

A Man of Many Roles

No function can help but reflect to a certain degree, the character and personality of those who direct it. This is true of Dalhousie University as much as anything else, especially when the direction comes from a personality as strong as Dr. Henry Hicks. This week in Part one of a two part story Andrea Smith takes a short look at Dr. Hicks and the influence he casts on the University over which he presides.



by Andrea Smith

When one strolls across the Dalhousie campus, there are days when certain physical properties of the university seem to individually stalk forward and reveal their presence. On a certain day, perhaps the imaginary academic dome which covers the entire campus rises and exposes a vast series of divisions. These are often so remote that the student preparing his thesis in a third floor corral in the Killam Library exists as if in a separate country from a professor in his LeMarchant Street office. It is quite probable that the various cubbyholes, corners and confines which would appear are so abundant and the dwellers so preoccupied that no one would blush under this stark revelation. One will cease to wonder if the differing views and perspectives from each niche are not so helplessly selected and served to fit personal tastes that optical illusions, double exposures and obstructed vision become an accepted matter of fact.

If you walk in the front door of the Arts and Administration building and firmly plant your feet on the enormous disc which once again reminds us of the university's position concerning

ora et labora and look to your left you will see the entrance to one confined area of space from which a panoramic view of the university is possible. The occupant of this office is President Henry Hicks who is both administrator and ancestor for every student at Dalhousie. One need never suspect that the panelled walls and thick carpet blur and muffle sights and sounds that should be nature of the president's position be seen and heard. Dr. Hicks has retained a great and useful portion of the curiosity which seized him and bade him to attend university and satisfy his appetite for the sciences in 1936. Dr. Hicks' present role at Dalhousie has been paved by an interesting mixture of education, military service, law practice, politics and luck. He is at one time, a charming, jovial grandfather to all of the Dalhousie students, who received a great deal of pleasure and personal satisfaction from begetting his immense flock of students and a strikingly strong source of administrative push and pull. No one suffers less from his seemingly incompatible mixture than Dr. Hicks himself.

The view from the president's office can be sensed even when the drapes are drawn and the door is shut. Boundaries crumble at will and obstacles melt into insignificant blotches of color until one can almost peer around corners and hear the steady march to a beat which often originates from the drum of one man. Dr. Hicks own wit serves not only as an encouragement to turn over rocks and good naturedly search underneath for new worlds but also as an inescapable aura which perpetually envelopes him and maintains his readiness for challenges.

Dr. Hicks is quick to tell of the unpredictable turns his life has taken. His decision to leave his comfortable hometown of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia and become the first in his long line of ancestors to attend university, his decision not to enter into the family business or the decisions handed to him by the electorate concerning politics have shown him the path to his office as president. As Dr. Hicks looks back with the clarity that hindsight can provide, he knows that the careers he supposedly selected for himself now seem buried along with all calculations one mistakenly disallowed fate to interfere with. He appreciates these facts about his life and expresses sympathy for students who honestly do not know what they want to pursue yet he keeps an observer from his office ever mindful of his insistence upon good, hard disciplined thought and study. It is as if a student must be prepared to make the same calculations as he and temporarily fix dreams about what life holds for them. Dr. Hicks has already discovered that it is by developing the mind and preparing it for future learning that the university education becomes most helpful background. Dr. Hicks no more seeks the sorry illusion that academic life should be noticeably relevant than he does conversion to Catholicism.

As one sits in Dr. Hicks office and senses the presence of many smaller surrounding offices, they can allow themselves to delve into the world of probability. They can acknowledge that Dalhousie is mortal. All the physical structures and the people who sit inside them will give what they can give and then step back to give tomorrow to tomorrow. They can look at the colorful picture which decorates the wall in his office and see how it is a symbol of unification in the room and perhaps in the university as seen by him; they can also feel the enormous potential for disharmony that the university possesses. The clashes and errors are inevitable. If one replaces the academic dome and once again returns the walls of academe to the privacy Dr. Hicks demands for them, they can go back to their office in peace.

Dialogue

by Ken MacDougall

With me at my desk, beside my typewriter, is a friend whom I picked up last week in the hallowed halls of Fenwick — or, rather, a friend of mine did. I'm not sure if it's a he or a she, and it really doesn't have much sex appeal. In fact, although my former Biology professors on campus would say that the only thing I could readily identify in class was how many minutes were left in the lecture, I would hazard a guess and say that this friend is a bug of some sort — probably a centipede.

In fact, it is a centipede, all shrivelled-up one and one quarter inches of it — found in Fenwick Towers.

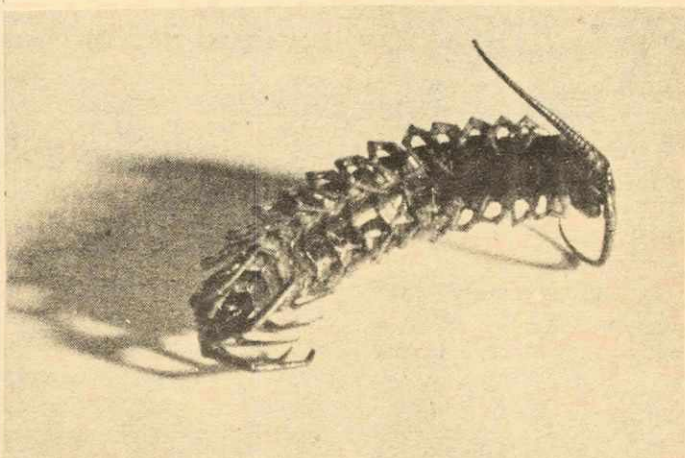


Photo by Ken Lee

Now, let us suppose that you are some sweet young thing, majoring in Sociology, and this thing waddled (what would you call a centipede's walk?) across your living room floor — what would you do? Step on it? Scream? Bottle it up and give it to the night managers in Fenwick? All of these are good reactions, and any one of them would score top points, if I was making score.

However, if you were really sensible (and here is where you would have the opportunity to score bonus points) you would experience a mild revulsion over the type of living conditions that would bring in this form of insect. Your point would be well taken.

BUT DON'T DESPAIR. . . if this bug happened to you, you wouldn't necessarily have to get down on yourself for your slovenly habits. An inspection of the building would do wonders to salve your conscience. The fourteenth, twentieth, twenty-fifth, and indeed, every student floor in front of the elevators looks as though it hasn't experienced any more cursory attention by soap and water, other than that administered by the drunks playing with the extinguishers on a Friday night. You can smell the garbage on the seventh floor the moment the elevator door opens. Other floors are equally bad.

Now, our floor isn't nearly as bad as most of the student floors, but that's only because the superintendent lives on our floor. Since the manager of the building, M.J. Middleton, lives on the fourth floor, it, too, is in fine shape. Unfortunately, most students don't have management living near them.

A CASE FOR THE TENANCIES BOARD

However, my little centipede isn't nearly all of the problem — of bugs, at least — Fenwick. Silverfish are the order of the day in most apartments (they're the little critters that scurry for cover when you turn the lights on in the washroom). Mice are another, although less frequent, pest. The lowest parking levels have rats, not to mention other vermin.

But by far the most interesting point about living conditions in Fenwick Towers is this story, given to me by a friend who worked in the building last year cleaning apartments. Some of the apartments, and at least two floors, should have been fumigated — because they were infested with fleas. Some of the apartments the workers refused to clean, because of their state of filth. However, the observation to be made from the refusal of persons to clean apartments was the building's attitude towards the problem, which was, to say the least, typical — send in the supervisor, or Mr. Roy, the superintendent, to clean up the mess. As for fumigation, this, too, was done by supervisory staff, or not at all. Fenwick keeps a supply of exterminator spray on hand which the staff, without the aid of masks, gloves, or any of the safety devices that normal fumigators consider essential to their trade, is expected to use when the going gets rough. Needless to say, because of the personal health hazard, the spray was seldom used this summer.

Now, the moment that this column is read, I'm sure that someone with a suitable aversion to publicity in Fenwick Towers is going to call to say that all of this is a lie. However, I'm not really concerned — I have my bottled bug, information from reliable sources who are prepared to substantiate my points, and the willing ear of the Residential Tenancies Board. Now, it only someone would organize the **Fenwick Tenants' Association**, perhaps tenants in the building might be able to start fighting the conditions that plague them. And I'll have more of these problems listed next week.