

Rediscovering an Architecture of fine detailing and exquisite drawing...

The Maxwell Scrapbook

by Stefan Wisniowski.



WITHIN today's architectural community, and especially within the Schools, a certain tension seems to exist between the aesthetic and the functional aspects of architecture and camps of 'artists' and 'engineers' seem to emerge from within the ranks of architectural students. In the face of this implicit schism, a figure emerges from the past who combined these two facets of architecture: Montrealer Edward Maxwell (1867-1923).

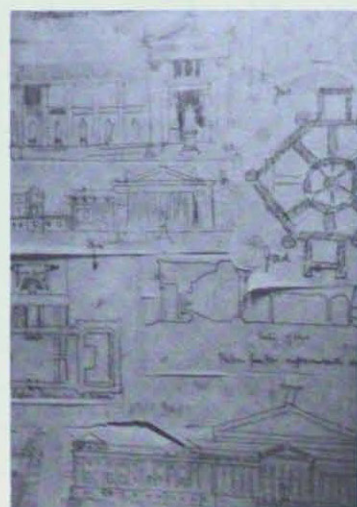
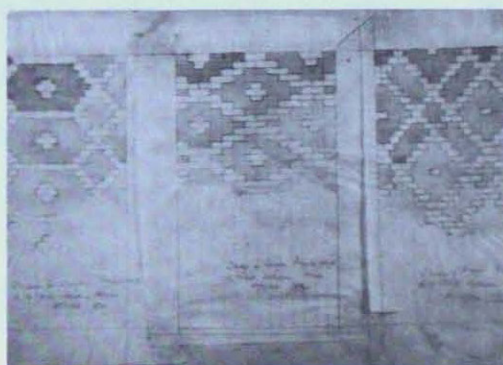
It was within the last generation before the Modern Movement took hold that Edward, with his brother William Sutherland Maxwell, learned and practiced a total architecture. His obituary of 1923 states it clearly: "He was the rare combination of a practical architect and true artist."² Whether designing houses for well-to-do clients within Montreal's Square Mile or planning institutional works such as the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the High School of Montreal, and the Regina Parliament Buildings, the Maxwells had a flair for fine detailing in addition to their practical approach to planning and lighting. This combination resulted in buildings that both looked pleasing and worked well.

Illustrations, from the top:

- a. Edward Maxwell in mid-career
- b. Notes on human facial structure
- c. Sketches of New England houses
- d. Marshall Field Warehouse, Chicago, cast mullion detail

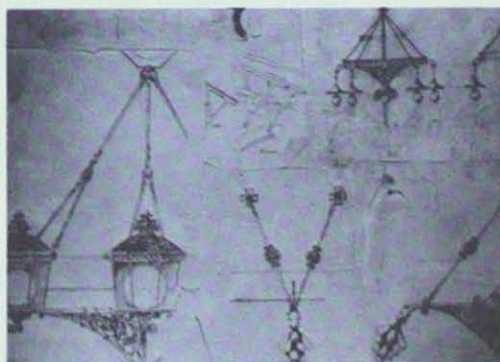
In the following pages we have reproduced excerpts from Edward Maxwell's scrapbook (held in McGill's **Canadian Architecture Collection**), which records much of his education, gained before the days of Schools of Architecture, in the Boston offices of Shepley, Coolidge & Rutan and at the Boston Architectural Club. We are immediately struck by the drawing skills of this future member of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts, for it seems that these skills led him to the sensitivity for detail that is crucial to an artist. It is in his exquisite detailing that Edward found expression for his artistic abilities, otherwise denied to him in the efficient lighting and commodious planning of his buildings.

The scrapbook contains scores of careful drawings of the New England houses (which so influenced Edward later on), studies of Classical detailing and planning, human morphology, and even a fanciful design for his own tombstone.



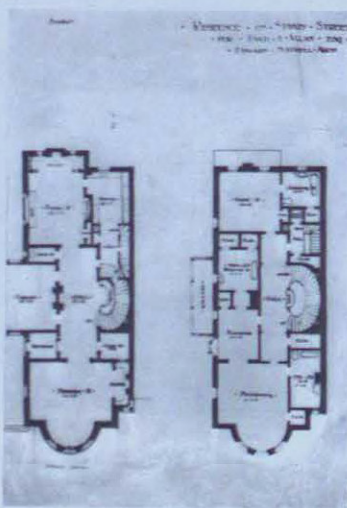
Illustrations, from the top:

- a. Design for John A. MacDonald statue competition, Montreal
- b. Sketch of the Albany City Hall "Lawyer's Staircase"
- c. Cornice form study, watercolour
- d. Hugh A. Allan House, studies of brickwork patterns
- e. Classical building-type notes: "Academie de Medicine", "Jail", "Palais pour Les Representants de France"
- f. Chandalier and lamp studies





We have also reproduced some of Maxwell's later work, showing some of his skills as an artist and draughtsman. An example is the entry to the Supreme Court competition in Ottawa. Although the Maxwells won a 1907 competition for the Court Building, typically drawing praise for their "simply and conveniently arranged"³ floor plans, construction was never commenced and the competition was presumably re-opened at a later date. Together with some of the Maxwells' other work, we have reproduced an entry into this second competition, in which the design has been expanded and a dominant central tower added to the composition, resplendant in its beautifully drawn Gothic tracery.



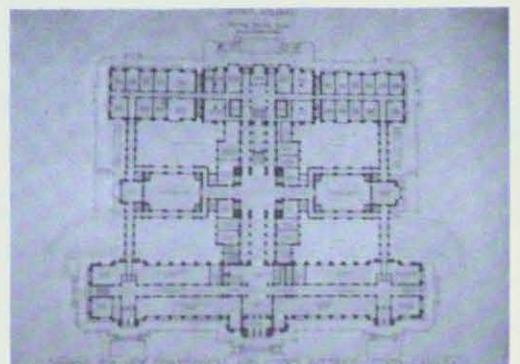
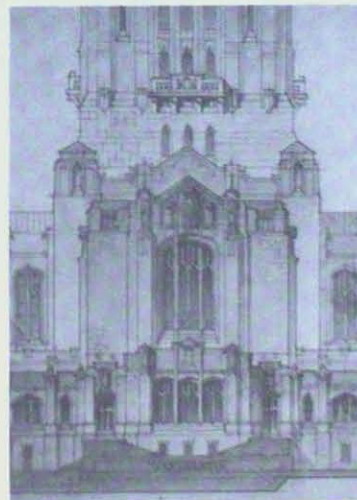
Illustrations, from the top:

- a. Hodgson House, pencil sketch
- b. Saskatchewan Legislature
- c. Andirons study, watercolour
- d. Hugh A. Allan House, plans
- e. Unidentified design, pen & ink
- f. Unidentified design, watercolour

The Maxwell Scrapbook is worth studying in its entirety; it provides a fascinating view of an architect's education and work at the turn of the century. These selections from the scrapbook should suffice, however, to demonstrate the caring and attention to detail exemplified by one of contemporary North America's most practical architects ●

References

1. Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University, Montreal
2. The Gazette, Montreal, November 15, 1923
3. The Canadian Architect and Builder, 1907, p.184



Illustrations, from the top:

- a. Unidentified design, ink wash
- b. Hodgson Cottage, Ste-Agathe P.Q.
- c. Departmental and Courts Building competition entry, tower detail
- d. Courts Building, elevation
- e. Courts Building, logical planning
- f. Courts Building, entrance detail