

FULLER, Thomas (1823 – 1898)

Thomas Fuller was Canada's Dominion Architect from 1881 until 1896. During those fifteen years he created a presence for the government of Canada through more than 140 public buildings, such as post offices and armories, on main streets across the country. Fuller left a legacy of buildings and began a tradition of architecture which played an important role in the construction of Canada.

Thomas Fuller was born in Bath, England in 1823 where he was educated. On leaving school he was articled to an architect in Bath and afterwards studied in London. His first large work was the design for a cathedral, St. John's Anglican Church, begun when he was 22, which was erected under his superintendence in Antigua, West Indies (1849-50). He then practiced successfully in Bath and Bristol, England, and Wales before he came to Toronto in 1857.

He entered into a partnership with Chillion Jones, an engineer. Fuller and Jones designs for St. Stephen-in-the-Fields Anglican Church at Bellevue and College streets, Toronto (1858) was the only major design they did prior to winning the prestigious competition for the Parliament buildings at Ottawa in 1859. The church was modeled on an early english gothic prototype and is a sophisticated composition with its sweeping roof and broad brick front, broken by the slim open belfry. Fuller moved to Ottawa in 1859 to supervise the erection of his design for the Parliament buildings and remained there until 1867, when he went to Albany, New York as he and Augustus Laver had won the competition for the New York State Capitol. They only completed the base and ground floor walls by 1874 before H.H. Richardson was hired in 1876 to finish the building to his own designs. Their plans for the city hall in San Francisco, California (1871) were accepted and Laver left for San Francisco to supervise the work (destroyed, 1906).

In 1881 Fuller was asked to return to Ottawa to accept the position of Chief Architect of the Dominion government. During his term of office in Ottawa there were erected from his designs more than 140 public buildings. This included six drill halls, one of the best being the Armories at Toronto, University Avenue at Queen Street West (1891-93, demolished) with its turrets and corner towers suggesting its military function. His handling of the materials, red brick and Kingston limestone trim was used to accentuate the foundations, window-sills and lintels as well as the tower crenellations with strong horizontal lines. Because of its great size and round arched windows it was an excellent structure to express the power and strength of the Romanesque Revival. At the Langevin block, Wellington at Elgin streets, Ottawa (1883-88) the buildings design is more High Victorian Romanesque with its smaller detailing and colored stone patterns. Fuller also designed all the buildings at the experimental farm, Ottawa (1887-78) including the museum, laboratories, barns, stables and staff residences.

Fuller designed many post office buildings throughout the country and he carefully controlled the final appearance of the designs rendered by his staff. The buildings were always executed in the Romanesque revival style which uses bold materials with cut stone and masonry walls assembled into muscular forms. All his designs were dominated by a clocktower as the establishment of standard time throughout the Dominion was one of the early roles of the Federal government. His post office designs in Ontario which are still standing include: Almonte (1889-90), Arnprior (1896-98), Brampton (1888-90), Brockville (1883-84), Carleton Place (1890-91), Cayuga (1887-89), Galt (1884-86), Gananoque (1887-89), Goderich (1890-91), Orillia (1892-94), Pembroke (1888-90), Petrolia (1891-93), Smith Falls (1893-94) and Strathroy (1889-91).