

Urban Studies symposium at York

# Dilettante conservationist citizens are the "devil of downtown areas like Cabbagetown"

Developers' restoration "dangerous exercise"



As the debate rages about The Designer and the Designed, (left to right) chairman Alex Murray, professor of York's faculty of environmental studies, architects Stephen McLaughlin and George Baird, and commentator Robin Clarke address the crowds at the three-day symposium.

By ANNA VAITIEKUNAS

Over 20 planning consultants, architects, designers and journalists swarmed together last Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the third annual York symposium on Urban Studies, for panel discussions, multi-media presentations and lectures.

The event, sponsored by York's urban studies international studies programme, was designed to bring together a diverse cross-section of the community to share ideas of how to confront and fight the urban problems of the inner city.

The symposium, entitled Reading the Urban Landscape, was divided into five sessions, each dealing with a different reality of urban planning.

The following are excerpts from the symposium:

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### Citizens' action

"We have a long way to go before we will have the urban situation under control," said restoration architect Napier B. Simpson, acting chairman for the first session.

"Fortunately, in the past 15 years there has been a movement towards a greater concern for urban problems." Citizen groups and government agencies, he explained, have become more concerned with the quality of life and their environment.

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Simpson added that he would not include the department of highways as an interested group, since it is currently widening the main roads of Maple township, creating environmental pressures on the residents living on and near the main road.

"We still have a 'hit and miss' way in which we decide what buildings we want to preserve," said Simpson. "Everyone is concerned with preserving museums and historical homes, and not with uninteresting houses in small towns."

### RESTORATION

"And the quality of restoration projects leaves something to be desired."

Simpson condemned the avant-garde citizens of Toronto as being "the devil of downtown areas such as Cabbagetown and parts of the annex".

Cabbagetown was formerly a slum section of Toronto, stretching from Parliament to Sherbourne, and Danforth to Carlton streets. In the past five years, ambitious homeowners have bought and renovated houses in that area.

Simpson said these people, who are not professional architects, have done an amateur's job of restoring their homes.

"Those houses may look very nice from the outside, but inside they are still in the same condition they were before they were renovated. Not only are the houses crumbling in their foundations, but the outside character of the buildings has been distorted."

### Campbell's house

The restoration of Sir William Campbell's house was "a dangerous exercise", according to U of T professor Doug Richardson.

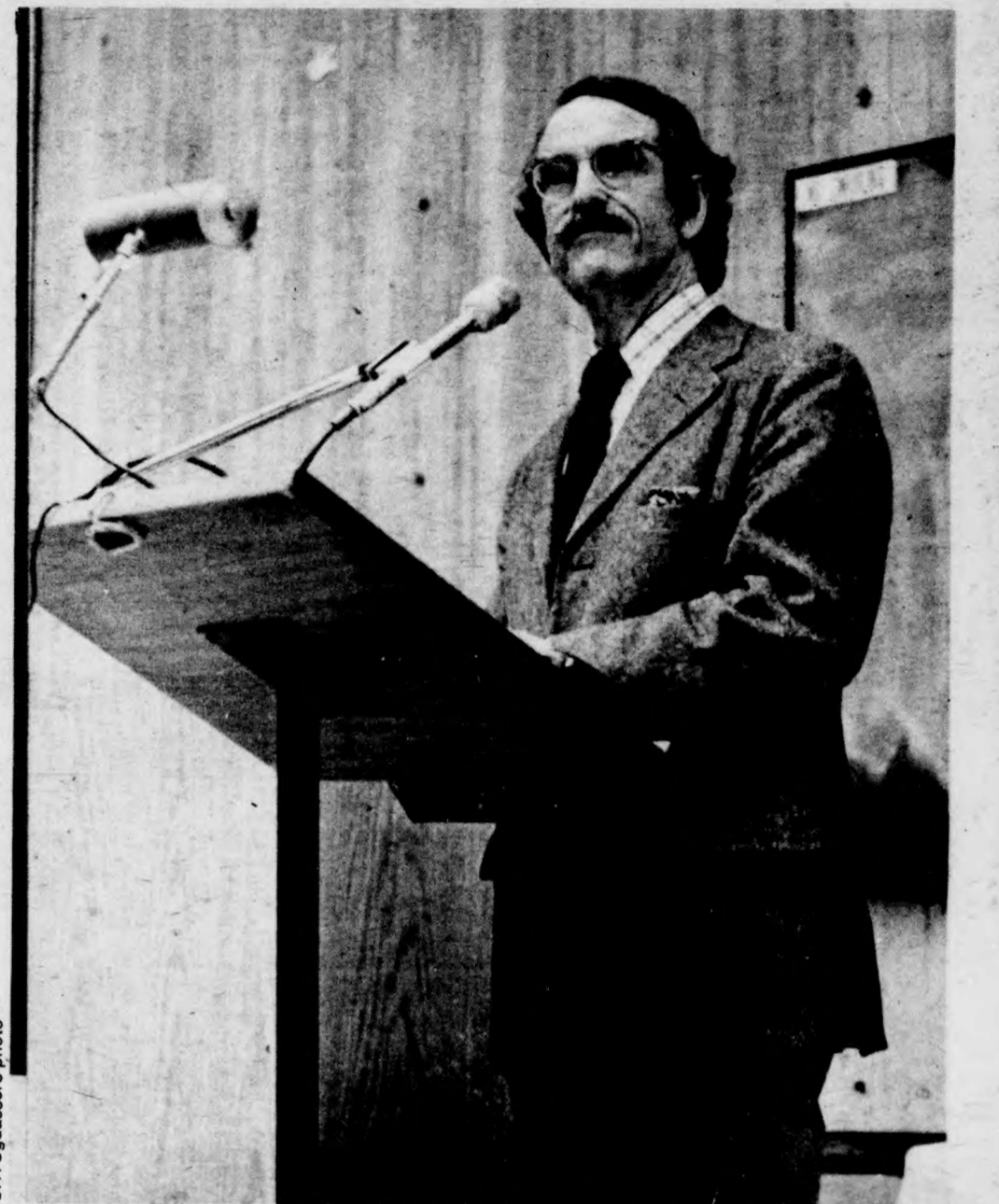
Because development companies were keen on the site of Campbell's house, they made us believe that the house was in dire need of restoring and that it should be removed from its foundations. \$800,500 was spent on the removal of the house to its present site on University Avenue, and every plank of wood that showed signs of age was stripped from the house.

A few of the original boards remain in the front door, the staircase and the doorframes.

Apparently the house did not need immediate restoration. The life of the house was limited, but it didn't need to be restored in such an indiscriminate way, said Richardson.

"Sir Campbell's house is a dead museum now, but the original site has not been redeveloped."

Campbell's house was restored four years ago.



Journalist for Landscape Architecture, Grady Clay.

### Revivals

Richardson, while clicking through slides of historic buildings, said, "It is difficult to pigeon-hole buildings by their architectural style, because most architecture since the 18th century encompasses many diverse qualities."

He suggested that the obsession of modern architects has been to copy architectural styles of the past.

"For a few moments, Richardson focused on slides of the St. Lawrence Hall in Toronto. The hall, he said, was a Greek revival structure because its cast iron ornaments were those of the Greek prototype.

"However, the hall can be interpreted as a Gothic building since it was built in the tradition of the 19th century."

### Heritage Canada

The executive director of Heritage Canada, R.A. J. Phillips, was present to tell the York audience how Heritage Canada has alleviated some of the problems of the inner city.

Phillips said that unlike its forerunner, the National Trust, Heritage directs its attention to the "cri de coeur" of the average citizen.

The National Trust, founded in England, was concerned only with the restoration and conservation of castles and homes of the nobility.

"We are not so much concerned with the buildings as we are with the people behind them," said Phillips. "Our approach to conservation is to look at the shape of the community before we go about conserving a particular urban environment."

### CONSCIOUSNESS UP

Phillips said he was pleased with the rise in Canadian consciousness towards the country's heritage, which he thought was partially due to the centennial year.

"Canadians took a closer look at their history during that year. I think, as a result, Canadians are a prouder people and have a stronger respect for the remnants of their heritage."

James Weller, another architect on the panel, interjected that "more people are becoming disgusted with the rapidity of change. This is a good sign".

Heritage Canada is a charitable organization founded in 1965.

### Sorting it out

"We grasp at straws," said U.S. journalist Grady Clay, author of Close-Up: How to read the American City.

Clay saw the need for a sorting-out process "so that we can deal with our environment".

"There is no such thing as urban chaos," he said, "but chaos in the minds of those who plan our cities."

He described his book as "a book which I looked for and never found, so I wrote it myself".

## Opening the city to the citizens

The Design Guidelines report for downtown Toronto is intended to make Toronto more livable by increasing the amount of land accessible to the public, said its authors George Baird and Stephen McLaughlin, both Toronto architects.

The guidelines report was published in response to the inadequacies of the zoning bylaws, as a list of in-

terim criteria for urban development in Toronto, "until it hopefully becomes law", said Baird.

McLaughlin, also a consultant for General Urban Systems Co. and the Halifax Harbour project, said "the old zoning bylaws were not enough to ensure the downtown Toronto people wanted".

"Zoning doesn't say anything about the effects of the microclimate — wind, sun, shade — or the connecting structures between buildings. Nor can zoning be isolated from the political or economic climates."

Baird and McLaughlin want to see a shift in the development industry from private to public demands.

Said McLaughlin, "The Eaton's centre was intended for public use. The mall space was designed as a public right of way, but it has been paid for by the private purse. Thus the public sidewalks will become private rights of way."

Both architects agreed that urban development in Toronto has ignored such elements as microclimate.

"When the Four Seasons Sheraton Hotel was built opposite City Hall, it

blocked sunlight for the Queen and Bay street area, casting huge shadows over Nathan Phillips Square.

"The ice rink and parts of the square are in semi-darkness during the early afternoon, the time the square is used the most. When the Bank of Montreal complex is finished, the shadows will reach as far as the Archer."

The Archer is located 40 feet from the entrance to City Hall.

The report also suggested "maximizing the visibility of the natural environment, as well as our man-made environment. To use as an example, Harbourfront limits the visibility of the waterfront."

Baird showed slides taken from the steps of City Hall on Bay street, facing south towards the lake. The lake could not be seen.

Baird and McLaughlin said they are applying pressure, to the municipal government to make the guidelines become law.

Commentator Robin Clarke said that the report "won't work, because there is too much government tape to battle."

### Privacy "trivial"

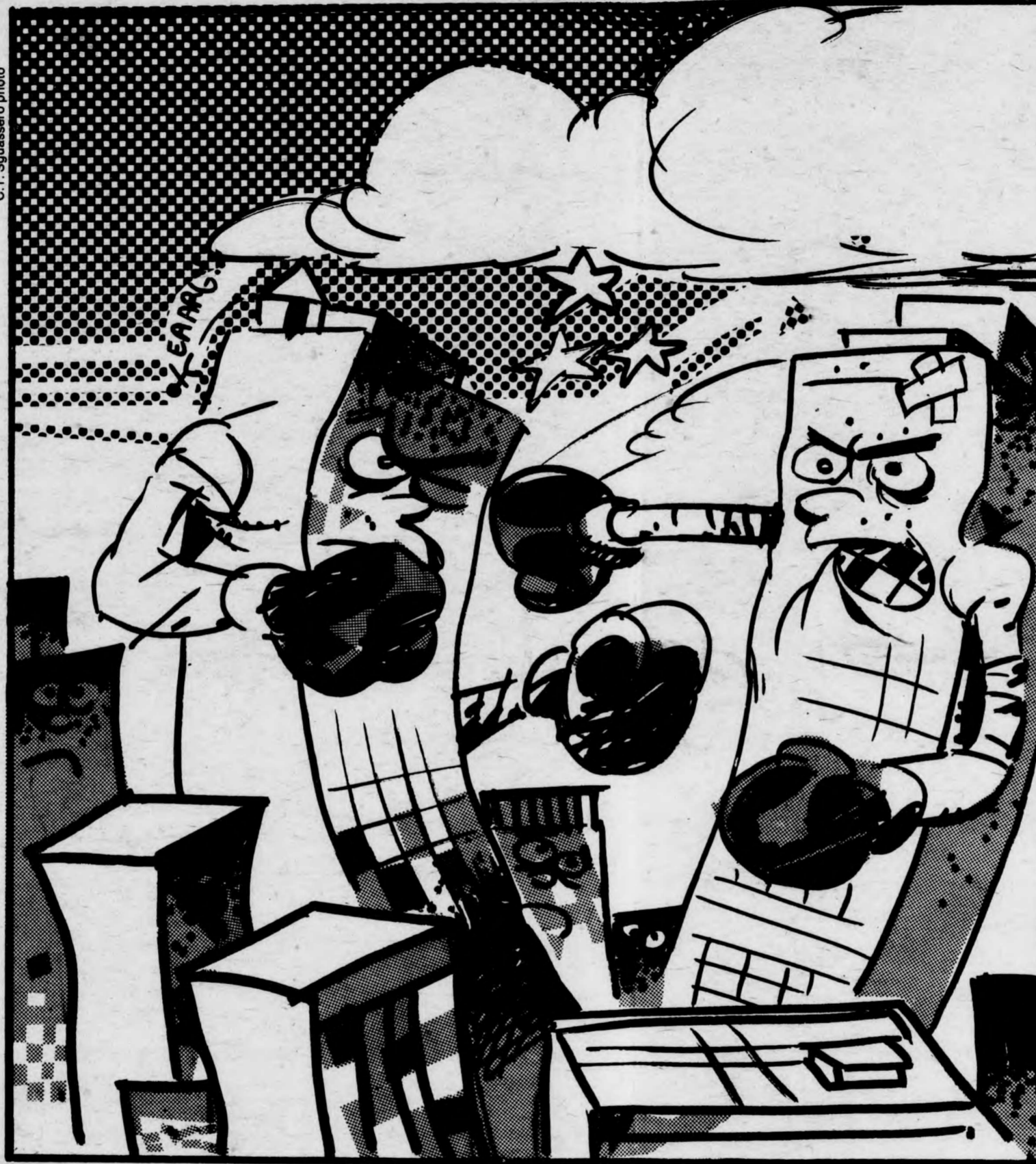
British architectural historian Nicholas Taylor said that most architects consider such amenities as privacy and density "trivial impediments".

Taylor said that most architects are concerned with how many low-cost houses they can build. "They seem to forget that people have to live in them," said Taylor.

He presented slides of old English houses and cottages, to show how the architecture of early residences in England were more people-conscious.

Both architects agreed that urban development in Toronto has ignored such elements as microclimate.

"When the Four Seasons Sheraton Hotel was built opposite City Hall, it



## The TD Centre air-conditioning cools the east, while the sun rises behind Commerce Court

During the Urban Studies session, comments and references were made to several significant buildings in downtown Toronto:

### TD CENTRE

"The Toronto-Dominion centre is a good and bad building," said author George Baird. "It manifests all the principles of the theory of architecture; thus it is a good building."

"On the other hand, it is not a good building because the atmosphere of the building is not all that pleasant."

Commentator Robin Clarke, who partially designed the centre, disagreed and said that he thought the centre had a dynamic feeling.

When the TD centre was built on the corner of King and Bay streets, the air-conditioning system was designed to handle temperature changes during the day.

During the morning, the system would alleviate the sun's heat on the east side of the building. In the afternoon, the air-

conditioning vents would send more cool air to the west side of the building, where the sun's rays are the most concentrated.

Apparently, when the Commerce Court was built on the east side of Bay street, it blocked out the sun's heat for the east side of the building. As a result, the Toronto-Dominion air conditioning system proved inadequate during the morning.

"The air-conditioning system for the Toronto-Dominion centre really got screwed when the Commerce Court was built."

### YORK CENTRE

Clarke, when asked by a member of the audience whether much discrepancy exists between the original and final drafts for a building, answered, "Usually yes."

He said the original plan is often re-drafted to please the commercial interests of the developer, and cited the York Centre as an example.

"The York Centre was originally planned with the main entrance facing the King and

University Avenue corner. The developers said that there was more pedestrian traffic on York street than University Avenue."

He said it was in the commercial interests of the shop-owners to attract as many pedestrians as possible into the stores.

"In designing a building, it is the architect's responsibility to please everyone in question," said Clarke.

### CN TOWER

"When the CN tower is completed, it will dent the raison d'etre of the Commerce Court and the Toronto-Dominion rooftop areas," said Baird.

He said that the viewing galleries and restaurants of those two buildings are private areas, because the public is not free to use the areas without paying money.

"The private skyline areas of the Toronto-Dominion and the Commerce Court will have to be made more public in order to compete with the superior skyline attractions that the CN tower will offer."

## REGISTRATION

'75

## Faculty of Arts

Registration for returning students will be held on

April 8, 9, and 10.

Further information and registration forms are available in

S-302 Ross.