

Becoming a City: Dorval, its Elite Clubs, and Human-Horse Relations (1855-1941)

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Introduction: Dorval, of the Parish of Lachine, and the Montreal Elite

Despite a strong Anglo-Saxon predominance amongst wealthy Montreal homeowners living near Mount Royal on the Island of Montreal, historian Nadine Klopfer reminds us aptly of the general sense of pride all Montrealers felt towards the beautiful part of town on the slopes of Mount Royal, as well as the not-quite-so-urban earlier nature of the sector: “Actually, since the 1840s, settlement had started spreading out towards Mount Royal with wealthy merchants like the sugar baron John Redpath erecting suburban villas on its southern slope. Although a trip to the mountain was still perceived as a trip ‘out of town’ in the 1850s, this was to change rapidly in the following decades.”¹ A place of strong symbolic significance in the history of Montreal, a point strongly and well-argued by Klopfer, it was also home to power struggles made perceptible by its towering height over the central city.² The area is an early example of the types of developments that occur in spaces and places easily accessible from the city core, and yet with sufficient untouched nature to become spaces of elite leisure and comfort.

Hence, in the middle of the 19th century, the most well-known *bourgeois* population of the city of Montreal was mostly established in lavish residences in what eventually became known as the Golden Square Mile. Situated at the foot of Mount Royal, considered one of the most natural and beautiful parks of the Island, the neighborhood was home to many prestigious anglophone businessmen of British origin. These men and their families often held high-ranking positions in banks and railroad committees, owned steamship lines, and were associated with the overseas trade of staples, to name but a few examples. Essentially, they dominated the financial, commercial, industrial, and transportation sectors of the economy which were then based in Montreal and/or Toronto.³ Historian Paul-André Linteau, in his book

¹ Nadine Klopfer, "Upon the Hill: Negotiating Public Space in Early 20th Century Montreal," *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 29.2 (2009): 88.

² *Ibid.*, 92-93.

³ Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain: De la Confédération à la crise (1867-1929)* (Les Éditions Boréal, 1989), 172.

on the history of Montreal since Confederation, cites Margaret W. Westley who reminds us of the exclusive, elitist, and closed nature of these social circles.⁴ Linteau also points out the importance of social rituals to these families: receptions, club visits, and afternoon tea formalities all made up an integral part of their lives.⁵ Spaces and places became associated with the development of leisurely activities and the rituals of every day life in the Golden Square Mile and areas surrounding Mount Royal... but not exclusively there.



Figure 1 Dorval Que. St. Charles St. West Side, Montréal and Coteau Landing: International Post Card Co., 19--?, BANQ 0002630845

Resorts, popular destinations accessible from the heart of the city, provided an escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life. These had increased in popularity by the 1850s. In *Faire et Fuir la Ville*, historian Michèle Dagenais describes the movement of elite members of society towards spaces near and accessible from cities as a type of “colonization” of these spaces, opposing the newly arrived social classes to the already present, often rural, French-Catholic populations and farmers already established in the areas.⁶ This strong desire to flee the city, to get closer to nature while maintaining a type of comfort level not unknown to the *bourgeois* of Montreal led to the transformation of these new coveted spaces and

⁴ Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération* (Les Éditions du Boréal, 1992), 169.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville: Espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto aux Xixe et Xxe siècles* (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 187.

places. Their definition of what was considered part of nature was often in contrast to what could already be found in these spaces, and their capacity and means to transform these places for their own use and comfort are described by Dagenais as a source of pride.⁷ The historian describes the movement which changed Pointe-Claire⁸. As a part of the Parish of Lachine at the time, the village of Dorval's fate would be quite the same: those vacationers wealthy enough to purchase land and build summer homes would do so, while others would either rent homes from the local population or stay in hotels.



Figure 2 Quatre-Vents - Dorval Résidence de campagne de M. Désiré Girouard, C.R., M.P./, Le Monde Illustré, Vol. 6, no 284 (12 October 1889), p. 188. BaNQ 0002749598

As it is now possible to see, the presence of what was considered a “natural” environment was of the utmost importance in the choice and development of new resorts away from the city. Both Caroline Aubin-Des Roches and Michèle Dagenais suggest that, in fact, vacationers were not only looking for time in the countryside but were faced with a dilemma of interest to us: their vision of a “natural” environment was tinted by the comforts and activities procured to them by a more urban lifestyle. Aubin-Des Roches describes this as a paradox: the resort and holiday lifestyle is considered to be a way of escaping the turbulence and rapid pace of urban life, while also seeking to repeat it and embody it as by-products of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

this very same society.⁹ Dagenais puts the question this way: “(t)he city in the country or the country in the city?”¹⁰ The accessibility of liquor stores, libraries, grocers, pharmacies, and other suppliers¹¹ in conjunction with an environment fit for leisurely activities (land, waterfronts) made these resorts “away from the city” very attractive to wealthy city-folk vacationers. The small village of Dorval (Parish of Lachine) fit the bill.



Figure 3 War Canoe - Dorval, 1892, Archambault, Henri E., 1893, in *Lake St. Louis Old and New*, BANQ 0002725663

The objective of this report is to bring to light the significant elements which led to Dorval separating from Lachine in 1892 and becoming a city in 1903.¹² It is also to reflect on these elements and on the role human-animal relations played in making the city what it is today. Through this synthesis of documents provided by the Dorval Museum of Local History and Heritage and the City of Dorval, as well as additional historical and archival research, we hope to demonstrate that four aspects were of the utmost importance in ensuring the popularity of the area, its development in the middle to late 19th

⁹ Caroline Aubin-Des Roches, "Retrouver la ville à la campagne : La villégiature à Montréal au tournant du Xxe siècle," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 34, no. 2 (2006): 18.

¹⁰ Our translation of Dagenais in *Faire et fuir la ville: Espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto aux Xixe et Xxe siècles*, 235.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Fiche du Secteur Forest and Stream Club," Ville de Montréal, http://patrimoine.ville.montreal.qc.ca/inventaire/fiche_zone.php?batiment=oui&lignes=25&protection=0&zone=&debutz=100&id=1245.

century, and its growth into a city culturally and socially different from other areas of Montreal Island. These four elements are: the presence of elite members of society and their preliminary vision for the town by the riverside (including Mr. Alfred Brown's), the railroad network passing through the West Island (especially the Grand Trunk Railway and its eventual Dorval Station), the development of multiple Clubs (such as the Forest and Stream and its coach house, where the Dorval Museum is situated today, and Jockey Clubs), and the importance of human-animal relations in the definition and embodiment of prestige. Additionally, we hope to provide strong evidence of the importance of animals in the growth of Dorval, bringing to light an often-invisible contributor who nonetheless played a major role in shaping the environment, its developments, and its people.

Alfred Brown and Bel-Air

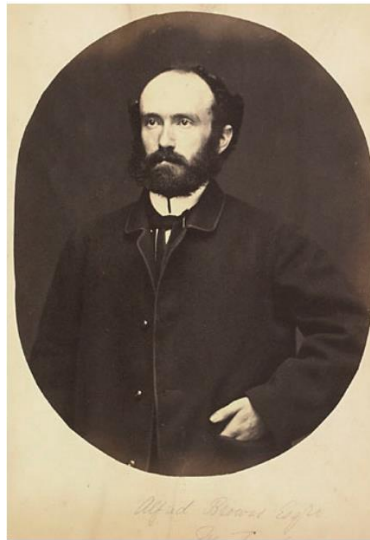


Figure 4 Alfred Brown Esquire, Montréal, de l'album du capitaine Frederick Stevenson, c. 1870, Musée National des Beaux-Arts du Québec (MNBAQ)

Mr. Brown's endeavour in the construction of Bel-Air is of interest in the development of the eventual City of Dorval due to him being renown as one of the main founders of the area as a summer resort. Alfred Brown, esquire, was one of the wealthy men who grasped the full potential of Upper Lachine as an ideal place of leisure in the countryside. He chose to invest in the construction of an expensive

residence bordering Lake Saint-Louis between the years 1872 and 1874.¹³ The original deed of sale for the land was signed on April 17, 1872, in the City of Montreal, between James Smith and Alfred Brown. Located in the Parish of Lachine, the “irregular”-shaped area of land was bought for the sum of “two thousand dollars current money of Canada.”¹⁴ A residence, Bel-Air, was then built by the firm of architects John William Hopkins and Daniel Wily in accordance with very specific descriptions provided in a handwritten agreement with contractors including François Decary, then responsible for the plaster work.¹⁵ In a document commenting on the architecture of the lot and its buildings, Richard M. White states that the complete three-building estate (the house, the stables, and the gardener’s house) were only completed by the year 1878, eight years before Mr. Brown’s death.¹⁶

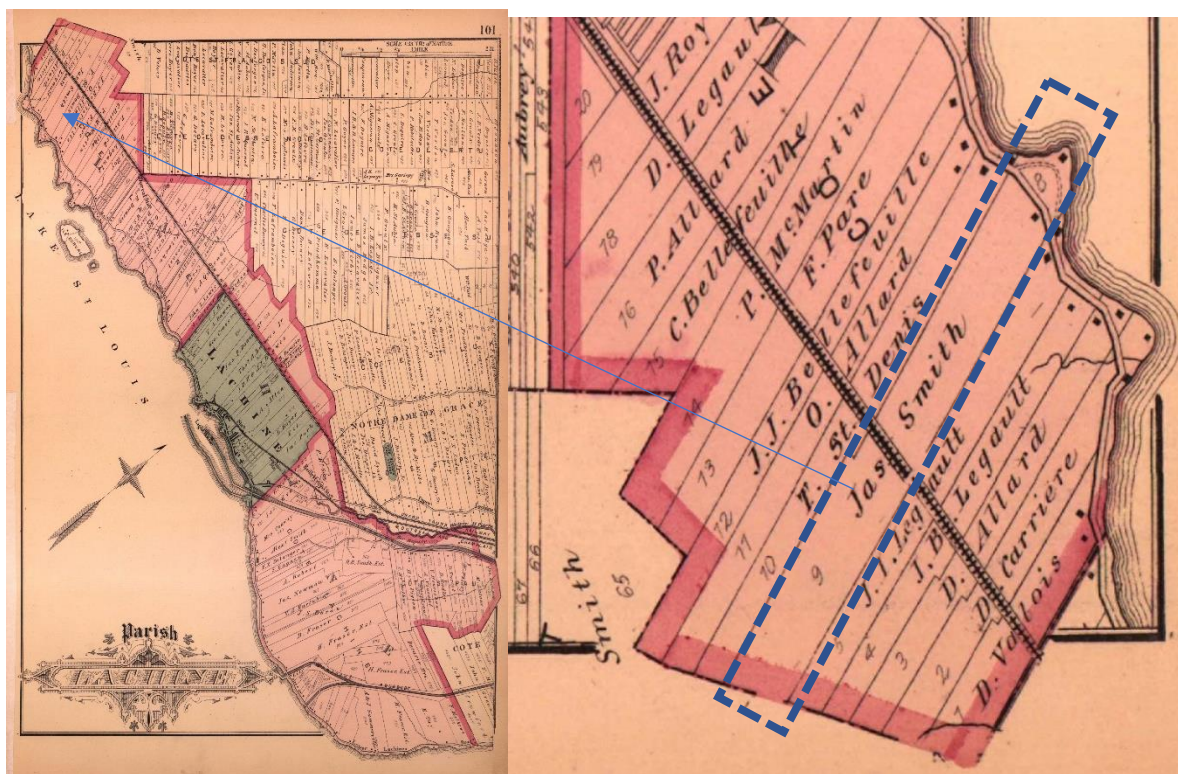


Figure 5 Hopkins, Henry W. *Atlas of the city and island of Montreal*, Provincial Surveying and Pub. Co. 1879. and cut-out showing lots 8 and 9, still appearing under the name Smith

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Deed of Sale from Mr. James Smith to Alfred Brown, Esq.," (City of Dorval, 1872).

¹⁵ "Contract Agreement between Mr. François Décaré and Alfred Brown, Esquire," (City of Dorval, 1894).

¹⁶ Richard M. White, "The Forest and Stream Club," (McGill University, 1969).

Not much is known about the coach house which currently houses the Dorval Museum, a fact which is telling in and of itself. It was, of course, the main building that required the most attention to detail by Alfred Brown, with the two other buildings serving as utilities necessary to this 19th-century lifestyle. Set apart from the main home, its architecture would nonetheless match Bel-Air's. Just as Richard White stated that Alfred Brown planned the construction of his estate and home so as to separate his staff from himself and guests ("This type of arrangement was probably incorporated into the design of the building to suit the wishes of Alfred Brown, who did not wish to be in contact with his servants," a practice which would have been continued by the Forest and Stream Club after its purchase¹⁷), the use of the stables and gardener's house would have been mostly for employees. The architectural style can be described as High Victorian (late 19th century), influenced by the Gothic-style architecture of the mid-19th century. Richard White's analysis also points to the common occurrence of building a gate house and coach house for High Victorian estates.¹⁸ Estates needed horses as the main method of transport as well as equipment, including, more generally: carriages, harnesses, and sleighs. More specifically, the estate sale for the late Mr. Brown lists, for the stables, "three good horses and one cow. Single and Double Harnesses, Rockaway, Dog Cart, Three Buggies, Express, Four Sleighs, Ten Buffalo Robes, set new four Black Bear Robes and stable tools" ensuring transportation for the owner and guests during the winter as well as the summer months.¹⁹

Mr. Brown's obituary stating that he was "widely known and respected throughout Canada", confirms that there is no doubt that he was not only well-connected, but also that he had the ability to use these connections to his best advantage, much like many of the other members of the elite who decided to settle in the area in the late 19th century. Mr. Brown arrived in the country in 1854 (possibly in

¹⁷ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ "Auction Sales - Order of Sale. Estate Late Alfred Brown.," *The Montreal Gazette*, April 23, 1886.

connection with the Grand Trunk Railway) before going into business as a merchant with “extensive mercantile connections (...) representing in Canada some of the most eminent European and American manufacturing establishments, including the great house of Krupp in Germany”.²⁰ The completion of Bel-Air was timed with his retirement from business. It is described as “a handsome residence” on “one of the prettiest of the many pretty spots in that locality”.²¹ He is also said to have held a position as an elected director of the Bank of Montreal until his death in 1886, at the age of 54.²² Bel-Air gained in popularity when it was purchased, in 1888, by the Forest and Stream Club. Although there is no doubt of Mr. Brown’s connections and his promotion of the City’s accessibility, other factors should also be considered. These will be discussed in the upcoming sections.



Figure 6 "Bel-Air." Built by the late Alfred Brown, 1874; now the Forest and Stream Club, Dorval by Henri E. Archambault, 1893, found in *Lake St. Louis Old and New Illustrated* by Désiré Girouard, BANQ 0002725660

A Breath of Fresh Air: Situating New Developments and Sharing Space

In its earlier years (1870’s), Dorval was known for its French-Canadian farmers and farmhouses, as we have already mentionned. It was also known for its lumbermen, who “brought down and anchored their immense rafts for months at a time, during the summer season and even winter” according to its

²⁰ "The Late Mr. Alfred Brown," *The Montreal Gazette* (1886).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

first Mayor Désiré Girouard.²³ Girouard writes that “(t)hey had to go elsewhere in 1877, owing to the injunctions of the Courts, granted at the request of certain river side (sic) proprietors.”²⁴ There is an evident clash in the demographics and population makeup from the earlier and later 19th century, after the settlement of the area for resort purposes by the Montreal elite. Girouard does not discuss the presence of Alfred Brown in his section on Dorval, but does address some of his peers, for example, Sir George Simpson, and his purchasing of several islands from a J. Bte. Meloche (grandson of Antoine) where he would build a “superb villa”, “occupied by himself and at times by General Williams.”²⁵

Gentrification is the beginning of the Dorval that we know today. This aspect should not be ignored as it forged new relations, new environments, and certainly impacted the types of exchanges individuals would have with each other. In this regard, citizen (from 1913) Germaine Racine describes the type of ambiance created by the presence of rich resorts and summer vacationers:

“In winter, it is the village life. The villagers seem to rest to be "more fit" for the arrival of the visitors and to better ensure the rest of these visitors, they seem to "clean up" to better receive these summer visitors who have almost become members of the family. Dorval and Montreal are then, one could say, a single house for two united by a "connecting door"; this door is the summer. In the summer, it is Montreal in Dorval, or Dorval in Montreal, one does not know any more, so much are they united. To describe this life, one serving the other, would be to describe an enriching experience, but it is difficult to define.”²⁶

Although Mrs. Racine’s experiences and souvenirs are one of many, they nonetheless help us to understand the types of relations that were developed in Dorval between the villagers (often French-Canadian) and those considered to be “visitors” (often elite anglophone vacationers). There was a sense of servitude and of offering a service which helped the village and its villagers outside of the summer

²³ Désiré Girouard, *The Old Settlements of Lake St. Louis : With a List of the Old and New Proprietors* (Montreal: Poirier, Bessette & Co., Printers, 1892), 8.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Our translation of Germaine Racine in "Histoire de Dorval," ed. Société historique de Dorval (Ville de Dorval 1983).

months, but also of strong dichotomies between the different lifestyles: the villagers versus visitors, those offering a service versus those receiving one, summer versus winter months, Montreal versus Dorval. Despite the relationship being based on a type of co-dependency, it remained unequal and separated. The visitors were “almost” family, but not quite.

Alfred Brown, in the late 19th century, was thus considered “the main promoter of the toll road that encouraged the development of Dorval as a resort town at the time.”²⁷ The businessman’s presence, his desire to settle by Lake Saint-Louis, and his comfortable financial situation certainly led to changes for the small locality (both before and after his death) which impacted its development first, as an entity independent from Lachine, and secondly, as a city in its own right. However, he especially served as a primary example of the power and money held by many of the prominent Montreal businessmen of the time and their ability to shape new developments to suit their needs outside of the busy city. Many other factors should not be put aside as major contributions. As described in the previous sections of this report, the natural aspect of the area played a role in its selection as a resort town, as did its accessibility to the City, its potential for the development of luxury housing, and its opportunities for leisure and activities typical of the gentry. Brown’s quick expansion of his own estate is but one example amongst others of the success of the area (many other wealthy families settled in the area, building prestigious homes). His renown was as much about his vision for Dorval as about the popularity and use of his home, Bel-Air, post-mortem. What else promoted the development of the town into the popular resort it became?

Increasing Accessibility

Accessibility and opportunity. In the middle of the 19th century, Montreal was a central hub connecting major railroads coming from the West and the United States, but also steamship lines from the eastern coast of the Americas outwards towards Quebec City and major European port cities. The City

²⁷ Personal translation of "Fiche du secteur Forest and Stream Club".

was home to the Grand Trunk headquarters and extensive railway network. Lachine benefited largely from its presence with the creation of one line in 1855, eventually providing increased access from downtown to the western outskirts of the Island of Montreal. Dorval Station, as evidenced in a cut-out of Hopkins' 1879 map, shows just how accessible the area became before the onset and popularity of motorized vehicles (below). The exact date of construction of this station has yet to be determined, although past research by the Dorval Museum and Allard suggests it dates back to the early 1870s.²⁸



Figure 7 Hopkins, Henry W. *Atlas of the city and island of Montreal*, Provincial Surveying and Pub. Co. 1879. Cut-out showing Dorval Station and the railway tracks, and, in the upper left corner, lot 8.

Founded in 1853, the Grand Trunk Railway quickly expanded its network. By the 1860s, GT Railway lines connected Montreal to New York and Boston, but also Sarnia to Rivière-du-Loup and Saint-Hyacinthe to Richmond, Ontario, amongst others.²⁹ Its network was of significance not only in moving merchandise

²⁸ Allard, "Research on the History of Dorval," (Unknown, Dorval Museum).

²⁹ Linteau, Durocher and Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain: de la Confédération à la Crise (1867-1929)*, 105.

and imports and exports, but also for the swift movement of individuals to far away places. Steamship lines were even scheduled around railway timetables (the Allan, Dominion and Beaver Ocean lines sailing between Quebec and Liverpool, for example) to better suit the needs of passengers.³⁰ These new modes of transportation helped interconnect cities, provinces, and even countries in ways which were suddenly much more affordable and efficient. The Canadian Pacific Railway would eventually open a main line in the area, making Dorval and its clubs increasingly accessible (early 20th century).³¹



Figure 8 Dorval Station, 1888. Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada. Henri E. Archambault, 1893, found in *Lake St. Louis Old and New*, by Désiré Girouard, BANQ 0002725661

For Victorian-era cities, previously dependent on horses for transportation, these networks provided new means to move about at a much faster pace. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to believe that the presence of such networks erased urban animals from the city: their presence was still notable but evolving. As stated in the introduction to *Animal Metropolis: Histories of Human-Animal Relations in*

³⁰ "Time Tables of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada and Connecting Lines, Official Issue, July 1880," (Dorval Museum 1880).

³¹ "[Pro]Gram[Me] 1895 Canadian Jockey Clubs : Sp[Ring] Meetings, Ra[Ce] & Ste[Eple Ch]Ashing over \$50.000 in Purses," in *CIHM/ICMH Microfiche series = CIHM/ICMH collection de microfiches ; no. 94786*, ed. Ontario Jockey Club (Toronto: s.n., 1995).

Urban Canada, historians have demonstrated the presence and impact of animal life in 19th century Canada, where it “played a key role in shaping the city in the nineteenth century, (with) many animals remain(ing) in the city well into the twentieth century.”³² Today, the urban horse is well-known for its contribution to the horse-cabby duo, essentially the taxi of the 19th century, but we tend to forget its urban role as an animal for leisure purposes.

The following section will discuss another major factor in the development of Dorval, namely, the presence of elite clubs and recreation which include the well-known Forest and Stream Club (Bel-Air) and its link to Jockey Clubs and horses. This is where everything essentially comes together: the importance of wealthy businessmen and the environmental and structural developments previously described, but especially how elite clubs reinforced their social status via power structures and struggles between humans and animals. Namely, we note the elite’s reliance on other beings for maintaining social status and prestige. There is no better place to study the contention and rivalry in spaces and places than at elite social clubs built as an accommodation to rituals of great significance.

³² Joanna Dean, Darcy Ingram, and Christabelle Sethna, *Animal Metropolis* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2017), 4.

Elite Clubs and Recreation

The Forest and Stream Club as a Meeting Place



Figure 9 Forest and Stream Club, Dorval, QC, about 1896. Wm. Notman & Son. McCord Museum Archives, VIEW-2806.

Following Alfred Brown's death, the exact order of who inherited, or purchased, Bel-Air is unclear according to several sources. According to Richard White, the building was first left to Malcolm Janson Brown, then William Brown, then Dame Julia Plessant Brown, and lastly Ormiston Brown who then sold the lot to the Forest and Stream Club for a total of \$30,000 in 1888.³³ A document created by the Dorval Historical Society and the Forest and Stream Club for the 125th anniversary of the Club mentions that Hector McKenzie and H. Montagu Allan were prominent members of the Club as were other Anglophone businessmen. Hugh Allan, an heir to Sir Hugh Allan and the Allan Steamship Lines, suggested it would be "desirable to purchase the property in Dorval" while quite possibly, Frank Stephen was against this. In any case, it was eventually purchased for \$30,000 as indicated in the Minutes of the Forest and Stream Club.³⁴ On the *Fiche de Secteur* from the City of Montreal, it skips ahead stating that "In 1889, upon the death of

³³ White, "The Forest and Stream Club," 2.

³⁴ Alain Jarry and Gisèle Hall, "The Founding Years: 1884-1910," in *The Forest and Stream Club - 125th Anniversary* (2009), 10.

Alfred Brown, the prestigious Forest and Stream Club acquired the Bel-Air estate and transformed it into a private club."³⁵ White's description, although at the moment it cannot be corroborated by numerous primary sources, nonetheless seems quite probable: Brown's obituary states that most of his family remained in Europe ("(t)he deceased gentleman's mother, sister and brother, we understand, survive him: all are resident in Europe."³⁶ Evidence of a large estate sale held by William H. Arnton, Auctioneer, following Mr. Brown's death (date of sale: April 21, 1886) could lead us to conclude that the Bel-Air estate probably remained vacant for several years until its eventual sale. The Gazette's published notice stated that the heirs provided instructions for the sale of the residence, its greenhouses, stables, coach house, lodge, boat and bath houses, etc., and mentioned that the estate also included "kitchen, laundry, butler's pantry, servants' rooms, large dining room, billiard room, library and drawing room, large halls, bedrooms and dressing rooms" and that the "stables are complete in every respect" and the "greenhouses simply perfection." Also, to be sold were the "furniture, pianoforte, pictures, plate, ornaments, books, billiard table, contents of the wine cellar and greenhouse, horses, carriages, harness, sleighs, robes, cow, boats and garden implements."³⁷ Such a complete inventory and well-designed space would have certainly been of interest to other prominent members of society, including those desirous of expanding an already existing local club.

³⁵ "Fiche du Secteur Forest and Stream Club".

³⁶ "The Late Mr. Alfred Brown."

³⁷ "Auction Sales by W. H. Arnton - Estate Late Alfred Brown Esq., "Bel Air", Residence and Grounds at Dorval," *The Montreal Gazette* (1886).



Figure 10 Dining Room, Forest and Stream Club, Dorval, QC, about 1896. Wm. Notman & Son. McCord Museum Archives, VIEW-2808.

The Forest and Stream Club was said to promote “boating, fishing, and other sports” as well as regular club meetings.³⁸ The list of original shareholders (1884) included the names of well-known Montreal gentry:

“Frank Stephen became the largest shareholder by buying 10 shares. Of the 80 shares issued 40 were sold. The original members were (number of shares held in parentheses): Frank Stephen (10), L. J. Forget (5), H. S. MacDougall (5), Hector Mackenzie (5), H. M. Allan (2), A. F. Baumgarten (2), R. A. Smith (2), Andrew Allan (1), Bryce Allan (1), G. C. MacDougall (1), Sir Vincent Meredith (1), Hugh Paton (1), Philip Scott (1), Charles Stimson (1) and E. A. Whitehead(1).”³⁹

As a social club which offered numerous activities and events, the F&S helped to promote the development of Dorval and the area as an elite space for recreational purposes. Other clubs included the St. Lawrence Yacht and Sailing Club (1888), the Bel-Air Jockey Club (1890s), the Royal Montreal Golf Club (1896) and the Dorval Jockey Club at a later date (1913).⁴⁰ Although founded in 1826 in Montreal, the

³⁸ Our translation from "Information Générale Et Historique" (Dorval Museum).

³⁹ "The Founding Years: 1884-1910," 9.

⁴⁰ Allard, "Research on the History of Dorval."

Montreal Hunt Club would also benefit from the presence of the Forest and Stream Club and its location at Bel-Air for its activities and meetings, including the breakfast hunt, thanks to the presence of foxes on the West Island.⁴¹



Figure 11 Fox Hunting, Montreal Hunt Club, QC, about 1885. Wm. Notman & Son. McCord Museum Archives, VIEW-2580.1

Dorval and the Bel-Air Jockey Club and Racetracks

In *Histoire des courses de chevaux au Québec*, Donald Guay describes horse racing and its relationship with the development of new purebred English horses and increasing popularity as an English sport in the 17th century.⁴² Guay states that by 1840, the sport is well established in Lower Canada and is

⁴¹ Jarry and Hall, "The Founding Years: 1884-1910," 20.

⁴² Donald Guay, "Histoire des courses de chevaux au Québec," (Montréal : VLB, 1985), 16.

especially organized by those of English origin.⁴³ The Montreal Hunt Club, discussed in the previous paragraph, is said to have organized races at Bel-Air, and was entirely made up of Anglophones. By 1909, the encompassing Montreal Jockey Club, Guay recounts, only includes 7% of francophone members (or 25 out of a total of 358).⁴⁴ If not the sport, many clubs are closed circles made up of wealthy people of Anglo-Saxon origin.

In Dorval, the Bel-Air Jockey Club (1890) gained surprising renown for a local Quebec club. Included in the 1895 edition of the "Canadian Jockey Clubs" races pamphlet, it is the only club outside of Ontario to have made the list.⁴⁵ The Dorval Jockey Club was established later, in 1913. To reach such a high status across Canada, these clubs needed to offer rich purses and be accessible and prominent enough to attract bettors, horse breeders and their jockeys. The presence of the Grand Trunk Railway line and the Dorval station is of significant interest in this case, providing access to the races not only to Montrealers, but also to Ontarians and Americans. Guay writes that by the 1860s, the presence of horses on Quebec racetracks with owners from Ontario and the U.S. was growing.⁴⁶ He also writes that the Bel-Air Jockey Club advertised a free entry ticket to the tracks "with a proof of purchase of a railway ticket."⁴⁷

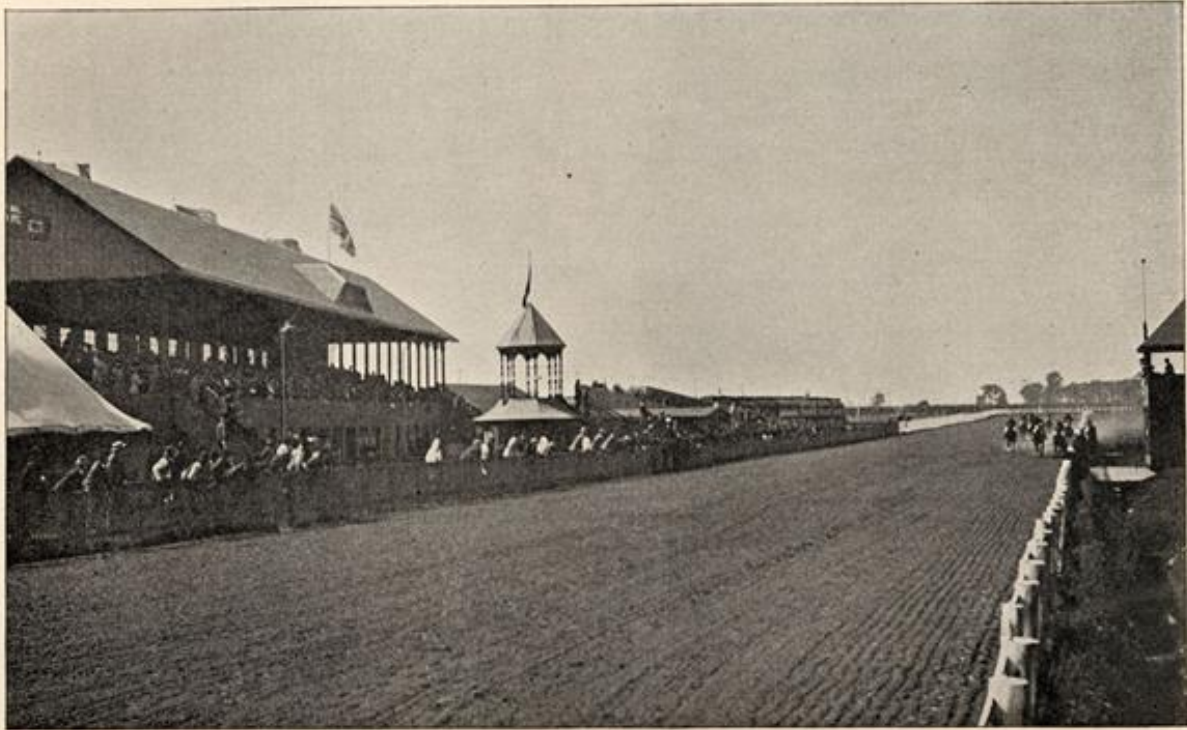
⁴³ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁵ "[Pro]Gram[Me] 1895 Canadian Jockey Clubs : Sp[Ring] Meetings, Ra[Ce] & Ste[Eple Ch]Ashing over \$50.000 in Purses."

⁴⁶ "Histoire des courses de chevaux au Québec," 63.

⁴⁷ Personal translation of a quote from *La Patrie* as cited in *ibid.*



"BEL-AIR JOCKEY CLUB," Dorval. STEEPLECHASE, June 1893.

Figure 12 "Bel-Air Jockey Club," Dorval. Steeplechase, June 1893. Henri E. Archambault. Found in *Lake St. Louis Old and New* by Désiré Girouard. BANQ 0002725664.

As early as 1889, the *Montreal Herald* (although certainly biased), described the Bel-Air course under construction:

"This splendid track is fast approaching completion, and when finished will be the finest race course (sic) in Canada. A grand new stand is being erected, as well as refreshment and retiring rooms for ladies and gentlemen, all of the latest design, the whole tending to add greatly to the comfort of the patrons of the course. A very fine stable, with all modern improvements, has also been erected for the accommodation of the horses, and already applications have been received from owners for stalls. The track is in good order, and no expense will be spared to make it perfect in every respect, giving great promise, judging from the excellent programme of ten races which has been organized for the two days, of being the best meeting ever held in the Province of Quebec."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "The Canadian Derby - Full Programme of the Meeting on the Bel-Air Course - Two Day Racing, with Ten Events," *The Montreal Herald*, May 7, 1889.

It was not the only newspaper to boast the quality of the Bel-Air course, with the *Montreal Gazette* writing that “there is one good thing about the Bel-Air track. In wet weather the track may be soft, but never muddy or dangerous.” This is said to have allowed an early opening of the tracks in 1890, where “only the most enthusiastic sort of a horseman will deliberately stand out and get wet.”⁴⁹ As the journal described in its headline, it was “Good Racing in Bad Weather”⁵⁰, offering opportunities to the most eager sportsmen by early June.

It can be argued that Bel-Air’s accomplishments (i.e., the track, but also the F&S Club which had recently moved into the building), paired with the success of Dorval as a resort town for the wealthy led to the promise of the opening of a second racetrack “situated near Dorval and Accessable (sic) to Montreal.” It is interesting to note how the arrival of the racetracks and social clubs certainly popularized Dorval locally, in Ontario, and in the United States, but it didn’t so much impact the City as it was the result of the City being a popular resort attracting people with a strong interest in leisure sports such as fox hunting and horse racing. Unsurprisingly, then, the new track was described as “first-class,” “with the necessary stands, booths, stables, paddock, clubhouse and buildings.” S. N. Holman, a proponent of the Club, has said that the Club was to “(hold) the promises of some of Montreal’s most prominent business men (sic) to become stockholders.”⁵¹ It was, of course, to become the Dorval Jockey Club, opened in July, 1913.

Maintaining Social Status

Relationships between People and Animals

Except for the golf club and the sailing clubs, many of the elite sports required the participation of animals, including horses, dogs, and foxes. We have previously seen how many of the clubs and leisurely

⁴⁹ “Good Racing in Bad Weather at the Bel-Air Jockey Club Track,” *The Montreal Gazette*, June 6 1890.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Another Race Track Promised - New Racing Plant Situated near Dorval and Accessable to Montreal,” *The Montreal Gazette*, December 1, 1912.

activities required, at the very least, horses. For the most part, this relationship is seen as positive on the part of humans and policymakers. These leisurely activities being associated with a mostly elite population also meant they would lead to the development of better breeds of horses and animals in Canada. In the “Statutes of the Province of Quebec” dated 1889, a petition is made for an act to incorporate the Bel-Air Jockey Club, “for the purpose of improving breed of horses and cattle in the Province of Quebec, (...)”.⁵² The activities suggested by elite social clubs were seen to improve and promote better breeds in the province. The petition continues: “(...) of acquiring and maintaining grounds and premises for the exhibition and trial of horses and cattle, and of holding contests, race meetings, and other exhibitions of horses and cattle, in the Province of Quebec.”⁵³ First and foremost, however, the objective put forward was one of improvement: one that would in turn improve the social status of the track and horse owners.

This type of document brings into focus the major differences between racehorses (purebred) and work horses, but also between the people and classes associated with these animals. In Dorval, the racetrack, its patrons, and its beautiful “improved” horses were associated with the gentry of the area and of Montreal in general; they were the individuals worthy of participating in elite clubs, as well as those able to purchase and build major estates in the area. Social status but also individual rights to the use of spaces and places were based on these relationships in ways which clearly demonstrate inequalities in society. Historian Darcy Ingram describes Montreal’s foxhunters as being “above the law” when they continued to hunt despite legislation passed by the Government of Quebec in 1897 making it illegal between April 1st and November 1st of the year.⁵⁴ Public demonstrations of power and prestige, associational contexts, and elite identity provided evident privileges not available to every member of

⁵² "An Act to Incorporate the Bel-Air Jockey Club.," (Canada 1889).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Darcy Ingram, "Horses, Hedges, and Hegemony: Foxhunting in the Countryside," in *Metropolitan Natures: Environmental Histories of Montreal*, ed. Stéphane Castonguay and Michèle Dagenais (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 211.

society.⁵⁵ Ingram states: “In sum, foxhunting attracted a segment of elite society that favoured aggressive forms of masculinity, conservatism, and the idealization of rural life.”⁵⁶ The foxhunting club, despite its central Montreal origins, often retreated to the countryside for its hunts. By the late 19th century, these domains included MacDougall’s land in Outremont, Miss Syme’s Elmwood in Hochelaga, Ogilvie’s down Lachine Road, Paton’s at Rivière des Prairies and, of course, Alfred Brown’s Bel-Air estate in Dorval.⁵⁷ The role played by the foxes, hounds, and horses is clearly described by Ingram: “And the importance of these animals went beyond their role in the hunt or the spectacle to which they contributed: as with foxes, the club’s horses and hounds helped both to link and to separate foxhunters and their sport from the rural populace.”⁵⁸

Those that Run and those that Carry

In short, there was a major divide between the animals which provided leisure and spectacle versus the animals used for work and transport. Firstly, they were not associated with the same humans and secondly, they did not have the use and benefit of the same spaces and activities. Urban animals and the humans they are associated with mirrored human class relations between themselves in a way which is telling about our own perceptions of an ordered hierarchical society.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 212.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 218.



Figure 13 Horse & carriage, Dorval, QC, about 1895. Harold Haig-Sims. McCord Museum Archives, MP-1978.82.157



Figure 14 Stables, Montreal Hunt Club, Montreal, QC, 1884. Wm. Notman & Son. McCord Museum Archives, II-75700.

Rich stables, such as those displayed in the image directly above of the Montreal Hunt Club, are representative of those which today house the Dorval Museum and which would have been used by an elite population, but especially its animals and not-so-elite employees. As discussed by Sherry Olson, by the 1890s in Montreal, many horses were still carrying and delivering building materials such as stone, gravel and sand, brick, and lumber.⁵⁹ They “towed the first generation of canal boats and powered the passenger coaches that fanned out from the city and the farm wagons that supplied the public markets” in the earlier 19th century. Not all stables were as richly built as those pictured above. The Montreal City Passenger Railway was also operated by horses.⁶⁰ In the same manner that some humans were coachmen, some horses worked daily to transport humans. If they were eventually pushed to the outer limits of the city with the arrival of new transportation technologies, the same was not so quick to happen for racehorses and horses used for hunting or leisure.

Jockeys and Patrons

Mrs. Albert Claude provided written evidence of her souvenirs of the Bel-Air Jockey Club: "For the most part, people arrived by train, but there were the sportsmen who came by buggy, often with coachmen in uniform, white or beige jackets with peaked caps, holding a long whip in their hands. The 'big gentlemen' had 'stove pipe' hats and the ladies wore large hats covered with veils that hid their faces and protected their skin from the dust of the dirt road."⁶¹ Patrons of the club certainly considered going to the races a ritual; an event of importance oftentimes followed by a meal at the Forest and Stream, which could be reserved for “luncheons, dinners, buffets or receptions.”⁶² In some cases, prominent members were also horse breeders: Andrew Allan, president of the Jockey Club, was said to have had

⁵⁹ Sherry Olson, "The Urban Horse and the Shaping of Montreal, 1840-1914," in *Animal Metropolis*, ed. Joanna Dean, Darcy Ingram, and Christabelle Sethna (University of Calgary Press, 2017), 61.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶¹ Our translation of Mrs Albert Claude, interview by Unknown.

⁶² Jarry and Hall, "The Founding Years: 1884-1910," 12 and 22.

several winning horses in the Queen's Plate.⁶³ For the races on June 13th, 1895, the Queen's Plate was described as being: "Of fifty guineas, the gift of Her Majesty, for horses owned, bred, raised and trained in the Province of Quebec, and that have never won public money, added to a sweepstakes of \$5 each, payable at time of entry, May 1, and \$5 additional unless declared out by June 8, between which dates entries can be made on payment of \$20 p.p. The first horse to receive the guineas and stakes; the Club to add \$100, of which \$75 to second, and \$25 to third. 1 ¼ miles."⁶⁴

On that topic, Germaine Racine mentions in her Memoirs that horsemen were most passionate about their animals, oftentimes staying "night and day with their horses, because they were constantly afraid that they would be drugged or poisoned and thus absent from their race." Jockeys were of the utmost importance and cared about their steeds. They had to know their horses well and they were said to visit their racing companions often.⁶⁵ We can imagine the importance of caring for these horses which could win big. The examination of the list of "Conditions and Regulations" for participating in the races is certainly indicative of how strict verifications and the competition could be: an executive committee would always have the final word on all disputes, jockeys were carefully weighed before the races, and a jockey dismounting without permission during an event could not only be fined but could disqualify his steed.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁴ "Canadian Jockey Clubs Programme," ed. Ontario Jockey Club (Online: Canadiana, 1895).

⁶⁵ Our translation of Germaine Racine in "Les Courses À Dorval," ed. Abbott Edition (City of Dorval, 1989).

⁶⁶ "[Pro]Gram[Me] 1895 Canadian Jockey Clubs : Sp[Ring] Meetings, Ra[Ce] & Ste[Eple Ch]Ashing over \$50.000 in Purses."

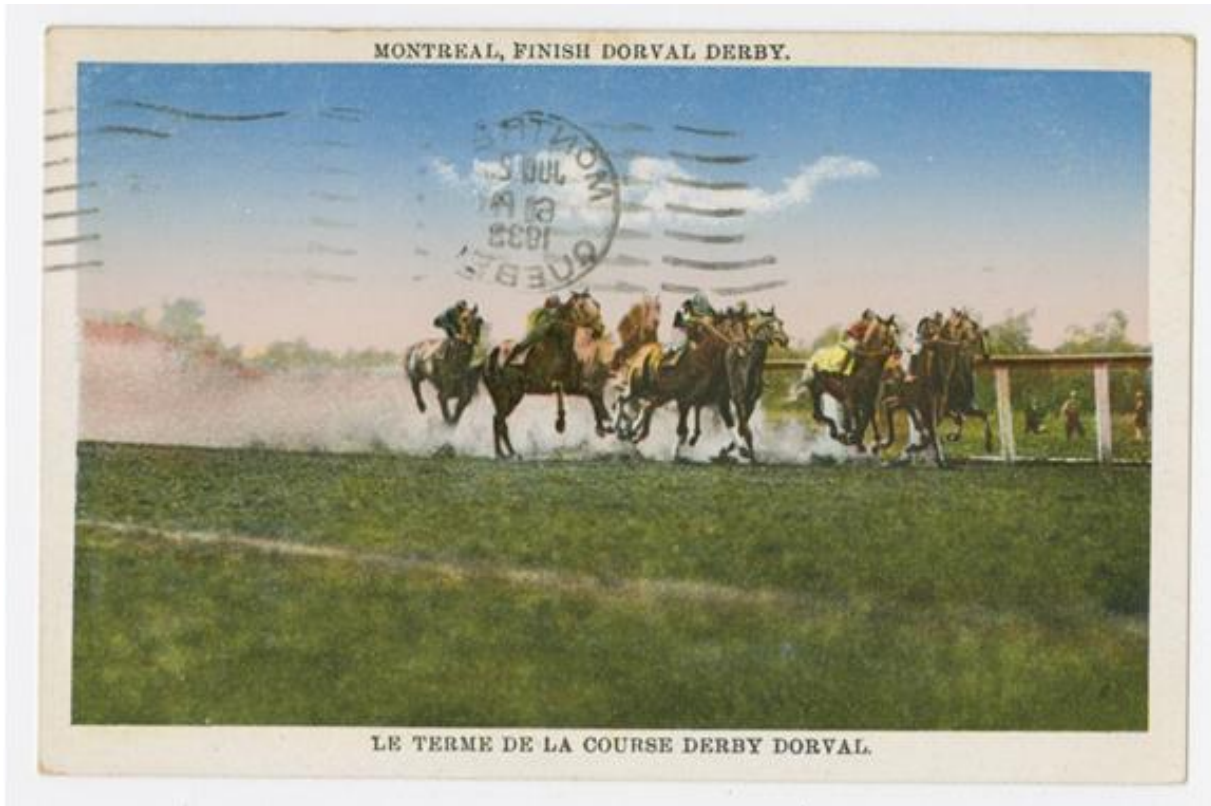


Figure 15 Montreal, finish Dorval Derby. Montreal, Weiss Import Co, Between 1924 and 1933. BANQ 0005586379.

Women at the Races

Although present at the races, women nonetheless played a much less significant role and were even discriminated against. Donald Guay mentioned from the start that “no women organized races, were owners of racetracks, were jockeys or conductors.”⁶⁷ Jarry and Hall mention in their written report that the F&S Club policy openly discriminated against women, with the “wives of male Club members (...) not allowed in the Club after 6 pm.”⁶⁸ Additionally, the authors cite Mr. Plummer, who wrote a section of a poem on the topic at the time:

*We can't let them in, in spite of the weather.
They'll have to stay out and just cuddle together.
It's not true, we're a bunch of chauvinistic old wrecks.*

⁶⁷ Our translation of Guay, "Histoire des courses de chevaux au Québec," 35.

⁶⁸ Jarry and Hall, "The Founding Years: 1884-1910," 19.

*It's out of deepest concern for our beloved fair sex.
Hell, we're in the eighteen hundreds, so we can feel free
The Year of the Woman's not 'til 1993!⁶⁹*

Guay also mentions that only those women considered “dames” or ladies could be allowed at the races.⁷⁰ Their betting was limited to the “lady’s purse” event at the races⁷¹, one which was available at Bel-Air. Listed last in the pamphlet of races, it was nonetheless attractive with a purse of \$250, and was reserved for “horses that have started at this meeting and not won first money” only.⁷²

All humans and all animals were certainly not of equal status and privilege, neither in society nor at the races.

Conclusion: A City in the Making

By 1903, Dorval was incorporated as a City independent from the rest of Montreal. From the middle to the late 19th century, the increasing presence of an elite population and, eventually, social clubs, had a direct impact on its accessibility, development, and environment, changing its demographics and renown as a resort town pre-1892. Evidence found in newspaper articles dating back to 1914 demonstrates new problems were developing around the racetracks of the Dorval Jockey Club by then: On July 20, 1914, John Rice would write letters to the general manager of the Dorval Jockey Club, Sam Holman, threatening to murder him and set fire to the race track, grand stand, and houses on the property.⁷³ In November 5, 1915, the *Toronto World* wrote about the financial difficulties facing the Dorval Jockey Club and the dismissal of all its working hands in an attempt to put off bankruptcy, with Sam

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

⁷⁰ Guay, "Histoire des courses de chevaux au Québec," 38.

⁷¹ Ibid., 36.

⁷² "[Pro]Gram[Me] 1895 Canadian Jockey Clubs : Sp[Ring] Meetings, Ra[Ce] & Ste[Eple Ch]Ashing over \$50.000 in Purses."

⁷³ "Much Accused Man Pleads Not Guilty," *Toronto World*, July 20 1914.

Holman giving up his voting rights.⁷⁴ By 1916, Captain W. Presgrave is said to have taken his place.⁷⁵ Twenty years later, a murder at the race tracks made the headlines in 1938⁷⁶, as well as news of a missing child in 1939.⁷⁷ The site was eventually bought in 1941 for the construction of the Dorval Airport, announcing an end to the horse racing era in that area.⁷⁸ The Bel-Air Jockey Club had also met its end by the late 19th century, when, according to Dick Nieuwendyk, it was subdivided into lots for a residential area.⁷⁹ If Dorval no longer hosted racing events, many of its clubs still remained including the F&S, and evidence of this rich past is still visible. The stables of Brown's Bel-Air are today used by the local museum, sharing material and immaterial heritage of this complex and dynamic past.

The first objective of this report was to demonstrate which important elements could have led to the development of Dorval into the City it is today. A second objective was to reflect on the role of human-animal relations in the resort town, and what these dynamics revealed about social status and hierarchy at the time. There is no doubt that the presence of a certain prestigious Montreal elite and their recreational activities requiring the use of animals helped shape the City into what it became and what it is, today. By the mid to late 19th century, its accessibility and natural environment attracted individuals such as Alfred Brown, and there is no doubt that the investments and involvement of the elite shaped the small town. Dorval and its development are an excellent example of how accessibility, desirability, and location forge communities.

⁷⁴ "Dorval Jockey Club Fires All Its Hands," *Toronto World*, November 5, 1915.

⁷⁵ "Capt. Presgrave to Manage Dorval - Succeeds Sam Holman - Turf Gossip.," *The Ottawa Journal*, July 18, 1916.

⁷⁶ "Unknown Found Dead Clad Only in Hat," *The Montreal Gazette*, November 21, 1938.

⁷⁷ "Vanishes Mysteriously: Child Left at Race Track, Two Witnesses Declare," *The Montreal Gazette*, August, 14 1939.

⁷⁸ Dick Nieuwendyk, "Research on the Location and Operations - Dorval Jockey Club and the Bel-Air Jockey Club," (City of Dorval 2019).

⁷⁹ "The Impact on the Development and Growth of Dorval through the Influx of Montreal's Golden Square Mile Elite, in Particular: Mr. Alfred Brown and His Bel-Air Estate, the Forest and Stream Club and the Bel-Air Jockey Club and Dorval Jockey Club," (City of Dorval 2020).

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