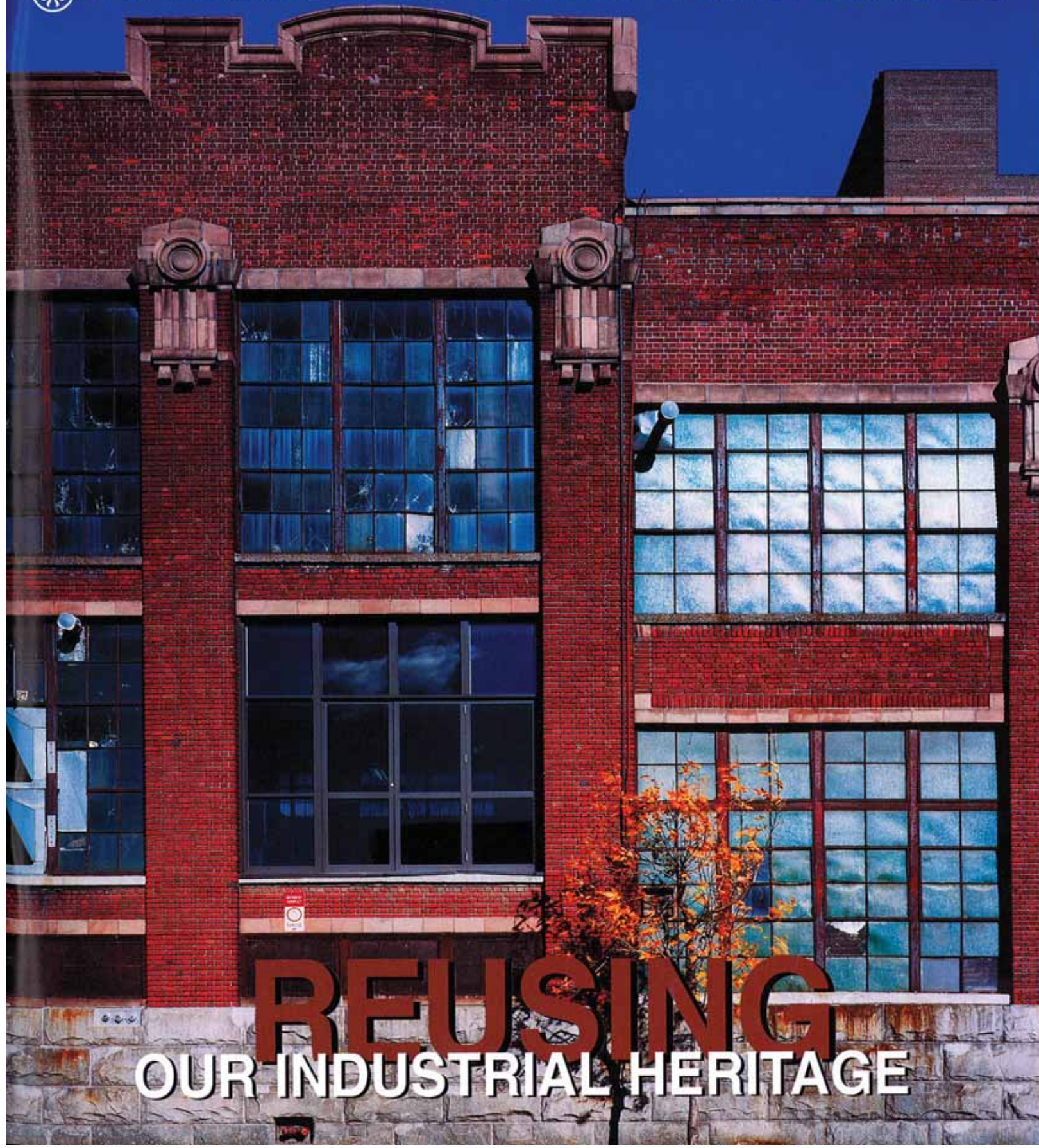


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REUSING

OUR INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

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by A. B. McCullough

Locoshop, The Canadian Opera Company, The Trans Canada Trail, The Power Plant Café & Bar, Prairie Plant Systems Inc.—a diverse collection of Canadian enterprises, but they all share one heritage characteristic: they occupy portions of Canada's industrial past.

Montréal's high-tech business park, Locoshop, is housed in a restored part of the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR's) Angus Shops, while the Canadian Opera Company occupies buildings originally built for Consumers Gas Company and Standard Woollen Mills. The Power Plant Café & Bar is in the University of Alberta's former steam heating and power plant, while many miles of the Trans Canada Trail follow abandoned rail lines. And Prairie Plant Systems Inc., operator of

Canada's only legal marijuana farm, grows its pot in an abandoned copper and zinc mine near Flin Flon, Manitoba.

The preservation and reuse of industrial structures is a fascinating, important and difficult aspect of heritage preservation. Industrial structures are among the most emotive artefacts of the first century of Canadian history. Massive and enduring, they define neighbourhoods and cities and evoke memories of Canada's growth from a small, rural colony to a modern industrial nation. Many are not conventionally beautiful, and sometimes the sites are heavily polluted. For some Canadians who toiled in them, under often harsh conditions, they are reminders of an unpleasant past.

Left: The Belding-Corticelli silk mill on the Lachine Canal in Montréal has been converted to stylish condominiums. Below: Locoshop business park, an award-winning adaptation of the old Angus locomotive shop in east-central Montréal, retains much of the original structure and some of the plant equipment. In one of the sheds, a travelling crane and gantry were used as a brace over the parking area.



Buildings, like people, have a life cycle. Factories constructed to house cutting edge technology of the nineteenth century were often technologically obsolete by the middle of the twentieth. As particular industries waxed or waned, building sites became either too cramped for further expansion or superfluous to the industry's needs. Often they were abandoned or recycled as low-cost industrial or storage space. Frequently these new uses involved minimal maintenance, and structures continued to deteriorate, increasing the risks of loss through fire or demolition.

Industrial sites are also threatened by rising land values. Many early industrial structures were centrally located in urban areas; frequently they were on waterways. The sites, if not the buildings, are attractive and too valuable to be left idle. All too often, the first step towards redevelopment involves the demolition of existing structures—structures which embody a part of Canada's industrial heritage. This does not have to be the case, for there is ample evidence that most industrial structures can be profitably recycled while retaining some, if not all, of their heritage character.

Industrial structures fall into three categories: buildings constructed to house light industry, those built for heavy industry, and structures or landforms created by industry. Light industry structures, typically of the "mill construction"

type associated with late-nineteenth-century textile mills and warehouses, are often considered attractive. Their brick or stone exterior walls frequently feature architectural details which would now be uneconomic to reproduce, while their regular fenestration and standardized floor plans lend themselves to conversion to office and residential use. Their potential for conversion has been recognized since at least the early 1980s, when the former Joseph Simpson knitting mills in Toronto were redeveloped as Berkeley Castle Yard. Shortly after, the Canadian Opera Company acquired two neighbouring buildings on Front Street. One, the former Standard Woollen Mills (built 1882), was converted to administrative offices, a box office, library, archives and workshops for the company. The other, the former Consumers Gas Purifying House (built 1887-88), now houses the 450-seat Imperial Oil Opera Theatre and facilities for rehearsal, coaching, workshops and receptions.

Textile mills seem particularly amenable to conversion. In Marysville, New Brunswick, the Gibson Cotton Company mill is now used as government offices, while in Montréal the Belding-Corticelli silk mill on the Lachine Canal has been converted into apartments, and the Merchant's Manufacturing Company cotton mill, once used for storage, is being converted to office use. Smaller mills in Sherbrooke,

Below: In 1985, the Canadian Opera Company rehabilitated the former Consumers Gas Purifying House in downtown Toronto for spacious rehearsal and performance space. Right: In the conversion of the CPR's red brick roundhouse in Vancouver, B.C., into a Community Centre, the railway turntable was preserved as a permanent reminder of the building's original function.





Quebec, and Almonte, Ontario, have also been converted to residential use.

Buildings designed to house heavy industry—railway shops, steel mills, power plants, mining structures and lumber mills—require different solutions. Often they are less attractive, in a conventional architectural sense, than mill construction buildings. In addition, many are little more than large shelters for machinery, with little internal structure. They do provide large interior spaces which can serve some conversion purposes—theatres and public markets—and several conversions have taken advantage of these spaces.

In Vancouver, the Granville Island Public Market occupies a series of renovated steel and timber sheds—the former B.C. Equipment Company factory. Opened in 1979, it was the first stage of the redevelopment of Granville Island, and the market—featuring vegetables, fish, meat, baked goods, and flowers—continues to serve as Granville Island's anchor. On the East Coast, Halifax's Brewery Market is housed in the old Alexander Keith's brewery. In addition to the weekly farmer's market, the complex comprises restaurants, studios and offices. Since 2000, Labatts, the current owner of the Keith's brand, has operated a small brewery/museum in the complex. In Winnipeg, the former Grand Trunk Railway and Great Northern Railway stables have been joined to house the Forks Market, combining produce stalls, food court, and restaurants. The Forks Market, along with the former National Cartage Building (which now contains shops, restaurants and offices), provides a commercial complement to the Forks National Historic Site, which commemorates native history and trade, transportation and settlement in the Canadian West.

Railways form a central part of the Canadian myth, and railway stations enjoy a privileged position under the *Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act* of 1990. Other buildings associated with railways have little legal protection; they can, however, be saved by imaginative conversion projects. Roundhouses, built for the maintenance of steam locomotives, were uniquely associated with railways. In Vancouver, both the CPR's red brick roundhouse (built in 1888) and a 1950s-era diesel shop were restored at the time of Expo 86 and subsequently converted for use as a community centre. In Toronto, the St. John Street roundhouse at the foot of the CN Tower was dismantled and reconstructed on its original site above an underground parking garage. It now houses a micro-brewery and is used as storage space for a number of engines and other railway artefacts.

The Angus Shops were opened in the Montréal suburb of Rosemont in 1904 and served as the CPR's main facility for building and overhauling locomotives until the 1970s. The main buildings were huge, single-storey brick sheds, over 1,000 feet long and 65 feet high. In the 1980s, portions of the site were severed and rebuilt with public and private housing. The entire facility was closed in 1992. Fearing the loss of its industrial base, Rosemont pressed for a redevelopment plan which incorporated an industrial component. With the financial aid of both the federal and provincial governments, one of the sheds was redeveloped as the core

of a projected high-tech industrial park.

Locoshop, as it is known, involved the insertion of modern office space into the interior of the huge shed. The project, which opened in February 2000, won the Herman Miller Sustainable Design Award for its incorporation of environmental criteria—the decontamination of the site, the extensive reuse of building components and materials, and the use of natural ventilation and lighting—in its development. In addition to its exterior shell, vestiges of the building's industrial past, notably a massive travelling crane, remains in place. Locoshop occupies only one of the three surviving sheds. A second stands as a roofless, stabilized ruin with parking within the walls, while a third houses a supermarket. The three buildings, taken together, provide an impressive reminder of the scale of the industry which once dominated the site.

Many industrial power plants built to house steam boilers and steam engines were made obsolete by the large-scale shift to electric power. Solidly built, with large interior spaces, they offer opportunities for conversion. In 1915 the University of Alberta completed a power plant to provide both heat and electricity to the campus. The plant was shut down and gutted in 1973. For a few years it was used as storage space and a "low quality teaching area" until it was condemned. Then it was redeveloped to house the Graduate Student Association with offices, meeting spaces, studios and a restaurant and bar. The restaurant and bar occupy the large open spaces formerly filled by boilers and generators.

In another instance of a power plant conversion, the Toronto Young People's Theatre operates out of a former Toronto Transit Commission generating station at 165 Front Street. Originally built as stables for horses of the Toronto Street Railway, the building was converted to a generating station when electric power replaced horse power. In 1906 the company began purchasing power from Niagara and shut the generators down. For more than half a century the building was used for storage or sat empty. It was saved from demolition in 1977 when the Young People's Theatre converted it to theatre and studio space.

Industrial land forms—railway and canal rights of way, quarries, and mines—form a third type of industrial "structure" which can be recycled or reclaimed. Abandoned railway and streetcar rights of way, especially in urban areas, are often reused as roadways. Sometimes, as is the case with parts of the Trans Canada Trail, railway rights of way are incorporated into parks and pathways.

Underground mines are hidden from sight and, in most cases, are simply closed off and abandoned when they are no longer profitable. Some underground mines do offer the prospect of a secure environment at a constant, moderate temperature. Security was the key factor in the federal government's decision to support Prairie Plant Systems' bid to establish Canada's only legal marijuana farm in an abandoned copper and zinc mine near Flin Flon, Manitoba. While this particular project, which produces marijuana for medicinal use, is not likely to be replicated, the use of abandoned mines as alternatives to greenhouses has potential.

Quarries and open pit mines have been recycled as everything from landfill sites to conservation areas; frequently these uses are more in the nature of reclaiming a damaged landscape than preserving an industrial one. For example, few visitors would recognize Victoria's Butchart Gardens as the quarry which Jenny Butchart converted to a sunken garden as a means of covering the scars left by the mining of limestone for the manufacture of cement. The only surviving evidence of the site's industrial past is the chimney of a long-vanished kiln.

None of these conversions provides an ideal solution to preserving our industrial heritage. Although few are as extreme as the Butchart Gardens, most reuse of industrial buildings or landscapes involves a substantial loss of the heritage associated with the site. Typically, buildings are stripped of their machinery and most ancillary buildings and structures are demolished. The huge interior spaces which were so characteristic of mill construction buildings like the Gibson Cotton Company are broken up into conventional rooms. In the process, much of the character of the industrial buildings is lost; sometimes all that is left is an attractive exterior, stripped of context.

On the positive side, the basic structures are preserved. The structures sustain an awareness of the industrial past and provide an opportunity to interpret industrial history using historic photographs, interpretive panels and industrial artefacts. Sadly, these opportunities are not always taken up, but the survival of the structures keeps the possibility of interpretation alive.

Museums offer the most comprehensive opportunity to preserve and interpret both the structures and equipment of an industrial site *in situ*. However, given economic imperatives and public and political priorities, only a small minority of industrial sites will ever be preserved as museums. Even those which are preserved will lack much of their context.

In Port Alberni, the former R. B. McLean Sawmill is being preserved as a commemoration of the British Columbia forest industry. Built in the 1920s and abandoned in the 1960s, the mill was recognized as a national historic site in 1989. The mill, lumber deck, sawmill bin, powerhouse and blacksmith shop are being restored as a working site with its machinery intact, operable, interpreted, and substantially safer than it was in its heyday. The social structure of the mill is also interpreted using surviving bunkhouses, cookhouses and family residences.

This complex and costly project is a product of extensive public and private co-operation. Owned by the City of Port Alberni, McLean Mill National Historic Site is operated by the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society, while the Alberni Valley Museum is responsible for collections management and interpretation. The federal and provincial governments, MacMillan Bloedel and the McLean family have all



Visitors to the restored R. B. McLean steam-operated sawmill in Port Alberni, B.C., can follow the process of turning logs into lumber, as practiced 75 years ago.

provided financial support and technical assistance.

In a similar development, the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation is working to preserve the Claybank Brick Plant at Claybank, Saskatchewan. Completed in 1914, the brick plant specialized in manufacturing fire brick for use in furnaces and boilers. The switch from steam locomotives to diesel engines reduced the market for fire brick and, with little new investment, the plant lost ground until it was shut down in 1989. In 1992 the plant was donated to the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation, and in 1994 it was declared a national historic site eligible for funding under the National Cost Sharing program. With federal, provincial and private funding, the site has been stabilized and restoration begun. A friends group, the Claybank Brick Plant Historical Society, has developed an interim interpretive program and conducts regular tours of the site. On Heritage Day the machinery is reactivated and a few hundred bricks are pressed out as they were before the plant closed.

In spite of the demonstrated potential of industrial buildings for reuse, recycling is still the exception. Why? First, the very real attraction of the new should not be underestimated as a factor working against recycling the old. Second, the potential liability involved in developing sites which are, or may be, polluted is a potent factor deterring both developers and those who would fund or insure them. Third, neither the federal nor the provincial government provides significant financial incentives to encourage the reuse of industrial buildings. Fourth, zoning regulations and building codes are designed with new structures in mind and are sometimes a hindrance to reuse of older buildings. All of these factors, even the allure of the new, are susceptible to change; the role of the heritage community is to make the argument for the necessary changes before it is too late.

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