



ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION.

At 2 o'clock p.m. on Tuesday, January 15th, the President, Mr. Edmund Burke, called the Convention to order. The minutes of the last convention were read and approved. The President then delivered the following address:—

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN: It is my pleasing duty to meet the members of the Ontario Association of Architects in this, the fifth annual convention since our incorporation. The year has been comparatively uneventful as far as our own history is concerned.

In response to the expressed wish of the convention, the Council inaugurated a system of lectures under the auspices of the Association. Two lectures have been given. The first, by Mr. Grant Helliwell, was open to the public, and was given in the hall of the School of Practical Science. It was a well prepared paper on "Current Architectural Styles," splendidly illustrated by Mr. Wright, of the School of Practical Science, with the aid of the fine lantern of the institution. The attendance, especially of members of the Association, was much less than the merits of the lecture deserved. The second lecture, given in the Canadian Institute by Mr. Wright, on "Graphic Statics," was a thoroughly good and practical exposition of the subject, and deserving of a much larger audience than was present—the total attendance, including lecturer and assistant, being only 18. Half of that number, only, were members of the Association, and the rest mainly students and draughtsmen. These facts are noted in view of the tendency to criticise the Council by some members of the Association who are prone to hint that this body is inactive and not alive to the interests of the Association. It is safe to assume that not one of these critics took the trouble to attend either of these meetings. Other critics have from time to time been invited to lend their aid to advance the interests of the Association, and have either refused or ignored the request. The members would do well to remember that their attendance at the meetings would not only be of benefit to themselves, but an encouragement to the gentlemen who, at much expense of time and thought, have prepared papers. The interchange of thought in the after discussions on the subjects presented, may be made most interesting, especially when the attendance is large—numbers always adding to enthusiasm and interest. It is an encouragement, however, to those who so kindly prepare papers for the enlightenment of others, to discover, as so many have by experience, that, while adding to the information of others, the knowledge they impart becomes doubly their own.

An event of decided interest, and having possibly an indirect bearing on the future of the Association, was the election of a new legislature for the province, a few months since. Your Council seized the occasion to endeavor to enlist the members of the Association in an effort to obtain an expression of the views of the various candidates with regard to the proposed change in our act. Our efforts were very poorly received, few of our men reporting any action in the premises.

Now that a new House has been elected, it is of the utmost importance that every member be up and doing from this time on. If each man would make a point of seeing his representative, of urging upon him our claims and explaining fully our position and aim, the chances of success in the next session of the legislature would be greatly improved. Leading men on both sides of the House have expressed themselves as favorable to our cause and have assured us of their support, at the same time warning us that we must work hard to secure the support of a large number of the rank and file, if we would look for success.

We were advised, as was stated in the address of our President at the last convention, that the temper of the House in its closing session was not favorable to the increase of close corporations. As we unfortunately were in the company of other organizations seeking, for them, unusual powers, discretion seemed to be advisable, and we withdrew our bill. Such may have to be our course again, and as the composition of the House has been considerably altered, no forecast of the situation is possible. But even if we do fail in our object at the coming session, we must not be discouraged, but hope on. We believe our cause is just and right, and that not only ourselves but the public will share, in days to come, in the benefits that will accrue to the profession in the elevation of the standard of education and professional training which will assuredly follow the legislation sought. We must, therefore, not swerve from our goal though it take years to reach it.

Education must ever be our watchword; the higher we reach in professional attainments and knowledge, the farther away will we get from charlatanism and unprofessional conduct, and the nearer will we approach the highest type of professional ethics. The question of education means for the older men considerable self-sacrifice; for the examiners much time and trouble; for the principals, the yielding to their students of considerable time for study and examinations, and the prospect of raising up competitors, who in years to come, by reason of their better preparation, will outstrip their masters in the race for employment. But what of this? Shall the profession stand still that the older men may not be outstripped? This would indeed be a low platform for men aspiring to be artists and the leaders of artistic thought in the community. The coming Canadian architect needs a better education for another and more sordid reason, but a very present one nevertheless, and one which we have very severely felt in this country of late years, namely—the competition of foreign architects. Some of our most expensive buildings have been erected from the designs of aliens. The apology for this is the alleged want of experience and ability on the part of the native architect. We do not admit for one moment the validity of this contention, the fine buildings erected by local men attesting to the contrary; but that this is, to a considerable extent, the condition of affairs is a well known fact. This contention is not advanced with regard to the employment of other professions in Canada, because they have aimed at and attained a high standard of professional education. The lesson for us is evident.

We need also an education, or lifting up, in the matter of professional ethics. Too often an architect is confronted with the competition of two or three of his fellows in a case where he supposed he had a client. He submits a sketch, perhaps without a definite engagement, talks it over with his client and leaves the matter with him for a few days' consideration. On his next visit he is confronted with the information that Mr. So-and-So has submitted a sketch (a catchy, showy one), probably backed up with the assertion that the design can be executed for 30 or 40% less than his, and at a commission far below the regular fee. There is little use in telling the client that your rival is not speaking the truth. The aforesaid rival has offered to guarantee the cost, and the client does not see why he should pay so much more for his building to oblige you. You are accordingly allowed to depart without a commission, meeting, perhaps, one or two more hungry applicants on your way out. It is small satisfaction to be informed, after the building has been erected, that your rival has run his client into an expenditure far greater than your estimate.

Good men are sometimes drawn into this unseemly form of competition from the fact that they do not feel like being ousted in such a manner—losing work which to all intents and purposes is theirs. And what is, what only can be, the inference drawn by the client? Simply that architects are a parcel of fools, and that he can use them as tools, one against the other, and thus dictate his own terms.

I speak thus plainly, because I notice a growing tendency along this line since the advent of an Ishmaelitic element into the craft a few years since. The other professions are an example to us. Physicians and lawyers observe their codes of ethics; they set their standard high and are rated by the public accordingly. When will we be wise enough to learn the lesson? Closer association and more intimate acquaintance with each other has helped us greatly; but ever and anon are some found who resort to the original type when assailed by the temptation of a possible commission. It is a pity that men, especially young and clever ones, should descend, even for the sake of obtaining work, to anything in the shape of unprofessional conduct. In an experience of 25 years, I have found that none have succeeded permanently and obtained a good name in the community who have endeavored to build their success at the expense of their professional brethren.

No competitions of importance have been inaugurated in the province this year. The few small ones, notably the London Free Library, have been unsatisfactory in results, as usual, the two chief reasons being the lack of proper judges and the absence of a properly prepared programme of requirements. Both these necessary accompaniments of a well conducted competition are embodied in the form suggested by the Council and approved by the Association, and it rests entirely with the architects themselves as to whether satisfactory methods of competition be insisted upon. The remedy is in our hands. Are we going to be always so miserably selfish as to ignore proper methods in ridiculous scrambles for the opportunity to obtain a commission?

The question of an exhibition of drawings in connection with our annual meeting was broached a few weeks since, but it was felt that the time was too short in which to assemble a representative collection. Possibly a mid-year exhibition would be practical and popular, and while keeping up an interest in the Association would avoid a possible clashing with the business of the convention.

Our sister Association in the Province of Quebec has not been idle during the year. A reading room for members and students has been opened, classes for students organized and examinations conducted. A very successful exhibition of drawings was organized in connection with the annual meeting last October. It had the advantage of being held in the galleries of the Montreal Art Association and drew a fair attendance. A considerable number of drawings was sent by members of the Ontario Association, under arrangements for transport made by our Registrar.

The Quebec Association has followed up the suggestions of Mr. A. T. Taylor, who read a paper at the annual meeting, advocating an Advisory Art Committee, by passing a resolution proposing to the City Council of Montreal the appointment of such a committee, consisting of artists, architects and others to supervise the erection of public monuments and the laying out of public parks, squares, etc. A league having similar objects in view is being formed in Chicago, while Boston and New York have their municipal art societies. Other cities and towns in Canada should join in a similar movement. Monuments are being located and erected without that thought and supervision which would add greatly to their character and effect, and committees and officials often take upon themselves responsibilities for which they are unfitted, not through any fault of their own, but simply for lack of education and taste in such matters.