Title:
“Image & Text Experience: Teaching Architecture with Special Collections Visual Resources, a Collaborative Approach”

Authors:
George Thomas Kapelos FRAIC, OAA
Associate Professor, Department of Architectural Science
Ryerson University

Susan Patrick, BA, GradDipLS
Archives & Special Collections Librarian
Ryerson University Library and Archives

Author Biographies:
George Thomas Kapelos is an architect and planner, and is a Fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. He is Associate Professor in Architecture at Ryerson and served as the Department Chair from 2002 – 2007. His research includes Canadian housing and modernity, skin cancer prevention through design, phenomenology and architectural pedagogy, and he has published and presented in these areas.

Susan Patrick has worked as an academic librarian for over 30 years, beginning at the University of Queensland Library, and then at Ryerson University Library, where her experience has been mainly in the areas of reference, collection development, library instruction and more recently, management of archives and special collections.

Abstract
Special Collections have an important role to play in architectural education. This paper describes the ways in which the Canadian Architect photography collection housed at the Ryerson University Library Special Collections was utilized to support teaching and learning in a required introductory architecture course for students enrolled in the Bachelor of Architectural Science program. In collaboration with the subject librarian and the special collections librarian, the course instructor delivered an assignment which provided students with online digital images of extant buildings and required them to undertake research and writing on Canadian architecture. Student outcomes demonstrate how architectural photographs found in special collections are integrated as a research and teaching tools in architectural education.

Keywords: architectural photographs, special collections, architectural education, faculty/librarian collaboration, architectural pedagogy, Canadian architecture

Introduction
Since its invention, the architectural photograph has played a seminal role in documenting works of architecture and conveying information about buildings. Photographs are often the first way students of architecture begin to develop knowledge of the monuments of the built world. This paper presents the outcomes of a collaborative project which utilized architectural images found in the Ryerson University Library and Archives Special Collections as a teaching tool in a first-year undergraduate course required of students in the University’s architectural science program. It demonstrates ways in which visual resources are integrated into teaching, connecting print and digital materials to field study, and provides a commentary on the ways such collections can enhance architectural education.

**Ryerson University and Library**

Ryerson University in Toronto (Ontario) Canada, a leading institution in innovative, career-focused education, offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs. The University is home to 28,000 students, including 2,300 Master’s and PhD students, and nearly 2,700 faculty and staff. The Ryerson Library collection consists of over 500,000 books, 3,700 print journal titles and over $2 million annually of electronic resources, including over 125,000 e-journals and e-books, databases and indexes, geospatial data, and catalogued websites or electronic documents.

**Library Special Collections**

Ryerson University Library’s Special Collections was established in 2005 with the acquisition of the *Kodak Canada Corporate Archives* and a large collection of photography books and an audiovisual archive of underwater photography. The Special Collections within the Library exists to meet educational needs and support the scholarly, research and creative activities of the University in niche subject areas and graduate programs; in addition, it has a particular responsibility for stewardship of cultural heritage and resources for the academic community.

Special Collections acquires and conserves primary source “special” material, provides access to this material and delivers expertise and services, all within optimally secure and conservationally sound facilities.¹ The creation of Special Collections was part of a larger move at the University to develop depth in research and accommodate the growth of new graduate programs.

Architectural Science is one such program and its 2007 Master of Architecture (M. Arch.) program and its revised undergraduate Bachelor of Architectural Science (B. Arch. Sci.) curriculum afforded an opportunity to seek out special collections that would support an increasing research agenda. Concurrent with curricular changes, discussions took place between the Editor of *Canadian Architect* magazine, Ian Chodikoff, and the University, which expressed an interest in acquiring a collection of architectural photographs from the magazine.

**The Canadian Architect Fonds at Ryerson University Library, Special Collections**

*Canadian Architect* magazine is a specialized monthly periodical for architects, planners and related professionals published in Don Mills, Ontario. The magazine features articles on current trends and a wide range issues affecting architectural practice in Canada. *Canadian Architect* also serves as the Journal of Record for the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, publicizing issues that concern both national and provincial architectural associations.² Since its inception in
1955, *Canadian Architect* magazine has continuously published a monthly review of design and practice and it is considered to be the most authoritative and reliable magazine of its kind serving the architectural community in Canada.

The editors of *Canadian Architect* wished to ensure that the vast collection of material assembled by the magazine over its first 50 years would be protected and made accessible to future architectural researchers. In 2009, following discussions between the Library and donor, *Canadian Architect* magazine donated the majority of its photographic archival material to Ryerson University Library Special Collections, thereby establishing the *Canadian Architect* Fonds at Ryerson University. The Library and donor anticipated that the Fonds would enable “students, researchers, architects, and select members of the public to have access to this rich and instructive body of historical information spanning from Canada’s postwar architectural history to today’s buildings.” In so doing, *Canadian Architect* and the University set their goal to “enhance research possibilities for students, academics and practitioners.”

The collection is extensive, containing approximately 5,700 photographic prints and 17,000 negatives taken for publication in *Canadian Architect* magazine. While some of the images appeared in the magazine, many others were not selected for publication. In addition, some of the documentation is unknown to Canadian architectural historians, which makes this collection of great interest. It was therefore expected that the gift would encourage the greater study of Canadian architectural history at Ryerson.

The subjects recorded are generally contemporary Canadian projects, but images of some international sites and early 20C Canadian buildings are found in the collection, as well as articles on leading Canadian architects of the day and images of entries to the *Awards of Excellence*, the magazine’s annual national design awards program.

Once the collection was received by the Library, expert staff in Special Collections processed it. Students from the University’s master's program in Photographic Preservation and Collections Management, as well as the Special Collections’ Photographic Curatorial Specialist, processed the donation. Since the collection’s acquisition, the print photographs and negatives have been arranged by location and project name, described using RAD (Rules for Archival Description), and re-housed in acid-free archival boxes. A digitization project was initiated, beginning with materials in poor/deteriorated condition. Metadata was recorded in two databases: the Archives and Special Collections publicly searchable local database, using the *Minisis* software system, and FADIS (Fine Art Digital Imaging System), a password-protected collaborative image database, centered at the University of Toronto, where digital images of over 2500 of the *Canadian Architect* photographs were uploaded. One of the interns who worked on the collection created a subject index for the Toronto and Montreal files as her master’s thesis project.

**An Undergraduate Research and Writing Assignment: Narratives of Place**

Architecture faculty quickly capitalized on the ready availability of the of the *Canadian Architect* Fonds and shortly after the gift was received, the collection became the basis for a student assignment in a first year undergraduate course in Architectural Science. In their first
year, architecture students are required to take *ASC103 – The Built Context*, which provides an introductory overview to the study of architecture and the built environment. A significant learning component of the course is architectural research and, among its stated outcomes, the course “expects students to be able to conduct research through data collection, use case studies as a design tool and identify and utilize resources, visual and virtual, for conducting research.”

Using Toronto buildings and the material in the *Canadian Architect* Fonds, students are asked to research and write about the experience of assigned buildings. Typical buildings include libraries, municipal buildings and major commercial projects. Buildings are extant, open to the public, and found within the Greater Toronto Area, enabling students to visit them freely and document the experience of the place visited. Images of buildings are drawn from the *Canadian Architect* Fonds, which are made available on line through FADIS.

Students are given a prescribed framework to undertake research of assigned buildings and a format in which to document results. The framework and format are intended to provide students with a basis on which future research may be undertaken. In the research assignment students are required to identify specific information on the building including journal and web-based articles on the assigned building, ephemera, visuals (in addition to the images provided in the *Canadian Architect* Fonds). Material is compiled; students prepare a report and submit their findings.

**Commentary**

Student facility with digital technology is omnipresent, and harnessing this in the classroom has become an imperative. Digital access fits well with contemporary modes of student learning. Digitization works well for large numbers of students (*ASC103* had an enrolment of 110 students), which ensures equal and ready access to all material. Requiring students to visit sites, find sources in print media (some of which were digitized) successfully exposed students to the range of material (text and image) that constitute the basis for sound architectural research. Most, if not all, students did visit the actual building sites, in order to complete the assignment, so from the perspective of connecting print and photograph materials with lived experiences of buildings and places, the assignment’s objectives were met.

Using digital material also raises the question as to whether students will access print and paper based materials in future. However, in some instances – as shown in this assignment – many texts and images are not digitally available and the future of their digitization remains uncertain or unknown.

Furthermore, while digitizing the *Canadian Architect* Fonds makes access easier, it raises questions about the value of the artefacts themselves. As with all digitized materials, the physical objects themselves continue to have value and interest. Photographs may reveal information about the buildings or design process, which may be lost through digitization. Images may be cropped, corrected or enhanced. Annotations by editors or photographers may disappear. Negative sequencing disappears or is forgotten, and thus knowledge inherent in the archival object itself may be lost forever.
This assignment reflected strong collaboration between the library and the classroom, which is a positive and mutually beneficial outcome. Collaboration enhances communication between different sectors in the university, with librarians and instructors each contributing their particular knowledge to enriching the student learning experience.

Student learning was enhanced through the combination of many factors: availability of the special collection on line, the capacity for each student to examine images at a pace and time that met their individual needs, access to the subject librarian in the classroom and in the library, and cooperation by all parties in making this project a success. Such assignments raise the profile of and generate interest in special collections and, in addition to demonstrating the value of these collections in teaching, reinforce the potential value to the institution of maintaining special collections.

Certainly there is an intrinsic value to any institution in retaining and managing resources of special interest, but beyond this, the possibilities for teaching with special collections are limitless. This brings us to the larger question of the role of objects in experiential learning. The presence and use of materials from special collections underscores the value of the real object. At the same time, digitization supports the desire by Ryerson’s Special Collections to ensure that originals are not damaged or degraded by excessive handling.

Another question posed is whether the experiential component to learning in architecture is altered by digitization, which makes access to information easier, but at the same time lessens the need to experience architectural space in real time and in context. This disembodiment, which can be seen as an impediment to experiential learning, certainly is evident in the daily life of the architectural student, where expediency to meet deadlines may overrule efforts to view sites in time and space at leisure and effectively comprehend a site or building’s intrinsic or spatial qualities. Nonetheless, the architectural tradition still includes the requisite site visit and, where possible, the ‘grand tour’ for which slides, photographs or drawings are no substitute.

There is no doubt that both photographs in whatever medium and in situ explorations will continue to be a cornerstone of architectural education. However, the presence of digital media, in a variety of forms, certainly will enable enhanced opportunities for learning and teaching, bringing special collections librarians, archivists, curators and instructors together as educators, collaborating with a common purpose in the academy.

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**References**

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1 See the *Special Collection Development Policy* of the Ryerson University Library, available on request from the authors.
2 The *RAIC Journal* ceased publication in 1955.
5 For Minisis see (http://minisis.library.ryerson.ca/m2a/); for FADIS see http://fadis.library.utoronto.ca/about.html
6 See Shoemaker, K., “A Subject index: The Canadian Architect image archive at Ryerson University Library’s Special Collections.”
8 For example, recent offerings by Ryerson’s Learning and Teaching Office, a unit which supports innovation in course delivery, have increasingly focused on utilization of digital technologies and adapting courses and teaching strategies to address current modes of learning. See www.ryerson.ca/lt/.