

The Buildings of Dalhousie University

Sir James Dunn Building

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Address: 6310 Coburg Rd.

Start Date: Spring 1958

Completion Date:
1960

Architect: E. W. Haldenby; J. Philip
Dumaresq

Renovation
Date(s):

Contractor: Foundation Maritimes
Limited



Sir James Dunn Science Building -
Exterior, November 1980

Building History

The Sir James Dunn Science Building was made possible by one of Dalhousie's most generous donors. Sir James Dunn was a generous and longstanding donor to the university after his graduation from the Law school in 1898. When he died in 1956, his widow was interested in using the funds of the Sir James Dunn Foundation to support the Law school; it had only just moved into its new quarters (today's University Club), however, so Lady Dunn was advised that her money would be most useful in funding a building for Physics, Engineering and Geology.

The architect hired to design the new Science building was E.W. Haldenby of Toronto, from the same firm which had designed the Henry Hicks Academic Building in 1949. The Georgian style of the other campus buildings was used again. Ironstone from Purcell's Cove was ornamented with sandstone trim. Spaces were even left in the foundation for creeping vines to fill in. The building would be hailed as the best example of Georgian architecture in the Maritimes. Contracting responsibilities went to A.G. Sullivan.

The sod-turning for the building took place October 29, 1957, the anniversary of Sir James' birthday. On the same day one year later, the cornerstone was laid. University Chancellor C.D. Howe declared the day a half-holiday and hosted a dinner for 150 at the Nova Scotian followed by a ball for the graduating classes in Arts and Science, Law and Engineering.

Construction proceeded turbulently. Lady Dunn (Marcia Christoforides) was a powerful woman who asserted her desires and protested loudly when they were not satisfied. She faced off with the Board of Governors, architects, and representatives of the Physics department over numerous issues, insisting on nothing but the best in materials and construction standards. She also refused to let tenders be called for the proposed Men's Residence, as it might 'distract' the attention of the architects away from the 'more important' Science building. She didn't want the elevator shafts to protrude from the top of the building, so a parapet was added at a cost of \$250,000. The door handles were not to her liking, so they were replaced, as was the marble in the foyer. The building plans



Sir James Dunn Building Physics
(Laboratory), 1962



Sir James Dunn Building Opening Ceremony (Lady Dunn & portrait of Sir James Dunn), October 1960

were constantly changing, as the costs rose above estimates and delay followed delay.

Finally, on October 29, 1960, the \$2.5 million Sir James Dunn Science Building opened its doors, with great pomp and another of C.D. Howe's impressive dinner parties. The opening ceremonies' speakers included distinguished scientists such as Sir John Cockcroft and Dr. Gerhard Herzberg. The building featured a lecture room with a capacity of 240, a drafting room, labs, a library, and research facilities. The nuclear and physics equipment were "unique in their type of any establishment east of Montreal" (Gazette October 7, 1959).

Today Dalhousie's Physics department occupies most of the Dunn Building. The building has classrooms, computer labs, a planetarium and Dalhousie's Lidar, an atmospheric laser. The Engineering department retains some offices, classrooms and labs; the growing Geology department was relocated to the Life Sciences Centre in 1971 and 1982.

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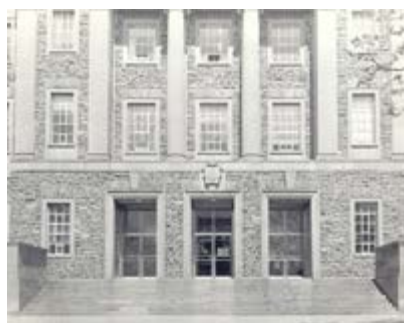
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Dunn Building [Exterior], 1980



Sir James Dunn Building - Main
Entrance, n.d.



Repairing the drainage lines in the
Dunn parking lot, April 1984

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Sir James Dunn Building -
Cornerstone, n.d.



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Sir James Dunn Science Building
nears completion as seen from the
University of King's College, n.d.



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