

BIOGRAPHY OF HUMPHREY CARVER
By Martha Edmond

Humphrey Carver was an internationally acclaimed architect, planner, and author. Born in England in 1902 he came to Canada in 1930 and would become a major force in public housing policy. In the post-war years, he helped guide the federal government's revival of Canadian community planning and transformation into a suburban nation. He was educated at Oxford University and the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, and was greatly influenced by Le Corbusier and the Garden City Movement.

Soon after his arrival in Canada, Carver became a strong advocate for affordable housing and community planning. His early years in Toronto turned him into a social activist. He practiced landscape architecture with Carl Borgstrom (with whom he helped found the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and Town Planners in 1934), taught at the University of Toronto School of Architecture, and launched its first housing course in the School of Social Work in 1946. He was associated with Regent Park North in Toronto, Canada's first low-rent, public housing project, and began a prolific writing career with his first publication, *Houses for Canadians*.

By 1937, he had emerged as one of Canada's leading advocates for housing reform and a national housing program. He gave numerous speeches, ran a CBC Radio series, and organized conferences on housing and planning, including the ground-breaking 1939 Housing Conference.

Carver came to Ottawa in 1948 to work for the then Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Under his leadership of its Advisory Group from 1955 to his retirement in 1967, he advocated for an interdisciplinary approach to urban problems and oversaw programs that funded the establishment of planning schools and scholarships, with millions of dollars made available for planning research and studies. In those years, Canada's housing policy and community planning would achieve an international reputation.

His focus turned toward planning suburbs, to make the new suburban landscape more compassionate and hospitable for a booming post-war population. It was an attempt to break away from the "standard rectangles" of land subdivision and "the tedium of the mass-produced city" to produce communities arranged around the social patterns of families and their lives. He offered a unique vision of how cities could develop in a humane and rational way in his *Cities in the Suburbs* (1962). He was a founding member of the Community Planning Association of Canada in 1947, president of the Town Planning Institute of Canada (now the Canadian Institute of Planners) from 1963 to 1964, and a vice-president of the American Society of Planning Officials.

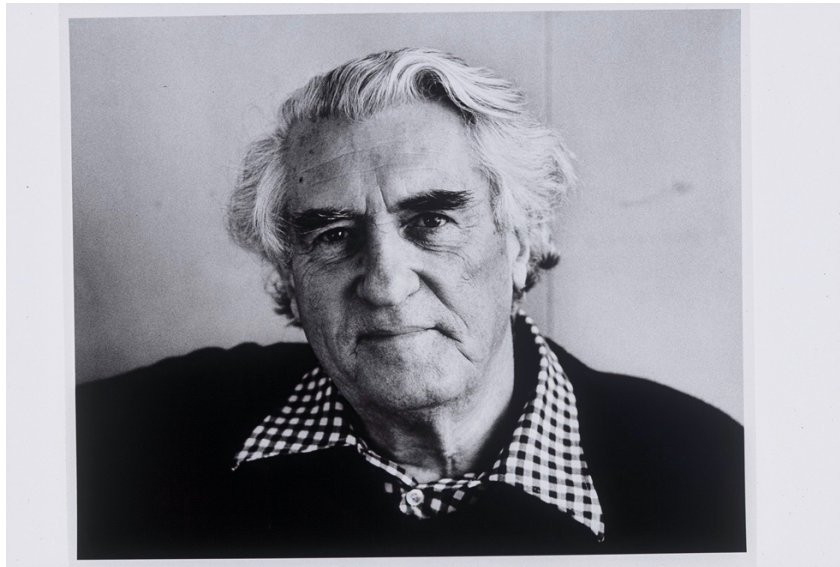
For many years, Carver lived in the Village of Rockcliffe Park, which he discovered by accident one day on a walk along the Ottawa River. He would develop a strong attachment to the

community. As described in his memoir, *Compassionate Landscape* (1975), it was a place he felt had “never lost its woodland character” with its houses “tucked in between the trees.” The Village provided him with inspiration, a perfect retreat for contemplation and reflection. In turn, he provided advice on its conservation and development, designing walkways and paths, analyzing its distinctive cultural heritage landscapes, and creating urban spaces and parkland — areas that embodied many of his thoughts on the role of landscape in an urban setting. He returned to a renewed love for the natural landscape, and the relationship between suburbs and nature became a persistent theme for Carver later in life.

His work has been acknowledged with many awards, among them the Order of Canada (1988). He died in 1995 in his beloved community, where his name is honored in the Carver-Caldwell Conservation Area. The Centennial Garden, a surviving work of Carver’s, is accessible to the public and can still be seen and appreciated today. It is a lasting symbol of the man and his vision, and a legacy that we are now entrusted with.

“Human settlements do not need to be so concentrated...Now you can live in a little village by the sea and participate in great industries and great corporate organizations, looking out on green fields and gardens. And I think the possibility of changing the way we live in this country is going to offer options which landscape architects can conceive and help build.”

Quoted in *Changing the Face of Canada* (1997) by Linda M. Le Geyt



Humphrey Carver
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