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Building Halifax 1841-1871

At its incorporation in 1841, Halifax was a modest colonial town, with a population of about 15,000. With a few prominent exceptions like the fine Government House and the elegant neo-classical Province House, it was a wooden town. Despite a decade of building activity and a rash of local boosterism in the 1840s, at mid-century the editor of the *Acadian Recorder* could still deplore “its long rows of old, dirty, dingy, shaky, wooden houses, all built originally in the tea-chest order of architecture”, and its “reputation of being the meanest looking city in the civilized world, in proportion to its wealth and other advantages”.¹ By 1871, when Halifax was first measured as a city in the new Dominion of Canada, it had both grown and changed remarkably. Its population had doubled to nearly 30,000, and its physical form had altered substantially.² Government building, commercial building, and residential building each made a distinctive contribution to the transformation of the city between 1841 and 1871, while the roles of the architect, the builder and the artisan in the building trades changed in response to new fashions, new laws, new materials, new technologies and new organizational arrangements.

The mid-nineteenth century was, in general, a period of prosperity in Halifax, and building was one of the most visible evidences of this prosperity. A nearly continuous program of government building between 1850 and 1870 reflected not only the initiation of municipal government in the town but also the mid-Victorian social conscience and concern for the quality of urban life. Markets, water towers, drains, sidewalks and street improvements all marked civic efforts to upgrade the quality of the urban fabric. Buildings to maintain the social order were prominent among the new government structures; Rockhead Prison (1857), the Halifax County Court House (1858), and the County Jail (1863) were all built to supplement or replace existing buildings for the control or implementation of due process of law. A number of new government buildings were also directed to meeting social needs. The Lunatic Asylum, contracted in 1856, was followed in 1857 by the City Hospital and in 1867 by a new Poors' Asylum. By locating in the urban fringe where land use was extensive rather than intensive, government building contributed to enlarging the operative areas of the city.³ The new structures required not only land assembly, but design,

1 *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 30 May 1857.

2 *Evening Express* (Halifax), 17 August 1864. The picture of Halifax by the late 1860s is well drawn in Phyllis R. Blakeley, *Glimpses of Halifax 1867-1900* (Halifax, 1949), ch. 1.

3 Contracts for these buildings were noted respectively in *Novascotian* (Halifax), 20 April 1857;

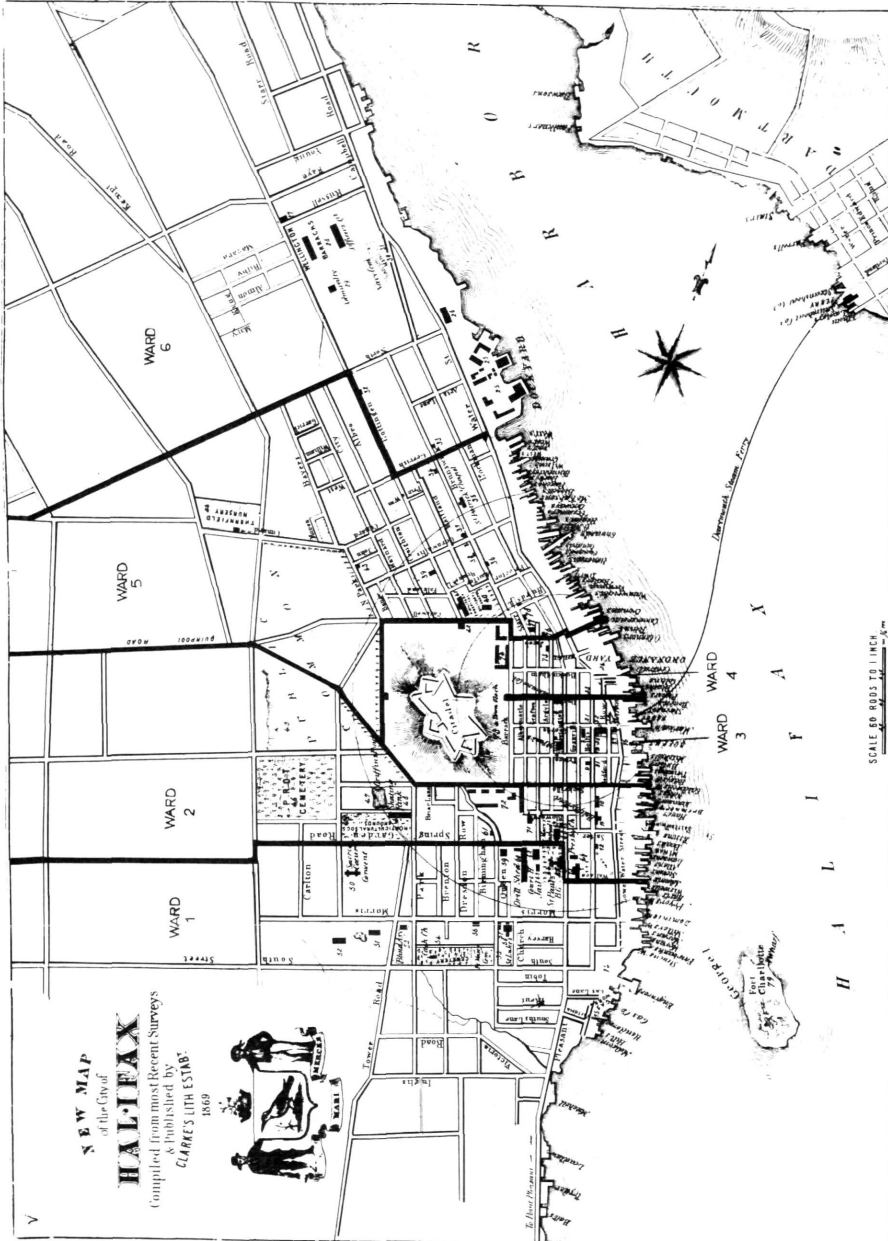


Figure 1.

“New Map of the City of Halifax”, 1869, with ward boundaries superimposed. (National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada).

purchase of materials and construction. The scope, continuity of demand and security of payment in these areas provided significant employment in the building trades and economic stimulus in the local market.

The evangelical spirit also resulted in building activity, in an industrial school, homes for the aged and for fallen women, a deaf and dumb institute, and a blind asylum. Private philanthropy stimulated both new building, like the cost-shared Blind Asylum in 1868, and the conversion of existing buildings to new uses, like Edward Billings' villa residence purchased for the Deaf and Dumb Institute in 1859.⁴ It likewise found expression in church building by all denominations, especially in the 1840s, as well as in substantial church enlargements and new religious-associated buildings such as glebe houses and schools. Another important stimulus to public building was the British army and navy presence in the town. The largest single military project was the fourth Citadel, begun in 1828 and costing, upon completion in the mid-1850s, £252,122.⁵ Construction of the Wellington Barracks in the 1850s had a major impact on the Halifax building situation, while other buildings and repairs for the Ordnance, Commissariat and Royal Navy services afforded further construction contracts to master craftsmen and builders.

Prosperity also stimulated commercial building and upgrading. By 1841 Granville Street, three blocks west of the harbour, had begun to challenge Water Street as the prime commercial row in the city. Bank building and improvement on Hollis Street and prime commercial construction on Granville Street in the next 15 years emphasized the trend. At the same time, suburban expansion attracted population away from the crowded core. While the consolidation of the business district can be traced throughout the period from 1841 to 1871, it focused on rebuilding in the districts burnt over in three major fires between 1857 and 1861.⁶ Commercial renewal on Hollis Street in 1857 and 1858 was stone and brick in accordance with new building standards, three and four storeys high in reflection of business confidence. Rebuilding the stores in the north block of Granville Street in 1860, to uniform architectural designs in free-stone and cast iron with Italianate detailing, gave focus to Halifax building

Acadian Recorder, 9 October 1858; *Evening Express* (Halifax), 16 September 1863; *Novascotian*, 14 April 1856 and *Evening Express*, 4 October 1865; *Acadian Recorder*, 25 July 1857; *Novascotian*, 6 May 1867. A laudatory report of city activity in the 1850s is found in the first *Report of the Several Departments of the City Government of Halifax, Nova Scotia for 1857/58* (Halifax, 1858). On public building in the urban fringe, see J.W.R. Whitehand, "Building cycles and the spatial pattern of urban growth", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 56 (1972), pp. 39-55.

4 *Acadian Recorder*, 27 June 1868; *Novascotian*, 8 August 1859.

5 See John Joseph Greenough, "The Halifax Citadel, 1825-60: A Narrative and Structural History", *Canadian Historic Sites* no. 17 (Ottawa, 1977), p. 9.

6 The fires occurred on New Year's Eve, 1857, 9 September 1859, and 12 January 1861. *Novascotian*, 6 January 1857, 12 September 1859, 21 January 1861.



Figure 2.

Commercial rebuilding in the downtown core in the early 1860s emphasized the consolidation and prosperity of the central business district. The rhythmic articulation and Italianate detailing of the new Granville Street facades (top) were soon reinforced in such prominent structures as the Union Bank (left) and the Halifax Club (right). (top: Public Archives of Nova Scotia; left: Archives of Ontario; right: *Illustrated London News*).

capacity, experience and aspiration. Because whole blocks were rebuilt at nearly the same time, there was opportunity to create coherent streetscapes through similar building heights, aperture patterns and architectural detailing. This momentum was carried over into more modest insurance offices rebuilt in Bedford Row in 1861-62, the new Union Bank on Hollis Street, and the most extravagant building of the early 1860s, the Halifax Club. Other commercial rebuilding for prominent merchants in the area in the early 1860s rounded out the transformation of the business core of Halifax from a mainly wooden district to a predominantly stone and brick quarter of new, large and fashionable buildings,⁷ although it would be another quarter century before similar rebuilding would extend to Barrington Street much of its familiar facade.

While stone buildings were by no means unknown before the mid-1850s, their prevalence after that date, and the widespread use of brick and cast iron, marked a substantial departure from the previous reliance upon wood in the city. The introduction, expansion and enforcement of a 'brick district' between 1857 and 1863 virtually eliminated the construction and enlargement of wooden buildings in the central core.⁸ Ironstone, the material of all but the finest stone buildings before 1840, was largely supplanted by freestone and granite. In addition to stone brought in from regional quarries, local builder Robert Davis opened the Chebucto Quarries near Bedford Basin. Brick, which had been imported either from abroad or elsewhere in the province, was made locally at Eastern Passage and for a time at Freshwater. Its local manufacture, using up-to-date, imported machinery, made brick a viable alternative for building in the city, while its low cost in comparison with stone made it relatively popular in the legislated 'brick district'. Cast iron, popularized by its use in rebuilding Granville Street, spread rapidly through the commercial district where it was perhaps used even more as a means of updating an existing building than in new construction. Mass production and ease of transport also brought other metals to the city where legislated fireproofing, especially on roofs, promoted their sale. The specification that roofs in the 'brick district' be either flat or crowned gave impetus to the use of American-produced patent felt roofing.⁹

Major growth outside the waterfront areas both north and south of the central

- 7 The extent and character of building can be readily traced in the local newspapers. See, for example, *Halifax Reporter*, 3, 24 November 1860, 28 February 1861, 31 January 1863; *Evening Express*, 8, 10, 17 April, 12 July, 13 November 1861; 28 March, 7 May, 6 June, 25 July, 15 September 1862; 15 January 1863; 25 January, 6 April, 15 June 1864. For the visual record, see *Rogers Photographic Advertising Album* (Halifax, 1871), reprinted as *A Century Ago: Halifax 1871* (Halifax, 1970).
- 8 Nova Scotia, *Statutes*, 20 Vic. c.35, c.36; 21 Vic. c.77; 22 Vic. c.65; 24 Vic. c.45; 25 Vic. c.37; 26 Vic. c.49; 27 Vic. c.81.
- 9 See, for example, *British Colonist* (Halifax), 6 March 1858, 25 January 1862, 2, 25 April 1863; *Novascotian*, 21 May, 22 August 1855; *Morning Sun* (Halifax), 24 April 1863; *Halifax Reporter*, 3 November 1860; *Acadian Recorder*, 2 August 1862.

core was primarily residential in character. In most cities, the south and west areas have proven to be more fashionable districts than those to north and east. While the Halifax Citadel formed a seemingly impenetrable barrier against concentrated westward settlement before 1871, the south suburbs comprised the most fashionable residential district of the town; in 1836 only one street registered an average real estate valuation lower than £250,¹⁰ and development resembled more closely the popular English ornamental villa than the town house. While the south suburbs attracted mid-century population growth, what most drew residential building to the area was the number of large, accessible estates convenient for subdivision. By the 1850s building activity was occurring in Spring Gardens, named for the fashionable London suburb. In 1862-63, Smith's Fields (between South and Inglis Streets) was sold off in building lots; by the late 1860s subdivision was extending along Tower Road and west to Robie Street, and some construction had already occurred further west near the present site of Dalhousie University.¹¹ Both quality speculative housing and contracted residences were erected in these areas shortly after subdivision. Further south and west, prime residential development in the 1850s and 1860s along the North West Arm conformed relatively closely to the ornamental villa common in the urban fringes of English country towns in the early nineteenth century.¹²

While residential development in the south suburbs primarily post-dates incorporation, by 1841 nearly 500 proprietors had taken up lots along 14 streets in the north suburbs, and by 1851 ward 5, comprising most of the north suburbs, contained nearly one-third of the population. Development continued more slowly thereafter, and by 1871 ward 5 had been overtaken in size by ward 1 in the south suburbs.¹³ Until 1850 the north peninsula, beyond North Street, was

10 Data were derived from Halifax Assessments, RG 35A, vol. 3, no. 12 (1836), Public Archives of Nova Scotia [hereafter PANS].

11 See, for example, *Novascotian*, 13 April 1847, 1 November 1852; *Acadian Recorder*, 8 March 1856, 7 June 1862, 14 March 1868; *Evening Express*, 20 April 1863; *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 2, 16 March 1868. See also *City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1865* (Reflex Copy of Church Map E-14-15, sheet 2).

12 John W. Regan, *Sketches and Traditions of the Northwest Arm*, (2nd ed., Halifax, 1909); *Acadian Recorder*, 23 February, 17 May 1856; Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, *Founded Upon a Rock. Historic Buildings of Halifax and Vicinity* (Halifax, 1967), pp. 66, 92, 94, 98; T.R. Slater, "Family, society and the ornamental villa on the fringes of English country towns", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 4 (1978), pp. 129-44.

13 Figures based on Halifax Assessments, RG 35A, vol. 3, no. 12, PANS; Nova Scotia Assessment and Census Returns, Halifax, 1851, RG 1, vol. 451, PANS (PAC, reel M3137); *Report of the Secretary of the Board of Statistics on the Census of Nova Scotia, 1861* (Halifax, 1862), App. 7; Census of Canada, 1871, Halifax, N.S., Schedule 3, PAC, reel C10550 [hereafter cited as Halifax City census, 1851, 1861, 1871]; *Evening Express*, 22 February 1861; see also J.G. McKenzie, *The City of Halifax* (1841) in PANS and *City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1865*. For the character of residential building, see *Founded Upon a Rock*, pp. 70, 90 and *The West House Brunswick Street Halifax* (Halifax, 1973).

characterized by farms and villa residences representative of the extensive land use of areas more distant from the city core. Subdivision of the area followed construction in the 1850s of the Wellington Barracks just north of the Dockyard. Proximity to the Intercolonial Railway yards, as well as the Barracks, made the district attractive for building throughout the 1860s and 1870s.¹⁴

Central to the expansion and transformation of mid-century Halifax were the architects, builders and artisans who carried out the building process. Their skills complemented one another in the construction of a building. The architect was the creator of the building insofar as he established its form, style and character in his designs. Usually a man of education and taste, he was trained not only in the practical rudiments of building, but also in its aesthetics. His three functions in a building project were to prepare a design acceptable to his client, to provide specifications and working drawings from which the building would be erected, and to supervise the actual construction to ensure that the design, layout and structural detail were implemented in accordance with the specifications. While architects, like other men of the arts, were attracted to the colonial town from time to time, none appears to have established residence in Halifax before mid-century. Few Halifax buildings in the first half of the nineteenth century were, then, architect-designed. Most were created by skilled local builders adapting designs in local materials from the published pattern books which proliferated during the period. The most skilled practitioner of this art appears to have been Henry G. Hill, a Halifax carpenter who, having built the successful Brunswick Street Methodist Church in the mid-1830s, announced that he would thenceforth “offer his services as an Architect, Draughtsman and Builder, and [would] be prepared to furnish accurate working plans, elevations and specifications for buildings of every description”. He continued to do so for the next 20 years. Drawing on the neo-classical forms popular in Georgian England and the United States, he provided designs for churches, suburban cottages, villa residences, banks and stores as well as for Halifax’s only Temperance Hall and the City Prison.¹⁵ He was probably the most active designer of buildings in Halifax prior to the permanent establishment of professionally trained architects in the late 1850s.

The fate of Hill’s design for the Halifax County Court House, in fact, marked the transition from the self-trained architectural designer to the profes-

14 Halifax Assessments, RG 35A, vol. 3, no. 12, PANS; *Novascotian*, 16 December 1850, 12 October 1857, 14 June 1858; *City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1865*; *City Atlas of Halifax, Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1878).

15 *Novascotian*, 5 February 1836; see also, for example, 2 June, 1 September 1842, 13 May 1844, 28 August 1848, 7 December 1857, 15 February 1858; *Acadian Recorder*, 15 December 1855, 17 May 1856; *Morning Sun*, 30 November 1859; Plan of Rockhead Prison, May 1855, PANS; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. xi (biography in press). On pattern books available in Halifax, see *Novascotian*, 18 April, 16 May 1859.

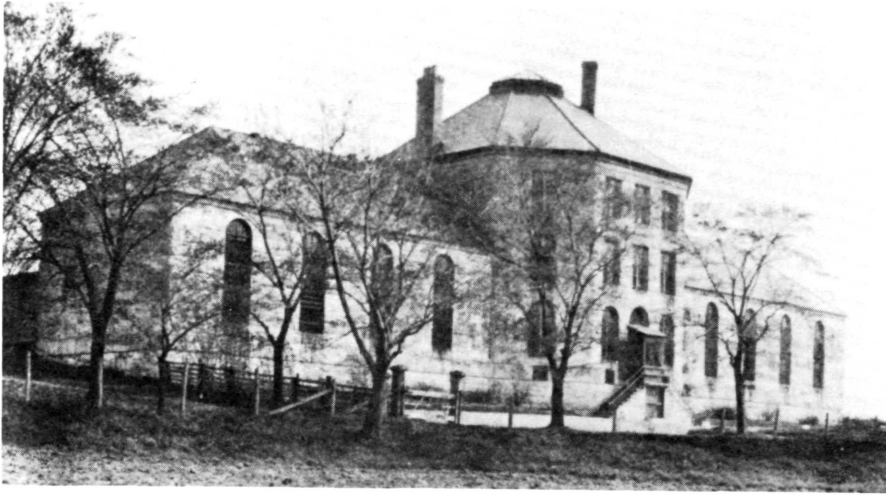


Figure 3.

Significant government building in the 1850s created both design and construction opportunities in Halifax which attracted architects and builders to the city. The tradition of local design in construction, such as Rockhead Prison (top), was challenged by the work of outsiders who soon outstripped local artisans in prime building competitions such as the Halifax County Court House (bottom). (top and bottom: Public Archives of Nova Scotia).

sional architect. As early as 1851, the Nova Scotian government had passed legislation authorizing funds for the construction of a new county court house in Halifax. Hill's 1854 plans for the building provided for a structure "perhaps more enlarged and more costly than was originally contemplated . . . [but] not out of proportion to the scale on which such an edifice should be erected, both with reference to architectural appearance, and the requirements of the capital of the province". But when local artisans refused to tender for the construction, Hill was sent back to the drawing board with an increased outside figure of £6700, for which he produced "a very pretty design . . . providing all the necessary accommodation". Before Hill's new structure could be erected the Hollis Street fire of 1 January 1857 sent ripples of alarm through Halifax at the thought of housing the county's legal records in a wooden building, while new legislation passed in April 1857 prohibited large wooden buildings within the developed part of Halifax. An amending act, passed on 1 May 1857, exempted a major wooden extension to an existing church, but specifically excluded the new court house from the exemption. Hill was paid the balance of sums due him in connection with the court house designs and effectively relieved of the commission. When an architectural competition was subsequently called to provide new designs for a stone or brick court house, the selection went not to Hill, whose principal working material was wood, but to the prestigious Toronto architectural firm of William Thomas & Sons.¹⁶

William Thomas was an Englishman who, after building experience at home, particularly in the Midland towns and spas, had emigrated to Toronto about 1840. In the course of the next 15 years he designed numerous Upper Canadian buildings including churches, commercial structures, and houses as well as such important public buildings as St. Lawrence Hall, Victoria Hall in Cobourg, Guelph City Hall and the Court House in Niagara-on-the-Lake.¹⁷ It was St. Matthews's Church which brought a representative of the Thomas firm to Halifax. The committee responsible for rebuilding the church after destruction of its century-old building in the 1857 fire resolved in May to invite Thomas' son, W.T. Thomas, to the city. Shortly thereafter they settled that the church should "be built after the design of St. Andrews Church, Hamilton", one of William Thomas' most admired works.¹⁸ With two Thomas commissions in Halifax already underway, the Granville Street fire, which wiped out the north block of the street in September 1859, induced the Thomas firm to open a

16 Nova Scotia, *Statutes*, 14 Vic. c.3, 16 Vic. c.20, 17 Vic. c.48, 19 Vic. c.65, 20 Vic. c.35, c.36, 21 Vic. c.13, 23 Vic. c.46; Halifax Court House, MG 4, Ms. file, no. 3, PANS; Nova Scotia, *Journals of the House of Assembly, 1854-55*, App. 15; 1857, p. 371; 1860, pp. 681-2; *Novascotian*, 1 September 1856; *Acadian Recorder*, 28 August 1858.

17 T. Ritchie, "The Architecture of William Thomas", *Architecture Canada*, 44 (May 1967), pp. 41-45; Neil Einarson, "William Thomas", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. VIII (in press); *Halifax Reporter*, 3 November 1860.

18 St. Matthew's Church, MG 4, vol. 61, 1857-1860, PANS.

Halifax office. It was first advertised in October 1859 while Thomas was busy preparing unified designs for seven proprietors rebuilding the centre of the city's prosperous dry goods trade. Thomas's individual building designs, unified by massing, height, detailing and materials, created a distinctive streetscape which reflected contemporary mercantile confidence. The cast iron store fronts which Thomas introduced along most of the Granville Street block had not only the well-recognized advantages inherent in the material but also the prestige of manufacture by the leading New York producer of architectural cast iron, Daniel Badger. The buildings popularized the Italianate detailing and forms which would soon dominate prime Halifax building of every type. The Thomas office remained open until 1863 when, with Granville Street rebuilt and a subsequent design for the rebuilding of the Union Bank completed, C.P. Thomas, the resident Thomas partner, left Halifax for Montreal.¹⁹

While the Thomas firm was the most prestigious architectural firm in Halifax at mid-century, Scottish-born architect David Stirling's work was both popular and widespread. Arriving in 1850 from St. John's, Newfoundland, where he had designed the handsome Bank of British North America, he soon prepared designs for the Halifax branch of the same bank and for the long-discussed city market. Although he subsequently departed to Upper Canada, he returned to Halifax in 1862 to design a large number of well-known buildings, including the Halifax Club, churches, stores, residences such as Alexander Keith's, and the Provincial Building. A number of his buildings combined to lend distinctive architectural quality to downtown Halifax. Well versed in the newly popular Italianate forms which he handled with considerable skill, Stirling has been described as "probably the best architect" in Nova Scotia by the late 1860s.²⁰

By this time the extent and quality of building in Halifax had attracted other architects to the city. Of those identified, only the firm of Henry Elliott & Henry Busch appears to have possessed the formal experience, the wide range of commissions and the continuity to have achieved an impact comparable to Stirling or Thomas. Elliott & Busch's documented work includes alterations and designs for several churches, the county jail, several prominent stores, and two distinctive residences, "Oaklands" for William Cunard in 1862 and "the Octagon

19 *Novascotian*, 19 September 1859; *Illustrations of Iron Architecture, made by the Architectural Iron Works of the City of New York* (New York, 1865; DeCapo Press, 1970), plates 68, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79; Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia, *A Sense of Place. Granville Street. Halifax, Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1970); Harold D. Kalman, "NSCAD Moves to the Waterfront", *Rehoused in History. Nova Scotia College of Art and Design* (Halifax, 1979); *Halifax Reporter*, 3, 24 November 1860; *Evening Express*, 13 November 1861; *The Halifax, Nova Scotia Business Directory for 1863*, compiled by Luke Hutchinson (Halifax, 1863).

20 Notebook of David Stirling, architect, Queen's University Archives, Kingston (xerox copy, PANS); *Novascotian*, 29 April, 11, 25 November 1850; *Evening Express*, 12 May 1862; 30 October, 9 November, 28 December 1863; *Acadian Recorder*, 15 July 1865, 16 March 1867; Robert C. Tuck, *Gothic Dreams. The Life and Times of a Canadian Architect. William Critchlow Harris 1854-1913* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 18-20.

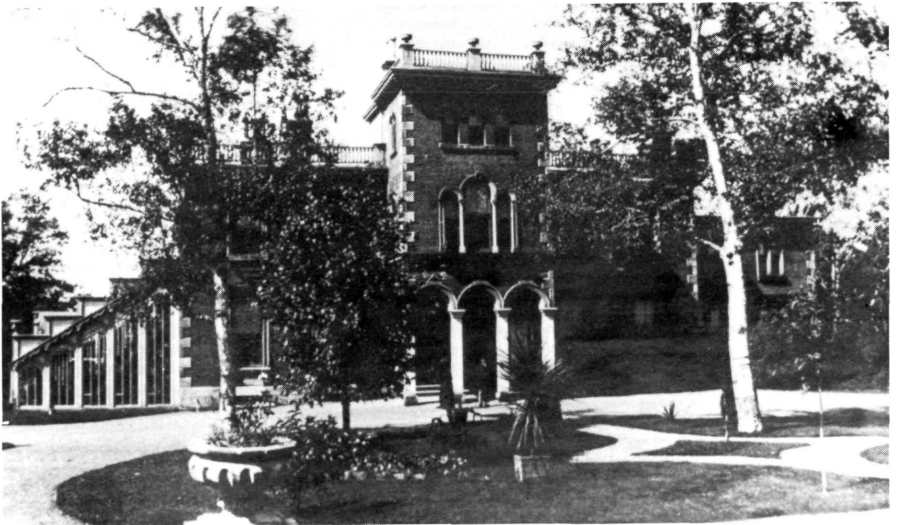


Figure 4.

Stirling's "Keith Hall" (top), built for Alexander Keith on south Hollis Street, and Elliott's "Oaklands" (bottom), built for William Cunard on the North West Arm, exemplify the transfer in the early 1860s of the new design and construction skills in Halifax from government and commercial to residential building. The Italianate forms and detailing lent a more opulent character and more complex visual interest to the architecture of the city. (top: author; bottom: Public Archives of Nova Scotia).

House" in Dartmouth in 1871.²¹ Although most buildings erected in Halifax were still not architect-designed, the substantial number of large, prominent and stylish buildings which had been erected in the city since the late 1850s had made architect-designed buildings an integral part of the Halifax townscape.

While an architect designed buildings, in the normal course of events he did not construct them. This was the role of the builder. In 1838 building craftsmen comprised 8.96 per cent of the heads of families in the city; in 1861, with increased labour specialization, 12.7 per cent of the labour force were employed in the construction industry.²² The building industry was composed of a number of highly skilled and closely controlled crafts. Members commenced their careers as apprentices to a master craftsman, graduated to become journeymen, and might, if skilled and ambitious, become master craftsmen themselves in time. The system had its roots in the medieval guilds and much of it remained firmly intact in pre-industrial areas in the nineteenth century.²³ Apprenticeship remained the principal manner of training in the skills and mysteries of the trades, and fathers passed their knowledge to their sons and nephews, although with increasing specialization the sons of labourers, probably themselves serving in the construction industry, also became building artisans.

Differences in the economic and social status of journeymen and master craftsmen make their differentiation of some significance in analyzing the building industry. Some masters, like Henry G. Hill, mason Thomas Saunders and carpenter Peter Artz, can be identified clearly from organizational records, wage agreements, and court cases. Those identified to date, however, represent a very small percentage of the building artisans working in Halifax. In early nineteenth-century Philadelphia Thomas Smith has found, by linking census data with entries in city directories and with total tax assessment and property tax, that 19.1 per cent of artisans were employed in the construction industry.²⁴ Very rough calculations based on 1838 and 1861 Halifax census data yielded 26.79 per cent and 27.58 per cent respectively of artisans employed in the building trades. Smith also calculated the ratio of masters to journeymen at 1.0:0.88,

21 See, for example, *Novascotian*, 9 January 1860; *Halifax Reporter*, 28 February 1861, 31 January 1863; *Evening Express*, 31 January 1862, 26 August 1863, 10 February, 6 April, 25 May 1864; *Acadian Recorder*, 8 May 1865, 20 April 1867; *Founded Upon a Rock*, pp. 92, 108.

22 The 1838 figure was calculated from data in Halifax City census, 1838, RG 1, vol. 448, PANS: the 1861 figure appears in L.D. McCann, "Staples and the New Industrialism in the Growth of Post-Confederation Halifax", *Acadiensis*, VIII (Spring 1979), p. 59.

23 There is scant evidence on which to evaluate its practice in mid-nineteenth century Halifax, but see Jean-Pierre Hardy and David-Thierry Ruddle's valuable study of apprenticeship in Quebec, *Les Apprentis Artisans à Québec 1660-1815* (Montreal, 1977), 2nd. part; Ian McKay, "The Working Class of Metropolitan Halifax 1850-1889" (honours thesis, Dalhousie University, 1975), ch. 2.

24 Thomas Smith, "Reconstructing Occupational Structures: The Case of the Ambiguous Artisans", *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 8 (1975), pp. 134-46.

which is not dissimilar to the oversimplified 1.0:1.04 ratio derived from Halifax directory and census entries for 1870 and 1871.

Acceptance in the construction trades was marked not only by apprenticeship but also by cooperation with others in one's trade. The largest of the construction trades in Halifax — the carpenters — had organized as early as 1798 and incorporated in 1850. Their rules and regulations as well as their quarterly meetings were intended to reinforce a strong sense of workmanship and artisanal pride.²⁵ Wage agreements, such as the increase to 7/6s. per journeyman's 10-hour day negotiated in 1854, were a well-established practice in Halifax by mid-century, when legislation against the combination of workmen specifically exempted from its restrictions those who voluntarily met together to establish or set wages, hours and other regulations regarding their work.²⁶ By then the number of carpenters working in the city had grown enormously, from 118 in 1838 to 408 in 1861 and to 518 in 1871. All work beyond sawing — such as trimming, moulding and carving — was carried out by carpenters, and the extent of labour involved in this work as well as in the final installation of these products in the structure made carpenters the largest skilled trade group in Halifax in 1838. Nonetheless, while their numbers grew substantially, their proportion of the building trades fell from 63.1 per cent in 1838 to 51.5 per cent in 1871,²⁷ as some of their labour-intensive work was subsumed by the four planing and moulding factories, primarily steam-powered, then operating in the city. In the early-1860s the increase in the number of carpenters, the building boom with its opportunities in a larger market for specialization, and local labour tension all contributed to formal subdivision among carpenters. Incorporation of the House Joiners' Union Society of Halifax and of the Shipwrights' and Caulkers' Association of Halifax and Dartmouth in 1864 marked a trade consciousness which was demonstrated in a carpenters' strike for higher wages later that year.²⁸

While the number of carpenters increased rapidly in mid-century Halifax, the numbers of masons and stonecutters grew even more quickly. From 1838 to 1861 they increased from 50 to 223.²⁹ The three successive fires in the downtown core, which led to strict building codes and extensive rebuilding in stone, may have made the numbers artificially high, but 30 years of work on the massive stone Citadel and large scale government and institutional building in stone in the 1850s attracted and held masons in the community. Following a strike for

25 *Rules and Regulations of the Brothers Carpenters' Society of Halifax, Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1833); *Novascotian*, 10 November 1845; *Nova Scotia, Statutes*, 13 Vic. c.43.

26 *Morning Journal*, 19 June 1854, 30 March 1857; *Nova Scotia, Statutes*, 27 Vic. c.11.

27 Figures based on Halifax City census, 1838, 1861, 1871.

28 *Nova Scotia, Statutes*, 27 Vic. c.24, c.33; *Evening Express*, 3 June 1864; *British Colonist*, 4 June 1864.

29 Figures based on Halifax City census, 1838, 1861.

higher wages in 1864, the Stone Cutters' and Masons' Association of Nova Scotia was incorporated in 1865 with a constitution and by-laws closely based on those of the Journeymen Stone Cutters' Association of the more mature Boston market.³⁰ While trades like painters, plasterers, and plumbers, whose crafts were discrete, played only a limited role in the construction of any building, these trades expanded significantly in response to the extensive local building activity of the 1860s.³¹

E.W. Cooney has identified four types of building firms in the early nineteenth-century construction industry in Britain.³² During the 1840s most Halifax building firms roughly corresponded to Cooney's first type. They were operations run by a master craftsman — usually a carpenter or a mason — undertaking work only in his own trade and usually employing only a small number of journeymen and apprentices. The expanded construction activity in the late 1840s and early 1850s appears to have stimulated development of a second type of building firm similar to that distinguished by Cooney, as a master craftsman, usually a carpenter or a mason, undertook responsibility for the construction of a whole building, carrying out himself those parts related to his own trade and sub-contracting the other parts to appropriate other master craftsmen. This was presumably the nature of the operation usually ascribed to the term "builder" in the city directories and the census. The 20 builders listed in the first Halifax business directory in 1858 and the 50 enumerated in the 1871 census may reasonably be accepted as representing minimum numbers of this type.³³

Until the 1850s all building firms in Halifax apparently operated as one of these two firm types. Moreover, in the 1840s, when the demand for building designs and the fee for supervising their construction (normally 6% of the construction cost) was not sufficient to provide an income, Henry G. Hill fulfilled the roles of both architect and builder for several structures including villa residences and the Temperance Hall. These operations appear to have been

30 *Evening Express*, 29 June 1864; Nova Scotia, *Statutes*, 28 Vic. c.75; The Journeymen Stone Cutters' Association of Boston, Roxbury, Charleston and their Vicinities, *Constitution and By-Laws* (Boston, 1863); *Constitution and Bye-Laws of the Stone Cutters' and Masons' Association, of Halifax and Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1865); *British Colonist*, 30 May 1868.

31 See, for example, Halifax city directories for 1858/59, 1863 and 1869/70; Halifax City census, 1861 and 1871.

32 E.W. Cooney, "The Origins of the Victorian Master Builders", *Economic History Review*, VIII (1955), pp. 167-8; "The Speculative Builders and Developers of Victorian London: A Comment", *Victorian Studies*, XIII (1969/70), pp. 355-7. Halifax does not appear to conform to the distinctions between building enterprises outlined by John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815-1970* (Newton Abbot, 1978), p. 20; the local market was not large enough to operate firms primarily distinguished by public building or commercial construction, although many smaller firms may have confined themselves to the third category, housing.

33 Halifax city directories for 1858/9, 1863 and 1869/70; Halifax City census, 1861 and 1871. Of the 25 builders reported in street entries in the Halifax city directory for 1869/70, 12 were carpenters and 6 were masons; the trade affiliations of the other 7 remain unidentified.

carried out as two branches of a single firm; Hill himself did the design and other architectural work, while master carpenter John Mumford, in Hill's employ, directed the actual building activity. Whether the artisans in Hill's employ constituted a permanent work force or whether they were independent journeymen carpenters hired for each undertaking is not entirely clear. The extent of Hill's work, particularly his involvement in speculative house building, suggests that there was probably a small regular workforce which was supplemented as occasion required by independent journeymen carpenters.³⁴

The role of the builder in mid-century Halifax was a precarious one. If a building was constructed by contract, tendering was highly competitive. The builder had to estimate accurately his competition, his markets for both supplies and labour, and any technical problems. Usually the contractor was left to finance his own operations, to find materials and labour, and to complete construction against an established deadline, which often incorporated a penalty clause for failure to meet the date. George Lang's contract for a Granville Street store, for example, had a penalty of £90 per week for non-completion; payment was to be made 85 per cent on completion and the balance three months later. When the proprietor proved unable to pay the building costs, he gave Lang a mortgage on his property which Lang, in due time, assigned to his own creditor.³⁵

In addition to construction by contract, a substantial quantity of residential building was erected on speculation. While prosperity and rising population in Halifax strongly encouraged such construction, it was also the outlet for a builder's skills and labour when contracted work was not available. Acquiring suitable land was the first stage in the building process. Its availability, its profitability as speculative property, its cost in relation to building costs all influenced the location and timing of building. Lots, primarily in the north and south suburbs, were purchased on speculation and usually mortgaged immediately for most of the purchase price. Subsequently they were either resold, sometimes to other builders, or built upon as the market and the builder's resources dictated.³⁶ Once building was completed, the structure might be sold or rented. As a large portion of the nineteenth-century population was never able to achieve home ownership, substantial quantities of rental properties existed in the city at any time. The majority were no doubt owned by investors for rental income, some of

34 See, for example, *Novascotian*, 1 September 1842, 13 May 1844, 28 August 1848, 1 November 1852, 5 September 1859, 26 November 1860; *Acadian Recorder*, 17 May 1856, 3 October 1857; *Morning Journal* (Halifax), 19 June 1854,

35 See, for example, *Acadian Recorder*, 9 October 1858; *Evening Express*, 10 May 1865; Halifax Provincial Building (New), vert. mss. file, PANS; Notebook of David Stirling, Queen's University Archives; #1314, Thomas vs. Romans and #1653, Murdoch vs Romans and Lang, RG 39C, 1862, PANS.

36 Halifax County, Index to Deeds, 1836-66, PANS; see, for example, entries for Henry G. Hill, Robert Davis, George Lang, George Blaiklock.

whom at least had commissioned their construction for that purpose. Whether by choice or by circumstance, a number of Halifax builders retained ownership of some houses which they had built and which they subsequently let.³⁷ In the early 1860s, the unusual level of sustained commercial construction created a shortfall in residential construction and stimulated a noticeably large number of independent builders to respond to market demand with speculative building for rapid sale in mid-decade. Effective timing and locating of speculative building were a major key in determining a builder's success or failure in the speculative housing market.

Repairs and enlargements, such as those carried out on the Brunswick Street Methodist Church in 1857-58 at a cost of £3000,³⁸ constituted the final principal area of the builder-craftsman's operation. Traditionally, this type of work constituted a large portion of a builder's and a craftsman's labour and income, and the large number of wooden buildings, the numerous enlargements to existing buildings, and the demand for fashionable renovation suggest that Halifax was no exception. Although Halifax builder-craftsmen undertook not only complete buildings but also contract work in their own trades, it is not clear what portion of the work of such firms was actually comprised of the more elementary, direct trade type.

Because of the precarious nature of building and the traditionally high bankruptcy rate in the building industry, financing was often a builder's most difficult problem. Like the English speculative builders,³⁹ the Halifax builder-craftsman must have found financing through a network of local sources including his sureties on contracts, mortgages on his property, and after 1850 the local building society. Some evidence of the important role played by the Nova Scotia Benefit Building Society can be seen in its transactions in mortgages in the decade 1852 to 1861. In these years it financed 452 mortgages and received on assignment a further 20; against this it released only 122 and assigned 4. Although a second building society was formed in 1863, the business of the earlier society appears to have increased rather than decreased through the mid-1860s.⁴⁰

The third type of builder described by Cooney — not a craftsman but perhaps a merchant, erecting complete buildings on the basis of contracts with master craftsmen in the various trades — appears to have been rare in Halifax, except

37 See, for example, John Mumford's ads in *British Colonist*, 22 February 1862; *Acadian Recorder*, 26 October 1862; 21 March 1863; also, *Novascotian*, 1 November 1852; *Evening Express*, 26 February 1862.

38 *Novascotian*, 15 February 1858; *Acadian Recorder*, 20 February 1858.

39 Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 24.

40 For discussion of building societies and their advantages, see *Novascotian*, 5 April, 10, 17, 24 May, 14, 28 June 1847; 30 August 1852; for Halifax societies, see *British Colonist*, 9 February 1850; *Halifax Reporter*, 9 August 1860; Index to Deeds, 1852-1866, PANS; *Acadian Recorder*, 28 February, 9 May 1863.

where a merchant was building for his own use either directly in a personal capacity as in residences or stores or in a personal investment capacity for rental purposes. Estate agents, such as Samuel Gray and William Allen, may have undertaken some such activity to feed their busy real estate agencies, but the one clearly identifiable builder of this type in Halifax was auctioneer J.D. Nash. More detailed examination of Nash's activities through property transactions, taxation and court cases is required to determine the extent and success of his operations but one example of his undertakings was his huge Victoria Buildings erected on Hollis Street shortly after the 1857 fire. While its designer and builder are both unknown, a notice in the *Novascotian* in June 1857 indicated that Nash was joining Doull & Miller and Maurice McIlreith in the erection of "fine brick buildings with cast iron fronts on the premises recently purchased". In January 1861 Nash's building was offered as a good opportunity for investment from which a return of 9-10% might be expected. As the notice went on to explain, "the proprietors [were] only anxious to sell that with the proceeds they may build up more Brick Buildings in the business parts of the city". How many, if any, of the buildings which Nash auctioned also represented a partial investment on his part is, at this stage, unknown. In May 1862, with the residential market more opportune for investment than the commercial one, Nash purchased the field between the Horticultural Gardens and Camp Hill Cemetery on which he intended to erect fourteen two-storey brick dwelling houses, "tenements for the masses". In noticing the purchase, the *British Colonist* lauded the much-needed "enterprise and public spirit" with which Nash had previously erected "buildings at once useful and ornamental".⁴¹

It is more difficult to assess when the fourth type of builder described by Cooney — the master builder, erecting complete buildings and employing more or less permanently a relatively large body of labourers and workmen in all the principal building crafts — first appeared in Halifax. By the mid-1850s the two circumstances that Cooney associates most strongly with the rise of the master builder both prevailed in Halifax.⁴² Large scale government building coincided with commercial prosperity and its attendant new construction and fashionable improvement of existing structures. The extent and sustained level of this building made possible the development of substantial workshops and relatively large, permanent work forces. Simultaneously, the emergence of the practice of assigning single, fixed-price contracts for large buildings, rather than solely for their individual parts as in the past, favoured the general builder who could capitalize upon economies of scale and the assurance of materials and an established work force. By the 1860s there were half a dozen builders working in Halifax whose operations exemplified characteristics of the master builder. All

41 See, for example, *Novascotian*, 15 June 1857; *Evening Express*, 30 January 1861; 23 May 1862; *British Colonist*, 27 May 1862; *Evening Express*, 14 July, 8 September 1865.

42 E.W. Cooney, "Origins of the Victorian Master Builders", pp. 170-6.

were regular bidders on major construction contracts in the city in the 1860s.

Robert Davis, a mason who had arrived in Halifax by 1840, may have been the first to establish an operation which began to move beyond the limits of his own trade. By the mid-1850s he was employed on successive government contracts while also carrying out private commercial building. The prominent new City Market (1854) was followed by the Lunatic Asylum (1856), the City Prison (1857) and the City Hospital (1857). The large scale of government construction, its regular system of payments, and the sequence of projects which he undertook provided Davis with the opportunity to establish a large regular work force. When it was not occupied on government projects, it was engaged in prime commercial construction which included the Bank of Nova Scotia, the adjoining new store for Messrs Boggs & Ross, and alterations to the Union Bank two blocks distant. In September 1856 the *Novascotian* reported Davis' weekly wage payment at £315; if that was his average weekly wage figure for the building season, his business was paying out at least £10,000 a year in wages alone. If Davis was, however, operating beyond the limits of his own trade by the late 1850s, it is surprising that he was not more successful in competing in the expanding construction market, where he was already well-established, against ambitious newcomers to the Halifax scene. In the prime building period from 1860 to 1863 Davis continued, in partnership with Andrew Barton, to take some substantial contracts, but by 1865 he seems to have largely withdrawn from major building and to have limited his principal role to the less capital-intensive supply of building materials.⁴³

George Lang, whose Halifax career lasted only from 1858 to 1865, epitomizes the builder-craftsman working in Halifax on a scale larger than his own craft, in this case masonry. The designer and sculptor of the Welsford-Parker Monument in 1860, Lang established himself in Halifax as the contractor for Thomas's county court house and the three Thomas-designed stores on the west side of Granville Street. His commercial and institutional building in the early 1860s, especially structures designed by Stirling, culminated in his successful competition for the \$100,000 Provincial Building in 1864. By this time Lang had his own work force, sustained by both the scale and quantity of his commissions, a well-established creditor in James Forman, cashier of the Bank of Nova Scotia, and a masons' workshop, a carpentry and building practice, a slate quarry and a steam engine. In addition to contracts for the erection of buildings of all sizes, he was prepared to provide plans and specifications for buildings and to do all kinds of jobbing. Lang's building establishment, however, was shattered in 1865 when, through a combination of circumstances, including his own overextension, he became bankrupt in the course of erecting the Provincial

43 *Acadian Recorder*, 17 July 1841, 8 April 1865; *Morning Journal*, 19 April 1854; *Novascotian*, 15 September 1856, 20 April 1857, 2, 9 January 1860; *Evening Express*, 8 April 1861; *Morning Chronicle*, 11 March 1868.

Building and retired to brick-making at Shubenacadie.⁴⁴

Two more successful builders who arrived in Halifax in the 1850s were George Blaiklock and Henry Peters. Both Blaiklock and Peters came to the city in 1852 as partners in the firm Peters, Blaiklock & Peters, Quebec principals contracted by the British army to erect the Wellington Barracks. This contract introduced a new scale of building activity in the city. In its first year Peters, Blaiklock & Peters employed 300 artisans and labourers in clearing the site and commencing operations.⁴⁵ The following year, unable to obtain locally a sufficient quantity and quality of bricks for the required work, they established a brickyard at Eastern Passage, equipped with American machinery, which by 1855 mechanically produced the first numerous, quality supply of bricks available to the city; in 1861 it reported over a million bricks of various types for sale. By the early 1860s, other brick manufacturers following Peters, Blaiklock & Peters' example made construction of brick buildings a feasible option to stone or wood.⁴⁶ To provide the interior and exterior finishing materials for the barracks, Peters, Blaiklock & Peters also established the first steam-operated door, sash and blind manufactory in Halifax, which was in operation by late 1855. Again, they brought to Halifax a new class of machinery rapidly coming into commercial production in the United States. Sold to long-established local carpenter Alexander Bain in 1860, the mill offered "Doors, Blinds, Sashes and Mouldings, of every description constantly on hand, and executed at shortest notice [as well as] all kinds of Carpentry and Joiner's work made to order". It too was followed by similar manufactories which, "with the help of a few attendants, could duplicate the work of dozens of joiners working with hand planes, and could quickly turn out large volumes of mouldings of extraordinary low cost and exact profile".⁴⁷

The Wellington Barracks established Peters, Blaiklock & Peters firmly in the Halifax building world. Not only did they become prime suppliers of manufactured building materials in the local market, but in the course of extending their contract in 1855, they obtained reputable financial backers in William Hare and M.B. Almon.⁴⁸ Upon completion of the barracks in 1858, they moved from

44 Susan Bugey, "Building in Mid-19th-Century Halifax: The Case of George Lang", *Urban History Review*, in press.

45 *Novascotian*, 6 September, 11 October 1852.

46 *Novascotian*, 22 August 1855, 21 April 1856, 14 June 1858; Royal Engineers' Papers, vol. 48, passim, p. 171 ff, esp. pp. 258, 264, MG 12, PANS; *Evening Express*, 31 July 1861, 19 March 1862; *Morning Sun*, 24 April 1863.

47 *Acadian Recorder*, 1 March 1856, 17 November 1866, 12 January 1867; *Evening Express*, 4 January 1858, 19 May 1865; *Novascotian*, 26 December 1859, 5 March 1860; Halifax County deeds, bk. 126, f. 522, PANS; John H. Englund, "An Outline of the Development of Wood Moulding Machinery", *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology*, X-4 (1978), p. 20.

48 Detailed correspondence relating to the progress and problems of the Wellington Barracks contract is found in Royal Engineers' Papers, vols. 48 and 49, MG 12, PANS.



Figure 5.

The Wellington Barracks (top), built in the North Suburbs to replace the North Barracks on Citadel Hill burned in 1850, and the new St. Matthews Church (bottom), moved from the town centre to the edge of the South Suburbs, marked the mid-century decentralization of Halifax. These two major construction contracts in the 1850s established Quebec builders Peters, Blaiklock & Peters in the Halifax building industry where George Blaiklock and Henry Peters firmly situated themselves as leading local builders throughout the 1860s. (top: National Army Museum, London; bottom: author).

military construction to the civil sphere by taking the £9000 contract for erecting the new St. Matthews Church, “universally spoken of as, beyond comparison, the most elegant specimen of ecclesiastical architecture in the city”.⁴⁹ Dissolution of the firm in 1860, and the departure of its senior partner, Simon Peters, left George Blaiklock and Henry Peters to re-establish themselves as individual builders in Halifax.

Indicating his willingness “to enter into contracts for the erection of every description of buildings”, Blaiklock moved immediately to a number of prime commercial contracts for rebuilding in the burnt districts on Granville, Hollis and Prince Streets and was soon recognized as a “contractor well and favourably known as the builder of some of our finest buildings”. Blaiklock’s 1865 contract for Trinity Church involved him in the classic problems of the Halifax building world; despite the building committee’s dedicated efforts to create a building fund equal to the costs, a year after completion Blaiklock had still not received \$2,500 of his contract price,⁵⁰ although his scale of operation was sufficient to absorb this delay in payment. As early as 1862, Blaiklock moved into the purchase of building lots and quality speculative house building in the rapidly opening south suburbs. In 1864, for example, he offered for sale “Two commodious and well-built Brick Houses on Queen street, now in course of completion, with Brick Stables and Coach houses in rear”, featuring not only a “beautiful situation” and “modern style of construction” but “Bathrooms fitted with pipes for hot and cold water; Water closets, &c.” Later that year he commenced a terrace of six pressed brick and freestone dwellings on Pleasant Street, which he had completed and disposed of by late 1865. By building and selling as rapidly as he could and holding his houses for rental only when he could not sell them, Blaiklock was apparently able to operate a revolving capital fund which continuously financed at least a portion of his building activity. Other funds were obtained by mortgaging properties to investors or to one of the local building societies. At the same time he was building substantial residences by contract, such as the Mary, Queen of Scots house on Queen Street. By 1871 Blaiklock’s building establishment was reported to have a capital investment of \$30,000, 33 employees earning aggregate yearly wages of \$7,000, and products defined as “Houses & Warehouses, Repairing, &c.” valued as \$30,000 per annum.⁵¹

In the 1860s Henry Peters moved even more firmly than his former partner, Blaiklock, towards the status of a master builder. Peters’ activities were more diversified, more secure, and more extensive. Early in the decade, when

49 *Novascotian*, 25 July 1859.

50 *Halifax Reporter*, 12 January 1861, 31 January 1863; *Novascotian*, 26 December 1859; *Evening Express*, 10 April 1861, 25 January 1864; *Morning Chronicle*, 5 March 1868.

51 *Evening Express*, 15 January 1864; Halifax County deeds, index, 1861-71, PANS; see also *Evening Express*, 26 February 1862, 20 April 1864, 24, 27 November 1865; *British Colonist*, 26 January 1864; Halifax City census, 1871, Ward 2, Schedule 6.

commercial building was most active, Peters undertook a series of prominent brick and stone stores as well as the prestigious Union Bank. In 1862 he successfully built the new skating rink in the Horticultural Gardens, firmly establishing his reputation as a reliable, economic builder; in 1863 he took contracts for the naval hospital and the new jail; in 1865 for the addition to the Lunatic Asylum; in 1867 for the Poors' Asylum; in 1868 for the Blind Asylum. At the same time he built Benjamin Wier's handsome Italianate residence on south Hollis Street. From at least 1862, he was buying building lots on speculation in south Hollis, Lower Water, Pleasant and Kent Streets, mainly areas of the south suburbs prime for the quality speculative housing which he was to erect on them as his other building contracts allowed. In 1865 he moved even further towards the role of developer by purchasing with two others the "Bremner property", which they proceeded to lay out in building lots according to a plan prepared by Peters. By 1871 his "Carpenter & Building Establishment", with an invested capital estimated at \$24,000, used lumber, bricks, building stone, plaster, lime, and portland cement valued at \$7750; it employed 32 men at aggregate yearly wages of \$11,085 and produced "Houses, &c." valued at \$28,000.⁵²

The undisputed Halifax master builder in 1871 was Samuel Brookfield who had succeeded his father at the latter's death the previous year. John Brookfield, primarily a railway contractor, had come to Halifax in the early 1860s and subsequently constructed an engine house, several wharves and some short railways in the civil sphere. His largest works were a series of contracts for the British army totalling over \$1/2 million and including a magazine, a military hospital, two barracks, four batteries, and work on the defences at George's Island. In 1866 he also took over Lang's incomplete Provincial Building and finished it satisfactorily at a contract price of over \$80,000. In 1871 the firm's building establishment, with a capital investment of \$16,000, employed 62 workers for aggregate yearly wages of \$35,000. The work made use of "Building Materials of every Kind" in the production of "Building of Every Description" valued at \$70,000 a year. While no evidence has been found to show that he provided his own plumbing and painting services rather than purchasing these services by contract from one of the numerous, well-established local firms, the scale, credit, capacity and labour force of the Brookfield establishment were in other respects those of a "master builder".⁵³

52 *Evening Express*, 12 July 1861, 15 December 1862; 2, 16 September, 23 November 1863; 4, 25 January, 15 June 1864; 27 March, 19 April, 2 June, 4 October 1865; *Halifax Reporter*, 28 February 1861, 31 January 1863; *Morning Chronicle*, 2 March 1868; *Acadian Recorder*, 27 June 1868; Halifax County deeds, index, 1861-71, PANS; Halifax City census, 1871, Ward 2, Schedule 6.

53 "Credentials for Private Circulation" (copy in possession of Parks Canada, Halifax Defence Complex); *Halifax and Its Business* (Halifax, 1876), pp. 150-1; A.J.B. Johnston, "Defending Halifax: Ordnance 1825-1906" (Parks Canada, Manuscript Report Series #234), p. 31; *Evening Express*, 28 April, 15 November 1865, 5 March 1866; *Acadian Recorder*, 16 February 1867, 27 June 1868, 26, 27 October 1870; Halifax City census, 1871, Ward 1, Schedule 6.

Changes in the Halifax building world were an integral part of the mid-nineteenth-century transformation of the city. Large scale and sustained demand for building services in the government, commercial and residential sectors stimulated the formation of architectural practices whose principals replaced self-trained designers as the architects of the city's most prominent new structures, as had already occurred in the largest Canadian cities. Continuous and substantial construction also facilitated the emergence of the building firm characterized by a relatively large, permanent work force, a reliable supply of materials, steady capitalization, and the capacity to undertake building of whatever type and scale required. The Brookfield firm, still in operation a century later, epitomized this direction. Increasing preference by proprietors for assigning single fixed-price contracts for whole structures to masons or carpenters who would orchestrate the total construction further altered traditional practice in the industry and the craftsman's role in it. The building boom in the late 1850s and early 1860s, which attracted increased numbers of building artisans to the city, encouraged specialization within their trades, which was reflected both in the extent of services available and in stronger trade organization. At the same time extensive demand for building supplies spurred mechanization in local production while commercial manufacture of new products elsewhere introduced a greater diversity of materials in the Halifax market. Although depression in the 1870s severely affected the building trades, the impact of these mid-century changes was seen in the evolution of the industry in the 1880s and 1890s as a more industrialized component of the social order and in the physical fabric of the late nineteenth-century city. More immediately, the influence of changes in the mid-century building world was evident in the transformation of a predominantly wooden town into a more substantial, more sophisticated, and more coherent cityscape, important segments of which remain in place today.