

**Bingham, Janet. *Samuel Maclure, Architect. Ganges, B.C.: Horsdal and Schubert, 1985. Pp. xii, 164. Illustrations, maps, index. \$9.95 (paper)***

**Deryck Holdsworth**

Volume 15, numéro 1, june 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018907ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018907ar>

[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

Holdsworth, D. (1986). Compte rendu de [Bingham, Janet. *Samuel Maclure, Architect. Ganges, B.C.: Horsdal and Schubert, 1985. Pp. xii, 164. Illustrations, maps, index. \$9.95 (paper)*]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 103–104. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018907ar>

then, even when all objections have been duly allowed for, Professor Qadeer still has a point. In any event, his essay is refreshingly undogmatic, and well worth reading and thinking about.

Randall White  
Toronto

---

Artibise, Alan F.J. *A Matter of Political Responsibility: Real Property Assessment in Winnipeg*. Research and Working Paper No. 12. Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 1984. Pp. 40. \$8.00.

This document should be required reading for every municipal politician in Canada. It is both scholarly, and, as it turned out, is a controversial tract for the times.

In brief, it documents what happens when the foundation of local finance — property assessment — is not properly cared for. In this case, successive local governments in Winnipeg gave assessment a low priority. There was no reassessment from 1962.

The results in Winnipeg were predictable, and not unlike those of every other community where assessment review has been neglected. As Artibise's research paper notes (p. 35) "many citizens are grossly and unfairly overtaxed (or undertaxed)," and development patterns are "adversely affected by an inequitable tax system." In the latter case, in Winnipeg, downtown properties were overtaxed compared with the suburbs: the core was subsidizing the periphery. Ironically, at the same time, the city, province and federal authorities were pumping money into the core in an effort to revive the heart of the city.

But despite the inequities, political action was slow. It was easier to let a complex problem lie, especially when re-evaluation would have affected most adversely the vote-filled suburbs. The more time that passed, however, the more gross the distortions became, and the more intractable the problem.

Of the many responsibilities of local governance, the assessment system is the one that can least afford to be neglected. It is the basis of local finance, for one thing, but it is also a yardstick of local economic activity, apart from any moral or legal questions involving equity. If it is not maintained and maintained equitably and accurately, the feedback it provides on the urban economy becomes distorted, and local economic policy as reflected in both taxing and expenditure is made false.

Attention to assessment should, before all else, be the top priority of every municipal politician. It cannot only provide

quite accurate diagnosis of the health of a place, but can often point to the proper treatment for urban ills.

This is an important document, not only for Winnipeg. It points to a problem that is widespread, for example in Ontario. And it is a delusion to think that provision of a current, accurate and fair assessment can be ignored or put off. To do so effectively precludes a city from developing social or economic policy. It can neither administer nor plan. It simply becomes a creature of its own momentum, and in time will slow down and stop, tangled up in the contradictions of its own financing.

John H. Taylor  
Department of History  
Carleton University

---

Bingham, Janet. *Samuel Maclure, Architect*. Ganges, B.C.: Horsdal and Schubert, 1985. Pp. xii, 164. Illustrations, maps, index. \$9.95 (paper).

Some of the most distinctive and expensive houses in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia were designed before the First World War by Samuel Maclure and his various partners. Many survive to this day as private homes or as quasi-public community centres. Characteristically they are Tudor Revival houses, with elegant spacious interiors, and set in generous gardens. Those in Victoria tend to be in Rockland, Oak Bay, or Saanich, while those in Vancouver are clustered either in the exclusive Shaughnessy Heights subdivision or are found on choice sites along the edge of the Point Grey peninsula. An examination of these houses and their architect should shed light on regional variants of international architectural currents and also on those who profited from the province's resource economy and then sought a package of pre-industrial images to announce their position.

Unfortunately this book does not come close to being comprehensive on the architect's work nor does it address broader issues. Thin documentation, a sycophantic narrative, and heavy reliance on the recollections of an aged daughter of the subject influence Bingham's thesis that Maclure's work was typified by his civility. He was kind and generous, loved his wife Daisy, and was concerned about the high quality of hand-crafted details. Making money was never a priority, but the creation of a work of art was critical. That his designs survive seems to be the product of such sensitivity, not the fact that they were for a class that had the resources to command such quality.

Bingham's book is best read with a pot of finely-brewed tea and with crustless sandwiches, thus cultivating the sitting-room tone appropriate for anecdotal family history,

many asides, and the occasional attempt to develop a perspective on Maclure's architecture. The history is organized in 10 chapters. After a précis of the career of "this noteworthy artist," the story begins when Maclure's English parents went out to what became New Westminster, as part of the contingent of Royal Engineers charged with bringing civilization to a frontier gold colony in the 1850s. They stayed on to help run the telegraph from a house at Matsqui in the Fraser Valley, where Sam spent his boyhood years before a critical year in the Spring Garden School of Art in Philadelphia in the 1880s (the closest he came to formal training). Maclure's early years as an architect (1890-92) were spent in New Westminster, where he worked first with Charles Clow and then Richard Sharp in executing quasi-pattern book designs. His "heyday" in Victoria was marked by over 140 residences, including what are referred to as 'Maclure Bungalows' as well as more palatial designs in his distinctive variant of the Tudor Revival style. In Vancouver he designed about 50 houses, first with Cecil Fox and then after the war with Ross Lort. Separate chapters treat Hatley Park, a 40-odd room rural retreat for James Dunsmuir outside Victoria, and designs for employees' cottages at brother Charles' brickmaking concern at Clayburn in the Fraser Valley. The wartime death of his partner Cox devastated Maclure, and his slower practice in the 1920s was less spectacular, typified by smaller houses in the Georgian Revival style, before his death in 1929. An epilogue on other family members rounds out the history. Throughout, the architect is wonderful; so are his family, and, by default, his satisfied clients. His designs were "delightful" houses to live in.

So much more could have been written, however, even recognising the dearth of records to work with. The book unfortunately perpetuates local folklore that equates Maclure just with half-timbered houses. His work in other styles receive only passing reference ("an unusual example of Maclure's work") and are never really considered worthy of assessment as important elements of an evolving design philosophy. It is always assumed that the reader (and the author) knows everything there is to know about Frank Lloyd Wright, Webb, Shaw, Baillie Scott, Sullivan, Voysey, etc., since there is no significant engagement with a broader architectural or historical literature. The Maclure Bungalow, a telling design for a Victoria linked to British India as much as to the mother country, surely needs to be seen in the light of Tony King's work on the colonial bungalow; the large houses warrant assessment in the context of Girouard's work on the English country house; and the Tudor Revival style should be assessed in terms of its execution elsewhere on the continent by many other architects. Hatley Park may not have been cloned from Compton Wynyates in Oxfordshire, but since we know that Goodyear Rubber founder F.A. Seiberling did have a copy built in Akron, Ohio, and that many Tudor Revival houses grace Cleveland, Minneapolis and countless other cities, what is it about Maclure that is so distinctive, or what is it about his B.C. clientele that made them so strongly anglophilic? Bingham treats none of these

or other important questions and instead relies too uncritically on the reminiscences of family, colleagues, or obituary writers. When she does seek the world beyond, it leads to wild conjecture, such as parallels between the Clayburn cottages and the industrial town of Saltaire in mid-19th century England.

In an age of expensive books, one is tempted to applaud the efforts of a small Gulf Islands publisher for producing an attractive volume with some 82 illustrations selling for less than \$10.00. However, the partial visual coverage is as lopsided as the text. One saving grace might have been the appendices cataloguing Maclure's work. Yet the list for Victoria and Vancouver Island is flawed by being presented in alphabetic sequence of owners rather than arranged by time-period (lacking even approximate dates). The list for Vancouver work is better, but for me at least only served to resurrect questions about the role of Cecil Fox in the partnership, he being the person who trained with the influential architect Charles F.A. Voysey in England. Who taught who, what, and when? The appendices reinforce frustrations that accumulate through a reading of a rambling text and its badly-flawed footnotes.

The book contains a generous foreword by famous Vancouver architect Arthur Erickson that could be valuable for students of Erickson's architecture. The author's own Introduction begins with her resentment at being beaten to two watercolours sketches by Maclure that she had discovered in a Victoria antique shop fifteen years ago. That sour anecdote is the lemon for the parochial brew that follows and serves to place her book in the genre of architectural history that seeks the rare and precious rather than the comprehensive. Maclure and his important work still awaits serious attention. Hopefully, when that happens, the study will be located not only in a rigorous architectural history that stretches to Philadelphia and beyond, but also be grounded in an informed social and political assessment of life in a company province. Civility alone is an inadequate basis for useful analysis.

Deryck Holdsworth  
Department of Geography  
University of Toronto

---

Germain, Annick. *Les Mouvements de Réforme Urbaine à Montréal au Tournant du Siècle: modes de développement, modes d'urbanisation et transformations de la scène politique*. Montréal: Centre d'information et d'aide à la recherche, Département de sociologie, Université de Montréal, 1984. Pp. xviii, 415.

Urban reform has a large literature, one that is international and interdisciplinary, and one that is controversial.