

**Gothic Revival in
Canadian Architecture**

Mathilde Brosseau
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The study of architectural history in Canada has finally come of age. Ten years ago Harold Kalman wrote an article, "Recent Literature on the History of Canadian Architecture," in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (Dec. 1972, Vol. XXXI), remarking on the new interest in the subject. This concern with Canadian architecture is broadly based including not only specialists such as architects, preservationists and historians, but the general public as well. As a result of this increased fascination with the built environment, a number of books, periodicals, organizations and lecture series have appeared firmly establishing the discipline.

The nationwide Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, founded in the early 1970's, publishes a bulletin that gives the reader regional news, book reviews and a wide range of articles on specific buildings and architects; the Society also sponsors an annual meeting where scholars present their current research. In 1974 in Montréal Peter Rose initiated a series of architectural lectures held at McGill and sponsored by Alcan. This past year Alcan began a similar series on the west coast in Vancouver. A signal event, in the long list of developments in the study of architecture, was the creation in 1979 of the Canadian Centre for Architecture. Located in Montréal, it is a resource centre designed to encourage the study of Canadian as well as international architecture. Early in 1981, *Trace*, a Canadian magazine devoted to architecture and aimed at a wide audience, made its debut.

An important part of this general trend is the appearance of books such as the *Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture* by the late Mathilde Brosseau. This small format (21 x 21 cm.) paperback makes a significant contribution to the analysis of the

Neo-Gothic style in its many manifestations across the country. The study resulted from the building survey undertaken by the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building in 1970 and sponsored by the federal government. The program was to be accomplished in four phases: Phase I: To record exteriors dating from 1880 or earlier in eastern Canada and up to 1914 in western Canada; Phase II: To record the interiors of particular buildings selected from Phase I; Phase III: In depth documentary research of selected buildings; Phase IV: To update the inventory of buildings in eastern Canada to 1914.

The data that provided the basis for this book was collected during field surveys made from coast to coast. A team of researchers was given a short training course and then sent out with a standard form to evaluate buildings of historic interest. The form consists of multiple choice descriptions of a variety of building features such as the type of plan, type of foundation, method of construction of exterior walls in wood, stone, brick, concrete, metal, glass, type of bearing wall construction, roof-type, treatment of windows and entrances. The information was then coded and computerized. Since the collected facts proved to be of limited use, stylistic studies were undertaken to interpret the material. The *Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture* is the first of a number of these analyses which also includes the *Second Empire Style* by Christina Cameron and Janet Wright.

The goal of this particular work, *Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture*, according to the author's comments in the preface, is to:

elucidate... the arrival of the style in this country, its evolution through three general phases of mutation, and finally the interpretive variants attributable to geographical context, various cultural traditions and the development periods of the principal regions of Canada.

This doubtless was a daunting task and is only partially achieved.

The book consists of an essay of approximately twenty-four pages, one hundred and twenty-four black and

white photographs each with a textual description, a list of illustrations, bibliographical notes to the essay, notes to the text accompanying the photographs and a bibliography. The essay is organized into chapters tracing the development of the Gothic Revival style from its whimsical romantic beginning, through its moral and structural second phase, to its High Victorian Gothic aspect and finally to the so-called Beaux-Arts conclusion. Within each of these major areas of stylistic development, consideration is given to religious, domestic and public architecture in that order. In each section the reader is given a selection of representative buildings from the Atlantic provinces to the west coast, with a discussion of influences to be found in the particular region. Sometimes these sources of inspiration are publications such as the *Canadian Farmer*, appearing first in 1864, which affected the Ontario cottage type: a small house with a square plan, Gothitized by means of the application of details such as the trefoil. Another work that had great impact on domestic style was A.J. Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses*, published in 1848. Many of the local builders of rural Ontario were stimulated by this book. Establishing these interconnections is extremely useful and they are convincingly achieved by Brosseau.

While the major Gothic Revival buildings in Canada such as the Houses of Parliament by Fuller, Jones, Stent and Laver, ca. 1859, and Christ Church Cathedral by Wills and Butterfield, 1846-53, are well-known, the Carpenter's Gothic examples are not. One of the joys of this book is that it provides examples of these beautifully inventive lesser-known structures such as the United Baptist Church, ca. 1862, St. Andrews-by-the-Sea, N.B., and the United Church, ca. 1870, Malpeque, P.E.I. Also of great interest are oddities such as the Hydraulic Power Station, Blair, Ontario (n.d.), an example of industrial architecture using board and batten siding and employing small pointed windows to emphasize its Gothicism.

Dealing with the rationalist and ecclesiological modes, the author discusses the influence of the Cambridge

Camden Society and its publication the *Ecclesiologist* on Christ Church, Fredericton. More interesting, because it has not been so often mentioned, is the fact that Pugin's theories made an impression on Roman Catholic circles in Montréal. Father Joseph Vincent Quiblier wrote to Pugin in 1842 asking him to provide a model of a medieval English church when preparations to build St. Patrick's Church were underway. This is the sort of valuable information the essay yields. However, the text suffers from excessive density and from the assumption that the reader possesses a great deal of knowledge about the development of the Gothic Revival in England and America.

The text, enlightening as it is, contains a number of errors. The editors should have been more meticulous in double-checking text information against that which accompanies the photographs. For example, on page 19, Trafalgar Lodge, Montréal, 1848 is attributed to "the English architect Albert Furniss," while the entry for Plate 60 gives the architect as John Howard. The current owners of the house say that there is in fact some doubt as to the architect although Howard is generally credited with the building. The basis for this assumption is to be found in Howard's diaries "Incidents in the Life of J.J. Howard of Coburn Lodge," in the Blackader Library, McGill. Howard states that he "drew plans, specifications and estimates for a Gothic villa which was erected in Montréal for Albert Furniss." An error of this nature indicates that more exacting research and checking is necessary to assure the reader on the accuracy of factual information. In this case, an attribution to John Howard with reference to the diaries would have been a more satisfactory mode of presentation.

The photographs were selected to demonstrate various points in the text, however, their quality is uneven. Many are no more than amateur snapshots depriving the viewer of precisely the Gothic details he wants to see. In the case of Trafalgar Lodge, the rose window above the door, one of the noteworthy features of the house recalling the French rosace, is hardly visible. In the case of Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Tors Cove, Nfld., ca. 1890, the

false buttresses are important but unfortunately, truncated in the illustration. The best photographs were those taken by the author where the stylistic peculiarities of the Neo-Gothic such as gingerbread trim and board and batten construction are clearly visible.

By virtue of its trans-Canadian scope, this book is extremely useful. This reviewer however, would like to suggest that for subsequent publications, some modifications should be undertaken to make them more efficient for the reader to handle. For example, the system of notation used for what has been called "legend sources" (a cumbersome term for the information accompanying the illustrations) is awkward. The reference note should appear on the page along with the information so that the reader does not have to flip constantly back and forth; in future, wherever possible, full archival references including numbers should be used. For example, Plate I illustrating the "Main elevation of the Government House for Quebec" Design 1811-12, by Jeffry Wyatt, comes from the Public Archives of Canada. The researcher wants to know the Ms, not only the secondary reference source which is given at the back of the book under "legend sources." While it was not the intention of this series at the outset to provide detailed archival information, it would be a welcome addition to future books.

Despite flaws that could be rectified by more attention to editorial detail, as a clearly defined approach to architectural photography and the inclusion of precise primary source material, the *Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture* is an important addition to the growing body of architectural literature.

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Dom Bellot et l'architecture religieuse au Québec

Nicole Tardif-Painchaud
Les Presses de l'université Laval,
Québec, 1978
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I have just been reviewing Tom Wolfe's *Bauhaus to Our House* for another publication. I don't know whether Canada as a whole is ready for Tom Wolfe yet or not; certainly my base, Victoria, isn't. My God, can you imagine Tom Wolfe in Victoria? However, I digress, and I haven't even started to review *Dom Bellot*... Yet actually it's not entirely a digression, for there is a connection. Tom Wolfe and Robert Hughes (and many others lately) have been usefully reminding us how much was lost in the Bauhaus Blitz; what a clean sweep these European manifesto-manufacturers made of American traditions, American heritage, American craftsmanship and for that matter, American common sense. But that obliteration of the past wasn't only limited to the United States. Among Gropius's earliest converts were Canadians who had gone down to the "shrine" he presided over at Harvard; on returning they were just as zealous as any Bauhauslers to wipe everything "bourgeois" (i.e. everything architectural and sculptural from ca. 1870 to 1940) off the landscape, in the name of some optimistic utopian new world to be created any day now. The Dom Bellot tradition of church architecture was among their victims. They didn't physically demolish its buildings; since they were churches in Québec that just wasn't possible. But the churches could be and were made to seem out of date, out of fashion, contemptible, in consequence "le style Dom Bellot... c'est une page brève," lasting twenty years, 1930-1950. All the more useful, then, to have so fine a study made of it now.

Tardif-Painchaud begins with a general review of artistic developments with particular reference to Catholic religious art circles during the early decades of this century. It was a time of discontent with old formulae and there was a sense of urgency about renewals and revitalization "in modernist spir-