



fig.1 UNB Memorial Student Centre, war memorial wall as viewed from the lower floor entry space. (Photo: the author)

ARCHITECTURE OF THE SPIRIT

Modernism in 1950s and 1960s Fredericton

AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN

AND IN THE MORNING

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM¹

These words from Laurence Binyon's 1914 poem *For the Fallen* adorn war memorials throughout the Commonwealth and they are carved as the gilded epitaph on the wall of the University of New Brunswick's Memorial Student Centre in the province's capital city of Fredericton (fig.1). Although the poetry has lost none of its meaning, paradoxically, the mid-twentieth century campus building seems to have been forgotten. There is a strong appreciation for traditional architecture in New Brunswick and anything outside the realm of historical convention has become suspect; significant post-War buildings are met with disdain, ignorance and in many cases, demolition. However, a number of noteworthy structures were designed in Fredericton during the 1950s and 1960s and they observe a purity of form and quality of material that is remarkable for the time and place. Their inherent modernist principles evoke the human spirit and notions of idealism through a visionary architectural framework that is both clear and austere. Perhaps it is these very qualities that are largely responsible for the structures' lack of recognition in a municipality rich in vernacular charm and Victorian ornament.

The architectural modernism that exploded in Europe following World War I was championed as a liberation from dead concepts as it wholeheartedly abandoned the classical language in favour of fusing contemporary technology with a utopian sense of social change. In 1929, the Canadian architect John Lyle described the modern movement as "a revolt against archaeology in architecture."² The noblest examples of modernism fervently pursued a democratic plan of building for the masses combined with a rational sense of surface purity, as epitomized by Walter Gropius' celebrated 1926 Bauhaus Institute in Dessau, Germany. When it was closed by the Nazis in 1933, most of the Bauhaus instructors fled to the United States and modernism almost immediately became the preferred architectural style in North America. The new émigrés became prophets for the movement that Philip Johnson titled "The International Style."³

Although some of the European modernists derived inspiration from such functional forms as Canadian grain elevators, as famously cited in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* of 1923, the architectural establishment's acceptance of "International Style" modernism came late to Canada. Canadian universities



fig.2 Bank of Nova Scotia building, Saint John, NB, completed 1939.
Architect: John Lyle. (Photo: the author)

did not have the benefit of the presence of European modernists, and the combined effects of the Great Depression and World War II delayed the country's acceptance of the avant-garde. This would change after the War: the economy was booming, the *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Massey Report)* of 1949-51 encouraged excellence and artistic collaboration in contemporary architecture, a massive influx of returning veterans entered Canadian universities, and a modernist vigour took over the reins of the design schools. This new approach is epitomized by the reorganization of McGill University's architecture curriculum under John Bland, who became the director of the Faculty in 1941.⁴

New sensibilities were discernible in New Brunswick; but the orthodoxy of long-established modes of expression was hard to break, especially in Fredericton with its cherished architectural heritage. The city has outstanding examples of Loyalist homes, British colonial buildings and several nineteenth-century churches, including Christ Church Cathedral (1845-53), which is considered a masterpiece of Gothic Revival in North America. This architectural abundance was directly related to the social and economic conditions during the

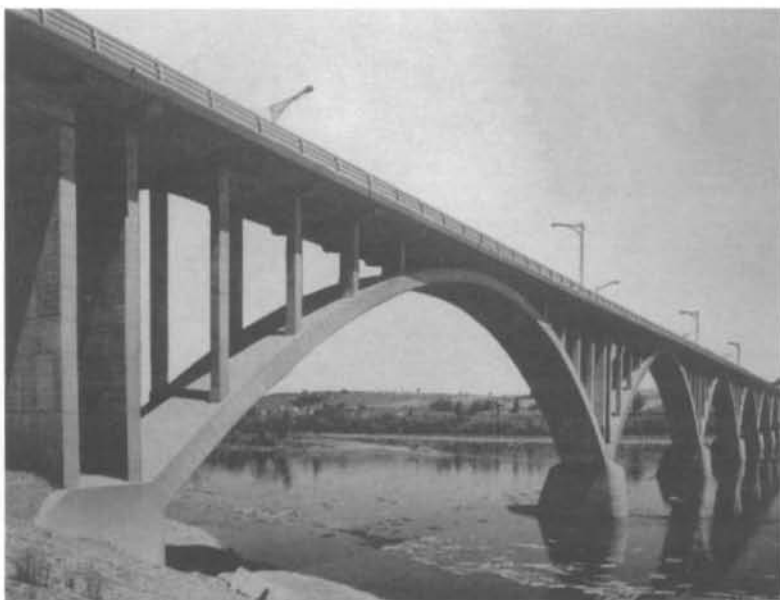


fig.3 Hugh John Flemming Bridge, Trans-Canada Highway, Hartland, NB, 1960. (Photo: photographer unknown)

robust times of the mid to late nineteenth century when the province was a shipbuilder and lumber merchant to the world. But the steady economic downturn in the early twentieth century also affected the built environment and New Brunswick citizens and politicians developed a growing indifference towards distinctive new architecture.

However, in New Brunswick there were several notable buildings in which visionaries fused the artistic, technical, and economic spirit of the times. John Lyle's last great work, his 1939 Bank of Nova Scotia in Saint John (*fig.2*) with its clean, stripped-down ornamental style, referred to as "Depression moderne," would be a springboard for much of the new Canadian post-War architecture.⁵ It is the finest of the Province's remaining structures from the 1930s and 1940s,⁶ and one of the few buildings to transcend the norms of the period. Although 1940s New Brunswick was essentially still a traditional rural society, significant economic progress throughout the next decade became a catalyst for rapid change throughout the province.⁷ For example, the discovery of massive mineral deposits near Bathurst led to increased industrialization in the northeast; a hydroelectric dam was constructed at Beechwood to harness the

St. John River; and Canadian Forces Base Gagetown was built near Fredericton, boasting Canada's most modern military facilities and a planned community for over ten thousand citizens. The Hugh John Flemming Bridge, erected at Hartland in the upper Saint John River Valley (fig.3), symbolizes the virtues of engineering and the efficient use of materials; it is reminiscent of the concrete bridges designed by Robert Maillart in Switzerland during the 1920s and '30s. The Flemming Bridge was also a critical component in the new Trans-Canada Highway that would link the entire country. At the end of the 1950s, New Brunswick desperately wanted to become "modern" and to be part of a forward-looking Canada.

The University of New Brunswick's Memorial Student Centre of 1955

The presence of Bauhaus architects at American universities quickly put an end to the dominance of traditional "Collegiate Gothic" style. Imitation of historical styles was replaced by experiments in Modernism, such as Mies Van der Rohe's IIT campus in Chicago (1938-58) and Eero Saarinen's 1950s buildings at MIT in Cambridge. Although most Canadian universities were slower to engage with Modernism, it was evident in Allward & Gouinlock's Mechanical Engineering Building (1948) at the University of Toronto and C.E. Pratt's War Memorial Gymnasium (1947-49) at UBC in Vancouver.

As one of the oldest universities in Canada, the University of New Brunswick was a small institution steeped in tradition, but it would be invigorated by the changing context. By 1946, returning veterans had tripled its enrollment, and an alumni memorial fund was established to honour the eighty-one students killed in both World Wars. By 1952 the initial plan to convert the campus' existing 1920s Tudor-style theatre into a student lounge was scrapped in favour of a completely new project. The result was a quietly sophisticated building, the first in Fredericton to adhere to the principles of High Modernism and break with the stylistic and material rules of the past (fig.4). Edith McLeod, university registrar and president of the Alumnae expressed the hope that the modern Student Centre would not only become the focus of campus community life, but the physical center of a new, growing UNB. In a letter to the Alumni News on the nearly completed building, she wrote: "If you could visit the Memorial Students' Centre, many of you would feel that you were born ten, twenty, or thirty years too soon. The magnificent view overlooking the hill and the Saint John River beyond is sufficient inducement for any student to seek a university education within our ancient walls."⁸

Designed by the Fredericton architectural firm of Stewart & Howell, which had been practicing since the early 1950s, the red brick Student Centre was one of the most modern and attractive in Canada when it opened on 12

May 1955. It was described as “the pride and joy of U.N.B. students and the envy of students from other universities who visit it.”⁹ Located at the eastern edge of the campus,¹⁰ the building included a large common room with freestanding fireplaces, picture windows overlooking the city and the river, a ladies’ lounge, music room, student offices, and a cafeteria that could serve twelve-hundred students a day.

The flat-roofed building featured many traits of the modern (fig.5): an open plan with a multi-storey central circulation space at the entrance foyers, deep precast concrete window surrounds, aluminum windows and doors, a glass block vestibule, unadorned stained birch doors, and a skewed geometry evident in the angled rear porch and the fluted concrete decoration at the front. The last is an unusual element that, although classical in inspiration, is kindred to Scandinavian modernism from between the wars, such as the work of Alvar Aalto or Erik Gunnar Asplund, whose architecture openly embraced traces of the classical. Surprisingly, the plan and overall form of the Memorial Student Centre is strikingly similar to the house Walter Gropius built for himself in Lincoln, Massachusetts in 1937 (fig.6). Both buildings have an open winding stair at their heart, glass block walls, ribbon and picture windows, a flat roof, a monolithic cubic form, and the unmistakable angled canopy porch. In a 1953 speech describing his house, Gropius stated that he was worried his American neighbours would be disturbed at the sight of such unconventional characteristics, but they approved when they:

could see that the moving spirit behind it was facing the problem in much the same way in which the early builders of the region had faced it, when, with the best technical means at their disposal, they built unostentatious, clearly defined buildings that were able to withstand the rigors of the climate and that expressed the social attitude of their inhabitants.¹¹

It is not difficult to imagine that the UNB Memorial Student Centre received a similar reception. Interestingly, most of Stewart & Howell’s projects built at this time were unassuming structures, built of flat-roofed red brick slabs with slight architectural punctuations to enliven the surface. While the Memorial Centre may reference the Gropius House, it is almost discreet rather than ostentatious or extravagant.

The most significant element in the UNB Centre however, is the war memorial wall that dominates the two-storey entry space at the core of the building (fig.1). Surrounded by an elegant cornice frame and warm brick walls, the huge stone surface gracefully contains an off-center and slightly raised section with the gilt inscription and the dates of the two World Wars, balanced by a Union Jack and Red Ensign at the lower right. Unlike the fanciful Beaux-Arts styling of most Canadian memorial cenotaphs and plaques that were installed



fig.4 University of New Brunswick Memorial Student Centre, Fredericton, NB, completed 1955. Architects: Stewart and Howell. (Photo: the author)

after the First World War (and inevitably became monuments to the Second World War), the minimalism of the UNB memorial is both poignant and powerful in its austerity. There are no angels in glory, no stone crosses – only a hushed absence.

The architects' execution of space was masterful; the scale and location of the memorial wall immediately engages the attention of anyone entering from either of the building's doorways. The selection of green slate is a distinct departure from the sugary white shrines of past generations, and its mottled green hue evokes both the serenity of nature and the khaki of combat dress. The upper handrail of the lobby staircase supports the altar-like stainless steel and glass case that holds the Book of Remembrance. The Book, inscribed with the names of the University's war dead, is placed at the epicenter of the building and directly faces the open space and memorial wall beyond. The most inspired decision of all was the installation of a ribbon of acrylic skylights directly above the inscribed wall; as the light changes throughout the day, the Memorial is washed with streaks of natural light. The American architect Louis Kahn believed that the sanctity of the human spirit should be reflected in an architecture of both monumentality and gentle reflection with nature, declaring that inspiration began "at the threshold where silence and light meet."¹² In the Memorial Student Centre, the meeting of light with the immeasurable emotional silence of the commemoration of sacrifice implies the sublime.

At the official opening, former UNB President and Victoria Cross winner Milton Gregg stated that the Memorial Centre represented "an urge to preserve the kind of things represented by the UNB community spirit," and that the activities and influences that would soon radiate from the building would "set the standards for all the years ahead."¹³ A "Letter to the Editor" in the local newspaper expresses a similar optimism about the aesthetics of the Student



fig. 5 UNB Memorial Student Centre exterior features, clockwise from top left: precast concrete window surround; angled rear entry porch; horizontal ribbon of aluminum windows at side elevation; and fluted concrete decoration at front entrance. (Photos: the author)

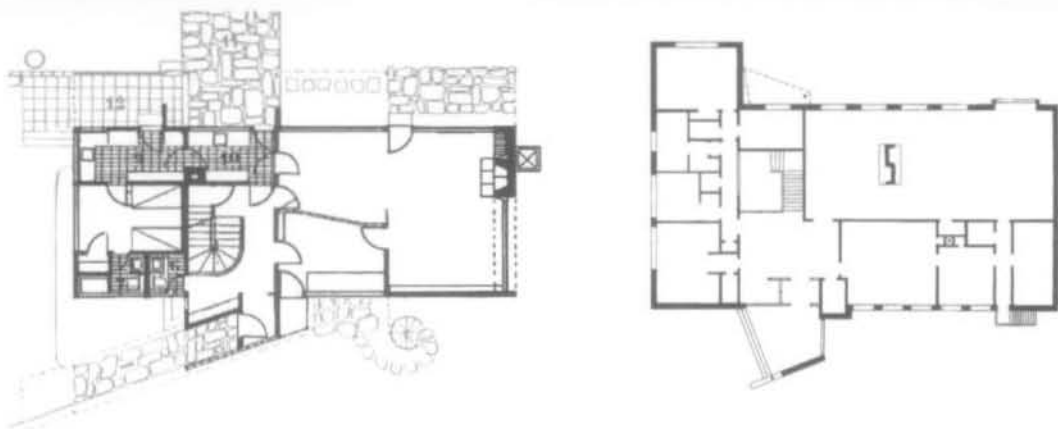


fig.6 Top: Gropius House, Lincoln, Massachusetts, USA, completed 1937. Architect: Walter Gropius (with Marcel Breuer). Bottom left: Main floor plan of Gropius House. Bottom right: Main floor plan of UNB Memorial Student Centre. (Photo: Paul Rocheleau)

Centre, and describes the building as an intelligently realized design in harmony with both the urbanism of the campus and the surrounding natural landscape. The letter adds: "These features are not a happy accident, but are the result of the foresight and imagination of the architects.... We hope that this building could be the forerunner of modern and imaginative architecture 'Up the Hill'."¹⁴

Unfortunately, the ambition for bold architectural imagination was never quite realized at the Fredericton campus, and for decades the Memorial Student Centre would remain an isolated example of modernist design on the University grounds.¹⁵ In the 1960s the campus experienced unprecedented growth during the mandates of Colin B. Mackay, the university president from 1953 to 1969, and Chancellor Sir Max Aiken, Lord Beaverbrook, who served from 1947 until his death in 1964. Red brick would remain the material of choice, but the majority of the new buildings would retain a standardized neo-Georgian style that came to define the image of the campus. In the mid 1960s, Dr. Mackay acknowledged that: "the subject of university architecture is a contentious matter, and certainly our new buildings have not escaped the scathing comments of the modernists."¹⁶ Despite Beaverbrook's conservative taste, his greatest gift to his native province would be one of the most sophisticated examples of modern architecture in eastern Canada.

The Beaverbrook Art Gallery - 1959

Without question, the opening of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in 1959 was one of the greatest cultural events in New Brunswick's history.¹⁷ His collection of Canadian and British art featured masterpieces that included paintings by Turner, Reynolds, Sickert, Freud, Kreighoff and Morrice, among many others.¹⁸ The Gallery was universally regarded as a major addition to the architectural attraction of Fredericton, and it was immediately described as *the* tourist destination in the city. With its idyllic setting on the banks of the St. John River opposite the Provincial Legislature – a site that presumably only the august Beaverbrook could acquire – the Gallery is unmistakable in its clean symmetrical form and pure lines. It is also a much-overlooked modern masterpiece of mid-century Canadian architecture (fig.7). Beaverbrook had originally intended to build the museum in Saint John, and he had also considered Newcastle and Sackville as possible locations. However, his ties to UNB were strong and his final choice was also intended to stimulate a fine arts program at the university. At the outset, Beaverbrook engaged Le Roux Smith Le Roux, the former deputy director of London's Tate Gallery, to assist in seeking potential architects, studying examples of similar institutions and selecting the building's final site.¹⁹ After much deliberation, Beaverbrook accepted the New Brunswick government's offer of its Provincial Architect, D.W. Jonsson to design the gallery, although his contract was cancelled within



fig.7 Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB, 1959. (Photo: Harvey Studios)



fig.8 Austrian Pavillion at the time of its opening at the Venice Biennale grounds, Venice, Italy, 1934. Architect: Josef Hoffmann. (Photo: photographer unknown)

less than a year.²⁰ Neil Stewart, who was one of the architects of the UNB Memorial Student Centre, was then given the position,²¹ describing his appointment as “the chance of a lifetime.”²²

Prior to the formal opening of the Beaverbrook Gallery, Richard B. Simmonds, Director of Extension Exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada, declared that it was among the finest art galleries in the country.²³ Michael Wardell, Beaverbrook’s friend and publisher of Fredericton’s *The Daily Gleaner* claimed that with “none of the rococo adornments or Corinthian pillars...which commonly tempt the designers of art galleries,” the Gallery attained the “dignity that comes from restraint.”²⁴ The Gallery was a one-storey structure with large exhibition rooms and a substantial underground area for storage, mechanicals and washrooms, along with a small exhibition space and a compact apartment to accommodate Beaverbrook’s visits to Fredericton.

In many ways the Gallery’s form, with a central entry bound by two solid equal volumes, is inherently classical in its proportion and layout. It is clearly a simplified version of other classically-inspired galleries such as the Walker Art Building at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine (1892-94) and the original Maxwell Pavilion of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1910-13). These earlier examples both have symmetrical plans with little or no fenestration, enclosing an ornamented tall entrance hall. In the Beaverbrook building however, any festooning of ornament is exchanged for a spartan sensibility reveling in the

luxury of simple materials and the textural play of light and shadow on clean walls. This arrangement was also evident in Josef Hoffmann's 1934 Austrian Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (fig. 8). Here, a monumental portal rises like a medieval gate in the center of the symmetrical single-storey structure. Its verticality is counterpointed by solid white side walls with horizontal fluting, capped with a continuous clerestory and deep cornice. The pavilion's interior plan is virtually identical to that of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery and as such, the Fredericton building reflects the influential vocabulary of central European Modernism. Another precedent and one certainly familiar to Lord Beaverbrook was Henry Van de Velde's Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Holland.²⁵ Built between 1937 and 1954, it was the first major twentieth-century example of a single-story art museum.²⁶ Like the Beaverbrook, it had a recessed central entry and a stark brick masonry exterior capped with a projecting stone cornice that defined its rectilinear form.

With its exterior use of glazed cream-coloured brick, white marble cornices and a light granite base, the Gallery resembles a modern altar; this would have pleased European modernists who saw minimal white cubic forms as expressions of purity and order. The palette of materials throughout the interior is equally striking with terrazzo floors, wood paneled walls, stainless steel handrails, and aluminum windows. Neil Stewart went so far as to claim the building was "of purely functional design,"²⁷ which would have indeed seemed the case in comparison to other Canadian museums constructed in preceding decades.

The interior plan is simple: a tall central gallery flanked by two large square galleries of equal size. The central space is dominated by two objects: Salvador Dali's majestic *Santiago El Grande* measuring four by three metres and occupying an entire wall,²⁸ and the great north-facing window (since modified) that constituted the rear façade of the room. The site offers a broad vista of the St. John River and the landscape beyond, creating an effect described as "startling" by *The New York Times* at the Gallery's opening.²⁹ The window and view created an unexpected link to the vast expanse of water and open sky behind the thin gothic framework in the Dali painting.

Although today the Beaverbrook Art Gallery is acknowledged as the city's priceless asset, the building has been increasingly referred to as a "mausoleum," with much of the public having the impression that its bare walls appear cold and inhumane. Ironically, Stuart Smith, the Curator of the Gallery in the 1960s, has said that a mausoleum is exactly what Beaverbrook wanted, not in an ominous way but rather akin to the root of the word – the large stately monument built to honour King Mausolus in 350 B.C. and one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World. Beaverbrook considered the Gallery and its contents to be his greatest legacy to the people of New Brunswick. In a letter of 1959 he stressed, "life is not worth living unless I get the Gallery going."³⁰ He wanted the Gallery to be serene and immortal, and possibly the greatest achievement of his lifetime³¹ – effectively becoming his own memorial.

St. Anne's Anglican Church - 1962

Writing in 1947, the pioneering German expressionist architect Erich Mendelsohn reacted strongly to those who felt that churches must employ "traditional" architecture in order to achieve sanctified space and "a sense of the sacred." He believed that "to admit this is to deny that religion is an important part of our contemporary society."³² One of the most prominent contemporary religious buildings constructed in the western world in the 1950s and surely the most ambitious, was the rebuilding of Britain's Coventry Cathedral by Sir Basil Spence. Destroyed by World War II bombing raids, its reconstruction engendered one of the largest architectural competitions in history. Although only a portion of the medieval ruins had to be maintained, Spence won the commission in 1951 based on a scheme that preserved nearly all the remains of the original Cathedral, linking it to a new adjacent structure with a soaring open stone porch. Spence's building was based on a rational structural form, repetition of geometrical elements, large glazed screen walls, rich stone cladding, a patterned ceiling and shallow roof supported by reinforced concrete columns, and an immense openness surrounding the altar/chancel. The reredos was an enormous tapestry designed by Graham Sutherland.

Like Mendelsohn, Spence was fully grounded in the spirit of his time; while designing the Cathedral, he was also working on the influential "Festival of Britain" exhibition that would have a lasting impact on modern British architecture and design. Spence believed that the duty of contemporary architects was not to copy, but to "think afresh." He insisted that the enduring churches of the Middle Ages contained a basic truth: "architecture should grow out of the conditions of the time, should not be a copy of past styles, and must be a clear expression of contemporary thought."³³ Spence also felt that the fusion of the old and the new implied "continuity and vitality – a living Faith" and that this was inherent in all great churches that had evolved over time. This was especially true when the use of materials was sympathetic to the original: "When an historic building is to be extended it is a trained instinct to be kind to the old structure, not to destroy its voice, to encourage growth and not to wipe out and start again.... All great buildings show a rhythmic consistency, even though they may contain four or five contemporary styles each showing integrity."³⁴ Mendelsohn and Spence's ideals and the precedent of Coventry were not lost on the building committee responsible for expanding St. Anne's Anglican Church in Fredericton's west side. The 1847 stone church, designed by Frank Wills, the young English architect of Christ Church Cathedral, is a National Historic Site and considered to be the finest and most significant Gothic Revival church of its type in North America (fig.9).³⁵

In 1959, the original chapel could no longer accommodate the changing demands of a growing congregation and it was decided to construct a larger church. The architects Stanley Emmerson of Saint John and John Feeney of Fredericton were commissioned to design the new building. Both of them had



fig. 9 Original St. Anne's Anglican Church (now Christ Church Parish Church 'Chapel of Ease'), Fredericton, NB, completed 1847. Architect: Frank Wills. (Photo: the author)

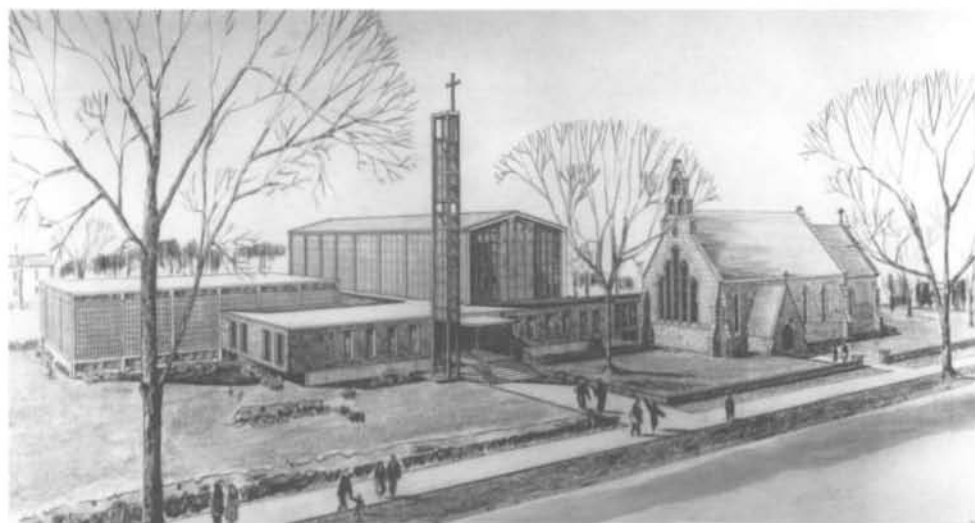


fig.10 Architectural rendering showing the new St. Anne's church and its relationship to the original building, Fredericton, NB, c. 1960. Architects: Stanley Emmerson and John Feeney. (Photo: the author)

entered the profession through the lengthy syllabus program rather than through a typical university design curriculum. Although he died at a young age, Emmerson was a highly respected architect who designed such esteemed New Brunswick structures as the former N.B. Power Headquarters in Fredericton (1948-49), and the Bank of Canada Building in Saint John completed in 1960s.³⁶ The architects' approach was clearly stated in their proposal for St. Anne's: "The existing church is an architectural gem which should be jealously preserved both for historical as well as architectural reasons."³⁷ Believing that the 1847 chapel was "of transcending importance in any worthwhile plan," the proposal then states that the physical and spiritual value of the existing parish church is dependent upon it being retained "as is," and that any attempt to tie it solidly into the new church would certainly lessen the aesthetic value of the old and probably even of the new church. They proposed tying the new and the old church together loosely by means of a colonnade or portico, and emphasized that the design of the new church should harmonize with the existing building.

Completed in 1962, the modern St. Anne's church (fig.10) was a substantial, autonomous structure, but it is clearly the result of a dialogue between the ancient and the modern. The new church was undoubtedly inspired by Coventry Cathedral and other precedents such as Eliel and Eero Saarinen's First Christian Church in Columbus, Indiana (1942)³⁸ and their Christ Church Lutheran in

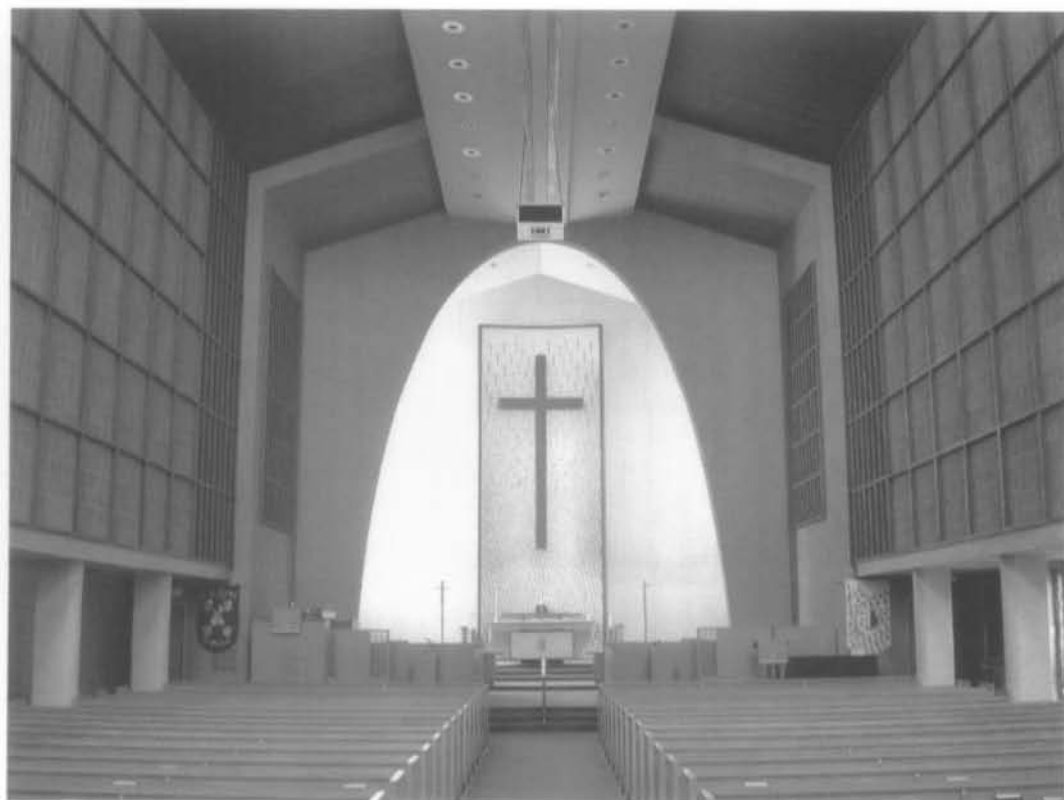


fig.11 New St. Anne's Anglican Church, interior view of chancel and the surrounding catatonic arch. (Photo: the author)

Minneapolis (1949). The Saarinens' structures used a simple cubic form that extolled the solidity of the flat planes of vertical wall, with a tall freestanding rectilinear bell tower at the corner of the front façade and a rectangular sanctuary plan; the materials used on the exterior and interior are mostly buff brick and smooth limestone.

The new St. Anne's maintains a similar height, volume, and material colour scheme to the original structure. The high sanctuary is clad with smooth limestone vertical ribs that are in-filled with buff brick panels. The lower office space is dressed with rubble-faced ashlar sandstone and punctuated by tall narrow windows with smooth stone surrounds. Like the Saarinen churches, the traditional steeple is replaced with a freestanding rectangular tower. St. Anne's tower has a Sol Lewitt-like modular concrete spaceframe of reinforced concrete that was originally intended to be capped with a cross. The architects' careful consideration of the older building is evident in the new church tower's physical detachment from its historic predecessor and in the slender connective passageway that was designed to minimize the alteration to the original structure. In fact, from most vantage points the 1847 church still appears as a fully freestanding building.

In a 1954 essay "A Religious Architecture for Today,"³⁹ John Stewart Detlie described church design as an act of devotion; he stated that contemporary architects could design out of a resignation to our materialistic post-atomic world, or they could envision a new spiritual age dominated by the Divine order of the universe. His frontispiece was a diptych of an atomic mushroom cloud on the left, balanced on the right by a glowing cross encircled by cosmic catenary curves. Detlie's essay was reprinted in 1957 as the conclusion to the widely-read book *Religious Buildings for Today*, published by *The Architectural Record* magazine. It hardly seems coincidental that Feeney and Emmerson used a massive concrete catatonic arch surrounding a wooden cross on a naturally sidelit gilded tile reredos for the chancel of the sanctuary (fig.11). The result is a striking revision of the original church's corresponding pointed stone arch delineating its own opulently tiled chancel.

St. Anne's Parish Church is quite simply one of the few distinguished pairings of modern and historic architecture in New Brunswick. The structurally expressive, open and light-filled modern church accentuates the darker, more enclosed and ornate qualities of its Gothic Revival ancestor. Going back and forth from one space to another provides a fascinating glimpse into how spiritual relationships were expressed architecturally, one hundred and fifteen years apart. By the early 1960s, Modernism was finally regarded as an appropriate style for Fredericton's major buildings as well as for less monumental structures such as houses and schools. The pursuit of Modernism would reach its apex with the construction of a new government building, which would become the city's largest structure.



fig.12 Centennial Building, Fredericton, NB, completed 1967. Architect: Bélanger & Roy. (Photo: the author)

The Centennial Building - 1967

Canada's centenary year of 1967 was both a transition and a defining point in the cultural aspirations of Canada; and one way in which this was made evident was in the design of new government buildings. There is no doubt that the most formidable of Fredericton's administrative buildings from this time still occupies a difficult place within public memory because an entire block of historic houses was demolished to accommodate the new structure. Nevertheless, the imposing Centennial Building is one of New Brunswick's foremost Modernist structures, and it was considered a "beautiful" symbol of progress during what may have been the most optimistic time in Canada's history.⁴⁰ Designed under the direction of Cyrille Roy, senior partner in the architecture firm of Bélanger & Roy of Moncton, the building (fig.12) was crafted with a tectonic intensity and a degree of technical refinement that has not been matched in the region to this day.

Occupying nearly an entire downtown city block, the Centennial Building was the first project in Canada to be completed under the federal-provincial Confederation Memorial Program, which assisted the construction of permanent structures to celebrate the nation's 100th anniversary. Opened on 14 March 1967, the building was intended to "streamline the efficiency"⁴¹ of government bureaucracy and to accommodate nearly all the Provincial Civil Service in one edifice. (However, the space soon proved to be insufficient because of the enormous increase in staff hiring early in the next decade.) Six stories in height with a T-shaped plan and over twenty-three thousand square metres of floor space, the Centennial Building initially housed over one thousand employees. Its structural steel framework was clad in polished New Brunswick black granite, olive sandstone from Nova Scotia, stainless steel and a reflective glass curtain wall, all laid out in a rational grid typical of the International Style. The main lobby is truly one of the great interior spaces in the province (fig.13) with terrazzo floors, round travertine marble columns supporting the lofty translucent panel ceiling, and polished travertine walls embellished with bronze-lettered historic texts written by New Brunswick statesmen, poets and others.⁴²

The Centennial Building represents the culmination of the International Style of High Modernism in New Brunswick. It was an admirable execution of Mies Van der Rohe's ideals combined with the subtle use of Canadian refinements on the exterior. In terms of precision and clarity, it can be compared to his Seagram Building in New York. The austerity of Van der Rohe's structure was a mixture of both necessity and virtue; it embodies his conviction that architecture is subject to neither the passing day nor to eternity, but, fully anchored in its time. It expresses the conditions of the contemporary economy, technological advancement, and a monastic spirituality. His buildings embraced an open plan, full expanses of glass, and movable partitions that freely adapted to the changing uses within. The inherent paradox of such minimalism of form is that it requires the finest of materials and a reverence toward craftsmanship. In the Centennial Building,



fig.13 Centennial Building, interior view of main lobby showing John Hooper's fiberglass relief mural, 1967. (Photo: photographer unknown)



fig.14 A selection of the Centennial Building's lobby murals, clockwise from top: Claude Roussel's welded metal rod sculpture; Jack Humphrey's coloured glass mosaic tile mural; and Bruno Bobak's painted gouged plywood relief. (Photos: the author)

Miesian severity was tempered by the use of local sandstone on the end walls. Although these surfaces appear imposing at first, the warm variation of colour and grain within the sixty by ninety centimeter blocks provides scale and texture; the stone walls actually shimmer like a checkerboard in the varying light of the day. The Centennial Building's use of stone as an equal to the adjacent slick metal and glass skin adds a clear expression of texture to the usual International Style structural language. Similarly, Peter Dickinson's iconic CIBC tower in Montreal, completed in 1963, uses green slate spandrels between the glazing rather than Van der Rohe's ubiquitous black opaque panels. This signifies, therefore, an injection of regional expression and a metaphor of robust Canadian geography rather than absolute adherence to conventional Internationalist methodology.

In keeping with a trend in government edifices of the era, the Centennial Building catered to "the cultural as well as the functional."⁴³ On each of the six floors a large mural was displayed in the lobby area, each in a different medium and depicting a different theme from New Brunswick's industry or history (fig.14). Six of the province's most prominent artists were chosen to execute the murals. On the first floor was John Hooper's extended fiberglass sculpture representing New Brunswick's history, with a central panel depicting the Fathers of Confederation. On the next floor Claude Roussel's welded metal rod sculpture represented the logging industry. Bruno Bobak's painted gouged plywood relief portraying three miners was installed on the third floor; and Jack Humphrey's coloured glass mosaic tile mural depicting fishermen is found on the fourth. At the fifth-floor lobby was Tom Forrestall's welded and buffed sheet metal construction of farm elements. Finally Fred Ross' circular painted mural on the uppermost floor was inspired by the prolific literary history of New Brunswick.⁴⁴ The murals ranged from figurative to abstract, and from flat paintings to three-dimensional sculptures, reflecting the diversity of New Brunswick's art practice at the time. The works were funded by the Provincial Department of Public Works and the Federal Government's public art program. Stuart Smith, Curator of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, selected the artists who were free to choose the form and medium. Other considerations such as location, size and theme were fixed, and the subject matter of the work had to relate to the specific government department on the artist's designated floor.⁴⁵ In 1967, Premier Louis Robichaud stated that:

New Brunswick's Centennial Building stands as a monument to the honour of achievements past; a symbol of our future aspirations. More than that, it epitomizes the progressive spirit of our people and indicates our confidence in our own bright future.... New Brunswick can have no finer memorial to Confederation than one that is in daily use by those who have chosen to serve the people of our province, and the great country we are.⁴⁶

In its day, Modernism was a movement defined as the end of historical style; inevitably, it has now become a distinct period of that same history. Until very recently Modernism was viewed as a flawed experiment, compromised by disasters in urban planning, highway sprawl, destruction of heritage, cheaply built imitations, and environments insensitive to human needs. Nevertheless, a new appreciation of the Modernist architectural legacy is rapidly evolving within design and academic circles, as well as among the general public. There is now greater awareness that the decades following the Second World War provided gems of craftsmanship and detail, and expressive spaces of light and colour that are increasingly recognized as central to the cultural heritage and development of New Brunswick and of Canada. Due to the tentative condition of architecture in Eastern Canada in the 1950s and '60s, distinguished Modernist buildings are the exception rather than the rule. This is partly attributable to economic conditions, but in New Brunswick it also reflects the tensions between local traditions and international perspectives.

The four structures described in this article touch many levels of the fabric of Fredericton: the University, buildings designed for the enjoyment of art, religious worship, and the workings of government. These buildings speak to the post-War spirit and to the ideals of the city, as well as to the technical advances in building design. They are most deserving of reexamination, and long overdue praise.

JOHN LEROUX

Architect

Fredericton

Notes

- 1 *The London Times* published his poem, *For the Fallen* on 21 September 1914. Laurence Binyon (1869-1943), the Lancaster-born poet and art critic, wrote it while working at the British Museum; in 1916 he went to the Western Front as a Red Cross orderly. After the War, he returned to the Museum's printed books department and authored several books. In 1933 he was appointed Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University.
- 2 John M. LYLE, "Address by John M. Lyle, 22 February 1929 at the Art Gallery of Toronto," *RAIC Journal* (April 1929): 135.
- 3 Philip Johnson (1906-2005) became the Director of the Department of Architecture at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1930. He and Henry-Russell Hitchcock coined the term "International Style" while curating the seminal 1932 modern architecture exhibition. Its accompanying publication, *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*, introduced European modern architecture to a North-American audience and codified its design principles.
- 4 McGill's pre-World War II curriculum reflected ideologies typical of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Bland replaced it with a program of fervent study of the Modern Movement. Students were required to study such fields as town planning and to take engineering courses in keeping with Bland's conviction that the disciplines of engineering and architecture must be brought together to resolve modern building problems.
- 5 Geoffrey HUNT, *John M. Lyle. Towards a Canadian Architecture/ Créer une architecture canadienne* (Kingston: The Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1982), 122.
- 6 The imposing Saint John General Hospital, built in 1930 and demolished in 1995, was considered an important example of an Art Deco public building.
- 7 See Margaret CONRAD, "The 1950s: The Decade of Development" in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1993), 382-420.
- 8 Edith G. MCLEOD, "Ladies' Lounge," *The UNB Alumni News* IX, no.2 (December 1954): 3.
- 9 Unsigned, "Memorial Student Centre cost Almost \$265,000," *The UNB Alumni News* X, no.2 (March 1956): 3.
- 10 With the subsequent growth of the University, the Student Centre became increasingly distanced from the center of the campus.
- 11 Sigfried GIEDION, *Walter Gropius* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992), 72.
- 12 Louis KAHN, "Space and Inspirations," in *Louis I. Kahn: Writings, Lectures, Interviews*, ed. Alessandra Latour (New York: Rizzoli International, 1991), 224.
- 13 Unsigned, "Memorial Centre Officially Opened," *The Daily Gleaner*, 12 May 1955.
- 14 Alda MAIR and Pat RYDER, "UNB Architecture," *The Daily Gleaner*, 29 March 1955.
- 15 Another notable (and essentially unknown) example of modern architecture at UNB is "Campus House," the residence built in 1957 for the university president, Colin B. MacKay. Constructed at the end of a concealed cul-de-sac surrounded by thick woods, the flat-roofed wood-clad structure is now the headquarters for the Centre for Conflict Studies as well as for the periodicals, *The Fiddlehead* and *Acadiensis*.
- 16 Quoted in Susan MONTAGUE, *A Pictorial History of the University of New Brunswick* (Fredericton: UNB, 1992), 184.

- 17 In praise of the opening of the gallery, Hannen Swaffer, a senior journalist in London who once worked for Beaverbrook wrote: "I regard Beaverbrook's magnificent donation to his hometown as the finest cultural contribution of my lifetime – one that will have infinite results on the art life of Canada's splendid future." Quoted in unsigned, "Round and About – Poetic Tribute," *The Atlantic Advocate* L, no.2 (October 1959): 83.
- 18 For a listing of the collection at the time, see *Beaverbrook Art Gallery - Paintings* (Fredericton: University Press of New Brunswick, 1959).
- 19 Ian G. LUMSDEN, "A Living Legacy" in *The Beaverbrook Art Gallery Collection: Selected Works*, Ian Lumsden et al. (Fredericton: Beaverbrook Art Gallery, 2000), 14-16.
- 20 Beaverbrook could have engaged any leading international architect, and in an interview with the author, 10 Nov. 2005, Ian Lumsden suggested that the hiring of Jonsson was Beaverbrook's way of both supporting a fellow New Brunswicker and employing someone who would not challenge his control of the building's design. Beaverbrook often showed little respect for professionals in the art world and invariably trusted his own judgment. It may simply have been a momentary courtesy when he ended a 22 Nov. 1954 letter to Jonsson with the comment: "You will, of course, understand that these are my suggestions and you are free to make counter suggestions, which will surely be more valuable than my own." Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Archives, Beaverbrook Papers Series #4, House of Lords Material, BBK-A-285.
- 21 Lynn Howell made the initial sketches and layout for the gallery. When Howell died during the design process his partner, Neil Stewart became the principal in charge and, as implied by the inscription on the Gallery's cornerstone, Stewart is credited as the sole architect. Beaverbrook's reasons for the contractual shift from Jonsson to Howell and Stewart are unclear, although, in 1955, they had designed the Lady Beaverbrook Rink, which Beaverbrook donated to Fredericton.
- 22 Unsigned, "Beaverbrook Art Gallery One of the Finest in Canada – Designing Gallery 'Chance of Lifetime for Capital Architect'," *The Daily Gleaner*, 14 Sept. 1959.
- 23 Comment from a speech at the UNB Art Centre given by Simmonds during the UNB annual Festival of the Arts, 27 Jan. 1958. Unsigned, "Sees Great Advantages To N.B. In New Beaverbrook Gallery: Higher Quality Of Exhibitions To Be Possible," *The Telegraph-Journal*, 28 Jan. 1958.
- 24 Michael WARDELL, "The Beaverbrook Art Gallery," *The Atlantic Advocate* L, no.1 (September 1959): 50.
- 25 In an interview with the author, 10 Nov. 2005, Ian Lumsden surmised that either Beaverbrook or an emissary visited the Kröller-Müller Museum. It would have been an appropriate precedent for Beaverbrook's gallery because the Museum's content's also originated from a single private collection and the two buildings are of similar size. A six-page summary of the Museum with the handwritten comment, "Copy of notes on a Dutch Museum sent LB [Lord Beaverbrook] with plans & photos" is found in the House of Lords Archives, BBK/A/285 (1954).
- 26 Nicholas PEVSNER, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), 138.
- 27 "Beaverbrook Art Gallery..." *The Daily Gleaner*, 14 Sept. 1958.
- 28 *Santiago El Grande*, which depicts Saint James of Compostela, was painted in 1957 for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels' World's Fair. It was presented to the Gallery by Lady Ann Dunn on behalf of the Sir James Dunn Foundation. Sir James Dunn, a New Brunswick native, was a major Canadian financier and industrialist during the first half of the twentieth century, and a close friend of Lord Beaverbrook.

- 29 Raymond DANIEL, "Beaverbrook Gives Art Gallery To His Native New Brunswick," *The New York Times*, 17 Sept. 1959.
- 30 Robert DUNCAN, dir., *Beaverbrook – The Various Lives of Max Aitken*, National Film Board of Canada, 2000.
- 31 Lord Beaverbrook to Mme. M. Escara, 10 Jan. 1959, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Archives, Beaverbrook Papers Series #4, House of Lords Material, BBK-A-283.
- 32 Erich MENDELSON, "In the Spirit of Our Age," *Commentary* (June 1947): 542.
- 33 Basil SPENCE, *Phoenix at Coventry: the Building of a Cathedral* (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1962), 8.
- 34 Ibid., 10.
- 35 Phoebe B. STANTON, *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste 1840-1856* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 130.
- 36 Author's interview with David Emmerson, 16 Dec. 2005.
- 37 J.L. FEENEY, Architect & Engineer, S.W. EMMERSON, Architect, "Report to the Rector and Trustees of St. Anne's Parish Church, Fredericton, N.B. Proposed New Church and its Location on the Existing Site. 1. May 15, 1959," Archives, Christ Church Parish Church.
- 38 The Saarinen's First Christian Church was the first Modernist building in Columbus; it was also one of the first among a number of similar churches that were highly influential in the United States.
- 39 John Stewart DETLIE, "A Religious Architecture for Today," in *Religious Buildings for Today*, ed. John Knox Shear (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1957), 171. Detlie was trained as an architect but went to Hollywood in 1934 and developed an extensive filmography. After World War II, he moved to Seattle where he joined an architectural firm, designing a number of churches as well as buildings in downtown Honolulu.
- 40 In the pamphlet accompanying the official opening of the building, André Richard, Minister of Public Works also stated that "Aesthetically, it provides suitable surroundings for conducting the affairs of the province."
- 41 Pamphlet, *New Brunswick Centennial Building. Official Opening. Tuesday, March 7, 1967*. Legislative Library of New Brunswick pamphlet file, "Centennial Building" folder.
- 42 The quotations include texts as early as the 1604 *Voyages du Sieur de Champlain* and *The Lord's Prayer* transcribed in Mi'kmaq ideogram by Father Christian le Clerq in 1677. Selections from addresses by Fathers of Confederation, Charles Fisher, John Johnson, Jon Hamilton Grey and Samuel Leonard Tilley, and poems by Bliss Carman and Charles G.D. Roberts are among the many others included.
- 43 Unsigned, "The Centennial Building Has A Large Mural On Each Floor," *The Daily Gleaner*, 13 March 1967.
- 44 The Fred Ross mural was removed from the wall during a renovation in the early 1990s and its present whereabouts is unknown. It is the only original Centennial Building artwork that is no longer *in situ*.
- 45 Author's interviews with Bruno Bobak and Stuart Smith, 4 Dec. 2005.
- 46 Pamphlet, *New Brunswick Centennial Building. Official Opening*.

L'ARCHITECTURE DE L'ESPRIT

Le modernisme à Fredericton dans les années cinquante et soixante

L'architecture traditionnelle est hautement appréciée au Nouveau-Brunswick, et ce qui est perçu comme étant «moderne» est devenu suspect. Le résultat est que d'importants immeubles d'après guerre ont été méprisés, ignorés et, dans de nombreux cas, démolis. Certains de ceux-là, parmi les plus dignes de mention, ont été créés à Fredericton durant les années cinquante et soixante.

Le modernisme architectural qui a explosé en Europe à la suite de la Première Guerre mondiale a été célébré comme la fusion de la technologie contemporaine et d'un sens utopique du changement social. Bien que l'*establishment* architectural au Canada ait mis du temps à accepter le «style international» moderniste, ces attitudes se sont relâchées à cause de l'essor économique d'après-guerre, de l'afflux massif d'anciens combattants dans les universités, du *Rapport Massey* de 1949-51 qui encourageait l'excellence dans l'architecture contemporaine et d'une nouvelle vigueur moderniste dans les écoles d'art.

Vers 1946, les anciens combattants triplèrent les inscriptions sur le campus de l'université du Nouveau-Brunswick et un fonds commémoratif fut créé en l'honneur des étudiants tombés sur le champ de bataille. Cela donna lieu à la création du premier bâtiment construit à Fredericton selon les principes du modernisme. Dessiné par le cabinet Stewart & Howell de Fredericton, en 1955, le Memorial Student Centre, immeuble de deux étages en briques rouges, comprend une grande salle commune dotée de foyers autoportants, de larges baies donnant sur la ville et la rivière, un salon pour les étudiantes, une salle de musique, des bureaux pour les étudiants et une cafétéria. L'immeuble à toit plat exhibait plusieurs caractéristiques du style moderne : un plan ouvert avec un espace de circulation central sur plusieurs étages dans les halls d'entrée, des tours de fenêtre profonds en béton prémoulés, des fenêtres et des portes en aluminium, un vestibule en blocs de verre, partout des portes sans ornement en bouleau teinté et la géométrie oblique du porche arrière et du décor en béton cannelé sur la façade. Le point focal du Centre était le monument aux morts, mur dominant l'entrée centrale sur deux étages auquel est fixée une énorme plaque d'ardoise verte avec des inscriptions dorées. Le hall comporte aussi une vitrine en acier inoxydable et verre où est exposé un Livre du Souvenir dans lequel sont inscrits les noms de tous les étudiants tombés au front. Cependant, la décision la plus inspirée fut d'installer un long vitrage en acrylique directement au dessus du mur monument, le baignant de lumière naturelle. Pendant des décennies le Memorial Student Centre allait demeurer un cas isolé de style moderniste à l'Université.

L'ouverture de la Beaverbrook Art Gallery en 1959 a été l'un des plus grands événements culturels de l'histoire du Nouveau-Brunswick. L'immeuble, dessiné par Neil Stewart de Fredericton est un chef-d'œuvre ignoré de l'architecture moderne canadienne du milieu du siècle. L'utilisation, à l'extérieur, de briques vernies de couleur crème, de corniches en marbre blanc et d'une base légère en granit suggère que la galerie pourrait être perçue comme un autel blanc, qui aurait plu aux modernistes européens. La palette des matériaux intérieurs est également méticuleuse, composée de planchers de terrazzo, de murs lambrissés de bois, de rampes d'acier inoxydable et de fenêtres en aluminium. Le plan intérieur comporte une haute galerie centrale flanquée de deux grandes galeries carrées de dimensions égales. L'espace central est dominé par le *Santiago El Grande* de Salvador Dali, qui occupe un mur, et par la fenêtre côté nord qui est la façade arrière de la pièce. Beaverbrook voyait la galerie et sa collection d'œuvres d'art comme le plus grand héritage qu'il pouvait laisser à la population du Nouveau-Brunswick et, sans doute, sa plus grande réussite.

Un des édifices religieux contemporains les plus remarquables des années cinquante est la nouvelle cathédrale de Coventry, Angleterre, qui relie l'ancienne église à la nouvelle par un majestueux porche ouvert en pierre. Cet exemple est évident dans les plans d'expansion de l'église anglicane Sainte-Anne de Fredericton, construite en 1847. La vision des architectes, Stanley Emmerson de Saint John et John Feeney de Fredericton, est clairement énoncée en 1959 : «L'église existante est un joyau architectural qui doit être jalousement préservé pour des raisons historiques autant qu'architecturales».

La nouvelle église Sainte-Anne, terminée en 1962, est extrêmement bien construite et semblable à l'église originale par la hauteur, la masse et la palette de matériaux. Le clocher est également détaché de son prédécesseur historique et l'étroit passage qui les relie minimise les changements de la structure antérieure. L'église moderne, structurellement expressive, ouverte et baignée de lumière accentue le caractère plus sombre, fermé et orné de son aînée de style néo-gothique.

Au début des années soixante, le modernisme était reconnu à Fredericton comme un style convenable qui pouvait se concilier avec et rehausser les monuments de la ville ainsi que des immeubles plus petits comme les maisons et les écoles. Cependant, la poursuite du modernisme allait atteindre son sommet avec le nouvel hôtel du gouvernement qui deviendrait alors l'édifice le plus imposant de la ville. Dessiné par Bélanger & Roy de Moncton et inauguré officiellement le 14 mars 1967, l'Édifice du centenaire a été construit pour «rationaliser l'efficacité» et loger la plupart des bureaux de la fonction publique dans un seul immeuble. D'une hauteur de six étages et d'une superficie de plus de 23 000 mètres carrés. Sa structure d'acier est habillée de granit noir du Nouveau-Brunswick poli, de grès olive de la Nouvelle-Écosse, d'acier inoxydable et d'un rideau de verre réfléchissant, arrangés selon une grille rationnelle caractéristique du style international. Le hall

principal, l'un des plus grands espaces intérieurs de la province, comprend un sol de terrazzo, des colonnes rondes en travertin, un haut plafond de panneaux translucides et des murs en travertin ornés de textes historiques en lettres de bronze d'hommes d'État, de poètes et autres personnalités du Nouveau-Brunswick. L'Édifice du centenaire représente le sommet du style international et du modernisme au Nouveau-Brunswick. Dans chaque hall d'ascenseur, une grande murale représente un aspect différent de l'industrie ou de l'histoire du Nouveau-Brunswick : une sculpture de fibre de verre de John Hooper pour l'histoire ; une sculpture de tiges métalliques de Claude Roussel pour l'industrie forestière ; trois mineurs sur un panneau en contre-plaqué gravé et peint de Bruno Bobak ; et des pêcheurs sur une mosaïque de tuiles de verre de Jack Humphrey. Sur les étages supérieurs on retrouve une construction en tôle de Tom Forrestall représentant des objets de ferme et un tableau circulaire de Fred Ross reflétant l'histoire littéraire du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Bien que la province compte un certain nombre d'immeubles modernistes remarquables, ils sont l'exception plutôt que la règle et ils expriment l'état incertain de l'architecture de l'est du Canada dans les années cinquante et soixante. Néanmoins, Fredericton a la chance de posséder ces exemples exceptionnels qui témoignent de l'esprit et des idéaux de l'après-guerre.

Traduction : Élise Bonnette