

***Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Special Issue: Ethnic Art and
Architecture, XVI (Fall 1984). Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies
Association, 1984. Pp. 186. Illustrations. \$7.00**

John C. Lehr

Volume 15, numéro 1, june 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018901ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018901ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Lehr, J. C. (1986). Compte rendu de [*Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Special Issue: Ethnic Art and Architecture, XVI (Fall 1984). Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, 1984. Pp. 186. Illustrations. \$7.00]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 97–98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018901ar>

Throughout they fail to establish a sufficient context for comparison, to present the Calgary experience in the light of development elsewhere. How sycophantic is journalism in other Canadian cities, how are other civic exhibitions managed, which other cities have coped better with explosive urban growth? Only the discussion of construction accidents shows just how bad the local record was compared with other provinces and against the earlier Alberta figures. The other arguments presented are too often without a clear frame or solid foundation.

The recital of instances of mismanagement, manipulation, and waste records some useful material for a future history of the boom years, and will win the reader's agreement that all this is deplorable, that somehow things should be better, but fails to suggest what improvement is likely, or how it might be achieved. The one contributor with experience of political office, one-time alderman Elaine Husband, explains that she chose not to run again despite strong support because she had no interest in playing "loyal opposition." Organized community power was more important, she felt, in improving the balance of a political process dominated by business interests. Her choice seems to confirm a disheartening message: representative government doesn't work, the representatives are either pawns or powerless; the best you can do is join the manipulators by establishing your own power block. Urban evolution is reduced to social Darwinism.

Stampede City was clearly not intended to address the larger questions of civic life and growth. Nonetheless they are implicit in the experience presented and the perspective taken. What roles should and do power blocks, administrators, politicians and voters play in shaping the city, and the experience of its citizens. Can and should everyone's immediate interests be equally powerful? What place is there for the vision of a Burnham and the ambition of a Drapeau? In the light of their efforts, Calgary's ambitions, and its failures, seem modest. This collection reminds us of both.

Michael McMordie
Faculty of Environmental Design
University of Calgary

Canadian Ethnic Studies, Special Issue: Ethnic Art and Architecture, XVI (Fall 1984). Calgary: Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, 1984. Pp. 186. Illustrations. \$7.00.

The Canadian scholarly journal, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, published three times a year, periodically devotes special issues to specific themes in ethnic studies. The recent Fall issue of 1984 was one such volume, devoted to the topic of ethnic art and architecture in Canada, some 186 pages with nine major articles, one research note, a review article, sev-

eral book reviews, and a special bibliography centred upon the theme of the issue.

Although the declared topic is ethnic art and architecture, the thrust of the issue is clearly towards ethnic architecture. Of the major papers only two deal directly with ethnic art; the review article and the research note address the art component of the theme, but in general it appears that ethnic art receives short shrift. Although it may be argued that architecture is an art form, it seems unfortunate that the editors did not separate out the two themes as distinctive manifestations of ethnicity, and devote an issue to each theme, rather than attempting to integrate them in a single issue.

Architecture and ethnicity is covered here from a variety of standpoints. The approaches range from the analytical to descriptive and from the innovative to conventional. Taken together they provide a good barometre of the level of scholarship in the field and provide a ready indication of those fields which are making significant contributions to this facet of ethnic studies in Canada.

The collection of articles opens with papers by Trevor Boddy and Radoslav Zuk, who address, respectively: "Ethnic Identity and Contemporary Canadian Architecture," and "Architectural Significance and Culture." The following articles range across domestic and religious vernacular ethnic architecture, from the structure and symbolism of a Swiss-German Mennonite farmstead of Waterloo County, Ontario; through Doukhobor architecture; to ethnic religious architecture as exemplified by three churches in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

In Canada there is an unfortunate but common misconception that ethnic contributions to the Canadian architectural heritage are confined to the quaint or picturesque heritage of European folk architecture transferred to Canada by those who pioneered the agricultural frontiers of the New World. In his opening article Boddy refutes this as he argues that recent immigrants and Canadians from ethnic and religious minorities have enjoyed considerable success as architects. Of these, the Edmonton Métis, Douglas Cardinal, the Winnipeg Franco-Manitoban, Etienne Gaboury, and the Toronto-based Japanese-Canadian, Raymond Moriyama, are perhaps the best known. Through a review of their careers Boddy attempts to isolate the one factor which has caused them to rise to the top of their profession. He argues that the role that their ethnicity has played was, and is, that of a "simulacrum which focuses and forges character within a far-too-homogenized culture" (p. 13). More prosaic, but probably of equal significance was the position of all three outside the social elite of Canada's two "founding nations" and their consequent exclusion from a social network through which contacts could be made and contracts awarded. Pushed by circumstance to obtain work strictly upon their own demonstrated merits they made

special use of design competitions as a democratic way of obtaining commissions and demonstrating their architectural qualities. This led to their being typed as "high design" prima donnas with no overt manifestation of their ethnic heritage appearing in their major designs. The ethnic tradition, indeed, was displayed mostly through a ready sensitivity to the relationship between architecture and environment, more especially, between building and the regional environment. It is this quality which offers the most promising opportunities for the development of distinctive and appropriate regional styles of architecture in this country.

This concern with image, meaning, and an embodiment of sense of place in building design is central to Radoslav Zuk's article dealing with architectural significance and culture. Zuk, a professor of architecture at McGill University and a practising architect of Ukrainian background, is well known for his innovative designs of Ukrainian-Catholic churches. Here Zuk explains his approach toward design of ethnic architectural icons. Briefly put, his philosophy is that the organization, presence and image of a building, which relate, respectively, to the functional, absolute, and expressive aspects of architecture, need expression beyond the traditional forms and materials of pioneer immigrant building. New materials, changed economic circumstances and transformed landscapes demand a re-expression of the Ukrainian spirit in modernistic forms within which traditional values are maintained in a conceptual way. The implementation of this thesis is well illustrated — both literally and figuratively — through a discussion of his evolving approach toward the design of five Ukrainian churches, commissioned between 1964 and 1982.

Both Boddy and Zuk address an issue too often neglected in the study of "ethnic" architecture in Canada: the place and role of ethnicity in the modern landscape, which for most intents will entail a study of the function of ethnicity in high-style urban based building.

In following articles Nancy-Lou Patterson examines Mennonite farmsteads in Waterloo County and William Thompson addresses the question of meaning in Hutterite architecture and patterns of settlement. Both adopt an analytic approach in an attempt to achieve an understanding of the underlying forces which shape the respective cultural forms associated with both groups. Mark Mealing pursues a similar approach to the explanation of Doukhobor architectural forms as found in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, tracing the evolution of Doukhobor architectural forms from the beginning of the sect in seventeenth century Russia and assessing the changes which contact with the wider society and an evolving theological debate have had upon the Doukhobor's building traditions.

A study of three churches in Sydney, Nova Scotia, by Elizabeth Beaton-Planetta adopts a somewhat different approach, relying more upon the description of the churches

and their communities to illustrate the diversity of architecture built, and still maintained, by ethnic groups in a Canadian urban setting. Unlike the foregoing papers she makes no real attempt to analyse the expression of symbolic meaning within the context of the built form and the paper, though well researched and thorough, lacks the intellectual challenge found earlier.

The final paper, which is devoted to an architectural topic, is that by geographer Audrey Kobayashi, "Emigration to Canada and Development of the Residential Landscape in a Japanese Village: The Paradox of the Sojourner." This is a fascinating account of the ways in which emigration affected the landscape and architecture of one village — Kaideima — in Japan, and by extension, illuminating the process of landscape change in the homeland as initiated by the process of emigration and return. Kobayashi's paper is noteworthy on a number of counts: it poses new questions, provides new insights, and may well serve as a model for future work on landscape change and the emigration process. Most scholarship has simply viewed the cultural transfer associated with emigration as a one way affair: the emigrants export culture to the new land. Kobayashi shows that it is not always so, that the process is complex and defies simplistic interpretation.

All this notwithstanding, Kobayashi's paper leaves many questions unanswered. She readily acknowledges this, and concludes by noting that further studies are needed to show "different dynamics of preservation and change, and confirm the claim that the value of 'tradition' is interpreted according to individual and group circumstances" (p. 128). If these further studies maintain the excellent quality of this pioneer article then Kobayashi will have made a major contribution to the understanding of the emigration process and the ethnic impact upon landscape.

This brief revue has dwelt only upon those papers which focus upon ethnic architecture. Together they comprise an excellent collection, diverse in approach but still preserving a strong sense of unity. It is unfortunate that those articles which are devoted to ethnic art seem misplaced within the context, or imbalance, of the volume. That, however, is no reflection upon their content, but it seems to this reviewer that it was somewhat injudicious to place them amongst a set of papers devoted to architecture. They deserve placement in a similar volume wherein ethnic art is more fully considered.

John C. Lehr
Department of Geography
University of Winnipeg