

# NOUVELLES/NEWS

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA  
SOCIÉTÉ POUR L'ÉTUDE DE L'ARCHITECTURE AU CANADA

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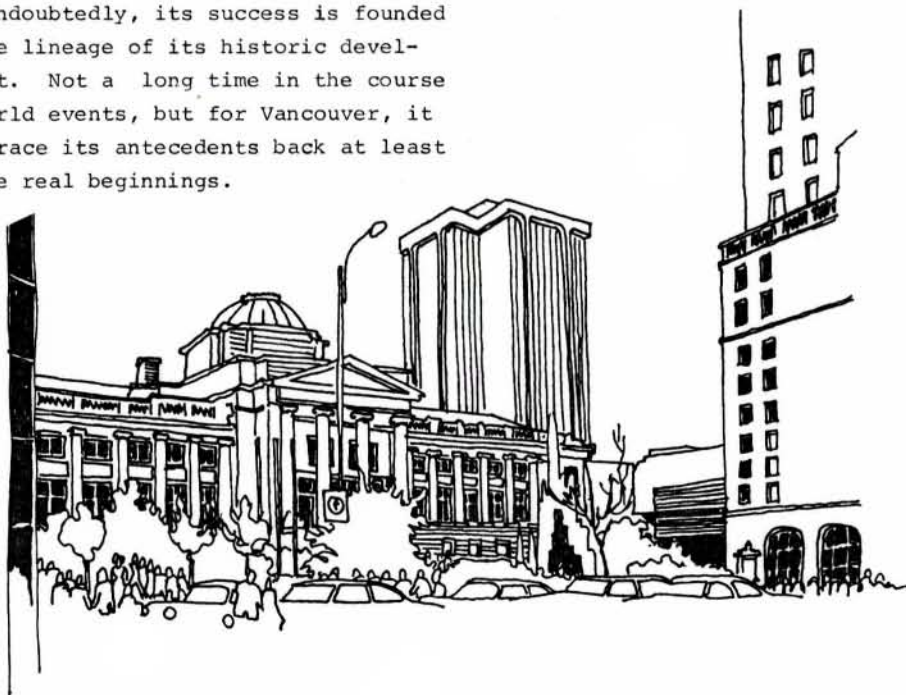
## VANCOUVER'S COURTHOUSE SQUARE

by Roger Kemble MRAIC

The Courthouse Square in Vancouver is not exactly a planner's dream. On the face of it, every element conspires to work against a successful urban space. Nevertheless, it works! It works so well that it has become, quite unintentionally, the epicentre of urban activity in downtown Vancouver. It would be well to call it Vancouver's Civic Square, because that indeed is what it has become.

Undoubtedly, its success is founded in the lineage of its historic development. Not a long time in the course of world events, but for Vancouver, it can trace its antecedents back at least to the real beginnings.

The first significant building to be constructed in the vicinity of the Courthouse Square was the first Hotel Vancouver. Described in the 1888 city directory as a 'large stately building', it was situated on the corner of Granville Street and Georgia, now the site of the Toronto Dominion Tower and the Pacific Centre. It was of course owned by the CPR and it was their architect, Mr. T.C. Sorby, who was responsible for the design.



Records do not show the activities surrounding the construction of these buildings and it would be dangerous to speculate. We do know however that Georgia Street was paved about 1890: the great Vancouver building boom was about to begin. Activity and confidence, we may surmise, were experiencing a high. Shortly after, in 1895, half a block westward the new Christ Church Cathedral was completed by architect Mr. W.O. Wickenden.

The Courthouse Square began to take shape in the collective city minds during 1905, at which time the provincial government called for a design competition. The result was that Mr. Frances Mawson Rattenbury, the designer also of the Parliament Buildings in Victoria, became the winner.

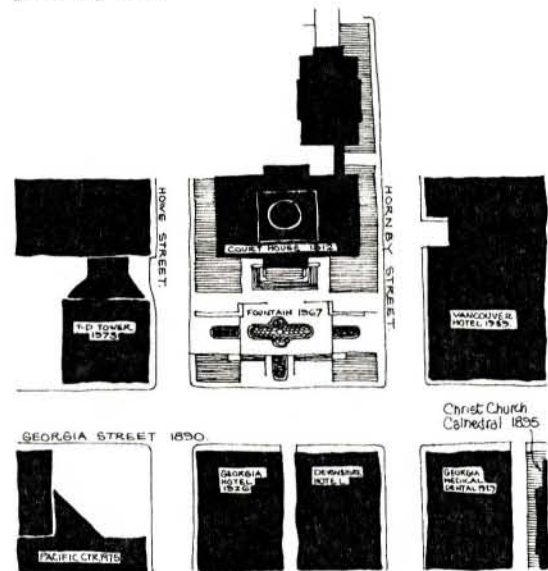
The Courthouse as we know it today, designed by Mr. Rattenbury, was completed in 1912. It became the southern side to the square. In the beginning the square was strictly 'keep off the lawn', resplendent with shrubbery and 2 'never to be forgotten magnolia trees.' These trees were flanked by a huge drinking trough, which incidentally, survived in spite of redundancy, until 1967, when it was lost for good in that inimitable zeal for modernization (or should the word be brutalization) that seems to smite us all the time.

The magnolia trees had a kinder fate. Originally donated by the IODE to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII they were carefully removed and were replanted in front of the new Centennial Museum and Planetarium, which was built in Kitsilano in 1967.

However, to return to the historic sequence, the next building to regale the square was a second attempt at a Hotel Vancouver. It was completed in 1912, also by the CPR. It was a most elegant building, designed by the

architect Francis Swales. In 1949 it was demolished, for reasons that are difficult to comprehend. In fact there appears to be no reason at all.

In any case the site was Vancouver's eyesore from 1949 until the start of the Pacific Centre in 1969. For 20 years Vancouver's Civic Centre was a parking lot.



**COURT HOUSE SQUARE  
VANCOUVER. (1976 STATE)**



Slowly but surely the space surrounding the Courthouse Square was being completed. In 1929 the Georgia Hotel was designed by architect Mr. R.T. Garrow. Later the Devonshire Hotel completed the enclosure on the north side. In 1929, the most successful urban masonry design, along with the Marine Building, was completed by the architects McCarter Nairne and Partners, in the form of the Georgia Medical Dental Building.

During the gloomy depression years the latest and newest Hotel Vancouver was looming towards the west. Ultimat-

ely contrived as a depression make-work project, the building process lasted from 1928 until 1939. Its gaunt unpenetrable facade of grey stone is a constant reminder of those years.

The enclosure of the square was not completed until relatively recently. In 1973, the eyesore parking lot eventually gave birth to the TD Tower and the Eaton's complex. In 1975 the final link was closed with the completion of the IBM tower portion of the Pacific Centre on the north-east corner. Listing in chronological order the buildings that have gone up to make the enclosure of the Square is for the most part a statistical exercise. To speculate on the feelings and activities that surround those long gone days would be an imaginative, exciting occupation but one fraught with hazard. Even to listen to accounts from those who were there, and there are plenty, is to have the facts distorted by time and by a persistent nostalgia for the good old days.

In the summer of 1967, Premier W.A.C. Bennett, who ran the province in a solo seat-of-the pants fashion, decided to build a fountain on the keep-off lawn. A large plastic and plywood enclosure was constructed to surround the area and great objets d'art started to take shape in tremendous secrecy. No one was allowed to see.

Eventually the plywood and plastic were tucked away and the city was presented with a pool fountain and sculpture. The tile work on the bottom of the pool was carried out by Count Alex von Svoboda and the sculpture and garden layout by Mr. Robert Savery, landscape architect for the Provincial Department of Public Works.

The square's first test of public authenticity came soon after the unveiling of the fountain. The sixties, and all that that implied, were at their zenith. Tidy buttoned-up types objected to the local long-hairs who frequented the square during sunny business hours. Subsequently these loiterers were removed forcibly from the square under some obscure wartime law that forbids loitering near a government building. The next week half the town turned out to loiter in the forbidden square to test what is quite obviously a ridiculous law.

Thus, Vancouver's Courthouse Square was born in the minds of the people.

My opening sentence, albeit somewhat pejorative, is very true. The Square lacks an academic approach to amenity. Certainly it developed in a most haphazard and unintentional way. It is quite likely that it has been such an unmitigating success for this very reason.

Essentially it is an agglomeration of buildings depicting the various growth surges of the city over the last century. There are old buildings squeezed in between new. There are power hungry new buildings trying to peek over the top of our more modest closer and older buildings; a most humbling view. There are sleek glass faces reflecting images their designers had no idea ever would exist. There are textures complementing each other, rough and smooth, reflective and opaque.

Add to these physical attributes all the people activity in both rain and shine and there is truly an urban event.

Roger Kemble is a Vancouver architect.

DEUXIEME CONGRES ANNUEL  
SECOND ANNUAL MEETING  
Université Laval, Québec  
du 24 au 30 mai 1976  
from May 24 to May 30, 1976

THEME: Les années 1885-1915 au Canada  
The Years 1885-1915 in Canada

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LUNDI 24 MAI  
MONDAY, 24 MAY

Inscription  
Registration

8.00 p.m. Réception (Pavillon De  
Koninck, salle 3244)  
Reception (Pavillon De  
Koninck, room 3244)

MARDI 25 MAI  
TUESDAY, 25 MAY

9.00 a.m. Séance de travail:  
"Urbanisme et architecture"  
Session: "Town Planning  
and Architecture"

Donald C. Kerr, Univ. of  
Saskatchewan, "Psychology  
of the Boom Era--1909-1913  
in Saskatoon"  
Luc Noppen, Univ. Laval,  
"Les efforts d'urbanisme  
à Québec de 1880 à 1920;  
la création d'une image  
nouvelle de la ville"  
Randy Rostecki, Winnipeg,  
"Development of Winnipeg's  
Architecture, 1880-1890"  
Trudy Soby, Fort Calgary,  
"Architectural Trends in  
Calgary's Downtown Core,  
1885-1914"

1.30 p.m. Visites d'architecture à  
Québec  
Tours of architecture in  
Quebec City  
a) Edifices commerciaux de  
la Basse-Ville  
Commercial buildings in  
the Lower Town  
b) Architecture domestique  
du XIXe siècle  
Domestic architecture of  
the XIXth. Century

MERCREDI 26 MAI  
WEDNESDAY, 26 MAY

9.00 a.m. Visite de la Côte de  
Beaupré et de l'Ile  
d'Orléans  
Tour of the Côte de  
Beaupré and of the Ile  
d'Orléans

8.00 p.m. Reunions des comités  
permanents  
Meetings of the standing  
committee

JEUDI 27 MAI  
THURSDAY, 27 MAY

9.00 a.m. Séance de travail:  
"Architectes canadiens"  
Session: "Canadian  
Architects"

Harold D. Kalman, Ottawa,  
"The Canadianization of  
Thomas Charles Sorby"  
Yves Laliberté, Univ.  
Laval, "L'architecture  
de Joseph-Ferdinand  
Peachy, 1830-1903"  
John D. Stewart, Queen's  
Univ., "The Architecture  
of William Newlands and  
Son, 1885-1914"  
William P. Thompson, Univ.  
of Manitoba, "Two Archi-  
tects in Winnipeg:  
J.D. Atchison and George  
Browne"

1.30 p.m. Visites d'architecture à  
Québec  
Tours of architecture in  
Quebec City

a) Le parc de l'Artillerie  
Artillery Park  
b) Architecture domestique  
du XIXe siècle  
Domestic architecture  
of the XIXth. Century

5.30 p.m. Assemblée générale  
General meeting

9.00 p.m. Banquet au Château  
Frontenac  
Banquet at the Château  
Frontenac

VENDREDI 28 MAI  
FRIDAY, 28 MAY

9.00 a.m. Séance de travail: "Architecture publique et architecture domestique"  
Session: "Public and Domestic Architecture"

Diane Bodnar, Univ. of British Columbia, "The Provincial Legislative Buildings in Western Canada: A Discussion of Style and Image"  
André Corboz, Univ. of Montréal, "Alexander Klein et le logement comme problème de circulation: un précédent canadien"  
Lynne D. DiStefano, Brescia College, "Domestic Architecture in London, Ontario: 1880-1910"

9.00 a.m. Séance de travail: "Architecture paysagiste"  
Session: "Landscape Architecture"

Fred Brooks, Vancouver, "Thomas H. Mawson: An English Landscape Architect, his Work and Influence in Canada"  
Douglas Cole, Simon Fraser Univ., "Wilderness Values and Canadian Tastes, 1885-1930"  
Deborah L. Schabracq-Sweitzer, Carleton Univ., "The Motherwell Homestead"

1.30 p.m. Séance de travail: "Génie et techniques"  
Session: "Engineering and Technics"

Frederick H. Armstrong, Univ. of Western Ontario, "The Second Great Fire of Toronto"  
T. Ritchie, National Research Council, "The Canadian Brick Industry, 1880-1915"

Frederick J. Netherton, Fort Steele, "The Baillie Grohman Canal in East Kootenay"

4.30 p.m. Réunion du bureau  
Board Meeting

SAMEDI 29 MAI  
SATURDAY, 29 MAY

9.00 a.m. Visite d'architecture entre Québec et Montréal, sur la rive nord du St-Laurent  
Tour of architecture between Quebec City and Montreal, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence.

DIMANCHE 30 MAI  
SUNDAY, 30 MAY

Visite d'architecture à Montréal  
Tour of architecture in Montreal

Appointment Sought

Graduate of Edinburgh University and Oberlin College, engaged in historic buildings recording and with architectural experience, seeks related employment anywhere in Canada or the United States. Fluent French-speaker. Available 1st August 1976.

Contact: G.L.M. Goodfellow  
2 Bangholm Terrace  
Edinburgh 3  
Scotland.

THE BATTLE ABOUT THE EMPIRE HOTEL  
IN WINNIPEG

The Cauchon Block (later called the Empire Hotel) built in 1882 was Winnipeg's first residential block. Its two facades of pressed metal with cast iron columns is one of the finest of such in Canada. Thus when the Winnipeg Environment Committee reversed its earlier decision not to grant a demolition permit on the building requested by its present owner, Great West Life Assurance Company, many groups and individuals across Canada were outraged. At the meeting of 2 Feb five representations were made to the Environment Committee requesting a delay in issuance of the demolition permit until a proper study of the most effective way to save the building could be found. This the Committee voted to do by giving 60 days for such studies to be done. Parks Canada has become involved in providing the necessary study of adaptive use costs. Two lessons about the study of architecture have come to the fore in the battle over the Empire:

The Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings of Parks Canada in Ottawa can be useful in such a situation by providing information on how unique the structure in question might be. But

there should be a more regular procedure to provide access to this information. Shortage of both money and personnel made retrieval too much an ad hoc operation and, when a building has a mixed set of materials (a facade of brick bearing structure, pressed metal parts, and cast iron columns and a mixed Classical and Medieval set of shapes) there is some difficulty in comparing apples in Winnipeg with oranges in Montreal.

There is a critical need for structural engineers who are both conversant with modern methods of construction and who can work constructively with older structural systems. This may not be a problem in Montreal, or Ottawa or Toronto but in regional centres (if Winnipeg is any indication some education is necessary.

William P. Thompson  
Winnipeg

## MEETINGS

Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, May 17-20, 1976 in Ottawa. Session topics include Formulation of Government Policy Regarding Building, Does Canada Need a National Architectural Organization?, The Architects' Response to the Anti-Inflation Board Regulations as they Affect Salaries and Fees, The Changing Nature of Professional Liabilities and the Need for a National Client Architect Agreement.

Society of Architectural Historians will meet in Philadelphia, May 19-24, 1976. The sessions will primarily deal with eighteenth century American architecture. For information contact Society of Architectural Historians, 1700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106.

Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain will meet at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, September 16-19, 1976. The SAHGB have kindly offered to waive the registration fee for SSAC members. Contact SAHGB, 8 Belmont Avenue, Melton Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 5QD, England.

Canadian Association of Geographers, Laval University, May 24-26, 1976. The following papers will be given:

"Strathcona, Alberta: the exemplification of a general theory of cultural landscape interpretation", Sitwell, O.F.G. (Alberta).

"Ethnic Architecture as a component of the cultural landscape in the Prairie Provinces" Schlichtmann, H. (Regina).

"The decline of regional distinctiveness in an industrial age: the Western case", Holdsworth, D. (U.B.C.)

"Sense of place in early landscape photography in British Columbia", Schwartz, J. (U.B.C.)

Discussion of the visible past human landscape of Glacier National Park, B.C., Marsh, J. (Trent).

"Planning for the preservation of Historic Environments", Sadler, B. (Alberta Env. Cons'n Auth.)

"Cultural origins, family size and relative affluence as causative factors in the development of regional house types: New Jersey c. 1780", Wacker, P. (Rutgers).

"Time and context in housing choice: a rural Ontario example", Norris, D. and Konrad, V. (McMaster).

"Barn style variations in Southern Ontario: A technique for rapid survey", Noble, A.G. (Akron).

"The built environment of Montreal in the late nineteenth century", Hannah, D. (McGill).

"Architectural styles as indicators of neighbourhood age and evolution", Bastian, R. (Indiana).

The following abstracts will be circulated:

"Principles in the Interpretation of the cultural landscape", Sitwell, O. (Alberta).

"La methodologie d'application de la nouvelle loi Quebecoise sur les biens culturels", Belanger, Bureau, and Raveneau (Laval).

"Historical biographies and visible landscapes of the past", Koroscil, P. (Simon Fraser).

"The Aran Islands: landscape and place in the writings of John M. Synge", Aiken, R. (Concordia).

T.B.A., Humphreys, B. (C.I.H.B., Parks Canada).

"Gulf Coast and Upland South Folk Houses of Alabama", Wilson, E. (South Alabama).

"The Annex: from elegance to populism", Lemon, J. (Toronto).

"Settlement and agricultural development in Southern Alberta", Miller, A. (Lethbridge).

T.B.A., Jakle, J. (Illinois, Urbana-Champaign).

"Cemetery marker origin: a key to market evolution", Norris, D., and Krogh, A. (McMaster).

"Housing taxonomy and micro-regional variation in type incidence: an Ontario township", Konrad, V., and Hall, C. (McMaster).

"Bush lots of the Northern rural landscape: a century of repetitive forest phindering", Wightman, W. (Western Ontario).

The International Institute for Conservation Canadian Group Annual Meeting, May 28-29, 1976, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Of special interest is a session organized by the Association for Preservation Technology The Conservation of Historic Monuments and Sites.

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