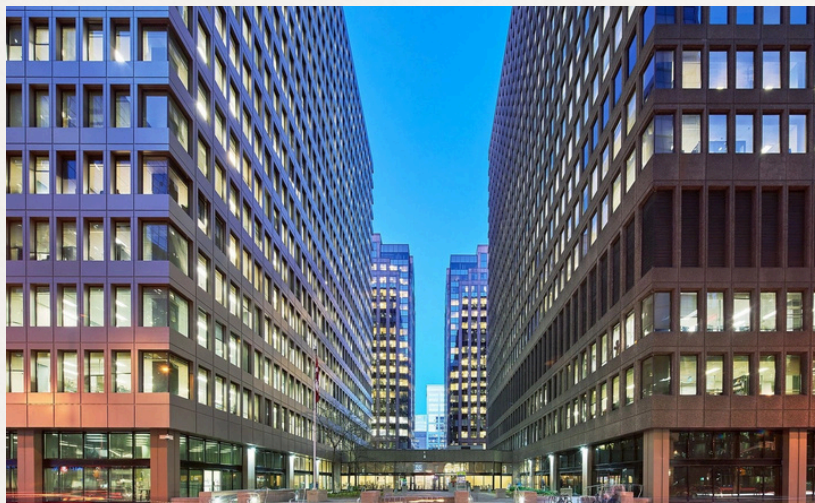


JEAN EDMONDS TOWERS

BUILT FOR DAILY JOURNALISM, NAMED FOR A CIVIL SERVICE PIONEER



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The story behind the Jean Edmonds Towers is as much about the personalities behind the buildings as it is the structures themselves. Here are two buildings in the downtown core, joined by a low-rise entrance and courtyard, that take their name from a pioneering journalist who, curiously, never worked a day in her life in the structure, and who would go on to become a pioneer in the federal public service.

A home for the Ottawa Journal

Spanning a half block bounded by Kent Street, Laurier Avenue, and Slater Street, the buildings were constructed in the 1970s – another vision for downtown office space conceived by developer Robert Campeau. Unlike the towers of Place de Ville, which were far grander in scale, more innovative in design, and attracted no small share of controversy, these structures were more modest in scope and approach. Their purpose: to house the offices of the now-defunct Ottawa Journal daily newspaper.

Construction of the North Tower at 300 Slater Street was completed in 1970. The South Tower at 365 Laurier Avenue West followed in 1973. Almost identical in their footprints, the towers were connected by a low-rise middle portion and an exterior courtyard. The only difference between the two buildings at the time of their completion was a taller fourth floor in the South Tower. The reason behind the change was entirely functional. This is where the Journal chose to locate its printing press room, and the height of the floor had to be able to accommodate more vertical clearance than an ordinary office floor.

A distinctive detail survives in the South Tower to this day: its fourth floor rises noticeably taller than the corresponding floor in the North Tower, a direct architectural consequence of having been purpose-built to accommodate the Ottawa Journal's printing press room, which required considerably more vertical clearance than an ordinary office floor.

Architecturally, both towers were originally clad in precast concrete panels that were punctuated by recessed windows. The glass windowpanes were positioned to meet directly at the corners of each of the buildings, with the goal of creating crisp, uninterrupted lines rather than visible structural corners.

That unified appearance has since changed. In 2017, the North Tower underwent a cosmetic re-cladding. Its precast concrete panels were replaced with metal panels painted brown in an attempt to match the older material.

Despite moving into its new, purpose-built space in 1973, the Journal was nearing the end of its run. It was losing ground to the Ottawa Citizen in the local newspaper wars. Thomson Newspapers acquired the struggling daily in February 1980 as part of a broader acquisition of the FP Publications Ltd. chain. Thomson executives made the call to fold the paper in the middle of July that year, and the Journal published its last edition on August 27.

The addition of vacant real estate to the downtown core, as it was wont to do in those days, quickly attracted the attention of the federal public service. The towers transitioned to government use, and joined the ranks of privately developed buildings across the core that were absorbed into the city's ever-expanding need for civil service space.

The buildings were formally renamed in honour of Jean Edmonds following her death in 1994. That distinction makes the towers among a very few in the federal office portfolio that are named for a woman rather than a male politician or dignitary.

Completed in 1968, Towers A and B at the development therefore became the first buildings to break through Ottawa's traditional downtown height ceiling.



Jean Edmonds: journalist, public servant, pioneer

Jean Edmonds herself grew up in Winnipeg. She was born in 1921 and graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1942 with a degree in economics and English. She would go on to spend two decades working in journalism with the *Financial Post* and with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. At the time, the conservative nature of financial journalism led Edmonds to work under the byline of J.K. Edmonds – a suggestion put to her by the *Post*'s then editor Ronald A. McEachern, who had a reputation as a pioneer in bringing women into financial journalism.

Public service was never far from Edmonds' life. In 1958, she helped draft the Liberal Party of Canada's general election platform. In 1960, she became the only woman to appear on the program at the Liberal Party's Kingston, Ontario Thinkers' Conference. The event is widely regarded as having helped to set the direction for the party for the decade to come.



Edmonds joined the federal public service in 1964, initially as an economist with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Two years later, she joined the newly formed Department of Manpower and Immigration. Two years after that, in 1968, she was appointed Regional Director, Prairie Region, becoming one of the first female senior executives in the federal public service.

Her career broke even more ground in the years that followed. In 1973 she was appointed Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration – a position unheard of for a woman at the time. By 1984, in the waning years of her career, she had risen to the role of Associate Secretary of the Ministry of State for Economic and Regional Development – a position that carried full Deputy Minister status.

Although Edmonds retired in 1985, she was far from finished working. In 1988, Treasury Board President Patricia Carney appointed her to chair the federal Task Force on Barriers to Women in the Public Service. The group's report, released in April 1990, was titled *Beneath the Veneer*. It found that while female representation in the federal public service generally matched numbers found in the overall labour force, "they are largely confined to a few occupational groups and compressed into the lower levels of pay and status. They face barriers to movement... and advancement to the top levels." The report made a series of recommendations for changes.

A biography of Edmonds remains on permanent display in the South Tower of the buildings that bear her name. Its concluding words: "Jean Edmonds, who died in 1994, changed the face of the Public Service forever."

Today, the Jean Edmonds Towers are jointly owned by Morguard Corporation and iA Financial Group. The buildings are almost entirely leased to the federal government, and serve as the headquarters for the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.