

SPROATT, Henry (1866 – 1934)

A third generation Canadian, Henry Sproatt came from a family which had seen Ontario develop from the beginning of non-native settlement to a thriving metropolis. Henry Sproatt contributed to that development with many significant buildings. His father Charles, also made a significant contribution as chief engineer of the Wellington, Grey and Bruce Railroad and as chief engineer for the City of Toronto.

Beginning his education with private tutors in Toronto, Henry Sproatt went on to Collingwood Collegiate. In 1882 he articulated with Arthur Denison and four years later went to New York to continue his architectural studies. Leaving New York in 1889, Sproatt travelled widely in Europe, particularly in France and Italy. Travelling mainly on foot he studied, drew and measured many great European buildings. On returning to Toronto in 1893, Sproatt entered the partnership of Darling, Curry Sproatt and Pearson. In 1899 he went into practice with Ernest Rolph. Rolph's abilities as a builder were an excellent match for Sproatt's talent as a designer. While of different dispositions, both partners shared a love of beautiful things and were avid antique collectors. Their practice lasted for 35 years until Sproatt's death.

In the early days of the partnership, their commissions were in Toronto and were residential and industrial such as the Lever Brothers factory (1899). By the time he designed the Metropolitan Parsonage in 1904, Henry Sproatt had firmly adopted the Gothic style which he would use for his most famous scholastic buildings. Sproatt said "Each style has its place, but Gothic collegiate architecture is one architecture developed for scholastic work. It has proved a success and a joy. Why throw it away"? Burwash Hall (1909) at Victoria College and Hart House (1911-1919) and its Memorial Tower (1924) certainly bear this out. Hart House won Sproatt and Rolph a gold medal for scholastic architecture from the American Institute of Architects in 1925.

Other notable Sproatt and Rolph commissions are the classical Canada Life Building (1929), Toronto; the National Research Laboratories (1932), Ottawa and the Lower School of Trinity College, Port Hope.

Henry Sproatt was an leading authority on old English silver and oriental prints. He was a member of Royal Canadian Academy, a Fellow of the Royal Institutes of British and Canadian Architects and had an honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Toronto.

Important work:

Birge-Carnegie Library, Victoria University, University of Toronto	1908-10
Burwash Hall residence and dining hall, Victoria University, University of Toronto	1910-1913
Hart House, University of Toronto	1911-19; tower built 1922-23
Ridley College Chapel, St. Catharines, Ont.	1921-23
National Research Council headquarters, Ottawa	1930-32
Royal York Hotel (with Ross & MacDonald), Front St. W., Toronto	1927-29
Canada Life Assurance Co. Building, University Ave., Toronto	1930-31
Ontario Hydro building, University Ave., Toronto	1934-35
Residence for Sigmund Samuel, Forest Hill Road, Toronto	1927-28