

## ADAMSON, Gordon Sinclair (1904 – 1986)

**G**ordon Adamson was the head of a large Toronto architectural firm, which produced designs that are distinctly contemporary. He practiced in the province for more than 50 years and completed a wide range of buildings. He was an extensive world traveller and believed in the theory that travel provides the background, training and stimulation necessary for successful architectural work. Adamson was extremely active in the Ontario Association of Architects serving on several committees and in 1953, at the age of 49, he was elected President of the Association.

He was born in Orangeville, Ontario May 19, 1904 and was educated at Orangeville High School. He later graduated with honors from the University of Toronto in 1928 with a Bachelor of Architecture.

He began his career as a job captain at the firm of Sproatt and Rolph in 1927, switching to the firm of Mathers and Haldenby as a draftsman the same year. In 1933 he became a designer with landscape architect Edwin Kay in Toronto and later joined Shell Canada, Montreal as a staff architect. He established his own architectural firm in 1934 and later became a senior partner in the firm Adamson and Morgan (Earle) which existed from 1934 until 1945. He then formed his own firm under the name Gordon Adamson and Associates which continued until his retirement in March 1971.

Adamson produced a great number of buildings over his long career and his versatility is indicated in his range of designs. He was awarded the Silver Medal in the Massey Foundation competition in 1953 for his work on a decidedly modernist apartment house at 130 Old Forest Hill Road, Toronto. He also designed the first solar house in Toronto which pioneered a new aesthetic – the Hobbs Sun House on Dale Ave. His ecclesiastical commissions include a Sunday school and auditorium for Lawrence Park Community Church, Toronto (1952); chapel and residence for the Sisters of St. Joseph, Toronto; Woodgreen United Church and addition to the community center, Queen Street, Toronto and the Church of St. Columba (Anglican), Toronto.

However, the majority of the firm's works are

commercial and industrial buildings. His 1946 office wing for the Canadian Nashua Paper Company, Peterborough, Ontario, won special mention in the 1952-53 Massey Medal Competition which prompted many industrial commissions in the post-war building boom. These included the Laboratories for Canadian Oil Companies Ltd., Sarnia (1957); Canada and Dominion Sugar Company, Queen's Quay, Toronto, (1961); Connaught Laboratories, Toronto; and Dow Chemical of Canada Ltd. Sarnia and Toronto. Governmental building designs included: Defense Research Medical Laboratories, Downsview; Polymer Corporation Limited, Office Building, Sarnia; Department of National Defense, Ottawa; Ontario Provincial Police District Headquarters, Toronto; St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Offices, Cornwall (1959). Adamson also designed many electrical generating stations throughout Canada.

Some of his more notable designs include Jordan Wines Limited Store (originally Holt Renfrew Ltd.) Toronto (1958); G. Tamblyn Head Office, Toronto (1959); New York Life Insurance Building, Toronto (1960); the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association, North York Branch (1961); the Royal Conservatory of Music University of Toronto, (1963) and Library Building, Laurentian University, Sudbury (1955).

His designs for Victoria College, University of Toronto are good examples of his capabilities as they reflect the stylistic tastes of the decade in which they were created. For example his Margaret Addison Hall Women's Residence (1959) expresses its structure in the modernist manner, leaving the concrete floor levels exposed on the rectilinear brick exterior, which emphasizes the lines accentuating the buildings sweeping curve. Adamson's E.J. Pratt Library (1961) and Northrope Frye Hall (1967) on Queens Park Crescent are exquisitely terraced and sited so as not to detract from the Victorian main building. They are quiet, immaculate 1960's boxes floating in space. However his St. Lawrence Center for the Arts, Front Street East, Toronto (1967-70) is in the "brutal" style with a striking profile and exposed concrete forms reflecting the stylistic dictates of the period.