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Introduction/Avant-propos

"Architecture is politics in three dimensions." That is a useful principle to keep in mind when you walk around any town or city, or drive through the countryside in Canada. It means that the kind of buildings people put on a landscape do more than merely reflect prevailing political or social views or economic conditions. They also play a large part in shaping those political and social views. Through architecture, establishments make the most dramatic statement of things officially believed in and hoped for. Architecture requires too much money and time ever to be a private art, ever to represent personal musings about life or sensibility to environment. Paintings or poems may be produced in garrets with little or no resources or commitment to an audience, but never buildings. They are always involved in community life to some degree and if they are of any size, they may affect that life for centuries. Because of these relationships between it and society, architecture makes the most lasting statements about history that can ever be made – history made visible for those who know how to see, history speaking to those who know how to listen.

Buildings function as historical documents in at least two distinct ways. Traditionally, the art of architecture was concerned with making visual metaphors, that is, with creating shapes or combinations of forms which had associations with the kinds of ideas on which the institutions of society – all societies, everywhere – are necessarily founded. The greater the impact of a building's shape and the more appealing its combination of mass, void and decoration, the more it was recognized as possessing Great or High Architecture. In our century, such aesthetic effects have tended to be isolated, separated from other and earlier kinds of functions. Designers have concentrated on them as ends in themselves. The result has been that instead of visual metaphors consciously associated with political and social ideas, modern buildings reveal the kind of society that created them by the way they are built

«L'architecture, c'est la politique en trois dimensions.» Il est bon de se rappeler cette formule lorsqu'on se promène dans les rues d'une ville ou sur les routes de la campagne canadienne. Elle signifie que le genre de bâtiments que les gens font construire sont plus qu'un simple *reflet* des idées politiques et sociales de leur époque ou des conditions économiques. En effet, ils contribuent dans une large mesure à *façonner* ces idées politiques et sociales. C'est par l'architecture que les classes dirigeantes expriment avec le plus de force leurs convictions et leurs aspirations. Au vrai, l'architecture demande tellement de temps et d'argent qu'elle ne pourra jamais devenir un art privé, traduire les réflexions d'un individu sur l'existence ou sa sensibilité à l'environnement. On peut peindre un tableau ou écrire un poème dans une mansarde avec un minimum de ressources et sans obligation à l'égard du public, mais il n'en va pas de même pour la construction des bâtiments. Ceux-ci participent toujours dans une plus ou moins large mesure à la vie collective. Pour peu qu'ils aient certaines dimensions, les bâtiments peuvent influer des siècles durant sur la vie collective. Parce qu'elle entretient ces rapports avec la société, l'architecture constitue le témoignage historique le plus durable; elle est l'histoire rendue visible à ceux qui savent voir, l'histoire qui parte à ceux qui savent écouter.

Les bâtiments font office de documents historiques au moins de deux façons différentes. Depuis toujours, l'architecture s'est attachée à créer des métaphores visuelles, c'est-à-dire à créer des formes ou des combinaisons de formes associées aux idées qui sous-tendent nécessairement les institutions de toute société. Plus ces formes produisent de l'effet et plus l'ornementation et la combinaison d'espaces pleins et d'espaces vides sont séduisantes, plus un édifice est reconnu comme appartenant à la grande architecture. Au XXe siècle, on a tendance à isoler ces effets esthétiques des autres fonctions souvent plus anciennes. Les architectes en font une fin en soi. De là vient que les bâtiments modernes ont cessé d'être des métaphores visuelles consciemment associées aux idées politiques et sociales pour devenir les révélateurs du type de société qui les a conçus; par exemple, une ossa-

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– by their use of exposed steel cage, for example, or huge sheets of glass (sometimes clear, sometimes opaque), or "brutal" masses of almost raw concrete. All these in their several ways proclaim faith in society being transformed through the powers of a technology capable of producing such things, but at the same time they paradoxically allude to a vision of happiness achievable by a return to some primitive state of a hypothetical natural man.

Once you understand how to read architecture in this way, you will never find yourself in a community without interesting buildings. For *all* buildings can be read as history. Whether you live in the far northwest of Canada where settlement goes back only a generation or two, or in the St. Lawrence valley where Europeans first arrived three and a half centuries ago, you will be surrounded by buildings whose forms can be traced into a remote past. If you were able to learn the origins of the words you speak, you would master history, so if you learn the "language" of architecture, you confront the past.

ture d'acier à découvert ou d'immenses surface vitrées (parfois transparentes, parfois opaques) ou de masses «brutales» de béton presque brut. Tous ces éléments proclament, chacun à sa façon, la foi en une société en cours de transformation sous l'effet d'une technologie capable de telles réalisations. Mais en même temps, ils évoquent paradoxalement l'aspiration à une forme de bonheur réalisable par le retour à un hypothétique état naturel primitif.

Une fois que vous aurez appris à interpréter l'architecture de cette façon, vous trouverez dans toutes les agglomérations des bâtiments dignes d'intérêt. Car vus de cette façon, *tous* les bâtiments sont des témoins de l'histoire. Que vous viviez dans les régions éloignées du nord-ouest du Canada où les établissements ne remontent qu'à une génération ou deux, ou dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent où les Européens arrivèrent il y a trois siècles et demi, vous serez entouré de bâtiments dont les formes remontent à un passé lointain. En fait, le langage de l'architecture se compare à n'importe quelle langue. Ainsi, si l'origine des mots peut nous permettre de comprendre l'histoire, la langage de l'architecture peut nous faire mieux connaître le passé.
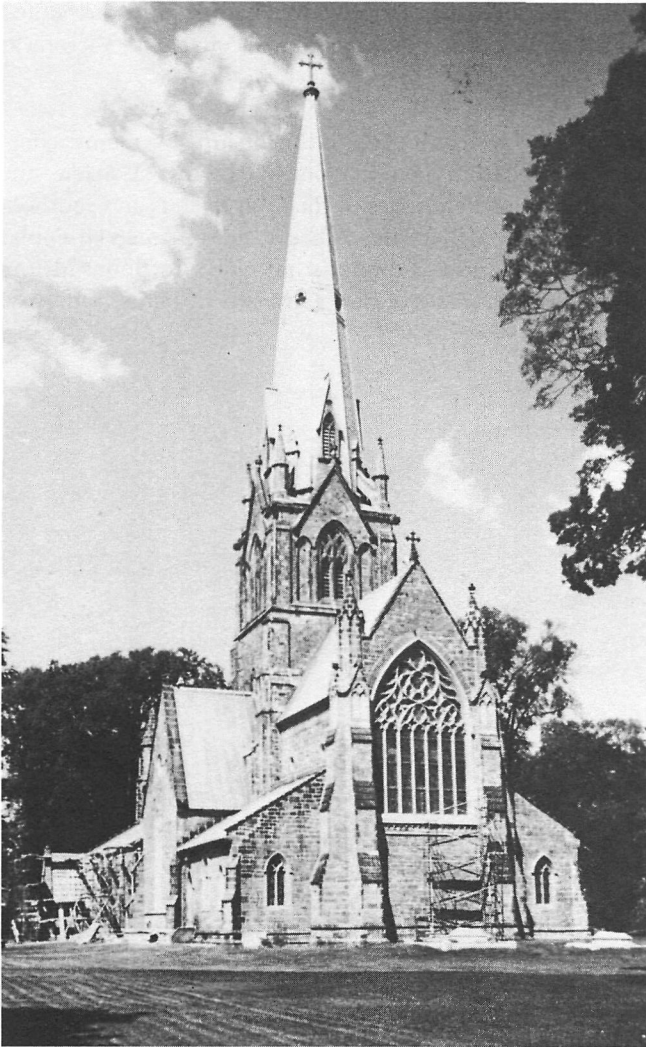
Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton, New Brunswick

Christ Church Cathedral was commissioned by Bishop Medley and executed by Frank Wills of New York following designs of William Butterfield supplied by the Ecclesiological Society of Great Britain. Corner-stone laid, 1845; consecrated, 1853.

Comments

To appreciate the novelty, and hence the cultural significance, of building an Anglican cathedral in this kind of "correct" Gothic style – or any Gothic style, for that matter – one should compare it to Anglican cathedrals in eighteenth-century classical forms standing elsewhere in Canada at the time. St. Pauls, Halifax (1759, remodelled in 1812, and again in 1867), Holy Trinity, Quebec (1803+), and the first two St. James, Toronto (1818; 1839), plainly recalled the St. Martins-in-the-Fields type invented by James Gibbs in Queen Anne's time to proclaim the triumph of Whig aristocracy and Low Church Anglicanism after the Glorious Revolution of 1689. St. Georges, Kingston (1825-28, rebuilt in 1899-1900) invoked an even older model, St. Pauls in London, mother-cathedral of the first British Empire. By contrast, Fredericton's cathedral represented "the new wave." Its design emphasized eye-catching outline instead of orderly, balanced masses and voids, pointed arches and pinnacles instead of round arcades and pilasters, spires that soared rather than punctuated. Above all, its forms were drawn from different sources, the English Middle Ages raher than Rome. No mere whim of taste explains such a change. It goes deeper; it is, in fact, a dramatic example of the axiom that architecture is politics in three dimensions. Gothic superseded Roman for Anglican churches because Roman forms, however nostalgically conserved by colonials as sourvenirs of the Old Empire, in fact had acquired inescapable associations with American and French efforts to revolutionize society on a republican Roman model. Gothic, by contrast, stood for non-revolutionary continuity – a visual metaphor of Tennyson's famous description of the British preference for "freedom slowly broadening from precedent to precedent" over revolutionary violence. Gothic, its Revivalists like Augustus Pugin and Charles Eastlake were fond of maintaining, had never died out in England. It had always been the national style, they said, and now was about to enjoy a second great flowering comparable to the Age of the Cathedrals, as Britain, secure in the strength of unbroken traditions, moved forward to become the world's leading nation. All over the new British Empire, Anglican cathedrals modelled on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English Gothic architecture rose to proclaim this conviction – in Colombo and Karachi, in Madras and Melbourne, in Kings-

town, St. Vincent, and Hamilton, Bermuda. And in Canada, Montreal (Christ Church, 1856), Hamilton, Ottawa, and Toronto (third St. James, 1858) soon followed Fredericton's lead, as did in due course Saskatoon, Vancouver and Victoria as well.

Such churches functioned for the transmission of English cultural values as well as for religious worship. Even more effective in some ways were the numerous small vernacular Gothic churches derived from them that one finds all over Canada – the "charming" (the only word that comes to mind), little, rough-hewn and stained churches of the Gulf Islands and southern Vancouver Island; "primitive" Gothic churches like the log Christ Church in Millarville, Alberta, or St. Annes in Poplar Point, Manitoba; or the inventive wooden Gothic of the Maritimes (St. John Baptist, Edmundston, N.B., St. Johns Milton or Holy Trinity, Georgetown, P.E.I.), or the patterned red-and-yellow brick churches of rural Ontario (St. Pauls, Sanhurst, St. Johns Tecumseh, Bond Head).

Further reference

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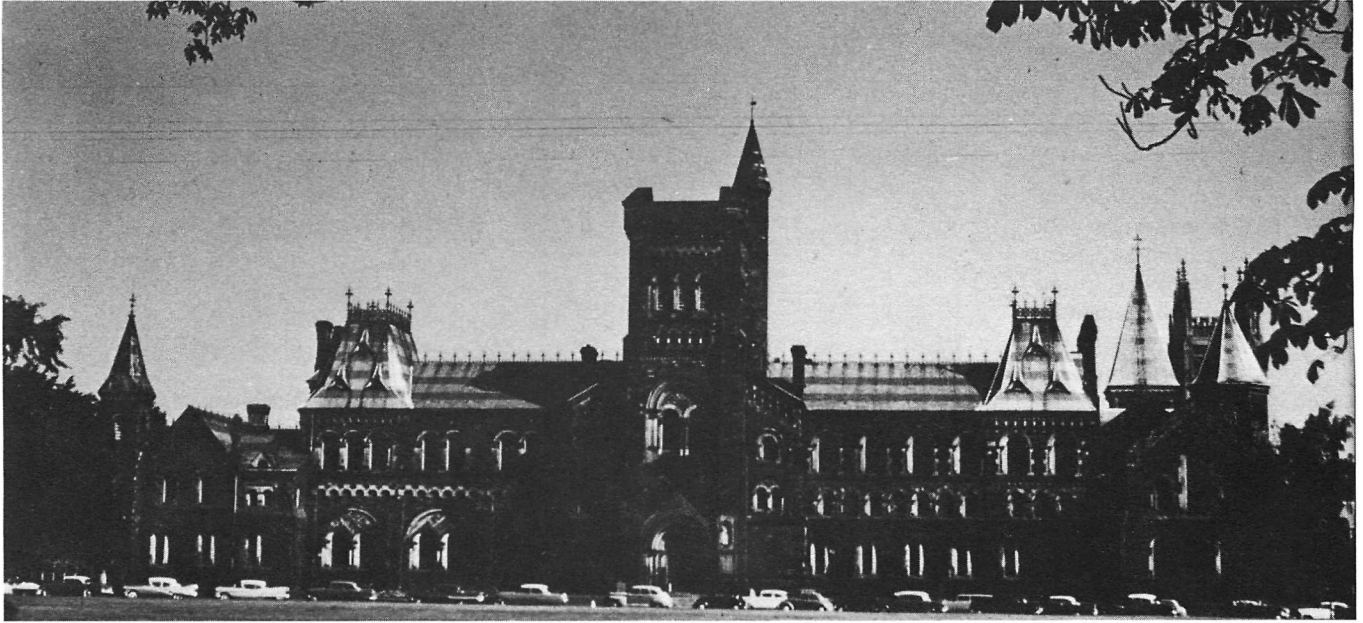
University College, Toronto

University College was designed in 1856 by Frederick Cumberland as the main building of the University of Toronto. A Gothic chapter house at the west end is separate because it was used as a chemistry laboratory; cloisters to the rear are integral to the building because they originally were intended for the residences (and are still used for offices) of professors. Completed in 1858, University College was damaged by fire in 1890; otherwise it stands essentially as built.

Comments

Stable continuity, to most nineteenth-century minds, was the great characteristic and crowning achievement of British civilization. New Gothic Revival cathedrals for Anglican dioceses all over the world proclaimed this conviction. So did buildings like this. Oxford, indubitably, was its inspiration and it is no surprise to learn that its designer, Frederick William Cumberland, was a classmate of John Ruskin there. But Cumberland's building is not a copy of anything at Oxford or, more exactly, it copies so many things that it is original. Bits and pieces of all sorts of medieval styles – Lombard, Byzantine, several varieties of Romanesque – are mixed together to project an eclectic ("drawn from the best") picture of pastness in general. Hence the term "Picturesque Eclectic" to describe such buildings. University College is a dramatic image of Old World culture transferred to the New and, in particular, of the mid-nineteenth-century Canadian determination to have higher education follow a British rather than an American model. (This determination was still active in the 1930s, when Hart House was built next to University College with a full complement of great halls and tuck shops and common rooms and the usual amenities of English upper-class education.) It is also one of the world's greatest examples of High Victorian eclectic building – certainly it is the best extant illustration of Ruskin's romantic dictum that a building should look one hundred years old on the day it stands complete. University College is also one of the first examples of designing primarily with an eye to the effect on individual spectators' subjective reactions, the attitude that would transform the art of architecture in the twentieth-century.

Further reference

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Main Block, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa

Commissioned in the late 1850s and designed by Thomas Fuller, the main block of the federal parliament buildings were completed in time for Canada's first parliament in 1867. They are shown here in a ca. 1890 photograph. Burnt in 1917, the main block was rebuilt in 1919 by John A. Pearson and J. Omer Marchand in a more modern Academic Gothic. The East and West blocks were not burnt and the East remains in its original condition.

Comments

In the late 1850s federal legislative buildings were under construction in both Canada and the United States. Washington's Capitol dome was being dramatically enlarged and heightened to underscore the conviction that Rome had really been reborn in the republic proclaimed in 1776, and so to remind the bitterly quarrelling North and South of their common heritage. President Lincoln pushed the dome to completion in 1863, during the Civil War, for the express purpose of proclaiming "Union Now and Forever." In Ottawa, an equally dramatic symbol was under construction – a parliament building for Canada East and Canada West, united as the Province of Canada following the recommendations in Lord Durham's report, which turned out instead to be a parliamentary home for the new Confederation of 1867. The architect had been instructed to prepare alternate sets of stylistic plans, and an elevation in the classical style of the first British Empire by him still exists; but there was little real debate – Otawa's parliament buildings would be in the image of London's, rebuilt in their original medieval style after a fire in the 1830s, and thereby constitute a symbol of "freedom slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent" (in Laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson's words) rather than revolutionary liberation, of the continuity of culture from Old World to New, and in particular of Canada's ties to Britain. Stylistically, Canada's parliament buildings were more up-to-date than London's. That is to say they made a more romantic metaphor of past continuing into present. Instead of an almost classically symmetrical body with naïve medieval detail added, like the London parliament buildings, Canada's parliament was in High or Picturesque Gothic style – deliberately designed to silhouette against the sky, with lots of eye-catching irregularities and textural contrasts, referring to all times and places, hence "built for all ages," the most appropriate possible advertisement for the permanence and stability of the new political institutions they housed. And indeed, with these federal parliament buildings, Picturesque Gothic in all its variants (Romanesque, châteauesque, etc.) became the Canadian national style and remained so for another thirty or forty years.

Further reference

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Farmhouse near Brampton, on old Ontario Highway No. 17

Comments

The farmhouses of central Ontario in Picturesque High Victorian patterned brickwork of the period ca. 1860-90 constitute one of Canada's most original architectural creations. Its commonest characteristics are red brick walls with openings and quoins picked out in yellow. West of London (generally speaking) the combination is yellow picked out by red, and everywhere one is liable to find grey or blue bricks mixed into the patterns as well. Almost always it is associated with details from one or other of the Picturesque styles, like sharp-pointed Gothic gables or windows, eaves-trim in cutout patterns deriving from medieval manuscripts or furniture, Italianate round-headed windows, brackets, or mansarded towers and turrets with fussy "gingerbread" ironwork. Quite apart from its visual attractions, this body of architecture is important cultural documentation for the history of Canada. Here, laid out for all to read, is a record of the kind of people who settled the rich heartland of Ontario a century ago. Parallels to this brickwork are to be found in areas like Lowland Scotland, Ulster, and the industrial Midlands of England, with large non-Anglican populations — precisely those districts whose emigrants gave rural Ontario so strong a dissenting, nonconformist, Calvinist cast.

Not that patterned brick houses are peculiarly Canadian *per se*. In France also, for example, picturesquely patterned brickwork was fashionable in the second half of the nineteenth-century, and there, too, it was associated with quasi-utilitarian and middle-class buildings. (Glance over J. Lacroux and D. Detain's *La brique ordinaire au point de vue décoratif* (Paris, 1878) and you will see plates illustrating how patterned brickwork suits "pavillons de jardiner et écuries," "orangerie et serres diverses," and the like.) But nothing quite like the Ontario combinations exists elsewhere, perhaps ultimately because they were felt to be medieval, in the style prevailing in the "Old Country," and so vaguely "proper." Not consciously, but still effectively, they constituted counterparts to the style of the Ottawa parliament buildings — a kind of popular or mass version of Canada's national style. Such an interpretation is lent strength by the spread of such houses across the country and by their high incidence compared to the United States, both absolutely and relatively. In the Prairies, Maritimes and British Columbia such "Gothic cottages" tend to be rendered in wood; in English Quebec, they are in stone. They are in effect the second British Empire vernacular, as the "British cabin" was a vernacular version of the eighteenth-century classical first empire style.

Old City Hall, Winnipeg

Winnipeg's Old City Hall was erected on designs of Barber, Bones and Barber, 1884-86, and demolished in 1962. This is a ca. 1902 photograph (courtesy of the Manitoba Archives).

Comments

On any list of candidates for the climactic Victortian monument in Canada, Winnipeg's Old City Hall would stand near the top. To which the typical modern reaction is, why? Why would anyone have expended such huge sums on masses of detail with no apparent function whatsoever – piles of cornices and pilasters and pediments, every sort of moulded brick and modelled stone? Asking the question answers it. Clearly, the great pile was intended to stun spectators, like hammering the donkey "to get his attention." Even in old photographs, the effect is dramatic. The building was calculated to make a grandiose statement: no hick prairie town this, but a metropolis, cultural centre for the West. Size, scale and "Renaissance Revival" detail combined make this claim. Especially the detail – for in style the old City Hall was very up-to-date for its time and place, a typical early example of what could best be described as that "Sun-Never-Sets Imperial Bombast" which climaxed in performances like the New Delhi parliament buildings of 1911. Of course, such taste could last only as long as the imperial jingoism it stood for. Disillusionment and cynicism after World War I did in the Old City Hall, and buildings like it. Thereafter "Renaissance Revival" somehow seemed all of a piece with "Butcher" Haig, Lloyd George changing his mind oftener than his shirt, secret treaties, corruption, hypocrisy. Cries began rising for honesty, for integrity, for Science and Communality. The Old City Hall was a monument to Ugliness, its critics complained, and to capitalism too, for was it not symbolic that a great market stood in front of it? (As a matter of fact, the association of civic governmental structure and civic market is almost as old as western civilization, and certainly was not unique to Winnipeg in Canada – Kingston, Belleville, Orangeville and dozens of other examples of city hall/market complexes spring to mind.) In response, down came the old massy piles. Replacing them came new piles, of sleek glass and slim metal, creations of stark angles and stern cubes, modern scientific construction directly expressed, industrial materials used with grim integrity., Alas, no new era of purified social morality merged, just a different sort of ugliness. Perhaps the answer is a combination of the two sorts of public architecture.

Further reference

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House in Broughton District, Vancouver

House of typical *late* Victorian picturesque vernacular style, surviving from the 1890s in present-day "apartment land" in the Broughton District of Vancouver.

Comments

The counterpart to the "picturesque piles" of public buildings that proclaimed "weight of constituted authority" from the 1860s until after World War I, were private houses like this. They came in all shapes, sizes and stylistic categories. The rich had houses designed for them by architects; the rest of the population had houses built out of pattern books by builders until about 1890 and thereafter most commonly assembled from prefabricated parts that could be ordered from catalogues. No matter how composed, however, from the 1870s on to about 1910 at least (especially in the west), the dominant consideration in their design was picturesque appeal to spectators. Symbolic associations in the older sense were becoming secondary, if not actually forgotten. Few brakes on designers' imaginations remained. Anything went — any mixture of styles, no matter how bizarre; any combination of details, colours or textures would do as long as the result was somehow eye catching. Buildings so composed, whether big or small, were often elegant, evocative, visually effective. They still strike perceptive eyes that way today. Especially when standing alone, they conjure up a vanished era, when people were unabashedly sentimental and sloppily romantic; when "quaint old nooks" anjd "ivy-covered walls" could be talked about without titters; when money talked loudly, through ostentatious houses, of success in business, farming, industry or whatever. But when any number of such compositions were arranged alongside each other, as on city streets, the result could be a visual chaos that corresponded to chaotic commercial competition.

Further reference

H.D. Kalman, *Exploring Vancouver* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1974).

Empress Hotel, Victoria

The Empress Hotel, completed in 1908, on designs of Francis Mawson Rattenbury of Victoria, is seen from the harbour in a ca. 1960 photograph. The north wing, 1928, was by Edward and William Sutherland Maxwell of Montreal.

Comments

In the early decades of this century, "château-style" hotels were by far Canada's best-known architecture. Arriving in Canada up the St. Lawrence, almost the first thing to be seen is the Château Frontenanc, crowning Quebec's citadel. Approaching Canada from the Pacific, you came first upon the château-style Empress at the head of Victoria's Inner Harbour. And you encountered château-style hotels in every major Canadian city in between. A common architectural style united them and, by inference, the country. This "Canadian national style" was a logical evolution from the High Victorian picturesque Gothic of the parliament buildings, and a logical reform of the unrestrained chaos of Richardsonian Romanesque. This national style kept a vaguely medieval appearance, and a picturesque outline; it still had great verticality and allowed scope for individualistic detailing and composition. But it conformed to the new age in being more scientific, more historically accurate. It no longer mixed styles in the High Victorian way, as even Richardsonian Romanesque did. It was modelled on a single era and, within that era, on a single type of building – castles built by "godly princes" of the Renaissance, Valois kings of France in the Loire Valley, Scots barons and kings of Scotland's last independent century. A visual metaphor was thereby created of a nation founded by French kings, unified and given national ethos by Scots. Less advertently, perhaps, it was a metaphor too of the dominance of early twentieth-century Canada by an Anglophone and Scottish capitalist establishment, for it is a curious fact that, while Canada's château-style hotels were inspired by British railway hotels like St. Pancras (an obvious model), the two most famous examples of them do not in fact incorporate stations in the hotel fabric. The reason, in the Empress's case at least, is not at all apparent; instead of standing beside or incorporating its ship- and rail-station on the sound rocky land on the south side of Victoria harbour, the Empress was built at enormous expense right in the middle of the harbour, which was filled in to accommodate it. One possible explanation is that, as in the case of Quebec's Hotel Frontenac, the hotel was intended as a powewrful image to block out any architectural statements of French culture in modern Canada; as the Frontenac was built upon the remains of the old French governors' mansion, so the Empress blocked off or minimized the old establishments of hospital and academy which used to dominate Victoria's inner harbour but now were left high and dry. Needless to say, no document can be found to support such an explanation – nor is any ever likely to be found.

Further reference

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Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin, *Victoria: A Primer for Regional History in Architecture* (Watkins Glen, 1979).

Old City Hall, Toronto

Toronto's Old City Hall, designed by Edward J. Lennox and opened in 1899, is seen here through the pillars of the east portico of Osgoode Hall (begun 1829, portico added most probably in 1844 to the designs of John Ewart). The contrast dramatizes a change in concepts of public architecture over a sixty-year period.

Comments

The period 1840-1900 has often been described as the time when individualism ran riot in every phase of life. Old community restraints built into the class-structured State (epitomized by the restrained correctness of Osgoode's classical portico) were dissolving rapidly. So were limits on how fast any individual could move up or down the social scale. Resources, too, seemed limitless all over the world, but most noticeably in new countries like Canada, and especially in a city like Toronto, which had shaken off old rivals (for example, Cobourg) and was in the process of consolidating economic control over the mineral riches of northern Ontario. Whole forests could be cut down; millions of acres of timber still stood elsewhere. Whole species of animals and birds and fish could be exterminated; there were plenty more. To the kind of mentality to which such exploitation seemed right and natural, the more exuberant an architectural style the more it appealed. Hence the extraordinary popularity of Picturesque Eclecticism generally and, within it, that substyle generally called after its American protagonish, H.H. Richardson, "Richardsonian Romanesque." Richardsonian Romanesque provided the chaos of picturesqueness with a rationale – a counterpart, really, to Herbert Spencer's doctrine, so popular in that same time period, of an individualistic free competition in which the strong grew stronger and the weak perished as being to everyone's benefit in the long run. Unrestrained capitalism thus corresponded to a fundamental law of nature; and Richardsonian Romanesque was its perfect visual metaphor. It epitomized Thorsten Veblen's famous concept of "conspicuous waste." It also expressed the boundless optimism of the West, at least on the superficial, popular level, in those decades just before the Great War of 1914-18 when no external enemies threatened and everything seemed attainable through Science in just a few more years.

Neither in fact "Richardsonian" nor "Romanesque," the style going under that name was boundlessly inventive, committed to no particular combination of Romanesque and proto-Gothic forms (hence, while Lennox Hall may have points of similarity with Allegheny County Courthouse in Pittsburgh it cannot be said to be a copy thereof). But at the same time, this inventiveness was conditioned by a principle comparable to the "law of natural selection." Use of materials was not haphazard

but dictated by expression of their nature. Thus stone was cut and shaped and laid so as to emphasize its stoniness; the woodiness of wood, and so on, was what counted. Similarly, Richardsonian Romanesque emphasized direct expression of structure, with huge arches ostentatiously carrying great loads, and interior beams exposed.

In this respect, Richardsonian Romanesque involved a curious paradox. This consummate monument to the power of individualistic capitalism at its height, this soul-satisfying spectacle for believers in its principles, this most effective of all instruments for furthering its progress, rested on the very principles which later would become the foundation of a modern architecture committed to oppose every value Richardsonian Romanesque stood for.

Bank of Montreal, Winnipeg

The Bank of Montreal at the corner of Portage and Main on a sleety February morning. It was built by J.N. Semmens on designs supplied by the American firm of McKim, Mead, and White, 1913 (which had also been responsible for a 1905 remodelling and enlargement of the Bank of Montreal's head office on Place d'Armes in Montreal). In front stands the bank's monument to employees from Winnipeg killed in the Great War, by James Earle Fraser of Scotland.

Comments

Principal rival to the "château-style" for public architecture was the grandiose Imperial Roman mode, which represented the Late Victorian version of the Renaissance Revival or Imperial Bombast style of High Victorian times. This was a style with international rather than national appeal, for it was in fact the principal visual metaphor of that tremendous general colonial expansion of European power all over the world which lasted from the mid-1880s until the European war in 1914-18 ended it. Germany, Russia, Austria, Italy, Belgium, France, all had colonial ambitions clothed in Imperial Roman garb in this age. From around 1885, Late Victorian Imperial Roman began displacing High Victorian Gothic as the preferred symbol of the British Empire in Bombay and Calcutta, Fiji, Melbourne, Madras, Capetown and Karachi. In the United States, Imperial Roman just as decisively displaced Richardsonian Romanesque and its descendants as the preferred image of Spanish-American War and Philippine annexation. Canada could hardly have escaped, nor did it. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta all got Imperial Roman parliament buildings, and all sorts of impressive late nineteenth-century American Imperialist banks.

From the beginning of the American republic, banks in the form of classical temples had proclaimed revolutionary promises to free mankind by freeing business enterprise; through public banks, every American citizen could hope to live on his own acres, secure from want and fear. Later on, after the American Civil War and the rise of monopolistic corporations, classical banks became images of entrenched social and political power, with scale and chosen model shifting accordingly. It is this latter kind of grand-scale bank that we find here occupying Winnipeg's most conspicuous site, a compelling symbol for all seasons, even in early winter sleet. For this commission, the Bank of Montreal, "Canada's first bank," chose the most prestigious Late Victorian architectural firm in the United States, propagators of Imperial Roman classicism in the 1893 Columbian World's Fair in Chicago, Pennsylvania Station in New York and countless important bank buildings, college campuses, union clubs, hotels and skyscrapers all over the continent. Herein is imaged that (to many) overly close tie with the United States which was the central concern of Canadian politics from Macdonald's last campaign (1896) to Laurier's defeat on the Reciprocity issue (1911).

Portable and Prefabricated
Bank, Watson, Saskatchewan

This portable and prefabricated bank at Watson was built in 1906 for the Canadian Bank of Commerce and restored in 1977. Plaqued by Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada.

Comments

All over the Prairies and British Columbia you can find little buildings like this, easily recognizable as small, simplified, wooden versions of grand city banks in classical style. Often they serve other purposes than their original; sometimes they are doctor's offices, as here, and sometimes a Masonic Hall (Drinkwater, Sask.) or library (Chase, B.C.). Sometimes they were partially rebuilt (Duck Lake, Sask.) or wholly restored (Watson, Sask.). But they were rarely demolished, for in small western Canadian towns these banks were usually the best-designed buildings they had and often the only well-designed building. (Only Anglican churches competed with banks in small western – or eastern – towns.) They were the product of those early twentieth-century years when railways were pushing across the prairies and over the mountains, committed to transporting settlers from the east as part of their financial agreements with the federal government. Almost the first loads carried on the new railroads were materials for erecting these banks. No sooner had the rails been extended another sixteen miles or so than packages of materials would be dropped off and a new bank would pop up on the prairie, conveniently located the maximum eight miles that farmers could drive a horse and buggy in and back from their land in one day to market produce and buy goods in return. Thus every settler on newly opened lands found himself within easy reach of a bank, with access to funds for buying seeds and tools, lumber and whatever else was needed. And of course the bank could make money too, by loaning it out at interest. So everybody profited – at least in theory. In theory too, each bank would become the nucleus of a new settlement, which in practice did not always work out. But often enough it did: Watson is a typical example, its little bank, now nicely restored, still standing as a monument to that moment in history when the West was settled and to the hopes of prosperity and independence which brought its settlers there. Its location in the midst of open space all the more vividly recalls how it must have looked when it was the only building to be seen.

Further reference

G.E. Mills and D.W. Holdsworth, "The B.C. Mills Prefabricated System: The Emergence of Readymade Buildings in Western Canada," *Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History No. 14* (Ottawa, 1975), pp. 127-69.