

SECORD, James Edwin (1917 – 1979)

James Edwin Secord successfully combined his landscaping and agricultural background with his architectural skills to create a vibrant and award-winning practice. An organicist in the fullest sense, he integrated structure with landscape to create noted architectural works in southwestern Ontario.

James Secord was born on December 2, 1917 in Grantham Township, Ontario. Both his grandfather and father were fruit farmers. His mother, a school teacher, encouraged him to further his education and he left for Guelph in 1935 to study landscape gardening at the Ontario Agricultural College, graduating in 1939, shortly before the outbreak of World War II. He continued his studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

In March, 1943, he joined the Royal Canadian Engineers and was sent overseas as Staff Captain for Camouflage, 2nd Canadian Corps. The contrast between the devastated landscape he witnessed in northwestern Europe and the green orchards of home could not have been more pronounced. Shaken, he was instrumental in establishing the Home Planning Centre in Hilversum, Holland, a school for training Canadian soldiers in the design and construction of veterans' housing, shortly after the end of the war.

Honourably discharged, Secord returned to his studies at Harvard, bringing home his English bride, a war widow, and her young daughter. He received his master's degree in Landscape Architecture in 1947. His work for the next few years closely followed the seasons: farming in the summers and working as an architectural draftsman and landscape architect during the winter months. The Secords' second daughter was born shortly after Christmas in 1951, and a son followed nine years later.

Secord's love of travel and his exposure to classical and contemporary architecture led to his formal study of architecture at the University of Toronto, and his bachelor's degree in 1955. He became a member of the Ontario Association of Architects a year later and he opened his own architectural practice in St. Catharines. Within five years he won the silver Massey Medal no less than three times: 1958, with Huget and Pagani, for the Beamsville Central Elementary School; 1961, with Saul Herzog, for the LaPierre residence in St. Catharines; and, again, in 1961, with Huget, for a footbridge for the Niagara Parks Commission. 1961 also saw him win the Red Deer City Hall Competition.

In 1966, Secord was appointed architectural advisor to Expo' 67, in Montreal, and he collaborated with Saski and Strong on the design and supervision of LaRonde. In 1970, he was appointed to the International Joint Commission as Canadian *fallscapist* for a five year term studying Niagara Falls.

Throughout his life, Secord derived much pleasure and inspiration from the family orchards and later, his vegetable and fruit garden. An avid card player who claimed that poker winnings financed his schooling, Secord would often be found at the St. Catharine's Club, a prominent businessmen's association. He loved fishing and duckshooting. He retained a strong passion for travel during which he would delight fellow travelers with his extensive knowledge of botany and architecture. He had a penchant for fine classic cars, taking advantage of his wife's absence one weekend to purchase seven particularly appealing vintage models. He died from a heart attack in Toronto on August 2, 1979 having lived his life to the fullest.