

# The Buildings of Dalhousie University

## Fenwick Place

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Address: 5599 Fenwick St.

Start Date:

Completion Date:

1971

Architect: Dumaresq and Byrne Limited

Renovation Date(s):

Contractor: Kenney Construction

### Building History



Fenwick Place, n.d.

Fenwick Place was an unforeseen, fortuitous purchase on the part of Dalhousie that was met with excitement beforehand and criticism nearly immediately afterward. In the late 1960s, a housing study of rental accommodations in Halifax showed a market that would reach saturation by 1970. Dalhousie's enrolment was increasing at a rapid rate of twenty percent a year. It expected to have 9000 students by 1980, but as it stood, 3000 of those would be homeless. The existing residences - Shirreff Hall, Howe Hall, Ardmore Hall, Quinpool Hall and seventeen houses - totaled only 1250 spaces in residence.

Fenwick Place was designed by Dumaresq and Byrne Limited, of Halifax. Sydney P. Dumaresq is the fourth generation of Dumaresq architects in the Atlantic region; his great-grandfather, J. Philip, designed Dalhousie's Forrest Building. In 1970, Kenney Construction of Yarmouth was in the midst of building the thirty-three-storey apartment building on Fenwick Street when it declared bankruptcy. Although Dalhousie was already loaded with construction projects, it was tempted by the 812 additional residence spaces that Fenwick Place would offer. The apartments would give single and married students a needed alternative to traditional dormitory-style residence. In April 1971, Dalhousie purchased the half-completed building for a bargain at \$5.25 million.

Almost immediately, problems beset Fenwick's completion. In August 1971 Hurricane Beth brought 235 millimetres of rain, filling the elevator shafts of Fenwick with seventeen feet of water. Of the three rickety elevators, only one worked. The swaying on the top floors in high winds was also a concern. Halifax building regulations stipulated a maximum sway of eight inches in eighty mile-per-hour winds; Fenwick got in under the wire at a five-inch sway.

Using a \$4.9 million loan from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Dalhousie spent a total of \$500,000 to convert Fenwick to hold more occupants and to furnish the apartments. In September 1971, some students were moving in before the building was even finished. The completion date was pushed back repeatedly as complaints were raised of apartments missing furnishings, appliances, doors and window glass. The laundry facilities were



Fenwick Place - Exterior - Full View -  
Low Angle, n.d.

limited and there was no heat. Almost from the beginning, Fenwick acquired a reputation as a wild and loud residence. Maintenance issues were recurrent.

Today Fenwick accommodates up to 400 undergraduate and graduate students in both student-shared and conventional (unfurnished) bachelor, one-, two-, three- and four- bedroom apartments. The two uppermost floors, each with twenty-two single rooms, have in recent years been reserved for International Exchange students.

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