

SOMERVILLE, William Lyon (1886 – 1965)

Noted for his unusual versatility, the Toronto architect William Somerville is not only remembered for his modern designs for such edifices as the Peace Tower and Canadian Plaza of the Rainbow Bridge, Niagara Falls, but also for the restoration of several important early forts.

He was born in Hamilton, Ontario and educated there at public and private schools before going to Toronto in 1905 to study architecture first with Darling and Pearson, then with Sproatt & Rolph. In 1909 he went to New York City where he studied until 1914 with the firm Murphy and Dana. In that year he accepted a junior partnership with them and two years later received a diploma in architecture from New York State University.

In 1919 he returned to Toronto with his wife Evelyn Gillard and set up practice. Over his long career he designed a wide variety of important buildings found in five Canadian provinces and the United States. In 1927 he won the international competition for the Shakespeare memorial theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, but this design was never realized. Somerville designed housing and community buildings at Temiskaming and Gatineau,

Quebec and in Ontario; hospitals at St. Thomas and Orangeville, Ontario, Calgary and Edmonton Alberta, and the art deco wing of St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto (1938). With J. Francis Brown he designed the entire first group of buildings for McMaster University opened in 1930. Later, for his work on behalf of this institution, he received an honorary Doctor of Laws from McMaster. Those interested in Canadian history owe Somerville a debt for his restorations of Fort Henry, Kingston, Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie, Fort Erie.

Somerville is best known for his work at Niagara Falls, as a consultant for the Rainbow Bridge and architect for the bridge's Canadian Plaza and for the Peace Tower and other buildings at the falls. These buildings built in the early 1940's reflect the architect's conversion to the international style that was quite different from the still classically inspired Memorial Arch to the Pioneers of Niagara District designed by him and built just a few years earlier.

Somerville was a President of the Ontario Association of Architects in 1927-28 and President as well as Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

Important work:

General Hospital, Niagara Falls, Ont.	1920-21
Campus and buildings at McMaster University (with J.F. Brown), Hamilton, Ont., (with J.F. Brown)	1929-30
Masonic Temple, Oshawa, Ont.	1929
Memorial Hospital, Fort Erie, Ont.	1930
Major extension to St. Michael's Hospital, Bond St., Toronto	1937-38
Restoration of Fort Henry, Kingston, Ont.	1936-38
Restoration of Fort Erie, at Fort Erie, Ont.	1937-39
Ontario Mental Hospital, St. Thomas, Ont.	1938-40
Oakes Garden Theatre, Niagara Falls, Ont.	1936-37
Carillon Tower and Plaza, Rainbow Bridge, Niagara Falls, Ont.	1941-42
St. Joseph's Hospital, Hamilton, Ont.	1949-50