

PENNINGTON, James Carlisle (1885 – 1963)

James C. Pennington practiced architecture in Windsor for over fifty years, from 1910 until his death in 1963. During those years, he was responsible for the design of hundreds of buildings in Windsor and adjacent Essex County, making an exceptionally important contribution to the architecture of that region of Ontario.

James Carlisle Pennington was born in Windsor on September 1, 1885, one of ten children of James Pennington, a plumber. After attending primary and secondary schools in Windsor, he planned to become a concert pianist. After three years of study and giving piano lessons, however, arthritis in his hands obliged him to abandon this plan. He then studied architecture for two years at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1908. After working for two years as chief draftsman at H.B. Clement, Architect, Windsor, he joined C. Howard Crane in the firm Crane and Pennington, Architects. After Crane moved to the United States in 1913 Pennington established his own firm, J.C. Pennington, Architect, in which he practiced for forty years, with the collaboration and assistance of many associates and employees. In 1957, he was joined by William J. Carter who had worked with him in the nineteen-thirties, in the firm Pennington & Carter, Architects.

It has been estimated that James C. Pennington was responsible for the design of between six and eight hundred buildings during his career. He established a close connection with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Windsor, and through the years designed most of the Roman Catholic schools and churches in Essex County, as well as St. Peter's Seminary and Brescia Hall in London. He also designed several public schools, both primary and secondary, including Walkerville Collegiate and the Essex High School addition, and several United, Lutheran and Baptist churches, as well as Temple Beth-El in Windsor. Pennington also designed a number of other educational buildings, including buildings for Assumption University and Essex College (later the University of Windsor).

Pennington considered himself a specialist in hospital design, and was involved in the design of several new hospitals, most notably Metropolitan

General, Hotel Dieu and Grace Salvation Army Hospitals in Windsor, the Leamington District Hospital, and many additions and renovations to these and other hospitals. His work also included many private houses, apartment buildings, municipal, office and industrial buildings.

Pennington's early designs were influenced by the Chicago School and Louis Sullivan, and by his early association with the Detroit architect Albert Kahn. Many of his buildings can be identified by their carved stone details. His later works were designed in the prevailing Modernist idiom of the period.

In his later years, Jim Pennington was regarded as the dean of local architects. His firm was the oldest established architectural practice in the area; many Windsor architects worked for him and owed much to his example and guidance. His skill in design was widely acknowledged, and he was a superb draftsman. Moreover, he was known as a man of high ethics. In the words of Windsor architect William A. Fraser, who worked with him from 1958 to 1963, he was "a gentleman architect with a loyal following, who handled all of his contracts with a handshake, and never disappointed anyone."

Pennington became a member of the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) and the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1922, and served on the OAA Council from 1930 to 1933. He was an active member of Central United Church, Windsor, a 32nd degree Mason, and a member of Windsor Lodge, No. 403, A.F. and A.M., and the Moramus Shrine.

James Pennington died on August 8, 1963, at the age of 77, predeceased by his wife, Hazel, but survived by their two sons, James and Arthur, and two daughters, Betty and Dorothy. The work of the firm Pennington & Carter was carried on by William J. Carter, and subsequently by William A. Fraser. In 1987 Fraser donated more than a ton of drawings and documents from Pennington's fifty-three years of practice, to the City of Windsor Archives where they remain as a resource for both historians and building owners.