

## ERIC ARTHUR'S RECORDING OF THE EARLY BUILDINGS OF ONTARIO

> STEPHEN A. OTTO

STEPHEN A. OTTO was the founding head of Ontario's heritage conservation programs in the late 1970s where, among other things, he inaugurated the architectural conservation provisions of *The Ontario Heritage Act*, persuaded Eric Horwood to make his splendid gift of over thirty thousand drawings to the Archives of Ontario, corralled Spadina House into the joint public ownership of the City of Toronto and the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and ensured the preservation of the Middlesex Courthouse in downtown London, Ontario. He undertook the first major revision in 1986 of Eric Arthur's classic work *Toronto: No Mean City*. In the mid-1990s, he was a founder of The Friends of Fort York and served subsequently as the organization's chair and as managing editor of its *Fife and Drum* newsletter.

In any history of architectural conservation in Ontario, the years from 1926 to 1938 are seminal. They are when Eric Ross Arthur, newly appointed assistant professor in the Department of Architecture at the University of Toronto, deployed his considerable talents to bring Ontario's early architecture to public notice, and to give it some modest protection. He wrote widely about it, had his students make measured drawings of worthy examples, photographed with assistance several hundred fine buildings and their details, lectured on them to his students and others, and was a moving force behind the organization of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Like an overactive waterbug, he moved among these numerous initiatives and was an essential force to them all.

In looking for Arthur's reasons for doing so there is no need to go beyond his introduction to *Small Houses of the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Ontario* (c. 1926), one of his first writings about his newly found passion. Considering the strides that had been made in appreciating the early architecture of the United States, Quebec, and England, he called attention to Ontario's blindness to its more modest but equally worthy patrimony:

[H]ere in Ontario, the best work possesses nothing but a quiet charm and dignity which make no striking appeal to the owner or the general public. Yet small houses and churches are to be found quite as fine as any on this continent, in fact, some are as good as the best work of the Georgian period when, in domestic architecture, the

**BUILDINGS ALREADY PHOTOGRAPHED OR MEASURED**

The buildings listed below are ones which have been inspected, photographed, or measured. It is not suggested that this is a complete list as many good houses which we have not seen must still stand on country lanes. On the other hand, many of the houses shown may have been destroyed or so altered as to be unrecognizable as old houses. The list has been made over a period of twelve years and could not be kept up to date without a personal inspection which, for obvious reasons, would be a long and expensive undertaking.

To simplify identification, the buildings are listed from the west of the Province to the east. It should, therefore, be possible for a person in Kingston, for instance, to identify the houses east and west of Kingston itself. I should be most grateful for descriptions, especially with snapshots, of houses or other buildings which are not listed here. These should be sent to me at the School of Architecture, the University of Toronto.

E. R. ARTHUR

St. Raphael —Church, stone (Roman Catholic).	Williamstown —House, stucco (Robertson, D. M.). —House, frame (Robertson, K.). —House, frame (corner near Presbyterian Church). —Bridge, wood (covered). —Parish Hall, stucco (St. Columba's Roman Catholic). —House, stucco (Robertson, Highway No. 2). —House, stucco (Campbell, Highway No. 2).	Corwall —House, stone (Marshall). —Cottages, attached, brick (on side street). —House, frame (with tripartite), Highway No. 2. —House, brick (Chrysler Farm).	Cardinal —Cottage, stone (Tablet over door, 1820, Highway No. 2).	Orawa —25 Sparta Street.	Prescott —Fort Wellington, stone. —Hotel, stone (Queens). —House, stucco (Peck). —House, frame (Kingston). —House, stone (Jenny). —House and tower, stone (Walters). —House and smithy, stone. —House, stone (Poplar Hall). —House, stone (Maplehurst). —House, stone (Blackie).	Maitland —Club House, stone (Brookville Club). —House, brick (9, Pine Street). —House, stucco (Moigan). —House, stone (Lawrence Hill). —House, stone (Burnside).	Merriekville —Block house, stone. —House, stone (O'Doherty, Burritt's Rapids Road).	Burritt's Rapids —Hotel, frame. —Shops, frame.	Perth —House, stone (Marlinton). —Hall, brick (St. John's). —House, stone (Lawrence). —Houses, attached, stone (26-28, Foster Street). —Mill, stone. —Cottage, stone (Scotch Line).	Goswainque —Town Hall, brick.	Kingston —City Hall, stone. —Cathedral, stone (St. George's, Anglican). —Fors House, stone. —Court House, stone. —House, stone (Albington). —House, stone (Cartwright). —Manse, stone (St. Andrew's, Presbyterian). —House, stucco (Glover). —House, stone (McMichael Farm, Highway No. 2).	Cataragus —Town Hall, stone.	Hav Ray —Church, frame (Methodist).	Bath —Town Hall, stucco.	Belleville —House, frame (Foster). —House, stucco (199, James Street).	Blomfield —Hotel, frame.	Picton —Court House, stone. —Chapel, frame (1809). —House, stucco (Healey).	Demorestville —Houses, frame (Main Street). —House, frame (Cryost). —Houses, frame (Andrews). —House, stucco (opposite school).	Cathorne —House, frame (Perquont).	Brighton —House, brick (Butler). —House, frame (Highway No. 2 and Paradise Road).	Grafton —Hotel, frame (Mansion House). —Cottage, frame (Cartwright, Highway No. 2).	Cobourg —House, frame (Barnum, Highway No. 2). —Spencer House. —College, stone (Old Victoria). —House, stucco (Cameron). —Lindis House, brick Street.	Peterborough —House, stone (Blue Stone). —House, brick (Main Street, north). —Terrace, brick (Barrers'). —Veranda, cast iron (Smith).	(Near)—Bechtel Farm.	Bellevue —Houses, frame (Oke).	Wellesley —Hotel, brick (Marah, Highway No. 2).	Bowmanville —Shop, brick (Canadian Radiant Co.).	Newcastle —House, frame (Schoell).
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FIG. 1. "BUILDINGS ALREADY PHOTOGRAPHED OR MEASURED." | ERIC ARTHUR, EARLY BUILDINGS OF ONTARIO, 1938, P.22.

Oshawa —House, brick (Bartlett). —House, frame (595, Kingston Road). —Lodge, stone (Boswell, base line). —House, stone (McGregor, corner of Brock Road).	Pikering —House, stone (McGregor, corner of Brock Road).	Rouge Hills —House, brick (Highway No. 2).	Rouge River —Cottage, frame.	Toxona —Ogoude Hall. —House, brick (19, Maitland Street). —House, stucco (15, Sydenham Street). —House, stone (King and Bay Streets). —Office Bldg., stone, 15 Wellington St. W. —Barracks, stone (Stanley). —House, brick (The Grange). —House, brick (54, Duke Street). —Queen's Wharf Lighthouse.	Dun Mills Road —House, brick (Armstrong).	Laing —Hotel, frame (Golden Line).	Thornhill —Church, frame (Trinity, Anglican). —Rectory, brick (Trinity, Anglican). —House, frame (Willcox). —Hall, frame (Quaker Sunday School). —House, stucco (corner of Woodbridge Rd.).	Richmond Hill —House, frame (Old Post Office). —House, brick (with lattice porch, Highway No. 1).	Sharon —Temple, frame.	Holland Landing —Hotel, brick (Royal). —Houses, brick (corrbelled gables).	Barris —House, brick (174, Main Street). —Cottage, stucco (Poplar Cottage). —Cottage, stucco (Shanty Bay Road).	Shanty Bay —Church, mud and stucco (Anglican).	Beaverton —The Old Stone Church.	Pennerangishew —Officers' Quarters, stone. —House, frame (20, Robert Street). —House, log (225, Robert Street).	Lefevre —Barn, octagonal, frame (Campbell).	Christian Island —Fort St. Marie, stone. —Lighthouse, stone.	Thunder Bay —Wayside Cross, wood.	Woodbridge —House, frame (Main Street).	Chaireville —House, brick (Mason's Grange).	Islington —Court House, stucco (occupied by Chinese).	Summersville —Shops, brick.	Cooksville —Houses, frame (Cherry Hill).	Meadowdale —Mill, frame.	Eridale —House, brick (Adamson).	Streetsville —House, brick (Sraley).	Palermo —Cottage, frame (with lattice porch). —Cottage, frame.	Milton —House, frame (Hagyard).	Waterdown —House, brick (English).	Hamilton —House, stone (Dandern Castle).	Dundas —Hotel, brick (Collins).	Ancaster —House, stone (Smith).	Stoney Creek —House, stucco (Gagel).	Galt —House, stucco (Boomer). —Cottage, stone (288, Main Street).	Preston —House, brick (Ashby).	Petersburg —Inn, brick.	Rockwood —School, stone (Rockwood Academy).	Grimby —House, stone (Nallex). —House, frame (Smith). —House, frame (Barler). —House, frame (Spiral). —House, brick (Osborne).	Beamsville —House, stone (Fuller).	Thorold —Church, brick (St. Andrew's, Presbyterian). —Houses, frame (Clusck). —Houses, frame (Redland). —Cottage, stucco (Rochly). —Cottage, stucco (Usher). —House, frame (Servon). —Shop, frame (Johnston Street).	Niagara-on-the-Lake —Church, stone (St. Mark's, Anglican). —House, stucco (Harrison). —House, frame (Heron). —House, frame (Bartie). —House, brick (McDougal). —House, stucco (Hester). —House, stucco (Gooderham). —Hotel, frame (Elliot House). —Fort Mississauga, brick.	Queenston —Houses, stone (Pres). —House, stone (Hamilton). —House, stone (Usher). —Mausoleum, stone (Brock's).	St. Davids —House, brick (Woodruff).	Deer Falls —House, stone (Griffith).	Stratford —House, frame (Wayside Inn).	Chippewa —Shop, brick (Kister).	Brigsburg —Houses, frame (on curve).	Nallex Corners —House, brick (Svetski).	Waterford —House, frame (A, Head Street).	Simcoe —House, brick (Donnelly). —House, octagonal, brick (Counner).	Parr Ryers —Hotel, frame (Buck).	Victoria —Church, stucco (Anglican). —School, frame (Chadwick Academy). —Church, brick (Baptist). —House, frame (Turver). —House, frame (Goodham). —Cottage, frame (Skejgrove).	St. Thomas —Church, frame (St. Thomas, Anglican). —Shop, frame (monument works). —House, frame (Schliss).	Pact Talbot —House, frame (Talbot).	Kingsville —House, stone (Golding).	Sandwich —Houses, frame (Bibby). —Houses, frame (Wickinson). —House, frame (Printer, Golf Club). —Pulpit, wood (Church of the Assumption, Roman Catholic).	Amherstburg —House, brick (Reynolds). —House, stone (Elliot). —House, frame (Mullin). —House, frame (Duff).
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FIG. 2. "BUILDINGS ALREADY PHOTOGRAPHED OR MEASURED." | ERIC ARTHUR, EARLY BUILDINGS OF ONTARIO, 1938, P.23.

general standard of taste was higher than in any other period in history.<sup>1</sup>

And so he set out to do something about it.

In 1926, Arthur joined two of his students, Mackenzie Waters and Jack Ryrie, in preparing measured drawings of Bishop Thomas Fuller's house, "The Beechlands" in Thorold, and of "Bertie Hall" in Fort Erie. That same summer, another student, Wendell P. Lawson, recorded several buildings in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Their drawings were included in Arthur's *Small Houses*. Over the following decade, other

students, including Robert Hanks, Alvin Sherlock [Shy] Mathers, Donald Reed, and Leonard Shore, turned out their own sets of visually-striking drawings. Although the practice of making measured drawings seems to have slowed down among Arthur's students in the mid-1930s,<sup>2</sup> it was revived in the 1940s and continued through the 1960s. Many hundreds of these drawings form part of Arthur's *fonds* (C-57-7) in the Archives of Ontario.

They are complemented by a related *fonds* (C-57-1), which comprises a remarkable collection of glass-plate negatives

for eight hundred and fifty photographs of early Ontario buildings and their details. These were assembled by Arthur between 1927 and 1932. He himself donated the collection to the Archives of Ontario in 1959. The Donor File for the gift held by the Ontario Archives sheds little light on how the project was carried out. For example, some mystery surrounds the actual taking of the pictures, since Arthur himself was not known to be a keen amateur photographer. Also, lugging around the heavy view camera as well as boxes of glass plates and other paraphernalia unassisted would have

tried his strength and his patience. But he has left no record of the names of his helpers on the project. Perhaps Arthur's photographer doubled as his chauffeur since his son Paul once stated that his father never learned to drive. In Paul's words,<sup>3</sup> "he was 'too nervous' to be allowed to conduct a vehicle on his own." But there is no doubt the redoubtable professor was in charge when it came to choosing his building subjects and the angles from which they were shot.

What follows benefits from a personal list I was permitted to make nearly thirty years ago as part of an inspection of the original glass-plate negatives. This section of the collection is now closed to the public. Each plate was stored in an envelope inscribed with the date the photo was taken and its subject. My handwritten list was left with the Archives of Ontario; I kept only a copy.

In analyzing the places where Arthur found his subjects, there is little evidence that project was planned much in advance. Some parts of the province were crisscrossed more than once, and towns like Niagara-on-the-Lake and Port Hope were visited on a number of occasions in different years. The great majority of photos were taken in the months of July and August, usually in a series of short excursions rather than in one long tour. Domestic buildings from the late eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century predominate, but sometimes Arthur would veer off to capture some building details, a bridge, a few grave markers, or some ironwork.

Arthur's first trip into the field was made in May 1927, when he and his companion(s) visited towns north of Toronto like Richmond Hill, Woodbridge, and Sharon; they continued apace a week or two later west along the Dundas

highway to Palermo, Dundas, and Galt; then east along Highway No. 2 to towns like Grafton, Cobourg, and Port Hope. The 1927 season was capped by their spending several days in the Niagara Peninsula, including in the town of Niagara itself.

In 1928, Arthur and his associates spent less time in the field, all of it in July, covering the area along the Front between Cornwall and Kingston. In 1929, the itinerary included Holland Landing, Simcoe, Waterford, Sandwich, and Amherstburg. The following years, 1930 and 1931, were periods of heavy travel resulting in some truly impressive pictures of Prince Edward and north Simcoe counties, the Niagara Peninsula, Picton, Perth, and Smith's Falls. In 1932, his last season in the field, Arthur returned to many of the places he visited earlier, but added Merrickville, Burritts Rapids, and Pakenham where he recorded bridges.

Meanwhile, in 1927 and 1928, Arthur was taking material fresh from the field and publishing it as a series of articles under the heading "Early Architecture of the province of Ontario," in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*. This title is similar to and anticipates *The Early Buildings of Ontario*<sup>4</sup>, a twenty-three-page summary of his work since 1926 which he published in 1938. Included there is a list of "Buildings Already Photographed or Measured," reproduced here (figs. 1, 2), that might have been the basis for an inventory of heritage buildings of provincial significance had Ontario chosen to go down the road of a provincial inventory of heritage buildings.

It is sobering to think Eric Arthur might have been the Sir Nikolaus Pevsner of this place had he continued to study earlier architecture and come to study Victorian-style buildings across the province before concentrating on Toronto.

## NOTES

1. Arthur, Eric Ross, A.R.I.B.A., c. 1926, *Small Houses of the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in Ontario*, Toronto, Department of Architecture, University of Toronto, The School of Engineering Research, n.d., n.p., but the quote appears on the first page.
2. Evidenced from of a list of the Arthur *fonds* at AO, which shows fewer sets of drawings annually in the late 1930s.
3. Quoted from "Snapshots from Family Life" by Paul Arthur, in Alex Keefer (ed.), *Eric Ross Arthur: Conservation in Context*, Toronto, Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy, 2001, p. 4.
4. Arthur, Eric Ross, 1938, *Early Buildings of Ontario*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press; list on p. 22-23.