

## FROM TOWN-BUILDING TO SOCIETY-MAKING Company Towns in Canada

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This article focuses on *company towns*: towns that were built by companies to serve the industry—usually by one company for one industry. While these might not mean much to the children of deindustrialization—a situation which in itself is a problem when we consider heritage, as we will see—they do carry a whole myth for scholars and practitioners for whom “company towns” are synonymous with control, exploitation, and even fatality, all of which are well expressed in the title of Hardy Green’s book: *The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy*.<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, at least in the most common literature, the “company town” brings to mind disastrous portraits provided by decades of studies regarding workers’ struggles or class distinctions. Lexicography also uses the term “paternalism” as a figure of control, that of the “company” over the people in the “company town.”

While this state of literature and the epistemology beyond it could justify an article by itself, as well as the domination of the paternalism paradigm over the historiography and popular interpretation of company towns, one might note that company towns are also *towns*. From that side of the lens, they do appear most of the time as “home towns,” inhabited by proud folks who call themselves “Arvidians,” and others “Flin Floners”: even when the plant no longer exists or the name of the town has changed, these inhabitants still feel nostalgic for their company town. Contrary to scholars, they find there a source of pride, of strong belonging, of fond memories. This is what Larry conveyed to me, in front



FIG. 1. LARRY'S HOUSE, FORT MCMURRAY. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

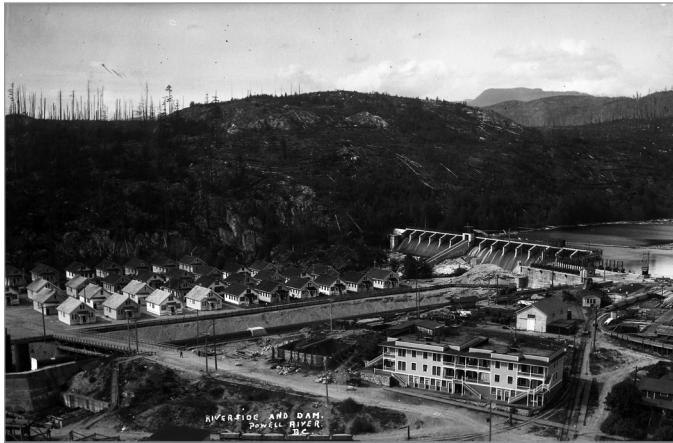


FIG. 2. VIEW OF POWELL RIVER IN THE 1910S. | POWELL RIVER MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES.



FIG. 3. VIEW OF ARVIDA IN THE 1940S. | RIO TINTO.

of the house in Fort McMurray (Alberta) where he now lives: “our industry, he said, our industry may have polluted. But we don’t have blood on our hands. You must remember that this is not backcountry savagery; it’s civilization. My lawn, our house: it’s Canadian modernity.”<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1) As a matter of fact, while recent research shows that pride and belonging tend to be quite common amongst company town inhabitants around the world, it seems even more the case in Canada, for reasons on which I will briefly get back. These company towns have marked the territorial conquest, the history, and the imaginary figures of Canada.

This work on Canadian company towns<sup>4</sup> has been undertaken in an attempt to create an overall picture of these planned single-industry settlements, and to understand their specificities, as well as their heritage. Although they number in the hundreds, very little is known about them, much less than on some British industrial villages, for example, or workers’ housing in France. While the history of urbanism and town planning—especially that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—is still a young field of research, and even though a great number of local initiatives aim at preserving more

and more of their heritage, Canadian company towns are generally ignored in scientific studies that address company towns or workers’ villages. It is telling that the work edited by John Garner, *The Company Town*,<sup>5</sup> explores the four corners of the planet, including America, and yet includes no Canadian company towns. In fact, everything seems to indicate that the traditional paradigms of studies that have dealt with Canadian company towns are inadequate for their understanding, especially as a legacy. In this synthesis, I will thus try to point to analysis parameters that allow an approach to these company towns which goes above and beyond the working-class living conditions that often frame questions concerning workers’ housing. I will concentrate on the morphogenesis and semiogenesis of company towns by examining figures and implementation procedures, as well as representations of their urban forms, their housing, and their architecture.

I will support this discussion by providing two main examples, located at the opposite ends of Canada but sharing many characteristics, among which are their original remoteness and the span of the industry development that they nonetheless supported. One is the

isolated Powell River, in British Columbia; it was home to the first Western Canadian paper-manufacturing facility and the site of the world’s largest newsprint mill in the 1960s, whose construction started in 1908 (fig. 2). And, more than 5000 kilometres to the east, the other is Arvida, a creation of the Aluminum Company of Canada on which I have previously published and which hosted, for a long time, what was known as the world’s largest aluminum plant. At the time the town was built, in 1926, it had the reputation of being so isolated that it was said to be found “450 miles north of Boston” (fig. 3). But I will also evoke other company towns elsewhere in Canada, even though it would be impossible to go through the two hundred and fifty or so that I have identified. Other towns I will use as examples are: Devon and Fort McMurray (Alberta); Cannery Village, Clayburn, Fraser Mills, Ioco, Kemano, and Port Edward (British Columbia); Flin Flon (Manitoba); Marysville (New Brunswick); Corner Brook, Gander, and Grand Falls (Newfoundland); Iroquois Falls and Kapuskasing<sup>6</sup> (Ontario); Glace Bay (Nova Scotia); Baie-Comeau, Bourlamaque, Gagnon, Grand-Mère, Port-Alfred, Shawinigan, Témiscaming, and Val-Jalbert (Québec); Uranium City (Saskatchewan).

## WHAT IS A COMPANY TOWN (IN CANADA)?

The “company towns” in Canada are, first and foremost, planned, single-industry communities, where one company has had housing built for its workers, generally by way of an urban project, and has set up various facilities. This generic definition has led these company towns to be described as “planned industrial cities” and, more often, “single-enterprise communities.” Company towns in Canada are also often frontier towns,<sup>7</sup> those that marked the growth of America: “resource towns” that pushed back even farther the boundaries of the inhabited territory given the search for wood, ore, or hydroelectricity.

All these factors, and the need to attract workers to regions distant from urban centres, may appear to be a phenomenon common to recent countries, Nordic or Southern, where some largely inhabited regions were just left out because of their harsh climate or living conditions. But there are strong arguments that more than in others parts of the world, company towns have been critical in building modern Canada, to the point where some people do not hesitate to claim that they have represented Canadian culture in its purest form.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this may be attributed to the economic dynamics of development, but also to their chronology, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, that is, later than many European industrial settlements and earlier than those found, for example, in Australia. Except for a half-dozen Canadian company towns that appeared between 1855 and 1866, they were built after the British North America Act gave birth to modern Canada (1867), and up until 1981; they constitute a corpus—a marker for the flowering of this nation—at least as coherent as the



FIG. 4. LOCATION OF 217 EXISTING (IN WHOLE OR TRACES) COMPANY TOWNS IN CANADA (THE NAMES DO NOT ALL SHOW ON THE MAP). | 2017 GOOGLE IMAGERY/NASA; LUCIE K. MORISSET.

Canadian nation itself. Canada is a country whose history is grounded in and repeatedly marked by company towns (fig. 4).

As previously evoked, these do have a specific characteristic that explains some of their components and justifies their contribution to any study of workers’ housing in the world: they are indeed towns, that is, relatively integrated and autarchic establishments, with not only an industry and housing grouped together more or less densely, but also with businesses and various institutions. They have been placed under the control of a specific administration, such as a municipal council, contrary to company towns totally owned and managed by companies as can be found in the United States, and differently from infill industrial housing found in older European settlements. In other words, they resemble architect

and urban planner Tony Garnier’s *Cité industrielle* more than the mining villages in Nord-Pas-de-Calais.

Whether they are nicknamed “model towns of the North” or other variations of the “model city of the wilderness,” company towns are fundamentally a product of their remote locations, this remoteness being such that everything had to be created (from building lots to churches) in order for the industry (and its workers) to survive in such a context. In various cases, particularly in the provinces established after 1867 from vast territories historically allotted to the fur trade and bought back by Canada, the company town, a result of land surveying promoted by the government, served as an urban alternative to the slow and precarious agrarian colonization. Even in British Columbia, a province that joined Confederation in 1870, Powell River was built on lands granted in 1902 by



FIG. 5. MONUMENT COMMEMORATING THE SETTLEMENT OF MAILLARDVILLE. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.



FIG. 6. PICTURESQUE VIEW IN POWELL RIVER. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.



FIG. 7. PICTURESQUE VIEW IN ARVIDA. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

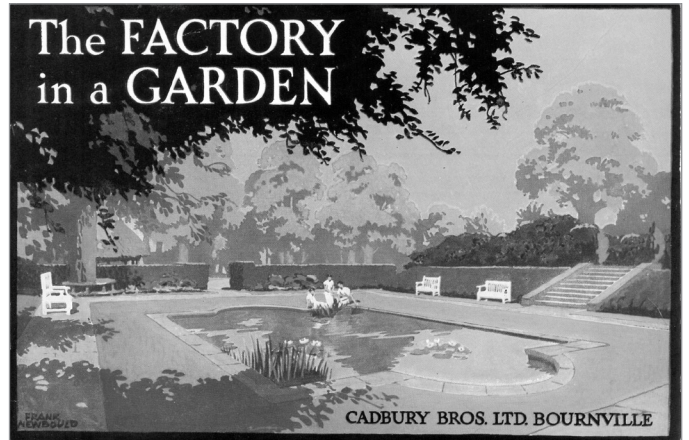


FIG. 8. BOURNVILLE (UK) AS BRAND IMAGE FOR CADBURY. | LEEMAGE.

the provincial government, which looked favourably on the development of the pulp and paper industry on this difficult-to-access, sparsely-populated land. As the nature of work changed, the industry did, indeed, offer a promise of densification and stabilization when it came to land settlement, leading to the creation of urban spaces under increasingly diverse circumstances. Hence, in Arvida, the company bought 2400 hectares of land needed for the construction of the town from a few dozen farmers who had settled there many years earlier. The engineers who took stock of the general situation claimed that the density of the regional population

was such that the need for factory workers could be met by local labour, which did not stop the company, in spite of it all, from founding nothing less than a town for 25,000 to 35,000 inhabitants.

Whether functional or symbolic, this determined thrust toward urbanity placed the centre of the fate of the company town: it is this impetus, justifying the name “company town” (centred around the company) rather than *workers’ housing* (centred around a category of workers), that clearly gave new life to eighteenth-century industrial utopia in Canada, given

that “creating a town” also meant “creating a society.” In a few rare cases, as in Maillardville (British Columbia, 1889), the company transferred parcels of land to workers, where they had to build their own houses or have them built by some promoter (fig. 5); but it was more common for the new town to be made up of homes that were as carefully planned and built in the largest possible number of models, since it was important to create a feeling of differentiation—and thus of belonging—in order to ensure that workers would stay, as inhabitants. The picturesque nature of the streets of Powell River, where 28 models are alternately distributed among some

400 houses, giving each house a uniqueness and producing a desire for appropriation (fig. 6), also underscores, as opposed to the monotonous alignment attributed to company towns by their detractors, the image of historicity of a town established in an organic manner, over time, where inhabitants could relate to being part of an identity built through their own history. In Arvida, where the company supervised and funded not only the construction of churches and schools but also the services of clerics and teachers, there are more than 2000 houses built according to 126 different models (fig. 7). Looking to foster “a sense of ownership,” its builders boasted that “no house resembled its neighbour’s.” In fact, documents show that the president of Arvida’s parent company, as it has been written, “spared no effort to make it a desirable place to live.”<sup>9</sup> The urban nature and conviviality of the company town, furthermore, rapidly colonized, in the style of Bournville, England, the brand image of the company (in this case Cadbury) (fig. 8). Famous photographers have provided literally dozens of images, all magnificent, of Arvida’s and Powell River’s workers (fig. 9); this phenomenon, which could be traced to Jean-Baptiste Godin and his Familistère in France, as it aimed to parallel the modernity of the workers’ society and their quality of life with the modernity of the company product and the quality of life it would bring to modern homes, seems to have been most common in Canada, as we can also discover in Grand Falls with the work of photographers E.I. Bishop and Albert Hillier, hired by the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company to produce images that would carry the company town at least as far as it could sell its products, or its shares (fig. 10).

From the double impetus to create a town and to create a society, we can today draw four key interrelated interpretations,



FIG. 9. ARVIDA DEPICTED AS A HOME TOWN IN A PICTURE PUBLISHED BY THE COMPANY IN THE 1920S. | RIO TINTO.



FIG. 10. PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY E.I. BISHOP IN GRAND FALLS AROUND 1910. | GRAND FALLS – WINDSOR HERITAGE SOCIETY.

making it possible to assess Canadian company towns’ contribution to industrial heritage and, moreover, to open distinct fields of investigations. 1) Canadian company towns are defined by their modernity. 2) Beyond its representations, which are also typical, this modernity is a result of international networks of ideas that landed and developed in Canada as “town planning” became a full practice, with its own lexicon and references. 3) Company towns in Canada also prefigure single-family homes and monofunctional suburban landscapes as embodied by the Athens Charter concept of “inhabiting”

and defining the American suburbs of the thirty-year post-World War II boom period. 4) Furthermore, they more certainly revisit the paradigm of the town as a transposition of a social hierarchy, which they have rather contributed to transform, if not abolish; that comes from utopia rather than from paternalism, and if something does define most Canadian company towns, it is precisely that constant relation to a vision of a better society through the betterment of the individuals, much more than the control of paternalistic figures that permeates the historiography<sup>10</sup>.

## ULTRA-MODERN TOWNS

Ultra-modern towns welcomed the first supermarket featuring the most avant-garde of banners; they were at the heart of the nation's war effort; cars were just as prominent there as in big cities and they did have, in fact, garages as would be found in major cities at a much later date; residents had the first tuition-free high school and a modern hospital at their disposal; both Powell River and Arvida boasted that they were home to Canada's very first movie theatre! Actually, they always identify with the "first this" or the "first that": the first town planned in Canada, the first garden city of Canada, the first paved road in America, the first movie theatre in the country, the first garden contest in the province, the best hockey team, the finest example of a nineteenth-century industrial town (as did Marysville, New Brunswick, built starting in 1862) (fig. 11), or the first government-planned resource town in Ontario (as Kapuskasing, 1921) (fig. 12).

Modernity takes centre stage in representations of Canadian company towns, to the extent that it has become a recognizable element of discourse. The language of residents is also packed with terms borrowed from the specialized terminology of their planning, which also seems to have become part of their imaginary and even their identity. Today's mainly Francophone Arvidians call sidewalks "gutters" (*trottoirs in standard French*), in reference to the street gutters drawn and identified on English-language plans. As for the settlement of Powell River, it is commonly known as the "townsite" (as some others throughout the country), for it was so designated in company documents referring to its development. Canadian company towns, or at least some of them, also have in common a

mythology explaining in popular terms the notion of urban planning itself, which, although seminal in their definition, can be difficult to grasp as ingredients of identity: residents of Gander for example patiently explain that the town plan takes the form of a goose (a gander being a male goose), and as proof point out some form that they more or less see in the street pattern; Arvidians for their part, will say that the city takes the shape of an "A" for "Arvida," that was meant to be written on the ground.

The combination of opportunity and necessity that engendered company towns also brought to their remote backwoods locations such amenities as running water, electricity, and central heating (which the oldest buildings of the towns and countryside were lacking), along with a full range of facilities, sanitary and otherwise, altogether and (almost) instantly; incidentally, many Canadian company towns share some sort of narrative on their high-tech, rapid, and efficient birth and growth, as the "city built in 135 days" (in the case of Arvida). While the industry got better-equipped with cutting-edge infrastructures, company towns conceived and built according to the tenets of revolutionary urban know-how. In a nation whose prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King (1921-1926), published, just before being elected, a work entitled *Industry and Humanity: A Study in the Principles Underlying Industrial Reconstruction*, it is possible that the timely influence of the British *Town Planning Act* (1909)<sup>11</sup> resulted in favouring, in the urban design of company towns, a greater refinement than was displayed by their American counterparts.<sup>12</sup> Company towns were also in a certain manner synchronized with their company, sometimes more than with their neighbourhood. As some companies, especially after World

War I—a period that coincides with most company-town building in Canada—grew global, company towns were anchored to worldwide networks of ideas that their executives and engineers (in still a small number and aware of each other's business) carried from one place to another. Simultaneously, while this transmission of a modernity that would only appear later and progressively elsewhere left a strong imprint in the narratives of modernity and the memories of company towns and their inhabitants, it also called for the emergence of an expertise grounded in a global and international network, to which, from one company town to another company town, Canada became a fully-enabled contributor. Whereas thousands of Canadian families were crammed into one-or two-room dwellings in urban centres, in a context of unbridled urbanization that had become Canada's most serious social problem, the flurry of company town construction served to channel the hopes and knowledge of a new generation of town planners. Out of 243 company towns, around 100 were built from 1904 to 1934, that is, a total of ten new towns per year. This certainly created an intellectual ferment and a practical framework favourable to putting new know-how to good use.

## GLOBAL NETWORKS AND A NEW PRACTICE MADE POSSIBLE: THE BIRTH OF A "SOPHISTICATED MANNER"

We can follow trajectories of expertise and knowledge as that of a pre-eminent figure of the Garden City Association in the United Kingdom, Thomas Adams [1871-1940], who founded the Town Planning Institute of Canada in 1919 and, five years later the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute of Canada*, where incidentally the project of Arvida was announced in 1925 as the "opportunity



FIG. 11. HOUSING UNITS IN MARYSVILLE. | LUC NOPPEN.



FIG. 12. AERIAL VIEW OF KAPUSKASING IN 1945, TAKEN AND ANNOTATED BY ARCHITECT RODOLPHE LAJOIE AS PART OF A SURVEY OF HOUSING IN CANADIAN INDUSTRIAL SETTLEMENTS. | RIO TINTO.

to create . . . the first garden city of Canada," a project, as was written, that was making "the heart of every town planner leap."<sup>13</sup> So would the Canadian expertise in town planning grow through transmission from site to site and from professional to professional. One town planner could come, or bring ideas from Norway, at the company's request, and the succeeding town planner could integrate these ideas and emancipate them in the Canadian context, thus becoming a specialist in company town planning, as Ernest Isbel Barott for example, who, as it is less known, dedicated an important part of his career to company towns, thanks to the constant needs and the networks of enterprises asking for his work.

In this context and given the chronology, references to the "garden city" or the "city beautiful," which generally appear in studies of planned industrial estates, seem inadequate to describe the quests and results of this rapidly growing town-planning profession, in its way much closer to Riverside (Illinois, Vaux and Olmsted, 1869) than Letchworth

Garden City (England, 1901). Of course, one could always identify this or that scheme of the "city beautiful" classicism (or its monumentality) or associate the greenbelts and other picturesque uses of vegetation with the (still very undefined) "garden city." But what could nowadays be understood as stylistic references, as in the "first garden city of Canada," remained much less widespread than the language used in manuals and specialized treatises written in ever-greater numbers in North America in the aftermath of the First World War. The resurgence of the architectural formulas of the English Domestic Revival, made popular by Raymond Unwin and transmitted using the term "garden city," thus serves more as a reminder of the global networks of ideas and models of a profession taking its distance from style exercises than as an illustration of a formal context that had dissipated before the 1920s. The skilled employees' homes in Powell River certainly bring to mind those of Port-Alfred (Quebec, 1916), but also, in the same vein, those of Notodden (Norway, 1906) and of Témiscaming (Quebec, 1919) (figs. 13,

14, 15). Likewise, it is much more than a dated stylistic trend, a global network phenomenon and its landing made possible in Canada that explain how a quadruplex from Massena (NY) published in 1907 in a town planning journal could be recognized in 1914, hundreds of kilometres to the South, in Badin (fig. 16), and then in 1925 in Corner Brook (fig. 17), thousands of kilometres to the North, or how the duplexes of Corner Brook, Newfoundland (fig. 18), can be traced back to Val-Jalbert, Quebec (fig. 19), and to Glace Bay, Nova Scotia (fig. 20), where they are called "gothic houses."

In strict terms of urban planning, this phenomenon can be contemplated, for example, in the circulating idea of separating pedestrian and car traffic while assimilating the inhabited lots as a global park. This idea is explicitly described in Tony Garnier's *Cité Industrielle*, published in France in 1917, where we can read that:

[T]he built area must always be less than half the total surface area, the rest of the lot becoming a public garden for pedestrians;



FIG. 13. "MANAGER'S ROW" IN POWELL RIVER. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

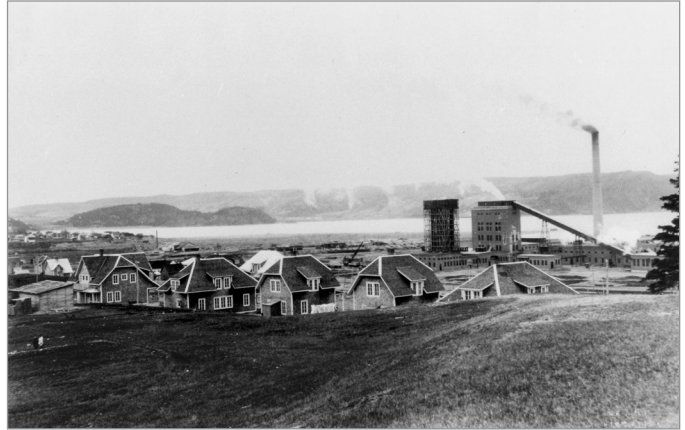


FIG. 14. HOUSES FOR MANAGERS AND EXECUTIVES IN PORT-ALFRED. | PRIVATE COLLECTION.



FIG. 15. HOUSES IN TÉMISCAMING. | MCCORD MUSEUM.

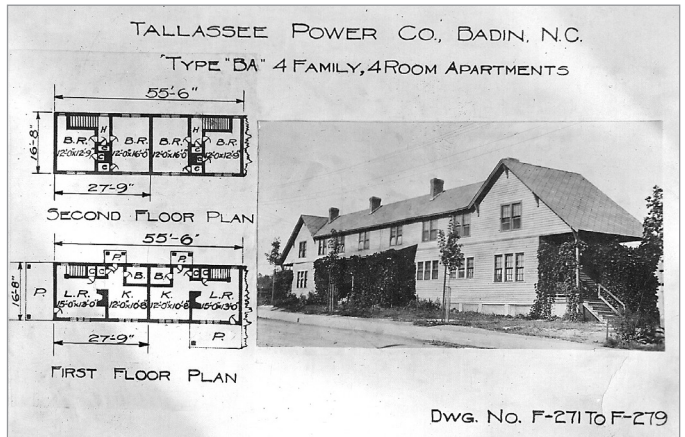


FIG. 16. CARD INDEX IN THE COMPANY'S FILES FOR THE QUADRUPLEX IN BADIN (NC). | BADIN HISTORY MUSEUM.



FIG. 17. QUADRUPLEX IN CORNER BROOK. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.



FIG. 18. DUPLEX IN CORNER BROOK. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.





FIG. 19. DUPLEX IN VAL-JALBERT. | LUC NOPPEN.



FIG. 20. DUPLEXES IN GLACE BAY. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.



FIG. 21. PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS BETWEEN LOTS IN KITIMAT. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

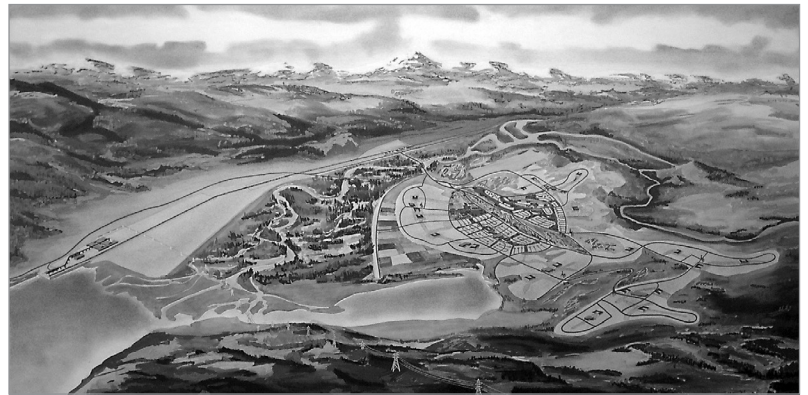


FIG. 22. ANONYMOUS ARTIST, RENDERING OF KITIMAT'S TOWN PLAN, 1950S. | KITIMAT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES.

that is, each building must leave on the unbuilt part of its lot an unimpeded passage from the street to the building situated at the back. This arrangement allows circulation through town in any directions independent of the streets which one no longer needs follow; the land of the town as a whole is like a large park, with no enclosing walls to limit the ground<sup>14</sup>.

In a previous issue of *Architecture Canada*, I have brought up a few hypotheses to explain how this came to Badin in North Carolina, where can be observed, in the built town or the very large lots that enable this, these pedestrian passages going through the lots, independently

of the main car lanes.<sup>15</sup> But in the history of Canadian company towns, it should also be noted that these can be found in Gander, Nova Scotia, and in Kitimat, British Columbia (fig. 21), designed in 1954 by town planner Clarence Stein (who had previously, as is well known, become famous with Radburn, New Jersey, and its traffic separation system) (fig. 22). In any case, the resulting "free standing" figure of houses in a park does seem to characterize many company towns in Canada, where fences were forbidden, at least for a time, even between private properties and to the exact contrary of their American counterparts. This probably also has something to do with tenure, which,

as we will see, became quite specific in Canadian company towns.

The documents from that period serve as a particular reminder of the growing Canadian and American expertise in town planning per se, besides initial influence of the British: they include contour plans, neighbourhood centres, park systems, zoning and rapid transit, for example, as discussed by Frederick Law Olmsted, John Nolen, Morris Knowles, Alexander Walker, and other specialists. This is how the reference universe of Canadian company towns became increasingly less British and more Pan-American, and then, eventually, more Canadian. Obviously,





FIG. 25. HOUSES DIVIDED IN TWO SINGLE-STOREY APARTMENTS BY THE BUILDER IN POWELL RIVER. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

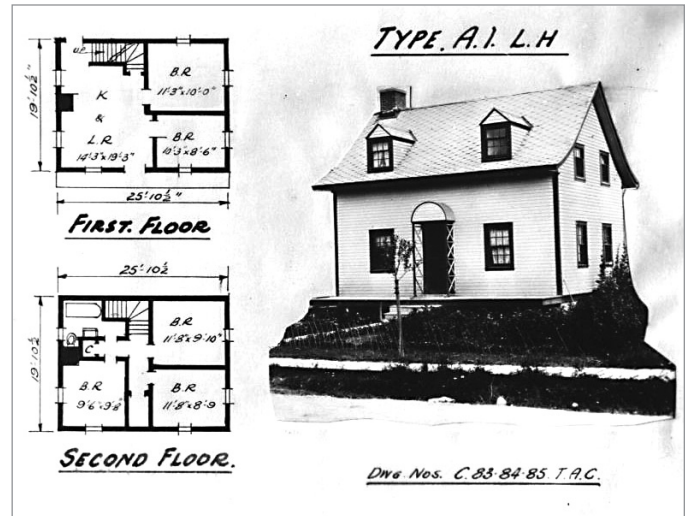


FIG. 26. CARD INDEX IN THE COMPANY'S FILES FOR THE A1 TYPE HOUSE IN ARVIDA: THE ORIGINAL PLANS SHOW THAT THE DIVISION WALL BETWEEN THE KITCHEN AND LIVING ROOM HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A BEAM TO MAKE WAY FOR A "FAMILY ROOM." | SAGUENAY.

of extreme climates, like those that inspired—however belatedly—the so-called Fermont Wall (Quebec, 1972), the desire to attract, maintain, and stabilize the workforce by targeting families, rather than single workers, favoured the choice of this Anglo-Saxon type of housing: a home on a plot of land in a mono-functional residential area, like the homes found in Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, and therefore much less like the housing found in Tomáš Bata's Zlín (Czech Republic). In Powell River, the only apartment building was erected downtown in 1916 (fig. 24), close to businesses and the plant; in Arvida, the only model of an apartment building was consigned to oblivion after one such structure was built in 1927, even though this was meant to be the most luxurious housing in town. The not-so-good state of preservation of this building, very unusual for Arvida, testifies to its low degree of appropriation in its urban environment. In fact, it was not until the end of the Second World War that rapid population growth occurred, and given specific zoning, that this type of housing was built in a particular sector of the town.

Freed from pre-existing local habits and other precedents, this type of housing does not illustrate the slow progression from one typology to another, as would be the case in "standard" cities and suburbs. This radical appearance of modernity disseminated in Canada a type of housing that would not come into general use until after the Second World War in speculative large-scale housing developments such as the Levittowns. It is rather in the opposite manner, by meeting more archaic needs and for more archaic purposes, that, in Powell River and Arvida, the modern home was adapted for roomers, tenants brought in by a family who reserved a room for them. The builder went so far as to subdivide certain Powell River homes into two apartments, one on top of the other (fig. 25). In addition, in one hundred or so houses in Arvida given a certain inclination toward the vernacular characterizing the company town, the dining room and kitchen formed a single family room, as could be found in the oldest houses in French Canada (fig. 26). Starting in the 1920s, this thrust toward the vernacular can increasingly be found also in the aesthetics of the houses, even the entire town,

as though an attempt was being made, despite its modernity, to enlist the company town in a historicity in whose lineage the industry, symbolized by aluminum in the case of Arvida (fig. 27) and by brick in the case of Clayburn, British Columbia (1905) (fig. 28), represented the culmination. In Bourlamaque, Quebec (1934), for example, the houses were adorned with logs to reflect the forestry history of the host region of this mining town (fig. 29).

The hotels built by the companies to accommodate various employees and visitors, heirs of the architectural eccentricities of their reference typology, furthermore display an impressive range of regional-style architecture; those of Powell River and Arvida can be included here, as can the hotels of Grand-Mère, Quebec (1888), Iroquois Falls (1916) (fig. 30) and Kapuskasing (1928), both in Ontario, and Baie-Comeau, Quebec (1937) (fig. 31), to give just a few other examples.

To create both this historicity, made of picturesque, of non-standardized forms and various references to tradition, and to do this even more in landscapes made of



FIG. 27. ALUMINUM CLADDED HOUSE TYPE M13 IN ARVIDA. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.



FIG. 28. BRICK HOUSES IN CLAYBURN. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.



FIG. 29. LOG HOUSES IN BOURLAMAQUE. | TOURISME VAL D'OR.



FIG. 30. IROQUOIS HOTEL IN IROQUOIS FALLS; PICTURE TAKEN BY RODOLPHE LAJOIE IN 1945. | RIO TINTO.

single-family homes, companies needed to reinvent ways of building, at a time when ready-made houses and other kit houses were making a very timid appearance in America.

The spread of the suburban-single-family home landscape, with an identity as we might say, was propelled by typically American building conditions, in particular timber-frame construction, which reduced costs and building time, at the same time as it allowed a variety of architectural shapes thanks to the permutation of ornamental components. Many

company towns endowed with a picturesque figure and an identity-making project were made possible by such a system. It is the case in Arvida, also in Devon, Alberta (1949) (fig. 32), to provide another example: the principle here is to pre-cut the home components on a given site, and once the components are distributed according to the landscape variations of the models, to simply build every house using “a hammer and nails.”

From a company town to another company town, the suburban single-family home thus became firmly established

during the inter-war period in the built and imagined landscapes of Canada. The first government interventions in the field of housing, and all those that followed, were directly influenced by this phenomenon; thus, when the crown corporation Wartime Housing Limited built whole neighbourhoods to house war-effort workers, they naturally chose small single-family dwellings, which in addition have been exported in every corner of Europe during the reconstruction following World War II. And later—at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s—when the government of Canada undeniably



FIG. 31. BAIE-COMEAU INN. | HOTEL MANOIR LE BAIE-COMEAU.



FIG. 32. AERIAL VIEW OF DEVON IN THE 1940S. | PRIVATE COLLECTION.

entered the field of housing and low-income family housing and took over what had, until then, been the realm of company towns, it did so by creating and publishing catalogs of exclusively single-family house models. These catalogs published by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, called “Small Houses Models,” would, in turn, support the very Canadian figure of the “developer,” building developments plot by plot, financing each new house with the sale of the one built before and, of course, varying the owner’s choice with a wide range of models. Nothing resembled these first suburbs that surrounded the older urban centres during the thirty post-World War Two boom more than the houses of the Canadian company town.

### THE EGALITARIAN COMPANY TOWN: A GLIMPSE AT THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY UTOPIA LEXICON

Paradoxically, the Canadian company town also prefigures the social homogeneity characteristic of American suburbs, or at least the homogeneity of a middle class with the same means and same possessions. A notable exception must be made here for the diversity of the

ethnic origins of Canadian company town inhabitants, a phenomenon that is furthermore partially responsible for the disappearance, in their midst, of the typical segregation found in them. All over the Western world, company towns, particularly the oldest ones, are in fact known for having propagated, within the resident company and the industry in general, a class distinction imbued with a labour hierarchy. In Quebec, during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the heads of companies most often came from the English-speaking minority, a phenomenon that engendered a number of what were known as “*Quartiers des Anglais*” (English Neighbourhoods), exclusive areas in company towns: this can be said of the “Manager’s Row” or of “Balkan Village” in Powell River (fig. 33), which, it is important to note, was temporary housing meant to last only until the end of the town construction phase. It was replaced in 1929 with an area built for workers waiting for a larger house in the town itself, as well as for workers of European origin; it would seem, according to certain oral sources, that several qualified employees moved more easily from this adjacent neighbourhood to townsite<sup>17</sup> homes.

Nevertheless, the structural factors that made them towns, rather than urban extensions, and that motivated their modernity, smoothed over relatively quickly the historical factors that buttressed this segregation. The idealism of certain industry bosses is a likely factor in this regard, as is the ethnic diversity fuelled by the settling of Canada itself, where earlier settlement in the country rarely led to the status of “native,” favouring a group at the expense of another. The racial segregation distinguishing “Black villages” from “White villages” in the southern United States company towns, for example, or the “racial engineering” of Fordlandia, Brazil, did not come about in the same manner—nor over the same length of time—in Canadian company towns.

In Arvida, where, starting before the Second World War, individuals of forty or so different nationalities could be found, in 1926 some twenty houses were reserved by the company for engineers and members of management stationed there on a temporary basis. The other Arvidians, that is, Americans and French-Canadians, Poles and Italians, for example, grouped themselves freely based on their religious practices, either near the Roman Catholic

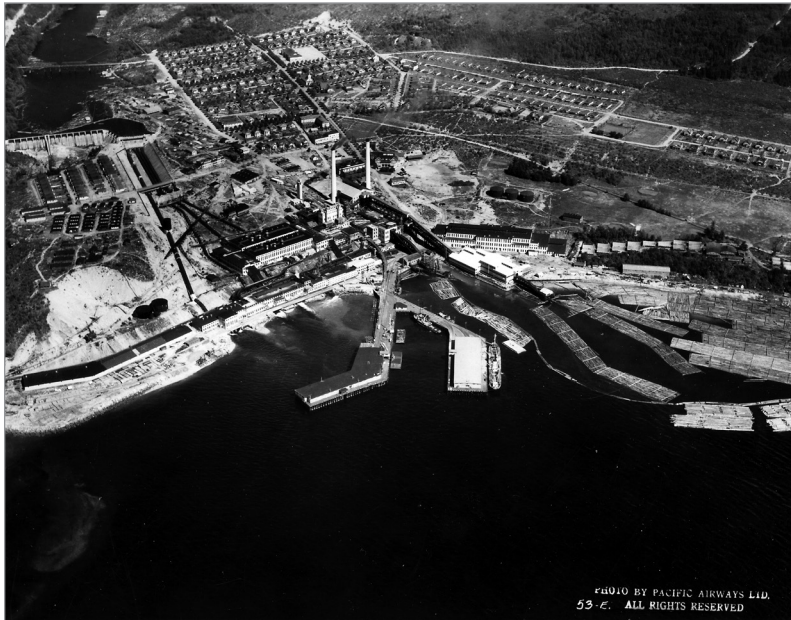


FIG. 33. BALKAN VILLAGE IN POWELL RIVER. | POWELL RIVER MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES.

church or around the Protestant church. None of the houses that they lived in, located on any of the town's streets, provided any external clues as to their social status. There was no "Quartier des Anglais" in Arvida.

It must be said that changes within the industry itself blurred levels of hierarchy: the resource town was often located hundreds of kilometres away from the company's headquarters, especially from those of the multinationals, whose executives did not live in the company town. As for everyone else in the company, the distinction between the value of a qualified employee and that of a worker became progressively less clear, especially since the company town also housed barbers, gardeners, bankers, firefighters, and other merchants with no employment ties to the company. The high degree of specialization needed for certain workers' jobs and the resulting costs of this work were also among the factors inciting companies to provide better living and

housing conditions for all their workers; this was true in Arvida regarding the job of pot-man, a worker with a socially reified position who in addition was treated as some kind of magician builder whose art was transmitted from generation to generation within a given family.

To these ingredients that served to level Canadian company town social structures, must be added a non-negligible element of the urban economy, directly linked with the utopian quest pursued by the industry bosses, which translated into so many of these towns being called "model something," and including even an example of a union-built town, Port Union (Newfoundland). Such a desire to create a society led companies to prefer long-term tenures for the houses they offered to their workers. As such, the typical Canadian company discarded the guiding principle of paternalist design, that is, rental housing held by the "boss," and instead sold houses, and that, incidentally, well before government programs facilitated access to

property. Several of them, for instance in Powell River, did so in the mid-1950s, generally by implementing innovative financial conditions. While creating Kitimat, British Columbia (1955), the company devised a double mortgage system, having recourse in part to a government program enabling workers to acquire company-built homes (fig. 34); in Flin Flon, Manitoba (1929), the company systematically sold off its housing stock and, after World War Two, it even built a set of houses and sold them to veterans at cost price.<sup>18</sup> In Arvida, as of 1926, the company established a "credit-lease" system designed to enable Arvidians to purchase their homes by staggering the required payments, based on the cost price, according to the owner's capacity to pay. It must be mentioned that the company had previously and unsuccessfully tested fixed-term mortgages in the company town of Alcoa, in the United States.

These "homeowner towns," like future American suburbs, significantly modified the company's range of action; at least

**ALUMINUM COMPANY OF CANADA, LIMITED**  
**1955 PLAN OF ASSISTED HOUSE PURCHASE**  
**How Company Employees Can Acquire Homes in Kitimat During 1955**

Kitimat has been established as a District Municipality with a municipal council elected to transact its business. The Aluminum Company of Canada, Limited feels that Kitimat should not be a "company town" but a normal self-governing community. With this in view, Alcan decided against building a group of houses for rent to the employees engaged in the new plant. Instead, the Company is assisting employees to buy or build their own homes.

During 1955 additional houses will be built to a variety of standard and well-tried designs. These houses will be offered for sale to employees under the scheme outlined in this pamphlet. They will include single, semi-detached and some row houses. For the purpose of this pamphlet the term "house" may refer to one unit of any of the three types.

The cost of housing at Kitimat at present is high as compared with costs in some established cities in British Columbia. To offset the higher costs, Alcan has continued, for 1955, a plan which will bring the purchase or building of a house within the means of an employee. It also provides that an employee who buys or builds a house under the plan, and later wishes to sell, will have the right to require Alcan to repurchase the house under certain conditions.

Because Kitimat is being developed as a planned community governed by municipal regulations, it has been possible to make arrangements with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation for first mortgage financing for houses meeting their specifications with the minimum down payment and easy monthly payments common to purchases made under their current regulations.

Over and above this arrangement to finance by a first mortgage through Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Alcan plans to assist its employees in the buying or building of a house by—

(a) Making second mortgage loans available on houses of an approved price or value up to \$16,000 at the same rate of interest as the first mortgage, so that the total loan procurable on a home will be up to 95% of the price approved by Alcan. This will leave a sum of 5% of the approved price as the required down payment.

(b) If, at any time during the first ten years, the employee vacates the premises in good repair and provided he is not in default on any taxes or payments on mortgages or other charges on the title of the house, Alcan will, at the request of the employee made not later than thirty days after vacating

**Repurchase—Table III**

(1) Approved Price	\$ 14,000.00
(2) Reduction as per DEPRECIATION TABLE: 3 Yr. — 60 x 14 = 840 6 mo. — 2 x 6 x 14 = 168	1,008.00
Gross Repurchase Price	\$ 12,992.00
(3) Less outstanding principal still due on 1st Mortgage—10,000 x 922/1000=9226	
Less outstanding principal still due on 2nd Mortgage—3300 x 704/1000=2325	11,551.00
Net cash due to owner	\$ 1,441.00

**Table for Calculating Outstanding Principal and Principal Paid Off per \$1000 of Mortgage Loan (Figures calculated to the nearest cent)**

	1st MORTGAGE 25 Yr. @ 5%		2nd MORTGAGE 10 Yr. @ 5%	
	Principal Outstanding	Paid Off	Principal Outstanding	Paid Off
6 Mo.	909.74	10.26	960.85	39.15
1 Yr.	979.23	20.77	920.73	79.27
1 Yr. 6 Mo.	968.45	31.55	879.60	120.40
2 Yr.	957.40	42.60	837.44	162.56
2 Yr. 6 Mo.	946.08	53.92	794.23	205.77
3 Yr.	934.47	65.53	749.94	250.06
3 Yr. 6 Mo.	922.58	77.42	704.54	295.46
4 Yr.	910.38	89.62	658.01	341.99
4 Yr. 6 Mo.	897.89	102.11	610.31	389.69
5 Yr.	885.08	114.92	561.42	438.58
5 Yr. 6 Mo.	871.94	128.06	511.31	488.69
6 Yr.	858.48	141.52	459.94	540.06
6 Yr. 6 Mo.	844.69	155.31	407.30	592.70
7 Yr.	830.55	169.45	353.53	646.67
7 Yr. 6 Mo.	816.05	183.95	298.62	701.98
8 Yr.	810.20	189.80	241.32	758.68
8 Yr. 6 Mo.	785.97	214.03	183.21	816.79
9 Yr.	770.36	229.64	123.64	876.36
9 Yr. 6 Mo.	754.36	245.64	62.58	937.42
10 Yr.	737.96	262.04	—	1,000.00

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FIG. 34. ALCAN HOUSING PLAN OF 1955. | KITIMAT MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES.

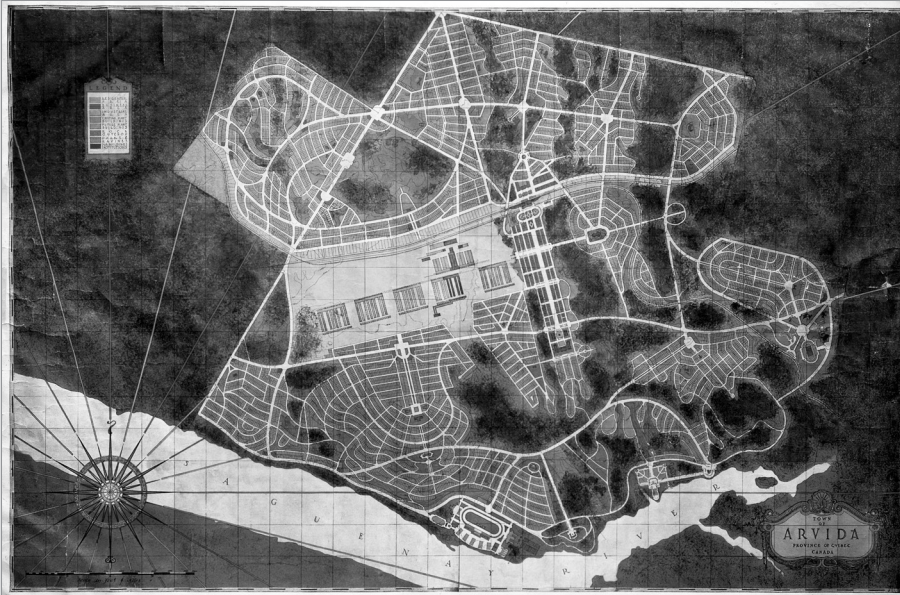


FIG. 35. PLAN FOR ARVIDA, 1926. | SAGUENAY.



FIG. 36. HOUSE LABELED AS "PROTECTED HERITAGE SITE" IN ABANDONED IOCO, IN 2015. | LUCIE K. MORISSET.

in certain cases, they became levers for a diversification of capitalization. Some of them became precursors of suburbs to the extent that they ushered in the principles of speculative subdivisions that subsequently became the rule, weighing, however, the gain from property sales against the social stability created and the value of the entire territory invested by the company town, all guarantees of future industrial activity.

In so doing, and this is one major contribution of Canadian company towns to the twentieth century, they resolutely overturned the traditional representation of the town as a configuration of power. To realize this, one only needs to compare the chromolithography of Arvida's town plan (fig. 35), published in the 1920s and composed of thousands of similar-looking residential lots, with any town image published between the fifteenth and the nineteenth century, dominated by castles, churches, or other singular figures of power.

### THE END—OR THE BEGINNING—OF AN ERA?

If understanding tenure enables a better grasp of certain characteristics of Canada's company towns, doing so, in the current context of deindustrialization, also provides insights into their destinies. For example, Ioco, British Columbia (1922), once a pleasant town in which to live, became a desirable speculative project after it was bought out by developers (fig. 36). This example raises the question of heritage and its transmission, an issue that is caught between the welfare of workers of bygone days and a collective legacy of social utopia.

As some other resource company towns in the world (from Brazil and Chile to Australia), but contrary to industrial villages and enclaves built or amalgamated in larger cities, Canada's company towns have a noteworthy advantage when it comes to heritage designation: as finished wholes, they easily fit into the monument

conception that still dominates the history of Western world heritage. They also offer a palpable experience on the ground made possible by the special features that are reflected through their quest for belonging and identity. It may be worth underlining at this point that Canada's company towns came into existence around the same time as these conceptions of heritage appeared. To the extent that these company towns now seem predestined to change, will the destiny of some contribute to what others effectively will become?

Certain towns that remained company property were destroyed after the closing of the plant, and they joined the somewhat swollen ranks of America's "ghost towns": some of the better-known examples include Gagnon, Quebec (1960), and Kemano, British Columbia (1954). Some were slowly appropriated to various degrees by inhabitants often left with a house but no work, and who did not always have the possibility or the desire to



FIG. 37. "HALF DUPLEX" AFTER DEMOLITION OF ITS OTHER HALF IN GLACE BAY. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.



FIG. 38. CAPE BRETON MINER'S MUSEUM. | MARIANNE CHARLAND.

belong to the former town and to continue history. It has been especially the case in mining communities decimated by successive economic crises (abandonment or demolition seems to be a characteristic of some mining companies' relationship with the territory), as in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, where many "half duplexes" standing with their other half lost to some unwilling or gone former dweller can be seen (fig. 37). Some company towns, despite being stripped of the old industrial structures that explained their existence, such as Clayburn, British Columbia (1905), became upscale little villages after they were carefully restored, but with few memories of their industrial past. Others were restored to serve their own historical interpretation; this is the case in Val-Jalbert, Quebec (1901), Cannery Village, British Columbia (1889), or Port Edward, also in British Columbia (1888), which indeed testify to the local attachment to these kinds of settlements. Some have even been partly reconstructed after having been lost, to interpret ways of living, for instance at the Cape Breton Miners Museum, in Glace Bay (fig. 38).

In all these cases, the towns have experienced major structural changes, even when a plant is still in operation. Their

inhabitants no longer share a common past or destiny. Towns that lose their main industry in today's world can teach us a great deal about urban economics. It is impossible to expect the town to be reinvented without also reinventing its society. Given that the financial and social success of Canadian company towns has been made possible by property ownership and valuation mechanisms, it is conceivable that former resource towns could, thanks to their real estate, become their own source of revenue. They could also become a collective embodiment of a sense of heritage. Could this be a sustainable solution?

Some initiatives coming from outside of the heritage field *per se* have targeted a sustainable effect on both the society and its built environment. In Glace Bay, a former miner's home was bought by a university professor and renovated in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, in accordance with sustainable development principles, to house a low-income family. And although this example might show to some that sustainable development is not always compatible with heritage as others traditionally see it, the house was subsequently designated by the municipality.

In this context, the proactive urbanity of Canadian company towns, which is at the forefront of the nostalgic discourse of the workers/residents of these towns—with the notable exception, as I mentioned previously, of some mining settlements—may inspire a broadening of heritage practices. The memories are shaped by a sense of belonging and pride, which, it must be noted, sheds light on a depiction of company towns that is quite different from the miserable rendering put forward by some authors. But this does not mean that traditional patrimonial visions are adapted to the task of preserving and transmitting this heritage, even though they do seem adapted to encompass at least their "monumental" urban form.

Some Canadian company towns are in fact "protected" under various historical monument statuses: Marysville, Powell River, and Arvida by the Federal government; Val-Jalbert by the provincial government; and Arvida, to state it again, by the municipality. But examples such as Ioco, British Columbia, remind us that heritage designations do not serve much purpose in, and of themselves. The commemorative practice that consists in putting a plaque on a building seems poorly adapted to the nature of



company towns. Indeed, the plants and machines that entered the corpus of industrial heritage in this commemorative manner were able to accommodate the univocal and high-minded principle of classification ordered by the State as a safeguarding measure. However, it is nearly impossible for whole areas that include hundreds of private properties, parks, schools, and other businesses to benefit in any way from institutional recognition along those lines; additionally, it does become difficult to think in that manner of whole areas that include hundreds of private properties, parks, schools, and other businesses; it is practically unrealistic to wish that such institutional recognition will protect the society that makes these living structures ongoing memories, and totally unfeasible to hope that they will sustain the preservation of the core relationship between the company town and the social utopia it used to foster. In that line of thought, we can observe that major reinvestments in a heritage site as Val-Jalbert barely seem to maintain its necessary income, which is now, in this case, supplemented by a new exploitation of the falls with a power plant designed as a real monument. Val-Jalbert and other company towns are also victims of the disappearance of common historical references in this “Age of discontinuity”: less and less potential visitors have the slightest idea of what these machines are, what these buildings are, and whom or what they were intended for.

These considerations highlight the importance to preserve the memories, but also to rethink a heritage such as company towns in tomorrow’s society. In that line of thought, company towns, and Canadian ones in particular, invite us to reflect together on what it means to “create a city” and to “create a society,” in order to see heritage less in terms of

an institutional monument and more as a community reality. To this end, one could, for example, convert the company town utopia into an urban heritage utopia by emphasizing the principles of participation and common drive that were the essence of company towns. Instead of being industry producers, the residents of company towns could collectively become heritage creators.

A lot of material exists that we already know of or are just discovering: as the hundreds of photographs taken by renowned artists who portrayed their growth, company towns leave to history thousands of magnificent planning documents that are just waiting to tell some story and the pride of the companies and the communities who left them. Powell River, Arvida, and Grand Falls are just a few of them. Some other material is still less exploited, although it probably should be, especially since it can nurture the patrimonial shift in society-making and heritage-making that company towns seem to be waiting for. It is the case of the memories previously mentioned, be they of the hard work in mines or of the beloved hometowns: projects have indeed appeared here and there to collect these. A growing number are also using them in innovative manners, for example the initiatives launched by the Sir William Ford Coaker Historical Foundation in Port Union, Newfoundland and Labrador, as seen with Habitat for Humanity in Glace Bay, and as promoted by the Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River, where old windows, doors, and other architectural elements were salvaged for use by residents in their home renovations, or as in an elderly home in Arvida, where the recollection of memories and thus the connection to history support a narrative on the value of the elderly, based on information that can be share instead of the outdated paradigm of the production

of goods. Such use of memory does in fact introduce a shift in the way people relate to heritage, making them producers of heritage instead of just end-users.

This new role, supported by company towns as bearers of an “urban heritage utopia,” of course presupposes that heritage institutions would give residents this type of preferential role when it comes to being repositories of the town’s narratives and values. In this manner, could company towns—Canadian ones at the very least—teach us how to live in the twenty-first century? In any case, we must now renew our knowledge once again for the sake of their future.

## NOTES

1. This production of this article was aided by the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Many people were seminal in the research that lead to this article. Amongst them, Marianne Charland, Samuel Mathieu, Mario Parent, and Jessica Mace, young scholars at the Canada Research Chair in Urban Heritage; and Luc Noppen, Director of Partnerships at the Canada Research Chair in Urban Heritage; Teedie Kagume and Bert Finnamore, from the Powell River Historical Museum and Archives; Linda Nailer and Ann Nelson, from the Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River; Louise Avery, from the Kitimat Museum and Archives; Ilke Ibrahim, from the Glace Bay Heritage Museum; Mary Pat Mombourquette, from the Cape Breton Miners Museum; Adriana MacLean and Anne Porquet, from the New Waterford and District Historical Society; Courtney MacIsaac, from the St. Patrick’s Church Museum of Sydney; Theresa Gillis, from the Dominion Heritage Committee; Cathy MacIntyre, from Cape Breton Regional Municipality; Marie-Hélène Parenteau, from Cabot Links; Jane Arnold and Anna MacNeil, from the Beaton Institute; Eleanor L. Anderson, from Cape Breton University; George French, from the Corner Brook Museum and Archives; Gail Goudie, Office Administrator, Baie Verte Peninsula Economic Development Association; Margaret Collins, from The Way We Were Museum; Gary Nofle and Renée Harris, from the James Hornell Boys and Girls Club; Hilda Bennett

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A previous version of this article was presented in French at the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) Conference, Lille (France), in 2015.

2. Green, Hardy, 2010, *Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy*, New York, Basic Books.
3. My translation, interview conducted in May 2013.
4. My observations here result from extensive research undertaken in the last few years (the work in question is entitled “Identity on the Land: Company Towns in Canada”), thanks to funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
5. Garner, John S. (ed.), 1992, *The Company Town. Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press.
6. A bit different from company towns *per se*, as Kapuskasing results from successive settlements, one of them being that of the Spruce Falls Ltd. in the 1920s.
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8. Tepperman, Lorne, 1971, “Introduction,” in Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Raitown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry*, Don Mills, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. xii-xvi.
9. See Morisset, Lucie K., 2014, “Housing for the Magic Metal City: The Genesis of an Ideal Home,” *Architecture Canada*, vol. 39, no. 1, p. 3-34.
10. This could probably be related to the period of their construction, which entails companies and modes of production different from those that characterized nineteenth-century paternalism *per se*.
11. Van Nus, Walter, 1975, “The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893-1930,” *Communications historiques*, vol. 10, no. 1, p. 191-210.
12. John W. Reps (1992, *The Making of Urban America: A History of Planning in the United States*, New York, Princeton University Press) writes that “town planning by American industry generally failed to produce communities significantly different or better . . . Company towns in this country added little to our knowledge of how communities should be planned.”
13. “A Garden City for Canada—Perhaps,” *The Journal of the Town Planning Institute of Canada*, vol. IV, no. 4, 1925, p. 4.
14. Quoted in Riccardo Mariani’s edition of *Une Cité Industrielle* [Ellis, translator], 1990, New York, Rizzoli International Publications, n.p.
15. Morisset, Lucie K., 2011, “Non-fiction Utopia. Arvida, Cité Industrielle Made Real,” *Architecture Canada*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 3-38.
16. See Van Nus, *op. cit.*
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18. Robson, Robert Stewart, 1980, *Flin Flon: A Single-enterprise Community*, Master’s thesis, Faculty of Arts – History, University of Manitoba.