

Preserving Industrial Heritage

First, there are questions to be answered

It is a sure sign of changing times when long-familiar objects are at last embraced as cultural artifacts. When they achieve that venerable status, it is a virtual certainty that they have been replaced by something new.



Jacques Dalibard

We have long been accustomed to thinking of the surviving implements and products of the predominantly agrarian "Iron Age" as worthy historical artifacts. That is because the agrarian age had

been replaced by something new, the "Industrial Age," and we felt it important to know how we'd come to that transformation.

With the dawn of what is variously called the "Information Society," the "Electronic Age," or even the "Global Village," rapidly-increasing interest in industrial heritage has come as a natural corollary. Industry as we've known it for a century and a half is still much in evidence. But already there is a certain urgency about preserving what is best in it because rapid change can be ruthless in its treatment of even the recent past.

In some countries, the study and preservation of early industrial heritage has been long accepted as a legitimate field of historical interest; Britain and several other European countries, notably Germany and Sweden, are leaders in this respect. In most other countries, Canada among them, the interest is much more recent — and somewhat chaotic.

In Canada, even basic questions of terminology, definition, scope, jurisdiction, and approach remain to be fully answered. On the question of terminology, for instance, confusion still exists over whether to call the field industrial archaeology or industrial heritage. "Archaeology"

seems inappropriate because it implies an approach often involving destructive investigation. "Heritage," on the other hand, encompasses too wide a sphere for some tastes.

The problem of definition can be as basic as deciding whether an object is "architecture" (traditionally the province of the architectural historian) or an "engineering structure." How, for instance, should the Eiffel Tower be classified? Or a distillery aging vault? A hydroelectric station? A railway roundhouse?

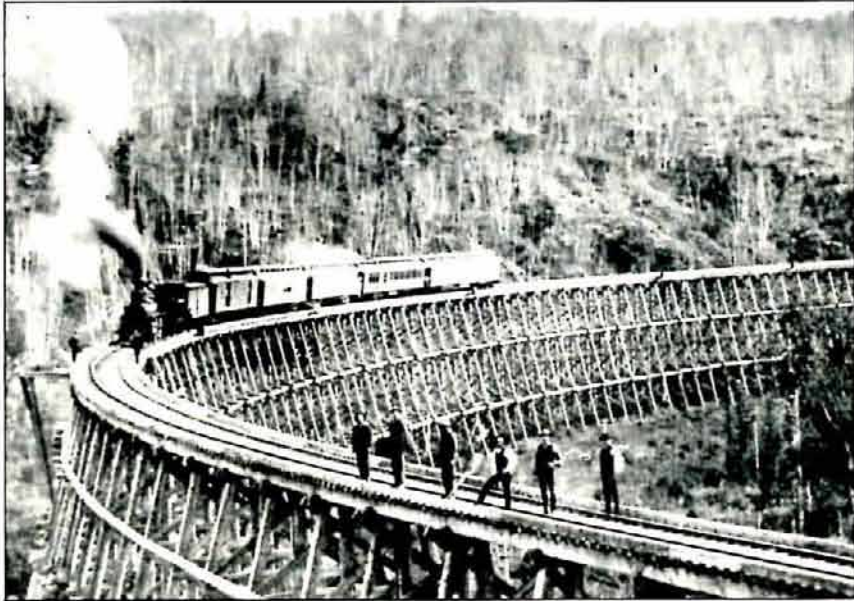
If we are to use a term like "Industrial Heritage," where are we to establish its boundaries? With abandoned industries? With structures and equipment, but not with products? Or are we to conceive of the field in broader terms that include manufacturing processes, products, and inventions?

In resolving such questions, matters of jurisdiction, the perennial Canadian concern, are already

ance of industrial heritage as a vital part of our national heritage.

The development of heritage resources usually follows a familiar progression. In Canada, achieving an appreciation first of our fine arts heritage and, more recently, of our architectural resources, began in each case with isolated recordings and preservation, gradually moved towards broad thematic conceptualizations, eventually resulted in the creation of institutions to further the work, and has since been followed by legislated supports and protections. In the field of industrial heritage, we are still at the first stage — that of isolated recordings and preservation.

There have been several unsuccessful attempts to do more. In the early 1970s, for instance, Parks Canada briefly funded research intended to create a comprehensive "Engineering Heritage Record." The information collected at that time now lies unused in the Public



The construction of this Canadian Pacific trestle bridge (so named because of its open-braced framework) helped bring industry to British Columbia. But is the bridge itself an example of industrial heritage?

beginning to emerge. Where do the traditional responsibilities of the museologist, the archivist, and the historian end, and those of the industrial preservationist begin? How are these distinctive roles to be integrated?

Questions. It is a measure of our current state of development that there should be so many of them. A systematic effort is clearly required in Canada to resolve those questions — and to win more widespread accept-

Archives of Canada. Insufficient funding, inadequately-defined mandates, wavering bureaucratic commitment, lack of strong support at the political level, and public indifference rooted in lack of knowledge have created formidable barriers. With one or two notable exceptions, the Federal Government, which often takes the lead in such things, has not been involved to any great extent.

Of one thing, Canadians may rest

perfectly assured. Canada has had a wonderfully rich industrial past. We have been pioneers in industries as varied as mining, paper making, long-distance communications, agricultural machinery, cold-weather metallurgy, all-terrain vehicles, and hydro-electric generation to name only a few. We have adapted and made effective use of many other technologies first developed elsewhere. To preserve the best and most significant elements of Canadian industrial heritage is to preserve an important slice of world industrial heritage. International industrial heritage organizations have been among the first to acknowledge this fact. In calling for a strong international committee specialized in industrial heritage, the International Council on Monuments and Sites has urged Canada to take steps at home to identify and develop its industrial heritage resources.

I don't want to imply that we

Maurice at Trois Rivieres in Quebec, Canada's earliest iron production facility, and the 1890s-vintage Kingston Municipal Pumping Station. Numerous others have since been added, or are in the process of being added. Notable among these: the Hamilton Pumping Station (which was the cover subject of *Canadian Heritage's* December 1983 issue); the restoration, currently underway, of long-abandoned gold dredges in the Yukon; and the creation of a museum of distillery history in Waterloo, Ontario, by Joseph E. Seagram and Sons Ltd. The Newell survey did not include potential sites. A systematic survey of industrial sites, let alone thorough recording, is still a thing of the future in Canada. Both are urgently required.

The Seagram venture, which is more fully examined elsewhere in this issue, raises a vital point. Private sector companies are often in the best position to ensure that industrial



In earlier incarnations, Ottawa was a military camp and a pulp and paper town. Perley and Pattie's 1872 mill, above, is emblematic of the city's industrial phase.

Canadians have been entirely neglectful of this part of our heritage. A survey of Canadian industrial museums and historic sites prepared in 1981 for the fourth International Conference on the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (ICCIH) by UBC history professor Dr. Dianne Newell identified 68 industrial museums and 101 transportation and communications exhibits. These included several world-class examples, like the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa, Les Forges St.

artifacts are preserved and exhibited. Most industrial buildings are on private property: they are controlled by their owners. There is very little that can be done to preserve the best in Canadian industrial heritage without the willing, enthusiastic participation of Canadian business.

The financial outlays can be enormous. Seagram's, for instance, has spent nearly \$6 million on the collection and restoration of artifacts and on the creation of a museum building. The company is perma-

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*For all who sailed,
For all who prayed,
For those we mourn,
For those survived,
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When gold was discovered in Dawson City, prospectors first used picks and shovels. Later came heavy equipment such as this gold dredge.

nently committed to expenditures of several hundred thousand dollars each year for salaries and upkeep.

There are some incentives, of course, for embarking on such a project — chiefly in the public relations value of creating a well-regarded public attraction. Tax write-offs help to offset some of the expense. But, if more companies are to follow this path, greater incentives in the form of tax breaks and financial assistance are clearly required. Winning these additional incentives should be high on the agenda of industrial preservationists.

It is a positive sign to note in recent years the formation of at least two private organizations concerned about Canada's industrial heritage: the Canadian Science and Technology Historical Society and the Ontario Society for Industrial Archaeology. The first has been primarily interested in studying and sharing industry's written history, while the second has an active interest in the hands-on preservation of structures and artifacts.

The Heritage Canada Foundation, too, has recently become active in the field. We are currently providing consulting expertise towards the preservation and development of the textile mills in Sherbrooke, Quebec. We are very interested in adapting the European concept of "eco-museums" — the preservationist approach that stresses the integration of the heritage resources of a particular district into the lives of the people who currently live there. An eco-museum, always evolving and always stressing the "human" as opposed to the "mechanistic", draws

on the resources of the district to create an appreciation of its historical significance. Artifacts become departure points for an integrated understanding of how the environment in which one lives has come to be.

In short, it is becoming apparent to us at Heritage Canada that some aspects of the preservation of industrial heritage fall within our mandate to preserve Canada's architectural heritage.

In a recent letter addressed to me, Chris Andraea, the President of the Ontario Society for Industrial Archaeology, suggested that individuals and groups interested in industrial heritage preservation gather in Ottawa this year, under Heritage Canada auspices, to discuss the full range of questions relating to this subject. In my reply, I welcomed the suggestion. Planning for such a meeting has since begun.

It will be an important step. From a situation currently characterized by isolated preservation and recording, confusion over responsibilities and objectives, and poor communication among industrial heritage specialists, we can see the emergence of a significant new movement in Canada — a movement to recapture a fascinating and significant part of our past. ✱


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