Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, *Power and Planning: Industrial Towns in Québec, 1890–1950*

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Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal,
*Power and Planning: Industrial Towns in
Québec, 1890–1950*
Curator: Robert Fortier
Designer: Robert Anderson
Duration: 6 March to 26 May 1996
Tour schedule: Témiscaming, summer 1996;
Centre national d'exposition de Jonquière,
9 March – 1 June 1997; Musée régional de
la Côte-Nord à Sept-Îles, September–
November 1997; Centre d'interprétation de
l'industrie de Shawinigan, October 1998 –
January 1999.
Publication: *Villes industrielles planifiées*,
Robert Fortier, ed., Canadian Centre for
Architecture and Boréal, 1996, 320 pp.,
65 illus., ISBN 2-89052-747-6, paper $29.95.

Artificial plantations of human habitation
shaped out of the wilderness, the three company
towns examined in the Canadian Centre for
Architecture (CCA) exhibition *Power and
Planning: Industrial Towns in Québec,
1890–1950* were virtually instant constructs,
whose historical, social and cultural roots lay
outside their geography. In fact the earliest,
Shawinigan Falls, was originally designed in a
manner that essentially ignored its topography,
and thus could theoretically have been
implanted anywhere, notwithstanding its
prerequisite location at the banks of the
Saint-Maurice River. These towns were gener-
ated to satisfy a central criterion: they would
serve the industries set up to exploit the vast
natural resources and hydro-electric potential
at their disposal, by housing employees and
management as well as the factories and facil-
ities that would be required. As this exhibition
so clearly and fascinatingly shows, what hap-
pened is that these towns derived their own his-
tory, both by appropriating identity traits based
on outside reference points, and through the
course of their own inevitable evolution.

How this history unfolded, what this history
is, and how it subsequently coloured the broader
geographical and social context are captivatingly
explored in this exhibition, and demonstrated
in some four hundred artifacts including maps,
drawings, photographs, a model, even a collec-
tion of aluminum ingots. Historical objects are
given a contrapuntal dynamic and a distinctly
contemporary reference point through thirty-
five specially-commissioned photographs, taken
in all three towns, by Montreal photographer,
Gabor Szilasi. The plan of the exhibit, designed
by Robert Anderson, is straightforward: an
entrance space introduces the three model
towns and leads to a central room, devoted to
the theme of power and industry, out of which
radiate five additional rooms. Two of these
focus on Shawinigan Falls (created in 1899), one
on Témiscaming (1917) and two on Arvida
(1925). The invitation, hence, is to see these
towns in terms of each other, of the industries
that spawned them, and as distinct entities.

Curated by Robert Fortier, Associate Archivist
of the CCA, *Power and Planning* presents its
subjects essentially from an urban planning
perspective. As such, the exhibition is a docu-
mentation of the application of planning theo-
ries in an era marked by substantial experi-
mentation in the field as well as the emerging
professionalization of urban planning in Canada.

Shawinigan Falls, first established by the
Shawinigan Water and Power Company, although
it accommodated a multitude of industries, is
the earliest of the three and was designed by
Pringle and Son as a principally orthogonal
grid. Within this framework, however, may
be observed layerings of City Beautiful and
American Park characteristics, in the diagonally-
laid out, monumental Pine Avenue, and the
incorporation of green space into the design.

Témiscaming, designed for the Riordan Pulp
and Paper Company as a closed, one-company
town, was created by Thomas Adams, an eminent
Scottish planner who had also been responsi-
ble for the construction of Letchworth in
1902–06, according to the plan of Raymond
Unwin and Barry Parker. Adams was strongly
influenced by the Garden City movement epit-
omized by Ebenezer Howard, and the plan of
Témiscaming, which was designed to be
sensitive to topographical variations, has a
picturesque quality that characterises its
English precedents.

Arvida (from ARthur VIning DAvis, pioneer
of the aluminum industry) owes its existence
to the establishment of what was to be the
largest aluminum smelter in the Western world,

built by Alcoa. The largest Canadian company town built before the 1950s, Arvida was conceived by New York architect Harry B. Brainerd as a regional metropolis to accommodate 50 000 inhabitants. Its multifaceted design strategy — subsequently developed by other planners — took into account innovative approaches to prefabrication of building components, systematization of the building process, and public hygiene. Here, close attention was paid to macro concerns, manifested for example in the careful hierarchy of traffic circulation, through to much more localized needs, such as experimentation with different types of heating systems for dwellings.[1]

The exhibition devotes a major portion of its display space to artifacts that illustrate the stages of growth of these towns, and would inspire anyone interested in twentieth-century urban design, particularly aspects of design specific to company towns; large-scale housing projects; manifestations of English/French differentiation; socio-economic distinctions, and so on. These issues have already been explored in the attendant monograph, *Villes industrielles planifiées*, by Luc Noppen, Normand Brouillette, José Igartua, Lucie K. Morisset and Paul Trépanier, who were also consulting curators for the exhibition.

There are consistent signs that in each of these three cases, the companies behind the company towns were committed to create an environment that would be seen to serve the best interests of both business and employees. That is why state-of-the-art urban design was chosen. One vice-president of Canadian International Paper even went so far as to donate a "Venetian" style water fountain and a bronze "Venetian" well, which he brought from Florence, to the city of Témiscaming. Needless to say, it was in the interest of the companies to have a compliant, contented working population, and this was the message that was emphasized. Témiscaming was called Flower Town as a tribute to its gardens. The exhibition includes an article from *Canadian Homes and Gardens* published during the Depression, in which Témiscaming is praised as a "town where every man and every woman works, not merely to the ultimate satisfaction of his or her pocket, but to the greater glory of home and garden and thus to a prouder community achievement."

The degree to which the companies' influence infiltrated non-working hours, and how that influence may be read in the built environment, is clearly an area of consideration.

Fig. 1
Plan for the Town of Arvida. Attributed to Harry Beardslee Brainerd, ca 1925, colour reproduction of a watercolour, 65 × 96 cm. Courtesy Ville de Jonquière-Archives municipales

Fig. 2
Perspective of Alcoa houses Type A1 and Type A2, Arvida, Quebec. Arvida Works and E.L.B., draughtsman, 15 March 1927, ink on drafting cloth, 31.5 × 46.5 cm. Courtesy Ville de Jonquière–Archives municipales
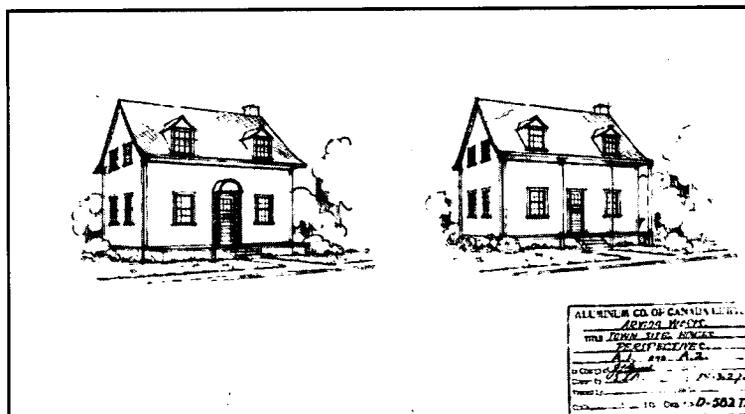
Living in a house owned and designed by the company, common especially in Témiscaming and Arvida, was in itself an extension of the employer's hegemony, and the numerous plans, sections, elevations and site-plans of housing in the exhibition are full of clues about lifestyle, affluence, cultural distinctions, and so on. The very scale of the rental housing constructed in Arvida between 1926 and 1950, when 1 500 units had been built, required a new perspective on how to build efficiently.

Construction documents — many of which are on display — and the very building process itself were systematized. For example, precut materials were brought to the site on tracks cut in the streets. Trade catalogues were influential in the design. The resulting homogeneity is still apparent in a photograph by Gabor Szilasi, taken in 1995, which shows rows of houses with grey-white (aluminum?) siding. One intriguing housing typology utilized in around 1926–32 by Arvida Works, "Type A.1.," borrowed from what was touted as traditional Québécois design, by combining kitchen and living room into a "family room" and by emulating the steeply-pitched roof and dormers. Other houses being built concurrently had the more predictable configuration of living room, dining room, and kitchen. The geographic distribution of the two models of homes through the town is one variable already being used to explore the ethnic and economic segregation of its residents.[2] For research on housing in Shawinigan Falls, one document on exhibit is invaluable to decode the housing types on the basis of occupancy: dated February 1927, it lists Shawinigan Water and Power Company houses by number, name of tenant, rent paid, and address — a veritable Rosetta stone. At the more affluent end of the scale, much of the

housing for management shows the characteristics of the Arts and Crafts movement, visible in so many suburbs of the time, and thus establishes connections with a wider cultural context.

One perspective that suggests itself on examination of the artifacts, is the degree to which design decisions were taken on the basis of current vogue, or particular, local need. For example, the *Report on the Extension and Improvement of the Town of Shawinigan Falls* executed in June 1916 by the firm Olmstead Brothers, landscape architects, comments on housing stock designed by local contractors for working-class inhabitants:

It is unfortunate from every standpoint that the tenement house has become a popular mode of building at Shawinigan Falls and it is a serious question if your Company should not take some steps to restrict their erection. The idea is growing that families are better off in every way if they live in cottage homes each with its own yard and patch of garden around and with plenty of light and air. (p.16)

No account is taken of the possible reasons for the popularity of these multiple dwellings in Shawinigan Falls, a typology which appears throughout this region of Quebec.

From a material culture perspective, there is much more to be gleaned from the artifacts on exhibit. A recurrent theme, reminiscent of the work of William Notman and the Group of Seven, for example, is the apparent fascination with the wild Canadian geography. But here, the distinct spin is the relationship between the land and the newcomers, between unbridled and bridled nature. An 1859 painting by Cornelius Krieghoff entitled *View of Falls on the Little Shawinigan River* seems almost

incongruous in its gilt frame, but resonates tellingly with Eugene Haberer's 142 × 224 cm watercolour of the town of *Shawinigan Falls and its Industry* executed in 1901. Commissioned to promote the town and company to potential investors, the latter has as its central image a very picturesque rendering of the topography, especially those awesome falls which are, after all, literally the motivating force.

Framing that image are nineteen panels of industrial buildings, public institutions, and "superintendents' residences" already built or soon completed. These are depicted as a human triumph, further accentuated in the rising-sun imagery graphically integrated with the panel's title. Looking at this it is impossible not to impose a late twentieth-century environmentally-motivated mindset as to how the natural context was being and would further be manipulated, for example by Hydro-Québec at James Bay. At the same time, it would be hard not to acknowledge the reliance of contemporary society on the generators of electricity and the makers of aluminum and other amenities we use in daily life.

The glory of the application of scientific principles is a predictable extension of the humans-harness-nature theme, and may be seen especially in the artifacts related to Arvida. After all, this was *The Age of Aluminum*, according to the title of a brochure of 1947 on display in the exhibit. This super-metal's modern qualities are conveyed through images of a skyscraper, an airplane, and a dirigible airship, and its numerous uses, from power cables and aircraft

to washing machines and cooking utensils are listed in the text. A pamphlet from Shawinigan Chemical Limited dated "after 1945" shows the hand of science holding a test tube and proudly lists some of its products, including dibutyl pthalate and monochloracetic acid, names that must have sounded impressive. And in the interest of passing along some of this new technology (and creating a need that it could satisfy), Shawinigan Water and Power had a showroom full of household appliances recommended by the company on the ground floor of its commercial building — a photo of it dated 1936 is on display — and also sent a mobile kitchen throughout the province to demonstrate household appliances, as seen in a circa 1930 photo of a woman in a maid's costume standing in this house on wheels.

Other photographs and artifacts are useful in giving a sense of what it was like to live in these towns. An image of the marketplace of Shawinigan Falls around 1925, seemingly in full swing, is very evocative. A copy of the newspaper *The Arvidian*, dated 31 August 1928, contains many rich veins. Its "Personals" section details the lives, at least of the socially prominent: their travels, their visitors (in one case for a two-month stay before returning to Montreal) and their parties are a means to understand, for example, the degree to which this community maintained links, physical and otherwise, to the world beyond. *Power and Planning*, one soon realizes, captivates our interest not only because it allows us to see the artifacts on exhibit, but also because it provides tantalizing clues to the wealth and diversity of archival

material that addresses the life and history of these three towns.

In her Preface to *Villes industrielles planifiées*, Phyllis Lambert reminds us how pivotal these company towns were in the unfolding of the Quiet Revolution, how the issue of "maîtres chez nous," the nationalisation of hydro-electric power, was the focus of the 1962 general election and brought René Lévesque to the forefront of Quebec politics. As *Power and Planning* so convincingly demonstrates, Shawinigan Falls, Témiscaming and Arvida owe their existence to outsiders attracted to their resources, to planners who brought their own ideas, to a population that had to get there from somewhere else. But these towns have also spun out their influence in a centrifugal manner, as a result of their contribution to the economic infrastructure of this province; their products, which we have taken for granted; and their roles as precipitators of political action. In that sense, then, when we look at these three company towns, we look at aspects of our own lives.

Power and Planning will be exhibited at four other venues: Témiscaming in the summer of 1996; Jonquière in spring, 1997; Sept-Îles in fall 1997, and Shawinigan from October 1998 to January 1999.

NOTES

1. See Robert Fortier, "Le pouvoir de bâtir," in *Villes industrielles planifiées*, 17–48.

2. Lucie K. Morisset and Luc Noppen, "La ville de l'aluminium," in *Villes industrielles planifiées*, especially 199–212.

Curatorial Statement

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE

In its exhibition entitled *Power and Planning: Industrial Towns in Québec, 1890–1950* the Canadian Centre for Architecture brings together over four hundred objects selected primarily from public and private collections in Quebec. The exhibition traces the creation and evolution of three communities built in Quebec regions rich in natural resources, on the banks of three powerful rivers harnessed to generate electrical power: the St-Maurice, the Ottawa, and the Saguenay rivers. The combination of resources and power permitted the development of new kinds of industry: electrochemistry, electrometallurgy (particularly of aluminum), and pulp and paper (turning the Canadian Shield's coniferous forests to profit).

Shawinigan Falls (1899), Témiscaming (1917), and Arvida (1925) were all promoted as model towns by the companies that built them. Part of the long European and North American tradition of the "company town," each of these towns is a milestone in the development of modern urban planning in Quebec and illustrates a distinct approach to town planning. By calling on renowned designers well acquainted with the latest international ideas in town planning, companies were often as innovative in building their towns as in developing new industrial products.

Urban Planning
New towns created by private enterprise in the early years of the twentieth century bear witness to the confluence of economic, social, and political forces at work in shaping urban forms. Built quickly and expensively, these towns thoroughly planned to sustain industrial profits, relying on social control to ensure the hegemony of the ruling class.

Shawinigan Falls: The City of Electricity
In 1899 the Shawinigan Water and Power Company (SWP) commissioned Montreal engineering firm Pringle and Son to design the master plan for a new town, meant to serve many industries, on the banks of the St-Maurice River. The gridiron street plan, poorly suited to the terrain and revised as more industries were established there, permitted the phenomenal growth of Shawinigan Falls. The town's English-speaking minority was housed on the more

privileged sites of riverbanks and hills, where the company built some 170 residences for its managers. The French-speaking majority, on the other hand, lived in tenement housing designed by local contractors. The exhibition presents designs by various architects, including David Robertson Brown, David Jerome Spence, Samuel Douglas Ritchie, Ludger Lemieux, Charles Lafond, and Jules Caron.

Témiscaming: Garden City of the North
Témiscaming, founded in 1917 by the Riordon Pulp and Paper Company, is a classic example of a "closed" company town built around a single industry. The master plan for this isolated community — financed and managed by a single business until 1972 — was created by Thomas Adams, an eminent Scottish town planner, upon principles of the Garden City movement. The Adams plan adapted its roads to the land, setting the town on a hill by Lake Timiskaming and the pulp mill further down on more level ground, where Gordon Creek meets the Ottawa River. From 1918 to 1923, Montreal architects Ross and Macdonald built the mill, the commercial district, and all the houses in the lower town. Between 1925 and 1950, William Lyon Somerville of Toronto designed for Canadian International Paper (CIP) — which acquired the mill from Riordon and the town with it — houses in the upper district, along with a hospital and all the town's schools and churches. A single design aesthetic, established when the town was created, prevailed throughout its development. In 1973, workers from the Kipawa mill and executives from Canadian International Paper established the Tembec company, which remains the town's leading industry today. Originally run by its company, Témiscaming made a sudden transition to a company managed by its community.

Arvida: The Aluminum Town
In 1925 the American aluminum giant Alcoa commissioned the planning of a model town on the banks of the Saguenay River, to be built around the largest aluminum smelter in the Western world. Inspired by the American City Beautiful movement, New York architect Harry B. Brainerd drew up an ambitious master plan for a regional metropolis of 50 000 inhabitants. Responding to the majestic site, Brainerd carefully sited residential districts of straight and curved streets connected by radiating avenues between the area's small river valleys. The downtown area, facing the smelter, was designed as a "Civic Centre" of monumental scale. As the largest Canadian company town built this century, Arvida bears witness to the rapid evolution of urban planning as designers employed new approaches in prefabrication, standardization, and public hygiene. Here the rigorous zoning of commercial, residential, and industrial sectors ensured that public amenities were carefully integrated into the landscape and fabric of the city. The exhibition presents works by architects Alfred Lamontagne, Léonce Desgagné, Ernest I. Barott, and Harold Lea Fetherstonhaugh.

The works on view in the exhibition — drawings by engineers, architects, and surveyors; photographs, scale models, and manuscripts — were provided by twenty-five lenders, including the public archives of Quebec and Canada, and of several municipalities, as well as the private archives of companies such as Hydro-Québec, Alcan, and Tembec. In addition, thirty-five photographs specially commissioned for the exhibition from Montreal photographer Gabor Szilasi reveal present conditions in all three towns and urge visitors to reflect on their future development.

The exhibition reflects the CCA's commitment to advance research and to encourage public understanding of the social, economic, and architectural forces at work in making the Canadian city. The exploration began in 1992 with *Opening the Gates of Eighteenth-Century Montreal*, which reconstructed the form, functions, and characteristics of the colonial town. It will continue with exhibitions and publications on the modernist movement, including one on postwar Vancouver and the role of international ideas in transforming this booming regional centre into a locus of urban and architectural experiment (1997). In 1998, *Montréal, métropole* will examine the transformation of a nineteenth-century industrial and commercial city into a full-fledged national metropolis, looking not only at the development of complex transportation systems, administrative headquarters, hotels, and public amenities but also at the processes that generated Montreal's distinctive architectural culture and character. All of these exhibitions will shed light on the growth of urban life and forms in Canada, and inform and engage the public in discussions about the future.

CCA Associate Archivist Robert Fortier, B. Arch., is curator of *Power and Planning: Industrial Towns in Québec, 1890–1950*. The exhibition is accompanied by a monograph, *Villes industrielles planifiées*. Co-published by the CCA and Les Éditions du Boréal, the collection consists of essays written by Quebec

specialists covering the latest research conducted on the subject. In addition to editor Robert Fortier, and a preface by Phyllis Lambert, the multidisciplinary team of authors includes Normand Brouillette, José Igartua, Lucie K. Morisset, Luc Noppen, and Paul Trépanier, who were also consulting curators for the exhibition. The book, published in French only, is available at the CCA Bookstore for $29.95.