

Modern Architecture in Logy Bay: Ocean Sciences Centre



Heritage NL

info@heritagenl.ca – PO Box 5171, St. John's, NL, Canada, A1C 5V5

By Juliet Lanphear

Introduction

In 1967, the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory building, now known as the Ocean Sciences Centre, was constructed in Logy Bay. Separate from the main Memorial University Campus off Elizabeth Avenue, the Ocean Sciences Centre was built for research into cold water marine sciences. The Ocean Sciences Centre is known for its unique architectural design and dodecahedral shape, representing the form of a sea anemone (Mellin 2011). Part of a movement of modern architecture representing the new MUN campus in the 1960s, the Ocean Science Centre is a unique building that has been featured in exhibitions and books like *Atlantic Modern*, curated by architecture professor Steven Mannell.



Fig 1. Photo of the Ocean Sciences Centre, taken September 2025. (Heritage NL)

Construction

Memorial University College was established in 1925 and was originally located on Parade Street in St. John's. By the 1950s, the Parade Street Campus had become overcrowded, and plans were made for a new, larger campus on Elizabeth Avenue, which opened in 1961.

Located separately from the main Memorial University campus is the Ocean Sciences Centre, formerly known as the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory. The site of the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory had been a fisheries preserve since 1904 and is an excellent location for marine research due to its proximity to the Gulf Stream and Labrador Current (Mellin 2011). The land was donated to the University by the Provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador (Memorial University College 1964-1965).

Planning began for the building in 1964 (Memorial University College 1964-1965), and the construction contract was awarded to Seabord Construction Limited in 1966 (Lewisport Pilot 1966). The National Research Council of Canada supplied funding to help support the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory (Memorial University College 1964-1965).

The first design for the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory was prepared by the architectural firm of Cummings and Campbell, but their design was not selected (Mellin 2011). The Quebec architecture firm of Dobush Stewart Bourke was

hired, with Peter Holtshousen as project architect and assisted by Sir Christopher Barlow.

Architects

The Montreal architectural firm of Dobush Stewart Bourkes was hired to design the Marine Sciences Laboratory (Mellin 2011). In the mid-1960s, a branch of Dobush Stewart Bourke Barlow Architects and Consultants was opened in St. John's, which designed buildings such as the Memorial University Engineering Building in 1973 (Dobush Stewart Bourke Barlow) and renovations to the Waterford Hospital (Halleran 2024). Originally from Winnipeg, architect Peter Dobush helped design scientific research facilities and atomic energy plants during WWII and thereafter. Dobush started Dobush Stewart Bourkes in 1960 in Montreal with William E. Stewart and R. David Bourke, with the firm expanding over the next two decades until Dobush died in 1980 (Architects in Canada, n.d.).

The architects for the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory were Peter Holtshousen and Sir Christopher Barlow (Mellin 2011). Other projects in the province worked on by Holtshousen and Barlow were the Corner Brook Arts and Culture Centre and the Corner Brook Government Centre (Mellin 2011).

The principal architect, Peter Holtshousen, was a member of the Association of Newfoundland Architects (The Daily News 1965). Later in his career, in the 1970s, he was head of the research division for the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings in Ottawa (B.C. Historical Association 1973). Sir Christopher Barlow was a British Baronet and Architect who moved to Newfoundland in 1966. Architectural projects in which Barlow was involved include the Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor Arts and Culture Centres, as well as the Royal Trust Building (now known as the Fortis Building) in St. John's (Smallwood and Pitt 1981).

Architectural Features

The Ocean Sciences Centre is a unique and memorable building due to several of its architectural features. The building has a

geometrical, dodecahedral shape, meant to emulate the form of a sea anemone. The building has numerous porthole windows, and the exterior walls are articulated with horizontal folds. The building has a narrow base and an exposed cedar board exterior (Mellin 2011).

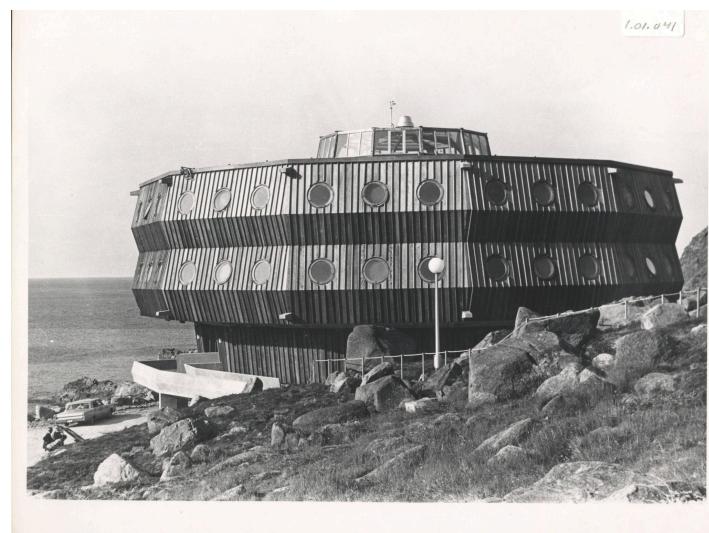


Fig 2. Photo of the Marine Sciences Laboratory, now the Ocean Sciences Centre, n.d.
Photo part of the S.J. Carew Photograph Collection (Coll-012) 1.01.041 (MUN DAI)

The architectural plans for the Marine Sciences Building are available at the MUN Facilities Management Archives, and selected floor plans are shown in *Newfoundland Modern* (Mellin 2011: 108) and *Atlantic Modern* (Mannell 2004: 83-85).

History since Opening

On June 21st, 1967, the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory was opened by Premier Joseph Smallwood (Memorial University College 1966-1967).

The first director of the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory was Dr. Frederick Aldrich, appointed in 1967. Originally from New Jersey, Aldrich held a doctorate in marine biology and physiology from Rutgers University and had previously served as curator at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Aldrich began his career at Memorial University in 1961 as a professor in the Biology department, and in 1963, he became head of the department. Later, he was Memorial University's first dean of graduate studies and

was known for his research on the giant squid (Memorial University of Newfoundland, n.d.)

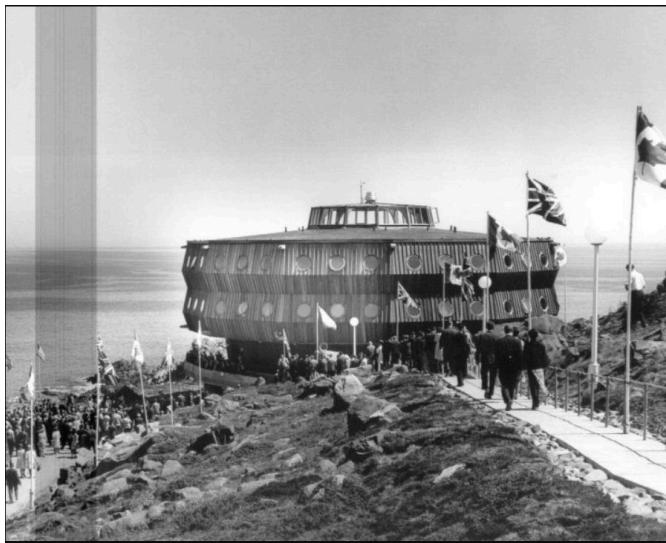


Fig 3. Photo from the official opening in 1967.
(MUN Gazette 2017)

When the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory was opened in 1967, the building has been home to several fisheries and ocean sciences-related programs.

In 1988, Memorial University merged the Marine Sciences Research Laboratory with the Newfoundland Institute for Cold Ocean Science to form the Ocean Sciences Centre, which is its current name (Ballam 2015). Now a research unit within the Faculty of Science, the Ocean Science Centre includes the Dr. Joe Brown Aquatic Research Building, the Cold-Ocean Deep-Sea Research Facility, and 57 laboratories. In 2012, the Ocean Sciences Centre was approved for an academic program with the Department of Ocean Sciences, which began offering its first academic programming with minors in oceanography and sustainable aquaculture and fisheries ecology in 2015 (MUN Gazette 2017).

Conclusion

Still in use today, the Ocean Sciences Centre is an architectural rarity in the province with its unique, geometrical design. Featured in exhibits and books like *Atlantic Modern*, it is a stunning example of modern architecture. The building is

also the site of an internationally recognized ocean science research facility.



Fig 4. Photo of the Marine Sciences Laboratory, now the Ocean Sciences Centre, n.d.
Photo part of the S.J. Carew Photograph Collection
(Coll-012) 1.01.042 (MUN DAI)

Suggested Bibliography and Further Reading

Bibliography

Mannell, Steven. *Atlantic Modern*. 2004. TUNS Press, Halifax.

Mellin, Robert. *Newfoundland Modern*. 2011. Pages 15, 106-110.

Suggested Archives

Library and Archives Canada's collections
Stewart, Hein, Dobush fonds (Finding aid no. MSS1946)

MUN Centre for Newfoundland Studies
MUN – MSRL – Marine Sciences Research Laboratory
MUN – Ocean Sciences Centre

MUN Digital Archives Initiative
Report of the President of Memorial University

MUN Facilities Management Archives

References

Ballam, Douglas. 2015. *Memorial University of Newfoundland*. n.d. “Frederick A. Aldrich,” *School of Graduate Studies*. <https://www.mun.ca/sgs/events/frederick-a-aldrich/>

B.C. Historical Association. “B.C. Historical News,” June 1973. https://www.library.ubc.ca/archives/pdfs/bchf/bch_n_1973_06.pdf

Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada. N.d. Dobush, Peter. <http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/2493>

Dobush Stewart Bourke Barlow. 1973. *Design report engineering building, Memorial University of Newfoundland*. St. John’s, NL. MUN DAI: <https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/cns2/id/214039>.

Halleran, Anna. 2024. *Reckoning with Decay: The Hidden Cost of Neglect*. Architectural History Thesis: Delft University of Technology. file:///C:/Users/Built%20Heritage/Documents/Halleran_Anna_Thesis_TUDR.pdf

Mannell, Steven. *Atlantic Modern*. 2004. TUNS Press, Halifax.

Memorial University College. 1964-1965. Report of the President. https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/pres_report/search/searchterm/1964-1965/field/subcol/mode/exact/conn/and/order/title

Memorial University College. 1965-1966. Report of the President. https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/pres_report/id/1337/rec/1

Memorial University College. 1966-1967. Report of the President. https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/pres_report/search/searchterm/1966-1967/field/subcol/mode/exact/conn/and/order/title

MUN Gazette. *Golden memories: Ocean Sciences Centre reunion to celebrate 50th anniversary*. March 30, 2017. <https://gazette.mun.ca/campus-and-community/golden-memories/>

Lewisport Pilot. 1966. “Marine Research Lab for MUN.” Vol V., No. 25, May 20, 1966. Lewisport, Newfoundland and Labrador. <https://collections.mun.ca/digital/collection/lewispiolt/id/2117>

The Daily News. “The Association of Newfoundland Architects: Register of Members.” January 25, 1965. Vol. 72, no.16.

Smallwood, Joseph, and Robert Pitt. “Sir Christopher Barlow,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*. 1981. Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., St. John’s

The Heritage NL Fieldnotes Series was created to openly share information concerning the ongoing research projects of Heritage NL in the fields of built heritage and intangible cultural heritage. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). Last update 29 January 2026