



Ontario Association
of Architects

GREER, William (Bill) N. (1925–2023)

Born in Kingston, Ontario, William Newton Greer studied architecture at the University of Toronto, graduating in 1948, before completing graduate work at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. A formative year alongside Buckminster Fuller sharpened his understanding of systems, form, and the built environment. He returned to Toronto to join Shore & Moffat Architects, where he was a partner for over two decades before a pivotal career turn that defined his legacy.

When Greer became Chief Architect of the Historical Preservation Division of the Toronto Historical Board in 1976, heritage preservation in Ontario was in its infancy—the *Heritage Act* was only two years old. Over 15 years in that role, he transformed the discipline of heritage into a rigorous practice, developing evaluation criteria, establishing conservation methodologies, and working patiently against development pressures to save landmark buildings that defined Toronto's urban character. His stewardship of Wychwood Park led to the establishment of Toronto's first residential heritage conservation district in 1981, serving as a template for subsequent districts.

In 1992, Greer founded a heritage consulting practice that spanned three decades, producing an extensive body of heritage assessments, conservation plans, and adaptive reuse strategies that extended to cities like Kingston and across Canada. His achievements ranged from individual heritage houses to landmark sites, including the College Street Wing of Toronto General Hospital and the Ontario Science Centre. Greer contributed to heritage planning for major institutional buildings, including Queen's Park and the Old Don Jail. His

conference papers, research materials, and professional contributions reveal a restless and generous intellect who read widely and shared freely. His heritage preservation papers are housed at the City of Toronto Archives.

Greer received the University of Toronto Arbor Award in 1993. In 1999, Trinity College at the University of Toronto conferred an honorary Doctor of Sacred Letters, recognizing his leadership as Chair of the Building Committee. Heritage Toronto presented him with a Special Achievement Award in 2007, and subsequently renamed its built heritage prize the William Greer Built Heritage Award in his honour. The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario awarded Greer the Eric Arthur Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010, and in 2016, the Ontario Association of Architects honoured him with the Order of da Vinci (now the Medal of Service).

Greer's civic commitments reached well beyond his consulting practice. As a board member of Heritage Toronto, he collaborated on preservation priorities and mentored emerging practitioners. Greer served as a juror for the St. Lawrence Market North design competition and for several Heritage Toronto awards cycles. As an active member of the Greater Yorkville Residents' Association, he advocated for sensitive redevelopment in one of Toronto's most contested neighbourhoods.

Greer's modesty was as legendary as his expertise. His name appears on none of the buildings he spent a career protecting, but in a city that spent much of the twentieth century demolishing its own history, Bill Greer understood that preservation is not sentiment—it is the responsible stewardship of what a city owes its future.