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No. 1

The Old Architecture

of the

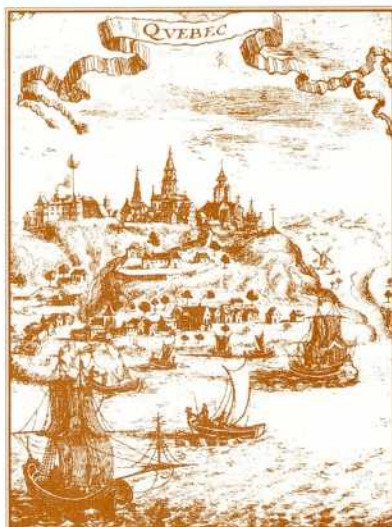
Province of Quebec

By

RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A., F.R.I.B.A.

MONTREAL, 1925

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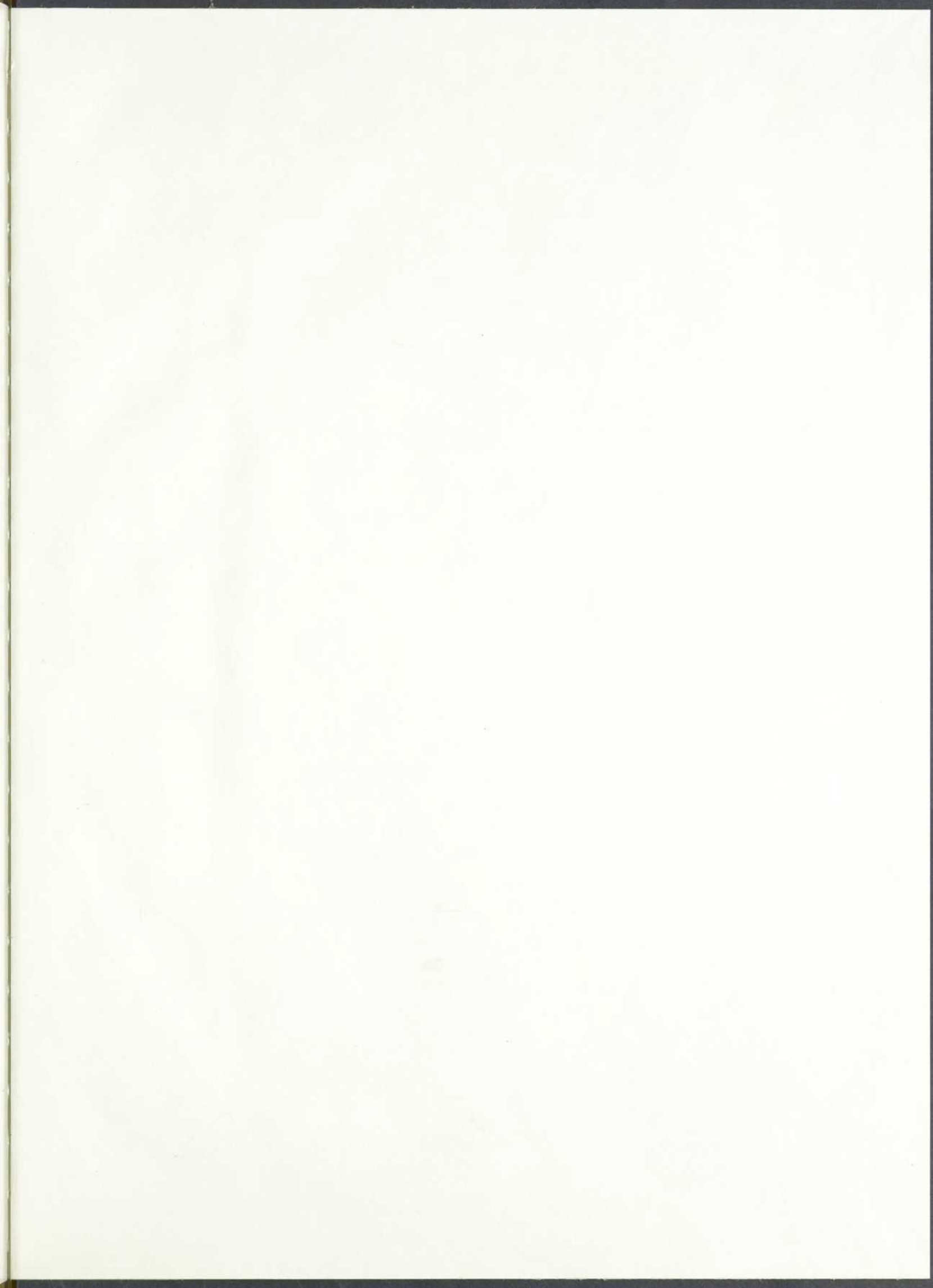


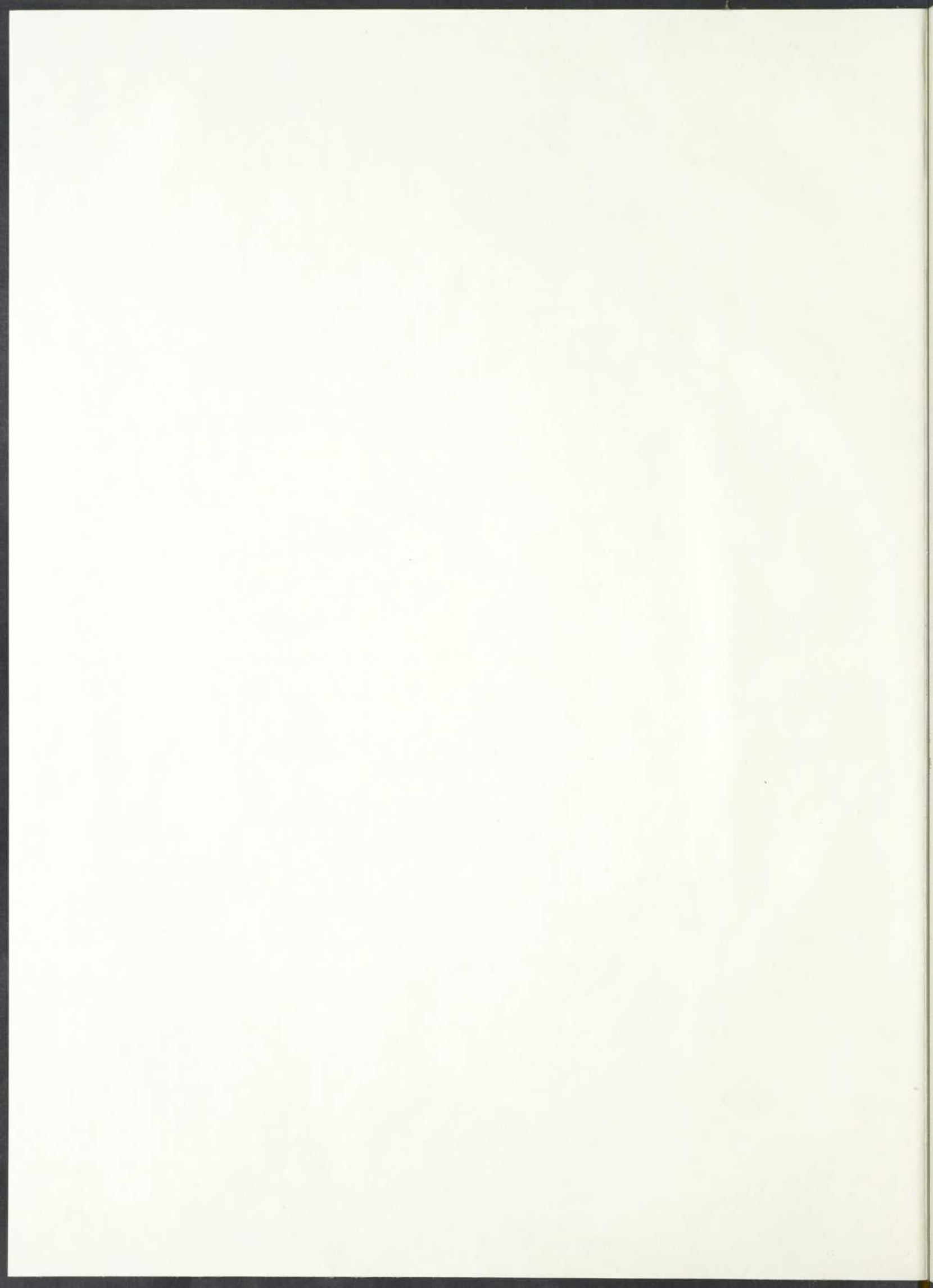
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THE OLD ARCHITECTURE
OF THE
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

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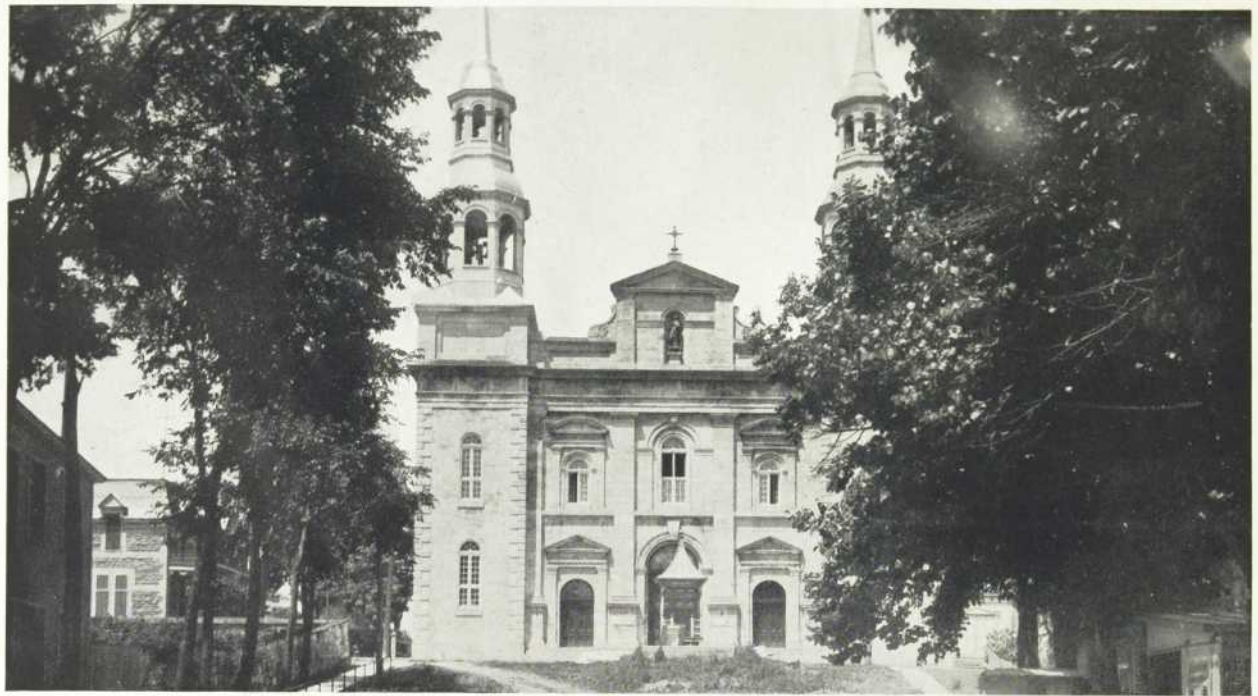


FIG. 12. L'ASSOMPTION, QUE.

The Old Architecture of the Province of Quebec

BY RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A., F.R.I.B.A.

Professor of Architecture, McGill University

ON the fifteenth of November last an exhibition of photographs and drawings of old buildings in the Province of Quebec was opened in the gallery of the Art Association of Montreal under the auspices of the Province of Quebec Association of Architects.

Although it has hitherto been rather neglected, excepting by a few historical enthusiasts, the local architecture of Quebec is one of the most important of North America. This exhibition was a first effort to collect the existing records and to arouse public interest. It did not pretend to be exhaustive, or even fully representative, but it must have demonstrated to many the richness of our local architecture: how large a field there is for study as well as how little has as yet been done to cover it.

Our information on the first buildings erected in the Province is very slight. Champlain gives a drawing of the "habitation" of which he was so proud, a somewhat mediaeval group of buildings,

with mullioned and diamond-paned windows, set in a small fortified courtyard. We must imagine it as closely modelled upon the smaller seignury buildings of Northern France. But of this building all traces have long since disappeared and of the early building in the Seminary and the Cathedral at Quebec only a few fragments of masonry are left.

But it would appear that from the beginning the French colonists built in stone, unlike those of New England, who brought from their English home a tradition of wood building. We are particularly told that the Cathedral of Quebec, dedicated in 1666, and that of Montreal, dedicated in 1672, were both of stone, whilst the houses show features which could only have arisen from the use of stone,—thick, low walls, high parapetted gables and chimneys in the end outer walls.

Old pictures of the City of Quebec show the streets lined by rows of houses separated from one another by partition walls which rise as high fire



Fig. 1. House, Upper Lachine Road, Montreal.

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ALLEN TOLENS
314 1/2 - 11th St



Fig. 2. Chateau de Ramszay, Montreal.
The tower on the left is a recent addition.

parapets above the roofs. Until recently a number of such houses of the XVII century remained in Montreal. They were two rooms thick, with a central wall parallel to the street, and had two chimneys in each gable rising through the partition parapets. This was the natural method of planning a street house.

But all through the Montreal district, and as far east as Three Rivers we find cottages and farm houses showing the same characteristics. Many of them now have verandahs, but these seem in all cases to be later additions: the noticeable features are the great stone end gables with the double chimneys connected by a flat parapet, and the high stone copings supported at the wall head on moulded corbels. The "Montreal" type is evidently derived from the earlier town house and has carried its town characteristics into the country. (Fig. 1.)

Large houses of this type are two rooms thick in plan with a central wall, they are rarely more than one storey and an attic high and all walls are of rubble stone heavily pointed. The moulded corbels and chimney heads and, at most, a plain trim round the windows are the only dressed stones in the building. The Chateau de Ramezay in Montreal (Fig. 2) is a well preserved example of such a large house of the XVII century. Here some attempt has been made to render the building fireproof. The main floor rests upon a large vaulted basement, and the



Fig. 3. On the road between Montmorency and Beauport.
The Quebec Type.

attic floor is constructed of stone slabs laid upon heavy wooden beams. The windows are high, in two vertical leaves opening inwards, the universal form in the French districts.

In the eastern parts of the Province, in the neighbourhood of Quebec, a different type prevails (Fig. 3). The houses are one storey high with an attic, the roof is steep with plain verges to the gables and a very large bellcast, forming a snow shelter, to the back and front. The bellcast is not really suited to the climate, as it tends to collect the snow in winter and to form immense icicles. It was probably imported from old France as a part of the traditional construction. In Quebec it actually tended to increase in size. Posts were added to support it and so a verandah house was produced, very like the so-called "Dutch" houses of the Hudson valley, though of quite independent origin.

The Quebec type never has parapets to the gables but a chimney at both ends was regarded as so essential that where the actual fireplace gave reason for a chimney at one end only it was usual to add a sham wooden chimney to the opposite end of the ridge.

Scattered through the Province is a third type with a steep roof hipped at both ends, as in the



Fig. 4. On the road between Montmorency and Beauport.
The hipped roof type.

charming old house at Baie St. Paul. This is evidently a direct French tradition. In the Ottawa valley and round Montreal many of the small houses have this form of roof, with a shallow gallery running round the house at winter snow level, sheltered by the broad bellcast (Fig. 4).

Double galleried houses occur, though not very common. The double pitched gambrel roof is very common in all French-Canadian villages, but it seems to have been introduced at quite a late date.

Towards the end of the XVIII century the larger houses begin to show strong Georgian and Classic influences. The Archambeau House at L'Assomption and the De Bleury Seigneurie at St. Vincent de Paul show this influence in different ways. The former, a very dignified and simple stone house, is now robbed of almost all its interior woodwork and is used to store stoves (Fig. 5).

The earliest large domestic buildings were monastic. Of these the old wing of the Ursuline convent at Three Rivers dates from the original foundation in the XVII century. The dignity of plain wall, the spacing of the shuttered windows, the large sundial and little statue niche, the simple verges and the fanciful little square louvre in the roof make

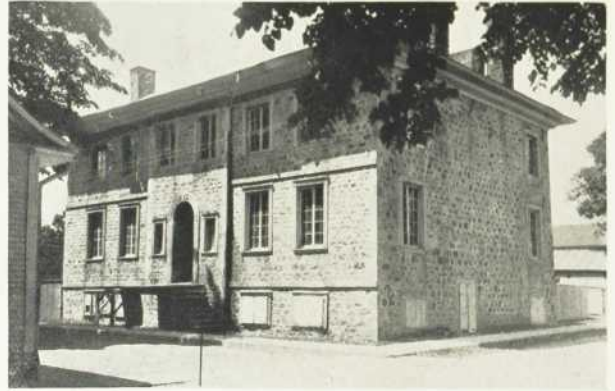
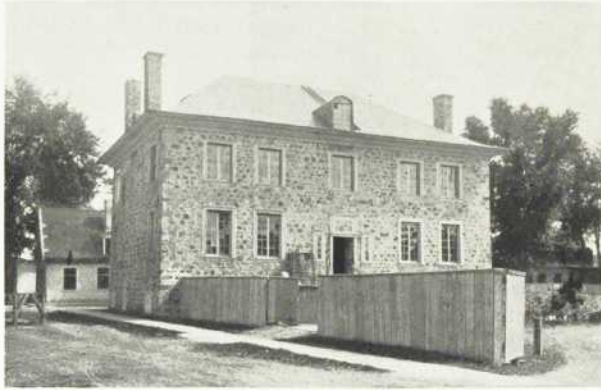


Fig. 5. Archange House, L'Assomption, Que.

this one of the most delightful old buildings in the Province (Fig. 6). Other Monastic buildings are treated with the greatest simplicity, yet good window spacing and proportion, the texture of the rubble masonry and the bronze-green roofing tiles of tinned iron make them pleasant and distinctive. (Fig. 12a).

In 1668 Monseigneur de Laval founded two schools, one in the Seminary at Quebec, the other at St. Joachim. These provided a general education, instruction in agriculture and in "arts et metiers." This included some training in architecture, woodworking and particularly in woodcarving. So from early times we find a local school of designers and woodcarvers in the Province. The earliest example of their work is the woodwork of the chapel of Monseigneur Olivier de Briand in the Old Seminary at Quebec, executed in 1784. The training was evidently based on contemporary French work, and we must suppose that masters were brought from France.

Regarded as the product of Canadian craftsmen, and there seems to be no doubt that it is, this work is of surprising quality. The general design is well

proportioned, well detailed and executed. A Corinthian order is used on a high dado. The altarpiece is surrounded with olive foliage in reference to the name of the founder, and at either side are niches with brackets for statues, carved with delicacy and spirit.

The succession of this school seems to have been preserved in the Province up to the middle of the XIX century. The School of Quevillon, to which we will refer later, was a continuation of that of Laval. Not until 1850 did the Province of Quebec cease to have a school of native trained artists.

The churches of the Province usually have a broad nave, spanned by an elliptical ceiling in wood or plaster, and terminating in a semi-circular apsed sanctuary. Beyond this, and connected to it by two doors in the apse, is the low square sacristy. Aisles are not usual. When they occur they are included under the single external roof. The lighting is by large semi-circular headed windows in the side walls and a clearstorey is not used. (Fig. 7).

In the smaller churches the western gable usually has a single entrance framed in a classic porch, often

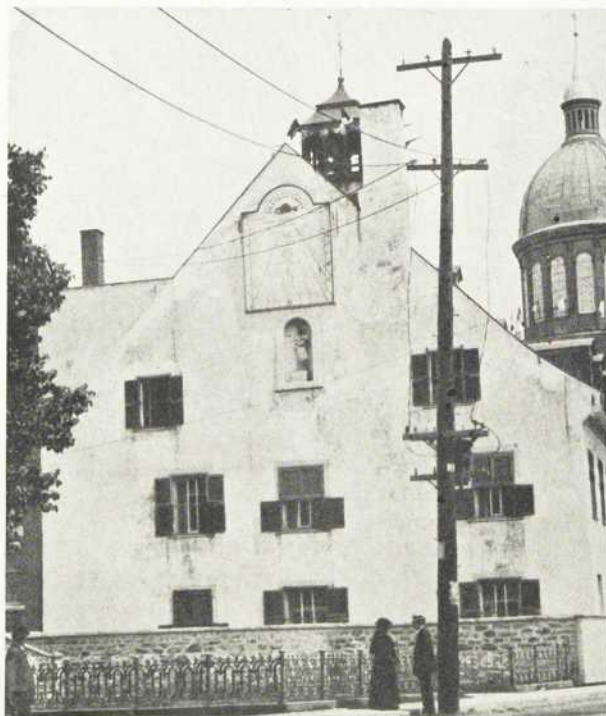


Fig. 6. Ursuline Convent, Three Rivers.



Fig. 7. Old Church, St. Charles de la Chenaye.

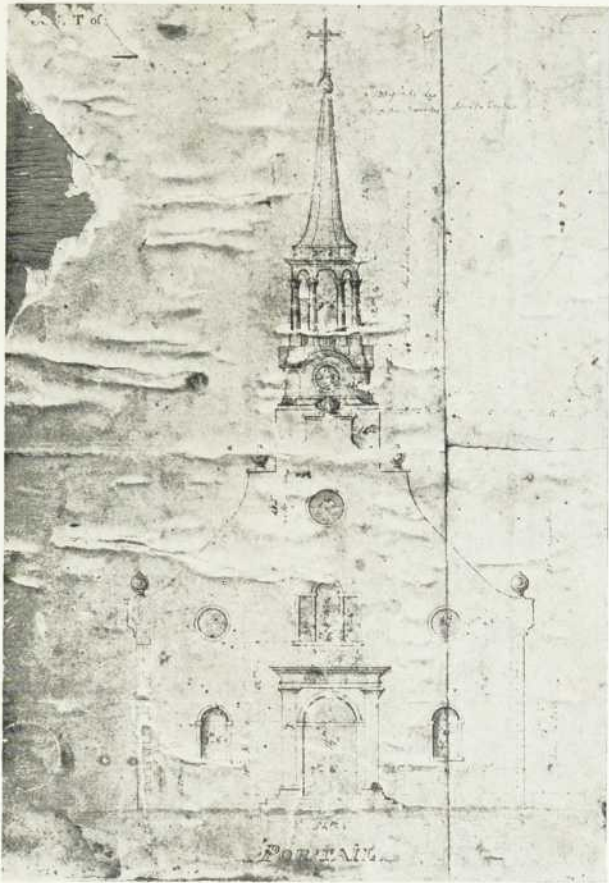


Fig. 9. Design for Church, at St. Luce by F. T. Baillargé, 1836.

taken from Vignola. Above this is the window lighting the western gallery and usually a small circular window. The gable is often very steep with low side walls, and is surmounted by an open wooden belfry in one or two storeys terminating in a slender needle spire (Fig. 8).

It is difficult to say at what time the tinned iron "tiles" were introduced. Tin is not produced commercially anywhere in North America and the tin plate of which these tiles are made must have been imported. Yet such tiles are not used anywhere in Europe. It has been suggested that they were made of disused food containers. However they originated, we find them used on almost all the larger buildings and on the churches. They were laid diagonally and in time weathered to very beautiful shades of silver gray, bronze green and red. A more beautiful roof has never been used.

In many churches, probably of a later date, the western fleche surmounts a tower, either boldly projecting from the gable, or almost buried in it.

This type, with western tower or fleche, continued to be built as late as the middle of the XIX century. The drawings for the Church at St. Luce, by F. T. Baillargé, lent to the exhibition by Mr. Marchand, are dated 1836

(Fig. 9, 10). It is probable that nowhere but in Quebec could a church of this purely traditional form have been designed at this date. Elsewhere was an age of revivals, but the French Province adhered to her traditional style until about 1860.

After about 1750 the larger churches were designed with two western towers flanking the central gable (Fig. 11). The towers are surmounted by open wooden lanterns and spires covered in "tin tiles": the central gable gave opportunity for a more or less elaborate classic facade.

Sometimes a single grand order is used, as at L'Assomption, sometimes two storeys of orders, as at St. Eustache. The general school is that of Vignola and Blondel (Fig. 12).

The wooden spires are in many cases undoubtedly a makeshift, they are often quite disproportionate to the rest of the design. It seems to have been customary to build the facade to roof level first, and to add the spires at a later date, no doubt as funds were available. The spires of Sault au Recollet, for instance, were not added until 1864. Still, even if sometimes a little incongruous, these slender open spires are too characteristic to be regretted.

The interior decoration is often very rich (Fig. 13). The Sanctuary is treated with a composition of Corinthian columns and niches. The Altar and its flanking doors are richly carved and often there is a Bishops Chair, a pulpit or a pair of large carved candlesticks of excellent craftsmanship. The general style is early Louis XV treated with a simplicity and frankness which is refreshing. The extreme "slickness" of the French School is replaced by a more naive spirit, rather to the advantage of the work.

This school of decoration is due to M. Louis Quevillon who worked in St. Vincent de Paul from 1787 to his death in 1823. Here he founded a school for the training of apprentices in architecture and sculpture. His work and that of his pupils and associates is still to be found in all parts of the Province. (Fig. 14-15.) A study of his life and work has been published by M. Emile Vaillancourt.*

*Une Maitrise d'Art en Canada. E. Vaillancourt. G. Ducharme. Montreal, 1920.

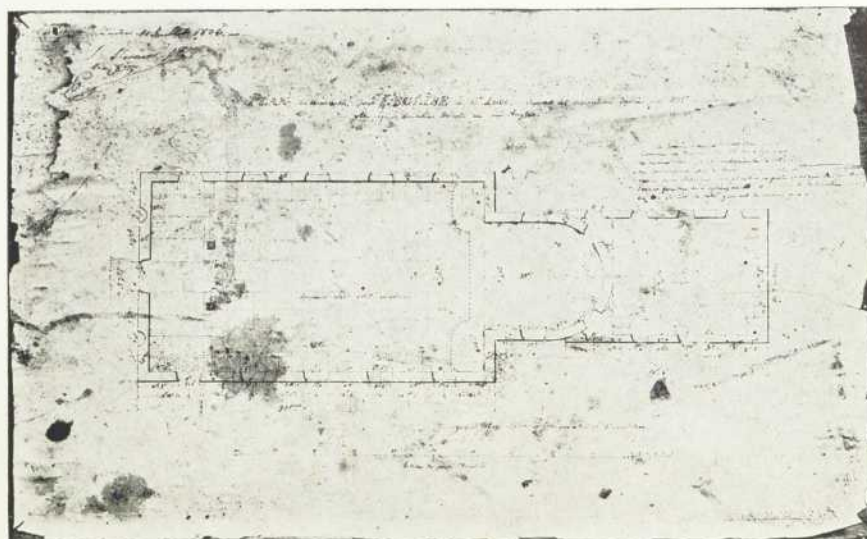


Fig. 10. Plan of Church at St. Luce, 1836.

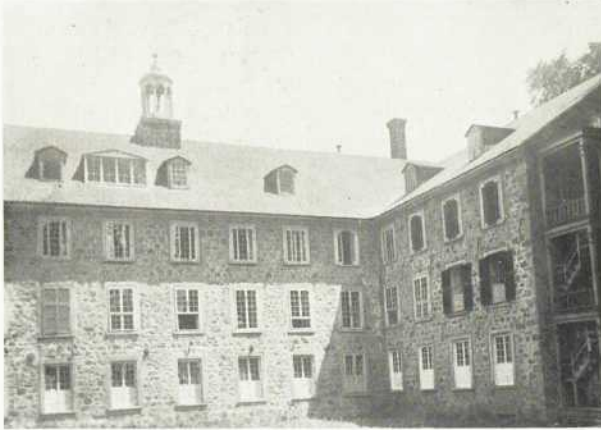


Fig. 12 a. The college, L'Assomption, Que.

As we have seen, the traditional style of Old Quebec passed out of use about 1860. In its place came a flood of revivals, elaborate, unnatural and exotic. Of the old churches too many have been destroyed by fire, or to make place for modern "horrors". If any record is to be preserved of those which remain, it must be made at once, for every year sees the remnant further reduced. This applies particularly to the Province of Quebec, but there are in Ontario and in the Maritime Provinces many fine old buildings of which no record has ever been made. Might it be suggested to the Ontario Association that this is a worthy object for attention.

In the first place it is desirable, if not essential, to have a survey of each Province, forming a list, with photographs and a few historic details, of every interesting building in the Province. At present we do not know the full richness of the field.

The principal buildings should then be carefully



Fig. 8 Old Church, Cap de la Madelaine.

measured and photographed. In Quebec the beginning of this work has been made by the travelling students of the P.Q.A.A. Publication could be made from time to time as the material merits it.

Summary of the more important exhibits at the Montreal Exhibition, November, 1924.

THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA.

Designs for Government House, Quebec, 1811, by Joseph Gandy. A single storey building of classic type.

Joseph Michael Gandy (1771-1843), A.R.A., was a pupil of James Wyatt and associated in his work with Sir John Soane.

Designs for Government House, Quebec, 1812, by Jeffrey Wyatt. This was the nephew of the well-known James Wyatt, the Cathedral restorer.

The plans show a one storey building with two



Fig. 13. Interior of Charlesbourg Church.



Fig. 11. Church, Charlesbourg.



Fig. 14. Altar Details

Old House, Baie St. Paul.
St. Francis Xavier, Caughnawaga, plan and sketches.



Fig. 14. Altar Details, Church of the Visitation, Sault-au-Recollet.

McGILL UNIVERSITY, DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

A collection of about 100 photographs, from the general collection of the Department. Many of



Fig. 14. Altar Details

legislative chambers. Two sets of elevations were submitted, one in classic the other in gothic.

A collection of Watercolour Drawings by Norwell including St. Gabriel's Farm House, Montreal, La Torque near Montreal (1676), John Jacob Astor's Store, Montreal.

THE MCCORD NATIONAL MUSEUM lent a selection of oil paintings of old buildings and a number of pencil drawings of Montreal Houses, which have now vanished.

THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS.

The work of the Travelling Students

The De Bleury Seigneurie, St. Vincent de Paul.

School House, Oka.
Fort Lennox, Isle aux Noix.
Les Maizerets, Quebec.



Fig. 15. Details

St. Etienne de Beaumont, Church.
Church of the Visitation, Sault au Recollet.
These are all full surveys unless otherwise stated.

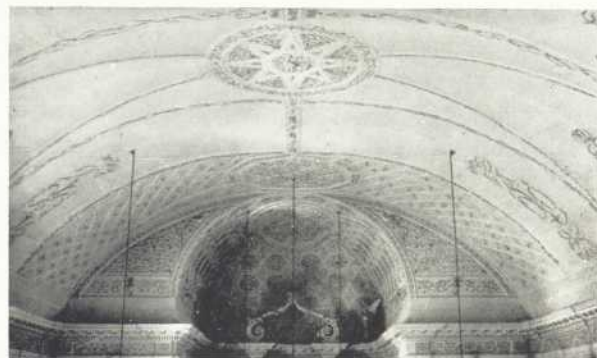


Fig. 15. Details, Church of the Visitation, Sault-au-Recollet.

these are of buildings which have been destroyed and of which there seems to be no other record.

Measured drawings by students of the Department—

- English Cathedral, Quebec. West Front.
- Old Mariners' Hospital, Quebec. Facade.
- Seminary, Quebec. Details.
- Chapel of Mgr. Olivier de Briand, Quebec.
- Church at Charlesbourg. Facade.
- Chateau de Ramezay, Montreal. Survey.

M. Emile Vaillancourt lent a collection of old woodwork and carving from the Church of St. Luce. School of Quevillon.

M. J. O. Marchand lent the working drawings of the Church of St. Luce, by Baillargé, 1836, approved by M. Demers, and a photograph of a drawing for a Banc d'Oeuvre in the Old Cathedral of Quebec, dated 1799, by F. Baillargé.

Contributions of drawings and photographs were sent by Messrs. W. Carless, R. Findlay, Hugh Jones, H. S. Labelle, P. B. Motley, P. E. Nobbs, G. D. Thompson, and others.



Fig. 15. Details

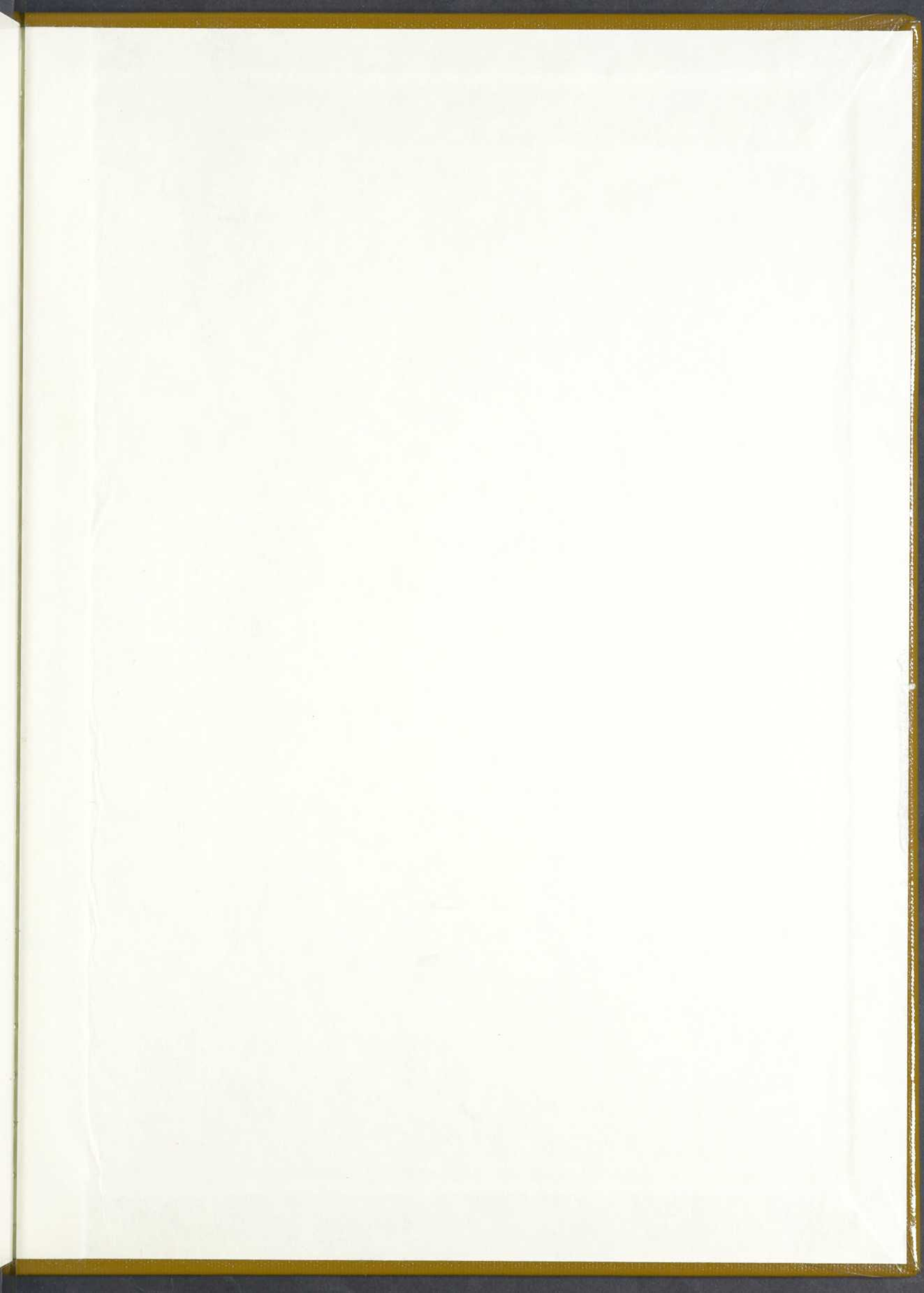
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