Hello! When W. Grant Egbert founded the Ithaca Conservatory of Music in 1892, he probably never imagined that one day IC music students would be studying and performing on an independent South Hill Campus in a building all their own. Today, all 538 students enrolled in the music school call the Whalen Center home. However, it wasn’t always the way it is today. This is the story of the building that has carried on IC’s original mission, the James J. Whalen Center. Welcome to another episode of Ithaca College: Then and Now.

The music school was built in 1964 and dedicated on June 4, 1965 as the Walter B. Ford Music Building, making it one of the older buildings on campus. While Friends, Williams, Egbert Hall, and the quads were in place, the campus was still quite bare. Even the iconic Towers had not been finished!

In fact, one of the only mature trees on campus was the huge, century-old oak in front of Ford. The college removed the tree in 1997 after its core had rotted away.

When first built, Ford was smaller than it is today. In the late 1990s, the college expanded the building, adding on the Whalen Center.

The additions included new class and office spaces on the building’s west side, eliminating the old west entrance.

More importantly, the college replaced the building’s modest front door with a more glamorous entrance a common room, and several new performance spaces, including Hockett and Presser Halls.

The Baker Walkway replaced the old double staircase to facilitate campus handicap accessibility, connecting the music building to the Towers Parking Lot.

Until the ‘90s, Ford was separate from the library, under construction to the right of this photograph. This changed when the college connected the new Whalen Center to the library.

Only the building’s east side has remained close to its original 1960s appearance. When comparing some of the old vistas to their modern counterparts, it’s easy to see how the college has evolved over time as trees have grown in, additional buildings have been added, and the campus has matured into a lived-in place. One can only imagine what another fifty years will do!

On the inside, some parts of Whalen have changed very little, such as the foyer, which still includes the dark tiles and round central structure.
However, Ford Hall itself has changed. When it was brand new, Ford lacked the grand organ. Mr. Ford himself donated the organ when he noticed the absence of one during a visit in 1968.

Many of the class and office spaces have been renovated since their debut, removing the ’60s-style furniture and décor. However, there are still some rooms that look almost exactly the same as they did a half-century ago.

Most interesting of all is how the original Ford Hall has melted into the Whalen Center. Careful examination of the building reveals the original outside west wall of Ford Hall, now on the inside of the front atrium of the Whalen center. More than any other spot on campus, this junction between old and new is a reminder of just how much the college has changed since the 1960s.

Today, the blue elevator shaft stands roughly where the original Front entrance used to be. Now a locker bank and storage closet fill most of what used to be a wide entryway.

What would a music school be without instruments? While they have been joined by some 150 new pianos, 26 of the original pianos from 1964 are still in use today. Imagine carrying them up the stairs!

If you’d like to add your own thoughts and memories, please leave them in the comments section of the video. Whether you’re a student, alumnus, or faculty member, we hope you’ll help us remember Ithaca College, then and now. Thanks for watching!