

History of Hart House Bridge Club – Beginnings

According to *An Uncommon Fellowship: the Story of Hart House*, the Hart House Bridge Club began officially sometime between 1945-1947:

At the Committees' dinner held in 1945, [warden] Bickersteth spoke of the new era...
...Now it was decided to close the small card room on the second floor, install soundproofing, and equip it as a [phonograph] record room... The decision really solved two problems: in adding a new strength it eliminated an old abuse. Card playing, always a nuisance, has become a serious concern, for there were instances of ex-servicement gambling and losing an entire month's government allowance as soon as the cheques arrived. With the decision of the Stewards to shut the card room, informal card playing was barred from the House. But to keep the best of the old, the Board approved a move by some of the displaced to form a Hart House bridge club. At weekly tournaments under its aegis, duplicate bridge was played seriously and with considerable ability.
...he did leave in 1947...
...Nicholas Ignatieff, his successor...[was warden when] [t]he record room, opened in his first year.¹

Clearly Bridge was played at Hart House before that. Its history likely paralleled that of Billiards.

[T]he Billiard Room in the basement... was a continual source of worry and anxiety, a complete nuisance. The pool room atmosphere was difficult to overcome, and a certain amount of gambling took place. Letters would come from irate parents complaining that Jimmy or Tommy had been fleeced of his money. We tried to improve it. We made many attempts to encourage good billiards, which is a wonderful game of skill. Experts came and gave exhibition games... None of these things did any good. The billiard room remained to me a squalid and unworthy part of Hart House...

The card room up on the second floor wasn't much better. You can see that gambling was inevitable as long as we set aside even one small room for cards, which were allowed nowhere else in the House. Personally I can't see anything wrong in playing bridge for 10 cents a hundred, or having a mild flutter on a horse—the platitudinous observation is to do it in moderation and not to do it at all if you can't afford it—but as warden my duty was to see, as far as I could, that callow freshmen were not being fleeced. No doubt the house committee and the Board of Stewards would have accepted my recommendation to shut the card room entirely, but there were difficulties about that also. It would only have driven card playing and gambling into obscure corners, and we always set our faces rigidly against anything in the nature of snooping around, trying to catch people out. So I had to put up with both cards and billiards through all the years, until after the war the men decided to shut them down and use the space in other ways.²

On online history of the Hart House Chess Club states:

One history records that the Club reached a nadir in 1928 when it allowed “checkers in its hallowed quarters in hopes of reviving interest”. This chronicle goes on to state, with evident satisfaction, that “this dastardly experiment failed utterly, of course”. By 1933 membership dwindled to as few as 11 members, the Club, in the interim, having had to tolerate “an insidious invasion by bridge addicts³.”

An illustrious former Hart House Bridge Club player, Director, and Committee member, Michael Shoenborn, wrote:

In the 1960s, as now, the Hart House Bridge Club was located at the downtown campus of the University of Toronto, where it had operated since the Great Depression. It had originally been run by the legendary Percy 'Shorty' Sheardown, one of the greatest bridge players who ever lived. Shorty by that time had moved on to manage Toronto's rubber bridge club, the St. Clair, one of the few places in the city where one could play the game for money.⁴

If we take "the Great Depression" to span 1929 to the late 1930s, and given that Mr. Sheardown was born in 1911 (and so would have been University age around 1929) and won the Chicago Trophy in 1936⁵, it is plausible that from the early 1930s or even before, there was a group of Bridge players in that second floor card room who considered themselves to constitute an unofficial "Hart House Bridge Club". While warden Bickersteth considered some in the card room to be gamblers, nuisances, and fleecers, one of the all-time Bridge greats was turning tricks there long before Hart House gave them official recognition.

While Montagnes states the Bridge Club came into official existence by 1947, a collection of yearly documents called "The Board of Stewards and Committees of Hart House" hanging in a stairway landing does not list the Bridge Club until 1954 (personal observation). This may be when the club gained a more formal status within Hart House.

1954
1955

THE BOARD OF STEWARDS AND COMMITTEES OF HART HOUSE



STEWARDS

J. McCullley B.A. (Warden)(Chair)
W. R. Cowan B.A.Sc. (Compt.)(Sec.)
J. A. Becker IV S.P.S.
Professor H. B. Jackson
Dr. Sidney E. Smith Q.C.

G. S. Bell IV Vic.
G. F. Lewis M.A.
J. F. Loosemore
Professor G. H. W. Lucas
G. Weese III Vic.

His Excellency, The Rt.
Hon. Vincent Massey, C.M.
W. J. McIlroy III Med.
A. E. McQuague B.A.
T. A. R. Virany B.A.Sc.

J. D. McKellar IV U.C.
J. M. Roberts IV U.C.
J. M. F. Shoemaker III Trin.
H. G. Singh III S.P.S.

HOUSE

Professor J. M. Ham (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
J. A. Becker IV S.P.S. (Sec.)
R. C. Bull I Med.

A. B. Cooper IV Dent.
M. N. A. Davies III St. Mich.
M. A. Fraser IV S.P.S.
G. H. Guy III Vic.
J. S. Stofky II Arch.

J. A. Ivory II Trin.
M. N. R. Sackman II Law
Professor L. E. M. Lunch
N. F. Mallon B.A.
E. A. Wilkinson B.A. (Asst. Compt.)

G. M. Marshall IV Dent.
G. A. McDowell B.A.Sc. (Asst. to Warden.)
M. A. Mogan II Law

LIBRARY

Dr. F. A. McCulloch (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
H. G. Singh III S.P.S. (Sec.)
F. J. Lewis

D. J. Armstrong IV U.C.
E. H. Berger IV U.C.
Rev. F. Black B.A.
III Trin.
C. J. M. Powell IV St. Mich.

J. F. X. Callahan II St. Mich.
J. R. H. Fowler I Trin.
J. P. Grace IV St. Mich.
D. G. Brent III Trin.

C. B. Guild B.A. (Grad. Sec.)
R. K. Ham IV S.P.S.
J. E. Harris II Pre-Med.

ART

J. Hall O.S.A. (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
J. M. Roberts IV U.C. (Sec.)
J. W. Barnes B.A.
S. Moscoe

T. D. R. Briant IV Med.
E. Cooke B.A.
P. S. E. Ezra II U.C.
G. A. Fierheller IV Trin.
III U.C.
R. Moyer M.A.

G. Finley III U.C.
A. K. Gigeroff III Law
I. Horl IV Dent.
R. J. Irvine III S.P.S.
E. J. Schonleber IV St. Mich.

J. G. Lister IV Med.
G. A. McDowell B.A.Sc.
(Asst. to Warden)
M. J. McMorde II S.P.S.

MUSIC

Professor J. W. Wevers (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
J. D. McKellar IV U.C. (Sec.)
H. E. M. Best I Med.

G. M. Brown III St. Mich.
R. M. Davies IV S.P.S.
J. P. Denny III Trin.
M. I. Friedland IV U.C.
G. A. McDowell

Dr. R. K. Graham
S. G. Harris Grad. St.
N. A. Irwin IV S.P.S.
R. E. Jarman IV St. Mich.
B.A.Sc. (Asst. to Warden)

J. D. Lane II Vic.
M. A. LeGour II St. Mich.
Dr. E. Mazzeletti
R. M. Spivak II U.C.

DEBATES

Professor T. A. M. Barnett (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
G. S. Bell IV Vic. (Sec.)
C. C. Batten II U.C.

J. R. M. Douglas II Vic.
C. B. Guild B.A. (Grad. Sec.)
T. C. Hammond III U.C.
G. G. Hariburt IV S.P.S.

J. S. Midanik B.A.
R. R. Price IV Vic.
S. A. Schiff II Law
I. G. Scott IV St. Mich.

H. R. S. Symons IV Trin.
Professor Malcolm Taylor
J. Vasoff III S.P.S.
C. B. H. Watson IV Trin.

GRADUATE

A. E. McQuague B.A. (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)

C. B. Guild B.A. (Grad. Sec.)
J. A. Geller B.A.
H. A. Turner B.A.Sc.

M. M. Goldberg B.A.
J. P. Hamilton B.A.
C. D. Woodley B.A.

E. B. Feffer B.A.
J. H. C. Riley B. Com.
E. A. Wilkinson B.A. (Asst. Compt.)

FINANCE

Professor N. E. Sheppard (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)

Professor W. H. T. Baillie
Professor S. G. Hennessey

Professor H. B. Jackson
Doverley Matthews Q.C.

A. E. J. Thompson B.Com. Coh.
E. A. Wilkinson B.A. (Asst. Compt.)
W. R. Cowan B.A.Sc. (Compt.)(Sec.)

QUASH BACQUETS

Professor B. Richmond (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
J. B. McClelland IV S.P.S. (Sec.)
H. R. Boake
J. Haque IV S.P.S.
M. Wilson S.G.S.

J. R. Hamilton III Trin.
H. Malcolmson II Vic.
G. A. McDowell B.A.Sc.
(Asst. to Warden)
W. Hesketh II U.C.
W. B. Witschel II Dent.

J. J. Kagaetsu S.G.S.
J. B. MacDonald B.A.
J. T. Sovella II U.C.
D. M. C. Sweeney III Trin.
G. O. Venier III S.P.S.

CAMERA

W. J. Blackhall B.A.Sc. (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
P. M. Miller III St. Mich. (Sec.)
W. A. Fullerton IV For.
J. A. Harvey II U.C.
J. S. LeGallais IV Dent.
D. A. Sprott M.A.

M. B. Leunox B.A.
W. C. Lucas Grad.
F. D. McIntosh IV S.P.S.
W. I. Perry (Admin. Asst.)
E. W. Quill IV S.P.S.
R. J. Sandusky III S.P.S.

Professor V. I. Henderson (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
C. R. Oakes II S.P.S. (Sec.)
H. Bentley B.A.Sc.
J. A. Norton II S.P.S.

J. D. Chambers III S.P.S.
E. J. Fischer III S.P.S.
A. Ford S.D.S.
R. J. Havanagh S.G.S.

LEE CLUB

Professor A. D. Coleman (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
R. W. Hartman IV U.C. (Sec.)
R. E. G. Campbell I Hon.
F. W. Channon S.G.S.
J. Chizen II Med.
W. M. Crossin III Trin.

H. Davis B.A.
P. L. E. Goering V Arch.
A. P. Gordon III U.C.
W. McAdam Mus. B.
G. A. McDowell B.A.Sc.
(Asst. to Warden)
J. Milligan II Pre-Med.

RIDGE

J. R. Walker S.G.S.
D. Flint III S.P.S. (Sec.)
K. C. Fowell

W. D. Coats III S.P.S.
J. Ory II S.P.S.
III Vic.

ABLE TENNIS

P. McClory (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
P. R. Pitts IV U.C. (Sec.)
M. M. Taylor III S.P.S.

T. D. Diel III S.P.S.
J. L. Gafhe III S.P.S.
J. E. Howell II Vic.
III S.P.S.

MESS

Professor C. C. Gottlieb (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
J. D. J. Forward III Med. (Sec.)
G. O. Davidson III S.P.S.
T. J. Enright II Med.

J. J. Kagaetsu S.G.S.
J. B. MacDonald B.A.
J. T. Sovella II U.C.
D. M. C. Sweeney III Trin.
G. O. Venier III S.P.S.

MATEUR RADIO

Professor V. I. Henderson (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
C. R. Oakes II S.P.S. (Sec.)
H. Bentley B.A.Sc.
J. A. Norton II S.P.S.

J. D. Chambers III S.P.S.
E. J. Fischer III S.P.S.
A. Ford S.D.S.
R. J. Havanagh S.G.S.

ACHERY

A. E. McQuague B.A. (Chair)
The Warden (Vice-Chairman)
V. H. Horbau IV Dent.
I. Forster IV S.P.S.
W. Goldie III For.
A. Hains II S.P.S.

G. Man
W. I. Perry (Admin. Asst.)
J. A. Becker B.A.Sc.
W. Stachura I Trin.
J. Strijfert II Med.
A. Wilson I U.C.

ALEDON

B. D. Loncarevic IV S.P.S. (Chair)
The Warden (Ex-Officio)
J. Sim II U.C. (Sec.)
H. Balmain II S.P.S.
E. Bowen II Vic.
Professor A. F. Coventry
G. F. West IV S.P.S.

B. Cross III For.
G. Gibson III U.C.
C. B. Guild B.A. (Grad. Sec.)
G. W. Hewitt B.A.
J. McCherchen I Vic.
E. J. Stevens III S.P.S.

EXPLORATION

G. F. West IV S.P.S. (Pres.)
The Warden (Ex-Officio)
W. R. F. Galoren III Vic. (Sec.)
W. Angus II Law
Professor A. F. Coventry

G. B. Guild B.A. (Grad. Sec.)
G. W. Hewitt B.A.
B. D. Loncarevic IV S.P.S.
M. Porter I Pre-Med.
E. J. Stevens IV S.P.S.



Percy Sheardown



Michael Schoenborn

¹ Montagnes, Ian. *An Uncommon Fellowship: the Story of Hart House*, University of Toronto Press, 1969, p. 155, 161-162, 164

² *Ibid*, p. 131-132, quoting Bickersteth.

³ "History". Retrieved from <https://harthousechess.com/history/>

⁴ Schoenborn, Michael. *Bridge on a Shoestring*. Master Point Press, 2014, ch.1

⁵ "Sheardown, Percy". Retrieved from <http://cbf.ca/percy-sheardon/>