

## WATT, John M. (1878 – 1954)

**J**ohn Watt, a London based architect was a partner in one of western Ontario's leading firms which designed many of the major buildings in London and the surrounding area. A charter member and Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, a Vice-President of the Ontario Association of Architects and a President of the London Chapter of the OAA, Watt was also a leader in disabled children's work in Ontario.

The son of Scottish emigrants, Watt was born in Hamilton Ontario and received his early education there and in London where his father moved in 1885 to establish his own grocery business. At the age of 18, Watt began a five-year stint studying architecture under Herbert E. Mathews. From there, in 1902 he went to Chicago

to work for a year at the architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. After two years with George Mason Architect, an equal term with William Wright & Company, interior decorators, and finally another two years with Harry J. Rill, a specialist in Roman Catholic institutions in Detroit, the young Watt felt able to embark on his own career. During this time he married Annie Lacey of London.

In 1908 he formed a partnership with nationally known architect C. Howard Crane with offices in Detroit and Windsor. After this partnership was dissolved Watt returned to London where he established the firm Watt & Blackwell in 1911 with architect, Victor C. Blackwell. In 1914 Watt an-

swered the patriotic call to arms. During the 1920's his partnership became London's major architectural firm and continued its leading role until 1944 when Watt and Blackwell went their separate ways. Watt practiced architecture on his own after the partnership broke up.

Watt and Blackwell's wide scope included practically every type of structure. Their buildings include the McCormick Manufacturing Company, Hunt Brothers Flour Mills, War Memorial Children's Hospital, the first medical school at the University of Western Ontario; several schools in London: Tecumesh, Boyle Memorial and Ryerson, the latter revolutionary in its day because of its central auditorium plan; Owen Sound Collegiate, and many residences. Watt & Blackwell's style was consistent during the firm's 33-year practice tending to formal, symmetrical classical schemes while trimming designs with the current architectural vocabulary as evidenced by the Edwardian London Technical and Art School (1918), the art deco skyscrapers the Huron and Erie Mortgage Corporation (1930) and the Dominion Building (1936), and the modern classical Victoria Hospital (1942) all in London.

As a leader in disabled children's work Watt was Chairman of the Crippled Children's Council for the City of London, and President of the Ontario Society of Crippled Children. He also helped found "Woodeden" Crippled Children's camp at Kilworth.

### Important work:

Aberdeen School, Grey St., London	1914-15
H.B. Eal Technical and Art School, Dundas St., London	1916-17
Ryerson School, Waterloo St., London	1916
Medical School, University of Western Ont.	1920-21
Huron and Erie Mortgage Co. Office, Dundas St., London	1930-31
Dominion Public Building (with O.R. Moore), Richmond St., London	1935-36
Victoria Hospital, Colborne St., London	1930-40