

Built Forms and Social Realities: A review Essay of Recent Work on Canadian Heritage Structures

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BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

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*BUILT FORMS AND SOCIAL REALITIES:
A REVIEW ESSAY OF RECENT WORK ON
CANADIAN HERITAGE STRUCTURES*

This review essay began as a critique of recent work on the architectural histories of several Canadian cities but blossomed into a broader consideration of some of the links between academic research on Canadian historical landscapes and the debate to conserve some of the best and/or typical structures of that past.¹ While Alan Artibise and Gilbert Stelter have recently used the phrase "The Usable Urban Past"² as an umbrella for essays on early 20th century planning and politics, it is clear that the built environment also contributes a significant urban past: old buildings provide textural and cultural components that can and should enhance the quality of present and future Canadian cities. The assumptions underlying such a belief are, for the most part, vague and are reflected in the variety of approaches towards the study of the built past. These include romantic and nostalgic views, negative attitudes towards modern architecture, labelling for educational purposes, and also a perception of rehabilitation as an increasingly sensible way of cutting costs rather than embarking on expensive new construction.

The Canadian preservation movement is not easily defined. Its rationale is uncertain, both because of the relative infancy of volunteer groups and government agencies charged with conserving structures or streetscapes and also because the procedures vary considerably between different

municipalities and provinces. Furthermore, both the feasibility and desirability of preservation, conservation, or rehabilitation have to be seen in the context of a society based on strongly defended property rights, tax disincentives, and a general historical insensitivity. While the salience of property rights and the economic pressures to renew are in themselves complex issues that merit separate essays, this paper concentrates on the potentials and weaknesses of attempts to inculcate a historical sensitivity - namely the creation of a consciousness that the past is important and that a broad range of artifacts have important non-monetary value.

While many people might subscribe to the value of the past, only a clearly articulated and convincingly argued case for saving old buildings can possibly have currency in the face of strong market forces that are prompting the demolition or otherwise transforming structures for current needs. The task of articulating heritage value has, until recently, been dominated by architectural historians. Several recent publications that reflect their perspective are reviewed here along with examples of the growing literature describing various preservation strategies. Their strengths and shortcomings will be discussed. The embryo exists of a more egalitarian approach to understanding and respecting the built environments of the past, which can be regarded as a broadening of the lens through which we see heritage landscapes. Vernacular structures, symbolic of ordinary men and women, are

increasingly given attention in community designations alongside the more impressive structures associated with famous or wealthy personages. This new perspective may be regarded as an essential pre-condition for effective conservation. However, since the whole designation process might be seen as an elitest exercise, even this broadening of the definitions might not provide a coherent paradigm for future conservation. Indeed, rehabilitation forces that are largely within the profit-oriented market place might continue to dominate the selection of elements of the past that are to be part of the urban future; accordingly effective heritage conservation might need to focus less on aesthetic arguments and more on the need for different tax incentives and desirable land-use mixes.

The Context for Conservation

In a society where the market place defines the quality of the environment, conservation perspectives need to be sensitive to pragmatic realities. Preservation can become business, but business always comes before preservation.³ In Vancouver, the Birks Building on the prime real estate corner of Granville and Georgia Streets, had to come down so that the Bank of Nova Scotia could hoist its corporate logo higher than those of its four main competitors. The same competition for height, symbolism, and modernity can be seen in one form or another from Victoria to St. John's. Often only where the "historic district" is off-centre; i.e., where it does not occupy sites sought after for modern commerce, does it appear that "preservation" can take place. There are considerable files of

newspaper reports on "demolition for progress" throughout Canada, and each issue of *Canadian Heritage* magazine⁴ invariably contains litanies of woe describing examples of perceived barbarism. Rather than itemize such cases and identify "market place culprits" a more useful approach might be to ask what is being done to protect the stock that remains and whether this action is effective.

There are two main avenues whereby preservation or rehabilitation occurs. One is business preservation, where there is adaptation of a building to new (current) uses. The structure remains but in a different context. Old houses or warehouses are transformed into fashionable offices, restaurants, boutiques, or apartments. The structure, although now devoid of its initial "authenticity," is exploited for its heritage value. A second approach is public sector preservation, whereby structures are adapted for public functions (again in a different context from their original purpose), or else are kept for explicitly museum purposes.

There are an increasingly large number of Canadian examples of business adaptation. Victoria's Bastion Square, Vancouver's Gastown, and Toronto's Yorkville and St. Lawrence Market districts come to mind. Halifax's waterfront Historic Properties provide expensive shops and restaurants close to the city's new complex of hotels, office towers, and convention centre. In these and other examples, the contribution of federal, provincial, and municipal government should be noted.⁵ It is tempting to comment that both the merchandise and character of such places are often

indistinguishable from city to city, though the shells of the buildings clearly reflect the earlier years of the particular city. There is undoubtedly a tension between the original purpose of the structure of area and pragmatic commercial considerations, and invariably authenticity is a casualty. In Ontario, historic Niagara-on-the-Lake is certainly successful heritage business, but the impact of tourism on the local community has caused considerable problems.⁶ In Toronto, the white-painters of Cabbagetown are preserving some of the city's Victorian stock, but there are some dubious side-effects. Real estate developer Darrell Kent's comment that "I've always resented the feeling that the poor had a God-given right to the downtown" is symptomatic of the social costs of the "gentrification" process.⁷ Future conservation strategists need to address themselves to these broader social questions.

Examples of the second approach, public sector conservation, raise the problem of representativeness and purpose. In some cases, structures are recognized as rare commodities highly valued because of their rarity, and groups that subscribe to that rarity value subscribe to the building's survival. Uniqueness is claimed for the only surviving example, "the place where a famous personage lived," or where "an historic figure made a significant contribution to regional or national history," or "the first example of a particular architectural style." Alternatively a building's value is recognized in relation to some regional or national set of identities. Examples might include an old jail, a tenement, a church,

or a house typical of a certain social group or area. This might be seen as an "educational" perspective, though it is difficult to utilize all the structures in a manner that preserves both their presence as on-going stock and also their original purpose. Instances of "rarity labelling" abound, as legitimate recognition of the birth sites or residence of important personalities, e.g. Bellevue, the Kingston home of John A. Macdonald, or the Brantford homestead of Alexander Graham Bell. Unfortunately, this approach precludes the perhaps anonymous structures next door to Bell's, or Nellie McLung's, or Norman Bethune's. The "biography of landscape," as Marwyn Samuels has recently argued,⁸ is an important consideration when we try to attach meaning to places. But whose biography? Too often farmhouses, residences, banks, and old office buildings need rarity biographies before they come within the public lens.⁹ Of course, even this is not sufficient in many cases: the great are only great within a sympathetic ideological context - witness the 1975 destruction in Montreal of railroad builder William Van Horne's mansion.¹⁰

Effective heritage conservation for cityscapes or structures that are *not* often amenable to a personality / preciousness categorization depend substantially on the priorities of provincial ministries of culture, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and municipal planning departments. It is here that the academic community can and does contribute. Through direct consulting, participation on various historical boards, and the training of students who become professional heritage administrators, the academic

community is in a position to influence priorities for the public purse. How this occurs, with what objectives, and with whose values are points not clearly defined. Too often scholars have been oblivious of the social realities¹¹ surrounding buildings, with the consequence that the vast majority of structures are ignored. For example, Vancouver has only twenty-two buildings designated for their heritage value. A plaque on one of them simply states "City of Vancouver Heritage Building: Brock House, Maclure and Fox, 1913." So successful has been the "education" of those involved in heritage preservation that these two rarity biographies - owner and famous architect - are sufficient shorthand labels for heritage Vancouver. Structures without such labels suffer the consequences of anonymity - destruction and replacement - until, presumably, the last remaining ordinary contractor-built house of the 1890s, 1900s, or 1920s is recognized and labelled! In suggesting that what people write about influences what people deem important, I am arguing that much current literature is preoccupied with a highly rarified set of criteria that influences designation. These values, and indeed the artifacts under examination, are not necessarily all that are available.

*Some Recent Publications On
Canadian Architectural History*

Martin Segger, a respected and influential architectural historian, suggests in a co-authored book on Victoria, B.C. that regional history is clearly revealed through architecture.¹² He presents his case through four introductory essays on society, economy, technology, and aesthetics

during Victoria's formative years, and follows these with four suggested tour guides to the architecture of the inner city. These are treated through illustrations (by Douglas Franklin) and descriptions of thirty-one buildings in "Old Town," sixteen houses in the James Bay district, some fourteen churches, and then twenty-nine buildings in a tour titled "Victoria's residence." Segger's introductory essays on the city's history rely far too heavily on flowery contemporary accounts and, like his selection of buildings for the residential tour, are a severely screened version of the past. Persons living in Victoria seeking information about their house as part of that city's rich residential landscape will be severely disappointed if they do not live in a sprawling Tudor Revival mansion or large houses in a few other styles. This is a book largely on Victoria as symbolized by structures associated with the small group of merchants and capitalists who were a dominant element of British Columbia's economy and society for so many years. As such Segger offers a primer for only one strand of regional history in architecture. Even the description of the most impressive palace of them all, Robert Dunsmuir's *Craigdarroch Castle*, contains little indication about the root of his wealth, namely the coal mining towns of Vancouver Island where miners lived in company shacks.¹³ For the most part, structures are described through the detailed biography of the business owner, or through the biography of the architect. If there is no 'famous' owner or architect, then a building rarely is considered. "Owner unknown" or "architect unknown" is a label of last-resort, and a few structures, selected generally because they are

located between more imposing buildings on suggested routes, are discussed under this heading. Naturally the architect is unknown, if a structure is the product of a pattern book floor plan; requiring a rarity/uniqueness biography makes it easy to treat a building as almost insignificant. For example, Segger describes a house at 309 Simcoe (architect unknown) as a

typical High Victorian builder's house of a kind which was *thrown up* by speculative builders during the 1880s and early 1890s. The symmetrical plan is *marred* by an *off-centre* porch and bay window which are *merely* added to the two-storey *box*. Similarly *tacked on* are the mass-produced, catalogue ordered decorative features like the milled porch posts and spindle ornaments or the *too-slender* roof brackets.¹⁴

The fact that the house was never intended as a symmetrical house is irrelevant if this arbiter of architectural significance deems that symmetry is the criteria for judging the structure. A similar imbalance is evident in the coverage of the H.G. Wilson residence, which receives attention as a one-of-a-kind California Bungalow, possibly because it is a rare Victoria "high-art" example of a style inspired by the exceptional architecture of the Pasadena firm of Greene and Greene. The more widespread "builders' vernacular" California Bungalow, perhaps the most popular model in the pre-1914 boom, receives minimal attention in the text and certainly no illustration. Does this absence suggest what is irrelevant or insignificant in Victoria landscape heritage?

Similarly selective screening is apparent in William Dendy's *Lost Toronto*,¹⁵ a volume that contains a superb collection of photos of buildings now destroyed, together with statements about their owners and architects. Dendy implies that a better, cosier Toronto has been replaced by an unfeeling commercial landscape. His nostalgia clouds the fact that the same social strata that now occupy the new landscapes of commerce also occupied and destroyed the old that made way for them. The text, like Segger's for Victoria, reads as a biography of commercial successes or a biography of well known architects in every attempt to explain a structure's significance. There is no sense of a Toronto lost that had working people, or simple, non-architect-designed houses. Again, by default, those structures are not to be mourned or saved.

Such criticisms do not deny the powerful impact of Dendy's presentation of Toronto's grand homes and institutions and some of Canada's finest commercial structures. King Street in its Edwardian heyday was an impressive streetscape, and perhaps it became an inevitable and newly mourned victim of commercial progress when it was upgraded towards today's shiny towers (whereas the ongoing decline of Montreal as a financial centre allows us continued access to that city's St. James Street as a "living" record of Canadian commercial streetscapes). Dendy's research is impressive and the approximately one hundred and twenty photos are accompanied by detailed description of architect, owner, and style. Yet the intensely academic vocabulary of his text possibly stands in the way of communicating to a broader readership. A layman audience is

surely important if the built past is to have much currency. Indeed, one might ask whether this gulf between "ivory-tower" academic and the community helps to lengthen the list of demolitions.¹⁶ Certainly the preservation arguments that dwell on detailed explanation of either architect or style rarely convince pragmatic aldermen and planners, sensitive to the social and economic values of building or site. So, for effective conservation strategies, perhaps Dendy needs to go beyond the visual editorials that juxtapose a small contemporary photograph of the parking lot or office tower against the rich historic image across the page.

While the scholarly pursuits of academic architectural historians are certainly legitimate, one might wonder whether, as part of their attempts to save distinctive elements of the built environments, they could integrate a critical perspective on the economic and political realities of contemporary land use changes. Possibly they could do more to convey the non-economic richness of landscape continuity, rather than bemoan the lost part from a somewhat detached and rarified standpoint. A broader perspective is indeed suggested in the work of various municipal chapters of Institutes of Architects, who have developed guide books to try to bring the public to its heritage. These small guides, *Exploring Toronto*, *Exploring Montreal* and *Exploring Halifax*,¹⁷ with sections on residential areas, downtown offices, old and new buildings, encourage the reader to walk up to and past buildings and see them in their broad urban context, rather than to isolate them as icons. Their enthusiasm for the past and

the present, their stress on both the idiosyncratic and the typical, can act as powerful educators.

Eric Arthur's classic book on Toronto, *No Mean City*,¹⁸ still offers an excellent model for the appreciation of urban built environment, but possibly the best recent work in this area, combining detailed architectural history research and enthusiastic tour guide is that provided in Hal Kalman's *Exploring Vancouver* 2.¹⁹ Adopting more of a Michelin-guide format than the other "exploring" volumes, this too is a guidebook adopted by the provincial Architectural Institute. John Roaf contributes many excellent photographs of buildings under discussion. The dynamic as well as relic landscape is noted in some ten tours of the city. Vancouver's historic core, Gastown, as well as Chinatown, the business district, the West End, and Shaughnessy are all covered in six walking tours, while the suburban districts to the south and across the harbour are explored in four driving routes. The front cover photo, of the 1913 Hudson's Bay Company building reflected along with the new Sears Tower in the glass of the Toronto Dominion tower, clearly signals the complementarity of old and new, and most pages attempt to fit a building into both its intellectual and its local functional setting. There are times when Kalman pursues the Segger/Dendy route and uses the "architect unknown" approach, but certainly cabins, cottages, and tenements, as well as modern apartment towers and tract subdivisions, are included along with structures associated with Vancouver's elite. Consequently the reader has a broader access to the city, and, by acknowledging the place of relatively commonplace or

"anonymous" structures the book contributes a possible conservation strategy. The potential link between Kalman's emphasis and the city's heritage stock can be seen in a proposal - sponsored by Heritage - to incorporate thirteen rather ordinary, but typical, frame houses in a public park for the high rise West End district.²⁰ The irony, of course, is that there are many such buildings on the east side, which no one is interested in preserving. The city's heritage guardians, still largely educated on the texture of the grander westside, tend not to regard the east side as worthy of attention. From this brief assessment of the salient messages of heritage "tastemakers," one should now turn to some of the recent publications that present examples of actual conservation processes.

Attempts to Define a Usable Urban Past

The potential link between public awareness and successful conservation strategies has been aided by the creation of the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building (C.I.H.B.) in 1970.²¹ Establishment of a central research staff of professionals in Ottawa and regional centres has been followed by provincial and municipal heritage research units. Detailed case studies of areas, building types, and style-periods have been forthcoming as well as a flood of publications that contain examples of heritage surveys and suggestions on who to contact for information or assistance in designating and protecting structures. An early example of such a "manual" approach is provided by Ann Falkner's *Without Our Past*,²² written as a handbook for heritage preservation and supported by the former

Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. She reviews what was then the state of the art on where and how conservation had worked in parts of Canada and America. Such a descriptive inventory is quickly out-dated as further work is done, but she does bring together, in one place, an impressive variety of examples of assessment procedures on the evaluation of buildings. Examples of what to do with the buildings once they are "saved" are also included. Falkner draws on the American author Arthur Zeigler, who stresses that community involvement is fundamental: "the first duty of a historic preservation group is to articulate to a community its indigenous architectural needs."²³ Published examples of "how to do it" heritage strategy are becoming widespread in surveys²⁴ and in consultants' reports.²⁵ These are invaluable for information-sharing, providing evidence of arguments used elsewhere that are moral support for those thinking they are struggling in a wilderness.

Not all reports succeed in conveying their message. Following on the heels of Falkner is a puzzlingly vague book by Marc Denhez, a lawyer and one-time research director for Heritage Canada. His *Heritage Fights Back*²⁶ is a reworking of the Canadian submission to UNESCO's information-sharing on the protection of historical and architectural sites. The original version was highly technical and legal, whereas this book is an attempt to translate the essential argument for the Canadian lay market. Denhez's style and content, however, do not provide convincing information. Reference material to support his points would have helped considerably. Almost a quarter of the book is

devoted to a case study of a heritage area (as the UNESCO brief required). Denhez's choice is a detailed chronology of the "Battle of Gastown" in Vancouver, replete with tactical jargon such as "reviewing the troops," "the eastern and western fronts," "offensives" and "mobilizing citizenry." It is a somewhat tenuous interpretation that would see the Gastown case as a model for heritage fighting back; the battle was mock, and other forces were at work in Vancouver to create a climate for "saving" heritage. These included a city-wide voter frustration with the business-dominated "Non-Partisan Association" council, whose support for futuristic plans for a \$200 million waterfront office and retail scheme, a waterfront freeway, and a third crossing of the Burrard Inlet had brought together a variety of citizen groups.²⁷ Given that dominant opposition, together with a broad defence of the threatened Chinatown district, the various actors involved in defending and/or exploiting the fabric of Gastown could emerge. Even with the "winning" of Gastown, its *ad hoc* history does not really provide a trans-Canadian model for heritage preservation, nor does Vancouver necessarily demonstrate a vigorous commitment to heritage in the wake of that "fight."²⁸

Denhez was more effective in the role of a heritage taxation lawyer in a presentation to the British Columbia and Yukon Heritage Conference, the proceedings of which were written up as *New Life for Old Buildings*.²⁹ Even then, it should be noted, his co-panellist, Harry Rankin, notable left-wing Vancouver alderman, reminds him and us of the socio-political context of

heritage, a context which is fundamentally important in a society where property interests clearly dominate.³⁰ The B.C. conference was a fascinating mix of local and national figures, politicians, local historians, bureaucrats, academics, and interested citizens. C.I.H.B. researcher Edward Mills expressed one clear message from this meeting:

while nationally and provincially based surveys and studies may serve to define outstanding architectural landmarks within broader spheres, the onus is on local groups to define and publicize the existence of buildings of historical and aesthetic value to the immediate locales in which they live and work.³¹

Perhaps the best model for such a community-based strategy is to be found in Ontario. In the last two years there have been several publications from the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation that provide both professional expertise and mobilise local pride and local initiative. Following the passing of the Ontario Heritage Act in 1974, some eighty Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committees (LACAC) were established to advise municipal councils on architectural conservation. Within three years, 550 properties were designated, and in a nicely written and illustrated book, *LACAC's at Work*,³² the achievements of some 63 communities were recognized. In his introduction, George Kapelos comments:

There is a deep feeling for architectural heritage across Ontario and people are working

with unequivocal devotion to ensure that proper attention and protection is given to our heritage resources. What we have developed is a movement which demands that future development occurs with heritage in mind.³³

The LACAC collective record was assembled for a 1978 conference, *Conserving Ontario's Main Streets*, sponsored by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. The proceedings of that meeting³⁴ are an impressive distillation of expertise and dedication. Also produced in conjunction with that conference were the consultant reports of Cambridge, Dundas, Goderich, Guelph, and Kingston, collated by Richard Rodgers as information-studies in the possibilities of downtown conservation.³⁵ All three of these Ontario government publications are written in a manner that provides digestable and usable information for community groups, as well as offering some thoughtful debate on current planning and economic realities. Their most impressive quality is their record of increasing community involvement, which is slowly beginning to transform perspectives away from the rarity biography and establishment criteria for heritage.³⁶ The Ontario guidelines and results are perhaps the best Canadian model for heritage conservation at the moment. This might well reflect the small-town scale at which local pride and initiative can be harnessed. Larger metropolitan centres might be vulnerable to limited "community patrol" that allows redevelopment forces a freer hand.

This is not to say that the larger urban places must be

abandoned to market forces. Issues and ideas can emerge that generate broad community consciousness. In Halifax, this broad unity has been largely established through the effort to maintain view corridors between the Citadel and the Harbour. In recent years that view has been increasingly eroded, and a very readable book by Elizabeth Pacey, *The Battle of Citadel Hill*,³⁷ traces post-war redevelopment schemes in Halifax. The various local and central Canadian actors are identified, particularly for the Scotia Square redevelopment scheme, and this book is a clear summary of a heritage battle without the forced framework that Denhez adopted for Vancouver's Gastown. This would seem to be a further suggestion for a grass roots focus, balanced by expertise that can contribute regional and national perspectives.

There is considerable room for optimism in the light of the recent intensification of research and action on heritage structures. In addition to the broadening of research on old buildings, two new directions by government agencies might be recognized. First, agencies are providing more advice on how to balance pragmatically contemporary needs while maintaining past structures. For example, recent federal and provincial energy conservation programmes that encourage property owners to upgrade insulation and heating efficiency sometimes results in unsympathetic vinyl siding, new aluminum windows, etc., that radically alter the appearance of buildings. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has issued a well-illustrated sixty page booklet on ways that maintenance and upgrading can still retain the character of a house.³⁸ A second development includes literature

explaining the legislative background to heritage conservation attitudes, which is beginning to address the crucial question of compensation. Section 11(4) of British Columbia's Heritage Conservation Act, for example, provides for compensation where designation can be shown to decrease the economic value of the building. Financial incentive programmes for maintaining heritage structures similarly place heritage in a positive light rather than the more negative or prohibitory mood that has so often accompanied designation.³⁹ Fundamental factors such as the tax system and capital depreciation allowances - in a society where individuals tend to use their property for private rather than more broadly defined public goals - need further attention if heritage consciousness is to be successfully maintained.

Conclusion: The Past in the Present

Unless there is an understanding of the connections between the dynamic late twentieth century elements of a landscape and the relics from previous times, effective heritage celebration will be difficult, however much optimism can be generated from current trends. Rather than be polemic in supporting the totality of the past or future, there is a need for recognition of a sense of the value and necessity of continuity in time.⁴⁰ A narrow focus on the past is not always productive. As David Lowenthal has commented: "much architectural preservation is avowedly antiquarian: the valued past is merely museumized, not integrated with the present."⁴¹ Indicative of this designation of "past" and "present" is the following advertisement for the reconstruction of a Loyalist

settlement at King's Landing, New Brunswick:

Tired of the rush and roar of modern traffic, the scream of tires, the smell of hot exhausts? Fed up with the voices of doom clammering from every radio and TV set? Come to King's Landing, where 55 buildings on a 300 acre site and a costumed staff of more than 100 people offer you a relaxing trip into the peaceful pioneer past of New Brunswick. Let the 20th century look after itself for a few hours while you take time to enjoy your heritage.⁴²

As Dendy and others have shown so well, the twentieth century landscape *cannot* look after itself. Since for many Canadian places the twentieth century stock represents a high proportion of available heritage, it is essential that we create a perspective on the past that goes beyond "the first," "the pioneer," and the "genteel" early days. We should not penalize our future by such a past/present dichotomy; we need not create rural heritage complexes such as Upper Canada Village, Louisburg and King's Landing at the expense of an urban heritage consciousness, nor should we perpetuate a partial view of the past.

The sentiments expressed in this review represent a hopeful call for a reassessment of priorities in the field of heritage conservation. To suggest that vernacular landscapes are worthy of attention too - simply adding other elements to what is still a labelling or designation exercise - is possibly as narrow as a pre-occupation with the grand structures of famous architects or

personalities.⁴³ Yet it is also a step towards a more egalitarian sense of past society and environment than some of the present exclusionary definitions. Lying beyond these adjustments are hopes for a time and society when a community in and of itself decides what is important and what stays.⁴⁴ Recent experiments within the museum world have pointed to the possibility of an entire region being regarded as an ecological community museum. Such a community-regulated heritage concept would need no outside curators, designators or interpreters.⁴⁵

Returning to my earlier assertion that we live in a society where market forces define the quality of the environment, this appeal for consideration of the ordinary and the mundane is possibly too quixotic. Real preservation tends to occur in the richest and poorest backwaters, and whitepainters will eventually transform those poor enclaves if the bulldozers haven't already been there. Accordingly, for academics to become involved in *action* alongside the heritage bureaucrats may be satisfying, but is it progress or is it a liberal defence of the existing order? Often preservation *per se* becomes the objective of undirected action, rather than preservation of something for some purpose. A concern for the ordinary is laudable when the recognition of the spectacular implies in some tangential sense a celebration of oppression, but how far can we move beyond educational labelling of the ordinary before we threaten the *status quo*? Perhaps more effort should go into debate about the underlying assumptions of the preservation "industry," into research on the social costs of

gentrification, and also into thinking about the meaning of the past for contemporary society. In other words what are the social priorities of our urban world? A leading Canadian figure in this regard is Pierre Berton, gallantly trying to convince us that we need a perspective other than the economic values that write off buildings after thirty-five years.⁴⁶

Clearly then, although there is an impressive body of literature that is providing case studies of specific building types, areas, and preservation struggles, there is still room for further discussion. What are the criteria for selection of heritage structures, and what is a broad, non-architectural approach to conservation trying to achieve? Is the usable urban past usable because it is good to look at, educational, or simply economic wisdom in an age of declining resources and high building costs? Those people interested in urban historical questions, be they trained as historians, geographers, sociologists, or art historians, clearly have a role to play in such a heritage debate. As a group, we can contribute, as educators, to a broader awareness of landscape, and hopefully, through critical debate and analysis, contribute to learning to live with our past in a healthy way, a way that is neither antiquarian, selective, exploitative, nor crass.

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NOTES

1. These arguments were first developed in a paper presented at a session on Heritage

- Research, Planning, and Preservation, at the joint meeting of the Eastern American Historical Geographers Association and the Ontario Historical Geographers, Niagara-on-the-lake, October 19th, 1979. I would like to thank Larry Bourne, Peter Ennals, Gunter Gad, Cole Harris, Cecil Houston and Kathy Mackie for their helpful comments on a later draft of that paper.
- 2 Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979).
- 3 A vivid example of this recently was Toronto Maple Leaf's owner Harold Ballard, commenting on the destruction of Foster Hewitt's famous broadcast gondola at the Gardens: "Hell we're not in the historical business and that gondola wasn't so old anyway" (Rich Boulton, "Oh no! Ballard's trashed Hewitt's gondola," *Toronto Star*, September 20th, 1979, p. 1). Clarence Campbell commented "that gondola represented one of the most significant things in Canadian history, as famous and as worthy as any historical site," (*ibid.*, p. 7); Foster Hewitt, who regarded the gondola as home for 48 years of broadcasting, said "it was one of the best-known places in Canada." Removed in renovations that allowed the construction of a series of mini-apartments rented by companies at \$30,000 per season to entertain clients, the gondola was a further casualty to an attitude exemplified by the comment, "my job is to build improvements, not worry about history," (*ibid.* p. 7). For background on North American preservation as business see "The Recycling of America," *Time Magazine*, June 11, 1979, pp. 46-9; R.L. Nessen, "Treasure Houses: Taking shelter in old buildings," *Harper's*, Dec. 1978, pp. 16-20.
- 4 Published bimonthly, *Canadian Heritage* has had a long gestation period without really deciding what its image should be, who is its audience, and how should it "sell" heritage. Part of their schizoid attitude has been their pragmatic wish to attract corporate financial support and yet maintain a critical attitude to the negative consequences of corporate involvement in redevelopment projects. *Preservation News*, the newspaper of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States has a somewhat more consistent format, and, along with its flagship magazine *Historic Preservation*, offers a good perspective on American heritage conservation issues.
- 5 W. Ellwood, "Private Sector Spin-offs from Public Investment in the 'Inner City,'" *Urban Forum*, 4 (May-June 1978), pp. 20-28.
- 6 Proctor & Redfern (consultant engineers & Planners) *The Economic Impact of Tourism Development Proposals in Niagara-on-the-Lake* (1977) for Parks Canada. An excellent source for information on the heritage structures of that town is P.J. Stokes, *Old Niagara-on-the-Lake* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). Fortress Louisbourg,

- in Cape Breton, N.S., offers perhaps the most successful Canadian example of heritage as business both in its superb reconstruction of an 18th-century town and its positive effects on the local economy. See S.D. Cameron, "Astonishing Louisbourg - French Canada in 1744 recreated - for \$25 million," *Saturday Night*, 95 (June 1980), pp. 43-48.
- 7 Ann Papert, "The Conquest of Cabbagetown: How Darell Kent and the whitepainters are remaking an old Toronto neighborhood," *Toronto Star Sunday Magazine*, February 10, 1980, pp. 8-13. The displacement of existing residents is a major adverse effect associated with the preservation of historic districts. This problem is noted in an American report issued by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *The Contribution of Historic Preservation to Urban Revitalization* (Washington, 1979). See also five articles on "Residential Displacement - A Program for the 80's," *Urban Concern*, 1 (March 1980).
- 8 M.S. Samuels, "The Biography of Landscape," in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 51-88.
- 9 Even within the museum perspective, changes in priorities are emerging; for example, the Nova Scotia Museum looks after 18 historic buildings scattered throughout the province. Eight of the 12 museum houses would be classified as vernacular, and they demonstrate a social range from small-farmer, small-town merchant, minister, jailer, Attorney-General, judge and gentleman farmer to in-shore fishermen.
- 10 D. Berku, "Saving Montreal," *City Magazine*, 1 (May 1975), pp. 38-46.
- 11 I take my title from Jim Lemon's use of the phrase in his essay "The Weakness of Place in Early Pennsylvania," in J.R. Gibson, ed., *European Settlement and Development in North America* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 190-207. In a study of attitudes towards various aspects of heritage, Victor Konrad revealed considerable differences in outlooks of professionals, heritage society members, and the general public. See V.A. Konrad, "Orientations Toward the Past in the Environment of the Present: Retrospect in Metropolitan Toronto," Ph.D. Thesis (McMaster University, 1978), especially pp. 327-373.
- 12 M. Segger and D. Franklin, *Victoria: A Primer for Regional History in Architecture, 1843-1929* (Watkins Glen, 1979).
- 13 See M. Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business 1883-1911* (Toronto, 1974), especially pp. 87-88. The broader background on Victoria businessmen can be found in M. Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto, 1972).
- 14 M. Segger, *Victoria*, pp. 172-3.
- 15 W. Dendy, *Lost Toronto* (Toronto: Oxford, 1978)
- 16 This point is developed more fully in *Archivaria*, No. 8 (1979), pp. 172-4.
- 17 A. Slaight, ed., *Exploring Toronto: Its Buildings, People and Places*, revised

- edition (Toronto: Greey de Pencier, 1977); in the same series, *Exploring Montreal* (1975), *Exploring Halifax* (1976), *Exploring Niagara-on-the-Lake* (1976).
- 18 E. Arthur, *Toronto, No Mean City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964).
- 19 H.D. Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver 2. Ten Tours of the City and Its Building*, revised and enlarged edition (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978).
- 20 Downs and Archambault, architects, *Park Site 19: A Feasibility Study*, on behalf of Heritage Canada (Vancouver, 1979).
- 21 A. Falkner, "The Canadian Inventory of Historic Building," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, 86 (Feb. 1973), pp. 44-53. In addition to a multitude of in-house research reports on selected architects, building types and communities, all of which build on the mammoth data-gathering exercise of the first five years of the project's existence, the C.I.H.B. has issued two useful booklets on style and building recognition: B.A. Humphreys and M. Sykes, *The Buildings of Canada: A Guide to Pre-20th Century Styles in Houses, Churches and Other Structures* (Montreal: Readers Digest, 1974); and H.D. Kalman, *The Evaluation of Historic Buildings* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979).
- 22 A. Falkner, *Without our Past? A Handbook for the Preservation of Canada's Architectural Heritage* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, 1977).
- 23 A.P. Zeigler, *Historic Preservation in Inner City Areas: A Manual of Practice* (Pittsburgh: Allegheny Press, 1971), p. 9.
- 24 See for example J.H. Lutman, "Conducting Urban Heritage Surveys: A Case Study of London, Ontario," *Urban History Review*, No. 1-77 (June 1977), pp. 46-54; N. Blanchard, "Approaches to Preserving a Community: The Pointe Claire Experience," *Urban Forum*, Vol. 4 (May-June, 1978), pp. 6-11, 29-35; Shane O'Dea, et al, *Ten Historic Towns: Historic Architecture in Newfoundland* (St. John's: Valhalla Press, 1978).
- 25 See, for example, Sheppard, Burt and Associates, and Arends and Associates, *St. John's Heritage Conservation Area Study. A Report on the Feasibility and Desirability of Establishing a Heritage Conservation Area in St. John's, Newfoundland* (Heritage Canada and The Newfoundland Historic Trust, December 1976); also H.D. Kalman, K. Wagland and R. Bailey, *Encore: Recycling Public Buildings for the Arts* (Toronto: Corpus, 1980).
- 26 M. Denhez, *Heritage Fights Back. Legal, Financial and Promotional Aspects of Canada's Efforts to Save Its Architecture and Historic Sites* (Toronto: Heritage Canada and Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978).
- 27 See D. Gutstein, *Vancouver Ltd.* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1975), pp. 151-60; also D.F. Ley, "Liberal Ideology and the Post-Industrial City," *Association of American Geographers, Annals* 70 (June 1980), pp. 238-58.

- 28 One of the leading Gastown entrepreneurs later became a member of the City of Vancouver Heritage Advisory Board but continued as developer in his purchase, demolition, and replacement by townhouses of the mansion of one of the province's leading lumbermen. This might well be a healthy development, following on from my comments on rarity biography, but it is indicative of the separation of heritage and business in most Canadian cities. See also Kalman's section on demolished buildings "In Memoriam," in *Exploring Vancouver 2*, pp. 263-71.
- 29 Community Arts Council of Vancouver, *New Life for Old Buildings* (Vancouver, 1977).
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-80.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 32.
- 32 O.M. Williams, ed., *LACACs at work...a primer of Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee activities in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, 1978).
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 34 M. Fraser, ed., *Conserving Ontario's Main Street* (Toronto: Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1979).
- 35 W.R. Rodgers, ed., *Five Studies Planning for Downtown Conservation* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, 1978).
- 36 There are still very traditional criteria for deciding what is valued as "historical" or "architectural" importance. Another adjective used in legislation is "cultural" importance, a term far less precisely defined, but encompassing gas stations, motels and the like as well as other commonplace structures. An excellent essay on the ordinary landscape and its meaning is by P.F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," in Meinig, *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, pp. 11-32.
- 37 E. Pacey, *The Battle of Citadel Hill* (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot Press, 1979).
- 38 H.D. Kalman, *The Sensible Rehabilitation of Older Houses* (Ottawa: C.M.H.C.1979). See also "Ontario Renews: Action for the '80s," *Housing Ontario* 24, No. 3 (1980).
- 39 For British Columbia, see the booklet *Methods and Means in Municipal Heritage Conservation* (Victoria: British Columbia Ministry of Provincial Secretary, 1978); a similar booklet for Ontario is, *Architectural Conservation and the Ontario Heritage Act* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, Heritage Conservation Division, n.d.). A summary of American tax reforms as they relate to heritage structures is provided by L. Curry, "Finding Shelter in Old Buildings," *Historic Preservation* 32, No. 2 (1980), pp. 26-31.
- 40 In Toronto, the infill schemes designed by Jack Diamond come to mind as an example of integrating past and present; see "Can Our Downtowns Be Saved?" *Canadian Heritage* (April 1980), pp. 46-48.
- 41 D. Lowenthal, "The Past in American Landscape," in D. Lowenthal and M.J. Bowden, eds., *Geographies of the Mind* (New York, 1976), p. 110; also "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65

- (1975), pp. 1-36.
- 42 *The Valley Visitor* (8 (August, 1979).
- 43 For an excellently pointed commentary on this idea, see Charles Klein "Who Needs the 'Folk'?" *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15, No. 3 (1978), pp. 263-5.
- 44 Optimistic views on the potential for community action can be found in L. Burton and D. Morley, "Neighborhood Survival in Toronto," *Landscape* 23, No. 3 (1979), pp. 33-40; and J.T. Lemon "The Urban Community Movement: Moving Towards Public Households," in David Ley and Marwyn Samuels, eds., *Humanistic Geography: Prospects and Problems* (Chicago: Maaroufa 1978), pp. 319-37. Toronto's Annex communities might equally be seen as the conservative organization of middle-class property owners for preservation and exclusion at the same time: see "The Greening of Stanley Gardens," *Maclean's* (Dec. 1979), p. 38.
- 45 Hughes de Varnie-Bohan, "The 'Fragmented' Museum: The Museum of Man and Industry at Le Crusot-Monteau-les-Mines," (UNESCO) *Museum* 25, No. 4 (1973), pp. 242-49.
- 46 P. Berton, "A Pause that Preserves," *Maclean's* (March 24, 1980), p. 6.

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Block, Jean F. *Hyde Park Houses: An Informal History, 1856-1910*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 156. Maps, illustrations, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$12.95.

Hyde Park is one of those

communities that belies the stereotype about the division between the suburb and city. It is a suburb *within* a city, having been annexed by Chicago in 1889. Over the years Hyde Park has grown from a commuter hamlet to a neighborhood within a metropolis, but it has still managed to maintain its own identity, much like Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia, which technically has been a city neighborhood since 1854. Jean Block has written an architectural history of the community in its formative years. She makes excellent use of photographs as evidence, and the book is a useful supplement to the survey of housing found in Harold M. Mayer and Richard C. Wade, *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis* (1969). *Hyde Park Houses* includes biographical information on more than forty architects and an impressive check list of over nine hundred existing buildings that is organized by street and notes construction date, architect, owner, and owner's occupation.

The brief narrative of eighty-eight pages is divided into three chapters ("The Perfect Suburb, 1856-71," "Years of Growth, 1872-89," and "A City Neighborhood, 1890-1910"). The Hyde Park that Block discusses is only a small part (3 square miles) of the former township of Hyde Park (48 square miles), and it extends south from 47th Street to 59th Street and east from Cottage Grove Road to Lake Michigan. This is the northeast corner of the township which a real estate speculator, Paul Cornell, saw as an ideal place to plan a commuter village. In 1853 Cornell bought three-hundred acres between 51st and 55th Streets and promptly gave sixty to the Illinois Central Railroad in return for the promise of a passenger station and