

**Pearce, David. *Conservation Today*. London and New York:  
Routledge, 1989. Pp. x, 245. Illustrations**

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same details as both meaningless and useless, and caused me so much grief in my first year.

When completed, University College was received by the public of Toronto with an enthusiasm that no modern work has come anywhere near equalling. Not even Revell's City Hall gained quite the same level of public adulation. University College was declared "perfect," "the finest structure in Canada," and "the finest ... in the New World." Today, we long for such acceptance of innovative work, but rarely get it. Yet Storm ardently followed the Puginian theory that "every building that is treated naturally, without disguise or concealment, cannot fail to look well"—another mainstay of orthodox modernism. Somehow, 20th-century pursuit of this ideal has taken serious architecture so far away from cultural norms that the most ambitious work appeals to a small minority.

I rather suspect that both our rejection of eclecticism and our superficial return to it in Postmodernism are strongly influenced by a general lack of appreciation for the professionalism, dedication, and competence of the best nineteenth century architects. Richardson's account of University College well exemplifies the task of the critic: he provides access to the substance of the architecture, ideas and issues at levels not accessible to most observers. Reading Chapter Five, one can not see how the best 20th-century architects are clearly superior to Cumberland and Storm, either in the handling of technical details or in the understanding of and dedication to architectural ideals.

Richardson's treatment of University College enables us to understand this well loved building much better, both as an outstanding contribution to our discipline,

and as a major event in the urban history of Toronto; certainly not as merely the work of an "easy going pasticheur." The book is a handsome, well-designed volume, profusely illustrated in colour as well as black and white, and a real bargain. University College, as it stands today, comes through in many fine photographs by John C. Wilson. Richardson's craftsman-like prose reads smoothly, like a well-told tale, or a fond reminiscence. After all, it is the content that counts, in writing as in building.

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**Pearce, David. *Conservation Today*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. Pp. x, 245. Illustrations.**

*Conservation Today* accompanied a major exhibition of the same name, launched in the spring of 1989 by the Royal Fine Art Commission at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The author (and Deputy Director of the exhibition), David Pearce, had played a significant role in the conservation of Britain's architectural heritage as a co-founder and Vice Chairman of SAVE Britain's Heritage and as Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

The book is primarily a collection of case studies of the projects illustrated in the exhibition, but it is prefaced by a discussion of their legal, political and historical context. Together, this constitutes a thorough and well-documented history of heritage conservation in Britain since 1975.

In his introduction, Pearce identifies the mid-1970s as a time of fundamental change in attitude toward architectural conservation and cites 1975, European Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY), as a

milestone in this early development. EAHY caught the imagination of a public disappointed with the results of post-war planning and housing policies, and it showed "a gentler way forward" which incorporated the preservation of historic buildings, conservation and adaptive reuse. Since that time, groups such as SAVE Britain's Heritage have campaigned to change legislation as well as attitudes. There is increasing awareness that monies spent on heritage more than pay for themselves in terms of tourism, job creation and other stimulæ to the economy. There has been a shift in emphasis away from high style to "the charm of the nearly ordinary," and a corresponding fashion for nostalgia has evolved. There is also an increasing interest in conservation as a means of preserving and documenting social history. Changes in public opinion have been reflected in changing governmental and corporate attitudes, and the results—some successful and some not—are illustrated in the case studies which comprise the main body of the book.

*Conservation Today* is quite pointedly *not* addressed to a specifically professional audience but, according to the author, to any and all who have an interest in protecting and maintaining the built environment. His stated aim is to reinforce the current general approval of the retention and reuse of old buildings and to "remove ... the remaining sense of mystery about the shaping and reshaping of the familiar environment." His audience, while broadly based, is nonetheless geographically quite specific. Pearce details the history of architectural conservation and adaptive reuse in Britain and illustrates it with home-grown examples. There is no attempt to place this information in an international context, yet it can easily be appreciated for the context it provides the Canadian reader who is involved

with, or interested in, heritage preservation. Many of the issues and, indeed, some of the solutions put forward are very similar. For example, in Canada, recent legislation aimed at the designation and preservation of heritage railway stations recognized and responded to growing public concern over the rapid disappearance of the physical evidence of our rail history. Bill C-205, the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act, prohibits railway companies from altering or disposing of designated heritage railway stations owned by them or under their control without the authorization of the Governor in Council. A railway company planning such action must give public notice of its intention thereby providing an opportunity to concerned citizens and groups to comment on the proposal. In Britain, British Rail, which has long been "resentful" of its responsibility for the large number of listed buildings in its charge, underwent a radical transformation of attitude during the 1980s which also reflected public opinion and concerns. It has since adopted a more flexible approach to the sale of surplus property; rid itself of a corporate mania for design standardization; recognized the potential of tourism; and accepted the principle of multiple use for its remaining stations. In 1985 the Railway Heritage Trust was created with a BR grant of £750,000 to help preserve those listed buildings within its portfolio.

Conservation Today is an interesting, informative (if specific), and well written book. The case studies clearly reflect the author's own flexible and creative approach toward adaptive re-use which acknowledges the architectural merit and integrity of a building and respects its defining characteristics, both aesthetic and functional. They also reflect, however, a pragmatic recognition of the changing functional, setting, and

economic realities of the current context in which these projects were and are continuing to be carried out.

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**Mahoney, Timothy R. *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Pp. xi, 319. Figures, tables, maps, appendices, index. \$39.50.**

Timothy R. Mahoney's new scholarly book, *River Towns in the Great West*, is an important contribution to understanding the structure and dynamics of nineteenth-century sub-regional urbanization in the midwestern United States. With that said, it is important to note that regions of the United States are based more on economic relations than on geography. At present, most people in the United States accept that the nation has four sections, the Northeast, the South, the Midwest, and the West. Yet, few people would agree in total with the boundaries of these regions. Some would, for example, place the old southern cities of Baltimore and Washington in the Northeast. Where the West begins has generally been accepted as the Mississippi River, but a good case can be made for the Rocky Mountains. And, it can be argued that the present American West will—over the next several decades—either break up into a number of new sections, or merge with the South to form a super-region called the Sunbelt that will challenge the rest of the nation for supremacy.

The biggest gainers in population in the 1990 census were Florida, Texas and

California. A few years ago, a geographer said in a review about a book that I wrote on the rise of the urban South that I did not understand geography. I suppose he was right in a geographical sense, but his review failed to recognize how the American version of westward settlement—technically the concept of the "Moving Frontier" as advanced a hundred years ago by Frederick Jackson Turner—has constantly redefined the nation's regions. A hundred years ago the Great Plains would have been defined as part of the West. Now, the force of economic relationships, the power of the regional centres of Chicago, St. Louis, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Kansas City, and even Omaha, has shifted North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas to the Midwest. A theme of American history has been the hewing out of hinterlands through economic rivalries by successful regional metropolises. What popular magazines of the nineteenth-century called "urban imperialism" played a major role in midwestern settlement, with St. Louis losing a "Great Urban Rivalry" to Chicago. As was to be expected in a great battle for regional domination there were losing cities, some innocent victims and others forced by circumstances to drastically scale down their urban aspirations, coming to terms with and joining and accepting subservience to a new emerging economic order.

Mahoney considers what happened from 1820 to 1870, in the western parts of a distinctive topographical area of the Prairie Peninsula. This district, embracing eastern Iowa, northeastern Missouri, and northwestern Illinois, geographically resembled southern Manitoba. So, there were all sorts of sites for cities. By the middle of the nineteenth-century, a number of localities had emerged as marketing towns, including Cedar Rapids and