

# The Buildings of Dalhousie University

## Shirreff Hall

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Address: 6385 South St.

Start Date: Spring 1921

Completion Date: 1923

Architect: Andrew R. Cobb;  
Frank Darling

Renovation Date(s):  
1962; 1967

Contractor:

### Building History



Shirreff Hall, Dalhousie University  
Women's Residence, n.d.



Shirreff Hall - Exterior - Front  
Entrance, n.d.



Shirreff Hall - Exterior - Front  
Entrance, n.d.

In 1918-1919, 31 percent of Dalhousie's students were women, and this figure remained above 20 percent into the 1920s. The problem of housing for Dalhousie's women students had been lurking for years. There were no university residences, and landlords in Halifax tended to prefer male tenants. In 1912 the university purchased a house on South Street to house eleven girls, and while this was far from solving the problem, the priority at the time was building the Science Building and Macdonald Memorial Library first.

Then in 1918 a donor came forward who was interested in funding the construction of a women's residence. Jennie Shirreff Eddy was a wealthy widow and former nurse, originally from New Brunswick. She pledged \$300,000 to a new residence that was to be in memory of her parents. It was then the largest donation ever given to Dalhousie and the largest of its kind ever given by a woman in Canada.

The site on the southwestern corner of campus was chosen in April 1919, close to Oxford Street in order to preserve as many of the original white pines as possible. The architects were Frank Darling of Toronto and Andrew R. Cobb of Halifax, the minds already behind the rest of the campus. Because the use of ironstone in buildings was beginning to be questioned (as the mortar proved to crumble with time), Darling found a new and promising type of stone, a pinkish quartzite from New Minas, Nova Scotia.

The cornerstone of Shirreff Hall was laid in August 1919 by the Prince of Wales, in a stop along his tour of Canada. Construction for the 110-capacity building, headed by the university's Master builder Colonel Marshall, began in the spring of 1921. The contractors were Hagen & Company Halifax Limited. The building opened in 1923, with 86 women taking up residence. From the time of Shirreff's opening, residence there became mandatory for any young woman coming from outside of Halifax. The building was designed with future additions in mind, including the allowance for a potential Women's College, if desired.

Shirreff Hall received praise for its beauty, in the press, from visitors, and from Dalhousians. Research into other women's residences had ensured it featured many of the elements that were considered important at the time: single rooms; generous public

space for activities like dancing; private spaces such as alcoves for ladies to entertain callers; a dining room warm, not sterile. Eddy herself was a forceful woman with firm ideas that she wielded into fruition, including making the library larger and brighter, and adding study rooms on the first and second floors. Eddy believed in women's education and was proud to contribute to giving women a comfortable and refined place to live while at school.

In 1957 the federal government announced that the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation would start awarding grants for university residences. This funding made possible an expansion to Shirreff (the eastern New Eddy wing) that doubled its capacity. In 1967 the five-storey Newcombe wing opened on the west side. Today Shirreff houses 451 students in four wings: New Eddy (1962), Old Eddy (1923), Newcombe (1967) and the Annex (1923). As of September 2005, Shirreff was no longer an exclusively women's residence, as New Eddy and Old Eddy introduced co-ed accommodations by floor.

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Shirreff Hall - Exterior - Front, n.d.



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