

# The Princes' Gates

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Figure 13. Statuary on the central arch, Princes' Gates. (Canadian National Exhibition Archives)

Everyone has a general idea of what a triumphal arch is. The most famous arch of the modern era is undoubtedly the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, but many other large metropolitan centres have triumphal arches, including Toronto with its Princes' Gates at the eastern entrance to the Canadian National Exhibition grounds.

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by Victor E. Graham

The earliest examples of triumphal arches date back to classical times. The three celebrated prototypes still to be seen in Rome today are the arches of Titus, Septimus Severus and Constantine. All are examples of the ceremonial *arcus triumphalis*, but in earlier times victorious generals who had been granted the honour of a triumph passed through a *porta triumphalis*, signifying a special kind of symbolic entry into the heart of the city (despite the fact that it never formed part of the city walls). This particular type of gate was dismantled when triumphs became the exclusive prerogative of the emperors, and all of the arches subsequently commissioned were arches of honour in the widest sense, supporting statuary and decorated with bas-reliefs and inscriptions designed to keep alive the memory of signal victories and those connected with them. These arches were not really meant to be passed through since they were generally constructed some time after the events they commemorated. For that reason they were frequently oriented parallel to the road, rather than over it, for optimum viewing.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout their empire the Romans built similar triumphal arches to serve as visible reminders of past glories. During the Renaissance, when the ceremony of the triumphal entry was so much in vogue throughout Europe, it was customary to construct a temporary *porta triumphalis* over the principal gate of a city to welcome the king on the occasion of his first formal visit. It was there that he was presented with the keys to the city, which were the actual keys to that particular gate. This custom has persisted into modern times, even for cities that never had walls, and the ribbon which is sometimes cut to permit entry really symbolizes the opening of gates.

Early in the nineteenth century in Europe a number of large permanent arches were constructed in imitation of the earlier Roman arches. The most notable among them were the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile and the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel in Paris, both

Figure 1. Apsley Gate, Hyde Park Corner, built in 1828.



conceived by Napoleon at the height of another classical revival. One might also mention Marble Arch in London, originally built as the principal entrance to Buckingham Palace in 1828 but later moved to its present location, and Apsley Gate at Hyde Park Corner, built the same year as Marble Arch but with a row of five Ionic columns on each side (figure 1). Like Princes' Gates in Toronto, it was conceived as the main entrance to a walled park within the precincts of a larger metropolis. It may well have been one of the monuments which inspired Alfred Chapman, of the firm of Chapman and Oxley, who was the principal architect for Princes' Gates. He was officially authorized to visit the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1925 and he seems to have adapted for his purposes a number of ideas which he picked up in London and in Paris.

Some temporary triumphal arches had already been erected for ceremonial occasions in Canada, but they may not have been known to Alfred Chapman and they are certainly not related in any way to Princes' Gates. One very elaborate example was the flamboyant arch designed by W.G. Storm in 1860 for a location at the bottom of John Street in Toronto as part of the celebrations to welcome the Prince of Wales, who was to arrive that year by boat from Kingston. Its configuration is preserved in a watercolour by William Armstrong (figure 2). A more traditional series of arches was constructed in Quebec City in 1886 to welcome Monseigneur Elzéar Alexandre Taschereau, Canada's first cardinal.

A formal gate to the exhibition grounds in Toronto had been mooted for some years, but construction did not begin until 1927, the sixtieth anniversary of Confederation.

<sup>1</sup> For a general consideration of the Roman triumph see H.S. Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*. (Dutch thesis translated into English), Leiden, 1970 and Robert Payne, *The Roman Triumph*, London, 1962.

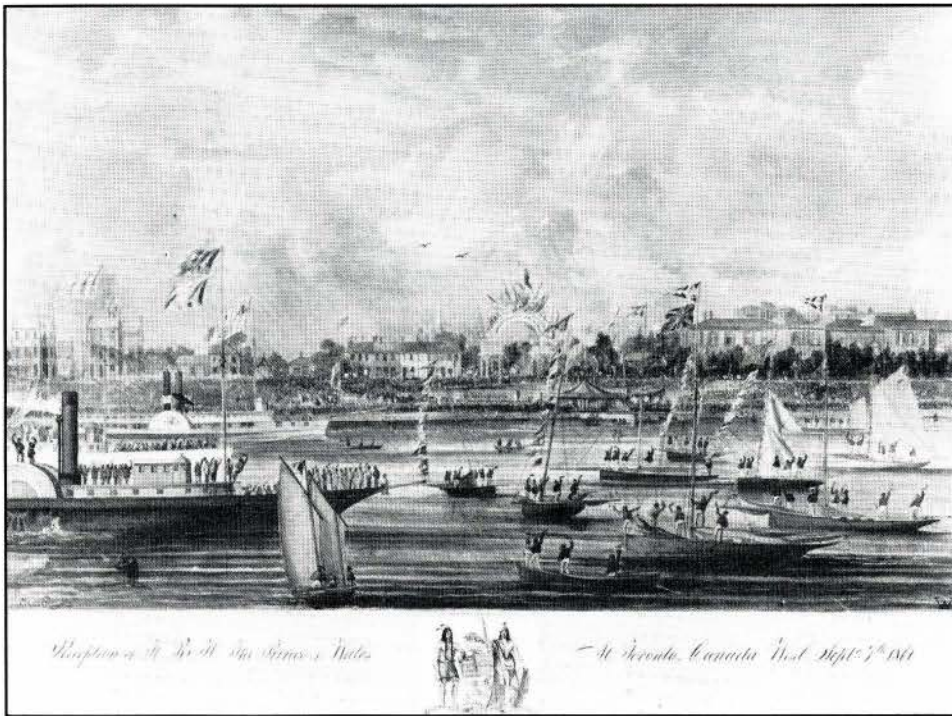


Figure 2. Watercolour by William Armstrong entitled "Reception of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales at Toronto, Canada West, Sepr. 7th 1860." (Art Gallery of Ontario)



Figure 3. Princes' Gates, Toronto, 1927. (Canadian National Exhibition Archives)

The first name proposed was "The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation Gates." As it happened, however, a royal tour of Canada had been arranged for that year and, as part of the ceremonies in Toronto, it was decided to have the gates officially opened by Edward, Prince of Wales, who was accompanied by his brother George, later Duke of Kent. This is where the name Princes' Gates comes from and it is properly spelled in the plural, with 's' apostrophe. This word has always been troublesome and it is frequently mistakenly written in the singular with apostrophe 's', or even as 'Princess'. Of course, if one wanted to quibble, one might well question the plural form *gates*, as applied to a single arch in the centre of a colonnade terminated on each side by symmetrical pylons. Some early references actually use the singular form *gate*, but Alfred Chapman himself used the plural form in a descriptive article published as early as October 1927.<sup>2</sup> One can only speculate that the two plurals were thought to sound well together and to give a more imposing ring to the designation, Princes' Gates.

The entire structure, as seen in a 1927 photograph (figure 3), consists of a single Roman-style arch of cement and stone with two detached Corinthian columns front and back, flanked on each side by a colonnade of nine Ionic columns surmounted by plinths for the display of flags. At each extremity are more substantial curved pylons with fountains at their base. Approval for construction of the entrance, the roadways and the landscaped boulevard leading to it, estimated at \$363,000, was sought in a civic referendum on 1 January 1927 and work was completed by the firm of Sullivan and Fried between 14 April and 30 August of the same year, a period of just four and a half months. Actual cost of the gates alone was \$152,240.17.<sup>3</sup>

2 A.H. Chapman, "The Princes' Gates. The Eastern Entrance to the Canadian National Exhibition Grounds, Toronto." *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, October 1927, pp. 351-355.

3 For details on construction of Princes' Gates, tenders, contracts, etc. see *Contract Record and Engineering Review* Vol. 40 (1926), 10 November, p. 58; Vol. 41 (1927), 23 February, p. 120, 30 March, p. 54, 29 June, p. 654; *Contract* Vol. 20 (September 1927), p. 290.



Figure 4. Model for the Princes' Gates, Chapman & Oxley. (Canadian National Exhibition Archives)

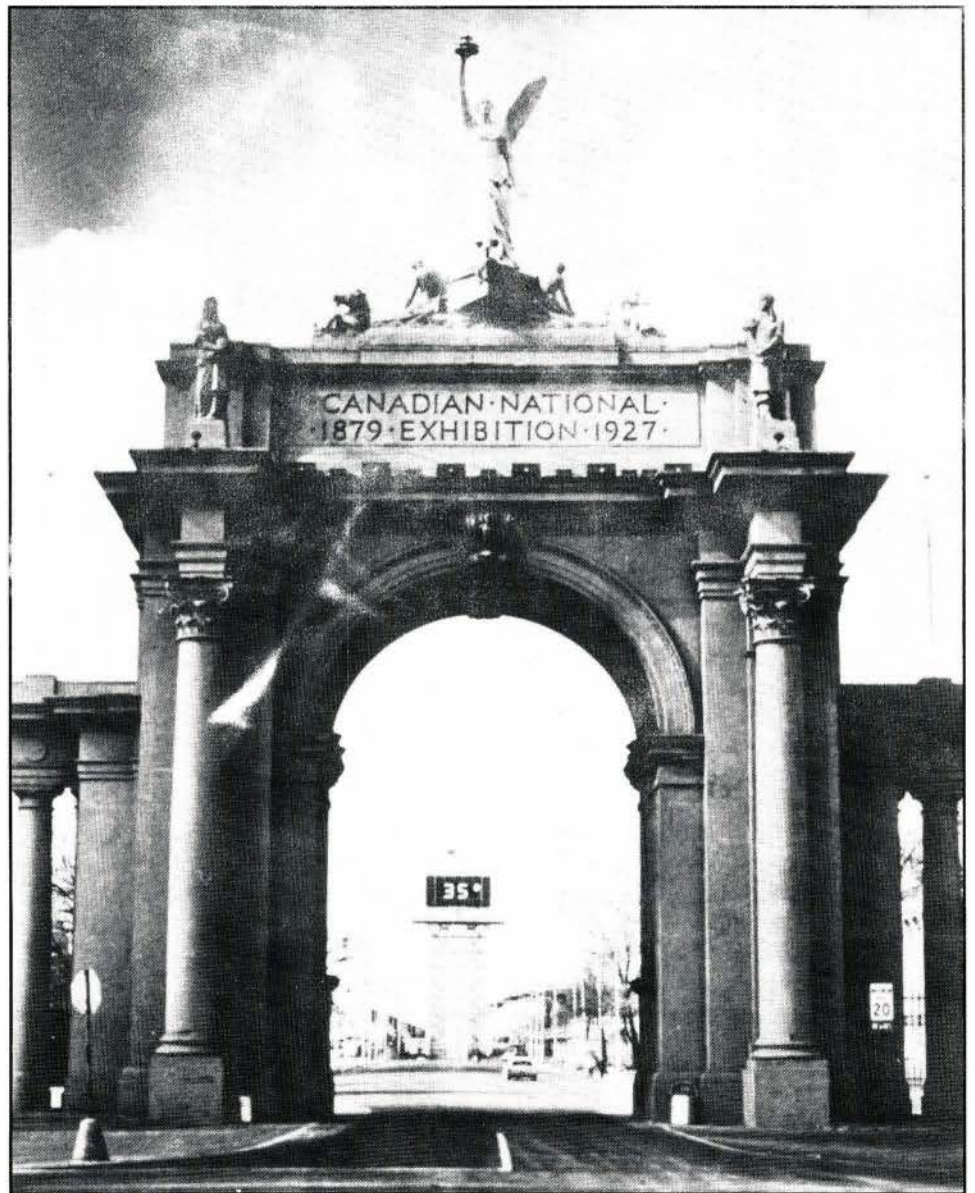
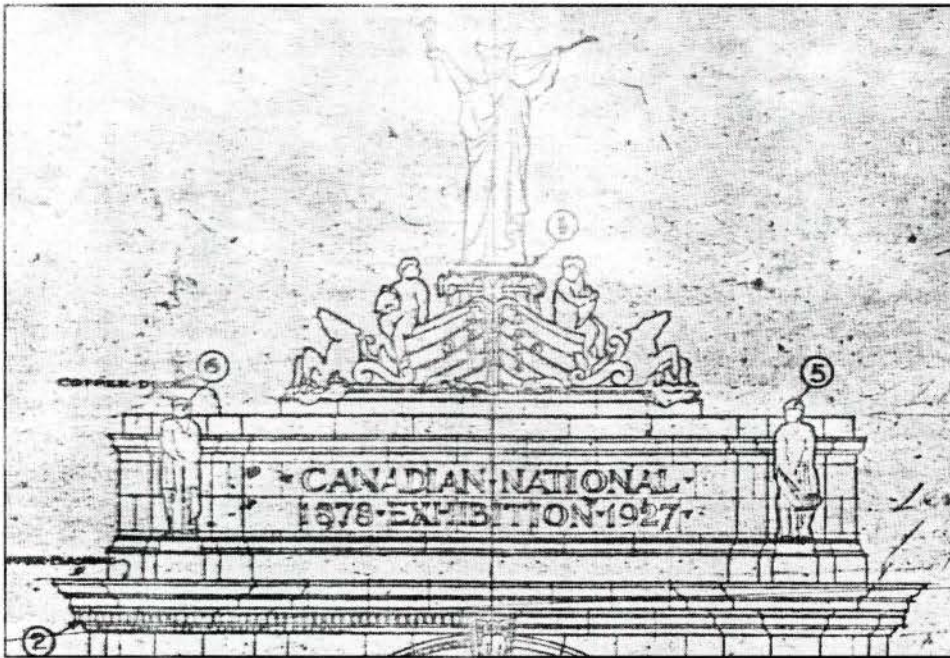


Figure 5. Central arch, Princes' Gates. (Canadian National Exhibition Archives)



All of the sculpture for Princes' Gates was done by Charles Duncan McKechnie, who was born in England in 1865 and died in British Columbia in 1935. He worked very closely with Alfred Chapman on a day-to-day basis and for that reason there are no records of their discussions concerning the symbolism intended. The nine columns on each side of the colonnade undoubtedly stand for the nine provinces in the Dominion, but it is intriguing to note that a photograph of the first model for Princes' Gates, completed before the iconographical program was fully worked out, shows only eight columns per side (figure 4). This may simply have been an error, but that seems doubtful since the model was constructed by the firm of Chapman and Oxley at a preliminary stage.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate choice of nine columns would therefore appear to be a deliberate change and it is, in fact, the only direct allusion to the constituent members of Confederation in 1927.

A close examination of the official architect's plans for Princes' Gates, which are preserved in the Archives of the City of Toronto,<sup>5</sup> reveals a number of other features that were subsequently modified, including the smaller sculptures and the large central figure holding aloft a lamp or torch (figure 5). The latter is commonly referred to as an angel, because of its wings, but it is really a heroic figure directly modeled after the Winged Victory of Samothrace in the Louvre (figure 6). That figure, conceived to celebrate a great naval victory in classical times, now lacks a head and the arms with hands which originally held a kind of lance and a trumpet, but the distinctive positioning of the legs with the windblown folds of the drapery slanting down from the right side of the waist to the left thigh is unmistakable and has been closely imitated. In the early model of the Gates (figure 4) this figure had a trumpet raised to its lips to suggest Victory or Fame, but in the architect's final drawings it is shown with draperies hanging evenly and both arms up in the air, one grasping a torch and the other holding a rudder (figure 7).

It is always risky to postulate specific antecedents in the case of such a commonplace concept, but attention should be drawn to two similar figures on monuments in North America built shortly before the construction of Princes' Gates. One is in Mexico City on the Column of Independence and the other is in Montreal at the top of the Georges-Etienne Cartier Memorial. The latter, carved in 1914 by George W. Hill, represents Fame rather than Victory, and this winged figure in classical robes stands on a globe with its right hand raised in an arresting gesture while the left, lower down, holds a crown of laurel (figure 8). The Mexican Victory, the work of Enrico Alciati, holds in its raised right hand a crown of laurel very similar in shape to the circlet which serves as a support for the lamp held by the central figure on Princes' Gates (figure 9). In both cases the left arm has been moved down to the side of the body with the left hand holding a tiny object that cannot be identified from the ground. In fact, it is only through reading the official account prepared by the Mexican Secretary of State in 1910 that one learns that the object held by the Victory on the column in Mexico City is meant to be a fragment of the chain which used to bind Mexico to the Spanish motherland.<sup>6</sup> What the Victory on Princes' Gates holds is another, less aggressive symbol of



Figure 6 (above). *The Winged Victory of Samothrace, the Louvre.*

Figure 7 (above left). *Architect's drawing for the Central Arch, Princes' Gates. (Archives of Toronto, Central Records No. 96054)*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Contract Record*, Vol. 41 (1927), 29 June, p. 654.

<sup>5</sup> Archives of Toronto, City Hall, Central Records No. 96054.

<sup>6</sup> *Secretaría de Estado del Depacho de Gobernacion, Monumento a la Independencia*. Mexico, 1910.

Figure 8 (left). Statue of Fame, Georges-Etienne Cartier Memorial, Montreal, by George W. Hill.

Figure 9 (right). Statue of Victory, Column of Independence, Mexico City, by Enrico Alciati.



independence and autonomy, a single maple leaf.

The statues on Princes' Gates were not carved from stone in the traditional manner, which helps to explain how the sculptor was able to execute his commission in such a short space of time. Briefly, the method used was to prepare models in clay from which a mould was made. This mould was then filled with a mixture of cement and chipped stone to produce a figure that was finished off by hand.<sup>7</sup> There are several pairs of identical statues on the gates made from the same mould, so the total number required was reduced even further. Unfortunately, sculpture made in this way is even more susceptible than stone to the effects of weather and pollution. As a result, the statues on the gates have had to be refurbished on three different occasions: first in 1957 when they were sand-blasted and patched with cement; again in 1977 when a more extensive program of restoration was undertaken;<sup>8</sup> and most recently in 1987, begun in January of that year so that work might be completed in time for the sixtieth anniversary of the dedication of Princes' Gates (30 August 1987). The last refurbishment involved the removal of all of the statuary for close inspection and reinforcement. It also included replacing the central figure (with its large wings and precariously outstretched arm) with a duplicate made of an epoxy-type material to forestall potential accidents.

In order to study any of the sculpture carefully, one really needs to have a better vantage point than is possible anywhere at ground level. It is possible to actually climb up inside Princes' Gates by means of a ladder in what is now the transformer room on the north side of the arch, but the metal roof at the top is slippery, especially when there is a wind, and the authorities are reluctant to give permission for anyone to try to take photographs without, literally, signing their lives away. Luckily, in this case, such an eventuality is unnecessary since the Archives of Ontario possess an extensive collection of slides of these statues in their

<sup>7</sup> The statues were cast in concrete form *in situ* by Peerless Artificial Stone Co. from plaster models made by the firm of W.H. Hynes. These were cut into sections and reinforced for the pouring when they were reassembled on the gates.

<sup>8</sup> This work was done by the firm of A.N. Shaw, Restoration, with the collaboration of Spencer R. Higgins, Architectural Consultant.

original state, as well as other works of sculpture throughout the province. The pictures, rather uneven in quality and colour reproduction, were taken by Lawrence Hayward, a pioneer in the field who set out many years ago to compile a complete record of the lives and works of all Ontario sculptors. As an example of his initiative, he even wrote to England, in the case of Charles McKechnie, to verify parish records concerning the date of his birth. His extensive files and photographs, though far from scholarly, are an important source of documentation conceived by an imaginative amateur working entirely on his own.

Right from the start it was the intention of the architect to have the coat-of-arms of the province of Ontario at the summit of the two pylons at the ends of the Princes' Gates colonnade, directly above the fountains. The refinement of this concept and the surrounding decorations provide a good illustration of the iconographical method used.

In the original architect's drawings there were four classical figures around the coat-of-arms on each pylon (**figure 10**). One pair was standing to the right and left with one arm resting on the coat-of-arms and the other pointing upwards in imitation of the Victory above the central arch. Two other figures, holding water urns, were seated facing outward on each side. At some stage it was apparently decided to change these rather conventional figures to something more closely related to the productive capacities of Ontario, as reflected in the Canadian National Exhibition.

An interesting small preliminary version of these statues modeled in clay by Charles McKechnie is shown in a photograph in the Archives of the Canadian National Exhibition (**figure 11**). It shows two realistic figures who tend to overwhelm the rather diminutive coat-of-arms placed between them. The female figure to the left is shown with a sheaf of grain to represent farming while the male figure to the right stands for industry. His left hand is resting on a cogged wheel and he holds in his right hand a wooden mallet.

In the final version, these two figures were further modified. The woman's robes were lengthened and her arms partly covered to produce a more imposing allegorical effect, and the man's right hand now supports draped chains with enormous links of two different sizes instead of the mallet (**figure 12**). His left hand still rests on a cogged wheel but he also appears to have a set of drawings spread out on his lap to suggest more explicitly the role of construction and industry in the province. The distance between the two figures was increased considerably and the enlarged coat-of-arms is separated from them by two rather elaborate miniature Ionic columns with large bands of acanthus leaves carved around the middle. These help to link the group both to the Ionic columns of the colonnade and the Corinthian columns of the central arch. In addition, another decorative element has been placed above the coat-of-arms in the central frame. It consists of a small orb centred between a pair of raised wings, which echo in turn the heroic wings of the Victory on the central arch.

When one turns to the group of statuary on the main arch, there are also some significant refinements to be noted (**figure 13**). In the original drawing the Winged Victory stood on a pedestal at the prow of a well-defined vessel, evoking the familiar classical concept of the ship of state. There were, in addition, two smaller figures, like those on the pylons, seated on the gunwales and holding urns. Characteristic hippocamps were shown surging out of the water at the four upper corners. Along with the torch and rudder held aloft by the main figure and the stylistically similar groups on the pylons, this formed a thematic unity directly related to the arms of Canada, which are carved on the stern of the boat with the legend, *A mari usque ad mare*.

In the execution, the rather prosaic bow of the boat was replaced by a rough, jagged prow similar to that supporting the Winged Victory of Samothrace in the Louvre. The prows of ships in classical times were always sharp and pointed for ramming other boats; they were frequently encased in bronze for that purpose. This feature sometimes took the form of the attacking head of an animal, occasionally a boar but more commonly a ram, hence the descriptive term. For that reason, no doubt, the prow of the boat on top of the central arch at Princes' Gates was furnished with a very realistic ram's head with large curved horns. This was intended to reinforce the overall heroic thrust of the concept but, for the casual observer, might also serve to evoke the many kinds of farm animals associated with rural Canada and the important role they have always played in the Canadian National Exhibition.

In the finished version, the two subsidiary male figures seated on the gunwales were turned around so that they now face the back of the arch, rather than the front, and the urns they were holding were suppressed. The hippocamps were retained, however, and a running wave motif was carried across the base at the front and at the back.

The pairs of identical figures which stand at the front and back corners around this group are holding in their arms two cornucopias and two beehives. Various interpretations are possible. The quaint suggestion which keeps reappearing in literature on the Gates, that

Figure 10. Architect's drawing for the pylon, Princes' Gates. (Archives of Toronto, Central Records No. 96054)

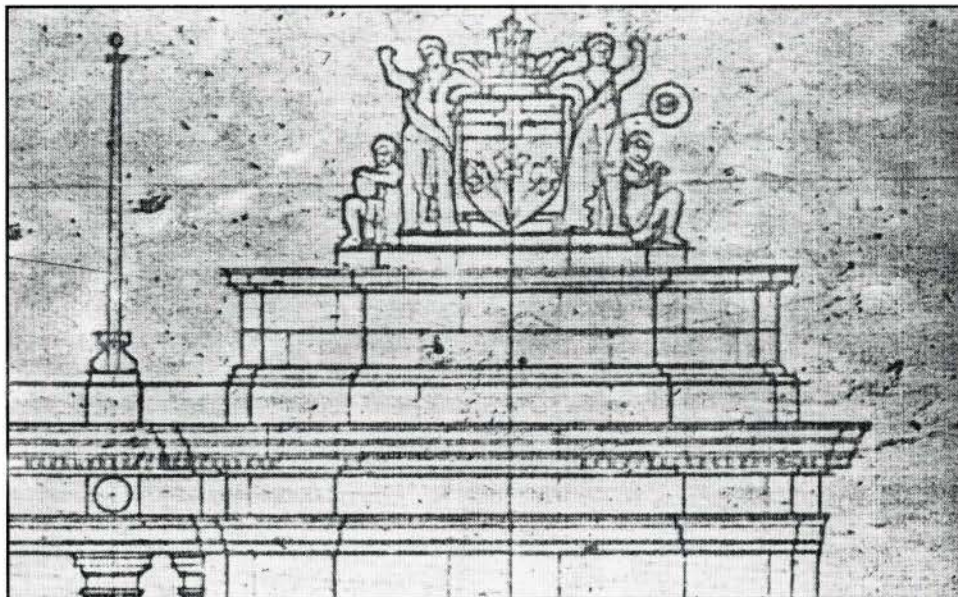


Figure 11. Model for the figures on the pylon, Princes' Gates, by Charles D. McKechnie. (Canadian National Exhibition Archives)

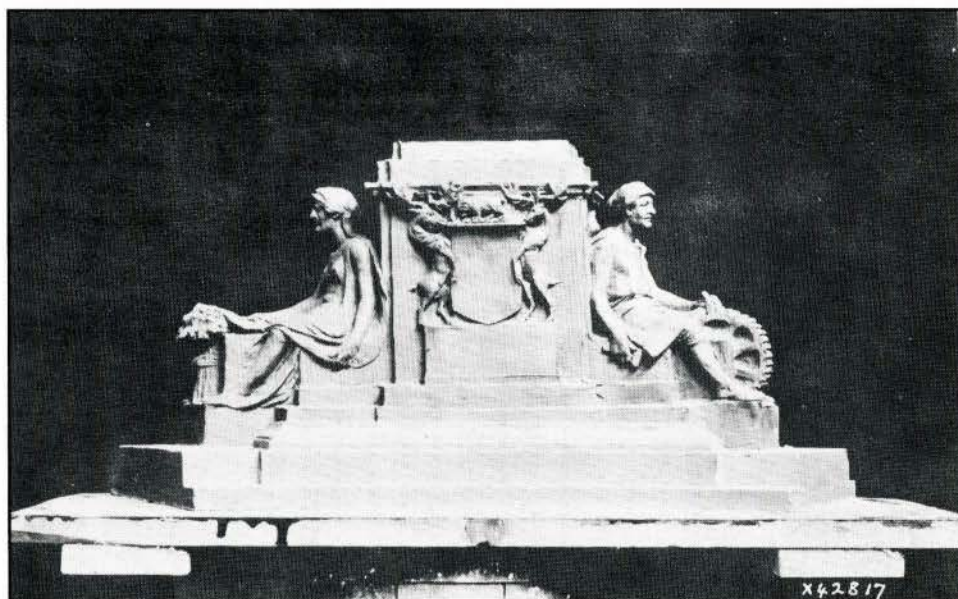
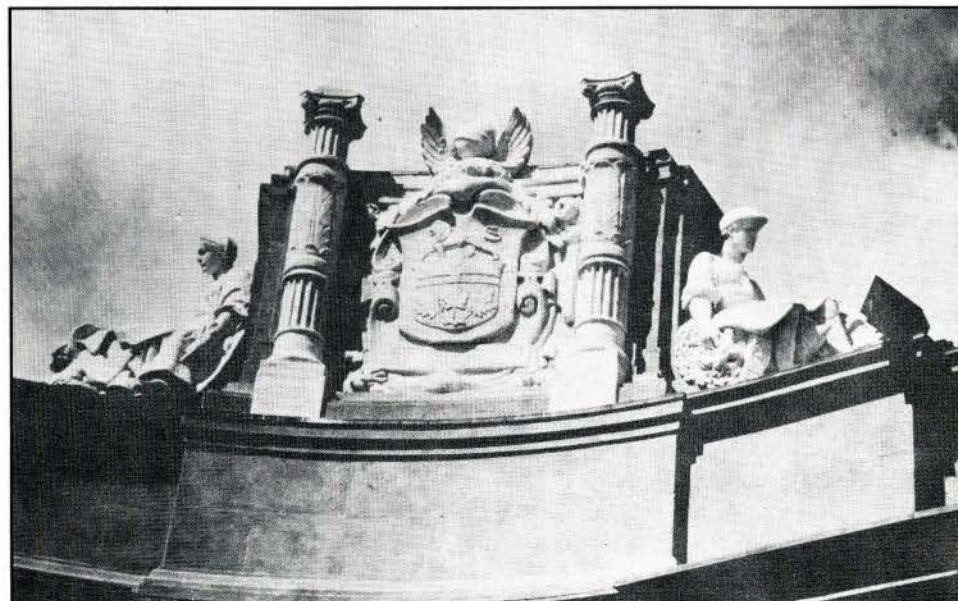


Figure 12. Statuary on the pylon, Princes' Gates, as built. (Archives of Ontario, Lawrence Hayward Collection)





they represent music, education and the arts, is not to be taken seriously. The cornucopia most often stands for the fruits of the harvest, while the beehive, a common symbol for activity, probably stands for all the different kinds of mixed farming associated with rural life. As a group, the four models repeated on the pylons and the central arch together characterize the produce and industry of Canada as demonstrated each year in the Canadian National Exhibition — traditionally held at the beginning of the autumn season.

In his article on Princes' Gates written in 1927,<sup>9</sup> Alfred Chapman mentioned only the central figure among the decorations on the arch. He described it as representing "progress and advance, the fundamental aim of the CNE." This is a curious kind of doublet since it is difficult to see much difference in meaning between the two words "progress" and "advance." Perhaps "continuing progress" would be closer to what was meant, but, in any case, the figure symbolizes the inspiration and determination of the past as it points the way toward the future. Heroically bareheaded, and wearing distinctive robes which are traditionally classical, it may be considered as a vital force unifying and leading the other figures, whose stylized garments correspond more closely to neoclassical models of the Beaux-Arts school in Paris where Charles McKechnie studied for two years. As a group they are all quite static, not only the seated figures on the pylons but those standing around the dynamic central figure.

There are no bas-reliefs on Princes' Gates but there is an inscription on the front which reads "Canadian National Exhibition 1879 1927." In the architect's original drawings the first date was shown as 1878. The reason for this is that prior to the inauguration of the Canadian National Exhibition in 1879, there existed an itinerant Provincial Fair which moved annually from town to town within the province. It was held in Toronto with great success in 1878. After a request to have it continue in the capital of the province as a permanent feature was turned down, the city decided to establish its own fair, which was formally incorporated in 1879. There was, and still is, some resentment in the rest of Canada at the designation "Canadian *National* Exhibition," but this title and its associated acronym CNE are so well established that they are not likely to be changed.

On the inside wall of the central arch of Princes' Gates there is an inscription in a frame which reads as follows:

The Princes' Gates were officially opened on Tuesday, August 30, 1927 by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, accompanied by H.R.H. Prince George. First to pass through the gates was a veterans' parade under the auspices of the Canadian Legion of The British Empire Service League for Review by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales.

The official opening, incidentally, did not involve keys but consisted, rather, in having the Prince of Wales cut a ribbon with a pair of scissors made of gold. The precedence given to the veterans who were then followed through the gates by the royal guests conformed to the normal rules of protocol associated with triumphal entries. After Princes' Gates were refurbished in 1977, the fiftieth anniversary of their construction, a commemorative plaque of cast metal supported by a metal pole about 5 feet high was unveiled just inside the gates by the Ontario Heritage Foundation at a ceremony held on 30 August. The text reads as follows:

#### The Princes' Gates

Designed by Alfred Chapman and Morrow Oxley, built by the Toronto firm of Sullivan and Fried, the Princes' Gates, one of Ontario's best known landmarks, were constructed in 1927 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Canadian Confederation. They are an outstanding example of monumental architecture in the Beaux-Arts Mode and were built during a period in which the redevelopment of the Exhibition grounds including the construction of a new eastern entrance was undertaken.

The entrance gates, built of stone and concrete, were surmounted by a "figure representing progress and advance" and terminated a landscaped boulevard. They were opened on 30 August 1927 by Edward, Prince of Wales, accompanied by Prince George, and officially named The Princes' Gates in their honour.

The gates have always been the unique symbol of the Canadian National Exhibition and, while they are indeed an outstanding example of monumental exhibition architecture, they properly belong to the long tradition of the triumphal arch. They are both *porta triumphalis*, since they provide a ceremonial entrance into a smaller walled city within the larger metropolis, and *arcus triumphalis*, since they honour Canadian achievements as demonstrated by the Canadian National Exhibition.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

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