

HOLMES, Arthur William (1863 – 1944)

Arthur Holmes was the pre-eminent architect for Roman Catholic commissions in the Toronto area. He worked comfortably in many styles, from the gothic revival style of Joseph Connolly in which he was trained to the Beaux-Arts Classicism which became the vogue in the first decades of the twentieth century. Holmes had a life long mission as a church architect and a consistent devotion to the revived Gothic.

Arthur W. Holmes was born in London, England in 1863 and received his first architectural training in the office of G.E. Street, one of Britain's leading High Victorian Gothic architects. After coming to Canada in about 1886, Holmes worked as a draftsman for architect Joseph Connolly for five years. From 1891-1895 Holmes worked in partnership with Albert A. Post, a former student of Henry Langley. After 1900 Holmes worked on his own from an office in Toronto until he retired about 1940. Holmes specialized in ecclesiastical architecture but would branch out into other building types and styles when called upon.

Post and Holmes designed many small churches modeled on the prototype suggested by Connolly in such buildings as St. Patrick's Church, Wildfield, Ontario (1894) or Holy Family Church, Parkdale (1902). Other designs include St. Michael's College School, St. Clair Avenue, Toronto (1891) and St. Michael's Hospital Wing, Bond Street, Toronto (1894). He also designed the office of the Catholic Register Newspaper, Bond Street, Toronto (1914).

After 1900 Toronto required large parish

churches to serve the rapidly expanding Catholic population and Holmes tried to meet the challenge of designing churches that would be inexpensive yet impressive in their context. Churches like St. Helen's Brockton, Dundas Street West, Toronto (1908-09). Holmes adopted the styles of Beaux-Arts Classicism that had become the universal language of public architecture throughout North America for his large Toronto churches. For example St. Ann's, Gerrard Street East, Toronto (1912-14) which is actually a large masonry hall with a broad classical facade facing the street acting as a kind of false front. Holmes used the same format for the facade of Holy Name Church, Danforth Avenue at Pape, Toronto (1914) with a much more successful facade modelled on Il Gesu in Rome.

His largest commission was the St. Augustine's Seminary, Scarborough (1910-13) which is done in the classicizing Baroque style and superbly situated above the Scarborough bluffs. Holmes returned to the gothic style in his later churches, for example Holy Rosary, Toronto (1925-27) which was faithfully modelled on a 15th century English parish church, St. Mary-the-Virgin at St. Neot's, Huntingdonshire, England. Holmes used a fresh version of the medieval collegiate gothic form in his designs for the campus of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto (1938-39) where he uses the forms of the gothic in a new manner, leaving more wall surface and roofs picturesquely arranged in court-yard groupings.