

SMITH, Eden Ralph (1858 – 1949)

At the turn of the century Eden Smith changed the look of residential Toronto. Over his extraordinary career this prolific architect personally designed over 2,000 houses. In Toronto the smallest to the grandest houses bear his trade mark “english cottage” style and revolutionary floor plan which put the principal reception rooms at the back of the house and the kitchen to the front. So striking were these houses that tour buses were rerouted by them.

Born near Birmingham, England to a well-to-do family, Ralph Eden Smith’s gentleman’s education included the study of art, music and archaeology. He received architectural training in England before bringing his wife, Annie Charlton and young son to Canada in 1885 largely to escape his family’s sudden economic hardships. After a disastrous year homesteading in Manitoba, Eden Smith moved to Toronto and was employed with the architectural firm Strickland and Symons. He opened his own office in 1892 but formed a four-year partnership with Eustice Bird in 1895. He disliked his Christian name and in Canada used the double unhyphenated surname, Eden Smith.

Eden Smith hated the style of Toronto’s houses and set about to change the look of residential design. His “new look” house reversed the standard floor plan, was simple and unpretentious and possessed the character of a cottage no matter how

large. The houses invariably had steep, high pitched roofs, tall chimneys, rows of casement windows and the whole seemed to grow naturally out of a basically simple design. The success of these houses also depended on Eden Smith’s imaginative use of ordinary building materials such as brick and wood. Examples of his work can be seen at 165, 228 and 260 St. George Street, 91 Crescent Road, 34 Chestnut Park and 48 Cluny Drive.

Eden Smith’s name is particularly associated with two important large projects in Toronto, the development of Wychwood Park where he also designed a number of residences and the Toronto Housing Company’s Bain and Sumach Terraces, Canada’s first successful attempt to provide inexpensive public housing. While noted for residential architecture he also designed several Toronto churches, St. Thomas’, Huron Street and Grace-on-the-Hill, Lonsdale Road; also Wychwood and Beaches branch libraries; the Standard Bank on Broadview and the Dominion Bank at the corner of Bathurst and Bloor. In 1902 he designed the Peacock building for Upper Canada College and the first St. Hilda’s College building now in Trinity-Bellwoods Park.

His son Harry joined him in 1909, and three years later his other son Ralph joined the firm which became known as Eden Smith and Sons. Eden Smith retired in 1920.

Important work:

(by Eden Smith)

St. Thomas Anglican Church, Huron St., Toronto	1892
St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, Kitchener, Ont	
St. Hilda’s College, Trinity Park, Queen St., W., Toronto	1899

(by Eden Smith and Sons)

Devonshire House residences, University of Toronto	1907
Wychwood Park Library, Bathurst St., Toronto	1915
High Park Library, Roncesvalles Ave., Toronto	1916
Kew Beach Library, Queen St. E., Toronto	1916
Riverdale Court Housing, Queen St. E.	1913
Spruce Court Housing, Spruce St., Toronto	1913