

Peter John Stokes FAPT

Draft profile prepared by Peter John Stokes, April 2013

It should be said that Stokes' interest in old buildings was fostered by his father, who, as Sales Manager for IBM in Yorkshire, would take his son on his summer holidays along with him on his business trips to customers and leave him for a time in an historic abbey or church, York Minster being a favorite place if not the Railway Museum, a close rival, for his son's second passion was steam locomotives!

Sponsored as an evacuee by the Canadian IBM, Stokes as a young teenager came to settle in Canada as a "War Guest" in the fall of 1940. There he came under the guardianship of a Danish English architectural sculptor, Jacobine Jones, who had built in the early 1930s a studio-house in York Mills, north of Toronto, where he grew up. From there he completed 4 years of secondary school education at Earl Haig Collegiate Institute in North York, graduating with a small bursary to enter the School of Architecture, U. of T., in 1945 (starting in Ajax early in 1946) and finally graduated in 1953, going then to the office of the contemporary Architect, Howard Chapman.

The scene begins to change rather radically and rapidly here as he joined an Urban Renewal Study Team for the City of St-John, N.B. in the summer of 1956, took the Planning Course (School of Architecture, U. of T.) in 1957 and was approached by one of his working colleagues, Verschoyle Blake Ontario's principal architectural historian, with whom he had led the second contingent of the U. of T., School of Architecture measuring team on recording threatened structures in the Seaway area, following on the 1956 foray led by B. Napier Simpson Jr., his one-time neighbour and schoolmate in Architecture. Verschoyle asked if Stokes would be interested in becoming assistant to the resident architect of Upper Canada Village, Milan Harminc, whom Stokes had met and shared discussions with in the planning course. He was engaged with Jeanne Minhinnick as Furniture and Decorations, for three and a half years, three years as Restoration Architect of the project, in a total immersion course in early building conservation.

After the opening of the Village, Stokes set up his own business in 1961 with a small team, in Ottawa, promptly getting work there. His first work on an older building was the addition of a new chancery to the South African Embassy and some conservation on an 1840s stone house. Then commissioned to record and make restoration drawings of the so-called Historic Mile of Sussex Drive (really the ¼ of the Sussex Street southern section) for the National Capital Commission he actually lived in an apartment on the site, he also engaged in work in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Port Hope; he was sent across Canada by National Historic Sites to investigate and report on candidates being considered by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board.

He was also commissioned to undertake the third Pilot Study for the National Inventory of Historic Building in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Halifax and Quebec being its fore runners. Here his team, besides recording a selection of early buildings in Niagara-on-the-Lake and area also drew up a series of sketches

as guides to identifying and recording historical architectural detail, later borrowed by Niagara Foundation that asked Stokes to write an accompanying descriptive text, published by the Foundation as the Early Architecture of the Town and Township of Niagara in 1967, perhaps Canada's first historical/architectural glossary. It was re-issued on the occasion of the Foundation's 50th Anniversary augmented by local photographs besides being issued in black and white as a "Student Version"! In 1971 came Stokes' Old Niagara-on-the-Lake (U. of T. Press) with sketches by Robert Montgomery. Also assistance to Tom Cruickshank in Rogues Hollow, the Story of the Village of Newburgh through its building, promoted through and published by the Architectural Conservation of Ontario, followed by HASPE (Historical Architectural Survey of Prince Edward County) which with Tom Cruickshank evolved into The Settler's Dream, 1985 by the County, and since reprinted. Stokes' own book, A Village Arising, the Story of the Building of Upper Canada Village 1958-61 and later, where he used his own coloured photographs of 50 years before came out in 2011.

His architectural conservation works have included many examples of varied nature, including St. Mark's (Anglican Church) 1809, 1822 (roof structure), St. Vincent de Paul (Roman Catholic) 1835 (conservation plus addition) both in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Grange (1817-1840s) A.G.O. Toronto, and perhaps his longest conservation – cum- restoration project, the Old Courthouse (1835, 1866) in Upper Woodstock, N.B. (from a house barn) which took 25 years under the auspices of the Carleton County Historical Society caught by the exigencies of fund raising and government assistance to carry on the work full tilt. He also worked on the renovations to Galt Town Hall (1857), Phase 1 and 2 to the conservation of Victoria Hall (1856-60) in Cobourg, a study of Collingwood's main commercial street, Hurontario, with a small team of University of Waterloo architectural students. With Frank B... in the late 1990s he updated Gordon Couling's Inventory of the City of Guelph. He also consulted in the layout and building placement of King's Landing on the St. John River, N.B.

Stokes has had a continuous and varied practice in the building conservation field over his chosen career.

In 1967 Stokes married Ann Tompkins. In 1973 he was awarded an honorary degree by Brock University. He has received numerous awards in building conservation over the years. Stokes has also had several teaching positions as Adjunct Professor with the School of Architecture, U. of Waterloo and more recently at the School for Restoration Arts at Willowbank, Queenston.

It was in 1968 that he, among others interested in the field, was invited to Stanley House, the Vice-regal summer residence in the Gaspé, to discuss the possibilities of an umbrella organization for the building conservation business. Many of those invited by David Bartlett Stokes already knew, such as Charles Peterson, American restoration Architect, Jeanne Minhinnick, Gerald Budner, her friend, Torrey Fuller, Jack Herbert, Jack Richardson, Canada's No.1 Architectural Historian, Dr. George McBeath from N.B., among them. There seemed to be a few notable omissions, but perhaps they were asked and couldn't come. Some participants had a 'rocky' voyage on their journey there, being delayed by a crossing of the St. Laurence. But it was a full working party and the verandah could not have taken more enthusiasts.

As it started out as a grass roots organization including at the start representatives from a wide group of workers in the museums and their buildings such as Wilfred Indernick of Perth, but gradually took on a more professional and technical approach as it tried to cover the real 'nuts and bolts' of building conservation. That earlier discensia was, sadly, lost, but APT has grown immeasurably in its technical research and reporting as it has grown internationally, largely leaving Canada, its originator, behind. But in 1968, at Stanley House the CAN-AM APT was born.