

HUGHES, H. Gordon (1902 – 1990)

Henry Gordon Hughes was an Ottawa architect who designed a number of well known buildings in that city. He is also noted for his leadership in the development of hospital design, in his capacity as Chief of the Hospital Design Division, Department of National Health and Welfare, from 1947 to 1963.

Gordon Hughes was born in Quebec City, on November 29, 1902. He was educated at Lower Canada College, Montreal, from 1911 to 1921, Royal Military College, Kingston, from 1921 to 1923, and McGill University,

from 1923 to 1927, obtaining the Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1928.

After completing his studies at McGill, Hughes worked for several architects: Nobbs & Hyde, Montreal, in 1927-28; Shorey & Ritchie, Montreal, in 1928-29; Cross & Cross, New York City, in 1929-30; and again Nobbs & Hyde in 1930-31. In the last period, he worked on the design of renovations to the Mill of Kintail, near Almonte, Ontario, as a residence and studio for noted sculptor R. Tait Mackenzie, and the design of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house on University Street in Montreal, a commission which he had brought to the firm. In 1931, Nobbs & Hyde went out of business, due to lack of work at the start of the Great Depression, and Hughes and his wife Norah, with their two children, moved to live with her mother in Almonte. For the next four years, he eked out a living designing small projects in the Almonte area.

Hughes became a member of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects and an associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1932, and a member of the Ontario Association of Architects and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1933.

In 1935, Hughes moved his practice to Ottawa. In the next six years, he designed the refinery extension to the Royal Canadian Mint on Sussex Drive, many houses in Rockcliffe Village, and twelve aeronautical and other research buildings for the National Research Council on Montreal Road, all in Ottawa. In 1941, he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Engineers, in which he served

until 1946, returning from active duty in Holland to assist in designing a new type of combined armory and community centre which the Department of National Defence envisaged at that time.

In 1946, Hughes became Chief of the newly created Hospital Design Division of the Department of National Health and Welfare. In this position, he was responsible for the collection of information on the design and construction of hospitals, clinics and similar buildings in Canada and throughout the world, and was available for consultation with other federal departments, provincial health authorities, municipalities and other bodies interested in health care facilities. He developed guidelines for building and safety standards in hospitals, and reviewed the design of all hospital projects receiving grants from the Federal Government, frequently being consulted by the architects in the early stages of these projects. He was thus involved in the design of many hospitals across Canada, including the National Defence Medical Centre on Smyth Road in Ottawa.

Hughes took a great interest in technical aspects of design. This interest was manifest both in the refinery extension of the Royal Canadian Mint, and the research buildings for the National Research Council, and in his work as Chief of the Hospital Design Division. In the latter capacity, for example, he devised a system of grounding operating rooms so that static electricity generated by staff would not ignite the highly volatile ether used as an anaesthetic at the time.

Hughes was an accomplished water colour painter, and was also noted for having written and directed the Friday evening entertainments for the RAIC Assembly when it met in Ottawa, especially those marking the 50th Anniversary of the Institute in 1957.

Gordon Hughes retired as Chief of the Hospital Design Division of the Department of National Health and Welfare in 1963. He was elected as an Honorary Member of the Association in 1965, in recognition of his significant contribution to the advancement of the architectural profession. He died on December 22, 1990.