

The Ontario Cottage: The Globalization of a British Form in the Nineteenth Century

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This article explores the spread of the diminutive, symmetrical, hip-roof cottage throughout part of the British Empire in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It documents and suggests the possible sources for this house form within a specific context (Ontario, Canada), and offers reflections on the issues of globalization and localization as they apply to this particular Ontario form.

The Ontario cottage is scattered across the countryside and clustered in towns and cities throughout the southern part of Ontario, one of Canada's oldest provinces. The story of how this form came to be built in Ontario, and how it then came to be seen as unique to Ontario, is a story of nineteenth-century globalization of a British house form.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British military systematically established forts in present-day Ontario. English, Scottish and Irish settlers followed the military — some to engage in trade or provide professional services, but most to claim land and establish farms. French and American settlers were also part of the process, but their influence was confined to discrete areas along the southern border that was shared by Canada and America.

It is impossible to know who built the first Ontario cottage. However, it is reasonable to assume that both the British military and British settlers carried with them shared memories — if not architectural pattern books — of building forms that were part of the eighteenth-century Georgian tradition. These forms, with their ordered, symmetrical front elevations and snug hip roofs, had been built by the Royal Engineers throughout the empire, and by private owners throughout England, Ireland and Scotland. By the turn of the nineteenth century, features that were more “exotic,” such as the verandah (an element that was probably of Anglo-Indian origin), were incorporated into cottage design, and these, too, became an integral part of the Ontario cottage.

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THE ONTARIO COTTAGE

The Ontario cottage, at its simplest, is a symmetrical, single-story building with three bays. A door is placed squarely in the middle of the central bay, and windows are arranged symmetrically on either side of the doorway, usually near the middle of the end bays (FIG. 1). However, what most distinguishes the Ontario cottage is the shape of its roof — a hip roof. When a cottage has a square floor plan, such a roof assumes the shape of a perfect pyramid; when the plan is rectangular, the corresponding roof has a ridge.

Symmetry is only one aspect of the Ontario cottage. As a thoughtfully designed Georgian structure, the proportions of its front elevation, in particular, are carefully considered and regularized. These tend to be simple, and the typical relationship of building elements to one another is 1:2 and 1:3. The house is so basic in its tectonic qualities that it is intuitively understood, like the stereotypical child's drawing of a house.

Not all Ontario cottages are three-bay structures. In fact, some of the earliest cottages were graceful five-bay structures, frequently described as Regency cottages. Like its three-bay cousin, the five-bay cottage is also symmetrical and intuitively simple in its tectonics (FIG. 2). An extremely rare variation of the Ontario cottage is the seven-bay variety. The multibay barracks designed by the Corps of Royal Engineers may well have directly influenced this curiously long form.

The elevational symmetry of the Ontario cottage is often mirrored in its floor plan. A central hall frequently divides the

structure from left to right, and in the simplest cottage there are usually four rooms, two on either side of a central hall.

Sometimes, a cottage may have a central hall surrounded by rooms — two on either side and one at the back, making a total of five rooms (FIG. 3). Other floor plan variations exist, but whatever the variation may be, it tends to carry the common theme of bilateral symmetry and strong rationality in its layout.

The kitchen usually takes on the form of an added “tail” attached to the main block at the rear or, less frequently, at the side. There were practical reasons for having the kitchen built as a separate structure — heat and odors from cooking could be easily isolated from the main house, and in the event of a fire, the separation would provide a barrier. However, some cottages have their kitchens tucked neatly into the basement along with service rooms, including sleeping quarters for servants.

THE ONTARIO COTTAGE AND THE VERANDAH

An integral part of many Ontario cottages is the storm porch (less common) or the verandah (more common), both of which add considerable aesthetic appeal and provide useful additional spaces. The closed storm porch serves as an air lock to keep heat in during the cool months, while the open verandah extends the interior space into the outdoors during the warmer months.

Verandahs were used by families for a variety of activities — from resting and reading to enjoying family meals (FIG. 4). In

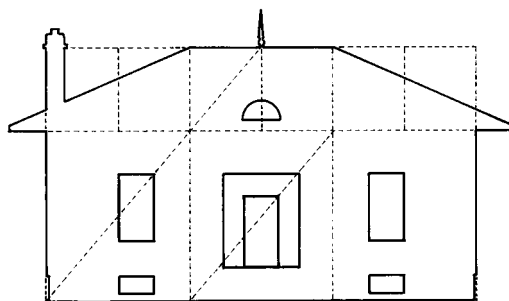


FIGURE 1. Typical three-bay cottage. Note the regularized relation of building components. Hoovey Cottage, Port Hope, Ontario. (Drawing by Lee Ho Yin.)

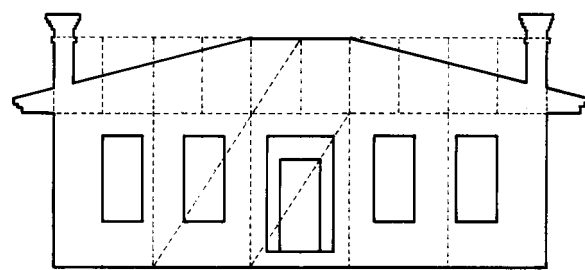


FIGURE 2. Typical five-bay cottage. Note the regularized relation of building components. Yerex Cottage, Guelph, Ontario. (Drawing by Lee Ho Yin.)

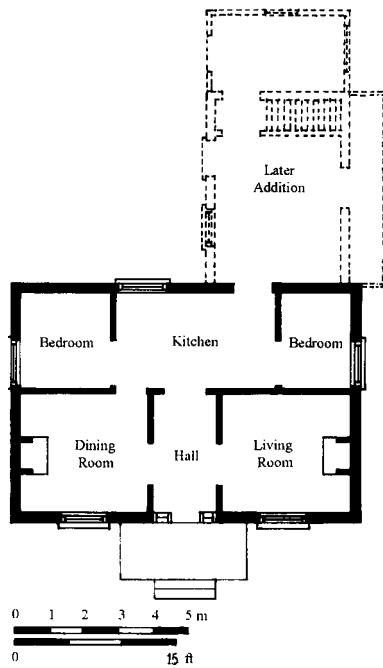


FIGURE 3. Typical cottage floor plan. Windrush Cottage, St. Marys, Ontario. (Drawing by Lee Ho Yin.)

1832, in a letter back to Ireland, a young settler by the name of Thomas Magrath described his family's wide Ontario verandah:

*We pass our leisure hours in it during the fine weather, choosing the shady, and sheltered side, according to the sun, or wind; and frequently sitting there with candles until bed time; with the occasional annoyance, however, of the troublesome moskitoes [sic]; — but where can we expect to find perfect enjoyment?*²

A year later, another early settler, Catherine Parr Traill, described her unfinished Ontario house to her family in England:



FIGURE 4. Cottage verandah. The Cresswells At Home (Cedar Creek, Harpurhey, Ontario). Photograph, c. 1870. (Private collection.)

*When the house is completed, we shall have a verandah in front; and at the south side, which forms an agreeable addition in the summer, being used as a sort of outer room, in which we can dine, and have the advantage of cool air, protected from the glare of sunbeams.*³

The use of the verandah, a building element most likely borrowed from Anglo-Indian architecture, demonstrates the network of influences that tied Ontario forms to more “exotic” countries within the British Empire. The use of the verandah outside British India was probably hastened by the English publication of illustrated histories of India and architectural pattern books that included Asian forms. John Plaw’s 1800 design for a dwelling “with a Viranda [sic] in the manner of an Indian Bungalow,” from his *Sketches for Country Houses, Villas, and Rural Dwellings* was one of the first pattern book designs to include a verandah, and of even more significance, to connect the verandah with the Indian bungalow.³

THE ONTARIO COTTAGE AND THE ANGLO-INDIAN BUNGALOW

Is there actually a connection between the Ontario cottage and the Anglo-Indian bungalow?⁴ The interesting tie between these two very different and yet similar building typologies is that both have connections with a common architectural heritage — the Georgian tradition. The relationship between the Ontario cottage and the Anglo-Indian bungalow is important to explore in some detail, as it raises the important issue about the flow of architectural ideas between distant places in the British Empire during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is only in examining the architectural roots of the bungalow that it is possible to understand the nature of the relationship, if any, between the Anglo-Indian bungalow and the Georgian cottage form.

The Anglo-Indian bungalow, a late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century house form, is thought to be a British adaptation of the Bengali peasant hut known as the *chauryari*, a square structure with a pyramidal roof (or a rectangular structure with a hip roof) that extends on all four sides to create a covered verandah.⁵ As Anthony King has argued, the British appear to have adapted the native house form as a prototype, and by doing so, created a unique form, which was at once Indian and English.⁶ However, a more fundamental question remains: why did the British choose to adapt this particular local house form, instead of the many others they came across in northern India? This is a point that has never been fully explored, and it can be argued that the Georgian cottage form might have been the catalyst that began the development of the Anglo-Indian bungalow.

The argument goes like this: the *chauryari*, with its thatch-covered, pyramidal or hip roof, could well have reminded early colonists of English cottage forms. An army officer, writing in 1803, described the army accommodation this way:

The Englishmen live in what are really stationary tents which have run aground on low brick platforms. They are 'Bungalows', a word I know not how to render unless by a Cottage.⁷

Such a comment suggests that the British found familiarity in the Bengali peasant hut, as it reminded them of the Georgian cottage. It was undoubtedly difficult for British colonists in India to build in their own architectural idiom, but here was a convenient local architectural tradition that uncannily resonated with memories of home. It was only a matter of expediency for the British to adapt a familiar house form and make it their own, and such is the power of the persistence of architectural memory, a phenomenon that occurs in every immigrant community.

And what about the verandah? In this case, the Anglo-Indian origin theory appears to have merit. Some of the earliest cottages in Ontario were constructed by Royal Engineers (this aspect will be discussed in greater detail in the next section), and it is probable that some of the engineers were familiar with the Anglo-Indian bungalow through their training in England or through their postings to other parts of the British Empire. If this was the case, it helps explain the close resemblance between many of the military-constructed cottages and the Anglo-Indian bungalow form, particularly in the use of the integrated verandah, which is a distinctive feature of the bungalow (FIG. 5).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MILITARY

The Corps of Royal Engineers, the building arm of the British military, was responsible for

. . . the construction and repair of the whole of the Fortifications and Barracks, and of all the other Military Buildings in Great Britain and Ireland, as well as those of the Colonies of the British Empire. . . .⁸

The Royal Engineers were well trained for their work. The officers, in particular, were rigorously schooled at two separate institutions. Their training started at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich (England), where they received a “theoretical and mathematical education.”⁹ Their education continued at the Ecole d’application at Chatham (England) where

. . . the officer becomes a good practical Surveyor, and is instructed in the principles of Reconnoitring [sic], besides being practised in Military Drawing.

He goes through a Course of Instruction in all theoretical matters connected with the Art of Building, and is taught the principles of Carpentry, Bricklaying, Masonry, etc., and in short of [sic] all those arts which are necessary in the construction of Military Edifices.¹⁰

Rather frustratingly for this author, the Corps of Royal Engineers seems to have left no records documenting the reasons for its specific use of hip-roof forms for military structures. However, in Ontario, extant fortifications and those depicted in nineteenth-century graphic images clearly show the repeated use of hip roofs for a variety of military buildings, including gatehouses, barracks, officers’ quarters, and small defensive structures along the Rideau Canal. The following three examples may help illustrate the Royal Engineers’ widespread use of the symmetrical one-story hip-roof form in Ontario.

In 1799–1800, Government House, the residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada (present-day Ontario) was built in Toronto (which was named “York” at this time). The building, a symmetrical nine-bay structure topped with a hip roof, was sited in the Toronto garrison and built to the design of Captain Robert Pilkington. As architectural drawings show, the ample residence had two deep wings extending from the rear of the main block, and each wing had an integrated verandah along its outer face.¹¹

In Kingston, the garrison included a residence for the Commissioner. Built before 1815, this residence — a five-bay hip-roof building — had an extensive verandah that wrapped around the front and sides of the building (REFER TO FIG. 5). Here, too, the verandah was integrated with the roof; in other words, the verandah and the rest of the building shared the same roof.¹²

Later, during the 1840s, thirteen “defensible lockmasters’ houses,” essentially three-bay hip-roof cottages with thick masonry walls and strategically placed loopholes (firing and observation ports), were built along the Rideau Canal.¹³ Unlike the other examples cited in this section, these sturdy structures were built without verandahs, but they were given spectacular views of the canal — technically, of course, for reasons of defense.

All three of the above examples show the consistency with which the Royal Engineers used the Georgian one-story hip-roof form for a variety of building types both for domestic and institutional purposes. Two of the examples also show the sophisticated incorporation of the verandah into military building design in Canada. The use of the verandah by the Royal Engineers is especially indicative of the transfer of architectural ideas among Royal Engineers from different parts of the empire, and particularly, it would seem, from the East.

Domestic architectural ideas, however, traveled to Ontario in more immediate ways, especially in the minds of early settlers and in the images found in a variety of architectural pattern books and emigrant guides.

THE INFLUENCE OF BRITISH SETTLERS: THE ENGLISH AND THE IRISH

It is a somewhat difficult exercise to establish which group of British settlers — the English, the Irish, or the Scots — was most responsible for the initial dissemination of the Ontario cottage in Canada.



FIGURE 5. Typical integrated verandah of a bungalow. Emeric Essex Vidal, Commissioner's Residence. Watercolor, 1815. (Courtesy of the Massey Library, Royal Military College of Canada.)

The English, in particular, had a long tradition of producing architectural pattern books, some of which included designs for utilitarian and ornamental cottages. Between 1790 and 1835, for example, more than sixty English and Irish architectural pattern books were published on domestic architecture, some of which included designs for cottages.¹⁴ The cottage designs featured in these books ranged from those of one story to those of one-and-a-half or two stories. Roof forms were as varied as the number of stories, but the majority were clearly based on the popular gable and hip roofs. However, for unknown reasons, the gable-roof cottage was more frequently featured in pattern books than its hip-roof counterpart, even though neither is specifically advocated. One notable exception was the seemingly more balanced use of both gable and hip roofs for estate gatehouses. This could well be explained by the almost perfectly square floor plan of many gatehouses, a shape most agreeably capped by a hip roof. For the purposes of this essay, it is instructive to understand the range of cottage designs through specific examples.

The first architectural pattern book to promote utilitarian cottage designs for laborers was John Wood's *A Series of Plans for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer*, published in 1781. In his attempt to address the appalling housing conditions of the lower class in England, Wood designed a series of cottages, from single-room to four-room types. Interestingly, he included hip- and gable-roof options for the one-, three- and four-room designs, but used only a gable roof for the two-room designs.

Wood's designs for three-room cottages are of direct relevance to this article. "Plate XII" showed two three-room designs (FIG. 6). One of these, "No.2," was for a three-bay, hip-roof cottage with the entrance placed at the side — an unusual placement, but one that did not detract from the rigid symmetry

of the primary elevation. The significance of design "No.2" is that it marked the formal debut of the simple one-story, three-bay cottage with a hip roof in an early English pattern book.¹⁵

By the 1790s, pattern book designers distinguished between functional cottages for laborers and ornamental cottages intended for people of taste but limited means. For example, Charles Middleton, in *Picturesque and Architectural*



FIGURE 6. "Plate XII — Cottages with three Rooms," from John Wood, *A Series of Plans for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer* (Westmead, Farnborough, Hant., England: Gregg International Publishers, 1972; orig., 1806), n.p. (Courtesy of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

Views for Cottages (1793), ignored the need for well-designed cottages for “the poorer sort of country people,” and concentrated instead on cottages “which are built at the entrance, or in different parts of parks or pleasure grounds.” His one-story, three-bay rustic cottages, some complete with thatched hip roofs and “rude trunks of trees” for columns, remain among the most aesthetically charming of the period (FIG. 7).¹⁶

This fascination with the ornamental cottage continued through the 1830s, while the simple laborer’s cottage, at least in England, received less and less attention. An exception to this shift was the 1805 publication of two pattern books by Joseph Gandy: *Designs for Cottages, Cottage Farms, and Other Rural Buildings*; and *The Rural Architect; Consisting of Various Designs for County Buildings*. The imaginative designs featured in these books, which employed refreshingly simple geometric forms, stood apart from the period’s penchant for more complex forms. One of his most delightful elevations was contained in the first cited book, *Designs for Cottages*. Here, in “Plate XII,” Gandy created a novel one-story three-bay cottage with a hip roof that included a “Piggery under the Steps,” and a “Cow-shed . . . under the same Roof as the Dwelling.”¹⁷ The functional adaptability of the cottage form was remarkable.

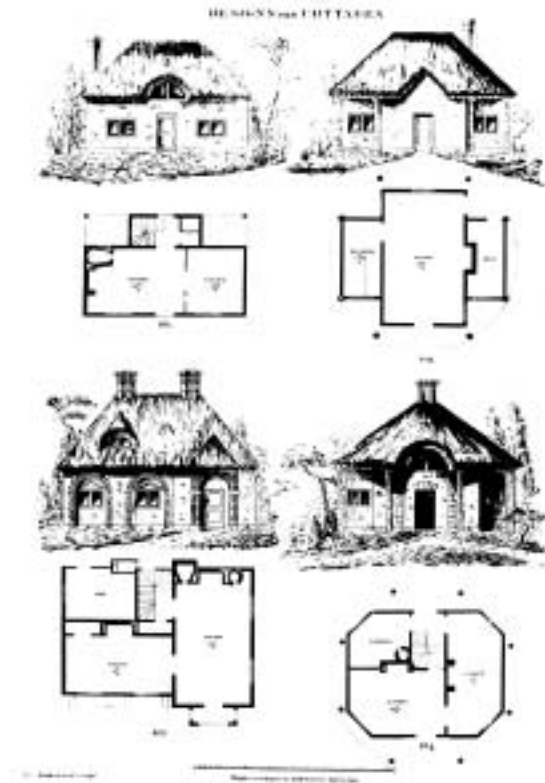


FIGURE 7. “Plate I — Designs for Cottages,” from Charles Middleton, *Picturesque and Architectural Views for Cottages* (Westmead, Farnborough, Hant., England: Gregg International Publishers, 1972; orig., 1798), n.p. (Courtesy of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

English architectural pattern books on domestic architecture also featured designs for essentially one-story hip-roof cottages with five bays. These cottage designs, very much in the Georgian tradition, clearly relate to the five-bay version of the Ontario cottage. One of the handsomest examples was contained in Richard Elsam’s *An Essay on Rural Architecture* (1803). This design — “Elevation of an Entrance front for a Gothic Cottage,” which includes an entrance portico with a room above — epitomized the regularity and order of the Georgian tradition in what appears to be, from the front, a one-story structure.¹⁸

In Ireland, there were at least two architectural pattern books published in the early nineteenth century that dealt with cottage design and construction. Under the patronage of the Farming Society of Ireland, William Barber published *Farm Buildings*, which could well have been the first Irish pattern book to address “a regular system of rural building.” Published in 1802, the author recommended “this Work to the consideration of the man of taste, whose eye seeks for gratification; and to the man of feeling, whose heart delights in the comfort and enjoyment of his neighbors or his tenantry.” Included among his designs was one for a small one-story, three-bay cottage with a hip roof, although in this example the entry was located in one of the end bays.¹⁹

Barber’s appeal to “the man of feeling” may have had some effect. Some 39 years later, Arthur C. Taylor similarly observed in his *Designs for Agricultural Buildings Suited to Irish Estates* (1841):

... many proprietors have given encouragement to their tenantry to build houses, etc., by granting leases and giving in part materials, etc.; but that as there exist no model plans suited to this country to erect from, these houses have been generally very defective in construction, and deficient in accommodation and convenience.²⁰

Taylor’s book, which included cottage designs for laborers and farmers, also offered a design for a farmhouse: “Plate XIII — Plan of a Farm House and Offices.” Although called a “Farm House,” the structure was actually an elegant hip-roof cottage whose three front bays, defined by “three flat arched recesses,” reflected the influence of Neoclassical ideas. The floor plan of the ample cottage, which measured 34 feet wide by 28 feet deep, included three bedrooms (two of which were so-called “slip” bedrooms), a parlor, and a kitchen. This cottage, with such sophisticated tectonic features as eaves “with a good projection,” inset paired chimneys, and a relatively low-pitched roof, would certainly have appealed to people of taste but limited means.²¹

It is hard to substantiate the degree of direct influence that English and Irish architectural pattern books had on cottages found in Ontario. However, the fact remains that many nineteenth-century Ontario architects were trained in Great Britain, and some of them possessed the most popular pattern books in their library collections.²² Notwithstanding the training of architects and their access to pattern books, it is reasonable to assume that English and Irish settlers in Ontario were familiar with Georgian house forms in their home countries.



FIGURE 8. (LEFT) Gate Lodge, Stubb House, Winston, near Darlington, Durham, England. (Photo by author.)



FIGURE 9. (RIGHT) Gate Lodge, Kinoith, Shanagarry, Cork, Ireland. (Photo by author.)

Another source of probable direct influence was the memory of those Georgian gatehouses that marked the entrance to the properties of landed gentry in England and Ireland (FIGS. 8, 9). In Ireland, in particular, gatehouses and other estate buildings would have been one of the best sources of Georgian design.

THE INFLUENCE OF BRITISH SETTLERS: THE SCOTS

Although the Scots produced relatively few architectural pattern books compared to the English, two of their books may well have had considerable influence on building practices in Ontario, and specifically on the production of three-bay cottages. The first was Robert Lamond's *A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of Emigration, from the Counties of Lanark & Renfrew, to the New Settlements in Upper Canada, on Government Grant*, which was published in 1821. The second book, J.C. Loudon's *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, was first published in 1833.

Both books, essentially architectural pattern books (strictly speaking, the first book was a guide for emigrants), contained important elevations of symmetrical one-story cottages with three bays and hip roofs. The earlier publication, Lamond's *Narrative*, is an astounding document for understanding the possible "emigration" of the hip-roof cottage form through Scottish settlers. This slim book included an insert entitled "Designs for Cottages" that featured nine cottage designs, five of which were symmetrical three-bay, hip-roof cottages of one story. What is fascinating about the nine drawings as a whole is the way they were sequentially arranged — from the simplest design to the most complex. The first design was for a very basic conical-shaped structure, while the second was for a straightforward shed roof structure with a symmetrical façade. The third design was for a symmetrical gable-roof cottage with raised gable ends, one that was very Scottish in character.²³

The fourth design introduced the hip-roof form; termed a "Log-Cottage" or "Frame-House," it was a symmetrical cottage with four rooms on the main floor (FIG. 10). The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth designs appeared to be slightly smaller variations of the "Log House." Each of these drawings, including the fourth, was distinguished by the application of different decorative details. These details included elements that anticipated the late-nineteenth-century American Stick Style, and most curiously, "rustic" elements such as columns decorated in the manner of "two trees in their natural state" and "trunks of trees."²⁴

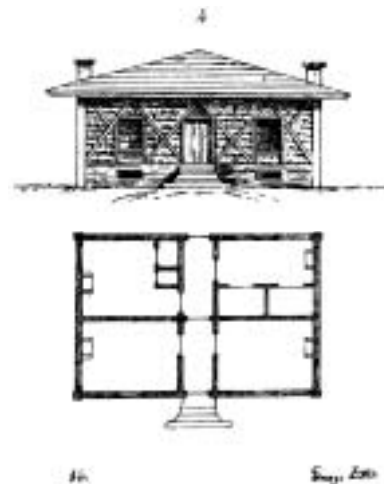


FIGURE 10. "Plate 4 — Plan and Elevation of a Log-Cottage, or Frame-House," in R. Lamond, *A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of Emigration, from the Counties of Lanark & Renfrew, to the New Settlements in Upper Canada, on Government Grant* (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1821), n.p. (Courtesy of Special Collections, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

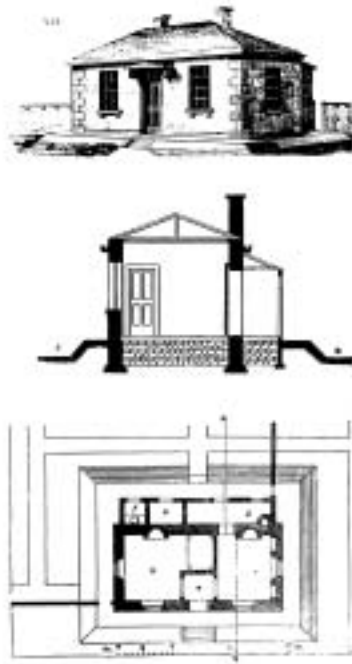


FIGURE 11. “Design VII,” from J.C. Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1853), p.34. (Courtesy of Special Collections, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

The grandest of all was the ninth design, which called for a three-building master plan reminiscent of a three-part Georgian (Palladian) composition. The main cottage, located in the center of the composition, was flanked on either side by a hip-roof cottage of a similar size. However, these two cottages were slightly set back from the central cottage, creating the illusion of smaller and less important buildings, and thereby establishing a clear architectural hierarchy.²⁵

It is impossible to know how influential these designs were, but the fact that they were included in a guidebook for emigrants suggests that they were considered practical housing options for use in Ontario. The predominance of cottage designs using a hip roof further suggests that this cottage type, in particular, was the most favored.

J.C. Loudon’s *Encyclopaedia* has long been assumed to have been very influential in establishing architectural taste throughout the British Empire. In this extensive compendium of architectural designs, Loudon first concentrated on the design of modest cottages. As he made very clear in his introduction, his goal “is to improve the dwellings of the great mass of society.” In “Book I,” “Chapter I,” “Design I,” Loudon presented his first model design, which he described as “A Cottage of One Story, combining all the Accommodation and Conveniencies of which human Dwellings of that description are susceptible.” This model cottage was none other than the symmetrical three bay, hip-roof cottage. But like his predecessor Lamond, Loudon was not content to provide just one variation. For example, he created a variation of “Design I” by adding porch pillars, ornamental chimneys, and a parapet on the terrace. For “Design II,” which is based on “Design I,” he added a verandah, and to this variation, he added ornamental

chimney pots and “a light iron parapet to the terrace.” There are, throughout “Book I,” a number of additional model cottages using the hip roof. “Design VII” is among the most compelling of the variations because of the simplicity and boldness of its compact form (FIG. 11).²⁶

It is tempting to suggest that the Scottish influence in Ontario was most clearly seen in the proliferation of three-bay, hip-roof cottages, a form that comes closest to the prototypical three-bay Ontario cottage. Five-bay cottages, and those of even more bays, were probably more directly connected with the graceful English Regency cottage and the hip-roof military buildings constructed by the Royal Engineers. However, the situation is not clear-cut, as the three-bay, hip-roof cottage form was featured in English and Irish pattern books as well as adapted for gatehouses in England, Ireland and Scotland (FIG. 12; REFER TO FIGS. 8, 9).

THE CANADA FARMER AND THE PERSISTENCE OF SCOTTISH INFLUENCE

By the 1860s, the major influence for the persistence of the cottage form, especially in its three-bay guise, became clearer. In 1864, the first issue of *The Canada Farmer* was published. This periodical, which appeared until 1877, probably did more to promote the widespread use of the three-bay cottage in Ontario than any other publication in either Great Britain or Canada.²⁷ *The Canada Farmer* was primarily intended for the agricultural community, and dedicated itself to educating farmers in a number of areas, including farming practices and the design and construction of farm buildings.

The first section on architecture appeared in an early issue of *The Canada Farmer* — that of February 1, 1864 — under the heading of “Rural Architecture.” The first buildings to be included were “A Log House” and “A Small Gothic



FIGURE 12. Gate Lodge, Strathtyrum House, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland. (Photo by author.)



FIGURE 13. (LEFT) “A Log House” from *The Canada Farmer* (February 1, 1864), p.20. (Courtesy of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

FIGURE 14. (RIGHT) “A Small Gothic Cottage,” from *The Canada Farmer* (February 1, 1864), p.21. (Courtesy of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)

Cottage” (FIGS.13,14). The log house, a one-story three-bay structure with a gable roof, was “made tasteful” by adding a gable over the front door and a “rustic” verandah at the front. No floor plan was included for this house, as the intent was probably to improve the appearance of the ubiquitous log house that had been constructed for decades by emigrants.²⁸

The small Gothic cottage, on the other hand, which was a solid one-story, three-bay structure with a hip roof, was presented in both elevation and plan, and described in detail and with considerable enthusiasm (FIG.15).²⁹ The selection of a cottage for the first section on architecture is significant, especially given the broad range of house types included in later issues. Of even more significance is the reprinting of the cottage elevation and plan in a later issue — that of January 15, 1873. This was not standard practice, and it probably reflected the continuing popularity of the form throughout much of the province.

An intriguing aspect of the design for “A Small Gothic Cottage” is the very real possibility that it was designed by James Avon Smith (1832–1918), a Toronto architect, who was originally from Scotland. The documentation for this assumption is a little vague, but reasonable. The editorial for the first issue of *The Canada Farmer* commented that “Mr. Smith, a successful and rising Architect of Toronto, will make important contributions to the Architecture department.”³⁰ Whatever its immediate legacy, “A Small Gothic Cottage” perpetuated the image of the prototypical one-story three-bay cottage with a hip roof. In addition, this legacy bore the greatest resemblance to cottages included in Scottish architectural pattern books and found throughout Scotland.

THE ONTARIO COTTAGE: LOCALIZING A GLOBAL FORM

What sets the cottage in Ontario apart from cottages in Great Britain — and, indeed, from other parts of the British Empire?

Although its ancestry can be traced to the Royal Engineers, and to design influences from England, Ireland, Scotland and even India, cottage builders in Ontario showed



FIGURE 15. Plan for “A Small Gothic Cottage,” from *The Canada Farmer* (February 1, 1864), p.21. (Courtesy of the J.J. Talman Regional Collection, D.B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario.)



FIGURE 16. *Carfrae Cottage, London, Ontario. (Photo by author.)*

a strong preference for one-story three-bay cottages capped by hip roofs (FIG.16). The probable reason for this was almost certainly economic, although the preference for the hip over the gable roof cannot be explained, surprisingly enough, on economic grounds. The hip roof, which is stronger than the gable roof under certain conditions, actually uses more framing materials.

In addition, and predictably, these cottages made use of an immense variety in building materials, ranging from wood framing faced with clapboard or stucco to structures built of brick, sandstone or limestone. Wood shingles or slates were originally used to protect roofs, although asphalt shingles have increasingly been used as a replacement material. The choice of building materials, until the late nineteenth century, generally reflected the availability of local materials. In addition, eaves, of varying depths, were used to give protection to the upper parts of walls. Likewise, storm porches, when built, offered protection during cold and wet periods, and the more prevalent verandah offered shade during the warm months.

Decorative elements were as varied as the range of building materials. Although the Ontario cottage form remains Georgian in its regularity and symmetry, the window, door and eave trim reflected both the Georgian and Victorian traditions, with a distinct predilection for Georgian, Neoclassical, Gothic and Italianate details. Early nineteenth-century cottages were excessively “polite” in their careful and conservative use of decorative trim — much like a proper English lady or gentleman. But by the mid-nineteenth century, with increasing influence from the United States, some trim came to assume a more exuberant American accent, especially in the use of ornate Italianate details.

Floor plans were as varied as the range of building materials and decorative styles. The typical cottage was one story, but the geography of Ontario created a class of cottages that might adjust to the terrain by becoming two stories at the rear or front, or even the side. The all-important kitchen, an

essential element of any Ontario cottage, was sometimes integrated within the main block of the cottage, although it was more frequently attached to the main block like the tail of the letter “T.” Within the main block, the kitchen might be found in the basement or on the ground floor; outside the main block, it might project to the rear or to one side. However, whatever the shift in the placement of the kitchen, the core of the cottage remained fundamentally symmetrical, both inside and out, its adherence to the ideals of the Georgian form unimpaired by concessions to functionality.

Does the adaptation of the Georgian cottage to Ontario conditions make the Ontario cottage uniquely Ontario? In many ways, the attempt by settlers in Ontario to adapt a British house form to suit such local conditions as the state of the economy, the availability of building materials, climatic considerations and the nature of the land form, did ultimately modify a house form sufficiently to produce an architecture that is distinctively “Ontario” in character. But the adaptation was by no means a conscious effort, and it happened over a considerable period of time. In the end, the cottage, as a house form, remained clearly Georgian, but it was Georgian with what can be called an unconscious local accent.

A LAST WORD ON LOCALIZATION

One Ontario cottage did exhibit a conscious attempt to try to be uniquely Canadian. Unfortunately, it appears to have existed only on paper. Sometime between the 1830s and the 1850s, the prolific Canadian artist Paul Kane (1810–1871) painted a hip-roof cottage, which one of his friends named “Paul Kane’s Wigwam.”

Although the cottage form was unmistakably British, it nevertheless did express in its localized name and in a distinctive detail the artist’s naïve desire to localize a British architectural form in Ontario. That detail is the head of a Canadian Native Person depicted on one of the door knockers. And however feeble it may seem today as an attempt in architectural localization, it did address the immediacy of the Ontario experience.³¹

Here, then, the Ontario cottage spoke beyond the predictable accommodation to local conditions — economy, materials, climate and terrain. Instead, the cottage acknowledged the local culture, in this case the culture of the Canadian Native People, and gave them pride of place — on the front door knocker.

The vast majority of builders and designers, of course, made no such literal attempt to localize the cottage form; instead, they relied on their own skills and knowledge to adapt, subtly and gradually, a global form to local conditions. In time, what was originally a foreign architectural form became so well assimilated to its adopted land that it became part of the local vernacular. Today, the Ontario cottage, as its very name implies, is part of the Canadian architectural tradition.

REFERENCE NOTES

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2. C.P. Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada*, M.A. Peterman, ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997; orig., London: Charles Knight, 1836), p.103.
3. J. Plaw, *Sketches for Country Houses, Villas, and Rural Dwellings* (London: J. Taylor, 1800), n.p. The verandah, as a distinct building element, was included in at least one earlier English architectural pattern book — Charles Middleton's charming *Picturesque and Architectural Views for Cottages* (1793), although there was no explicit reference to the bungalow form.
4. Information and arguments posed in this section are based on Anthony D. King's *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially chapters 1 ("India 1600–1980") and 2 ("Australia 1788–1980").
5. *Ibid.*, pp.24–28. King's discussion of the origin of the Anglo-Indian bungalow included a number of theories. For more information, see the entire section on this subject, "Theories of origin," pp.24–30.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
7. S. Nilsson, *European Architecture in India* (London: Faber, 1969), p.186, as quoted in King, *The Bungalow*, p.28.
8. War Office, *Outline of the Organization, Duties and Course of Instruction of the Corps of the Royal Engineers in the British Service*, 1849, WO 55/1931, p.3.
9. *Ibid.*, p.4.
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15. J. Wood, *A Series of Plans for Cottages or Habitations of the Labourer* (Westmead, Farnborough, Hant., England: Gregg International Publishers, 1972; orig., 1806), pp.20–31. For Wood's description of Plate XII, see p.26.
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19. W. Barber, *Farm Buildings* (London: John Tyler, 1802), pp.1–2,4.
20. A.C. Taylor, *Designs for Agricultural Buildings Suited to Irish Estates* (Dublin, 1841), p.5.
21. *Ibid.*, n.p.
22. For example, John G. Howard, one of Toronto's most important early nineteenth-century architects, was known to have owned Loudon's *Encyclopaedia*. The author is grateful to Shirley Morriss and Stephen A. Otto, both of Toronto, for this information.
23. G.A. Neville, facsimile forward to R. Lamond, *A Narrative of the Rise & Progress of Emigration, from the Counties of Lanark & Renfrew, to the New Settlements in Upper Canada, on Government Grant* (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1821), n.p.
24. *Ibid.*, n.p.
25. *Ibid.*, n.p.
26. J.C. Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839), pp.1,9,20–21,34.
27. *The Globe and Mail* absorbed *The Canada Farmer* on January 5, 1877.
28. *The Canada Farmer* (February 1, 1864), pp.20–21.
29. *Ibid.*, p.21.
30. *The Canada Farmer* (January 15, 1864), p.8.
31. *Paul Kane's Wigwam* is in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum. The title of the watercolor was written directly on the front of the work, although not in Kane's handwriting. This was not unusual; others frequently labeled his works. It has been suggested that the watercolor could well have been titled during the period when Kane became devoted to recording Native People in Canada (after the early 1840s). It also appears that the head of the Native Person could have been painted after the work was labeled, which suggests, perhaps, not only a later naming of the piece, but an even later incorporation of the door knocker design.

