

The Buildings of Dalhousie University

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Student Union Building (SUB)

Address: 6136 University Av.

Start Date: April 1967 Completion Date: 1968

Architect: C. D. Davison Renovation Date(s): 1977;
and Company 1979; 1988; 1999; 2002-
2003

Contractor: MacDonald
Construction Company
Ltd.



Students in front of Student Union Building statue, c1978



Dalhousie University President Dr. Henry D. Hicks in Green Room, Student Union Building, ca. 1960s



Student Union Building, 1989

Building History

The history of Dalhousie's Student Union Building goes back much farther than the year when it was built. Plans for such a building originated with the purchase of the Studley campus in 1912, when a site was tentatively allotted where the University Club now stands. Not until fifty-six years later, however, would the students of Dalhousie have a common and central meeting ground to call their own. The first fundraising for the "S.U.B." took place from 1913 to 1915; in a single week in 1914 canvassers raised \$31,000! Halted by the First World War, interest in a SUB waned as later students' priority was a gymnasium.

As Dalhousie expanded in the 1930s and 1940s students had only residence common rooms and the rundown and cramped "Atwood's Canteen" in which to congregate. (Atwood's was located in the Arts Annex/Old Men's Residence, a temporary building which stood between the Studley gymnasium and the University Club). By the 1960s, though, over half of the university's students, roughly 2000, were from Halifax, and needed somewhere to spend time between classes. Funding remained the main hurdle to be surmounted, as the students were responsible for the bulk of it. In 1960, 82 percent of the student body turned out to vote, 90 percent being in favour of raising student fees to help pay for the SUB. Then in 1961, the Board of Governors agreed to include the SUB as an object of the new \$16 million fundraising campaign. Fundraising efforts by the students continued, with a Blitz in 1963 netting \$5000 through canvassing, a dance and variety show. Another referendum in January 1967 resulted in a second boost in fees to push forward progress on the building. Then the province of Nova Scotia added funding support in the form of a self-liquidating loan of \$2.7 million.

Finding property for the Student Union Building was difficult because Dalhousie did not have power of expropriation and private residents resisted letting go of their homes. One version of the



Student Union's mascot for the Student Union Building opening, GOOOB (Grand Opening of Our Building), c1968

plans worked around the house of a particularly intractable owner and lacked the present front entrance. The owner eventually agreed to move.

The architect of the Student Union Building was C. D. Davison, who took suggestions from the Building and Campus Development Committee. Construction began in April 1967, headed by the MacDonald Construction Company Ltd. The final cost of the SUB was \$3.7 million. The "Grand Opening of Our Building" (Gooob) took place in November 1968 with three days of activities and entertainment. Presiding over the official opening ceremony was Premier G. I. Smith. Aiming to meet "the students' recreation, welfare and cultural needs," the SUB was to be a community centre and a "laboratory of citizenship" that would complement the lessons of the classroom (Gazette September 29, 1966).

The interior of the SUB was furnished by interior designer Jack Miller, who wanted the building to be "alive, young, yet quality conscious." Bright carpets coordinated with the mosaic walls on the stair landings. The original "Green Room" lounge on the first floor had leather chairs and a "conversation pit" surrounding the broad fireplace, a gift from the graduating class of 1927. There were games rooms, a music room, cafeteria, conference room, clubs and societies space and student services offices. Indeed, the building appeared so well furnished that the Halifax Chronicle-Herald insinuated that it was a bit TOO luxurious for college life.

As the years passed the SUB became less "alive" and "young," however, and renovations were necessary to keep it up-to-date and efficient. 1988 renovations cost \$350,000 and included moving and improving the Grawood student bar. In 1999 the layout of the front entrance was changed to make it safer and less "ugly." Another facelift in 2002-2003 put new glass doors on the front entrance, added a food court on the ground floor, moved the Grawood again to the ground floor and expanded the bookstore in the basement.

Today the SUB continues to serve its function as a hub of student extracurricular and social activity on campus. It features the Grawood Lounge, a food court, coffee shops, a travel agency, Campus Copy, the university bookstore, campus radio station, and Career and Counseling Services.

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Student Union Building - Dalhousie University - Opened November 7, 1968, January 28, 1969 [date on photo]



Dalhousie Student Union Building - Construction Shot, 1968

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Dalhousie University Student Union Building - Exterior - Front, April 1982



Dalhousie Student Union Building - Lounge Area, n.d.



The Grawood Lounge, 1981

- The S.U.B. Pharos. 1988, p. 38-39.

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SUB - Construction Shot - June 1968



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