

From Grad House to Grad Club

Whether it has been called Grad House, as it was in the beginning, the Grad Club – as it's known today – for almost 50 years the venue has been a favourite gathering spot for grad students and their friends.

BY ANDREA GUNN, MPA'07

In 2009, CBC Radio listeners named the Grad Club at Queen's as one of the Top 10 best clubs for live music in Canada. Not bad for a venue that's the living room of a rambling Victorian house.

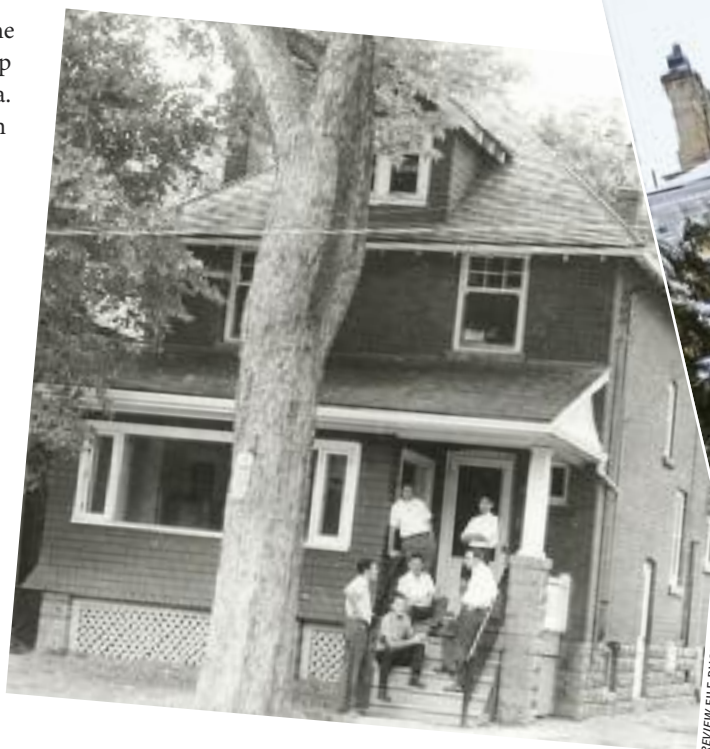
The Grad Club, at 162 Barrie Street, is actually the third iteration of a campus home for Queen's grad students.

In January, 1962, when a group of those graduate students got together to create an association for the University's 350 graduate students, they envisioned a space of their own, where grad students from all disciplines and departments could meet, exchange ideas, and socialize. Don Stewart, MSc'64, was among the organizers. "I got involved in the Graduate Student Society (GSS) just as it was being formed," he recalls. "There were concerns about getting year-round health coverage for grad students, and housing."

In May, 1963, Queen's administration offered the GSS the use of a University-owned property at 211 Stuart Street. Queen's offered the house without rent, if the GSS would carry the heat, utilities, and maintenance expenses, and could appoint someone who would be accountable for the house.

Donations to furnish the house trickled in from faculty, students, and the Kingston community. Upstairs, four bedrooms were rented out to six graduate students. Their rents, \$25 a month each, also helped to keep the house operations going.

In October 1963, the Grad House acquired a piano. After that, music became a constant aspect of life in the building, whether it came from students jamming with guitars, dancing to a record player, or listening to student and local bands. The West Indian Steel Band was a popular draw at the house.



The original Grad House at 211 Stuart Street opened in 1963.

Richard Devereaux, MSc'68, served as house manager from 1965 to 1967. "My main chore was to collect the rent cheques," he says. Another important job was to supply "refreshments" with the introduction of a beer vending machine. "I got a soft drink cooler, and modified the coin operation, so it would take 25 cents, instead of 15 cents."

By 1969, there were nearly 1,000 graduate students at Queen's. Heavily used, the little house on Stuart Street, besides being

dingy and tired, was too small. Where else at 4 am could grad students, as one put it, discuss the merits of socialism, Freud, or the sex lives of rats? When 157 King Street East, the former residence for Army Commanding Officers became available, Queen's bought the property and made it available to the GSS, which signed a five-year lease agreement. The second Graduate House provided residence for 11 students, plus the live-in House Manager and assistant manager. The beer cooler tradition continued, although draft beer and hot pies were available on Fridays, starting in 1971. (Beer was sold at three bottles for a dollar.)

In 1975, as the King Street house lease drew to an end, the GSS learned that the property would need costly renovations

REVIEW FILE PHOTO

Do you have stories or photos of Grad House or the Grad Club you'd like to share with Alumni Review readers? Send them to review@queensu.ca



MEMBERS OF THE 2011 GRAD CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ryan Kelly (Biochemistry), Jillian Burford-Grinnell, Artsci'09, (Gender Studies), Andrew Maloney (Law), Adam Middleton, Artsci'06, (Biochemistry), and Simon Hamilton (Business) in front of the Grad Club.

157 King Street East, a former Army Commanders' residence, became the second Grad House.

in order to qualify for a permanent liquor licence, according to new rules from the Liquor Licensing Board of Ontario. So in the spring of 1975, the GSS began searching for a new home.

Once again, the University was able to help out. The GSS made a request to utilize another Queen's-owned property, this one the south half of a duplex at 162-164 Barrie Street. The request was approved, and the new Grad Club opened for business at 162 Barrie Street in the fall of 1976. The facility's new board of directors was independent of student government.

Virginia Clark, Artsci'94, the Grad Club manager, explains: "The first directors were adamant that the club would be a space for all graduate and professional students at Queen's." Today, the nine-

person board has representation from all faculties and schools at Queen's.

In 1979, the Grad Club expanded into 164 Barrie Street, the north half of the duplex. The ground floor today has two large open rooms with a full bar and kitchen facilities. The Club regularly plays host to live performances by local and touring musicians. The other rooms at the Grad Club are also well-used, for book readings, poetry slams, and departmental socials, just like in the old days. As the Grad Club nears its 50th anniversary, it has never been busier. Or more lively. "Our rooms are booked solid," says Virginia. ■

This is a shortened version of the Grad House history. The full article and more photos are available online at alumnireview.queensu.ca



A sample of entertainment at the Grad House/Grad Club over the years.