

GEMMELL, John (1850 – 1915)

John Gemmell was a junior partner in the architectural firm of Smith and Gemmell, which practiced together for over 45 years. The firm left a legacy of many fine buildings and were said to be involved in the design of over 30 of Ontario's churches. Gemmell was an associate of the Royal Canadian Academy for many years and served as president of the Ontario Society of Architects which later merged with the Ontario Association of Architects.

Gemmell was born in Ayrshire, Scotland in 1850 and shortly after came to Canada with his family. He attended the Model School and Upper Canada College in Toronto and received his professional training with James Smith, with whom he became a partner in 1870 until 1915. James Smith had formed a partnership with his father William Gemmell in 1870, but it only lasted until Gemmell's sudden death in 1872.

The firm of Smith and Gemmell came into early prominence by winning the competition for Knox College, Spadina Crescent, Toronto (1873-75) with its excellent site at the head of Spadina Avenue, they built a High Victorian gothic revival college building of yellow brick, with pointed windows, dormers, gables and turrets laid out in formal symmetry around a high medieval tower. In 1888 they designed the Noble Block, a 7 unit commercial row on Queen Street West, Toronto which used exuberant oriel windows, Romanesque arches, cor-

belled brick, among other flourishes. They also designed the National "Reform" Clubhouse, Bay Street, Toronto (1874); O'Keefe Lager Brewery, Gould at Victoria streets, Toronto (1878, demolished) and the Warring Kennedy house, St. George and Bloor streets (1879) one of the best Shingle Style mansions in Toronto. They also designed Farady Hall at Victoria University, Cobourg, Ontario (1876-78, demolished 1909) which was one of the quintessential High Victorian Gothic buildings of the period.

The firm executed many refined designs for churches, mainly in the gothic style, but later they began to work in the Romanesque style as it became more popular. In 1878 they built the Church of the Redeemer, Bloor Street at Avenue Road, Toronto which is a good High Victorian interpretation of a 13th-century rural church with its interior of red and yellow brick and bold wooden brackets at the ceiling. The firm also designed St. James' Square Presbyterian Church, Gerrard Street, Toronto (1877, demolished); St. Paul's Methodist (United) Church, Avenue Road at Webster Avenue, Toronto (1886-87); and St. Lukes United Church, Sherbourne at Carleton streets, Toronto (1871). Northern Congregational Church, Rosedale, Toronto (1915) was one of the last designs executed on his own and demonstrates his strong design capabilities.