

Agronomy's Home for 52 Years Lilly Hall of Life Sciences

By Kelly Delp, adapted from Fred Patterson's *Glimpses of History*

Constructing the Lilly Hall of Life Sciences was a long process that took about 10 years to complete.

Originally, Indiana Crop Improvement approached the state legislature to request a new building for Agronomy. Purdue President Frederick Hovde's reaction was to expand the university's plans for the new Life Sciences building. The concept was that by housing them together in one building, there would be more interactions among the different facilities in plant, animal, and soil sciences.

J.B. Peterson, who became Head of Agronomy in 1948, reviewed plans for the new Life Sciences building and thought it would be too small. His influence helped increase the space by about 50 percent. The first, second, and third floors of the west wing were completed in the original contract. The ground and basement floors in the west and east wing were completed with grant funds, mostly from Eli Lilly and Company, hence the name change from the Life Sciences Building to Lilly Hall of Life Sciences.

Lilly Hall of Life Sciences is 426 feet wide, 520 feet long, and originally had 750 rooms. The basement, ground, and three floors have 499,877 square feet. The west and east wings are separate, free-standing units joined by aluminum slip joint thresholds.

The west wing was built first. Construction began in 1951 and Agronomy moved into it in 1955. Construction on the main entrance began in 1957 and Biology and Animal Sciences moved into the east wing in 1959.

The completed building was dedicated with a symposium June 16-18, 1960. The Symposium, "Growth in Living Systems," covered three areas:

1. Molecules, viruses, and bacterial
2. Cells, tissues and organisms
3. Plant growth and plant communities.

There were 35 distinguished national and international scholars who made presentations, including Francis H.C. Crick from Cambridge University, of later DNA fame.

A Purdue newsreel from 1958-1959 explains the mural in the main entryway.

"The aluminum and walnut mural in the main lobby symbolizes scientific interest in living things and the interrelated specialties needed to solve the mysteries of life." The mural was created by Adolph Wolter from Indianapolis.

Interesting Fact

Every new building has its share of quirks to work out, and the Lilly Hall of Life Sciences was no exception.

When Agronomy moved into the building in 1955, faculty and staff found that some office door locks were installed incorrectly. Those who went into an office and shut the door without unlocking it got locked into the office. Luckily, there was room under the door to slide a key.