This anthology of scholarly articles which grew out of a series of lectures offered at the University of British Columbia is an in-depth study of the architecture of the nation from early settlements days to the late twentieth century. This is not a chronological history of Canadian architecture, but rather a narrative of different aspects – people, places, and buildings – which have shaped the architectural fabric of the country. While not every architect, region, or building type is addressed, the book does, nonetheless, provide a solid grounding of what constitutes the architecture of Canada. The book is divided into seven parts beginning with the French influence. The accounts of Jesuits like Pierre Biard are shown to be crucial to the conception of New France. The next part of the book describes how the British challenged the French influence and their role in the formation of cities like York (now Toronto). Two case studies, one on St. James Cathedral and the other on public market structures, are used to describe how that city’s urban development was impacted by social conditions. Other buildings studied in this work are used to illustrate how architecture helped to create the Confederation, shape place, and define modernity. These include the Gothic Revival Parliament buildings in Ottawa, Toronto’s Art Deco Maple Leaf Gardens and the lesser known Beaux-Arts World Building (Sun Tower) in Vancouver. Brutalist architecture receives a thorough treatment as an example of a modern style while the iconic late twentieth-century Canadian Museum of Civilization is presented as a rethinking of nationalism. Vernacular forms like the Quebec bungalow and big-box retail architecture are discussed in terms of their impact on people and communities in the late/post-modern era. A number of architects key to Canada are also analyzed including Ralph Erskine and Arthur Erickson.

According to the editor’s conclusion, this study should “reinforce attention to Canadian architectural patrimony and demonstrate its significance for the international discourse and practice of design”. This work does succeed in doing so and also adds significantly to the body of literature on Canadian architecture. It is well researched and thoroughly documented. The analytical principles guiding the publication could be applied to other works, including further studies by this group of authors, covering more aspects of the architectural heritage of Canada.

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