

The housing shortage strike

By JEFF DAVIES

The housing problem has reared its ugly head once more.

With the academic year just getting underway, students can already be heard grumbling about greedy landlords, exorbitant rents, and substandard housing.

Just what the explanation is depends on who you listen to. Dr. Steven Patterson, chairman of the housing committee which last year took a survey of the students believes that part of the difficulty can be attributed to the fact that there is an increased desire among students to live in apartments.

Patterson said that the survey showed that 60 per cent of the students would choose to live in apartments if they could get them. His conclusion? "What they mean when they say there is a housing shortage is that there's a shortage of the kind of things they want, i.e. apartments. The funny thing is, 10 years ago most of the students wanted a room downtown or a room in a residence. If that was the case, there wouldn't be a shortage."

As a result, he felt that the university should attempt to make apartments available to the students. He added that apartments for married students should be given priority as the shortage is particularly acute in this area.

As far as the housing situation this year is concerned, Patterson said there is a "very decided shortage of apartments of all kinds, but there isn't a shortage of single rooms." On the whole, he felt that the situation was better than it was last year.

He noted that last year only six per cent of the students were living in "substandard" housing. (Actually, the students were never asked if their housing was substandard; they were asked to rate their housing under a number of headings, such as cost, maintenance, and furnishing, and the information was fed to the computer. The computer then arrived at the conclusion that six per cent were living in substandard housing.) Therefore, the housing committee recommended that the university build enough housing for six per cent more people.

"I think what we need around here, and the students can do it better than anyone, is some sort of rating system," said Patterson, explaining that in order to make their views known, the students could rate their housing from A to F.

Mrs. Ruth Spicer of the university's Accommodations and Placement Office, told us "by mid July it seemed as though the apartment situation was very tight, and it has been straight along since".

At one time, the Accommodations and Placement Office conducted inspections of apartments and rooms before including them on its lists. They don't anymore, however. "It's just not been possible," said Mrs. Spicer.

Students Representative Council President Roy Neale takes a very straightforward approach to the housing situation: "There's obviously enough housing because people do live here." Neale said there are two factors in student housing: quality and quantity, and it's the quality of this year's housing he's not happy with.

Said Neale, "If he (a student) is living in a sewer, you can't expect him to turn out Grade A papers."

While no cases of students living in the sewer have yet come to light, we did go to investigate one reportedly undesirable apartment and found it to be considerably less than ideal.

In a house on the corner of University Avenue and Charlotte Street live three first year UNB students. We'll call them Smith, Jones, and Brown. They did not want their names released for fear of reprisals. The boys sleep in one room and share the first floor of the building with approximately seven other people. The rent is \$13 per person per week but the boys also had to pay a \$25 damage deposit which they will lose if they move out before the academic year ends.

No laundry facilities or bedding are provided. For those ten people there is one kitchen with a fridge and stove, one bathroom, and a shower. (Later we checked at the Placement Office and were amazed to find that the apartment is listed as having a "private bathroom" and "private kitchen.") The shower is in an appalling state, with a gaping hole in its crumbling wall.

The door to the section of the apartment in which the boys live is falling off. The screen "doesn't fit and it's busted all to hell." A window is missing - well, part of it is missing anyway; a sizeable chunk of broken glass has been left exposed in the frame.

Brown invited us in for a look at the kitchen. The fridge was on about an 80 degree angle. A closer look at the floor revealed that it appeared to slope from two directions toward one corner.

"I think it's made for drainage," suggested Brown.

With all these items to be repaired, we asked the boys if their landlord, ever came around to the house. "Oh yeah," said Smith, "he comes around once a week to collect the rent."

This is the second house the boys have lived in (they were refused admission to residence). They were kicked out of a residence at 537 Albert Street because their landlord, Robert MacElwain, thought they were making too much noise. "The only problem was that our room was right under the landlord's," explained one of the students. They found MacElwain to be critical of their even playing records and talking.

"The landlords here have you over a barrel," said Jones. "They know the housing situation is poor. They don't take into account that you're a student and you haven't got a million dollars to spend a year, especially if you're from Ontario or Quebec or

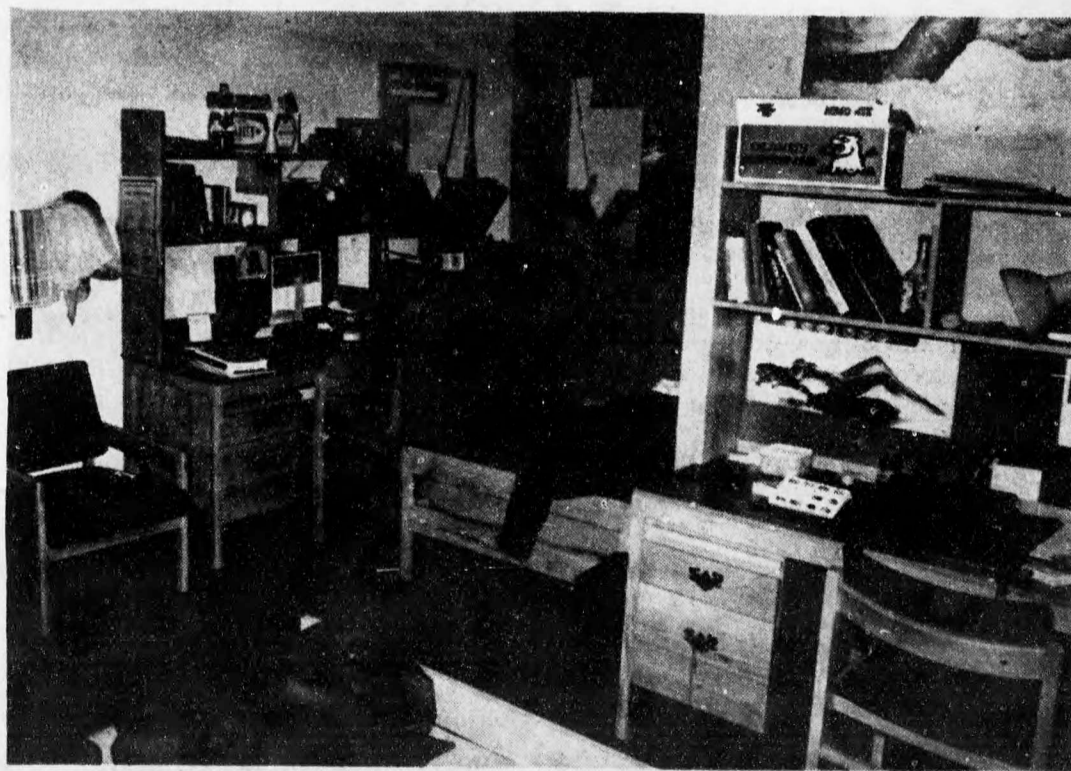


Photo by Bob Boyes

If you live here, you're lucky. This is a double room in the Lady Beaverbrook Residence. Rent is \$925 a year. There is a long waiting list for the residence rooms.

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