The Buildings of Canada

A guide to pre-20th-century styles in houses,
churches and other structures

Foreword

There is a very strong concern in this country for the preservation of our heritage, and this concern is becoming more articulate.

For more than fifty years the federal government and Parks Canada have played a major role in the conservation of our Canadian heritage. Parks Canada's mission has always been not only to restore the riches of yesteryear for all Canadians, but also to ensure that this legacy is preserved for generations to come.

It was for this reason that Parks Canada, in 1970, began the identification of buildings of great historical and architectural significance.

The Canadian Inventory of Historic Building is an ongoing computer-based survey to locate a valid sample of surviving historic buildings throughout Canada. It was primarily designed to provide data to enable the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to judge the significance of a building or group of buildings, and to compare it with others of similar style and value in Canada.

The Inventory also serves as a source of current basic data for architectural and social historians as well as an information bank for urban planners, preservationists and other groups or individuals interested in our architectural heritage.

The Buildings of Canada, originally published by Reader's Digest in the book *Explore Canada,* will serve as a valuable reference for all who share a concern for our Canadian heritage.

The Buildings of Canada

A guide to pre-20th-century styles in houses,
churches and other structures

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« L'architecture du Canada ».

The architecture of Canadian buildings up to roughly the start of the 20th century followed styles developed largely in France, Britain and the United States. Local adaptations resulted in what can be termed a Canadian architecture. Variations were due in part to restrictions posed by the availability of building skills, materials and technology; they were due also to attempts to relate buildings to their surroundings and to the occupants' functional needs. Stone cottages in rural Ontario and Quebec, prairie grain elevators, small railway stations . . . all reflect indigenous architectural styles. Buildings in which foreign styles and details have been more faithfully copied have a Canadian originality of scale and proportion.

The earliest buildings are of French design, characterized by steeply pitched roofs, broad chimneys and unadorned exterior walls of stone. British and Loyalist settlers introduced the solid Georgian style: simple, rectangular shapes, with symmetrical facades and rectangular window openings. A softening influence appeared about 1810-30: the Neo-classic, developed in Britain under the leadership of the Adam brothers, architects who favored the use of the delicately curved line.

Neo-classic gave way in the early 1830s to Classic Revival—another influence from Britain, where it had developed from a growing interest in the arts of early Greece and Rome. Classic Revival, unlike Neo-classic, emphasized the straight line. The British Regency style, distinguished by tall first-floor windows, wide chimneys and verandas, also appeared in the early 1830s. In the mid-1800s the formality of Classic Revival was gradually replaced by a succession of styles, with much overlapping and borrowing of detail. Gothic Revival, the style in which Britain's Houses of Parliament were designed in 1836, became popular. In the 1860s came Italianate, a style based on the villas of Italy. Second Empire, which followed about 1870, originated in France.

The technological developments of the late 19th century led to varied architectural styles and to a period of eclecticism rather than adaptation. Designs of the late 1880s and 1890s often grafted architectural details of various periods onto buildings of irregular outline. This Queen Anne style persisted, with variations such as the Stick and Chateau styles, until well into the 20th century.
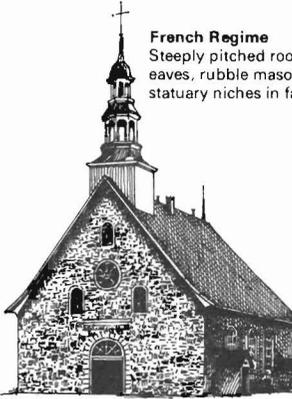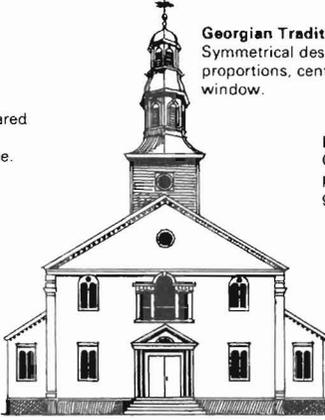
THE EDITORS
OF READER'S DIGEST

Churches

Most early Canadian churches were constructed in Gothic Revival style. Its features, particularly pointed-arch windows, are evident in churches of many denominations and all sizes, from simple log buildings to elaborate stone cathedrals. Exceptions to Gothic Revival include the early Quebec churches with their semicircular-headed windows, and Georgian style churches with similar detailing. A few large churches were designed in Romanesque Revival style. While basic church style is generally derivative, there are small, charming interpretations of Gothic Revival (in wooden churches in the Maritimes) and the "turnip-domed" churches on the prairies. The design of some early churches is severely plain but sometimes an ornately detailed interior contrasts with a simple exterior. Wood carving and plasterwork are often impressive.

ST. ANDREWS, N.B.

French Regime
Steeply pitched roof, flared eaves, rubble masonry, statuary niches in facade.

Georgian Tradition
Symmetrical design, classic proportions, central Palladian window.
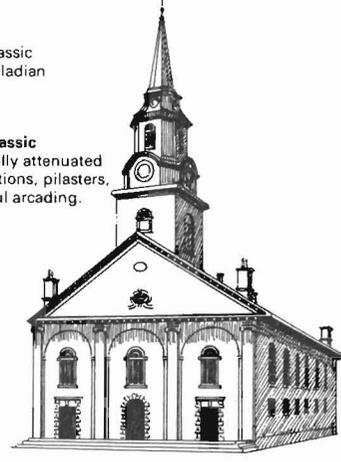
Neo-classic
Generally attenuated proportions, pilasters, graceful arcading.
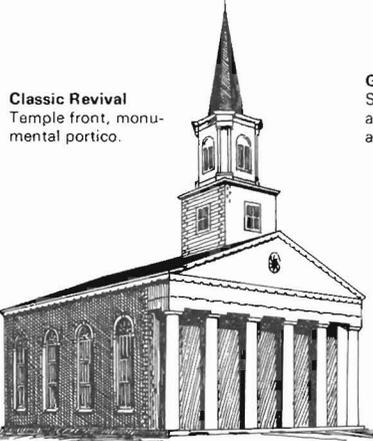
Classic Revival
Temple front, monumental portico.
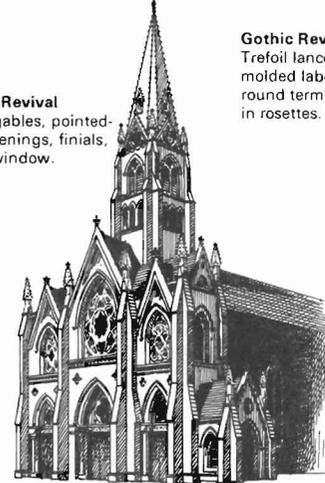
Gothic Revival
Sharp gables, pointed-arch openings, finials, a rose window.
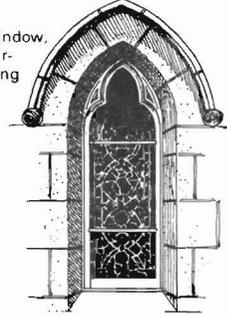
Gothic Revival
Trefoil lancet window, molded label surround terminating in rosettes.

Picturesque
Slender sham buttresses and delicate spire for a small chapel.

Italianate-Tuscan
A symmetrical main elevation is detailed with flat arcades and coupled with a square bell tower at the side. The style is defined also by semicircular-headed openings.

Ethnic Tradition
"Onion" or "turnip" domes indicate strong ethnic tradition originating in Central and Eastern Europe.

Dwellings

Canadian houses have varied in size from the one-room cabins of the settlers to large, complicated structures almost like castles. Canadians have dwelt in buildings of sod, of round or squared logs, some willow lathed and plastered. They have built timbered houses, houses of solid brick and of brick veneer, and stone houses of rubble, fieldstone and ashlar. Stone houses predominated in early Quebec; brick became popular in the second half of the 19th century, chiefly in Ontario. But due to the geography and the economy of the country, most dwellings have been of wood.

Canadian houses reflect style influences primarily from France, Britain and the United States. Pure examples of any style, however, are comparatively rare. Most houses are highly vernacular, displaying interpretations that were limited (and sometimes inspired) by local resources. Strong regional influence can be seen in the predominance of certain designs and/or construction techniques in various parts of the country.

Of all the styles that influenced Canadian architecture, Classic Revival (opposite page) had the greatest impact. To that stylistic pattern we owe medium-pitched gable roofs, front gable plans, doors with rectangular transoms and sidelights, and all manner of detailed ornamentation such as moldings, columns and pedimented trim. Classic Revival

French Regime
(pre-1759)

Houses are 1 or 1½ stories, generally of stone. Steeply pitched gable or hip roofs are finished with either straight or flared eave lines. Chimneys may be centered, or inset from the ends of the roof, or extensions of end walls. Early windows are multipaned casement. A profusion of dormers may be part of the original design but on smaller buildings one or two dormers may be additions.

Triple chimneys, steep gable and bellcast curve at the eaves (top) and multipaned casement windows are typical. Center chimneys (below) also are common.
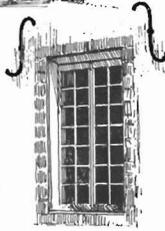
An early French type has a steep gable roof with no eaves trim. Hip-roof house (below) has slightly flared eaves.

Georgian Tradition
(pre-1820)

Sturdy and secure, usually 2½ stories, these well-proportioned houses follow a tradition started under the Georges who were Britain's kings in the 18th century. Most have medium-pitched gable or hip roofs, with end chimneys usually inset. Balanced facades have 3-5-7 bays and center doors. Openings are rectangular, windows small-paned. The Palladian window is a decorative motif.

A steep hip roof, broad chimneys, and a balanced facade of five bays place this house in the Georgian tradition.

Solid Georgian proportions are combined with a typical hip roof.

The decorative Palladian window over the main door (closeup below) is a dominant feature of many Georgian houses.
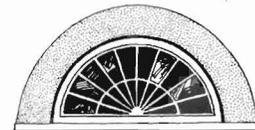

Neo-classic
(c.1810-30)

This gracefully proportioned style with its delicate detailing is derived from the work of the Adam brothers in mid-18th-century England. Buildings are rectangular with low-pitched gable roofs or square with hip roofs. There are often four end chimneys. Houses are usually 2-2½ stories, with balanced facades. Semielliptical transoms and sidelights often emphasize center doors.

The low gable, paired chimneys and decorative gable window are characteristic.

The center door has a fan transom and sidelights with a classically detailed pediment and columns.

Small windows of geometric shapes often decorate the ends of Neo-classic houses.

houses are found in greatest profusion in the Maritimes and Ontario and date from the 1830s. Traces of this style are seen in the west but the older, large houses of western Canada tend to follow the dictates of the Queen Anne Revival style.

DESCHAMBAULT, QUE

MOUNT UNIACKE, N.S.

Regency
(c.1810-40)

This style originated during the period 1811-20 when George, Prince of Wales (later George IV), was the British regent. Most Regency-style houses are 1 or 1½ stories with low hip roofs and a villa or cottage appearance. Center door and large first-floor windows with small panes are typical. A Regency house may have a central belvedere; a one-story front gallery is often seen.
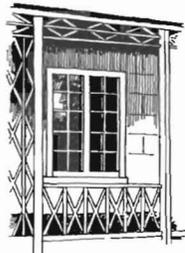

Windows, gallery, bell-cast roof of this Quebec vernacular show Regency influence.

More Regency touches: contrasting window sizes, sweeping gallery, tall chimneys.

Gallery, large windows appear also in this low, hip-roof cottage.

Veranda treillage, geometric and finely scaled, belongs to the Regency period.

Classic Revival
(c.1830-60)

The medium-pitched gable roof is common, often with a roof pediment or large center gable. Temple effect is obtained by an open portico across the facade, supported on columns with a heavy entablature, or by flat attached pilasters. Elegant, urbane masonry structures have flat or pedimental hoods over the windows: open porches are supported on fluted columns.
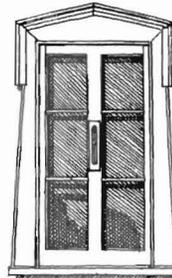

Returned eaves and classical moldings (right) on Classic Revival houses in Quebec.
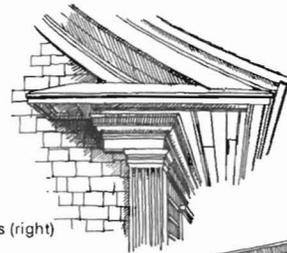
A bold door surround with heavy entablature is coupled with a front gable plan in this house.

Tapered or battered trim with eared moldings.

A classic open porch, parapet gables and contrasting window heads enliven an example of Quebec Classic Revival.

The front gable plan was a Classic Revival design in North America.

A temple-like facade is suggested in the pediment (above) and paneled pilasters of this house.

Eared door trim, tall pilasters and stylized entablature decorate this Classic Revival row.

Dwellings

From Gothic Revival to Beaux Arts and Chateau, the styles of the second half of the 19th century followed the sequence found in the influencing countries. Gothic Revival left its mark largely in decorative details, irregular shapes, exaggerated roof pitches and a generally fancy look. Later came the Italianate town houses, solid and square, seeming to emphasize their owners' wealth and importance. (A somewhat restrained Italianate is often seen in the brick farmhouses of Ontario and occasionally in stone in the southern parts of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.)

The Second Empire mansard roof was a practical way to utilize third-floor attic space and was often used to convert a 2½-story gable-roof building to a three-story edifice. The Queen Anne style manifested itself in many forms, most often in Ontario and the west. Characterized by irregular outlines, one- and two-story bay windows and winged brackets, it was used in thousands of brick houses in Ontario cities. Modified versions are seen in frame on the west coast.
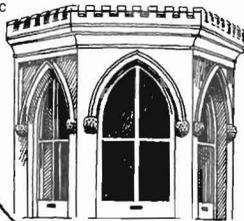
Gothic Revival
(c.1850-70)

These decorative buildings are customarily distinguished by finely scaled gingerbread trim, pointed-arch openings and sharply pitched gables. The decorative detail includes intricate bargeboards and/or veranda treillage and window tracery with the pointed-arch motif. Chimneys are paired, paneled or diagonal and there are finials or drops at the gable peaks and labels over the openings.

Gingerbread trim (detail below), steeply pitched gables and pointed-arch openings (right) mark Gothic Revival.

Elizabethan-Gothic Revival has angular, shaped gables, label window surrounds, Tudor arches on veranda.

Baronial-Gothic Revival is typified by this crenellated tower.

Picturesque and Renaissance Revival
(c.1850-70, c.1860-75)

Picturesque houses, often relatively small and reflecting the individual tastes of builders or owners, have decorative elements of Gothic Revival origin: bargeboards, pointed-arch windows, lacy trim on eaves and verandas. Renaissance Revival houses are blocky in mass, with flat, low hip or truncated gable roofs, shaped gables and strong eave lines.

Picturesque, an interpretation of Gothic Revival, utilizes its decorative trim, steeply pitched gables and board and batten siding.
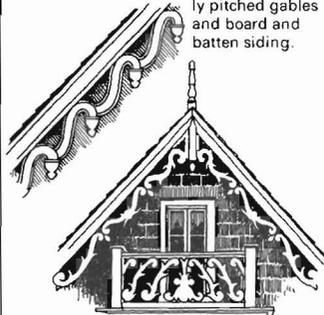
Two elements of Renaissance Revival style are curved Dutch gables and applied pedimental window or door trim.

Italianate
(c.1850-70)

This strong style was in popular use for town houses about the time of Confederation. Buildings were often square, many with square towers or projecting frontispieces. The towers and main blocks of these houses have low-pitched hip roofs. Under wide eaves are prominent decorative brackets. Other Italianate characteristics are verandas, round-headed windows and belvederes.

Wide, bracketed eaves, round-headed windows and a belvedere are Italianate in style.

Round-headed windows and a projecting frontispiece identify this Italianate.

The style often incorporates a square tower, either central (as here) or asymmetrically located.

This Italianate porch has round-headed openings and strongly modeled detailing.

LONDON. ONT.

PORT HILL, P.E.I.

SIMCOE. ONT.

Second Empire
(c.1860-80)

The style is distinguished by the mansard roof. Individual houses tend to be square, sometimes with projecting center towers or end pavilions. The upper roof level is sometimes visible but usually very low-pitched. The top of the lower roof slope may be marked by decorative cresting. The frequent use of one- and two-story bay windows tends to make building outlines irregular.

The mansard roof, the distinguishing feature of Second Empire style, here has a concave slope.
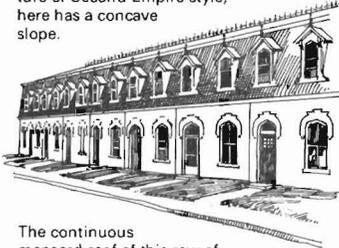
The continuous mansard roof of this row of Second Empire town houses is enhanced by an iron cresting.

Bay windows and twin dormers (above) and ornately bracketed eaves (right) make this an eclectic Second Empire house.

Queen Anne Revival
(c.1885-1900)

Large, commodious houses of two or more stories, Queen Anne Revivals have steep hip roofs and tall chimneys. There is often a tower (generally offset) and a broad veranda. The facade may have more than one sheathing or several patterns. Double-hung windows often have one large bottom sash, small panes in the upper sash. The Queen Anne in western Canada is more angular, less voluptuous.
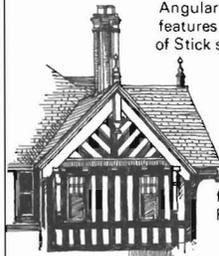

Tower, shaped veranda and irregular massing typify the Queen Anne in eastern Canada.

In western Canada the Queen Anne style is apt to be more contained in plan.
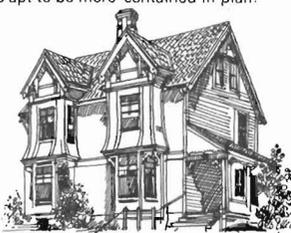
Angularity of decorative features is characteristic of Stick style, a variation of Queen Anne Revival.

Imitation half-timbering is a distinguishing feature of Tudor Revival, another variation of Queen Anne.

Romanesque Revival, Beaux Arts, Chateau
(c.1880-1910)

Romanesque Revival style includes round towers, tall chimneys, steeply pitched roofs, and wide, arched windows and door openings. Undercut decorative stone or terra-cotta trim uses medieval foliate patterns. Beaux Arts uses cold, classic decorative trim (columns, pilasters and capitals). Chateau has steeply pitched hip roofs and multiple tall chimneys.

Undercut trim (stone or terra-cotta) in Romanesque Revival uses medieval foliate patterns for decorative effect.

Wide round-arch openings, circular tower and heavy masonry mark a notable example of Romanesque Revival.

Early 20th-century interpretations of classic motifs define the Beaux Arts.

Irregularity of the roof line, steeply pitched gables and multiple tall chimneys denote Chateau style.


7

Commercial Buildings

Classic Revival detailing, largely in the form of temple fronts, is used also on commercial buildings, particularly banks. Some major commercial buildings display Renaissance Revival detailing, recalling the style that originated with the great Italian palaces. Commercial buildings of a more modest scale have the segmentally arched windows of post-1870 design, surmounted by a wide and decorative cornice of Italian influence. Most are brick and many once had living quarters on the second and third floors. Signs and advertisements have altered the first-floor levels of so many older commercial buildings that the original fine scale and rhythm of design—and consequently the unity of the streetscape—have been lost.

Modern factories, office buildings, hotels, railway stations, shops (and shopping centers) are a far cry from the examples on these pages. Since the mid-'30s, influenced heavily by new materials and radically new methods of construction, styles in commercial buildings have been markedly changed. Today's styles are generally plainer, seeking to meet the requirements of function, structure and appearance in each unit.
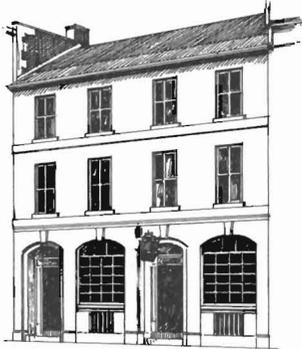
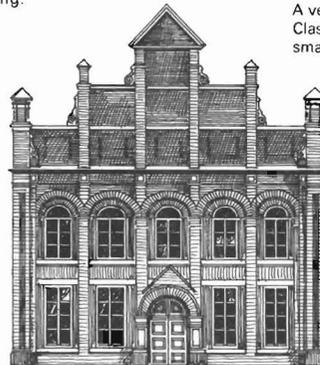An example of Regency arcading and restraint of detail.

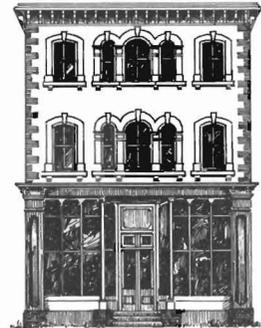Flat pilasters accent the doorway of a Classic Revival building.

A vernacular interpretation of Classic Revival is seen in this small-town shop.
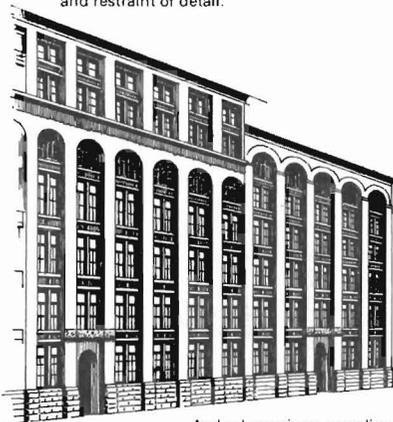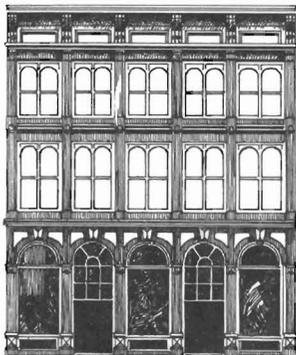
Arched openings, arcading and a rusticated stone base are notable features of the Romanesque Revival.

An ornately decorative gable places this building in the Renaissance Revival.
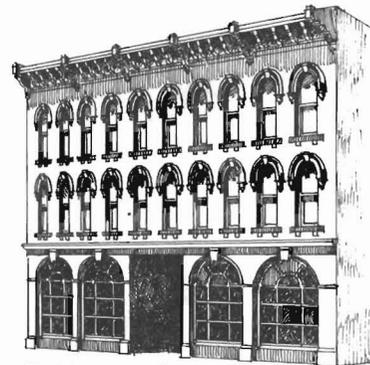
This Italianate shop is enlivened by its flat roof and dominant cornice and its tripartite round-headed windows.

A heavy-bracketed flat roof and paired round-headed windows in an example of Italianate style.

A Renaissance Revival window with fussy, almost overworked detailing.

The label surround of round-headed windows is repeated to give this Italianate facade a distinctive rhythm.
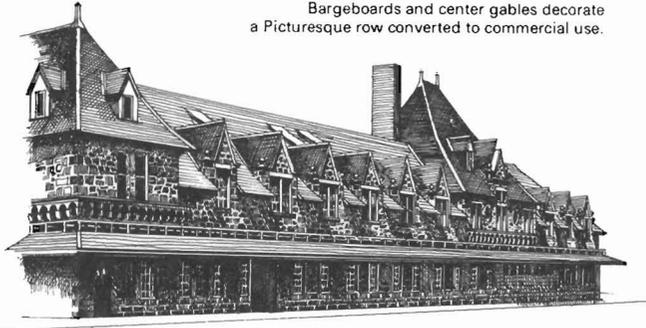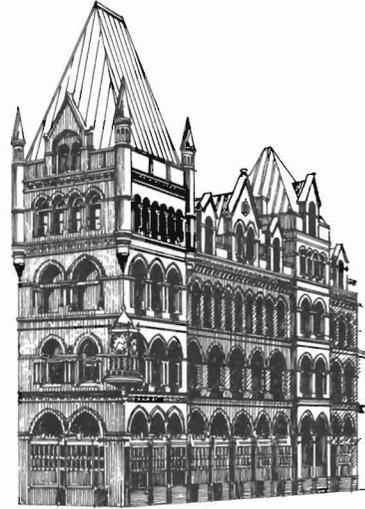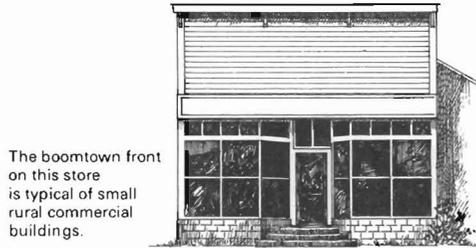
VANCOUVER, B.C.

VANCOUVER, B.C.

Bargeboards and center gables decorate
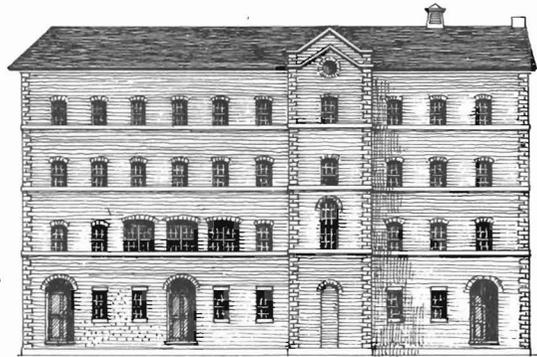a Picturesque row converted to commercial use.

A roof line with a multiplicity of
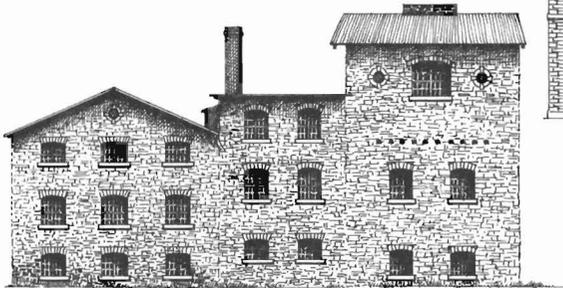gables tops this Chateau-style railway station.

Renaissance dormers, turrets and a
sharply pitched roof line distinguish
this example of the Chateau style.

The boomtown front
on this store
is typical of small
rural commercial
buildings.

Segmentally headed windows such
as in this distillery were commonly
used in the 1870s.

Miniature kegs in upper-story roundels decorate
this 18th-century brewery.

Administrative Buildings

Administrative or "public" buildings in Canada almost invariably display the rather formal approach of the Classic Revival style. This approach is manifested in the recurring use of columns and pediment detailing—a reminder of the temples of Greece and Rome and of the 19th-century movement that dictated the use of a particular style for a particular type of building. A few of Canada's legislative and government buildings did, however, escape this architectural principle. The outstanding example is the Parliament Buildings, which have all the flourish and pointed detail of the Gothic Revival style.
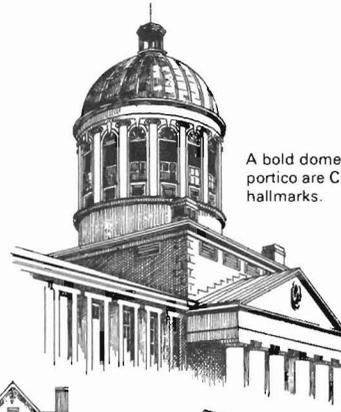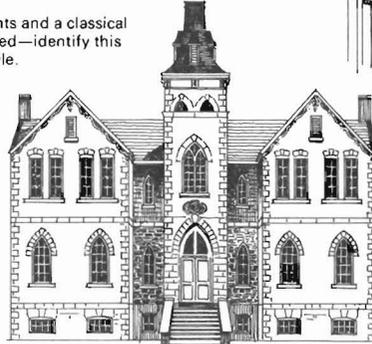

LETHBRIDGE, ALTA.

GREAT VILLAGE, N.S.

Niches, pilasters, pediments and a classical portico—all quietly subdued—identify this building in Neo-classic style.
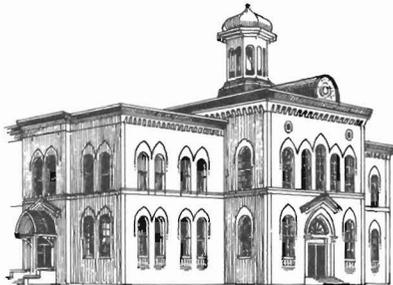
A bold dome and temple-like portico are Classic Revival hallmarks.

Pointed-arch windows, a central tower and decorative bargeboard on twin gables are Picturesque elements.
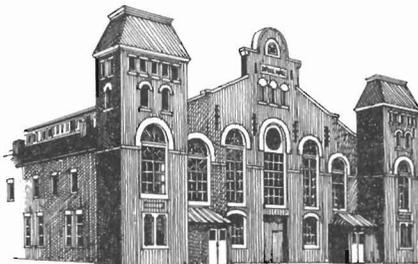
This Renaissance Revival post office has segmental dormers, pilasters, balustrade and rusticated first story, as well as a prominent clock tower.
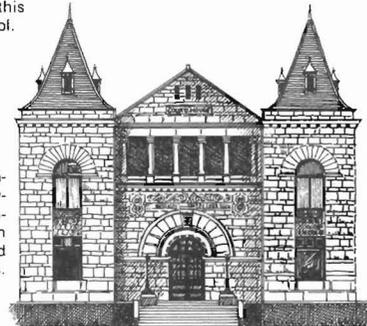
A domed lantern on a flat roof and paired semicircular windows distinguish an Italianate courthouse.

A mansard roof identifies this Second Empire style school.

Round arched windows with bold surrounds light an Italianate drill hall.

Romanesque Revival features include bold towers, rough-faced masonry, terra-cotta panels with medieval designs, and large round arches.
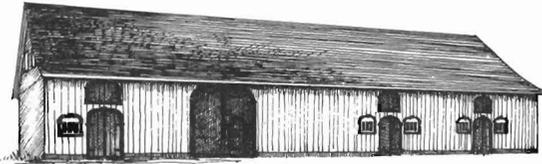
Barns

The earliest Canadian barns, rude shelters for livestock, were built of logs on newly cleared land. As techniques were improved and imaginations went to work, a wide range of barn designs began to dot the land: square barns, rectangular and polygonal barns, barns that looked like houses (below, bottom left), barns with twin openings, barns with decorative arcades, barns with heavy second-story overhang, massive fortress-like stone barns.
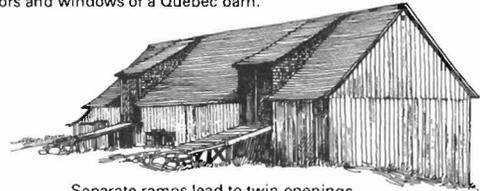
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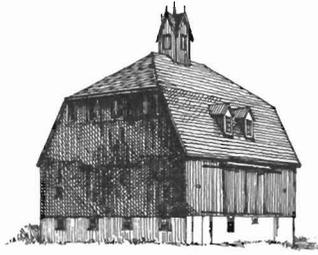
A hipped gable roof, side windows, dormers and cupola are features of this barn.

Concern for shapes and patterns is seen in the handsome curved doors and windows of a Quebec barn.

Cupolas on barns, some round, some square, others polygonal, provide light and ventilation.

Separate ramps lead to twin openings and a second-story storage area.

A basically circular plan and a series of angular gables: a barn that resembles the Festival Theater in Stratford, Ont.
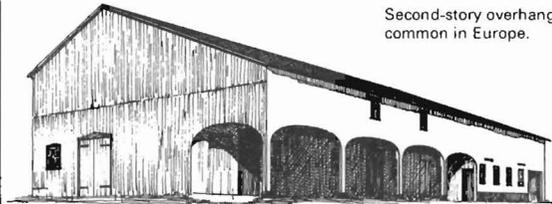
Second-story overhang continues a tradition common in Europe.

A squared-log storage shed is roofed with thatch.

A parade of arches forms a shaded arcade along one side of a big frame barn.
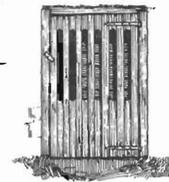
This slatted wooden barn door resembles medieval prototypes.

The double pitch of the traditional gambrel roof is seen in this prairie barn.

Vertical siding, a hipped gable roof and round-headed windows are all part of this busy facade.

A central cupola tops a polygonal frame barn set on a stone foundation.

Another prairie barn: long and low, built of stone with brick arches over doors and windows.

11

Vernacular

The vernacular in architectural expression makes use of local forms and materials, clings to familiar forms from old lands and responds to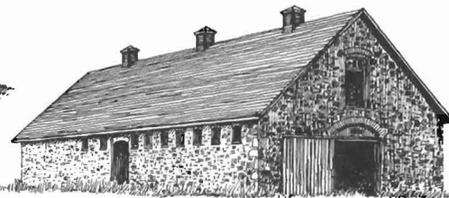 climatic conditions in the new. Canadian vernacular ranges from west coast pagoda roofs to the steep roofs of old Quebec, from mud-walled prairie cottages of relatively recent date to great stone houses built in the days of New France, from prairie grain elevators to Montreal's distinctive outside stairways.
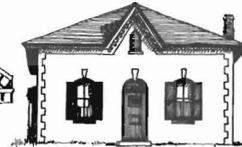

CALIENTO, MAN.

Prairie Vernacular
A grain elevator and adjoining buildings cluster in apparent disorder. A domed wooden church and a thatched-roof, mud-surfaced house continue central European traditions.

West Coast Vernacular
Pagoda-like roof detailing reflects an Oriental flair. The small frame bungalow is typical of British Columbia.

Ontario Vernacular
The beaver in a gable . . . a brick farmhouse with gables and a commodious porch . . . a small, three-bay cottage with hip roof and center gable.

Quebec Vernacular
Stone with two large parapeted gable chimneys: the urbane Quebec town house. Exterior metal stairs, often curved: a Montreal trademark. A steeply pitched hip roof and casement windows: French tradition characteristics.
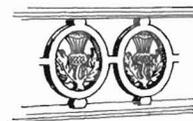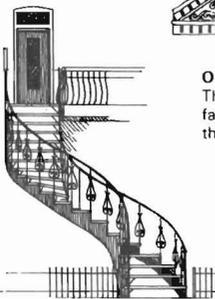
Maritime Vernacular
Thistles carved in wood as balustrade decoration speak of Scottish heritage. Central upper-story windows that break the eaves line and simple gable roofs with windows tight to the eaves are Maritime types.

12

Miscellaneous Building Types

Designs of miscellaneous building types often reflect sensitivity that may seem surprising in utilitarian structures. Canadians have built flour mills whose windows would look well in fine town houses, registry offices with attractive arcades, armories like castles. Lighthouses and firehall and water towers have been designed with flair and imagination. The major early styles found in dwellings and churches are seen also in these miscellaneous building types.

ELORA, ONT

Sawmills such as this, with wooden waterwheels, were once common in many parts of Canada.

Arcade-like openings for windows and a center door were frequently used in small registry offices in the 19th century.

Lighthouses dot the Canadian coastline, one of the longest in the world.

An unusually elaborate municipal water tower has round-arched Italianate decoration.

Sensitive detailing is seen in the segmentally headed windows of this flour mill.

A frame tower for drying hose tops a small-town firehall.

Stylized Baronial Gothic detailing is seen on this turn-of-the-century building.

An interesting carpentry pattern embellishes a fish warehouse.

Martello towers were British copies of a round fort at Cape Mortella in Corsica. The thick walls are tapered slightly.

Crenellated towers in Baronial Gothic style are typical of armories in many cities.

Glossary

Arcade series of arches
Ashlar squared, hewn stone
Balustrade low parapet
Bargeboard decorated board on a gable edge or eaves line
Batten strip covering a joint between vertical boards
Batter receding upward slope
Bay structural opening for a door or window
Bell-cast with flared, overhanging eaves
Belvedere raised turret or lantern
Boomtown false front masking a roof line
Brackets angular supports at eaves, doorways, sills
Buttress mass of masonry or brickwork adding stability to a structure
Capital crowning feature of a column or pilaster
Casement with side-hinged sashes
Cornice projection crowning a building
Crenellated (wall) with indented or notched breaks in the top
Cresting ornamental finish on the ridge of a building or edge of a balcony
Cupola small circular or polygonal dome on a roof
Diagonal (chimney) diagonal vis-à-vis roof ridge or eaves
Dormer window projecting from the slope of a roof
Double hung (window) with vertically sliding double sections

Drop decoration hanging from a roof edge or gable end
Eaves horizontal edges of a roof
Entablature wide, horizontal band on a building
Facade face of a building
Finial pointed ornament at the apex of a gable or pediment or roof edge
Frontispiece projecting section (more than one story) of a principal facade
Gable triangular upper part of a wall at the end of a ridged roof; triangular hood over a window or door; triangular break in an eaves lines
Gallery long porch across a facade
Gambrel roof gable roof with double pitch or two slopes on each of two sides
Gingerbread decorative wooden trim
Half-timbering surface treatment: wooden members with plaster or stucco infill
Head uppermost part of a structural opening
Hip roof roof sloped on all four sides
Inset (chimney) parallel to but set in from the side walls
Label door or window molding extending part way down the sides
Lancet (window) narrow, pointed
Lantern small glazed structure similar to a cupola
Mansard roof variation of hip roof, with a steep lower slope (which may be curved) and a flatter upper section

Palladian arch-headed window flanked by narrower, shorter, square-headed windows
Paneled (chimney) with a type of decorative trim providing a raised or inset surface
Parapet low wall along the edge of a roof
Pavilion plan with slightly projecting wings
Pediment triangular shape ornamenting a door or window or the front or the gable end of a building
Pilaster vertical, rectangular member projecting slightly from a wall
Portico porch with pillars or columns
Return continuation of a molding at a right angle on an adjacent surface
Rose window round window
Rusticated tooled (as the surface of stone)
Sheathing exterior cladding of a building
Sidelight glazed panels adjacent to a door
Surround trim outside a door or window structural opening
Terra-cotta fired clay
Transom horizontal bar between the top of a window or door and the structural opening; the section above is a transom light or panel
Trefoil (arch or window) having a three-lobed opening
Treillage decorative trim, primarily of wood
Truncated abrupt; having the top or end cut off