

A History of Campus Architecture

SEVEN ON ARCHITECTURE

At the sod turning of yet another graceful structure, which will soon adorn our beloved campus, we pause to survey past architectural glories and give some thought to future ones.

In the beginning, our present forefathers mindful of the necessity of higher education to a civilized society, erected a magnificent building on the picturesque hillside we cherish so deeply which probably surpassed in proportion and design anything then standing in New Brunswick. Such was their zeal for this most worthy project that the very structure which they designed and engineered in 1828 still stands, and is fondly referred to as the Old Arts Building by the present generation of N.B. students. Built of massive stone blocks, its classic simplicity bespeaks the grandeur of a forgotten era. This building has become the world wide symbol of the University of New Brunswick, and whether in London, Bombay or Kuala Lumpur, whenever U.N.B. is discussed or remembered, the image of that timeless structure becomes focussed in the mind.

Unfortunately (in a sense), our forefathers builded better than they knew, for their simple structure proved so solid and commodious that none other was required to accommodate the university for nearly a century. However, the spirit of Thomas Carleton and Sir Howard Douglas was long dead when in 1900 it became necessary to erect a roof over the engineers. Instead of adhering to the classic pattern set by the pioneers of 1828, the new generation adopted the latest institutional style of architecture and produced a building reminiscent of the finest Victorian public schools in Fredericton. Alas, the era of cupolas and turrets was just past, thus the engineering building was deprived of the splendid embellishment which characterized the earlier triumphs of Victorian architecture. In the sublime tradition of the Smythe Street school, it stands a peacock without feathers, a cake without icing, yet preserving the essentials of the best Victorian style.

1925 saw the erection of a structure which was to meet the cultural demands (such as they were) of the expanding post war campus. In keeping with the new look in campus architecture, Memorial Hall was built to conform with the style of the engineering building on the outside, but within a Gothic elegance is concealed, little suspected from the red brick facade. A Grecian porch was added, possibly at the request of the influential classics department which desired at least token resemblance to the Old Arts Building. This innovation proved so successful (it keeps the rain off) that it was incorporated into the design of the Forestry Building, the Library and the Engineering Building Annex, which were erected several years later.

(SEE page 10)



David Galloway
English Department
"They're just buildings, and not very good ones at that."
Brunswickan
What is your opinion of the architecture on this campus, beginning with the 1955 building boom?

Galloway
You mean the so-called Georgian. Well the trouble is with this Georgian on the campus is that it's not really good Georgian. There is a vague hint of Georgian on the outside, true, but inside there is absolutely no Georgian at all. I think that a good Georgian is a safe style for University architecture and it is appropriate to this University, but Georgian architecture does have certain proportions and if you build in a good style it's probably going to be in good taste for as long as the building stands.

Brunswickan
Who is at fault: Larson and Board, the architects, or the Board for choosing them?
Galloway
Well I wouldn't like to pin the blame down exactly, but I cannot believe that the University governors and people responsible for this could not be aware that the buildings going up were very poor examples of Georgian architecture, if this is what they intended.

Brunswickan
Would you rather see the administration change to good Georgian or something modern?
Galloway
I hear a lot of people talk about something else, but there doesn't seem in their minds to be any clear idea of what this something else is going to be. The great advantage of Georgian, it seems to me (good Georgian again), is that it is always in taste — it will never really date. You may get something more dramatic and exciting and more appealing, but it has been there for 200 years and its classic proportions such that it is still in style.

Brunswickan
Would you not agree that it is almost impossible for one to suggest what this "something else" is, when no other architects have been consulted and no other sketches considered.
Galloway

I think that that is the big question, the whole thing should have been much more public. I think we should know far more about building on the campus.

Brunswickan
Are these buildings functional?
Galloway

People say that the function

of a University is to encourage an atmosphere in which to teach and do research in comfort. Obviously any architecture should reflect your needs and your aspirations. I'm not sure what the aspirations of this University really are.

I've been told, for example, that this office in Carleton Hall is functional. This word functional is one which is so often used very loosely. I take it to mean that a functional building is one which serves the function for which it was built. Unfortunately there is a tendency for someone to see any old square-looking box and then say that this is functional. It's true that the purpose of a box is to put something in, but when somebody tries to tell me that the Carleton Hall prisons are functional, I think that a study is a place which should provide one with an area conducive to study. This room is not especially conducive. I'd like more space so that more students could visit me in comfort; more comfortable chairs, though you couldn't get too many into this office; a wine cabinet and a change in the liquor laws. Generally it needs windows; better lighting; and a door which you can't half-see through.

Brunswickan
Do you think that a new building might possibly be a sore thumb on campus if it broke with the present trend.

Galloway
Well there are a lot of sore thumbs on campus and I don't know that one more would make that much of a difference.

Brunswickan
Any final comment?
Galloway
At the moment, we're just pottering along in the middle, we haven't got good Georgian and we've got nothing new and exciting. They're just buildings, and not terribly good ones at that.



Neil MacGill
Philosophy Department
Don of Neill House
"These Larsonian structures have been done on the cheap."
Brunswickan

What is your opinion of the recent architecture on this campus?
MacGill

In the Student Centre and the Chemistry Building, attempts at balancing areas and volumes seems to have been fairly successful, as for the Larson and Larson structures, they are all very derivative, imitating a style which, if they are going to imitate properly, would require far more money as it's a style which requires

far more ornamentation. These Larsonian structures have been done on the cheap. It's very pseudo-Georgian with no sense of proportion. The windows are exactly the same size on each floor — plunk, plunk, plunk — and the buildings could continue on endlessly. One has the image of a great master plan for all Larson's buildings which is just unrolled and cut off when he feels he's got enough length. There is also the problem of building this type of structure on a hilly site. It is essentially a style for flat land and these buildings have resulted in some very peculiar effects, as though they were disappearing into the ground. There is a great indulgence in what is euphemistically called landscaping by Larson and Larson, which to them means digging big holes to put your pre-conceived buildings in. Their attitude: if the site doesn't fit — by all means change it.

Brunswickan
Is this bad style then, and are we stuck with it?
MacGill

All this recent architecture is certainly very backward looking. It reflects an image that's very peculiar, and one of a somewhat decadent society. The problem, though, is not one of being stuck with a style but rather being stuck with bad architecture. We have ended up imitating things and this never produces anything worthwhile. As well, Larson and Larson put bits and features of all their buildings into the others, and if you propose to put good architecture next to it, its badness will become much more obvious. But I think one has to take the bull by the horns and just do it — because otherwise we're committing ourselves to bad architecture for the rest of time.

Brunswickan
Is this all the fault of the designer?
MacGill

The architect, to some extent, only builds what he is told to build and the University must also share the responsibility. Merely getting a new architect might not solve the problem. There seems to be no direct access between the architect and those for whom he is building. The amount of construction that goes on seems to warrant somebody with some architectural knowledge who could co-ordinate the needs of the departments, residences or student bodies concerned with the architects. On a number of these buildings, the plans simply don't reach the interested authorities, or bodies — the people who are in a position to criticize the plans in detail — until it is too late. In the case of the residences they often didn't get over to the Dons till the foundations were being laid.

Brunswickan
Two main problems are cost and continuity. As one person on the administration is reported to have said: "Larson and Larson are cheapest and they provide us with a package deal." We are saving perhaps \$55,000 by hiring these Americans to design our SUB — is it worth it?
MacGill

It certainly seems to me one's not getting more than one's paying for. Larson's buildings are merely reproduced from one structure to another without any attempt to be original. The possible advantage of a new architect would be his willingness and ability to come up with certain solutions to some of our problems. It would seem to me that we're not getting anything very much in the way of a bargain by this reduction in architectural fees.

You mentioned continuity. Well, interesting groups of buildings are most frequently, unless you have an architect of genius, ones which come from diverse styles and designs which interact. The idea that you have to build them all to match is absolutely daft. Styles can contrast quite successfully. Take for example the old Neville Farm House between Neill and Neville Residences. It's interesting that the University plans to move it or completely destroy it. This farmhouse provides the feature which gives these residences some distinction, and it is interesting that a campus which seems to value so highly its history should want to destroy it.

Brunswickan
It is said that one of the biggest features offered to us by Larson and Larson is that their buildings easily take additions.

MacGill
I suppose, for they are so ugly nothing would harm them.



Des Green
Don of Neville House
Chemical Engineering
"Why build a building which makes you itch a lot when you see it?"
Brunswickan

What are your opinions of Larsonian architecture?
Green

Well, I think, number one, that it's a travesty of architecture. It's very disappointing because a University is an academic institution where there is a certain search for truth, a search for beauty, and if you have this search for beauty you must have beautiful things around you if at all possible. We have a duty to our society to build beautiful things and to elevate minds. To say that architecture isn't an integral part of the University is nonsense. I think that it's not so expensive that we cannot afford to have things built by artists who are competent in their fields. I don't believe that it should be modernistic just for the sake of being modern, but I think that to build sham

(SEE page 8)