

BURKE, Edmund (1850 – 1919)

Edmond Burke was one of the country's greatest architects, not only in terms of the number of buildings he designed, but also through his writings and role in the development of the architectural profession at a very pivotal time. In his day he was recognized as one of Canada's leading architects, receiving the utmost respect from his colleagues and establishing a reputation for work of outstanding merit. Burke figured prominently in the evolution of the architectural profession in Ontario. He was a founding member of the Architectural Guild of Toronto in 1887. He served on the first Council of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1890, was elected President in 1894 and again in 1905-07. Mr. Burke, when President of the Ontario Association of Architects, submitted a well received plan for the aesthetic improvement of the streets, park system and water front of Toronto. He was also an important member of the Guild of Civic Art at its inception and was elected vice-president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in its founding year (1907).

Born in Toronto in 1850, Edmund Burke was the son of Sarah and William Burke, a local builder. Edmund attended Upper Canada College (1863-65) and upon graduation entered the office of the Toronto architectural firm of Thomas Gundry and Henry Langley, Edmund's uncle. Following Gundry's death in 1869 Burke remained with Langley as a junior architect. Four years later Burke and Langley's brother Edward, joined Henry Langley as partner in the firm Langley, Langley and Burke, where he remained until 1892. Following the death of the prominent Toronto architect, William G. Storm, Burke took over his long established practice. In 1909 he formed a partnership with John C.B. Horwood to form the firm Burke and Horwood; They were then joined by a third partner to create Burke, Horwood and White.

It was their initial designs for the Robert Simpson Company Department Store, Queen and Yonge Streets, Toronto in 1894 which was so influential in the development of twentieth century commercial design in Canada. The original building unfortunately was destroyed by fire shortly after completion but was redesigned in 1895-96 by

Burke and Horwood, based on the same innovative design principles but this time using brick and terra cotta cladding on the steel frame to make it fire proof. The six-storey structure was the first to exhibit the structural principles pioneered by Louis Sullivan and others in Chicago which used a steel skeleton to bear the weight of the building, allowing the interior to be opened up and the introduction of large light giving windows so well suited to the requirements of the modern department store and later in high-rise office construction. The exterior walls were now free of their load-bearing function and served only to enclose the building. The walls at Simpson's were composed of terra cotta and decorated in the finely carved detailing of the Romanesque revival. These innovations were incorporated in their later designs for the Hudson Bay Company Stores in Vancouver, British Columbia (1911), Calgary (1911) and Edmonton, Alberta (1912).

In 1916, Burke, Horwood and White in partnership with the American architect Max Dunning, designed a state of the art mail-order building for the Robert Simpson Company at Mutual and Dundas Streets, Toronto. This 11-storey reinforced concrete warehouse was the largest in Canada with its stylish corner pavilions decorated with terra cotta. Its interior design was completely work oriented with conveyor belts throughout, turning the interior into a vast machine.

Burke designed many church buildings especially with the Baptist (and Methodist) faiths with which he was associated. These include Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Jarvis Street, Toronto (1893); Central Methodist Church, Dufferin and Wellington Streets, London, Ontario (1895); First Methodist Church, London, Ontario (1895); Central Methodist Church, Bloor Street, Toronto (1898); Parkdale Methodist Church, Dunn and King Streets West, Toronto (1898); King Street East Methodist Church, Toronto (1900); Bathurst Methodist Church, Bathurst Street, Toronto (1900); Walmer Baptist Church, Bloor Street (1901); Baptist Church, Bank and Fourth Avenue, Ottawa (1904); Methodist Church, Ferguson and McIntyre Streets, North Bay, Ontario (1905); First Baptist Church, Vancouver, British Columbia

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(1909); and Baptist Church, Murray Street, Peterborough, Ontario (1910).

Burke also designed the Methodist Book and Publishing House, Queen at John Streets, Toronto (1906) in which he combined the latest in structural steel technology with traditional gothic styling in terra cotta, complete with grotesque figures decorating the exterior.

He designed many public buildings including: McMaster University, Bloor Street West, Toronto (1884); Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Conservatory and mortuary chapel, Toronto (1892); Art Institute, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick (1894); Architectural treatment of the

Bloor street viaduct, Toronto (1914); Muskoka Free Hospital for Consumptives, Gravenhurst, Ontario (1905); Observatory, Bloor Street and Devonshire Place, Toronto (1907); Royal College of Dental Surgeons, (now School of Architecture) College and Huron Streets, Toronto (1909); Young Women's Christian Guild, 21-23 McGill Street, Toronto (1908); West End Y.M.C.A., College Street at Dovercourt Road, Toronto (1910); Central Y.M.C.A., College Street, Toronto (1912); Municipal Building, Orillia, Ontario (1915) and additions to Consumers' Gas Company, to Gas Works, Eastern Avenue near Booth Avenue, Toronto, (1912).