

BAKER, Francis Spence (1867 – 1926)

Francis Baker a Toronto architect, was considered one of the best Beaux Arts architects in eastern Canada, designing many fine structures over his thirty year career. Baker took an active role in establishing the ethics for architectural professionalism in Canada. In 1910 he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier on behalf of the architectural profession, strongly condemning the plan for the new departmental buildings at Major's Hill Park, Ottawa, on the grounds of their being "a travesty on good architecture". This led to a national debate on federal patronage.

Mr. Baker was born in Kilbride, Halton County on August 21, 1867 and received his primary education in Hamilton. He commenced his study of architecture in the office of Thomas Kennedy of Barrie and continued for a number of years as a draftsman in Buffalo and later in New York with J.C. Cody and Company. He finished his training in London, England with Sir Thomas Colcott with whom he stayed several years. The plans of the Imperial Institute, South Kensington, were prepared during this time and Mr. Baker assisted in this work, as well as the superintendence of its construction.

Returning to Canada he took up the practice of architecture in Toronto, becoming a member of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1893. He entered the office of Knox and Elliott where he succeeded the principals upon their retirement. In partnership with J. Wilson Siddall, they created the firm of Siddall and Baker. Baker was also associated with the firm of Carrere and Hastings of New York in the erection of the Traders Bank Building, Yonge and Colborne Street, Toronto

(1905). For some time he was in partnership with George W. Gouinlock under the firm name of Gouinlock and Baker (1900-1903).

He was the first Canadian to be made an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and was made a Fellow in 1901. He held the position of honorary secretary for Canada for many years and was instrumental in establishing examinations in Canada for admission to RIBA. He also took an active part in the proceedings of the Ontario Association of Architects and of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC) serving as president of the RAIC in 1910 and 1911.

His designs show evidence of his English training and his love for the English Renaissance is exemplified in his larger works. Some of the notable Toronto buildings designed by him include the General Accident Assurance Building, Bay Street at Temperance (1921-22); Nordheimer Building, King Street East (1905, demolished); Traders Bank Building on Yonge Street at Bloor (1906-07) and Royal Bank branch on Yonge Street north of College (1917, demolished). The Saturday Night Building, Richmond Street West (1911-12, known as the Graphic Arts Building) was conceived to house aspiring Canadian culture, in a robust Classical temple form with Ionic colonnades rising a full three-stories.

He was the architect for the General Hospital, Guelph; Royal Victoria Hospital, Barrie (1910); St. Alban's Church, Glenwilliams (1902-03); Knox Church, Brantford; and the Presbyterian Church in Bradford and Huntsville. He also executed numerous Trader's Bank branches including ones in Winnipeg (1907), Guelph and West Selkirk (1906).