamenting the locals' reluctance to accept comprehensive rebuilding. "Therefore, it seems to be the intention that the question of replanning and redeveloping the Devastated Area, as well as the larger problem of preparing a development scheme for the city, is to be left to the existing authorities." Such an approach, he was predicting, would stand in the way of the needed improvements.

The true beginning of Adams's work with the Halifax Relief Commission fell on 10 April 1918. He attended three meetings that day, one a "lengthy conference" with Chairman Rogers, another a guided tour of the Devastated Area conducted by Commission Secretary Ralph Bell. And the third seems to have been a full meeting at which the general business of the commission was discussed. Before leaving the last, Adams made a number of requests that suggest planning work was imminent:

1. that arrangements be made with Pickings [the commission's consulting engineer] for him to map out the Devastated Area, showing individual lots and details about ownership;
2. that Mr. Ross [the commission's architect] should immediately report on materials available for reconstruction, quoting prices; and
3. that the government [provincial or municipal?] should suggest to the federal government the advisability of placing at Mr Adams's disposal an engineer to work with him in connection with replanning Halifax.²⁹

Discussions lasted most of the day and into the night, the final session being a conference at Adams's hotel among himself, Chairman Rogers and ex-Chairman (of the Halifax Relief Committee) Macleith on the subject of the provincial bill to incorporate the commission. Adams had evidently won the argument for expanding the commission's mandate, because the bill, formally enacted two weeks later, gave the commission full responsibility for reconstruction of the Devastated Area. The Relief Commission could now engage Adams to do the required planning.

Planning Reconstruction

Work progressed quickly from this point onward. On 6 July Adams submitted to Chairman Rogers his "Preliminary Report on the Planning of the Devastated Area at Halifax."³⁰ Its section headings reveal its scope: introduction, general economic considerations, proposed new streets, widening of Barrington Street (eastern extremity of Devastated Area), straightening of Barrington Street, lands to be expropriated, open spaces, and application to Nova Scotia government for approval to proceed with a town planning scheme (the purpose of which, as defined in the Town Planning Act, was to set out specifications for the project). "In this preliminary report," he wrote, "I propose to confirm suggestions which I made you at our two interviews in Ottawa [May 1918] and Halifax [April], and will deal only with matters which I understand to be urgent. A more extended report and a plan and estimates will be sent you when the plan

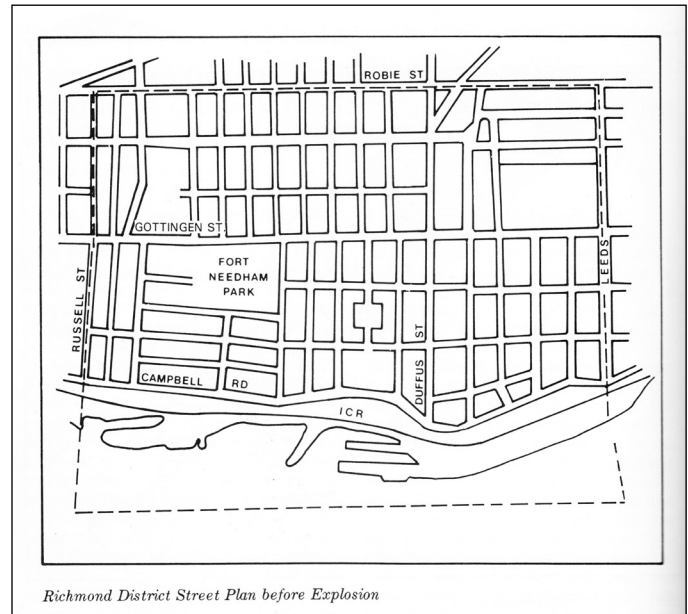


Figure 1. Richmond District Street Plan before the Disaster. Reproduced from John C. Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District of Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918–1921," *Plan Canada* (March 1976): 38

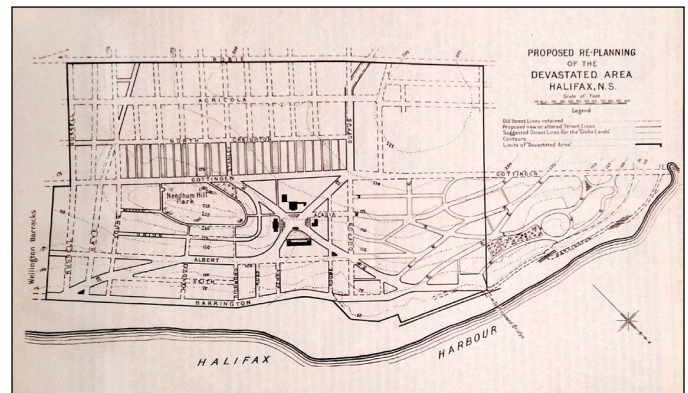


Figure 2. Thomas Adams's Plan for the Devastated Area, showing elevation contours (broken lines) as well as streets. Reproduced from Horace Llewellyn Seymour, "Town Planning in Halifax and Vicinity," *Journal of the Engineering Institute of Canada* 1, no. 5 (October 1918): 264

and survey, which is now in course of being carried out, is completed. A print of a draft plan is sent herewith to illustrate points referred to in this report."

Adams's suggestions were accepted, and the plan itself—*Proposed Re-Planning of the Devastated Area, Halifax N.S.*—was completed in August 1918. Adams came to Halifax to present it in person to the commission.

The explanatory note states,

The main features of this tentative scheme for the replanning of the Devastated Area ... is [sic] the substitution of diagonal streets for the old rectangular layout. Two main diagonal thoroughfares are provided [Dartmouth and Devonshire Avenues], 80 ft. wide, of which the grades will generally be from 4 to 5.5 per cent, replacing grades

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of 8 to 20 in the former street arrangement. While 508,370 square feet of land is included in these new diagonal streets, there is a possible saving of streets, waste land, etc. of 433,140 square feet. Fort Needham, which is one of the highest points in the city, is to be developed into a park. At the northwest [*sic*: northeast] corner of the Devastated Area is shown the proposed location of a bridge across the narrows at Dartmouth.³¹

The plan indicated the position of old street lines to be retained, proposed new or altered street lines, suggested street lines for the previously undeveloped "glebe lands" (formerly belonging to St. Paul's Church of England),³² and contours and limits of the Devastated Area.

In September 1918 Adams's assistant, engineer H.L. (Horace Lewellyn) Seymour presented a paper on the plan to a meeting of the Engineering Institute of Canada, of which he was a member. That paper, subsequently published in the institute's *Transactions*, sets out the plan's seven specific objectives:³³

- More direct access in a northwesterly direction at an easy grade from Barrington Street at its southern end, nearest to the city, by a diagonal route to Gottingen Street.
- More direct access in a southeasterly direction from Barrington Street, near to the point where it will connect with any bridge that may be constructed over The Narrows [of Halifax Harbour] to Gottingen Street.
- Extension of Albert Street to the extreme southerly boundary so as to ensure the linking up of this street with the ultimate continuation of Brunswick Street³⁴ ... thus making Albert Street a through thoroughfare from the centre of the city.
- Laying out of curved streets in areas not already subdivided or built upon, so as to get easy grades and convenient building sites and link up with the rectangular development already carried on.
- Provision of a central square suitable for the erection of public buildings...
- Preservation of existing paved streets, sewers and water mains as far as possible.
- Increase of the industrial area and waterfront, as far as practicable consistent with maintaining the convenience and directness of Barrington Street.³⁵

Adams had plenty to say about the scheme as well, and in fact became something of a propagandist for it. One illustration is the article he published in Toronto's *Contract Record* in August 1918, the month the plan was completed, the title of which—"The Planning of the New Halifax"—reveals, yet again, his vision of moving beyond the status quo ("New") and of this district plan being an element of a city-wide plan ("Halifax"). It also reveals that the Halifax Relief Commission had already begun preliminary work, even before it received Adams's plan: "The work of planning the Devastated Area in Halifax has been proceeding for the past six months. Good progress has been made in regard to the fixing of the boundaries of the areas, surveying lines and fixing grades for main arterial thoroughfares, determining building lines, selecting portions available for residential and industrial development and carrying out the preliminary procedure under the Nova Scotia [Town Planning] Act."³⁶

Noteworthy as well in this piece is that this work was being done under the province's new Town Planning Act, which gave

planners the powers they needed to shape new development; Seymour had noted this in his paper as well.

Adams also had a paper of his delivered on his behalf in August 1918 at the annual conference of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, of which Adams was described as "an old friend ... and a constant and valuable helper in our work."³⁷ It did not address the Halifax situation specifically, as Chairman Rogers was dealing with that in his own paper (which was not printed and does not survive), but it made some revealing points: "Mr Rogers has told you something of the special reconstruction work and town planning that is being carried on at Halifax. It is an inspiring thing in those of us who for long have been pleading for the application of business principles to the development of land that the work at Halifax is being carried out in the main on these principles. But the greatest value of that work will not be in what is done but in the manner in which we follow it as a guide for improving our methods of developing the province as a whole."³⁸

By "business principles" Adams is referring to the notion that plans should propose programs of work that public authorities can carry out in a financially sound manner and concern themselves with practical, rather than aesthetic, matters. This approach, which was gaining support in planning and municipal government circles, was possible only when planning was done comprehensively. Adams became a staunch proponent of this approach in his later work in New York.³⁹

It is hard to determine precisely what occurred in the following months. In November 1918 the Halifax Relief Commission sent Adams, by then back in Ottawa doing other work for the Commission of Conservation, a copy of the province's authorization for it to prepare a town planning scheme for the Devastated Area; this gave the commission, as noted above, permission to move on to detailed design and specifications and, essentially, to begin implementing its plan. Adams acknowledged receipt quite tersely, stating his hope "that you will be able to get forward with the next stage at an early date."⁴⁰ This seems to have been the end of it. Adams would play no role in refining his plan or overseeing its implementation. His work for the Halifax Relief Commission was done.

There is no record of his tendering a final report to the Relief Commission. He did, however, submit a formal report on the job to his employer, the Commission of Conservation, a few months later, clearly expressing disappointment:

I am not able to say anything very definite with regard to the extent to which this plan is being carried out. My latest information on that point is not quite satisfactory. I hesitate to say anything of a critical nature of what is being done in Halifax, but personally I am not satisfied with what has been accomplished. The absence of any expert advice on the Relief Commission itself must be regarded as a matter of extreme disappointment, although, for personal reasons, I was opposed to the suggestion made on behalf of this commission [Commission of Conservation] that I should be made a member of the Relief Commission.⁴¹

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Adams would not be the last design professional to be disappointed at what seemed likely to be laymen's inept implementation of a carefully conceived design. He was also chagrined that the Relief Commission had declined to retain his assistant and protégé H.L. Seymour to carry on his work, favouring instead a local engineering firm.

Adams seems to have ceased all communication with authorities in Halifax soon after this. The author of a dissertation on the impact of the disaster, published in 1920, reported "progress in street-opening, in grading of the slope and in architectural treatment of the houses" and "Five hundred trees and three hundred shrubs have been ordered to be planted in this area."¹⁴² So reconstruction was occurring, but Adams was playing no part in it.

Adams did return to Halifax in March 1921, part of a sponsored cross-country tour of Canadian universities, to speak at a meeting of the engineering, law, and arts and science students at Dalhousie University on the history, scope, and future of town planning.¹⁴³ In concluding his speech, Adams "commended the work done by the Halifax Relief Commission in carrying out the plan of the Richmond Heights and hoped it would be carried through to completion with the cooperation of the city."¹⁴⁴ But by then cooperation between the Relief Commission and the City of Halifax was at an end (if there had ever been any), and Adams's plan for the Devastated Area never was integrated into

an overall city plan. Adams opted not to meet with the current members of the Relief Commission during this visit, but he did speak with the commission's comptroller, William Evan Tibbs (a fellow English expatriate), who attended his lecture and to whom Adams afterwards offered his thoughts. As reported by Tibbs, "Adams expressed himself pleased with the development so far as it has gone, but pointed out that in his opinion the lands on the east side of the diagonal running from Gottingen to Barrington Streets [Devonshire Avenue], where the filling has made it unsuitable for dwelling purposes, should be laid out in playgrounds as the cost to make this suitable for building purposes would be prohibitive."¹⁴⁵

At about the same time an article of Adams's was published in which he reported, "Considerable progress has been made during the past year in constructing the diagonal road [Devonshire Avenue] through the Devastated Area at Halifax. The first building on the central area is a large school [new Richmond] which is now well advanced toward completion."¹⁴⁶ So he was still following reconstruction and seems to have come to terms with his exclusion from it. But Adams had moved on, in both mind and body. As far as can be determined, he never visited Halifax again, and he seems not to have published anything further on the project.

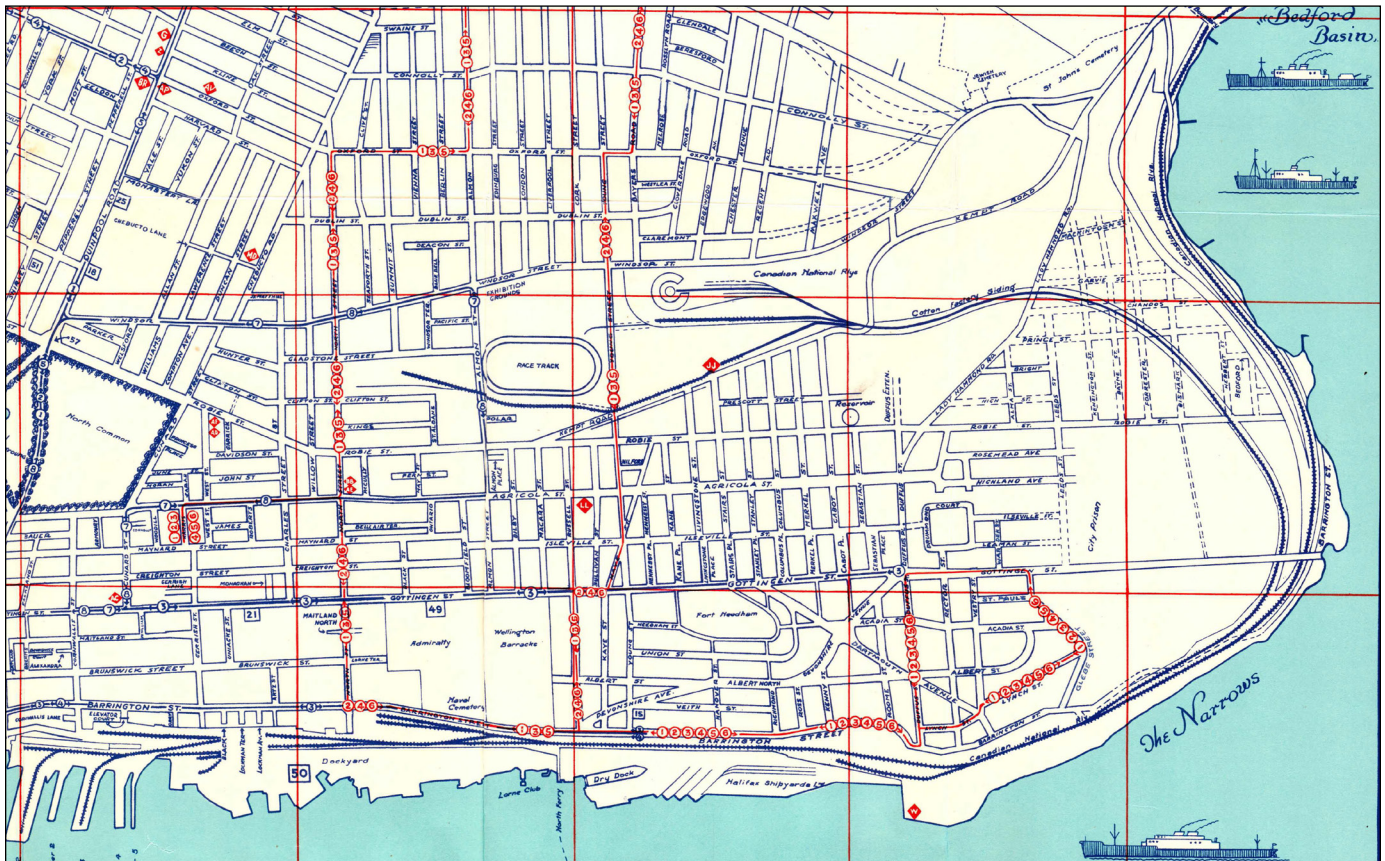


Figure 3. Detail from a 1945 map of Halifax, showing several elements of Adams's plan for the Devastated Area in place. Source: "The Only Authentic Map of the City of Halifax and Town of Dartmouth ..." (Halifax: The Maritime Merchant Limited 1945) [segment]

Adams's Impact

How important was Thomas Adams to all of this? Planners do not shape urban environments as completely as is often thought. They usually lay out street lines, prescribe major land uses, and sometimes specify lot lines and sizes, but they rarely design the buildings or public spaces that give a neighbourhood its character, which, in most cases, are created over several years. With that general caveat in mind, how much impact did Adams's plan for Halifax's Devastated Area have?

A good part of the old rectilinear street grid on the slope up from the harbour was replaced as Adams proposed, the key element being Devonshire Avenue, a major road that, as a diagonal, could ascend the grade gradually. As Seymour explicitly stated, this was a prime objective. The second diagonal in the scheme, named Dartmouth Avenue on Adams's plan, was partly built, though not as a thoroughfare, so its intended function never fully materialized. Nor did a town square surrounded by public buildings ever develop at the intersection of the two major diagonals; the only public building erected on this site was the new Richmond School, now home to the Family Division of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. This is more than a minor deviation, for the missing public square considerably dilutes the plan's vision of a coherent, defined neighbourhood. The park atop Fort Needham hill was created where Adams called for it, though not until the 1950s.⁴⁷ The most striking absence is the extensive area of curving residential streets he laid out on the undeveloped "glebe lands" north of Duffus Street. Nothing of the sort ever appeared. The Halifax Relief Commission later did develop the area, with modest detached houses, on small lots, but with streets laid out in a fairly conventional grid.

The most significant element of Adams's plan that was realized is the stretch of "terraced housing" as Adams would have called it—the English term for row houses—west of Gottingen, "Hydrostone" as it came to be called, referring to the name for the locally produced concrete blocks used in the buildings. Though he did not design the buildings and probably played no part in choosing the building material that gives the area its name, this stretch of row houses, with plentiful green space on wide, boulevard-style streets, is clearly present in Adams's plan for the Devastated Area.

Historiography

Thomas Adams's role in the reconstruction of Halifax's Devastated Area has not been well understood or accurately portrayed. The principal distortion seems to have been simply to exaggerate that role. Laura MacDonald, for example, in concluding her 2005 history of the Halifax Disaster, writes, "What was left of Richmond was razed and turned over to city planners and Thomas Adams, a British town planner working out of Ottawa. Adams, who was put in charge of the redevelopment . . ."⁴⁸ In their 2006 study "re-visiting the Halifax Explosion" Janet Kitz and Joan Payzant state, "After the explosion the Halifax Relief Commission appointed Thomas Adams, a British town planner, to lead the reconstruction of the devastated

area."⁴⁹ In his 2010 thesis on the Halifax Town Planning Board,⁵⁰ Will Robinson-Mushkat considerably exaggerates Adams's power and influence, as well as perhaps misrepresenting his motives, by suggesting that Adams lobbied the federal government to expand the authority of the Halifax Relief Commission with a view to ensuring that Adams "would direct and have final authority over the replanning of the Devastated Area and the implementation of his plans." He later overdraws the scope of Adams's work by saying that he drew up "plans for the entire North End of the peninsula."

Others also exaggerate Adams's actual work. In his 1985 biography of Adams, Michael Simpson gives three pages to what he describes as "the replanning of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1918," apparently not realizing that Adams's plan was confined to the Devastated Area. Gordon Fulton's 1993 research report, the basis of the 1994 designation of "The Hydrostone" as a national historic site,⁵¹ lists a "draft official plan for Halifax" among "the most notable of Adams' hands-on achievements in the practice of municipal planning." Adams made no such plan. The 1992 catalogue for a Nova Scotia Archives exhibit commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Disaster states, "Adams drafted the urban renewal scheme for Halifax which transformed the North End after the 1917 explosion." This assertion has multiple distortions. Had Adams completed his pre-Disaster work for the Halifax planning board, he might have proposed some sort of urban renewal, but he never completed it; moreover, characterizing Adams's plan this way is somewhat misleading, first because the term *urban renewal* was not yet in common use, so its meaning is unclear, and second because his plan did not propose transforming "the North End," though as noted, it did include the glebe lands, which the Relief Commission thought were beyond the Devastated Area.⁵²

In his 1959 article on Adams's career with the Commission of Conservation, Alan Armstrong—not a historian but a planner, an early employee and shaper of the CMHC—characterizes Adams's work in post-Disaster Halifax as the "apogee of the commission's planning work," surely something of an overstatement, given Adams's prodigious output. Armstrong's account is based on the commission's reports, and one would expect it to be factual, but it contains numerous small inaccuracies that on their own are easy to overlook but taken altogether leave one unsure how carefully he read those sources—or how accurate they were, for they were based on Adams's reporting to his employer, and Adams may well have overdrawn the magnitude of his work. Armstrong states that Cabinet ordered Adams to go to Halifax to assist with reconstruction (Cabinet seems to have permitted it, but his employer sent him, in response to a request from the Halifax Relief Commission), that Adams drafted a master plan for greater Halifax (he barely started this), that the government asked him to be a member of the Halifax Relief Commission and that his employer concurred (there is no evidence of this, nor would it have made sense).⁵³

Armstrong's piece has had influence of its own. In 1960 Stanley Pickett, a colleague of Armstrong's at CMHC, published a piece

on the Hydrostone housing development. Seeming to draw from Armstrong, Pickett makes the mistake of equating Adams's pre-explosion work for the city planning board with his planning for the Devastated Area, which leads him to state that the work on the general plan had been "accelerated" by the explosion, when in fact it was delayed and nearly derailed by it. The historian John Weaver, in a 1976 article, similarly draws from Armstrong in claiming that Adams had previously "assisted in drafting a zoning by-law and an official plan for the city."

Apart from this minor inaccuracy, however, Weaver's article is the most substantive and satisfactory study of Adams's work in post-disaster Halifax.⁵⁴ Weaver was fortunate enough to be able to consult the records of the Halifax Relief Commission while it still existed and its records were still fully intact. His account is solidly grounded in these archival records, most notably a file of correspondence with Adams, which covers the entire time of his involvement in reconstruction and beyond.⁵⁵ And his understanding of the historical context in which the reconstruction took place gives him considerable insight.

All of this exaggeration of both the scope and the significance of Adams's work is not easy to explain. It could well be a case of historians exaggerating the role of an individual "great man" in what was in fact a collective undertaking, or of an internationally celebrated man in what was essentially a series of local events. Or perhaps it flows from apparently mundane local affairs not having as much appeal, or cachet, for researchers as the activities of a celebrated great man. And as noted above, one cannot exclude Adams's own distortions as a source of these exaggerations; Adams seems to have thought rather highly of himself, a tendency that could well have grown stronger when surrounded by colonials.

Descriptions of the Plan

Descriptions of Adams's actual plan are generally accurate. Weaver does a good if rather superficial job of it in his short paper. Garry Shutlak, in an essay published in 1994 in a book of papers on the disaster, provides a concise summary, fully consistent with Adams's and Seymour's own descriptions, writing that the plan "altered the grid with diagonals; rerouted roads along contours; eased grades; varied street widths according to function; improved access; provided a central square, park and playgrounds; reduced housing densities; and expanded industrial space."⁵⁶ Adams's biographer has described it similarly, writing that the plan "demonstrates Adams's sympathetic eye for topography, the streets curving with the contours. Diagonals further divide the rigid grid which was the plan [layout] before the explosion and the remains of which can be seen to the south of the devastated area. The highest ground [Fort Needham] was reserved for a park⁵⁷ and there was to be a central square. Adams hoped to include adjacent undeveloped land."⁵⁸

Gordon Fulton's 1993 report for Parks Canada accurately summarizes the plan as having "three main elements: reconstruction of streets to get better grades, incorporation of a large public

park on the site of Fort Needham; and construction of about 325 dwellings plus a shopping area in a 'court' development, with confined service traffic, rear lanes running behind backyards and houses facing wide, tree-lined courts."⁵⁹

There are, however, two problematic aspects in the portrayals of Adams's plan.

One is the focus on the Hydrostone area. Whether it has become the focus because of its designation as a historic site, or it was so designated (in 1994) because of the attention it received from earlier commentators, one cannot say. But there is no sign of it being especially important to either Adams or engineer Seymour. Adams seems never to have mentioned it in his writings on the project, understandable to a degree since, as noted, planners do not customarily concern themselves with the design of housing in areas they plan. Seymour does mention it in his paper to the Engineering Institute. It is not among his seven key points, most of which pertain to street locations and grades, perhaps because he was speaking to engineers, but he goes on to talk of housing, explaining that when detailed plans are prepared "there should be a limitation placed on the height, character and use of buildings, and also on the number which should be erected to the acre." And he reports that the Halifax Relief Commission had secured the services of the noted Montreal architectural firm Ross and Macdonald to design housing for a particular area, west of Gottingen, which was to include 326 terrace-style homes, built with a durable, patented, pressure-formed concrete block known locally as "Hydro-Stone™."

This confirms that the Hydrostone was part of Adams and Seymour's plan—that has never been in doubt, as the unique street layout is apparent in all reproductions of the plan—but Seymour presents the Halifax Relief Commission as the prime force behind it. John Weaver's recounting, based on excellent primary sources, clearly attributes the Hydrostone housing to the architect George Ross, of Ross and Macdonald, who became involved with the Relief Commission early on in the process.⁶⁰ And it should be noted that Halifax had an active housing reform movement for some years before the disaster that almost certainly would have had some influence on the Relief Commission. One is left wondering how much Thomas Adams had to do with Hydrostone's genesis. Ruffman and Howell's claim that the Hydrostone is Adams's "most significant remaining legacy," and that it "incorporated all his town planning and urban design ideas,"⁶¹ seems more than a little shaky.

The other problematic theme in the published literature is the claim that Adams's plan reflects Garden City ideas. In her 1995 social history of "Richmond Heights" (the original name of the area), historian Suzanne Morton writes, "The link between the British garden-city movement and the post-Explosion reconstruction of Halifax was Thomas Adams... The reconstruction of Halifax therefore was a rare opportunity for Adams to supervise a garden suburb in this country."⁶²

On first thought, how could this not be true? Thomas Adams had been immersed in the English Garden City movement almost from its inception; he had been appointed secretary of the first Garden City Association and manager of the first Garden City corporation (Letchworth Garden City), and was among the first planning consultants to devise garden suburbs for private clients.⁶³ So when he came to Canada in 1914 to work for the Commission of Conservation, how could he not have brought Garden City ideas with him? And when called upon to plan the reconstruction of Halifax's Devastated Area how could he not have been guided by Garden City principles?

Yet there are reasons to hold back on this. It is important to bear in mind, to begin, that the term *garden suburb* has no precise definition. It is not a *Garden City*, that much is clear. A *Garden City*—more of a concept than a thing, since strictly speaking none was ever built—was envisioned as a largely self-contained city of maybe 30,000, created *de novo* in the countryside, in which residents would collectively own the property and cooperatively manage the affairs. It was imagined by its inventor, Ebenezer Howard, as a radically new kind of community that, by blending the social benefits of urban life with the environmental benefits of rural life, would provide an escape from the dreadful slums of London. As such, it was to be primarily a home for working-class families, though not exclusively so. Two were conceived and built in England, Letchworth in 1903, which Adams managed, and Welwyn in 1919. Neither came close to Howard's radical vision, but they took root nonetheless and evolved into successful, rather unusual urban communities, "garden" being more prevalent in their form than "city." And one fundamental *Garden City* principle—that of it being a "satellite town" with its own employment—lived on in the urban planning world with the name "New Town."

While Letchworth was being built in the early 1900s a variant known as the *Garden Suburb* was conceived. It lacked the fundamental principles of the *Garden City*—it was attached to rather than apart from an existing city, included no employment, and was devoid of socialist ideals. But like the *Garden City* it was initially envisioned as an alternative to urban slums, designed as a coherent and balanced thing, and did mimic some *Garden City* design elements, notably curving narrow streets, ample green space, and romantic cottage-style housing. So *Garden Cities* and *Garden Suburbs* were part of the same movement, and they did look alike, something accentuated by the fact that the principal architect of Hampstead, the prototypical *Garden Suburb* on the northern fringe of London, was Raymond Unwin, one of the two architects of Letchworth. But lacking any defining feature, it was hard to know just what a *Garden Suburb* was, other than a not-too-dense town extension with stretches of green space and a curved rather than a rectilinear street pattern. And in fact in the decades after the First World War hundreds of such town extensions, in many parts of the world, were labelled *Garden Suburbs*; their working-class aspect was lost as affluence and automobiles prompted more

detached housing, bigger lots, and wider streets, but the label stuck.

Clearly what Thomas Adams planned in North End Halifax was not a *Garden City*. Only by not understanding the term can one say it was. The fact that Adams was an early espouser of the *Garden City* movement should not be taken to mean that everything he subsequently planned was shaped by that initial conviction. A few years after this work in Halifax, Adams was put in charge of the Regional Plan of New York, and there is no sign of his work on it being influenced by a belief in the *Garden City* concept.

Might what he planned be considered a *Garden Suburb*, imprecise though the term may be? Looking over his plan, one does see some possible *Garden Suburb* elements: a coherent community, with a central public square, curving residential streets (in the glebe lands), and a major central green space. Three of the four never came to be, but that does not negate their presence in his plan. Still, though, it is hard to see even the plan as a *Garden Suburb* if one compares it to plans for other *Garden Suburbs*, notably Hampstead, or any of the suburbs Adams himself devised before he came to Canada. The absence of green space woven into the residential areas is the main reason for this, but so too is the presence, or retention, of the rectilinear street grid in parts of the site, something that, according to Weaver, Adams had forced upon him by the fact that the city's existing infrastructure followed a square-block layout, so it had to be retained in places.⁶⁴ This point brings to light that *Garden Suburbs* were always essentially new developments, not redevelopments, and explains why Adams could employ a *Garden Suburb* style of layout only in the undeveloped glebe lands. The fact that the area was rebuilt as a largely working-class district might suggest *Garden City/Suburb* ideals. But this cannot be attributed to Adams since, for one thing, it was a working-class district before the disaster but also because Adams did not design the houses. Seymour did state that "there should be a limitation placed" on the size and character of the housing once building began, but imposing that would have been up to the Relief Commission. The plan itself does not prescribe it, nor could it have.

What then of Hydrostone itself as a *Garden Suburb*? First, neither Adams nor Seymour used those words to describe it. A questioner in Seymour's audience of engineers referred to English *Garden Cities*, as a point of comparison, so the concept and the term were known, but Seymour never used it in his description. Then there is a problem of scale. Hydrostone is maybe a dozen short streets, with 326 private homes, quite unlike full-scale *Garden Suburbs* with complex arrangements of land uses and populations in the thousands. Hydrostone does, however, have *Garden Suburb* design features: it has its own commercial strip, its row houses resemble housing in the "artisan quarter" of Hampstead,⁶⁵ its boulevard streets use their medians for green space (though not present in Hampstead, this would be employed in later *Garden Suburbs*, notably those in Latin America with sidewalks and linear gardens in their central medians). So,

while mindful that the term has no precise definition, there may be some justification for labelling Hydrostone a Garden Suburb, although to do so stretches the concept to or even beyond its breaking point.

Yet one is still left with the absence of any sign that Thomas Adams designed or strongly influenced Hydrostone's design, even if it is considered a Garden Suburb. And one needs, again, to bear in mind the broader international context. A housing reform movement had emerged in Britain before the Garden City was invented; in fact Howard's Garden City concept—newer, better housing for the poor in an uncongested environment—was rooted in that pre-existing movement, and housing reform remained an influential thrust of its own, in Halifax and elsewhere, through the early twentieth century. That is to say, a public agency building row houses for working-class families on a Halifax street in 1918 might be simply acting on the principles of housing reform, not emulating the Garden City/Suburb. And even if it is acting with Garden Cities in mind, it might be doing so without any help from Thomas Adams. One comes away from this analysis believing that the Hydrostone, intriguing though it may be as a historical artifact, was not a product of Thomas Adams's hand.

So while Adams was a Garden Suburb advocate, in his early career anyway, there is next to nothing in Halifax that reflects this. The plan he devised for Halifax's Devastated Area might be seen as including some Garden Suburb design elements, but most of those elements never materialized. The assertions that this work presented "a rare opportunity for Adams to supervise a garden suburb in this country" and that "the link between the British garden-city movement and the post-Explosion reconstruction of Halifax was Thomas Adams" are questionable.

Conclusion

The picture emerging from this study is that planning for the reconstruction of Halifax's Devastated Area was a complex matter that involved several agents, all of which would have been overseen by the Halifax Relief Commission. It was not by any means the activity of one man. This is not surprising, given the circumstances, the complex interconnections with Halifax politics and society, and the amount of public money put into the reconstruction. What, then, is to be said of Thomas Adams? Given that the scope and significance of his work have been exaggerated and his plan for the Devastated Area only partly implemented, what is his legacy on the Halifax urban landscape?

First is the simple fact that the reconstruction was planned, something that commentators preoccupied with Adams's Garden City connections may have overlooked. Adams did not come to Halifax to turn the Devastated Area into a Garden City or Suburb. He came with the conviction that it should be reconstructed on the basis of "town planning" as he understood that term. It should be done as a single, coherent undertaking, rather than piecemeal, for this would ensure logical and efficient placement of the elements necessary for a balanced community (parks, schools, homes, shops). So too should it make use

of expert knowledge in matters such as the grades of hills and the design of housing, and as such it should be conceived and directed by qualified architects or engineers. And it should seek to improve, not simply rebuild, the Devastated Area. Adams was not able to implant all of these principles, but he came close. The most telling illustration is his success in having the Halifax Relief Commission's mandate include planning and actual reconstruction, for which it could then use the powers set out in the province's 1915 Town Planning Act that he had helped shape. Of course the circumstances, both the catastrophe itself and the fact that it was in wartime, were unique, and these extraordinary circumstances largely explain the commission's extraordinary powers. But Adams's persistent demands that it be given them should be counted as a reason as well.⁶⁶

In contrast to his success in expanding the Halifax Relief Commission's mandate, Adams's achievements in devising and implementing his own plan were, all things considered, rather limited. As Weaver puts it, "His reputation could not guarantee that his actual plans would receive full endorsement."⁶⁷ This frustrated Adams, no doubt. But one should not lose sight of the fact that several elements of his plan were adopted. The diagonal street with its moderate grade is perhaps the most important. A mundane, physical matter such as this might not catch the attention of most non-planners, but conceiving and implementing this idea would not have been a trivial matter, especially since, as an entirely new creation rather than a return to the pre-Disaster neighbourhood, it would have faced opposition. It remains an important feature of the district. A corollary that Weaver uncovered is that it created the potential of new residential lots with a view of the city and thus brought the possibility of larger, pricier homes for higher-income residents, promoting a degree of social diversity.⁶⁸ The idea seems to have come from the Relief Commission, and architect Ross publicly supported it, but Adams doubtless bought into it. Providing homes for different social classes, spatially segregated of course, was a feature of Adams's early suburb plans in England, and in fact draws upon a fundamental Garden City principle. The large-scale public park cannot be attributed entirely to Adams, as noted, but the fact that it was in his plan is not irrelevant. It was an element he valued. What plans do not include are often as important as what they do, and in this case the absence of any grand, monumental structures or ceremonial boulevards is notable.⁶⁹ "City Beautiful" elements such as these, though their peak popularity had passed, were still in some designers' vocabulary. But not in Adams's. His planning principles were, and essentially would always be, more pragmatic and more grounded in the real world. By no means did Adams create a Garden Suburb in North End Halifax, but he did contribute significant elements of its present urban landscape.

In the end, however, Halifax proved a disappointment to Adams professionally, for he was unable to establish planning in the municipal administration of Halifax and its region—the overall objective of his work with the Commission of Conservation, one should not forget. Not that Halifax was unique in this regard;

other Canadian cities resisted the institutionalization of planning. But Adams was right to be disappointed. The city's first experiment in town planning, for which he had done the preparatory work, went nowhere for a generation. In fact the reconstruction undertaking, rather than expediting town planning as Adams hoped it would, seems to have been among various forces impeding it. There would be no "master plan" for the City of Halifax until 1945. Adams's last words on the subject appear in his 1932 book, *Recent Advances in Town Planning*: "The replanning of part of the city of Halifax, destroyed by an explosion in 1917, permitted an opportunity unique in its possibilities from the town planning point of view. Unfortunately, the demands of private interests and the natural pressure exerted by the inhabitants to hasten rebuilding, did much to prevent this opportunity being fully utilized. But at the instance of the federal government the Devastated Area was replanned by the town planning adviser [Adams], and resulted in much improvement of the street system."⁷⁰

This seems to be a balanced assessment. "Private interests," by which he likely meant contractors with business or political ties to members of the Halifax Relief Commission, probably did stand in the way of "town planning" as he envisioned it, as did the "inhabitants" or displaced survivors, although Adams's use of the words "natural pressure" to describe their resistance suggests he had some sympathy for them. Adams had begun to recognize that planning to rebuild an existing urban area was far more complex than planning to build on hitherto un-urbanized land, a principle the planning profession would not fully espouse for another fifty years.

Notes

- 1 The author acknowledges with most grateful thanks the assistance of Professor Richard White, who contributed substantive material on town planning history.
- 2 Throughout this article I use the term Halifax *Disaster* to denote what is popularly, though mistakenly, called the Halifax *Explosion*. The explosion was not the disaster; it was the incident that caused the disaster.
- 3 The literature on the Halifax Disaster is large and growing. For a critique, see Barry Cahill, "The Significance of Disaster: The Explosion Too Often Overshadows the Global Root Cause and the Subsequent Rebuilding of Halifax," *Atlantic Books Today* 85 (Winter 2017–18): 16–21.
- 4 See the introduction to David Sutherland's *"We Harbor No Evil Design": Rehabilitation Efforts after the 1917 Halifax Explosion* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 2017), 44–81. See also Barry Cahill, "The Halifax Relief Commission (1918–1976): Its History, Historiography and Place in Halifax Disaster Scholarship," *Acadiensis* 42, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2018): 93–110; and Cahill, "The Canadian Federal Government and the Politics of Disaster Relief during Nova Scotia's Great War," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 20 (2017): 37–50. The author's history of the commission, "Disaster Recovery and Its Discontents: The Halifax Relief Commission, 1918–1976," has been accepted for publication by Formac Publishing Company Limited.
- 5 The literature on the Canadian career of Thomas Adams is large and growing. See, for example, Jill L. Grant, Leifka Vissers, and James Haney, "Early Town Planning Legislation in Nova Scotia: The Roles of Local Reformers and International Experts," *Urban History Review* 40, no. 2 (2012): 3–14; Wayne J. Caldwell, ed., *Rediscovering Thomas Adams, Rural Planning and Development in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); C. Ray Smith and David R. Witty, "Conservation, Resources and Environment: An Exposition and Critical Evaluation of the Commission of Conservation, Canada," *Plan Canada* 11, no. 1 (1970): 55–70 and 11, no. 3 (1972): 199–216; Walter van Nus, "The Plan-Makers and the City: Architects, Engineers, Surveyors and Urban Planning in Canada, 1890–1939" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1975), 51; John David Hulchanski, comp., *Thomas Adams: A Biographical and Bibliographic Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, "Conservation Planning and Urban Planning: The Canadian Commission of Conservation in Historical Perspective," in *Planning for Conservation: An International Perspective*, ed. Roger Kain, 17–36 (New York: St Martin's, 1981); Michael Simpson, "Thomas Adams 1871–1940," in *Pioneers in British Planning*, ed. Gordon E. Cherry, 19–45 (London: Architectural Press, 1981); and David Lewis Stein, "Thomas Adams: The Father of Canadian Planning," *Plan Canada Special 75th Anniversary Issue* (July 1994): 14–15.
- 6 Laura M. Mac Donald, *Curse of the Narrows* (New York: Walker, 2005), 275.
- 7 Richard White, "Jane Jacobs and Toronto, 1968–1978," *Journal of Planning History* 10, no. 2 (2011): 114–38.
- 8 The commission was a federal agency established by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier in 1909 to promote the rational management of the country's natural resources. See, generally, Michel F. Girard, *L'écologisme retrouvé: essor et déclin de la Commission de la conservation du Canada: 1909–1921* (Ottawa: Les presses de l'université d'Ottawa, 1994); and James Robert Allum, "Science, Government and Politics in the Abolition of the Commission of Conservation, 1909–1921" (MA thesis, Trent University, 1988). See also D.J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton*, vol. 2, *The Lonely Eminence, 1901–1929* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985), 236–63.
- 9 See, generally, *Daily Echo* (Halifax), "City Planning Scheme Again to the Front," 16 February 1915. Adams's visit the following week received extensive coverage in the press.
- 10 Chapter 3 of the Statutes of N.S., 1915. For the history, see Leifka Vissers and Jill L. Grant, "Planning Experts and Local Reformers: The 1915 Town Planning Act in Nova Scotia," *Urban Transformation: Controversies, Contrasts and Challenges, Conference Proceedings (International Planning History Society conference, Istanbul, July 2010)*, 1:487–507.

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- 11 Oiva Saarinen, "The Influence of Thomas Adams and the British New Towns Movement in the Planning of Canadian Resource Communities," in *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City*, ed. Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1979), 273.
- 12 Samuel Henry Prince, *Catastrophe and Social Change: Based upon a Sociological Study of the Halifax Disaster* (New York: AMS, 1968), 130. First published in 1920.
- 13 Halifax Relief Committee minutes, 10 December 1917, vol. 525, MG 20, Nova Scotia Archives (hereafter NSA).
- 14 Adams to R.M. Hattie, 11 December 1911, "A Vision of Regeneration," Nova Scotia Archives, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/virtual/explosion/archives.asp?ID=73>. Several of Adams's letters to Robert McConnell Hattie, secretary of Halifax's town planning board, are among the Hattie papers, file 22, vol. 2899, MG 1, NSA.
- 15 Halifax Relief Committee minutes, 14 December 1917, vol. 525, MG 20, NSA. On Adams's mission, see editorial, "The Rebuilding of Halifax," *Globe* (Toronto), 20 December 1917.
- 16 Adams's report is rendered *in extenso* in the minutes of the Board of Control, December 1917, 599–602, 102–2A-15, Halifax Board of Control minutes, Halifax Regional Municipality Archives (HRMA). See *Daily Echo* (Halifax), "Town Planning Expert on Reconstruction Work," 18 December 1917.
- 17 Board of Control minutes, 20 December 1917, 610, HRMA. A copy of the resolution is in the Hattie Papers, file 22, vol. 2899, MG 1, NSA.
- 18 Order-in-council PC 1918–112; Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1918, chapter 61.
- 19 As set forth in the order-in-council appointing the commission, 22 January 1918, PC 1918–112.
- 20 Adams to MacLreith, 15 January 1918 [telegram]: Halifax Relief Commission records, item 3, file 5, series C, NSA.
- 21 T.S. Rogers to A.K. MacLean, 14 February 1918 [copy], p. 74950, Borden Papers, Library and Archives Canada.
- 22 This and what follows, unless otherwise indicated, are based on the commission's official record of proceedings: vol. 526, MG 20, NSA. The undated seven-page stenographic report of Chairman Rogers's preliminary conference with Halifax's town planning board, which took place sometime between January and April 1918, is of critical importance, both for understanding why reconstruction of the Devastated Area proceeded as it did and explaining how Thomas Adams became involved with the commission; see "Conference with Town Planning Board," doc. 1, file 195, series C, MG 36, NSA.
- 23 *Evening Mail* (Halifax), "Get a Settled Policy for Reconstruction and Housing with A1 Architect Supervision," 4 March 1918.
- 24 This point is a mirror image of Adams's contribution to the Town Planning Act, 1915.
- 25 *Toronto Daily News*, "Restoration of Halifax City—Problems to Be Faced in Connection with Rebuilding—Desire throughout Canada That Advantage Should Be Taken of Opportunities Created by Disaster—Serious Difficulties Are to Be Confronted Including the Provision of the Necessary Capital—Willingness to Cooperate but an Absence of Any Coordinating Influence Is Apparent," 9 March 1918.
- 26 Hall, *Lonely Eminence*, 257.
- 27 Ottawa-Gatineau was rebuilt as before, without the benefit of a redevelopment plan. On this subject generally see G.W. Shorter, *Ottawa-Hull Fire of 1900* (Ottawa: National Research Council of Canada, 1962).
- 28 *Memoirs of the Life and Works of Sir Christopher Wren* (London, 1823).
- 29 Horace Llewellyn Seymour, an engineering surveyor who was Adams's assistant for Atlantic Canada, arrived in May as Adams's personal representative in Halifax and remained for most of the year. While the conceptual and design work was done by Adams, all of the work "on the ground" was done by Seymour, afterwards an eminent town planner in his own right.
- 30 Doc. 14, file 5, series C, MG 36, NSA.
- 31 The bridge across The Narrows of Halifax Harbour—the A. Murray MacKay "new bridge" (which Adams proposed to locate at the eastern extremity of Leeds Street), would not become a reality until 1970. According to a recent study, "Adams's proposal superimposed two 25-metre (80 foot)-wide diagonal avenues—Devonshire and Dartmouth Avenues—on the already existing street plan. These would link Gottingen and Barrington Streets, with squares where they meet for public buildings. In the end, only Devonshire was completed for its full length and Dartmouth became a mere shadow of Adams's original proposal": John Boileau, 6.12.17: *The Halifax Explosion* (Lunenburg, NS: MacIntyre Purcell Publishing, 2017), 68.
- 32 These now correspond to Glebe, Rector, St. Paul's, and Vestry Streets, northwards of Fort Needham.
- 33 *Evening Mail* (Halifax), "How Halifax and Its Vicinity Are to Be Beautified by Town Planning Schemes," 13 September 1918. The paper was published as H.L. Seymour, "Town Planning in Halifax and Vicinity," *Journal of the Engineering Institute of Canada* 1, no. 5 (October 1918): 262–8.
- 34 At that time Brunswick Street, a north-south artery, stopped at Sackville Street; it did not become a thoroughfare until the late 1940s.
- 35 Seymour, "Town Planning in Halifax," 265–7.
- 36 Thomas Adams, "The Planning of the New Halifax," *Contract Record* (Toronto), 28 August 1918, 680–3. Another version of the same article, under the title "Planning the Greater Halifax," was published by the Commission of Conservation in its official journal, *Conservation of Life*, in October 1918.
- 37 Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, *Proceedings ... 1918* (Halifax, 1918), 77–86.
- 38 Thomas Adams, "Community Development and Reconstruction in Nova Scotia" (paper presented to Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, August 1928), 86.
- 39 Michael Simpson, "Meliorist versus Insurgent Planners and the Problems of New York, 1921–1941," *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 2 (August 1982): 207–28.
- 40 Adams to Bell, 2 December 1918, doc. 15, file 1716, Halifax Relief Commission fonds, MG 36 series R [Reconstruction], NSA.
- 41 The archival records of the Commission of Conservation have not survived. There is, in any case, no evidence that such a suggestion had ever been made.
- 42 Prince, *Catastrophe and Social Change*, 130–1.
- 43 *Dalhousie Gazette* (Halifax), "Lecture on Town Planning," 16 March 1921.
- 44 *Halifax Herald*, "Town Planning Makes Cities More Healthful," 8 March 1921.
- 45 Halifax Relief Commission supplementary minutes, 7 March 1921, file 2, vol. 526, MG 20, NSA.
- 46 Thomas Adams, "Progress at Halifax," *Journal of the Town Planning Institute* 1, no. 3 (April 1921): 9.
- 47 The commission purchased Fort Needham from its private owner in May 1918 and deeded it to the city in 1942. The development of the site as a memorial park honouring the victims of the Halifax Disaster did not commence until the late 1940s and was not completed until the late 1950s. On this subject generally, see Paul A. Erickson, *Halifax's Other Hill: Fort Needham from Earliest Times* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1984), 34–9.
- 48 Laura M. Mac Donald, *Curse of the Narrows*, 275.
- 49 Janet Kitz and Joan Payzant, *December 1917: Re-visiting the Halifax Explosion* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2006), 52.

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- 50 S. William Robinson-Mushkat, "City at a Critical Juncture: Halifax's Town Planning Board at the End of the Progressive Era, 1911–1924" (MA thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2010), 79–93. All quotations are from page 86.
- 51 "The Hydrostone District, Halifax, Nova Scotia," Parks Canada, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, agenda paper [research report] 2004-SDC/CDE-022, 1993–008, 228.
- 52 "A Vision of Regeneration": *Reconstruction after the Halifax Explosion, 1917–1921* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1992), 7–8, 42. For the Halifax town planning exercise, see Michael Simpson, *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement: Britain, Canada and the United States, 1900–1940* (London: Mansell, 1985), 113 and n32.
- 53 Alan H. Armstrong, "Thomas Adams and the Commission of Conservation," *Plan Canada* 1, no. 1 (1959): 26; Armstrong, "Hydrostone," *Community Planning Review* 10, no. 1–2 (1960): 29–30; Armstrong, "Thomas Adams in Canada, 1914–1930," *Urban History Review* 11, no. 2 (October 1982): 6; Simpson, *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement*, 88–90.
- 54 John C. Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District of Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918–1921," *Plan Canada* 16 no. 1 (March 1976): 36–47.
- 55 Some forty-three items of Adams's correspondence are preserved among the archival records of the Halifax Relief Commission: file 5, series C, MG 36, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA). They provide an excellent overview of Adams's interaction with both the Halifax Relief Committee and its successor, the Halifax Relief Commission, December 1917 through April 1920.
- 56 Garry Shutlak, "A Vision of Regeneration: Reconstruction after the Explosion, 1917–21," in *Ground Zero: A Reassessment of the 1917 Explosion in Halifax Harbour*, ed. Alan Ruffman and Colin D. Howell (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing and Gorsebrook Research Institute, 1994), 421.
- 57 Now Fort Needham Memorial Park.
- 58 Note accompanying figure 11. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Richmond District, Rebuilding Plan, 1918: Simpson, *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement*, 89.
- 59 Gordon Fulton, "The Hydrostone District, Halifax, Nova Scotia," Parks Canada, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, agenda paper [research report] 2004-SDC/CDE-022, 1993–008, 224.
- 60 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 40–1.
- 61 Ruffman and Howell, *Ground Zero*, 407.
- 62 Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 19–20.
- 63 Simpson, *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement*, 41–52.
- 64 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 42.
- 65 Mervyn Miller, *Hampstead Garden Suburb: Arts and Crafts Utopia?* 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: History Press (1830), 2006).
- 66 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 39.
- 67 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 40.
- 68 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 41.
- 69 Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District," 42.
- 70 Thomas Adams, *Recent Advances in Town Planning* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1932), 56.

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