

Photographic Documentation and Buildings: Relationships Past and Present

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Each generation has left a visible trail of its passage across the face of the earth — such as religious monuments, public or private — and it is through the study of these monuments that, today, we may form an exact idea of the various civilizations.¹

Photography is part of a long tradition of visually recording the built environment. These images have been created, collected, reproduced and disseminated for various reasons, ranging from simply historical interest to complex contemporary efforts to improve the urban environment. Although large numbers of randomly produced and acquired photographs have often served such purposes, the capacity of photography for large-scale systematic documentation is increasingly being recognized as an extremely important tool for architects, planners and historical researchers. One such project, documenting the grey stone buildings of Montreal, illustrates this application and will be discussed later. The second project, on the county court house in the United States, is described in the article following this one.

The visual recording of buildings as expressions of society has a long European tradition.² In France from early in the sixteenth century, carefully engraved plates were bound in sumptuous volumes whose essence was secular and political, beginning with *Les plus excellents bastiments de France* (Paris, 1576-79) by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau, which publicized the sheer power of the king and his domain, and by evolution to the more subtle cultural imperialism reflected in the superbly detailed works issued in 1878 by architect Charles Garnier showing his new Paris opera house.³ Photographic documen-

¹ From an unpublished manuscript by Charles Nègre, ca.1854, quoted in James Borcoman, *Charles Nègre, 1820-1880* (Ottawa, 1976), p. 6.

² The different types of visual records of buildings discussed in this section are also dealt with in my essay "The Record of Buildings as Evidence," prepared for *Court House: A Photographic Document*, edited by Richard Pare and to be published by Horizon Press, New York in spring, 1978.

³ It is interesting to note the changes in France over three centuries. From the middle of the sixteenth century most of the publications on buildings were architectural treatises. In the middle of the seventeenth, views of the monumental buildings of Paris and of the chateaus of the nobility became popular. They were produced in large numbers by artists and engravers such as Silvestre, Perelle, and Aveline, bound in volumes with 100 to 250 plates, published and

tation began in France in the 1850s and maintained the tradition already established by graphic artists of representing the stature of the country through its buildings. The early masters of photography, Hippolyte Bayard, Charles Nègre, Henri le Secq, Edouard Baldus and the Bissons, made exhaustive records of buildings and great engineering works for various government departments under the Second Empire. Many of these photographs were known to the European public from international exhibitions, salons and showings by photographic societies in London, Paris, Vienna, Brussels and New York, and from portfolios sold by influential publishers such as Blanquard-Evrard and Goupil fils. Some of these photographs, such as the extensive record made by Baldus of the new Louvre erected between 1852 and 1868, must have been partly responsible for the profound impact of these buildings in North America.

In a more romantic sense, but still based on national pride, lithographers and photographers in France contributed to ambitious publications describing historic monuments and remains as well as the landscape. These works were modelled on Baron Isadore Taylor's *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*, published in twenty volumes from 1820 through 1878, and on his pioneering use of lithography.⁴

Roman ruins had long been a preferred subject for graphic artists who had measured, drawn and presented them in architectural treatises since the Renaissance in order to provide models for new buildings which would then inspire certain valued moral and spiritual qualities in society. The ruins also were the subject of picturesque views made for the pilgrims in Rome. Between 1544 and 1577, the great print publisher, Antoine Lafrery, first gathered these views and issued a collection of prints under the title *Speculum Romanae Magnificentiae*. Early photographers, who continued this tradition, began to have their images widely distributed in the 1860s when developments of printing techniques permitted the manufacture of large quantities of uniform prints. By the 1880s, such photographer-publishers as Alinari in Florence distributed large numbers of images of buildings as souvenirs for a modern version of the Grand Tour which now included many more people from a greater range of society travelling more rapidly to traditional and new attractions throughout Europe. These prints and albums, along with the more formal treatises, accelerated and broadened the national and international dispersal of architectural concepts while providing source material for scholars, especially architectural historians, who were becoming increasingly imbued with the notion of empirical evidence. Above all, this distribution of quite exact information through a popular new medium served to encourage an ap-

reissued many times. By the middle of the eighteenth century, editions with 300 plates were not uncommon and there is the example of an edition in several volumes which contained 960 plates. General views of Paris became important in the last half of the eighteenth century; they became more picturesque by the nineteenth. At this time the plates accompanied more detailed descriptions and histories. Publications oriented toward preservation became important in the last half of the nineteenth century with picturesque views made by graphic artists such as Meyron and Martial as well as by photographers. There were also archaeological inventories published by governments and treatises on restoration, viz Viollet-le-duc.

4 In C. Nodier, I. Taylor, and A. de Cailleux, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* (Paris, 1820-78).

preciation even beyond the scholarly community for the structures depicted. This growth of knowledge and thereby respect for buildings in turn stimulated further photographic documentation as a technique for accurate representation preferred above hand-drawn examples.

Initially, historical interest rather than physical preservation of buildings motivated photographic documentation of doomed ancient city quarters. Following the Napoleonic Wars, studies of the past flourished in France where monuments were prized as primary evidence. The Comité des monuments historiques, formed in 1837, initiated in 1851 a programme of photographing imperilled historic buildings throughout France.⁵ Baron Haussmann, who as Prefect of the Seine was charged with restructuring Paris for Napoleon III, destroyed entire streets and neighbourhoods, countering criticism of his actions by the promotion of historical research directed at the compilation of a detailed record of all that would be lost. In Paris, where a department within the city government was responsible for developing techniques of photography and reproduction, photographers documented archaeological specimens and Charles Marville was commissioned by the city to photograph its old quarters before demolition. Only after Haussman's resignation and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 did a strong preservationist movement develop in France.

A distinct sense of the past and its moral virtues also appeared in early nineteenth-century England. Men such as Auguste Welby Pugin, architect of the Houses of Parliament, and various reform societies, such as the Ecclesiological Society, at Cambridge, believed that the reinstatement of certain features of the past would help restore desirable spiritual values. Their publication of carefully measured drawings of early Gothic churches profoundly influenced English and North American architecture during the mid-nineteenth century. In Britain as in France, preservation of the structures only later became an important issue. The Society for Photographing the Relics of Old London, a private group formed in the late 1870s, commissioned Henry Dixon and A. and J. Bool as photographers, and during the next eleven years, the Society issued 120 photographs of threatened buildings. Significantly, this project was part of an effort to save the buildings themselves. In Scotland, Thomas Annan documented the old closes and streets of Glasgow for the City Improvement Trustees in 1868. *Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry* (1870), with photography by Annan, was a conscious attempt to prevent the structures from being forgotten. The publisher, a Glasgow bookseller, remarked in the introduction: "We get nothing for nothing in this world, and our wonderful present prosperity costs us, among more valuable things, many an interesting monument of the past in Glasgow and round Glasgow."⁶ The book's form was patterned on previous English volumes containing engraved images of houses and "descriptive notices," printed largely for subscribers who were usually the owners of the structures shown. One such earlier publica-

5 Interesting accounts of preservation in Paris are given by Anthony Sutcliffe, *The Autumn of Central Paris: The Defeat of Town Planning, 1850-1970* (Montreal, 1971), Chapter 7 and Paul Léon, *La vie des monuments français* (Paris, 1951). Other sources are the many publications of the period — photo albums and heliogravures, and recent books and catalogues on photography.

6 Thomas Annan, *Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry* (Glasgow, 1870).

tion, Neale's *Views of Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland* (1818) declared its intention "to mark with fidelity the rise and gradual progress of our subject, exhibiting the rapid and successive changes that have taken place in the national taste during three centuries." The objective was clearly more to record than to preserve the buildings.

In North America, where primaevial landscape and conquest of virgin territory were the compelling features of settlement, the related experience differed substantially from that of Europe. Instead of consciously documenting past glories, North Americans used the camera to record the path of advancing civilization. From the 1840s to the 1870s, exploration and commissioned surveys generally included photographers whose work reveals basic documentary impulses paralleling those behind architectural recording in Europe. The Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1803 to 1806, was in part a "scientific and literary" survey of little-known western territories. The records of the Expedition, including the leaders' diaries, specimens, maps, and the drawings prepared by William Clark, provided valuable information and fell within the tradition of the numerous reconnoitring surveys undertaken by Britain which included topographic artists of the Royal Engineers.⁷ Many such expeditions encompassed a substantial political motivation; for example, Lewis and Clark's mandate was largely to lay claim to a territory and to locate a route to the Pacific Ocean for the United States. When such expeditions included major documentary objectives, increased impetus was given to the development of photography in North America.⁸ The American Civil War, during which eruption many photographers were active, further contributed to advancing the documentary importance and capability of photography. The war also provided experience to numerous photographers who later were employed on various railway and geological surveys commissioned by the government. The very large contact prints of the landscape photographers made in this period under extremely difficult circumstances often were to serve both scientific and political objectives. For example, W.H. Jackson's photographs of Yellowstone in 1871 directly influenced preservationist law, and were instrumental in the passage of the Congressional bill creating Yellowstone National Park in 1872.

⁷ The continuation of this tradition in the Canadas in the nineteenth century is evident in the Sigmund Samuel Collection at the Royal Ontario Museum. A large proportion of the work in this collection was made by army officers. See Mary Allodi, *Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario Museum* (Toronto, 1974).

⁸ Before the Civil War, photographers (usually daguerreotypists) accompanied geographic expeditions to locate the land features which would influence road and rail routes to the Pacific. Afterwards photographers, many trained by the experience of the Civil War, were employed on railway surveys and on the many government geological surveys. To these we owe the heroic and hardly believable landscape photographs of T.H. O'Sullivan, A.J. Russell, W.H. Jackson and the two photographers from San Francisco, C.E. Watkins and E.J. Muybridge, who were engaged in exploratory expeditions on their own. The major publication on the subject is Weston J. Naef and James N. Wood, *Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860 - 1885* (Boston, 1975). Watercolours and photographs made for similar railroad and geological explorations in Canada remain to be studied. Certain publications indicate the wealth of material to be found and identified: Omer Lavallée, *Van Horne's Road: An Illustrated Account of the Construction and First Years of Operation of the Canadian Pacific Transcontinental Railway* (Montreal, 1974); by the same author and publisher, *Narrow Gauge Railways of Canada* (1972); Pierre Berton, *The Great Railway, Illustrated* (Toronto, 1972); and *Archives: Mirror of Canada Past* (Toronto, 1972).

The systematic documentation of buildings in the United States does not seem to have started in earnest until the end of the nineteenth century.⁹ Publications relating to buildings, monuments and engineering works for the federal government were not infrequent in the 1830s and 1840s, but unlike the European publications, they were sparsely illustrated by plates. There was, however, one major exception: thirty-six numbers with from nine to fourteen plates each of *Plans of Public Buildings in Course of Construction* were published in 1855-56 under the direction of the Secretary of State. The line engravings were in the best European architectural tradition, but the statement of purpose was more American: that the improvements shown, the “wholly new” use of wrought-iron beams and girders, and other details, might prove useful. Printed handbooks for architects and published advice for home builders did distribute some information on architectural details and construction techniques, but this information was not compiled with the idea of providing the kind of reasonably comprehensive documentary base sought through the exploratory expeditions. More often, existing buildings were made known outside their immediate locales by daguerreotypes and stereograms.¹⁰ Yet even these did not derive in any important sense from efforts to document buildings systematically, but rather were produced to publicize and to inform at popular and technical levels, like the handbooks.

Of more lasting impact were books containing views of buildings.¹¹ Woodcuts of early American buildings appeared in local histories as early as the 1830s. When buildings were presented collectively before the 1880s their usual format followed the English pattern of text and images describing the houses of the famous. G.P. Putnam issued *Homes of American Authors* in 1853, followed the next year by *Homes of American Statesmen* which included the first photographic print published as an illustration in a North American book. *Villas on the Hudson*, 1860, was the first book in the United States to use pho-

One substantive photodocument known to me is an inventory of engineering structures in the Canadian Pacific Archives, consisting of some five to six thousand photographs made along the road ca. 1898 to 1910 by Joseph Heckman, who was both an engineer and a photographer for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

- 9 I am most grateful to Herbert Mitchell, bibliographer of Avery Library, Columbia University, New York, for his invaluable help in identifying documentary publications on architecture in the United States. Mr. Mitchell guided me through the library's rare book room and its collection of material from nineteenth-century architecture offices. An invaluable source on nineteenth-century publications is Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books* (New York, 1946; reprint ed. 1976).
- 10 Studies of daguerreotypes have shown that almost every American city was represented to some extent, and not infrequently, by impressive multi-plate panoramas. See Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society* (Albuquerque, 1971). Stereograms were popular parlour viewing which informed Americans of the great fires and rebuilding of cities, of the growth of new towns and erection of numerous civic buildings after the Civil War. They also gave a perspective on a continent of spectacular landscapes and the American Indian way of life.
- 11 Recent compendiums of illustrations and views of buildings in North America indicate the type and extent of illustrated publications addressed to the general public, for example: Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., *Early Illustrations and Views of American Architecture* (New York, 1971) and the publications of Canadian woodcuts and engravings begun by Peter Winkworth with Charles de Volpi in the two volumes on Montreal, (Dev-Sco Publications) and continued by de Volpi with the same publisher for Ottawa, 1964, Toronto, 1965, the Niagara Peninsula, 1966, and with Longman Canada, Newfoundland, 1972, British Columbia, 1973, and Nova Scotia, 1974.

tographs transformed into lithographs for the purpose of reproduction.¹² A generation later, houses of the wealthy were being referred to as “country seats” and published in elaborate limited editions. One such volume proclaimed American villa and cottage architecture to be the result of a renaissance in American art brought about by the centennial exhibition of 1876.¹³ Still the motivation was not documentation, for such work focussed not on history but on success, purportedly showing “how art is affected by the individual character of a wealthy and cultivated portion of our citizens”¹⁴ and that “the domestic architecture of no nation in the world can show trophies more original, affluent or admirable.”¹⁵

As the centennial celebrations of the United States approached, the growing pride in the United States in its buildings became visible in a type of popular documentation comparable to what was being produced at the same time in Europe. A counterpart to *Voyages pittoresques* by Baron Taylor could be found in *Picturesque America*, edited by William Cullen Bryant and published in 1872, though in two volumes rather than twenty.¹⁶ Books on buildings in the United States had begun the critical transformation from simply presenting to actually documenting structures of the colonial and revolutionary periods. By 1874, such works were also clearly being inspired by a concern for preservation of the built as well as natural environments. The first issue in 1874 of a monthly publication, *The New York Sketch Book of Architecture*, edited by Henry Hobson Richardson, explained that in part the editors “hope to be able to do a little toward the much needed task of preserving some record of the early architecture of our country now fast disappearing.”¹⁷

12 Austin A. Turner, *Villas on the Hudson: A Collection of Photolithographs of Thirty-One Country Residences* (New York, 1860). Turner was the photographer and lithographer. The first publication to use photolithography in Europe was *Premier cahier de lithographie, de l'impression obtenues sur pierre, à l'aide de la photographie* by Barreswill, Davanne, Lerebours and Lemerrier. (Paris, 1854). See the forthcoming publication by Weston Naef and Lucien Goldschmidt, *The Truthful Lense* (New York, 1978).

13 George William Sheldon, ed., *Artistic Country-Seats: Types of Recent American Villa and Cottage Architecture* (New York, 1866), vol. 1. The most elaborate of all is the two-volume work on the Vanderbilt Mansion in New York City by Earl Shinn, *Mr. Vanderbilt's House and Collection* (New York, 1883-84). The text describes in detail the materials used in construction, the furnishings, their sources and artists, but the attitude is that of the victor with his spoils rather than an attempt at documentation. The book is lavishly illustrated to show every space and detail. Engravings and chromolithographs are from drawings by different hands and made by different printers. A number of photogravures are included, and it is noteworthy that while the author and printer of graphic work are always identified, the photographer is not. American books concerned with buildings at the turn of the century seldom mentioned the photographer's name.

14 From the introduction to Turner, *Villas on the Hudson*.

15 From the explanatory note to *Artistic Houses, Being a Series of Interior Views of a Number of the Most Beautiful and Celebrated Homes in the United States* (New York, 1882).

16 In the preface Bryant mentions a “similar book in Europe.” Almost all the illustrations were made by artists sent out for the purpose. Bryant adamantly opposed the use of photographs for “however accurate, [they] lack the spirit and personal quality which the accomplished painter or draughtsman infuses into his work.” The same attitude and format is to be found in George Munro Grant, ed., *Picturesque Canada* (Toronto, 1882).

17 In that same year, Samuel Adams Drake wrote in his introduction to *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex* (Boston, 1874), “Foremost among my motives is the knowledge that the experiences of commerce or overflowing population are changing the face of nature beyond all power of recognition.” In *American Architectural Books*, Henry-Russell Hitchcock notes

There seems little doubt that the centennial encouraged a flowering of pride in American architecture, of which the most interesting example is provided by the American counterpart to Alinari, Albert Levy, who published a photographic series on architecture in the 1880s.¹⁸ At about the same time, monographs on individual buildings began to appear. Architectural journals, which had first appeared in the 1870s, increased in number and influence, and began also to issue architectural monographs. Commercial firms and architects published albums of photographs showing their buildings. Universities and cities were popular subjects for numerous and various types of publications. A series entitled *Art Work* consisted of several fascicles each for many cities in the United States and Canada.¹⁹ Photographs were also commissioned for popular histories of cities: *The New York Metropolis*, a compendium of three hundred years of New York's history boasted a thousand illustrations, and Moses King published a large series of views or handbooks during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Such books and photographs, as well as builders' guides and architectural magazines, provided building models and were more numerous and widely circulated once half-tone reproduction became practical in the 1880s. By the Chicago exhibition of 1893, such works were very common and the many different books illustrated with photographs must account in some measure for the considerable influence this fair had on architecture and city planning in North America.²⁰

In contrast to such prideful presentations, other documentary projects also made North Americans aware of different aspects of the urban environment, although these projects were not directly concerned with buildings. Urban poverty was the theme of *How the Other Half Lives*, with text and photographs by Jacob Riis, which appeared in the 1890s; two decades later, Lewis Hine's photographs of urban slums which had developed in North American cities were published and widely distributed. Such documentary works ultimately led to remedial legislation. During the Great Depression, the impressive power of visual documentation was demonstrated through the elaborate photographic undertaking of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) to raise public consciousness of waste, poverty and destitution in rural areas of the United States. The FSA project was the most comprehensive photographic document ever achieved.

Systematic documentation of the built environment through photography represented a coming together of various threads from the past with the possibilities of a new technology. With added accuracy and immediacy, photography continued the traditional content of visual representation motivated by the desire to display and to glorify; to romanticize and to give pleasure; to inform, to record and to catalogue; and to preserve and to reform.

that apparently the first photographic documentation of colonial architecture in book form is to be found in James M. Corner, *Examples of Domestic Colonial Architecture in New England* (Boston, 1891) with Ellis Suderholtz, photographer and joint compiler.

18 In *American Architectural Books*, Henry-Russell Hitchcock gives the locations of the thirty-three issues known to exist.

19 *Art Work on Montreal*, by William H. Carre, was published in twelve parts in 1893.

20 Its influence is evident by 1915 in the new town of Maisonneuve, now a ward of Montreal. See Phyllis Lambert and Robert Lemire, *Inventaire des bâtiments du Vieux Montréal* (Québec, Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1977).

Because of relative speed in recording, it also extended the range and breadth of subject matter. It is a medium through which man and his works can be seen in a universal context, a desire which appears constantly through time. Again, the photographic tradition stems from the Renaissance view of a world centred on man which permeated all art forms. The same Pythagorean figures related representations of man, arms and legs akimbo, and the ideal city. One pertinent example placing city views in a universal context is provided by a book published in France by Alain Monesson Mallet in the seventeenth century. This work included views of important cities integrated with a description of the world systems, ancient and modern geography, and a vision of the universe.²¹ Less than half a century later, the first general survey of architecture drawing on various sources, including, for example, medals, was published by Fisher von Erlach.²²

When the International Institute of Photography was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, it became part of a world-wide inventory as an arm of the Repertoire iconographique universel based in Brussels, which sought to illustrate human activity in all manifestations. The Institute began to collect and catalogue supporting photography as well as information about photographic technology. This scheme was mentioned in *The Camera as Historian*, published in 1916 to establish methods of handling the vast photographic record already accumulated since the 1880s.²³

Several broad schemes of a like nature were initiated, but only two were fully executed. For *Les Excursions Daguerriennes*, more than one hundred views in Europe, Africa and North America, made between 1840 and 1844, were printed as aquatints for the publisher N.M.P. Lerebours in Paris. And *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*, with photographs by the writer Maxime DuCamp, was also published in Paris in 1852. Some ambitious projects failed in the planning, such as that of H.E. Insley, a daguerreotypist who asked colleagues to participate in collecting views of cities and villages in the United States. Other schemes came closer to meeting their objectives. For example, the National Photographic Record formed in 1897 by Sir Benjamin Stone was partly completed. Stone sought to record "not only the buildings — the places which have a history or are beautiful in themselves — but the every day life of the people." The archive, consisting of prints made by regional photographic societies, was to form a permanent record of contemporary life across the British Isles showing "the manner and customs, the festivals and pageants, the historic buildings and places."²⁴ This documentary study was to be deposited in the British Museum. More than four thousand photographs, twelve hundred taken by Stone himself, were housed in the Museum's print room by 1910 when the Record was dismantled because it was felt that the work could more effectively be carried on by county and other local societies. Similar groups ap-

21 Alain Monesson Mallet, *Description de l'univers, contenant les différents systèmes du monde et en particulier de la géographie ancienne et moderne, les plans et les profils des principales villes et des autres lieux plus considérables de la terre* (Paris, 1683).

22 See A. Hyatt Mayor, *People and Prints: A Social History of Printed Pictures* (New York, 1971), p. 241.

23 H.D. Gowan, L.S. Jast, W.W. Topley, *The Camera as Historian* (London, 1916; reprinted New York, 1973).

24 From the introduction in *Sir Benjamin Stone's Pictures: Records of National Life and History* (London, 1906).

peared in the United States, leaving some historical societies today with important holdings for research. Unfortunately, these records are known only to a few specialists because of a general failure to recognize their value, their context, and the importance of making them broadly available through publication.

Photography can be both an art form and a documentary technique, although the two are not mutually dependent for their separate and individual significance. One may enhance the other by combining the record and certain aesthetic qualities, such as the extraordinary document of Paris by Eugène Atget, whose work was begun in 1898 but was little known before his death in 1927 and was never published in its entirety. Individually, Atget's photographs have been more important as models to photographers than his systematic approach, but the latter quality is being increasingly acknowledged. Year after year, he photographed subjects by categories: historic buildings, architectural detail, fountains, statues in the parks of Paris and Versailles, churches, markets, street vendors, shop windows, houses which were solidly comfortable, as well as the most decrepit of buildings.

Even the many instances of grand objectives never realized have left at least important statements of man's aspirations and condition, whether through textual declaration or by the provision of a partial visual record where nothing similar would otherwise have existed. One such fertile and comprehensive project belongs to the early years of photography. Charles Nègre in 1858 drafted a memoir to Napoleon III proposing a photographic catalogue of the history of man, his civilization and planet. The commission was not granted, but Nègre had undertaken on his own, from 1852 to 1854, a portfolio entitled "Midi de la France," only part of which was published. An unpublished manuscript, possibly meant to serve as an introduction, contains the epochal statement which opens this article.

During the past 135 years, photographic documentation has been increasingly recognized as an indispensable tool for studying and understanding the social art of building in its fullest expression, which is to say as components of a city rather than as isolated formal structures. The role of buildings in the quality of urban life through the daily reminders they provide to everyone of the continuum of history and civilization has become ever more evident during the recent post-war destruction of cities. Ironically, advancement of the human condition through increasing urbanization has become almost synonymous with the transformation of our built environment through the elimination of old structures even though this change increases our society's need for the comfort and security of some familiar surroundings. Such devastation and waste is an expression of a lack of knowledge and respect for human achievement through time and its identifying symbols. Photographs can help counter these factors by contributing to an appreciation of the complex fabric of our urban culture. This is particularly important in North America where buildings of other civilizations have usually been prized, and local architectural innovation and the vernacular dismissed.

Buildings in North America must be studied differently from those of older societies and civilizations. Building types and the appropriate architectural vocabulary evolved slowly in Europe and Asia, and the lineage of individual structures has been traced over time. Buildings in Canada and the United

States must be explored over space across the continent. The rise of cities in the New World was extensive and almost explosive by comparison with the Old World, and coincided with new techniques of recording appearances. A flood of steel plate engravings, photographs, and eventually of half-tone reproductions spread a wide range of building vocabularies, information and ideas rapidly over the continent moulding architectural tastes and significance. Photographs are essential for the tracing of ideas, and for preparing the bases for understanding why certain forms were accepted or rejected, by permitting the analysis of building and its elements even where they have long since disappeared.

THE MONTREAL PROJECT

Without having studied in detail the tradition of documenting buildings, some years ago I began a project to record the grey stone buildings of Montreal. The scheme stemmed rather innocently from a desire to photograph the great long walls which had so impressed me as a child, and as an architect, to develop an approach to understanding the processes of city building. While I had used a 35mm camera to investigate the structure and environment of natural building forms, for the Montreal grey stone buildings I wished to use a view camera to avoid distortion and to obtain a high level of resolution. Inexperienced with this type of camera, late in 1971 I asked Richard Pare, a recent arrival from England and a graduate student at the Art Institute of Chicago, for help. While working in Chicago, I had come to appreciate his direct yet rich images made using four-by-five-inch negatives. What was originally conceived as a two- or three-week project in Montreal soon expanded into a programme of photographic documentation which still continues in part, though the bulk of the work was completed by the summer of 1974. The initial two weeks of work demonstrated the potential and the vastness of the undertaking: the identity of neighbourhoods, the clear definition of building types, the infinite detail, the humour and grandeur of the grey stone buildings.

The attitude toward photographing was established from the outset. Only the grey stone buildings were to be shown — not their often grubby environment and neglected appearance. The buildings were to be a revelation. The documentation was to depict the scale of large institutional buildings, the monolithic expanse of their walls, the tight texture of rock face stone, the serenity of walls smoothly dressed. These same characteristics were to be found in row houses along with their vigorous and often humorous detail and protuberances of wood and tin as well as stone. The buildings were to be seen as street architecture from the perspective of a pedestrian: how they sit on the street, how they are entered. Only interiors accessible to everyone and which continue the sense of the street were to be included, such as railway stations and churches.

The quality of the light was most important. I wanted to photograph in winter because snow is so characteristic of Montreal and its often austere grey stone walls. There is an exciting quality to the low winter sun as it rakes the stone at different times of the day; it heightens the texture of stone while emphasizing the void left by small window openings or ornamental detail. On the other hand, the light of bright overcast skies proved more appropriate for certain other buildings. Each day a shooting schedule according to light condi-

tions was prepared. Not infrequently a miscalculation meant the right moment never came again and we had to accept less than desired. There are still photographs to be made for the project because satisfactory ones do not yet exist or because research has revealed aspects that had been missed or overlooked.

The buildings to be photographed during the first winter were chosen by personal observation. Although I had grown up in Montreal, my knowledge of the city was very limited. The first research tools were simply a car, a driver, and the telephone book. The city was scrutinized from the vehicle to locate areas of grey stone buildings.²⁵ The choice of subjects emerged from a procedure of establishing the character of districts based on the identification of buildings which appeared often in one locale, but less frequently or not at all in others. The neighbourhood, nineteenth-century wards and new towns became the organizing unit for all subsequent work and linked fortuitously with the municipal system of property registration.

Systematically gathered visual representations of buildings alone can provide a great deal of information about a city and its people. The most fruitful method of analysis is to start with drawing information from one building, then to proceed through a process of comparison with other buildings which form an entity, and finally to determine the relationships of these entities. The principal elements to be studied are the size, shape and volume, the construction and facing materials, and the organization of the building parts. Such features in the hands of an experienced observer may, in the absence of other documentary information, almost certainly determine function (home, store, warehouse, theatre, church, school, city hall, court house, fire station, and so forth). The construction and facing materials suggest not only the period of construction, but can also indicate economic conditions in specific and general terms. For example, the quality and use of materials might point to low individual economic standing or to prevailing economic cycles in a city or society. The consistent use of one particular material for construction could be the result of the existence of a local industry associated with that material. The size, shape, and articulation of the components of buildings all can be read to refine knowledge of a city and its inhabitants. The development of a city and its districts can be identified from visual documentation through patterns delineated by types of buildings and apparent modifications. Such techniques of social reconstruction bear a close resemblance to archaeological methods of inference. Overall, such analysis leads at least to the formulation of hypotheses which can usually be tested by reversion to other kinds of documentation available in modern cities.

Historical city maps, cadastral plans, insurance atlases, assessment rolls, directories, notarial records, private papers of individuals, corporate records, information on health and welfare, and so forth, all can be used to confirm the patterns and hypotheses emerging from a study of the visual documentation of buildings. This process could also be restated to the effect that the visual

²⁵ A driver was necessary because of the condition of the streets in winter, the problems of parking, and the impossibility of driving while looking for buildings and having to handle the equipment in the cold. Our driver knew the city well and was extremely helpful in suggesting certain areas, streets and buildings for consideration. The telephone book was an aid in locating religious institutions, churches, convents, asylums and so forth as it became apparent that such structures were almost always faced in grey stone.

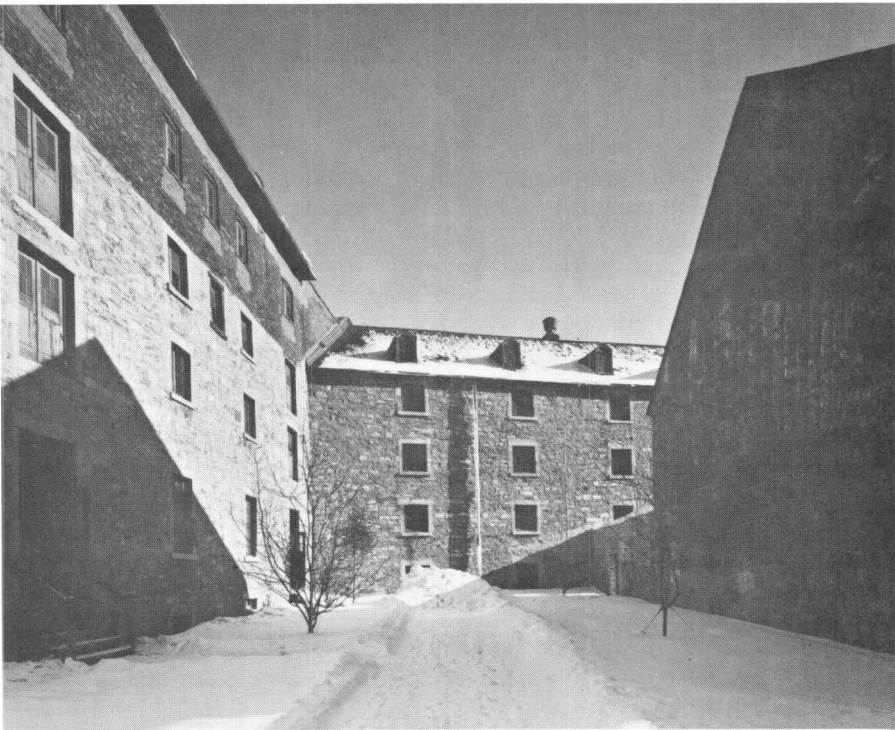
record can be used to test as well as to illustrate effectively the results deriving from use of more traditional types of documentation. This approach is obviously the most effective means for arriving at an accurate image of society.

The visual record of buildings also conveys information at a symbolic level. Collectively, buildings are a formal expression of society's needs, values, and aspirations. While structural soundness and functional suitability are requirements of any good building, the ordering of the materials and the means of construction also, consciously or not, represent abstract concepts. In architecture at its finest, symbolism is inherent in the way the building is put together as exemplified in Gothic and the best of modern architecture. At times, the architectural vocabulary of one civilization becomes the metaphor for another.

The establishment of such relationships requires visual evidence of buildings no longer standing or which are outside the society being studied. For example, in Montreal many of the buildings on St. Paul Street bear a striking resemblance to depictions in the photogravures of *Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow* and the photographs of *Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry*. The Bank of Montreal is very similar to the earlier Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh, and textual evidence confirms that the Scottish building was indeed the model. Various written histories have established the importance of political, religious and economic links between Montreal and Scotland in the first half of the nineteenth century. Buildings also reflect these ties while adding to our knowledge of the societies which built them. In the same vein, the rise of the new commercial class in the 1850s and 1860s with physical and conceptual associations with the United States is mirrored by the architectural affinities to be found in warehouses of the time. Again, buildings of this same period indicate a revitalization of the religious and humane institutions which participated in the founding of Montreal. The large new buildings of the Sulpicians, the Grey Nuns, the Soeurs hospitalières de St-Joseph de l'Hôtel Dieu were built at the edge of the city because of the crowding and insalubrity of the old town and to better serve the needs of rural people flooding into the city. When these buildings are compared with visual representations such as prints and drawings of earlier periods, it is clear that these structures are metaphors of the past. The new buildings were a reassertion of symbols of admired traditions and spiritual values of the seventeenth century.

As the questions and work for the Montreal project expanded, a research group had to be founded, Le groupe de recherche sur les bâtiments en pierre grise de Montréal, by drawing upon talented recent graduates from the fields of library science, architecture, history, and art history. Several hundred buildings have been photographed, and archival sources of all types searched to produce data on almost three thousand buildings. Important and fruitful contacts have been made with the ambitious federal documentary project, the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, whose Montreal-based researcher, André Giroux, introduced me to assessment rolls and notarial records of building contracts.

Gradually all this documentation is being digested in the hope of publishing late in 1979 a book on the grey stone buildings of Montreal which will contribute to a fuller understanding of our built environment largely through the use of systematically produced and analyzed photographic documentation.



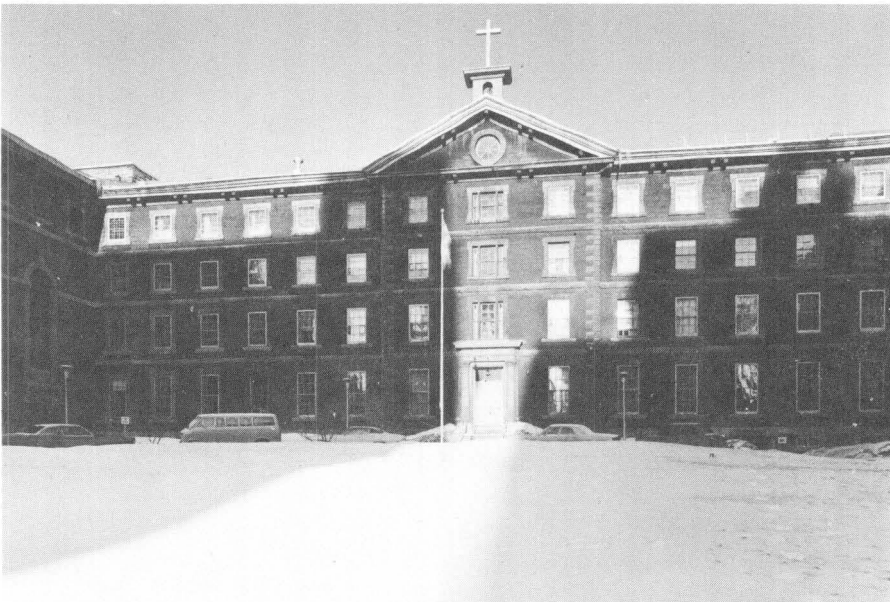
Stone detail of Maison Delvecchio, 1807 architect not known (404 Place Jacques).

John Try's Warehouse, 1831: architect not known (295 rue de la Commune).



Customs House, 1838: John Ostell, architect (150 rue Saint-Paul Ouest).

Bank of Montreal, 1846: architect, John Wells; attic storey and dome addition in 1905 by McKim, Mead and White, architects (119 rue Saint-Jacques).



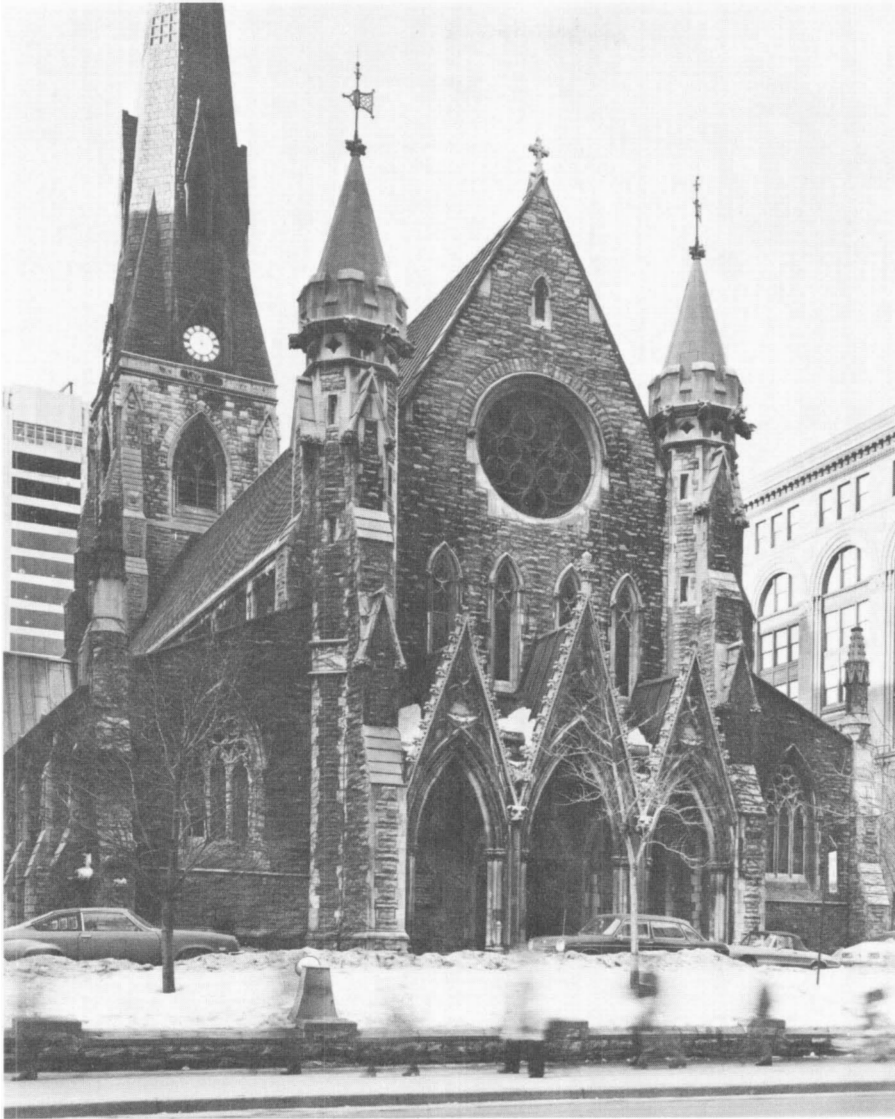
Towers of the Fort de la Montagne, 1694: Vachon de Belmont, engineer. Le Grande Séminaire de Montréal, 1857: John Osten and Maurice Perrault, architects. Chapel, 1907: Omer Marchand, architect (2065 rue Sherbrooke Ouest).

Collège de Montréal, 1870: Maurice Perrault, architect (1931 rue Sherbrooke Ouest)



Hôtel Dieu Commercial Buildings, 1862: Victor Bourgeau, architect (85 rue Saint-Paul Ouest).

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Christ Church Cathedral, 1859: Frank Wills, architect (635 rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest).



D.J. Ouimet Grocery Store and Dwelling, 1887: architect not known (901 rue Cherrier).

Alfred Brunet's Stores, 1891: architect not known (1082 Boulevard Saint-Laurent).