

ARCHITECTURE

History of architecture goes beyond landmarks

ANNMARIE ADAMS
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

What do Micmac wigwams, the Redpath Sugar Refinery and the West Edmonton Mall have in common? They are all part of Harold Kalman's long-awaited *A History of Canadian Architecture* (Oxford University Press, \$95), an attractive, two-volume study of buildings from every corner of the country. Illustrated with nearly 900 images, these hefty tomes include not only the well-known monuments of Canada, but also the ordinary buildings in between. Bungalows and barns, lighthouses and logging camps, parish churches and porches: in Kalman's ambitious project, all are discussed with the same seriousness as the Parliament buildings, Louisbourg and the Banff Springs Hotel.

Indeed, *A History of Canadian Architecture* reflects many of the major changes that have occurred in architectural history and its related fields over the last two decades or so. As scholars have become more interested in the lives of ordinary people, the history of architecture has broadened to include all sorts of buildings outside the established canon of famous monuments. Following this expanded view of the field, Kalman sees just about every place in Canada as worthy of study, rejecting the old distinction between "architecture" and "buildings."

A History of Canadian Architecture includes substantial sections on native architecture, the impact of the railway, housing, the development of cities, the influence of ethnic groups and the historic preservation movement, in addition to the more predictable sections on New France, Classicism in Upper and Lower Canada, the 19th-century revival styles and the development of Modernism.

Like the feast which follows the famine, the work is particularly gratifying because it meets an urgent need. It has been nearly 40 years since the publication of the equally ambitious *Looking at Architecture in Canada* (1958) by Alan Gowans, which was revised by the author eight years later as *Building Canada: an Architectural History of Canadian Life*. Although many fine studies on aspects of Canadian architecture have been published in the interim, Kalman's is the first comprehensive survey

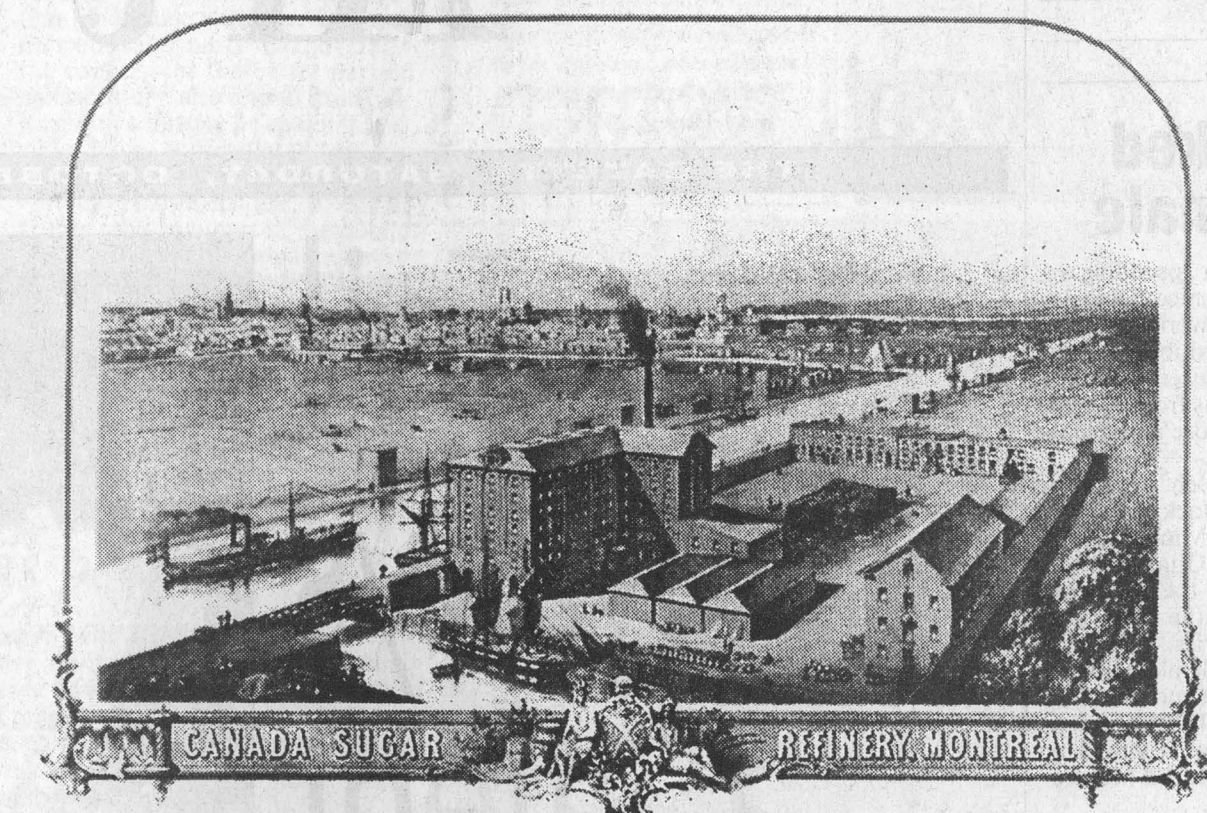
since Gowans's pioneering books. It will be particularly welcome in Canadian schools of architecture, where professors have frequently scrambled to collect ad hoc material from regional studies, journals, and even American surveys to teach Canadian architectural history.

General readers, too, will be delighted with the set, particularly those interested in Montreal. In Kalman's heroic attempt to present both typical and atypical Canadian buildings in a single study, Montreal is represented by about the same number of examples as the entire provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta combined. Kalman's familiarity with the city's architecture is evident throughout the text. Born here in 1943, the author learned about buildings early on with his father Maxwell Kalman, who practiced architecture in Montreal from the 1930s through the 1950s.

The first volume includes a lengthy section on Montreal in the chapter titled *Building for Communications, Defence, and Commerce*. Synthesizing previous research on a variety of Montreal building types, Kalman recounts the history of the city's architecture by skillfully juxtaposing a 1704 map, early bank buildings, a panoramic view from Mount Royal, various types of multiple dwellings, and industrial buildings along the Lachine Canal. Other examples of the city's architecture appear in nearly every chapter of the book, which are ordered regionally, typologically and thematically, rather than strictly chronologically.

The photographs and drawings in the book are particularly stunning and reflect the breadth of Kalman's architectural research. Through a combination of contemporary photos, archival images, and measured drawings, *A History of Canadian Architecture* offers a wealth of hitherto unseen documentation on our built environment. The number of photographs showing places actually being used as they were intended and the broad array of measured plans are particularly significant.

Many other surveys use only photographs of the buildings' front elevations, as if architecture were only an aesthetic object, rather than a thing to be used and inhabited. A photo of Bonsecours Market in the 1870s, crowded with wagons, and another of a lone man enjoying the tranquility of Mount Royal Park are particularly good examples of

Illustration of Redpath Sugar Refinery in Montreal from *A History of Canadian Architecture*.

this genre, as are the dozens of fascinating photos of Prairie towns.

Like the late Spiro Kostof, whose 1985 world survey, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (also published by Oxford University Press) marked a decided move away from the established model of an evolutionary, style-based survey, Kalman sees architecture as a reflection of broader social and cultural values. For the most part, he lives up to his claim to have written a history of Canada as illustrated through the country's "most permanent creations: buildings and communities." Rather than seeing the history of architecture as the history of styles, Kalman explores the intricate connection between buildings and the lives of their makers and users.

He also believes that there are distinctly Canadian features to our architecture. Ordinary builders' houses, for example, are less likely to be brightly colored here than in the United States, he says. He also argues that natural forms and local materials have been more respected here than in other places. He sees the resource towns that developed near the sites of forest and mineral extraction — places like Temiscaming — as a particularly Canadian form, given their impor-

tance to our economy. In general, he suggests that Canadians have simplified models adopted from other places and that we have excelled in the architectural resolution of social issues.

These are powerful assertions in a field which has seen few commentators as broadly conversant with the nation's architecture as Kalman.

The major drawback of *A History of Canadian Architecture* is its price. At \$95, it will be difficult to use this set as required texts for teaching. This problem would have been offset had the publishers made these volumes available for purchase separately. Let's hope that subsequent editions — one could imagine a giant paperback volume — will be more affordable.

Canada's cultural landscape is receiving unprecedented scholarly attention these days. Last year saw the publication of the final volume of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, a work of historical geography that pays careful attention to the built environment. In May 1995, the Vernacular Architecture Forum, an American professional organization dedicated to the study of ordinary buildings, will hold its annual meeting in Ottawa. This will mark

the first time the society has ever met outside the U.S. The four-day meeting will include two days of extensive tours of the region's vernacular landscapes.

These sorts of events and the publication of major works like Kalman's will undoubtedly lead to an awareness of the richness of Canadian architecture far beyond our own borders.

As many Canadian cities, too, are struggling to maintain neighborhoods, city centres and open spaces, the timely publication of *A History of Canadian Architecture* will bring new focus and insight to our much-neglected built environment.

■ Annmarie Adams is an assistant professor at McGill University's school of architecture.

■ Harold Kalman will attend a book launch at the Canadian Centre for Architecture on Nov. 10 at 6 p.m.

Gaspé centre wins OAQ prize

DAVID ROSE
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

On Wednesday, the Order of Quebec Architects awarded its annual Prix d'Excellence for outstanding architectural achievements. Fifteen awards were presented at the Université de Montréal ceremony — one grand prize, four prix d'excellence, and 10 mentions.

Of the 98 projects submitted for appraisal, nearly one third were in the newly created category of Architectural Conservation. If this is an indication of the way current building trends are going, it is an encouraging sign. On the other hand, there were only two entries in the Urban Planning category and no finalists.

Other trends noted by the jury included an ongoing preoccupation with interior space in many of the projects, and a pronounced symbiosis between the buildings and their sites.

The Grand Prize went to Cormier, Cohen, Davies, architects, for the Centre d'Interprétation du Bourg de Pabos. Located in the Gaspé at the Pabos archaeological site of an 18th-century fishing village, the innovative interpretation centre, according to the jury, has reinvented the museology and ornament of the interpretive building type.

Two of the Prix d'Excellence went to projects in Montreal: Les Habitations Georges-Vanier, by Richard de la Riva, architect, took the prize for Residential Architecture, group housing, and, in the new category of Architectural Conservation, the superb renovation of the Monument National by the firm of Blouin, Faucher, Aubertin, Brodeur, Plane was the winner.

The other major prizes were awarded for Commercial Architecture — given to Webb Zerafa Menkes Housden, and Lemay et Associés for the aerodynamic, aluminum-clad Canadian Space Agency Building in St. Hubert — and Institutional Architecture, which was awarded to Allaire, Bergeron, Courchesne, Henderson, architects, for the Ecole Professionnelle de St. Hyacinthe.

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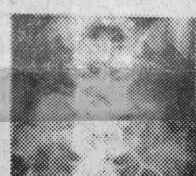
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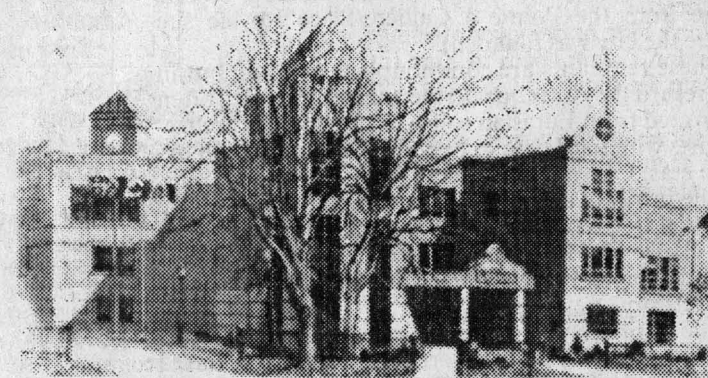
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