

**Montreal's Delorimier Downs Baseball Stadium as Business
and
Centre of Mass Culture, 1928-1960**

By Robert Harry Pearson

**A thesis submitted to the Department of History
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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Abstract

Montreal's Delorimier Downs Stadium was home to the Montreal Royals of the International Baseball League from 1928 to the conclusion of the 1960 season when the Royals folded. The stadium stood another nine years after the Royals disappeared, and was demolished in 1969 to make room for a high school.

The most popular resident of Delorimier Downs was Jackie Robinson, Major League (referred to as organized baseball in the remainder of the thesis) baseball's first black of the twentieth century. He played one season, 1946, in Montreal, but made a notable impact on the city. During that year, while he faced a great deal of prejudice in other baseball cities, Robinson was gradually accepted by Montrealers, who were at first reluctant to admit his baseball ability. He was eventually endorsed by the Anglophone press, however, upon which I have relied for newspaper coverage.

Delorimier Downs was also a business. It made a major contribution to municipal income through the city's Amusement Tax. The building was never owned by the city, although municipal ownership was considered in 1936 and again in 1953. In 1936, the city nearly possessed the ballpark to compensate for unpaid taxes; in 1953 it considered ownership as part of a bid for the St. Louis Browns. In both instances, municipal ownership would have enhanced the profitability of the stadium.

During its 41-year existence Delorimier Downs was home to thousands of sports events, and dozens of cultural undertakings. Over the years, it hosted pageants, a mass wedding, winter carnivals and circuses. Indoors, on the concourse, the stadium boasted a roller rink and a dance hall, and was host to popular trade promotions such as the home and auto shows. Conceived as a ballpark, Delorimier Downs became much more over its lifetime.

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This thesis is dedicated to three people whose influence on my life has been immeasurable. First, it is dedicated to Joyce. My wife, my best friend, my everything. Life without her does not make sense. Second, to Victor Davis. His death nine years ago left a profound void in the lives of many. Once a teammate and friend, his passion for sport and life continues to inspire me daily. Finally, to Keith J. Lowther. Keith was a Ph.D. candidate at Concordia University until his death in 1997. Throughout my years at Concordia, his friendship and guidance inspired me to continue my education at the graduate level. It is my wish that his work someday come to fruition in the hands of a similarly competent scholar. He is sadly missed, and will be remembered always.

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Chapter 1 – Canadian Baseball: Historiography and Controversy

A BRIEF LOOK AT CANADIAN BASEBALL HISTORY

Canadian baseball history, William Humber tells us, has a "magnificent heritage" that began with the Beachville game in 1838 and culminated in the Toronto Blue Jays 1992 and 1993 World Series victories.¹ Throughout the late nineteenth, and into the middle of the twentieth century, baseball was the most popular sport in Canada,² with the sport's development running parallel to the American game, and eventually became part of it as leagues in Canada adopted the "New York rules," and cross-border leagues proliferated. Until then, like hockey later in the nineteenth century, local variants of the game could be found from town to town across the country.³ During the 1880s, baseball leagues were organized in large cities across Canada, and inter-town play began among small towns linked together by rail. Many of these ephemeral leagues disappeared before the turn of the century, but the sport's popularity continued, with the early 1900s "witness[ing] the massive expansion of clubs, intra-city and inter-city leagues, and the involvement of various institutions in the promotion of the game."⁴

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Canada had three professional teams connected with organized baseball (i.e., part of the hierarchy of major league baseball and its minor leagues), the Montreal Royals and the Toronto

¹ William Humber, *Diamonds of the North: A Concise History of Baseball in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1.

² Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914*, Canadian Social History Series, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 95-98; Nancy and Maxwell Howell, *Sports and Games in Canadian Life: 1700 to the Present*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), 281; Don Morrow et al., *A Concise History of Sport in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), 128; David Bernard highlights the popularity of the Guelph Maple Leafs in "The Guelph Maple Leafs: A Cultural Indicator of Southern Ontario," *Ontario History*, LXXXIV, 3 (September 1992): 211-223; and Janice Waters, "Sporting trends in major Canadian cities 1927-1935." *Proceedings: 5th Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 215-226.

³ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, *passim*.

⁴ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 86-87.

Maple Leafs, both of the International League, and the Vancouver Beavers of the Northwestern League.⁵ These were not Canada's first professional teams. Among the earliest professional teams in Canada were the Guelph Maple Leafs, whose players were hired by the Sleeman Brewery on the premise they would play for the Maple Leafs.⁶ Despite the problems faced by professional athletics in Canada, baseball persisted as a professional sport through the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Throughout the century and a half since baseball was created, Canadians have played the game in various forms—baseball, softball, slow-pitch—and continue to do so. During that time a number of Canadian players—men and women alike—have starred as professionals. The first Canadian superstar was Woodstock, Ontario's James Edward 'Tip' O'Neill, who played major league baseball in the 1880s and early 1890s.⁷ In addition to the more than 190 Canadian men who have played major league professional ball since 1871, 53 Canadian women played in the All American Girls Professional Baseball League from its inception in 1943 to its closure in 1954.⁸ Chatham, Ontario's Ferguson Jenkins is Canada's most decorated baseball player. He won the Cy Young award as the National League's best pitcher in 1971, and became the first Canadian elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1991.⁹

While many baseball histories tend to focus on the professional game, the amateur game has thrived equally as long in Canada. Much of the work of Colin Howell and William Humber emphasizes the role of the amateur in Canadian baseball. While

⁵ See Robin Anderson, "On the Edge of the Baseball Map' with the 1908 Vancouver Beavers," *Canadian Historical Review*, 77, 4 (December 1996): 538-574.

⁶ Bernard, "The Guelph Maple Leafs," 211-214. For more on the Guelph Maple Leafs, see Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 28-40.

⁷ See below. Note: O'Neill was not the first Canadian to play in the major leagues.

⁸ Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 198-200.

⁹ Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 163-165, 195.

the first national organization, the Canadian Amateur Baseball Association, was not formed until 1919, the amateur game dominated in terms of the number of participants.¹⁰ Howell notes the amateur game remained strong in the Maritimes well into the twentieth century; fan interest turned decisively to the professional game when Canada became home to two major league teams: the Montreal Expos in 1969 and the Toronto Blue Jays in 1977.¹¹

IMPORTING HEROES AND INVENTING THE GAME IN CANADA?

Canadian baseball indeed has the rich history Humber and others suggest, but there are two problematic trends among its chroniclers. The first involves the importation of heroes and exaggeration of the exploits of Canadians in the game; the second contends baseball was played in Canada before it was played in the United States.

HEROES

Babe Ruth was one of baseball's most recognizable heroes, and he remains so fifty years after his death. Ruth was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on February 6, 1895, and died at the age of 53, a victim of throat cancer, on August 16, 1948. He played 22 major league seasons—1914 to 1935—with the Boston Red Sox, New York Yankees, and briefly with the Boston Braves. Ruth was an American hero¹² of epic proportions—an unlikely candidate to be a Canadian hero.¹³

¹⁰ Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 12; and Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 98-99.

¹¹ Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 12 and *passim*.

¹² See Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 429-433; Phil Pepe, "The Babe Hits 100," *New York Yankees Yearbook*, (New York: 1995); and Bill Plaschke, "Fifty Years After His Death, Babe Ruth Still Captivates as Man, Myth, Legend," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 August 1998.

¹³ See Robert Ashe, *Even the Babe Came to Play: Small-Town Baseball in the Dirty 30's*, (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 1991); Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 196-198, and "The Man Who Taught the Bambino," in William Humber and John St. James, eds., *All I Thought About Was*

Colin Howell and William Humber (largely based on the work of Howell) both claim Ruth was taught the game by a Xaverian priest—whom Ruth himself named as his baseball mentor—known as Brother Matthias. While investigating Nova Scotia baseball history Howell discovered a 1923 Halifax *Herald* article suggesting Matthias was Haligonian Walter Comeford. Further research revealed Comeford was not Matthias, but another Nova Scotian, Martin Boutlier.¹⁴ Even if Martin Boutlier was Brother Matthias of the St. Mary's School, can we trust Ruth's recollections? Babe Ruth had a notoriously poor memory,¹⁵ we cannot be certain he correctly recalled who taught him to play.

In addition to borrowing heroes, Canadian baseball historians often exaggerate. In 1935, keeping with major league customs of the time, the National League's Boston Braves went on a post-season barnstorming tour that included a stop in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. While this game no doubt represents a highlight in the town's baseball history, Robert Ashe badly misconstrues the outcome. The Braves won the game by a score of 11 – 3 after taking a 9 – 0 lead through the first two innings. Ashe suggests the St. Stephen team won the remaining seven innings—a game within a game—by a score of 3 – 2.¹⁶ While a clever fabrication based upon actual results, baseball games are not reported in this manner. If anything reasonable can be said of the St. Stephen team's ability to outscore the Braves over the final seven innings, it is that the Braves coasted, allowing the local club to score runs for the entertainment of its fans. Otherwise, Ashe admits, "it could have been—and likely should have been—worse."¹⁷

William Humber and John St. James recount a moment when a Canadian-based team really beat a big-league club. In the introduction to *All I Thought About Was*

Baseball: Writings on a Canadian Pastime, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 149-152; and Humber, *Diamonds of the North* 102, 154, and 165.

¹⁴ Howell, "The Man Who Taught The Bambino," 152.

¹⁵ Plaschke, "Fifty Years After," and Pepe, "The Babe Hits 100."

¹⁶ Ashe, *Even the Babe Came to Play*, 71-72.

Baseball, they remark on their polling of “knowledgeable baseball fans” to speculate on the outcome of a hypothetical game between any Toronto team and the greatest team ever, the 1927 New York Yankees.¹⁸ In July 1927, however, the hypothetical match-up was actually put to the test:

...the Yankees, on their way to Detroit for a mid-season series, and anxious to make a few dollars [their share of the gate receipts], stopped off in Toronto to play an exhibition game against the city’s International League team in their new Maple Leaf Stadium. Ruth and Gehrig played... But the Yankees lost 11-7... to Toronto....¹⁹

The efforts Canadian baseball historians are willing to make to show some connection between the sport in Canada and the United States reveals a passionate interest in the sport’s past. Exaggeration of the feats of Canadian teams and Canadian players, unfortunately, reveals that Canadian baseball history, while long and heroic, has yet to develop on paper.

In *Northern Sandlots* Colin Howell overestimates the prowess of the Saint John Roses’s 1898, “eighteen-year-old phenom, William ‘Tip’ O’Neill, a slick fielder and speedy base runner who later played left field for the World Series champion Chicago White Sox in 1906....”²⁰ O’Neill played only 96 games for the White Sox in 1906, and one game, with one at-bat, in the 1906 World Series; he was far from being the star Howell makes him out to be.²¹ Moreover, William O’Neill was not known as “Tip.” There was a Canadian baseball star who went by the name “Tip”, but not in the twentieth century. “Tip” O’Neill was born in Woodstock, and starred for the New York Giants, the St. Louis Browns, and the Cincinnati Reds in the 1880s and 1890s. Late baseball writer

¹⁷ Ashe, *Even the Babe Came to Play*, 71.

¹⁸ The 1927 Yankees won 110 and lost 44 games, and are widely thought to have been the best team in major league history. David S. Neft and Richard M. Cohen, *The Sports Encyclopedia: Baseball*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 152-155.

¹⁹ Humber and St. James, *All I Thought About Was Baseball*, xvi-xvii.

²⁰ Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 123.

²¹ Neft and Cohen, *The Sports Encyclopedia: Baseball*, *passim*.

Lee Allen commented on O'Neill's notoriety: "O'Neill's name is etched indelibly in the record books because his batting average in 1887 was a startling .492. O'Neill was aided by a rule, in force only in that year, that credited a base on balls as a hit..."²²

Fanfare surrounding O'Neill remains significant not only in Canada—perhaps influencing Howell's error—but also in the United States, where fans continue to debate O'Neill's 1887 batting average.

INVENTING THE GAME

A second problematic trend appears in many works concerning the game's Canadian past. Canadian baseball historians claim the game was invented in Canada. In the summer of 1838, a year after the failed Upper Canada Rebellion, the residents of Beachville, in St. Mary's,²³ like those in communities across the colony, celebrated the successful repression of the 1837 uprising. Beachville's celebration, some claim, was unique: celebrants gathered to watch a game of baseball. This claim seems inconspicuous enough until one considers that baseball's much mythologized creation allegedly took place in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839.²⁴ Record of the Beachville game came from Dr. Adam Ford, a long-time resident, and one time mayor of St. Mary's, who penned "A Game of Long Ago," for *The Sporting Life* in 1886.²⁵

William Humber discusses the Beachville game in all of his works on Canadian baseball history,²⁶ Alan Metcalfe and Don Morrow both refer to the game in their

²² Lee Allen, *The Hot Stove League*, (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1955), 29; and Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 177.

²³ The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame is located in St. Mary's, Ontario.

²⁴ This has since been rejected by most of the game's historians, but is clung to by the Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown.

²⁵ Adam Ford, "A Game of Long Ago," *The Sporting Life*, May 5, 1886. For the complete text of Ford's article from *The Sporting Life* see: Adam Ford, "A Game of Long Ago," Humber and St. James, eds., *All I Thought About Was Baseball*, 112-116.

²⁶ They include the essay "Cheering for the Home Team: Baseball and Town Life in 19th Century Ontario," *Proceedings: 5th Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education*,

histories of Canadian sport,²⁷ and Mark Kearney validates the contest as an "excellent starting place for the history of the game." He writes of the discoveries made by a group of University of Western Ontario (UWO) researchers who in 1988 laboured to validate Ford's claims in "A Game of Long Ago."²⁸ Using Ford's extensive list of Beachville players, county records, and searching area tombstones, the UWO group verified that many of the men Ford claimed were participants in the game had lived in the area.²⁹ No one—Kearney, Humber, Metcalfe, Morrow, the UWO researchers—considered that as a local doctor Ford may have known many of the so-called baseball players as patients, and that it is entirely possible he used patient records to create his list of players. What makes Ford's account of the game most doubtful, however, is his age at the time of the game and the 48 years that transpired between the alleged game of baseball and his written recollection. In 1838, Adam Ford was seven years old; when he wrote "A Game of Long Ago," he did so with stunning clarity and attention to detail—not only naming all of the players, but also describing, with measurements, the playing field as well as play during the game itself. Kearney notes that "Ford was known for having a good memory,"³⁰ and his recollections, Robert Barney suggests, taken in consideration with "known events of immigration and social development in southwestern Ontario establishes a starting-point for understanding baseball's roots in Canada."³¹ One is left to

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); *Cheering for the Home Team: The Story of Baseball in Canada*, (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1983); *Diamonds of the North*, (1995); and *All I Thought About Was Baseball*, (1996).

²⁷ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 26; and Morrow et al., *A Concise History*, 109.

²⁸ Mark Kearney, "Abner Who?" *The Beaver*, October-November 1994: 17. This group was led by Robert K. Barney, Professor of Kinesiology, at UWO. Barney explores Canada's baseball heritage in "Whose National Pastime? Baseball in Canadian Popular Culture," in *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada*, David E. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning eds., (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 152-162.

²⁹ Their findings were published by Nancy B. Bouchier and Robert K. Barney, "A Critical Examination of a Source in Early Ontario Baseball: The Reminiscence of Adam E. Ford," *Journal of Sport History*, 15, 1 (1988): 88.

³⁰ Kearney, "Abner Who?" 14.

³¹ Barney, "Whose National Pastime?" 154.

wonder, however, how a seven year-old boy was attentive enough to note the details of the game, and then recall them as a 55 year-old man. Not only was his memory suspect, so was Ford. When he wrote "A Game of Long Ago," in 1886, he was living in Denver, Colorado, where he moved in flight from murder charges.³²

The controversy over the invention of baseball is not limited to Canada. Arguments over the game's creation persist in the United States. Many towns would surely love to claim theirs was the place the game was invented. The Hall of Fame, resting place of baseball records and memorabilia, remains firm in upholding Abner Doubleday as the creator, and Cooperstown, New York as the place of his invention.³³ The Doubleday myth was developed in 1907, when sporting goods mogul Albert G. Spalding commissioned his friend, Abraham Mills, to determine the origins of baseball; Spalding hoped to find proof the game was undoubtedly an American creation. The Mills Commission later reported that "baseball was uniquely American and that [Abner] Doubleday invented it [in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839]."³⁴ If the game was not invented by Doubleday, nor someone who organized the game at Beachville in 1838, then who was the creator of the game? While baseball was developing from the British game of rounders, and a variant called Town Ball,³⁵ the modern version of what is known as baseball is widely credited to Alexander Cartwright of the New York Knickerbockers Club. In 1845 Cartwright penned the first version of the New York Rules, which were later widely adopted, and which resemble the game played on baseball diamonds

³² Humber, *All I Thought About Was Baseball*, 113.

³³ The Hall of Fame claims its location in Cooperstown remains at least symbolic of baseball's putative rural origins.

³⁴ Kearney, "Abner Who?" 12; and Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 10.

³⁵ See William Baker, *Sports in the Western World*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 138-154.

today.³⁶ The origins of baseball, however, precede these people and places by centuries; the sport evolved from medieval games such as stool ball, and later similar games.³⁷

WHY CANADIANS CLAIM THE GAME

While the assertion of Canadians' role in baseball history is not unfounded, it is not, as William Humber suggests, a history that culminates with the exploits of the Toronto Blue Jays in 1992 and 1993.³⁸ Similarly, Robert Barney notes the importance of Canadian-based major league teams in Montreal since 1969 and Toronto since 1977.³⁹ Yet, the reason why Canadians claim the game has much less to do with the arrival of the major league game in the country.

Addressing the importance of the link between Canadian and American baseball, Alan Metcalfe explains that baseball was *the* Canadian sport in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The prominence of the game during the Victorian era offers some understanding of why late twentieth century historians emphasize the role of Canadians in the game. Interest in American baseball heightened in the 1870s when Canadian teams adopted the New York Rules. Thereafter, Metcalfe writes, "Canadian baseball always maintained a strong link with the United States."⁴⁰ As Canadian baseball rivalries tended to develop on North-South rather than East-West axes:

³⁶ Baker, *Sports in the Western World*, 138-141; Kearney, "Abner Who?" 12; Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 20-22; Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 13, 18, and 93-94; Seymour, *The Early Years*, 11-22; and Allen Guttmann, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 71-75.

³⁷ Baker, *Sports in The Western World*, 138-154.

³⁸ Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 1.

³⁹ Barney, "Whose National Pastime?" 158-159.

⁴⁰ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 88.

...the Maritimes [played] with the New England states, Ontario and Quebec with adjacent states; the Prairies with Minnesota and North Dakota; and the West Coast with the state of Washington... Throughout the latter years of the nineteenth century there was a continual flow of teams back and forth across the border... However, it must be emphasized that the intensity of the interaction varied: the further one was removed from the border the weaker the American presence became.⁴¹

Undoubtedly this connection continues in the late twentieth century with Canadian amateur and (Canadian-based) professional teams competing in leagues with American teams.

Metcalfe further addresses the sport and the extent to which it was truly Canadian by asking three questions: Where was the game invented? How many games were played? How many people played the game? With respect to the second and third, he found the game was indeed Canadian in the Victorian era. Baseball was played by the widest variety of social groups, while other sports such as rugby, lacrosse, and cricket, and other amateur sports, were limited to particular class groups.⁴² The obvious popularity of baseball as Canadian sport—with Victorian era fans and participants, as well as late-twentieth-century historians—along with the long-time connection to American baseball offers some insight into understanding the Canadian preoccupation with American baseball heroes. Furthermore, Robert Barney suggests that the arrival of the major league professional game in Canada has helped to “[raise] interest in baseball to a fever pitch....”⁴³ None of this, except for contemporary pride in Canadian baseball, accounts for the somewhat misled attempts to place the invention of the game in Canada.

⁴¹ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 88-89.

⁴² Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 97-98. For more on class implications on amateur sport see Metcalfe, “The Evolution of Organized Physical Recreation in Montreal, 1840-1895,” in Morris Mott, ed., *Sports in Canada: Historical Readings*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1989), 130-155.

⁴³ Barney, “Whose National Pastime?” 152-153.

CANADIAN BASEBALL AND CIVIC PRIDE

Canadians are, of course, proud of their baseball tradition. Since baseball was first played between teams from rival cities the game has played an important role in the discourse of civic pride across the country. Among the earliest rivalries in Canada were those in Southern Ontario—still Canada West at the time—between teams from Guelph, Hamilton, London, Dundas, and Toronto, to name a few.⁴⁴ The importance of sport and boosterism is obvious: the population of a city or town whose sports team(s) can compete with or surpass the excellence of a rival town's team(s) will feel proud to live in that city; they will feel their home is just as good as the next. Similarly, civic pride extends to regional and national levels.

People tend to take great pride in local sports teams, especially when they are successful on the playing field. Writing of the English Soccer League team, West Ham United, Charles P. Knorr discusses the importance of the team to the community.⁴⁵ In 1923, when West Ham earned a berth in the league finals, not only did fans celebrate, the entire borough joined the excitement. "Masses of non-supporters," Knorr wrote, "were caught up in the expectation of the Final and the celebration that followed it."⁴⁶ Dean Baim underlines the importance of the non-sports fan's reaction as a "positive externality" from a stadium and its team's success. While he mentions this within his framework of stadiums as municipal investment, he understands that "non-sports fans [may develop] a more positive image of their city because of the success of the [local]

⁴⁴ See Barney, "Whose National Pastime?" 155-156; David Bernard, "The Guelph Maple Leafs," *passim*.; Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 146-170; William Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, *passim*.; Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 86-92; and Robin Anderson, "On The Edge of the Baseball Map," especially 541-549. Famous Canadian baseball man Knotty Lee wrote in 1920 that taking advantage of local pride was the best way to get a town interested in hosting a baseball team. "Baseball in Canada," *Maclean's*, May 1, 1920: 24.

⁴⁵ Charles P. Knorr, "A Different Kind of Success: West Ham United and the Creation of Tradition and Community," in Richard Holt, ed., *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain*, International Studies in the History of Sport Series, (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 1990): 142-158. West Ham is a borough of London.

⁴⁶ Knorr, "A Different Kind of Success," 146.

sports team.⁴⁷ One can understand that as more people become involved in supporting a sports team—because it makes them proud of their district, town, city, province, or country—the more potent civic pride becomes. Despite admitting that pride is difficult to quantify, Stephen Riess adds that “participation in the rituals of baseball encouraged community pride as sportsmen identified with their hometown team and its accomplishments....”⁴⁸

In his study of minor league baseball and local economies, Arthur T. Johnson notes that “intercity competition is a prime motivator of local economic development activities. Community-based economic development policies and plans are adopted to, and in anticipation of, actions taken by competitor cities....,”⁴⁹ further emphasizing the importance of civic pride in the decision to host a sports team or build or refurbish a local stadium. Likewise, it is likely the plans for Delorimier Downs in Montreal, the focus of this thesis, were influenced by the 1926 opening of Maple Leaf Stadium in Toronto. The Toronto ballpark could accommodate 20,000 fans, and was designed with expansion in mind if the city managed to win a major league franchise.⁵⁰ It is no coincidence Montreal built its own state-of-the-art baseball stadium to accommodate a rival team in the International League. In addition to material competition, civic boosterism was an impetus for the development of professionalism in sport.

Professionalism, Bruce Kidd writes, “was an outgrowth of stakes gambling,” that became increasingly important as team and facility owners went to greater lengths to

⁴⁷ Dean V. Baim, *The Sports Stadium as Municipal Investment*, Contributions in Economics and Economic History Series, number 151, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 5.

⁴⁸ Steven Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era*, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 224.

⁴⁹ Arthur T. Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, Sport and Society Series, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 2.

⁵⁰ Humber, *Diamonds of the North*, 151-155.

ensure they had a winning team.⁵¹ To guarantee a team's success, team and facility owners and promoters offered the best players a portion of the gate in return for their play. Alan Metcalfe reflects on the development of professionalism in Canada:

Although men had competed against one another for wagers and prize money for many generations, by the 1870s a market had been created that allowed a man or a woman to earn a living from sport. The development of urban-industrial society, the invention of the telegraph, and the increased popularity of the daily newspaper created the conditions for the emergence of professional athletes. Thus it was no accident that professionalism [in Canada] first saw the light of day in Montreal and Toronto.⁵²

Professionalism also gained momentum as sport became increasingly associated with entertainment. The success of barnstorming teams who made their way from city to city to display their athletic prowess helped enhance sport's attraction as entertainment.⁵³ While promoters recognized the income potential of professional athletics, there was more to the development of paid athletics than commerce. "The ready association of athletes with local boosterism," Kidd suggests, "proved a powerful stimulus. If a town's reputation was on the line, then 'its team' had to have the best players. [And having the best players] eventually meant freeing players from their other jobs to enable them to practice."⁵⁴ Colin Howell, however, looks disparagingly at the development of professionalism in Maritime baseball:

While the establishment of professional baseball served to elevate the calibre of play in the Maritimes... it also raised questions about the essential purpose of sport itself. Initially, sport advocates hoped that baseball would serve, as cricket and rugby had done, to enhance

⁵¹ Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 189.

⁵² Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 159. For more on the nature of sports and gambling, see the following in Holt, ed., *Sport and the Working Class*: Douglas A. Reid, "Beasts and Brutes: Popular Blood Sports c. 1780-1860," (12-28); and Alan Metcalfe, "'Potshare Bowling' in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland, 1800-1914," (29-44). See also, Richard L. Miller, "The Baseball Parks and the American Culture," in Alvin L. Hall, ed., *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture*, (Westport CT: Meckler Publishing, 1990), 168-186.

⁵³ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 159; and Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 74, 86, 93-96, 157, 165-168, 171-178, 196, and 206-208.

⁵⁴ Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport*, 189-190.

'gentlemanly' values... Newspaper accounts of games regularly criticized the practice of 'kicking,' or disputing an umpire's decision, and derided those players who would not accede to the arbiter's authority...⁵⁵

Despite these problems the professional game continued to develop in the Maritimes, with more and more cities boasting relatively high-calibre professional teams.

In addition to the rise of professionalism, and its implications for local pride, the development of sports stadiums serve as monuments to the wealth of the proud entrepreneurs whose money financed their construction, as well as the city or town as home to the building. For magnates like Philadelphia's Benjamin Shibe, who built Shibe Park in 1909, the stadium and the baseball played inside it were about money. Moreover, Bruce Kuklick writes, "Shibe also wanted a grand showplace as a symbol of his worthiness as an American entrepreneur."⁵⁶ In Montreal there is little doubt the men who financed the construction of Delorimier Downs did so to show off theirs and the city's wealth. The same men who supported professional hockey in the city, the "beauty and chivalry" of Montreal, as Leslie Roberts called them in 1928, supported the construction of "a grandstand which has no equal in any city in the International League."⁵⁷ It is with a similar refrain that Benjamin Shibe and Philadelphia boasted in 1909 that they had the first concrete and steel baseball park ever built, the finest stadium in all of professional sports.⁵⁸

Civic boosterism and baseball were, and remain, inextricably mixed in Canada. In 1982, William Humber suggested to the Fifth Canadian Symposium on the History of

⁵⁵ Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 64.

⁵⁶ Bruce Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 29.

⁵⁷ Roberts, "'Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 16.

⁵⁸ Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season*, *passim*. Allen Guttmann, suggests the construction of stadiums has long been connected with civic pride: "In Book X of his *Description of Greece*, Pausanias assured his second-century AD readers that every *polis* worthy of the name had a gymnasium along with the agora and the theatre," *Sports Spectators*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 14. John Bale suggests, the stadium has taken on such an important role in civic boosting that it has come to "typify the excess of urban monumentalism," *Sport, Space and the City*, (London UK: Routledge, 1993), 35.

Sport and Physical Education, that baseball was an important element in civic identity during the 1854-1869 period. During that time, the game came to mean a number of things:

[the baseball diamond] was a place of casual encounter between like minded social groups; it provided an opportunity for town dwellers attending games to assert their civic identity in an era of tremendous dislocation; it furthered the local political ambitions of those who sponsored a club [i.e., those who wanted to be mayor]... and gradually, though ironically, it united many towns in a larger regional and even national way by providing through the spirit of competition an awareness that other towns were more than mere dots on the map.⁵⁹

Colin Howell would not find the connection between baseball and regional identity surprising. Regional identity, he suggests, was forged by the rivalries between Maritime towns and New England towns.⁶⁰ Howell also explains how the civic purpose of the game changed after the First World War, becoming more connected with entertainment than social regeneration.⁶¹ A simple exhibition game played in a sportsmanlike manner was both entertaining and a boost to local spirit. Not only, then, could the game improve the town's status vis-à-vis other towns, it could also improve the town's self-image significantly. Eventually local and regional pride were overshadowed by national pride, with increasing numbers of Maritimers preferring major league baseball.⁶²

Across the country, in 1900s Vancouver, professional baseball and boosterism were closely related. When the Vancouver Beavers of the Northwestern League won the 1908 league pennant, the city's middle class beamed with pride. Unlike Howell's complaints about commercialism and professionalism and their impact on the Maritime game, Robin Anderson clearly points out the positive effect these two elements had on

⁵⁹ Humber, "Cheering for the Home Team," (1982), 190.

⁶⁰ Howell, "Baseball, Class and Community," 271; and *Northern Sandlots*, 146-170.

⁶¹ Howell, *Northern Sandlots*, 157.

⁶² Howell bemoans the role of Canadian-based major league teams in Maritime baseball culture. He suggests that in their presence, "memories of the Springhill Fencebusters, Stellarton Albions, and Yarmouth Gateways understandably, if perhaps regrettably, continue to fade" (*Northern Sandlots*, 231).

the game and civic pride. "To the city's middle class sport's fans," Anderson begins, "winning the most prestigious baseball pennant in the northwest was of major significance: a prize sports team would bring attention, and perhaps significant investment to a young city locked in a regional battle for real-estate sales and industrial development."⁶³

Unlike the Maritimes, where baseball was central in the pre-First World War discourse of respectability, Vancouverites had no qualms about supporting the professional game: "the middle class social reform impulse was far weaker in Vancouver than in urban centres in central and eastern Canada. As such," Anderson adds, "Beaver baseball was all about money and profit."⁶⁴ While notions of respectability did not inhibit the professional game in Vancouver, they did influence who should sit in the crowd. Tension between boosterism and middle-class ideals imposed limits on spectatorship: if the game on the field did not live up to the code of gentlemanly behaviour, at least the crowd would. But, "worries raised by 'respectable' spectators and members of the sporting press about... fan behavior were motivated less by a desire for gentlemanly behaviour (as was the case in the east) than by a concern with the city's commercial reputation."⁶⁵ While the play of the club was important to local boosters, so too was the behaviour of its fans, who were thought to make a greater impression, perhaps, on outsiders' views of the city than the team itself; Vancouver might have had a winning ball club, but what it wanted was a winning reputation.

⁶³ Anderson, "On the Edge of the Baseball Map," 538.

⁶⁴ Anderson, "On the Edge of the Baseball Map," 540.

⁶⁵ Anderson, "On the Edge of the Baseball Map," 541.

OVER-THINKING THE GAME.

David Bernard's 1992 essay about the Guelph Maple Leafs and baseball as cultural indicator exemplifies some of the problems associated with writing baseball history. While he recognizes the importance of the game in regional culture and civic pride, he brings into his essay an obvious lack of understanding for the game of baseball which is further misconstrued by a theoretical argument ill-suited to the game. Discussing the connection between baseball as urban game and the ball diamond as evocative of rural nostalgia, he wonders if this is apt for discussion of baseball in southern Ontario since "the evils of urbanization may not have been as obvious" in the region as they were in the nearby United States.⁶⁶ While this seems harmless enough, Bernard uses this as springboard to further discussion of the implications of urban-industrial growth on baseball. He suggests "the outfield evoked an idyllic pastoral setting in a psychologically compensatory manner, [and] the infield evoked the growing departmentalization of modern urban industrial life in a congruent manner."⁶⁷ Despite the many changes to the game since the nineteenth century, people do not see the game this way. While baseball may be considered pastoral recreation, fans of the Guelph team did not recognize the game's rural-urban dichotomy. Even in Guelph, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, baseball fans would have been of a similar class to those Anderson relates to in his essay about Vancouver baseball in 1908. At the very least, patrons of the Guelph Maple Leafs watched the team for personal entertainment.

Entertainment is an important element of baseball for participants on and off the field. In Montreal's Delorimier Downs stadium, entertainment ranged from baseball and other professional sporting events to numerous cultural festivals. While the stadium was

⁶⁶ Bernard, "The Guelph Maple Leafs," 215. For more on the rural-urban dichotomy and the putative cathartic value of baseball, see Steven Riess, *City Games*, 66; and *Touching Base*, 226-233.

⁶⁷ Bernard, "The Guelph Maple Leafs," 216.

home to heroes and epic events with the potential to be retold with embellishment, the present work, with Canadian baseball history in mind, focuses instead on the role of the stadium as prominent in Montreal's economy and cultural life from 1928 through 1969.

Chapter 2 – Montreal Baseball History and the Stadium.

It has long been my conviction that we can learn far more about the conditions, and values, of a society by contemplating how it chooses to play, to use its free time, to take its leisure, than by examining how it goes about its work.

A. Bartlett Giamatti.¹

BACKGROUND: MONTREAL BASEBALL HISTORY—THE ATWATER PARK YEARS AND BEYOND.

In the late summer of 1927, when rumours of the return of professional baseball circulated in Montreal, hardly anyone paid attention. Since the departure of the city's International League team—the Royals—at the end of 1917, stories of the league's return to the city circulated annually.² Yet 1927 was different. Legendary baseball man George Stallings was searching for Montreal businessmen who could support his bid to move the failing Jersey City Skeeters International League franchise to Montreal, and he was serious.³ By late autumn, 1927, the Montreal Exhibition Company Ltd., as the ownership syndicate called itself, was ready to build a stadium at the corner of Delorimier Avenue and Ontario Street in the city's East End. Construction did not begin until winter had set in, however, and the stadium was quickly built during the coldest months of the year. Despite the cold, and the poor condition of the land on which the baseball diamond would be landscaped, the building was ready in time for May 2, 1928, when the city planned to welcome the return of International League baseball.⁴

¹ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Take Time for Paradise: Americans and Their Games*, (New York: Summit Books, 1989), 13.

² Leslie Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," *Maclean's*, July 15, 1928: 16.

³ Leslie Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 16; and chapter four.

⁴ The game was actually delayed by several days because of rain. While the rain would not postpone most games, the absence of grass on the playing field—which would not be seeded until the season was complete—made any rain problematic for baseball. See *Montreal Gazette*, May 1 to May 5, 1928. Roberts describes the land Delorimier was constructed on as in poor condition, yet this was a park prior to the stadium's construction. Perhaps the condition of the field, prior to the landscaping, deteriorated during construction and winter heaves.

Before the 1928 season, the Montreal Royals played in the International League from 1897 through 1917. During those years, the club played home games at Atwater Park, where it enjoyed only four winning seasons (i.e., winning at least fifty percent of its games), and won the league pennant once, in 1898. Atwater Park straddled the border of Montreal and the affluent suburb of Westmount. Despite its location near some of the city's wealthy sports patrons, the club was not successful as a business. While fan support was increasing in the early 1900s, the club was cut from the league for the start of the 1903 season to make room for the Baltimore Orioles who had been dropped from the budding American League to make room for the New York Highlanders (later the Yankees). Later that season the Worcester, Massachusetts, club found itself in financial difficulty so it moved to Montreal and resumed play under the name Royals. Thereafter, the club remained in the city without interruption for 14 years.⁵ At the end of the 1917 season, Montreal was banished from the International League: the team had succumbed to debt, disinterested ownership and fans, less than ideal playing location, the departure of International League players for the Federal League during the 1914 and 1915 seasons, and the affects of American involvement in the First World War (many of the league's players were American, and became involved in the war in 1917). The latter two factors played havoc with the league itself, which considered closing operations for the duration of the war.⁶ Team owner Sam Lichtenhein was unwilling to try to boost

⁵ William Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals: The Minor League Team that Made Major League History*, (Montreal: Robert Davies, 1996), 13-14.

⁶ For much of this summary of Montreal baseball history prior to the construction of Delorimier Downs, see my "The Decline of Professional Baseball in Montreal: A Case Study of the Montreal Royals and the Montreal City League, 1910 – 1917," Concordia University Undergraduate Honours Thesis, 1996; Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 7-24; and Harold Seymour, "Chapter 10: The Federal League Challenge," *Baseball: The Golden Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 196-213.

interest in a club whose home games oftentimes in the 1910s attracted less than 100 people, including the press.⁷

In 1897, Atwater Park was the only place in the city of Montreal capable of housing a professional baseball team; no other parks had grandstands with the capacity to host a crowd of significant size. A few years later, however, there were other parks, in other parts of the city, that may have been better situated for the team to draw fans.⁸ Other locations would have given the team the chance to attract fans whose only way to games was by foot, especially the working class, among whom the game was quite popular. While the club played home games in a wealthy district of the city, tickets to games were not necessarily expensive. Royals chronicler William Brown notes that the 68-game season ticket sold for \$20.00 in 1898.⁹ This worked out to twenty-nine cents per game, making it reasonable to suggest single-game tickets were available for less, and on a day-to-day basis rather than so far in advance. The workingman might have afforded a game every now and then, but to pay for the whole season in advance would not have been feasible. Although Atwater Park was located near the well-known working-class districts of St.-Anne and St.-Henri, the work of Herbert Ames and Terry Copp suggests poverty in these areas would have prevented working-class support for the team from these wards.¹⁰ Indeed, working-class endorsement for the Royals came not from these wards, but from the East End, where the team played Sunday home

⁷ Roberts, "'Base Pelotte' Comes Back", 16; and Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 7-24.

⁸ The Ville de Montreal Archives (hereinafter VMA) has press clippings files for all buildings and streets in the city. In the file for Delorimier Avenue, along with information on Delorimier Downs, one finds a clipping from the July 16, 1900, edition of *La Patrie*, depicting a stadium located on the site. (VMA press clippings file R-3329-2-20-12). On April 4, 1900, *Le Canada* featured the stadium of the National Club, simply known as the National Club Grounds, at the corner of Bennett and Ontario Streets in the City of Maisonneuve (VMA, press clippings, R-3062-2). In addition to these stadiums, by the early 1900s, the Shamrock Grounds stood just north of the city along St. Denis St.

⁹ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 11.

¹⁰ Herbert Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, (Montreal: 1897); and Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

games for most of its 1897 to 1917 tenure in the city. Because Atwater Park lay partially within the city of Westmount, where sports were prohibited on Sundays, the club played Sunday games at either the Shamrock Grounds or the National Club Grounds.¹¹

Oftentimes the Sunday afternoon attendance outnumbered Saturday attendance by as much as ten times, and occasionally outdrew the entire week's attendance. Further evidence of the popularity of baseball in the East End comes from the City League.

From 1910 to 1917, the City League operated as a semi-professional league staffed by local working-class players—French- and English-speaking alike—that played Saturday afternoon doubleheaders. During its height, prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the league's fixtures often outdrew Royals games happening across town at Atwater Park, and while attendance figures were not regularly reported for either the Royals or the City League, the latter certainly appears to have come close to matching the professional club in annual attendance. The status of the City League, however, depended on the Royals and local interest in the professional game. After 1917, when the Royals left the city, the league struggled with obscurity, eventually becoming a senior amateur league rather than semi-professional.¹² Among the reasons for the lack of working-class support for the Royals home games at Atwater Park was transit. Working-class patrons from the East End could not have afforded both a tram ticket and a baseball ticket; and it was too far to walk. Without the support of enthusiastic fans, the team was unable to remedy financial problems in time to avoid removal from the league by commercially-minded league executives.

¹¹ A 1966 *Montreal Gazette* article noted that the Royals played Sunday home games at either of these two East End locations. *Gazette* writer Al Palmer interviewed an aging Montreal resident who explained to him the nature of Westmount's Sabbatarian by-laws. *Montreal Gazette*, June 8, 1966 (VMA, in file 3-30-1.1-VM6-3-R.3048.2 (1500)).

¹² Colin Howell describes the term 'semi-professional' as nothing more than a euphemism designed to protect amateur players who played on teams who paid ringers—star players. Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995), 141. While this may have been the case in Montreal, there are also suggestions that all players were paid from admissions or passing the hat. See my earlier work.

During the 20 years the team played at Atwater Park, the park was never witness to cultural events like those associated with Delorimier Downs (see chapter five). Certainly the park took on an important role aside from baseball—as part of urban beautification projects, and as recreation space for wealthy residents of Westmount. But neither baseball nor the park's civic function were significant enough for it to last, and in the 1950s, Atwater Park was closed to make room for the commercial developments of Westmount Square and Place Alexis Nihon as the downtown core expanded westward.¹³

The baseball games played at Delorimier Downs are not the primary focus of the present work, but many games were played there. Beginning in 1928, the Royals played 33 seasons in the stadium, winning the International League Pennant eight times, making the playoffs 18 times, winning the Governors' Cup playoff trophy seven times, and the Junior World Series title three times in seven appearances.¹⁴ During those 33 seasons the club achieved a winning record, in the regular season and playoffs, making the post-season 12 straight seasons beginning in 1945.¹⁵ In 1940, the Royals began a relationship with the National League's Brooklyn Dodgers, making the Montreal club the top Brooklyn farm team, and in 1946, the Dodgers bought the stadium, consolidating their control of International League baseball in the city. Owing to the relationship between the Royals and the Dodgers, many future major league stars passed through Montreal during their minor league playing days. Most famous of these players was

¹³ VMA press clippings file 3-30-1.1-VM6-3-R.3048.2 (1500).

¹⁴ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 182-183. The Governors' Cup was first contested in the league in 1933. The Junior World Series was played between the playoff champions of the International League and the American Association, another of baseball's minor leagues.

¹⁵ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, *passim*.

Jackie Robinson, baseball's first black player since the 1880s, whose season in Montreal is discussed in chapter three.¹⁶

Late in the team's history, in 1958, the Dodgers moved from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, making Montreal inconvenient as the National League club's top minor league affiliate. As a result, the Dodgers promoted their other Triple-A club, in Spokane, Washington, to top status. The Royals enjoyed one more successful season in 1958, winning the Governors Cup as league playoff champions. Thereafter Spokane's roster benefited from the top Dodger prospects, and the level of play in Montreal declined; the club was not competitive in the 1959 and 1960 seasons. Following the 1960 season, the worst year in the Royals history at Delorimier, the team ceased operations. Delorimier Downs stood another nine years, and continued to be the site of cultural events in Montreal before its 1969 demolition to make way for Ecole Polyvalente Pierre Dupuis, which opened in 1971.

THE STADIUM

The baseball stadium, or any sports stadium, is more than just the place where professional athletic events take place: they are cultural centres as well. In his study of British football (soccer) stadiums, geographer John Bale suggests "these structures can be truly called the folk cathedrals of modern Britain," and that it is within the confines of stadiums "that modern rituals take place; it is the floodlights of the stadium, not the spire of the cathedral, that more often than not act as urban landmarks and points of reference...."¹⁷ In addition to sports as cultural events, Bruce Kuklick writes of the numerous other-than-baseball events that took place in Philadelphia's Shibe Park during

¹⁶ Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10-29.

¹⁷ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 2-3.

the 62 years it was open. Shibe was home to NFL football games, local high school baseball and football championships, presidential campaign rallies, several world series games, concerts, and prize boxing matches; in addition, he writes, "from the time businessmen constructed their parks until the 1960s, the buildings were central to community activity in the United States. Because few large public facilities existed, entrepreneurs frequently selected baseball stadiums to house civic functions."¹⁸

Attendance in stadiums is based upon a desire to take-in and be part of a spectacle: spectators are both viewers and producers of the spectacle. Bale asserts that "at its pinnacle football extends beyond the ritual and is undoubtedly a form of spectacle... and it could be argued that even at more modest levels the very existence of spectators encourages the spectacular"; moreover, the spectacle is not always what transpires on the playing field, but oftentimes includes the ambience of the crowd and their participation in the match.¹⁹ While integral to the spectacle, spectators, he contends, also learn implicitly from their experience in the stands: "the stadium... perform[s] an educational role—a school for the people—providing a physical-educative function including the inculcation of the idea of fair play." Unfortunately, he admits, "it did not take long for [stadium events] to become more analogous to the circus than to the schoolroom," which served only to enhance the attraction of the spectacle.²⁰

In addition to the cultural impact of the stadium, Bale notices both explicit and implicit segregation among crowds at football games. Explicit segregation, he writes, "by social class, or at least ability to pay, had become fully established by the First World War. In the inter-war years virtually nothing changed in this respect; those who could

¹⁸ Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season*, *passim.*, and quote from p. 82.

¹⁹ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 6 and 10.

²⁰ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 18.

afford them had seats but the majority stood."²¹ Implicit segregation, however, is not structured by ticket prices, separate structures for general admission, fences, or other barriers within the stadium; spectators segregate themselves through seat selection. While this phenomenon is little examined, Bale cites a study of Olympique Marseilles FC's home stadium in France:

...broken down by residential origin, the public in the stadium presents a faithful copy of the spatial structure of the city. The different districts are represented in proportion to their respective demographic importance.... The distribution of spectators in the stadium does not reflect the simple mechanisms of segregation by price of ticket... [and] ...although the prices are very similar, the east and west sides, and the north and south ends form clearly distinguished sociological universes.²²

Bale adds:

Spectators living in the north, mainly the working class, and those from the south—the upwardly mobile—occupy respective ends of the stadium; if they have been upwardly mobile and moved residences from one to the other it is reflected in their stadium location also. Black fans have a black quarter of the stadium as they have a black quarter of the city; even fans of particular players are concentrated in particular parts of the stadium.²³

Both types of segregation existed at Delorimier Downs: the bleachers were separated from the reserved seats by a chain-link fence, while fans seated in the reserved sections congregated in the wings of the stadium based upon religious, ethnic and linguistic divisions.²⁴

Divisions in ballparks have existed as long as the parks themselves. With respect to Brooklyn's Ebbets Field, David Nasaw writes that the separation of the stadium into expensive and cheap seats "resulted in de facto ethnic segregation," with Irish- and German-American spectators relegated to the bleachers, since they could not afford box

²¹ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 21.

²² C. Bromberger et al., "Allez L'O.M.! Forza Juve! The Passion for Football in Marseilles and Turin," Working Paper, Unit for Lay and Popular Culture, Manchester Polytechnic, 1991, cited in Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 24.

²³ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 24-26.

²⁴ See below, chapter five.

seats. When Negro League games were held in the park, blacks were largely limited to the "poorest seats" available, as the best seats were reserved for white customers.²⁵

While this type of racial and ethnic segregation did not exist in Montreal, certainly the fences separating the bleachers from reserved seats, as well as ticket prices, served to segregate the working class as well as children, from the middle-class spectators in the reserved and box seat sections of the stadium.

THE STADIUM AS BUSINESS: THE SUCCESS OF CITY-OWNED BALLPARKS

While ballparks serve as cultural centres, they are also important businesses in local economies. In *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, Arthur T. Johnson looks at the impact of minor league baseball teams and their stadiums on communities.²⁶ Many of the conclusions people make about minor league baseball, he suggests, are based on public perceptions of major league baseball, other big league sports, and high profile college sports in the United States.²⁷ Johnson suggests the real appeal of studies of stadiums will be for "local officials, economic development practitioners, planners, and leaders of chambers of commerce and of other community organizations who want to understand the risks and potential value of hosting a minor league baseball team and want to gain insight into the dynamics of city-team relations."²⁸

City-team relations, while an important aspect of the minor league game, are further enhanced by the impact of team and stadium development (or purchase) on the local economy. Johnson suggests that even at the minor league level, this development

²⁵ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 100. Ballpark historian Paul Munsey confirms that fences and other means of physically separating fans was and remains common in baseball stadiums (personal correspondence, February 28, 1998)

²⁶ Arthur T. Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, Sport and Society Series, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²⁷ Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, xi.

²⁸ Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, xii.

plays an important role in municipal economies, exceeding the obvious contribution of creating jobs and tourist interest:

Critics and advocates alike recognize that development projects may assist a community in achieving its economic development goals in less direct ways than creating jobs and producing a large multiplier effect. For example, a positive quality of life is an intangible that makes a community more attractive to businesses considering relocation and provides individuals and businesses already situated within the community reason to remain. Such projects as theaters, convention centers, civic centers, sports facilities, and symphony halls are defended in terms not only of their economic impact, but also the activities enhancing the community's way of life.²⁹

While it remains difficult to judge how much Delorimier Downs initially affected Montreal in this manner, it is reasonable to believe that once the Royals became part of the Dodgers' organization, these factors became more important. The Dodgers remain one of baseball's most popular teams, something that has not changed in decades; in the 1940s their popularity would have trickled down to Montreal as home of their top farm club.

Baseball in Philadelphia, Kuklick suggests, had a notable impact on the local economy, providing jobs in and around Shibe Park. Positions among the grounds crew, ushers, ticket sellers and takers, cleaning staff, and the separately organized concessions staff amounted to more than 400 jobs; outside the ballpark, local bar and restaurant operators not only earned higher income as a result of patrons of both their establishment and the ballpark, they also hired more people to deal with surges during stadium events. In addition to these jobs, neighbourhood residents made money through offering their driveways as parking spaces, and before the construction of the "Spite Fence" in 1935, residents whose homes overlooked right field sold spectators the right to sit on their rooftops, or at second-floor windows, to see baseball games.³⁰

²⁹ Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, 5.

³⁰ Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season, passim*. The Spite Fence, he writes, was constructed to help deal with the financial exigencies of the Depression, but was first conceived in the 1920s.

In 1953, Montreal sought a berth in the American League when it joined the group of cities trying to attract the St. Louis Browns.³¹ Part of the city's plan to lure the Browns to Montreal involved purchase of Delorimier Downs from the Brooklyn Dodgers. The bid for stadium ownership was driven by an understanding of the grandeur of the major league game compared to the minor league game. Johnson explains the difference:

A major league team is capable of attracting millions of fans to a stadium in one season, whereas even a successful minor league team rarely draws more than a few hundred thousand fans. A major league team attracts many fans from beyond its local [area], especially for post-season play, but this is not the case with a minor league team. Employees salaries of a major league team are significantly higher than those of a minor league team, most of whose employees are seasonal. A major league team brings national recognition to its host community.³²

While at least one of the Royals's seasons—1946, when Jackie Robinson was in the lineup—drew continent-wide attention to the city of Montreal, the Royals otherwise attracted the normal minor league level of attention.

With Robinson as part of the Montreal lineup, minor league promoters, who would otherwise need to enhance stadium and crowd ambience,³³ did not need to extend their efforts to make baseball more entertaining. Robinson's play sparked a keener interest in the club at home and on the road. Higher attendance, however, meant more than just increased ticket revenue: it increased concessions sales, which Johnson suggests can account for up to 25 percent of a team's revenue. "In some

Because fans could see games for much less than park admission from the rooftops, the fence was erected with a height that made impossible the viewing of games from these homes (73). The impact on the neighbourhood was considerable: "by 1929, the 'rooftop stands' produced substantial income for the block and raised its real estate value and rental values... In 1930, North Twentieth [Street] had wooden bleachers erected [on the roofs] along most of the street... A block committee fixed prices. During the [1929] World Series, estimates were that three thousand people per game collected in the houses, paying from seven to twenty-five dollars per head" (74); even in the throes of the Depression, baseball spectators provided a hefty income for the residents of the block. The Spite Fence changed that.

³¹ See chapter four.

³² Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, 7. See chapter three for details of Montreal's expected income.

circumstances," he adds, "tickets can... be given away, and a profit will still be realized."³⁴ In Montreal this was an important consideration in the 1953 bid for municipal ownership, as the city would, regardless of ticket revenue, benefit from the Amusement Tax which was charged on tickets whether sold or given away.³⁵

It is no small coincidence that as the city of Montreal made a bid not only for ownership of Delorimier Downs, but also to offer the stadium for rent to the St. Louis Browns, that the first major sports stadium built and owned by a city government was in its first year of operation. Prior to the 1953 season, Dean Baim points out, the city of Milwaukee financed the construction of County Stadium to host the Milwaukee Braves.³⁶ Baim explains that the benefits of government ownership are manifold. Among them is that governments have goals less driven by the entrepreneurial desire for profit; rather the goals of a city government include a boost in civic pride and the local economy.³⁷

Economic growth and a boost in employment come in three forms. The most visible is game-day revenue and employment: "proponents of stadium investments argue that the expenditures for tickets and concessions spur the local economy by creating jobs for stadium employees and demand local products." Not all of this would necessarily represent new input into local business, as some of the money would nevertheless be spent on other forms of entertainment if baseball (or football, etc.) were not available in the city. What does provide a stimulus for the local economy, however, is the expanded following of a team, and the travel and other expenses incurred by those who journey from other regions to attend events in the stadium. Regardless of economic

³³ Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, 13-17.

³⁴ Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, 25.

³⁵ See chapter four.

³⁶ Dean V. Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, Contributions in Economics and Economic History, Number 151, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 21.

³⁷ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 1.

input from other regions, Baim reminds us that "this... does not translate into 100 percent of the game-day expenses as being new spending."³⁸

The second source of increased economic activities comes from the influx of customers in ancillary industries such as hotels and restaurants. Baim suggests that stadium sites are often chosen to enliven the neighbourhood economy, "converting a blighted area into an attractive site catering to stadium patrons."³⁹ The importance of local businesses is apparent in Bruce Kuklick's discussion of the area around Shibe Park: many bars and restaurants thrived on the business generated by the stadium.⁴⁰ The third source of economic boost comes from the changed perception outsiders have of the city as a destination. Major league teams, Baim writes, "can make the city more attractive to vacationers, convention planners, and firms choosing a city in which to relocate if [the city] offers the amenity of major league sports."⁴¹ This last notion was not lost on city planners in Montreal in 1953 when the city hoped to become home to major league baseball.⁴²

Chapter three of the present work explores Jackie Robinson's minor league baseball career with respect to the reception he received from the Anglophone Montreal media, and charts the changes in how sportswriters portrayed him throughout the 1946 season. The chapter shows that Montreal, far from being the safe-haven for blacks that some commentators suggest it was, was hesitant in welcoming Robinson. As the season progressed, and Robinson's level of play rose to the point where he was expected to be called-up to play for the Dodgers, his skin colour became less important in baseball-

³⁸ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 176-177.

³⁹ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 177.

⁴⁰ Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season*, *passim*.

⁴¹ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 177. Admittedly, there are numerous other factors involved in these decisions, but Baim's point remains: the major league status of the city is a positive aspect of a city's character.

⁴² See chapter four. While the city had been home to the NHL Canadiens for decades, the profile of the NHL was not on par with that of Major League Baseball as it is today.

related stories. Chapter four examines the business side of running Delorimier Downs through the records held in the City of Montreal Archives, with particular attention to stadiums as municipal investments. It focuses on two years—1936 and 1953—when the city, once by default and once by choice, nearly became the owner of the facility.⁴³ In those two years, extensive documentation was prepared showing the stadium's profitability as municipal investment; the data collected also reveals the potential of the stadium as a largely profitable business with or without municipal ownership. Chapter five surveys a number of cultural and other than baseball events that took place in the stadium during the course of its existence: part of Montreal's tercentenary celebrations; a mass-wedding of 106 members of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique; rallies held to welcome King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Canada, as well as to welcome home Montreal-based regiments at the conclusion of the Second World War. The chapter is largely based upon newspaper research using English- and French-language Montreal newspapers, as well as a small number of interviews conducted with Montrealers who attended sports and cultural events in the stadium from the mid-1940s until the 1960s.

Delorimier Downs was a vibrant part of Montreal's cultural life and economy during its 41-year existence. As such, the work of John Bale and Bruce Kuklick provide useful insight into the phenomenon of sports stadiums becoming centres of mass culture. The ballpark was indeed conceived as more than the home of the Montreal Royals, but the plethora of activities that took place within its confines well exceeded expectations, making it an important cultural centre in the city of Montreal. As a business, Delorimier Downs attracted the interest of local entrepreneurs as well as the

⁴³ In 1936, the Montreal Exhibition Company, owners of the stadium and the Royals, owed back taxes to the city, and defaulted, losing the building and the team to auction. In 1953, the city chose to pursue the purchase of the stadium and the team as a means of making a bid for the Browns. See chapter four.

city itself. While never owned by the city, investigation of potential municipal ownership in 1936 and again in 1953 underline the importance of minor league baseball in local economies as well as the role of municipal ownership discussed by Arthur T. Johnson and Dean Baim respectively.

Chapter 3- From 'Coloured Comet' to Ballplayer: The Acceptance of Baseball's First Black in Montreal, 1946.¹

The appeal of Baseball is not limited to any racial group. The Negro takes great interest in baseball and is, and always has been, among the most loyal supporters of Professional Baseball.

Major League Steering Committee, 1946.²

I have always suspected that Jackie Robinson did more for Montreal than Montreal ever did for him. We so often congratulate ourselves for [being] 'the city that made it all possible' that we tend to forget that, in the final analysis, it was Robinson alone who could have done it.

Ted Blackman, *Montreal Gazette*, 1972.³

On October 23, 1945, the North American baseball world was shocked by the announcement made at Montreal's Delorimier Downs and Brooklyn's Ebbets Field: Jackie Robinson would be playing for Montreal in 1946. Player signings did not usually generate this kind of fanfare, but Robinson was the first black player to sign an organized baseball contract in the twentieth century. The signing put Robinson—a star athlete at UCLA,⁴ and most recently shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League—in a position to become the first black in the major leagues. Montreal had been Brooklyn's top farm club since 1940, and was the last minor league stop for prospects before promotion to the Dodgers. Robinson's life since 1945 is well

¹ Note: all quoted instances of "color" and "colored" have been changed to "colour" and "coloured" to allow for consistency with the text. In addition, all original use of "Negro" has been retained.

² The Major League Steering Committee, "The Race Question," in Jules Tygiel ed., *The Jackie Robinson Reader: Perspectives on an American Hero*, (New York: Dutton, 1997), 130. The "Race Question," was a section of a larger report; its authorship is unknown, but Tygiel believes it was written by Larry McPhail, at the time the owner of the New York Yankees.

³ *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1972.

⁴ Robinson did not finish his education at UCLA: he dropped out when he was unable to further finance his studies, and sought work to help support his mother. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, expanded edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 61.

documented,⁵ and his season with Montreal is often discussed within the framework of North American integration. Jules Tygiel covers Robinson's year with the Royals in *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, but the chapter dedicated to his Montreal sojourn follows the general trend of Robinson literature.⁶ The present chapter is centred on how Robinson was received by the Anglophone Montreal press, and focuses exclusively on the day-to-day writings of sportswriters at the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Montreal Star*.

From the moment news of Robinson's signing broke in Montreal, sportswriters in the city, like their colleagues across the continent, doubted Robinson would be more than a fleeting memory by the time the 1946 International League season came to its conclusion. *Montreal Star* sports columnist Baz O'Meara waited two months before proffering his feelings to readers, carefully hiding them within his predictions for the coming International League season: "...Jackie Robinson will be farmed out and Stan Bréard will play shortstop [for the Royals] again."⁷ Across town, at the *Montreal Gazette*, the tone was notably different. *Gazette* sports editor Dink Carroll seemed proud that Montreal would be the testing ground for baseball's integration; not once did he doubt Robinson's playing ability, nor the decision of the Dodger organization for his signing. Yet Carroll and the *Gazette* sports staff remained noticeably quiet on the whole affair, and generally remained that way throughout Robinson's tenure in Montreal.

⁵ The National Baseball Hall of Fame maintains a "selective bibliography" of Robinson related histories. The list currently indexes 43 books and 148 articles.

⁶ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 120-143.

⁷ *Montreal Star*, December 31, 1945. It should be noted that by coincidence or design O'Meara's daily column, "The Passing Sports Show," did not appear from late October 1945 to late December of the same year. There is no mention in the *Star* explaining his absence.

"THE BIGGEST BASEBALL STORY TO EVER HIT THIS TOWN"

The ceremonial signing of Robinson to a Royals contract at Delorimier Downs seemed unimportant to most of Montreal.⁸ The day before Robinson's signing, Royals president Hector Racine informed the Montreal press of a news conference to be held at the stadium at five o'clock on October 23. While making the announcement, Racine was badgered by reporters who wanted more information about the conference. Racine reluctantly told them "the whole story will break before a press gathering at the ball park offices... I can't tell you much more than that." He did, however, remind the curious reporters to have a photographer in their company when they arrived at the press conference. In response, Racine was pushed for more information. Annoyed, Racine retorted "no... I can't reveal any more. This story will break simultaneously from New York and Montreal at five o'clock... it's the biggest baseball story to ever hit this town."⁹ The press speculated the news might be 1945 Royals manager Bruno Betzel being rehired by the team or the city being awarded a major league club for the 1946 season; no one could fathom a black player signing a Royals contract.

Montrealers were rather unconcerned with the true news when it broke. "Local fans," Dink Carroll wrote in the *Gazette*, "didn't seem to appreciate how monumental and revolutionary a move the Brooklyn and Montreal ball clubs had made." When fans called the sports desk for details of the big news, they seemed disappointed. Most were let down because they had hoped a major league team would be the tenants at Delorimier in 1946. Their reaction, Carroll opined, "surely proves the absolute absence here of anti-Negro sentiment among sports fans, which is what Mr. Rickey doubtless had in mind when he chose Montreal as the locale for the history making experiment...."¹⁰ In reality,

⁸ The signing was ceremonial insofar as the deal between Jackie Robinson and the Dodgers had been secretly in place since August 28, 1945. Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 64-67.

⁹ *Montreal Star*, October 23, 1945.

¹⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1945; and *Montreal Star*, October 23, 1945.

it was the letdown, not local tolerance of blacks, that influenced the reaction. While Carroll was making these remarks, writers at the *Star* did not offer any reasons why Montreal had been chosen. They merely pointed out the Royals were breaking "baseball's 'unwritten law,'" and otherwise offered only a factual presentation of the story.¹¹

BASEBALL'S REACTION

While Carroll and the rest of Montreal, as he saw it, remained open to Robinson playing for the Royals in 1946, reactions around baseball were not necessarily of a welcoming variety. International League president and former Montreal field manager Frank Shaughnessy avoided making a personal judgement: "there's no rule in baseball that says a Negro can't play with a club in organized ball. As long as the fellow is of the right type and can get along with other players, he can play ball. I don't believe," he added, "that much prejudice exists any longer... such things are more political than social now."¹²

While Shaughnessy was ambivalent, Joseph Brown, club secretary of Montreal's International League rival Buffalo Bisons, was blunt: "it's very surprising—it's hard to understand. I can't understand it."¹³ Both the *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Star* shared remarks from around organized baseball. Many of those cited were ambivalent, while others passed blame for baseball's exclusion of blacks to the minor leagues. Very few commentators offered unambiguous praise for the signing. The reaction of Roy Hamey, president of the American Association, rival league to the International League,

¹¹ *Montreal Star*, October 24, 1945.

¹² *Montreal Gazette*, October 24, 1945.

¹³ *Montreal Gazette*, October 24, 1945.

prompted Lloyd McGowan to write "that professional jealousy is rampant."¹⁴ Clark Griffith, owner of the American League Washington Senators, suggested organized baseball should honour the contracts between black players and the Negro League clubs they played for:

The only question that occurs to me is whether organized ball has the right to sign players from the Negro League. That is a well established league and organized baseball shouldn't take their players. The Negro League is entitled to full recognition as a full-fledged baseball organization.¹⁵

Griffith was not alone in founding his objection to the signing on business principles.

Nearly a year later, the Major League Steering Committee would appeal to major league teams to avoid stealing players from the Negro Leagues.

[The] Negro leagues cannot exist without good players. If they cannot field good teams, they will not continue to attract fans who click the turnstiles. Continued prosperity depends upon improving standards of play. If the major leagues and big minors of Professional Baseball raid these leagues and take their best players—the Negro leagues will eventually fold up—the investments of their club owners will be wiped out—and the lot of professional Negro players will lose their jobs. The Negroes who own and operate these clubs do not want to part with their outstanding players—no one accuses them of racial discrimination.¹⁶

In addition, the committee upheld the notion that businesses such as Yankee Stadium had a substantial amount to lose should the Negro leagues dissolve. "The Yankee Organization..." it suggested, "nets nearly \$100,000.00 a year from rentals and concessions in connection with Negro league games at Yankee Stadium...." A solution to the problem, the report added, should be "compatible with good business judgement and the principles of good sportsmanship."¹⁷

Dink Carroll observed that many people in organized baseball, who refused to accept blame for the absence of blacks, "claimed... hostility to coloured players didn't

¹⁴ *Montreal Star*, December 7, 1975.

¹⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, October 24, 1945.

¹⁶ The Major League Steering Committee, "The Race Question," 132-133.

originate with the club-owners or with the leagues but with the players themselves.” Some players, he felt, simply refused to play with blacks because of their Southern upbringing. Others, also from the South, often explained “no matter what their private opinions happened to be, they would be ostracized by folks in their home towns” if they played on the same team with a black.¹⁸ Indeed, many players, past and present, were opposed to Robinson and other blacks playing organized baseball, but Robinson and Branch Rickey were ready for opposition regardless of how it was manifested.

MONTREAL: SPRING TRAINING AND THE EARLY 1946 SEASON

With the 1946 spring training season about to begin, the *Gazette* had little to say about the upcoming International League season—it was instead concerned with the exploits of the Montreal Canadiens. As early as January 29, however, the *Star's* Baz O'Meara was prognosticating again. O'Meara had already expressed his doubt in Robinson's ability to stay with Montreal, and when it was announced that a second black, pitcher John Wright, would join the Royals (ostensibly to share a room with Robinson on road trips), O'Meara opined that Wright would quickly find his way down the St. Lawrence River to Trois Rivières, where the local class B team was part of the Dodgers organization.¹⁹ Like many detractors of the move to integrate baseball, O'Meara continued to voice his opposition through commentary on the playing ability of the men rather than their skin colour. Another Montreal sports writer, Al Parsley of the Montreal *Herald*, himself shocked by how dark Robinson's skin was, found it surprising that “[Robinson] spoke with that easy fluency of an educated man,” and that he

¹⁷ The Major League Steering Committee, “The Race Question,” 133.

¹⁸ Montreal *Gazette*, October 24, 1945.

¹⁹ Montreal *Star*, January 29, 1946.

demonstrated neither cockiness nor braggadocio.²⁰ Through February, however, Robinson fell out of the media spotlight in Montreal, as local heroes—French-Canadians Jean-Pierre Roy and Roland Gladu—were rumored to be leaving the team for a place in the Mexican League.²¹

Shortly after the Roy-Gladu affair, Robinson and Wright arrived at the Royals training camp. "From here on," Baz O'Meara remarked, "there is going to be a lot of attention paid to the Royals because Jackie Robinson is making the great experiment."²² A few days later, Robinson made headlines when he went hitless in his debut with the team.²³ O'Meara jumped on the black player's hitless performance with a hint of optimism: "there is unusual silence about Jackie Robinson from the Royal camp... [he] may be one of those good field no hit fellows," suggesting Robinson was solid defensively, but a liability offensively.²⁴ John Wright, whom O'Meara had openly doubted in late January, was described as "impressive" in his first appearance on the mound; he was getting less publicity than Robinson, "but could turn out to be a winner in the International League."²⁵ After his debut, Wright philosophized on his role as one of the first blacks in organized baseball and on playing in the South: "I am a southerner. I have always lived in the South. So I must know what is coming. I have been black for 27 years and I will remain like that for a very long time."²⁶

Wright may have been accustomed to Southern prejudice and segregation, but the Montreal press had difficulty understanding when it meant cancellation of Royals

²⁰ *Montreal Herald*, October 25, 1945.

²¹ *Montreal Star*, February 6 – 28, 1946.

²² *Montreal Star*, March 1, 1946.

²³ An Associated Press wire article merited a rather large headline in the *Star* while the text of the article was itself short and focused only on Robinson's failure at the plate. *Montreal Star*, March 7, 1946.

²⁴ *Montreal Star*, March 9, 1946.

²⁵ *Montreal Star*, March 9, 1946.

²⁶ *Montreal Star*, March 15, 1946.

games. After a game between the Royals and the Jersey City Giants was called off in Jacksonville, because blacks and whites were not permitted to congregate on the same playing field at the same time, O'Meara began to feel differently about the black players. He noted with some doubt that many sportswriters simply wrote off Robinson and Wright with the excuse there was no room for them on the Royals roster. Many of the American journalists covering spring training, the *Montreal Star* writer noted, were not fazed by cancelled games. They also expected the black players to fail. The first few game cancellations heightened the Montreal writers' awareness of the race issue. Taking a stand, O'Meara wrote: "we think it is a terrible thing, but then we have no problem like that [in Montreal], and we can hardly appraise these things from an American standpoint." In this respect, he judged Montreal to be quite liberal in its attitude towards blacks, and praised the Montreal and Brooklyn teams for their efforts.²⁷ Concern over the issue faded quickly. By the time the Royals cancelled three of their remaining preseason games—in Jacksonville, Florida; Savannah, Georgia; and Richmond, Virginia—the Montreal press had lost interest in the story.²⁸ Robinson and Wright were not only removed from the lineup of the game at Sanford, they were removed from the ball park. By this time, with the season opening game at Jersey City only ten days away, Montreal sportswriters chose to wait on Robinson's debut before making further comment.

SENSATION OR FLUKE: ROBINSON'S FIRST WEEK IN ORGANIZED BASEBALL

The day Jackie Robinson made his debut in the International League, Baz O'Meara and the *Montreal Star* dramatized the event as "another emancipation day for the Negro race...."²⁹ Accompanying the *Star's* opening day coverage was a collage of

²⁷ *Montreal Star*, March 24, 1946. In addition, see Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 108.

²⁸ *Montreal Gazette*, April 6, 1946.

²⁹ *Montreal Star*, April 18, 1946.

photos depicting Abraham Lincoln, Branch Rickey, Hector Racine, Jackie Robinson, and Royals field manager Clay Hopper. The caption suggests that Lincoln, whose image overwhelms the others, was the “‘champion of freedom’ casting a benediction over the men to the forefront in the move that has focused all the eyes of baseball on the Royals and Robinson.” Moreover, the caption adds, manager Hopper, a Southerner, “defies an American custom by looking upon Robinson as a ‘regular fella and a regular member of his baseball club.’”³⁰ While O’Meara, the leading columnist at the *Star*, seemed to be warming to Robinson late in spring training, he still doubted his playing ability, particularly his hitting: “Robinson may not be a great all-round player,” he noted, “but on the say-so of Clay Hopper he is an excellent defensive player, [and] a streak on the bases. He has yet to prove himself as a high hitter.”³¹ The *Gazette*, on the other hand, was notably mum on the day of Robinson and the Royals’ first 1946 game; that would change after the game.

“Negro Gets 4 Hits as Jersey Routed” the *Gazette* proclaimed on April 19, 1946, glorifying Robinson’s opening day performance. Robinson, Dink Carroll wrote, “broke through baseball’s unwritten colour barrier today with a dazzling .800 batting performance for Montreal.”³² At the *Star*, however, Baz O’Meara was unimpressed. “Everybody in baseball,” he complained, “is talking about the sensational debut of Jackie Robinson at Jersey City. His home run, his four hits, [and] his base running have evoked wide comment. [But] one game isn’t a season.” In Montreal, he added, there was widespread support among long-time Royals fans, most of whom were thrilled by Robinson’s opening day performance. O’Meara unwillingly admitted that the April 18 performance made Robinson seem capable, but underlined his doubts, writing “you can’t

³⁰ *Montreal Star*, April 18, 1946.

³¹ *Montreal Star*, April 18, 1946.

³² *Montreal Gazette*, April 19, 1946.

entirely judge his future on this [one] game."³³ Two days later he opined that the Royals' roster would look different soon, "because this one wearing colours is bound to be experimental."³⁴ O'Meara's colleague at the *Star*, Lloyd McGowan, held a notably different opinion of Robinson, and wondered "what have we got on the ball club besides Jack Roosevelt Robinson," after the team was easily beaten in Syracuse.³⁵ In the meantime, Dink Carroll speculated players were not saying if they were against having black teammates. He suspected many of them were indeed opposed. "Quite a few of them," he explained, "are from the South and have been brought up to feel superior to the Negro race"; they remained quiet, Carroll added, because "baseball is their bread and butter, and they aren't likely to risk the displeasure of Mr. Rickey by being openly hostile."³⁶

IF HE PLAYS WILL THEY COME? ROBINSON'S DELORIMIER DOWNS DEBUT

In the days leading up to the May 1, 1946, Royals home opener, sportswriters pondered what the attendance would be like. Robinson, many felt, was already a drawing card in the International League, and would continue to be one in Montreal. On April 30, O'Meara suggested that a season gate exceeding 400,000 was possible based on the turnout at other International League parks during the opening week of the season. McGowan added that among the reasons for a strong opening day crowd would be the Montreal "unveiling of John Roosevelt Robinson, dark keystone [second base] king for the nonce." Contrary to preseason speculation about Robinson's playing ability,

³³ *Montreal Star*, April 20, 1946.

³⁴ *Montreal Star*, April 22, 1946. Despite his pessimism, O'Meara recognized that Robinson was also a drawing card at International League ball parks. O'Meara later pointed out that despite an expected fan boycott in Baltimore—where the worst spectator abuse was predicted—Robinson's first game in the southernmost city in the league drew over 25,000 fans, *Montreal Star*, April 29, 1946. Lloyd McGowan also noted 40 percent of the Baltimore crowd was black.

³⁵ *Montreal Star*, April 25, 1946.

³⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, April 20, 1946.

McGowan noted that he was hitting strong without impressing much in the field—although “there [had not] been much wrong with his fielding either,” the Montreal writer admitted.³⁷ His fine play alone was enough to make him an attraction. A week prior to the game, the *Gazette* suggested Robinson could attract a large crowd, but that the novelty of seeing a black player would soon wear off.³⁸

When game day arrived, Delorimier hosted one of its largest opening day crowds. Lloyd McGowan wrote that “a combination of sunshine, Jack Robinson and the 1946 version of the Royal Family brought out a fine opening day crowd this afternoon.” Interest in the ball club and its new star was so strong that local hockey superstar Maurice ‘Rocket’ Richard was anonymous as part of the crowd as it filtered through the gates.³⁹ Apparently writing on behalf of the *Gazette* sports staff, Carroll denied the black player was the reason for the crowd: “some believe J. Robinson put them in there, but we don’t agree.”⁴⁰ Whether the black players were responsible for the size of the crowd remained arguable. Their popularity, however, was certain: both Robinson and Wright spent an hour after the first game giving autographs before finally managing to escape the stadium through a side door for the comfort of hotel rooms.⁴¹

The *Gazette* may have downplayed Robinson’s popularity, but fans no doubt attended that afternoon to see him play. He was more than a spectacle as his batting and fielding had proven to that point in the season. The approach taken by the *Gazette* can only suggest its sportswriters worked under a policy that forbade them too much

³⁷ *Montreal Star*, April 30, 1946.

³⁸ *Montreal Gazette*, April 23, 1946.

³⁹ *Montreal Star*, May 1, 1946. Royals general manager Melvin Jones, later said: “I don’t want to take anything away from Robby, but he is not the reason for the big crowds.” It was the team’s winning record which fans found most enticing. Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, 130.

⁴⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, May 2 and 3, 1946.

⁴¹ *Montreal Star*, May 2, 1946.

commentary on the black ball player.⁴² At the same time, when sports editor Dink Carroll commented on Robinson, or baseball integration in general, in his daily column, "Playing the Field," his remarks appear genuinely positive and supportive of black players and the Dodgers organization for making the move to ending baseball segregation. But was Montreal as accepting as Carroll made it seem?

Montreal in the 1940s was home to only 10,000 blacks, and a "relative absence of prejudice."⁴³ This lack of prejudice, according to Concordia University professor of history Graeme Decarie, who was raised in Montreal, only existed because there were so few blacks in the city, and because they were ghettoized: "I think people exaggerate the impact of Robinson in Montreal. The reality is that in Montreal in those years blacks were very heavily discriminated against. They were not allowed in lots of restaurants, they were not allowed in most night clubs, they couldn't get into most hotels, they could not rent in most districts, they could not even buy houses in most districts; and that was true at least into the 1960s."⁴⁴ Indeed, Robin Winks notes that as late as the early 1940s, for example, "only one hotel in Montreal could be depended upon not to turn Negroes away."⁴⁵ A few years later, however, Montreal became the accepting home of Jackie Robinson. Winks writes:

... Canadians were quick to point out that in 1945 when Branch Rickey, President of the Brooklyn Dodgers, decided to introduce Negroes into major league baseball in the United States, it was to the Montreal Royals, a farm club of the Dodgers, to which he sent Jack Roosevelt Robinson and Johnny R. [Wright]... Robinson found that Canadians regarded him 'as a United States citizen who happened to have coloured skin'; and although he went to the Dodgers in 1947, he regarded Montreal as a 'paradise.'⁴⁶

⁴² Without deliberately ignoring Wright, he truly became marginal to the "great experiment." His place on the Montreal roster was to be "a Robinson buffer and his roommate," *Montreal Star*, May 2, 1946.

⁴³ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 123.

⁴⁴ Graeme Decarie interview, February 9, 1998, Montreal, Quebec.

⁴⁵ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2 ed., (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997 (1971)), 420.

⁴⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 462.

As a result, Decarie claims, "Montreal takes great pride in responding to Jackie Robinson; the reality is that Montreal was not a more tolerant city than most North American cities. It was very tolerant of blacks wearing major-league [or minor league] baseball uniforms, apart from that, no [Montrealers were not tolerant]."⁴⁷ These sentiments are not notably apparent in either the *Montreal Star* or the *Montreal Gazette*, but may have played a role in the obvious silence in the *Gazette*. At the *Star*, room for indirect criticism may also have been facilitated by Montreal's general standing on the issue.

During the first two weeks the Royals played at home, the team generated many headlines. Robinson missed some action with a sore wrist, but when he was in the lineup, Lloyd McGowan noted, his playing ability "is a pleasant surprise to everybody, [and he is] the strongest man in the inner guard [infield] at the moment... pivoted on three double plays," in the previous game.⁴⁸ As Baz O'Meara had predicted, John Wright did not last with the Royals, and was demoted to Trois Rivières. Roy Partlow, another veteran Negro leagues pitcher, was signed to replace Wright, making him, the *Gazette* boasted, "the third coloured player to crash the ranks of organized baseball."⁴⁹ Controversy struck the team when shortstop Stan Bréard disappeared to entertain offers to play in the Mexican League. In addition, rumors of local hero Jean-Pierre Roy's demotion from Brooklyn again amounted to speculation that he too would jump to the outlaw league in search of more money.⁵⁰ No longer concerned about the attraction of these French-Canadian stars—Robinson was draw enough—the Royals put an end to

⁴⁷ Graeme Decarie interview, February 9, 1998, Montreal, Quebec.

⁴⁸ *Montreal Star*, May 11 and May 15, 1946.

⁴⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, May 15, 1946.

⁵⁰ Leagues operating outside the structure of organized baseball were deemed "outlaw" by the Commissioner's Office.

"L'affaire Bréard" on May 16, 1946, by selling the shortstop to the San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League.⁵¹

Once the affair was behind the team, Robinson grabbed headlines for his stellar play. "Jack Robinson High Above Fondest Hopes" blared the sports page of the *Star*. Lloyd McGowan praised Robinson, writing that his "steady performance through the dozen games [played during the club's first home stand of the season] was definitely a rave. He has played far above fandom's [*sic.*] fondest hopes. Nobody can chase Robby off his keystone job—nobody you've seen playing baseball lately."⁵² This was the *Montreal Star's* first unambiguously supportive report on Robinson. His great play, and his ability to put aside the race issue was beginning to turn heads in the city. Twelve days later McGowan again expressed strong support for Robinson's play. What was unique about the article, however, was not the scribe's support for the Royal second baseman, but the absence of references to his skin colour.⁵³

DOES SKIN COLOUR REALLY MATTER?

When news of Jackie Robinson's signing first broke, hardly a paragraph about him could be read without some reference to his skin colour. Critics of the move saw him as simply lacking the talent to make it in organized baseball, but those remarks were paired with anti-black sentiments. In Montreal—where Baz O'Meara was at first unwilling to support Robinson, where Lloyd McGowan constantly reminded readers Robinson was black, and where the entire *Montreal Gazette* sports staff avoided mention of the black player—skin colour mattered. In December, 1945, McGowan referred to Robinson as a "dark boy" in reference to American Association president Roy Hamey's remarks about

⁵¹ *Montreal Star* and *Montreal Gazette*, May 10 through May 17, 1946.

⁵² *Montreal Star*, May 16, 1946.

⁵³ *Montreal Star*, May 28, 1946.

the player.⁵⁴ Robinson and Wright were often referred to as "boy" or "lad." In addition, Robinson was portrayed as the "dusky second baseman", "Coloured Comet", "Dark Poison", "Dark Danger", by the Montreal papers.⁵⁵

As the 1946 season progressed, and it became increasingly apparent that Robinson was a star player, he was no longer described by his skin colour, doubters became colour-blind when a pennant-win seemed possible. Moreover, Montreal writers, especially McGowan, leapt to Robinson's defense when he was criticized by baseball personalities and media in other cities. In early June, when Robinson sat out some games with a sore ankle, McGowan was upset by criticism of the player. "Down here [in Baltimore] they seem all too eager to belittle Robinson... there was a blast at the Keystone King in the *Evening Sun* yesterday," McGowan informed Montreal readers. Criticism ranged wide on the subject of Robinson's so-called weak ankles: "In a second-hand quote from Abe Saperstein, who promotes the east-west Negro game in Chicago, the Sun says: 'Robinson has always had weak ankles. Anyhow, there were three better shortstops in the Negro American League last year; Rickey took Robinson because of his college background.' ... Sounds sappy Mr. Saperstein," McGowan jokingly concluded; but there was no joking in his defense of Robinson, and he clearly endorsed him by this point in the season.⁵⁶

At the same time, Dink Carroll was beginning to worry that Robinson would not last the season in Montreal after all; he thought he might be called up to play for the Dodgers.⁵⁷ Unknown to Carroll, and perhaps most of baseball, Branch Rickey planned to

⁵⁴ *Montreal Star*, December 7, 1945.

⁵⁵ "Coloured Comet" was most popular, as both the *Gazette* and the *Star* referred to Robinson as such. "Coloured Comet" first appeared on June 4, 1946, when an editorial cartoon in the *Gazette* depicted Robinson under the heading "Coloured Comet."

⁵⁶ *Montreal Star*, June 7, 1946.

⁵⁷ *Montreal Gazette*, June 5, 1946.

let Robinson play the entire season in Montreal regardless of his play.⁵⁸ Robinson may have been a prospect, but he was still sitting out games a few days later, as ankle problems continued to keep him out of the lineup. Resting his injury, Robinson posed for a Montreal sculptor; in reporting this to fans, Lloyd McGowan joked that “certainly Jackie is no ‘bust’ for the Royals.”⁵⁹ McGowan enjoyed using humor, but his increasing support for the black player was indeed sincere. When Robinson was reported back in the Royals lineup later in the month, Carroll again speculated on Dodger call-ups. This time, however, there was no mention of Robinson.⁶⁰ Because of the secrecy within which Rickey enveloped the integration scheme, it is unlikely Carroll was aware of the plan to leave Robinson on the Royals’s roster. More likely, Carroll expressed his hope to see Robinson stay in Montreal by not citing him as a Dodger prospect; after only two months of the International League season, no one in Montreal wanted to see Robinson depart. In mid-July, McGowan also speculated on Robinson’s prospects for promotion in response to rumors circulating around the city (and the ballpark). There was “little ground for it though,” McGowan explained, “Jackie could hardly supplant [Dodger second baseman] Ed Stanky, and he is no longer regarded as a shortstop.”⁶¹

Around the International League many hoped Robinson would stay in Montreal. Despite opposition to black ball players in some cities—notably Baltimore and Syracuse⁶²—attendance was up in the International League for 1946, an increase owing to post-war enthusiasm,⁶³ and the presence of Robinson. In Baltimore, for example, Robinson made a dramatic impact on attendance. When the Royals visited Maryland to

⁵⁸ Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, 138.

⁵⁹ *Montreal Star*, June 11, 1946.

⁶⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, June 29, 1946.

⁶¹ *Montreal Star*, July 15, 1946.

⁶² See Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, 120-143.

play four games over the weekend of June 7, 8, and 9, 1946, Robinson was not in the lineup owing to his ankle injury, and the four game series drew 30,000 fans.⁶⁴ Seven weeks later, the Royals returned to Baltimore for another four-game weekend series with the Orioles. This time, *with* Robinson in the lineup, 64,000 Baltimore fans turned out to see the two teams.⁶⁵ A week later, Dink Carroll finally admitted Robinson was a drawing card: "everyone wants to see [him] play."⁶⁶ The impact of the black player(s) on box office income across the league no doubt had even those most opposed to skin colour interested in black players' ability to attract fans; surely International League team accountants welcomed his presence in the Montreal lineup, and hoped he would remain for the duration of the season.

In Montreal, while the Royals and their black star were popular, all-black baseball was not. According to the *Star*, Delorimier Downs was home to a team called the Montreal Crawfords of the United States League. This short-lived league was organized by Branch Rickey as a scouting ground for choosing black players with major league talent.⁶⁷ The July 21, 1946, doubleheader between the Montreal club and the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers is the only time the league was mentioned in a Montreal paper.⁶⁸ The double bill at Delorimier only attracted 1,395 fans, significantly less than the "large crowd expected,"⁶⁹ and far behind the Royals's 1946 season average of 5,200.

⁶³ See Bruce Kuklick *To Every Thing A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 100; and Patrick Harrigan, *The Detroit Tigers: Club and Community, 1945-1995* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 13.

⁶⁴ *Montreal Star*, June 10, 1946.

⁶⁵ *Montreal Star*, July 29, 1946.

⁶⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, August 2, 1946.

⁶⁷ See Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 47-70; Clyde Sukeforth as told to Donald Honig, "Oh, They Were a Pair"; Arthur Mann, "The Negro and Baseball: The National Game Faces a Racial Challenge Long Ignored," and "Jackie Robinson's Signing: The Untold Story," John Thorn and Jules Tygiel, ed., *The Jackie Robinson Reader*, 65-70, 71-80 and 81-93.

⁶⁸ The game was announced on the *Montreal Star* sports page on July 12, 1946, and later reported on July 22, 1946.

⁶⁹ *Montreal Star*, July 12 and 22, 1946.

GROWING SUPPORT

Support for Robinson in the *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Star* continued to grow as the season progressed and the Royals seemed assured of a second consecutive league pennant. On July 27, McGowan's daily article boasted "Robinson Has Silenced His Critics for Keeps," and noted that while many people had doubted the black player during spring training, "Jackie is here to stay."⁷⁰ As the season rolled into August, McGowan's praise for Robinson was a daily occurrence. At the *Gazette*, Dink Carroll was also on the Robinson bandwagon: "There doesn't seem anything he can't do... he is a superb fielder."⁷¹ McGowan added that there is "nothing left for him to do"⁷²; he had shown people he could hit and field as well as any player in baseball. The Montreal writers were both proud and thrilled to have Robinson as a member of the Montreal club. Robinson was no longer the "coloured" star of the Royals, the *Gazette* boasted the feats of "Flashy Jackie Robinson" after he stole home during the Royals's August 22 game.⁷³ McGowan not only sung praise for Robinson on the pages of the *Montreal Star*, but also *The Sporting News*:

Robby went on a rampage when the club returned home [from a road trip], August 4. Over a 10-game stretch, he banged 22 hits in 39 times at the plate officially and boosted his average to .371 through August 14. He passed Eddie Robinson of Baltimore and Al Clark of Newark while en route to the league summit... Robinson's defensive play has been steady from opening day. In his first 110 games, he was charged with only seven fielding errors. Through one stretch, from May 7 to July 23, he didn't have a bobble... All pitchers, whether righthanders or southpaws, have looked pretty much alike to Robby in recent games. He can hit the curve, and while a natural righthanded pull hitter, he can powder the ball to all fields and has proved that he can hit behind the runner....⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Montreal Star*, July 27, 1946.

⁷¹ *Montreal Gazette*, August 2, 1946.

⁷² *Montreal Star*, August 10, 1946.

⁷³ *Montreal Gazette*, August 23, 1946.

⁷⁴ Lloyd McGowan, "Robinson, Topping Int. Hitters, Rated Ready for Dodgers in '47," *The Sporting News*, August 21, 1946. Source: *The Sporting News Archives*.

While McGowan's exuberance was somewhat muted for the American audience of *The Sporting News*, it continued to pour onto the pages of the *Star*, particularly after the playoffs started.

When the Royals clinched the league championship, advancing to the Little World Series, the team made front page headlines for the first time that season, and Robinson was noted as the hero of the game as he made four of Montreal's eleven hits.⁷⁵ As winners of the International League playoffs, the Royals were matched with the Louisville Colonels, who hosted the opening games of the series. The games in Louisville marked one of the rare times a black athlete had played alongside whites that far south; there was some doubt Robinson would be in the Montreal lineup.⁷⁶

After the Royals split the first two games of the series in Louisville, Dink Carroll explained that Robinson received a mixed greeting of boos and cheers from the grandstand, with "the customers in the plush seats... applauding."⁷⁷ Carroll also explained the odd situation faced by blacks in Louisville to his Montreal readers:

The Jim Crow law is only half in effect in Louisville. Negroes go to their own theatres, but they ride in the same street cars as the white people. At the ball park there is one small section of the covered stand for them down the right field foul line. Both white and coloured fans sit in the bleachers... The question was [even] raised here as to whether Jackie should be allowed to play in this series. The Colonels finally came to the inevitable conclusion that as long as he had been admitted to organized baseball he was eligible to play.⁷⁸

When the Royals won the first game played in Montreal, Robinson was the hero, driving in the winning run in the tenth inning and scoring his "revenge for the hard ride he got

⁷⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, September 27, 1946. The team's Governors Cup triumph did not make the front page of the *Star*, but Robinson was portrayed as star of the game by McGowan. *Montreal Star*, September 27, 1946.

⁷⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, September 28, 1946.

⁷⁷ *Montreal Gazette*, September 30, 1946.

⁷⁸ *Montreal Gazette*, September 30, 1946.

from the crowd in Louisville," Carroll exclaimed under a headline that read "Jackie Robinson Is Hero as Royals Edge Colonels."⁷⁹

Robinson continued to star in the Little World Series, prompting McGowan to suggest "just say Robinson, then you have [the] story." In addition, he quoted Louisville *Courier-Journal* sportswriter Thomas Fitzgerald as saying "we [the Colonels] came up here as favorites and quickly as saying Jack Robinson, we're the underdogs."⁸⁰ Dink Carroll continued to praise the efforts of the second baseman, noting his fine play at his position and his three hits as primary contributions to the team's success in winning the game.⁸¹ And while Baz O'Meara had certainly softened his hostility to Robinson, the best he could do was mention that Robinson had pivoted a key double-play late in the game.⁸² He remained unconvinced of Robinson's place in baseball, and could not escape his tendency to downplay the black player's exploits on the ball diamond.

When the Royals beat Louisville in game six, winning the first Little World Series in team history, fans remained in the stadium chanting for the players and manager Clay Hopper to make a curtain call. Hopper and winning pitcher Curt Davis obliged them, each finding themselves paraded around the field on the shoulders of fans. But they were not done. "We want Robinson, we want Robinson," came the chant from the throng who refused to leave... then [he] came... the coloured comet, and before they sat him down [on their shoulders] tears slid down his cheeks. Jackie was deeply moved," McGowan described the scene. Carroll added that the mob of exuberant fans were so "eager to touch [Robinson]. They almost ripped the clothes from his back."⁸³ When Robinson was finally able to retrieve his belongings from the Royals locker room and

⁷⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, October 3, 1946.

⁸⁰ *Montreal Star*, October 4, 1946.

⁸¹ *Montreal Gazette*, October 4, 1946.

⁸² *Montreal Star*, October 5, 1946.

⁸³ *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Star*, October 5, 1946.

head for home, the crowd, by now forced out of the stadium when the lights were shut down, chased him down the street until he was picked up and driven home safely by a passing motorist. "To [Pittsburgh *Courier* reporter] Sam Maltin, who had shared so much of the magical season with Jackie and Rachel, it provided a fitting climax. 'It was probably the only day in history,' he wrote, 'that a black man ran from a white mob with love, instead of lynching on its mind.'"⁸⁴

The behaviour of the Montreal fans, and the acceptance given Robinson by them and the city's anglophone press seems at a glance to substantiate claims—even made by Robinson himself—that the city was a haven from prejudice for blacks. Early season indications, however, suggest there was some unwillingness on the behalf of the Montreal sporting press to accept a black player, whether in Montreal or any city. Their collective attitude evolved as the 1946 season progressed because they came to know Robinson as a star ball player and a person. While he would never escape names like "Coloured Comet," by season's end Robinson was certainly considered a ball player before a black; a complete reversal from spring training.

CONTINUED SUPPORT FROM THE MONTREAL PRESS

Three months after Robinson and the Royals concluded the 1946 season—the most successful in Royals history—*The Sporting News* engaged Montreal *Star* sportswriter Lloyd McGowan, and his Buffalo, New York, counterpart, Cy Kritzer to partake of a print debate concerning Robinson's readiness for promotion to Brooklyn.⁸⁵ Naturally a supporter of Robinson as a Montreal player, McGowan was engaged to take

⁸⁴ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 143. Maltin cited from *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 12, 1946.

⁸⁵ Lloyd McGowan, "Accustomed Position is Second Base and He is Best Equipped for Keystone," and Cy Kritzer, "Montreal Negro Star Lacks Physical Equipment to Reach Big Time Stardom," *The Sporting News*, January 8, 1947.

his side; Kritzer wrote the counterpoint.⁸⁶ At this point in Robinson's baseball career, which was nothing less than a success, people were no longer discounting him because of skin colour. Kritzer's reasoning, however, had a similar ring to those whose late 1945 and early 1946 doubts saw Robinson never making the major leagues. Responding to Montreal manager Clay Hopper's suggestion that Robinson played his best games in front of the largest crowds, especially Sunday games, Kritzer wrote:

That is a characteristic of many great athletes; they need the stimulus of the roaring mob to make them produce their best. But there are many around the International League who still believe, after watching the Negro star do everything expected of a future major-league player, that he was playing over his head in 1946... Can Jackie continue at the inspired pitch he attained last summer at Montreal? We don't think so.

As Kritzer continued, however, he built a case against his own, recounting all the reasons why Robinson had what it took to be a major leaguer. For every point in the black player's favour, however, Kritzer noted a reason against him. Citing Robinson's ability to hit for doubles and triples—a combination of well-placed hits and running speed—he put the player down for lacking home run power and having legs old enough that he would soon lose the speed (he was 27). Despite all the negatives Kritzer was able to conjure, he concluded: “a year ago we heard Jackie Robinson's ability evaluated by many professionals who had played against him. They said he couldn't hit a curve ball, that he had blind spots as a batter and other negative words... But Jackie lived them all down to become a Triple-A star... and even as we... believe the cards are stacked against him... we wouldn't wager a plugged dime that he wouldn't be in the Dodger lineup come opening day, even though we don't think he will and can't see how

⁸⁶ While Buffalo Bisons secretary Joseph Brown was among the first to voice confusion and disbelief over Robinson's signing, Buffalo was the most supportive of the six American cities in the International League (see Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 128). It seems strange, in view of Buffalo's support, that *The Sporting News* would rely on a member of the Buffalo press corps to provide opposition.

he is going to make the majors with such a shortage of physical equipment, including youth."⁸⁷

Lloyd McGowan began by commenting on the doubts facing Robinson's promotion to the Dodgers or any other major league club, but remained steadfast in "insist[ing] that with an even break he can make the grade." He indirectly agreed with Kritzer's assessment of Robinson as an athlete, but noted that he only seemed this way until "you consult the records and they slam you in the face, for you find that he batted .349 righthanded to top the International League and that no pitcher was able to get his number." He continued through his measure of the black player on this thread, first saying why his detractors might not see him making the majors, then confronting those doubts by recounting Robinson's stellar play in Montreal. Moreover, he believed, Robinson's constant improvement over the 1946 season was merit enough to make the Dodgers for 1947. "Defensively," McGowan explained, "Robby goes to his left naturally, but for a time last season it appeared that he wasn't too fast darting towards the bag to knock down the ball or take it. He corrected this weakness as the campaign progressed and, in the end, he was everything that any manager could hope for, with something added."⁸⁸

McGowan reminded readers, as he did frequently during the previous season, that, "there isn't much Robby can't do with the bat. He pulls the ball, hits the curve, and can find the other field when the hit-and-run is on." More importantly, unlike Kritzer who would only have seen Robinson when Buffalo played Montreal, McGowan got to know the player and he liked him. "His baseball working clothes," the Montreal writer explained, "tend to hide his intelligent features, [and] his charming manner." In

⁸⁷ Cy Kritzer, "Montreal Negro Star Lacks Physical Equipment to Reach Big Time Stardom," *The Sporting News*, January 8, 1947.

⁸⁸ Lloyd McGowan, "Accustomed Position is Second Base and He is Best Equipped for Keystone," *The Sporting News*, January 8, 1947.

conclusion, McGowan addressed Branch Rickey rather than Robinson's critics. Unless exceptional circumstances prevailed, he felt Robinson would make an excellent addition to the 1947 Dodgers: "Throw out the racial complications with the RBI record, install him at second base and you've got a Flatbush favorite, Mr. Rickey."⁸⁹ Lloyd McGowan had become an ardent fan of Jackie Robinson, of that there is little doubt. Through the period of Robinson's tenure in a Royals uniform he came to support the black player more than any of his newspaper counterparts. McGowan's son suggests that while his father may have referred to Robinson as "the Ebonese Speedster," or the "Coloured Comet," he indeed respected Robinson.⁹⁰

* * *

Twenty-six years after Jackie Robinson's last game as a Montreal Royal (and 15 years after his last as a Dodger), baseball's integration hero died of a heart attack. All of baseball mourned, and Montreal, only three years the National League home of the Expos, mourned knowing that it had been one of the important places in the road to integration. The day after Robinson died, Montreal sportswriter Ted Blackman expressed his feeling that Robinson did more for Montreal than the city did for him.⁹¹ Blackman also talked to former Royal and Dodger Jean-Pierre Roy the day Robinson died. Roy was in the Dodgers training camp in the spring of 1946. He suggested the reason Robinson was given rough treatment in training camp was the threat he posed to position players rather than his skin colour.

Roy told Blackman "I like to remember him more as a human being than a performer. He was humble, he was courageous. He answered all the shots with finesse." Blackman added, "[and] fought for every handshake and backslap he received. To be

⁸⁹ Lloyd McGowan, "Accustomed Position is Second Base and He is Best Equipped for Keystone," *The Sporting News*, January 8, 1947.

⁹⁰ Don McGowan interview, Pointe-Claire, Quebec, February 10, 1998.

⁹¹ *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1972.

sure, the neighbours [on De Gaspé Street] were kind to an apprehensive Rachel Robinson and the fans encouraging to a game Jackie Robinson. But it might have happened anywhere else and Montreal is fortunate to have been the historic venue. We must remember that only he could wear the black face.⁸²

The day after Blackman's column paid homage to Robinson, the *Gazette* was full of ads in memoriam of the late ball player. Among those most noticeable was a full page sponsored by O'Keefe Breweries:

The world of sports has lost one of its greatest figures of all times when Jackie Robinson died of a heart attack.

Ironical though it may be, if ever a man and athlete had boundless heart, it was certainly this great American who became the first of his race to carve a niche in major league baseball when he broke in with the Montreal Royals in 1946.

The O'Keefe Brewery wishes to associate itself with the sports world and especially with the baseball world in saying good-bye today to a man who will always be immortal.⁸³

Montreal continues to pay homage to Robinson. A statue stands at Olympic Stadium, where the Expos have played since 1977, and his Royals number 20 was retired by the Montreal club in 1996 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his first year in organized baseball. In addition, like all clubs in major league baseball, Montreal will not reissue the number 42, which Robinson wore as a Dodger; the number has been permanently retired.

Jackie Robinson remains known as the first black to break baseball's so-called unwritten colour barrier. He will always be remembered because of his skin colour, but for that one season in Montreal, as the members of the media and the fans got to know the ballplayer in Robinson, his skin colour came to matter less and less. They liked Jackie Robinson for who he was, how he played ball, and managed, for a brief period in their lives, to transcend the divisive issue of race.

⁸² Montreal *Gazette*, October 25, 1972.

⁸³ Montreal *Gazette*, October 26, 1972.

Chapter 4 - The Stadium the City Almost Owned: Montreal Contemplates Municipal Ownership of Delorimier Downs, 1936 and 1953.

BACK IN BUSINESS: BASEBALL RETURNS TO MONTREAL

As the 1927 International League baseball season neared its conclusion, rumours of Montreal's return to the league in 1928 began to circulate: the Jersey City Skeeters would relocate to Montreal. Initially the move was nothing more than a proposed business venture but, the *Montreal Gazette* reported, a group of investors from the city had received approval from the International League to buy the Skeeters and move them to Montreal. The transfer was delayed, however, when a group of Jersey City investors made a late counter offer to keep the team in their city.¹ This proved only a minor setback. Several International League clubs were for sale late in the 1927 season. The business of acquiring a team was not laid to rest, and the Montreal investors eventually succeeded in buying the Jersey City club. Over the next thirty-two years the business endured not only the fluctuations of a normal economy, but also the depths of the Great Depression. During that time, and again in the early 1950s, the city of Montreal council and its financial advisors contemplated turning the stadium into a municipal holding. While the city never owned the stadium, the liquidation of the Montreal Exhibition Company in 1936, and a municipal proposal to buy the stadium in 1953, offer insights into the operation of the stadium, and its financial stability and profitability as both private business and municipal property.

In 1927, the business of acquiring the team was spearheaded by George Stallings. Influential in the 1908 sale of the Montreal Royals to Montreal sports promoter

¹ *Montreal Gazette*, August 19, 1927.

Sam Lichtenhein,² Stallings sought greater involvement in Montreal baseball twenty years later. No stranger to baseball, Stallings was most famous as the field manager of the 1914 World Series winning Boston Braves. Baseball historian Harold Seymour suggests Stallings had a keen ability to instill confidence in ball players; it was with similar charisma that he wooed Montreal investors.³ Stallings attracted a number of prominent Montrealers to invest in and sit on the board of directors of the Montreal Exhibition Company Ltd. Among the investors were Athanase David, Ernest Savard, Lord Shaughnessy, and Hartland MacDougall. All of them were wealthy patrons of the Montreal sporting scene. In addition, Stallings brought in associates Carlos Ferrar and Walter Hapgood to manage the day-to-day business of the team, and he also assumed the role of field manager for the club.⁴ Sadly, for the team and the sport, Stallings suffered a heart attack in June, and left the team to recuperate in his Georgia home; he never returned, another heart attack killing him in 1929.⁵

The newly formed Exhibition Company purchased the team for a reported \$225,000.00 from its Jersey City owners,⁶ and Delorimier Downs was built, according to various reports, for an additional \$700,000.00 to \$1.5 million.⁷ Of these estimates for the stadium's construction cost, the lower figure is likely more accurate. While municipal evaluations of the property value declined rapidly in its first decade, bottoming out at \$283,000.00 in 1937,⁸ the 1928 assessment was \$703,550.00.⁹

² William Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals: The Minor League Team that Made Major League History*, (Montreal: Robert Davies, 1996), 27.

³ Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 152-153.

⁴ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 27.

⁵ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 29.

⁶ The franchise was moved to Montreal and renamed the Royals, after the original Montreal franchise in the International League.

⁷ *Montreal Gazette*, December 20, 1927; Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 28.

⁸ VMA 1937 City of Montreal Valuation and Assessment Roll, St. Eusèbe Ward, 259. See table 4-1 for complete list of municipal evaluations of the property from 1928 to 1968.

Table 4-1 Municipal Property Tax Evaluations for Delorimier Downs, 1928-1968.¹⁰

Year	Owner ¹¹	Land Value	Building Value	Total	Change
1928	MEC Ltd.	\$174,000.00	\$ 529,550.00	\$ 703,550.00	N/A
1929	MEC Ltd.	\$270,450.00	\$ 379,550.00	\$ 650,000.00	-\$ 53,550.00
1930	MEC Ltd.	\$270,450.00	\$ 379,550.00	\$ 650,000.00	\$ 0.00
1931	MEC Ltd.	\$270,450.00	\$ 379,550.00	\$ 650,000.00	\$ 0.00
1932	MEC Ltd.	\$270,450.00	\$ 354,550.00	\$ 625,000.00	-\$ 25,000.00
1933	MEC Ltd.	\$264,700.00	\$ 235,300.00	\$ 500,000.00	-\$ 125,000.00
1934	MEC Ltd.	\$264,700.00	\$ 115,300.00	\$ 380,000.00	-\$ 120,000.00
1937	MEC Ltd.	\$173,000.00	\$ 110,000.00	\$ 283,000.00	-\$ 97,000.00
1940	JRL	\$173,000.00	\$ 110,000.00	\$ 283,000.00	\$ 0.00
1945	JRL	\$131,600.00	\$ 130,700.00	\$ 262,300.00	-\$ 20,700.00
1946	MBC Inc	\$131,600.00	\$ 130,700.00	\$ 262,300.00	\$ 0.00
1948	MBC Inc	\$200,650.00	\$ 131,350.00	\$ 332,000.00	\$ 69,700.00
1951	MBC Inc	\$200,650.00	\$ 131,350.00	\$ 332,000.00	\$ 0.00
1959	SH	\$363,200.00	\$ 653,700.00	\$1,016,900.00	\$ 684,900.00
1960	Group 1	\$362,450.00	\$ 653,750.00	\$1,016,200.00	-\$ 700.00
1965	Group 2	\$510,300.00	\$ 753,700.00	\$1,264,000.00	\$ 247,800.00
1968	CECM	\$924,400.00	\$1,816,600.00	\$2,741,000.00	\$1,477,000.00

The figures in table 4-1 show the impact of the Great Depression on the value of Montreal real estate, as well as the declining value of the business as fewer people were able to support the team. There appears to be no formula in use for calculating depreciation, as the rapid decline in the mid-1930s also represents the increasing inability of the Montreal Exhibition Company to pay its tax assessment. Above all, the company was unable to pay because of declining attendance figures. Montrealers may have enjoyed watching the Royals play, but for those given the choice of attending a ball game versus feeding a family, surely the latter took priority. The Montreal Exhibition Company, and the Montreal Baseball Club (the Royals) suffered a great deal during the

⁹ VMA, 1928 City of Montreal Valuation and Assessment Roll, St. Eusèbe Ward, 58.

¹⁰ These figures were gathered by sampling the Valuation and Assessment Rolls. In many cases, throughout the 40-year period, when the property's value did not change there was no entry in the roll. This is particularly the case when more than one year's evaluations appear within the same book.

¹¹ MEC Ltd. represents the Montreal Exhibition Company Limited; JRL represents Joseph Raoul Lefebvre; MBC Inc represents the Montreal Baseball Club Incorporated; SH represents the Sherburn Investment Corporation; Group 1 represents an ownership syndicate comprised of Sherburn Investment (3/8), Davis Realty Investment Corp (1/4), Jaybalt Corporation (1/8), Baltco Limited (1/8), and Turcot Investment Limited (1/8); Group 2 represents the same group, with Davis Realty giving up half its 1/4 to Sam Mestral; CECM represents La Commission des Ecoles Catholiques de Montreal.

Depression, but managed a strong recovery in the late 1930s and through the 1940s, indicating that baseball could be profitable in Montreal.

DELORIMIER'S STRONG FINANCIAL FOUNDATION AND EARLY SUCCESS

The Montreal Exhibition Company was formed with strong financial backing from a number of Montrealers. Owing to their number, and the apparent cost of the team and stadium—roughly \$1.0 million—each investor did not have to invest large amounts to bring baseball to the city. Their experience with professional hockey led them to believe big-league sport was a sound investment in 1928.

Leslie Roberts explained in his 1928 *Maclean's* article on the Royals, that while each year since the team's demise was filled with reports of its return, 1927 was different: "Moneyed Montreal had discovered in recent years that *there is money to be made* in big time sport." Proof of the potential profit offered by professional sport, he suggested, could be found in the success of the Montreal Forum hockey arena. While there were many detractors during the Forum's construction, the building's tenants—the Maroons and the Canadiens—regularly turned fans away from the ticket window; their games sold out.¹² While this may seem an exaggeration, clearly demands for Maroons and Canadiens tickets did exceed availability.¹³ Nevertheless, the location of the stadium would only have been convenient to those whose bank accounts were poised to gain from the business's profits. It also appears that moneyed Montreal not only understood how it could become richer through professional sports promotions. It was also somewhat interested in the spectacle; the middle-class west end crowd likely made up most of the Forum crowd.

¹² Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," *Maclean's*, July 15, 1928: 16. My emphasis.

¹³ *Montreal Gazette*, January 16, 1928.

In the East End, the new stadium and baseball team's early 1928 profit expectations were buoyed by \$40,000 worth of season ticket sales to what Roberts calls "Montreal's beauty and chivalry."¹⁴ Among this "beauty and chivalry" were the investors in the team whose involvement made "the Royals look like an ironclad business venture...."¹⁵ Despite Roberts's enthusiasm for this group of investors, the baseball club was a corporation, and shareholders wanted and expected to make money; they were not in it for the sport. All of the men whose money propped up the Royals were smart capitalists looking for returns on their investments. Among the savvy they brought with them was the understanding that location was vital to success. And by early summer, it appeared, the club was a success:

Will it [the investment in the club] pay? ... Will the people who bought shares because they like interest and dividends and stock bonuses and things like that get them? It looks as though they will. [Walter] Hapgood [business manager of the club] says this year's operations will show a profit... On the ground floor, for instance, are several shops, built into the façade of the building. They have all been rented. Inside the building there are three floors of exhibition space, the best in Montreal. Already the Motor Show has been signed up for three years. This winter there will be a Sportsman's Show and an Aero Show... Before a ball was tossed on the diamond, \$130,000 had been realized in revenue from concessions, the sale of advertising space on the fences and scoreboard, and the season sale of boxes.¹⁶

Certainly the rush to complete a home for the team had paid off, with the Royals appearing well on their way to record a profit in their first season. If the first half season was any indication, it appeared the capitalist backers of the team had chosen the right part of Montreal in which to erect their stadium.

¹⁴ Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 16.

¹⁵ Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 17.

¹⁶ Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 59. My emphasis.

SHORT-LIVED SUCCESS—FACING THE DEPRESSION

The first season may have been a roaring success for the team and the stadium, but it was short-lived success. Within two years of its founding, the Exhibition Company was in arrears on tax payments to the city of Montreal. Tax debt combined with three successive years of losing money drove many of the original investors out of the company. "The Savard-David group," William Brown writes, "had paid a lot for the franchise and, ravaged by the Depression and poor attendance, was no longer able to pay its bills. [By the end of the 1932 season,] The Royals owed \$51,000 in back taxes to the city of Montreal and the mortgage company that owned the stadium was about to foreclose."¹⁷ Despite these woes, the property value had dropped only \$78,550.00 since 1928.¹⁸ While this represented a mere eleven percent decline since construction, the combination of back taxes and imminent mortgage foreclosure left the Exhibition Company in a rather precarious position. Ernest Savard did not crumble under the pressure.

In the months following the 1932 season, it appeared the Royals were about to fold again, only five seasons after their triumphant resurrection. But late in the year, Ernest Savard, the club's major shareholder since the departure of Athanase David, started to speak optimistically about the future of the team. He alluded to a deal that would bring in enough new money to keep the team afloat. In early 1933, Savard announced a major reorganization of the team's financial structure.¹⁹

The team's saviours were Jean-Charles Emile Trudeau and Lt.-Col. Roméo Gauvreau. Trudeau was a rare Depression find. He had become a millionaire in the early 1930s by selling a chain of gasoline stations to Imperial Oil. Despite his wealth and a love of sport, it took some pressure before he signed over a cheque for \$25,000.00 to the Montreal Exhibition Company. Like his friend Trudeau, Gauvreau also made his wealth in the oil

¹⁷ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 34.

¹⁸ VMA, 1932 City of Montreal Valuations and Assessment Roll, St. Eusèbe Ward, 55.

¹⁹ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 34-35.

industry. Brown emphasizes that with their investments, Trudeau and Gauvreau made strong demands for sound management of the company. They hoped to realize their demands through their mutual friend Hector Racine, whom they appointed club president. While admittedly a man of sparse baseball knowledge, Racine was regarded as a shrewd businessman who would help solve the business's financial woes.²⁰

Despite the new money and sharp management, the assets of the Exhibition Company continued to decline in value while debts continued to accumulate. As a result, the value of the company plummeted over the next few years. Having declined only \$78,550.00 from 1928 to 1932, it dropped an additional \$245,000.00 by 1934.²¹ As fewer and fewer Montrealers were able to spend money on watching baseball games, the Exhibition Company found itself without the funds to begin paying its steadily accumulating tax debt. The increasing debt, combined with the rapidly decreasing value of the company's assets, added momentum to the downfall of the business. Matters only worsened in 1936. On March 26, 1936, the city of Montreal placed the Montreal Exhibition Company Limited in liquidation; it owed, by this point, \$75,133.33 in back taxes from 1931 to 1935.²² The rescue funds provided by Trudeau and Gauvreau were not enough to save the company over the long term. The liquidation of the Montreal Exhibition Company provides us with a look at how the city of Montreal perceived the chance it might become the owner of the building.

²⁰ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 35.

²¹ VMA, 1933 City of Montreal Valuation and Assessment Roll, St. Eusèbe Ward, 55; and 1934, 60.

²² VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-355-53566. Letter from E.A. Grise, Assistant Director of Finances, City of Montreal, to I.F. Philie, Director of Finances, July 27, 1936. This letter is the first item in the file concerning the liquidation of the Exhibition Company. A later letter, dated October 16, 1936, from J.A. Rice, (of an unspecified job title) to the Executive Council of the City of Montreal, indicates the date the Company was placed in liquidation.

ON THE AUCTIONING BLOCK: THE LIQUIDATION OF DELORIMIER DOWNS

By July 27, 1936, the city was ready to auction the stadium rather than assume ownership, and was entertaining an offer of \$31,500.00 from Mr. J. Raoul Lefebvre, of suburban Outremont. Lefebvre's offer, however, failed to cover a number of things: a three percent provincial tax on the sale, which was calculated on the value of the property, not the sale price; a surtax of ten percent on top of the tax (or 0.3 percent of the value); as well as lawyer's fees. The latter were estimated at \$2,500.00. With the stadium most recently valued at \$283,000.00, the taxes would be \$8490.00 and the surtax \$845.00. The city was willing to pay the surtax, but it hoped to cover as much of the remainder as possible through sale of the property. Had Lefebvre's offer stood, the city would manage only \$20,760 towards payment of the back taxes; \$31,500 was simply too low (see Table 4-2). Assistant Director of Finances, E.A. Grise explained to his superior that "if the city puts the property up for auction starting at \$40,000.00, it would cost him [Lefebvre] \$48,490.00, plus the lawyer's fees of \$2,500.00 for a total of \$50,740.00."²³ Before 1936 ended, however, Lefebvre agreed to pay \$50,000.00 for the stadium, effectively meeting the city's demands.²⁴ In June 1937, when the liquidation was finally laid to rest, "[the Executive Council] authorize[d] the director of finances to strike from the ledger the balance of taxes owed by the Montreal Exhibition Company— an amount of \$25,133.33 plus interest since April 30, 1937... a sum of \$50,000.00 [had] been accepted by the city and ruled as complete and final payment of back taxes up to the actual date of sale."²⁵

²³ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-355-53566. Letter from E.A. Grise, Assistant Director of Finances, City of Montreal, to I.F. Philie, Director of Finances, July 27, 1936. My translation. Note, all citations from City of Montreal records not indicated as translated are in their original English.

²⁴ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-355-53566, letter from Geoffrion Prud'homme, lawyer for Lefebvre, to Camille Tessier, city of Montreal Lawyer, October 21, 1936. The letter informs the city that Lefebvre will pay \$50,000 for Delorimier Downs. My translation.

²⁵ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-355-53566, extract of the Minutes of the Executive Council, June 28, 1937. My translation.

Table 4-2 Details of Liquidation of Delorimier Downs, 1936.²⁶

Item	Amount
Taxes Owing	\$ 75,133.33
Municipal Assessment Value of Property	\$283,000.00
Provincial 3% Tax on Sale	\$ 8,490.00
Provincial Surtax	\$ 845.00
Lawyers fees	\$ 2,500.00
Lowest Bid Acceptable to City	\$ 40,000.00
Plus Tax and Fees	\$ 10,740.00
Minimum sale amount	\$ 50,740.00
Minimum loss to city on tax not collected	\$ 35,133.33

The demise of the Montreal Exhibition Company implies that baseball was anything but profitable in Montreal. A look at a more detailed ledger, prepared by J.A. Rice in October 1936, suggests the contrary.

In addition to explaining the financial situation of the stadium, and speculating on how much money the city would make if it assumed ownership, Rice's memo also expressed concern over the problem faced by the city: the stadium was jointly owned. In his lengthy dispatch to the Executive Council, Rice explained that he did not know "all of the clauses [regarding ownership of the stadium], as this company [the Montreal Exhibition Company Limited] is not the owner of a large part of the southwest half of the building, that part is owned by the Côte de Liesse Land Company."²⁷ The thrust of Rice's assessment was not to determine what would become of the Côte de Liesse Land Company, but to outline the revenues the city would earn during the stadium's continued operation, as well as how much money it might make if it were to become the owner of the business. Municipal ownership offered the city additional income that would otherwise be the profits of private owners.

²⁶ These are based on the above cited letter from E.A. Grise to I.F. Philie, July 27, 1936.

Table 4-3 Extended Details of Montreal Exhibition Company Liquidation Including Potential Municipal Ownership Revenue.

Item	Particulars	Amount
Land Value		\$173,000.00
Building Value		\$110,000.00
Stadium sold to J.R. Lefebvre, June 22, 1936 ²⁸		\$ 31,500.00
Taxes to be Paid to Provincial Government		\$ 8,490.00
Estimated Legal Fees		\$ 3,000.00
Provincial Surtax		\$ 845.00
Remaining for Municipal Taxes		\$ 27,655.00
Total Municipal Taxes Owning		\$ 75,137.33
Taxes Lost		\$ 47,482.33
<u>Potential income of site</u>		
Baseball	annual	\$ 25,000.00
Le Taverne Poirier	annual	\$ 2,400.00
Le Restaurant	annual	\$ 1,800.00
Canada Printing and Lithographing	annual	\$ 3,300.00
Salle de Danse	out of business	\$ 0.00
Roller Rink	out of business	\$ 0.00
Garage	empty	\$ 0.00
Total		\$ 32,500.00
<u>Expenses²⁹</u>		
Central Heat		
Lights		
Salaries of Montreal Baseball Club Employees. ³⁰		
<u>Annual Tax-based Revenue for the City</u>		
Property Tax		\$ 12,884.24
Amusement Tax	attendance dependent	\$ 0.00
License for land use		\$ 200.00
Minimum income for city		\$ 13,084.24
<u>If the city bought the property, it would pay:</u>		
Estimated Legal Fees		\$ 3,000.00
Provincial Surtax		\$ 845.00
Droit du gouvernement (Provincial tax on sale of property)		\$ 8,490.00
Total taxes and fees		\$ 12,335.00
<u>Estimated income if the city assumed ownership:³¹</u>		
Total of Baseball, tavern, restaurant, etc.		\$ 32,500.00
Less Expenses	no amount estimated	\$ 0.00
Minimum revenue for city ³²	annual	\$ 32,500.00

²⁷ VMA, letter from J.A. Rice to the Executive Council of the City of Montreal, October 16, 1936. My translation.

²⁸ Counted towards payment of tax debt. Lefebvre's payment of \$50,000.00 was agreed to after Rice's figures were prepared.

²⁹ Rice did not provide estimates for Expenses.

³⁰ Not specified whether this includes players and coaches, front office staff, grounds keepers, or other employees.

³¹ Calculated from Rice's information.

Among these figures the annual property tax seems to be somewhat high, and incongruous with figures for other years. Rice calculated the annual tax at \$12,884.24. Another document, prepared in the spring of 1937, shows the 1936 property tax as \$8,473.07, significantly lower than Rice's figure. It appears, when compared with data from 1928 and 1953, that Rice's figure may be erroneous. It is quite possible that Rice's estimate reflects a compounding of taxes from other years, or includes other unspecified municipal assessments such as schools or street taxes.

Table 4-4 Montreal Municipal Property Tax Figures for Delorimier Downs: 1928, 1936, and 1953.³³

Year	Tax Assessment	Property Value
1928	\$9,497.93	\$703,550.00
1936a	\$8,473.07	\$283,000.00
1936b	\$12,884.24	\$283,000.00
1953	\$11,836.00	\$332,000.00

Notably missing from Rice's calculations in Table 4-2 are expenses—heating, lighting (electricity), and the salaries of the Montreal Baseball Club employees³⁴—as well as Amusement Tax revenues. Using information from 1938 and 1940, reasonable estimates of Amusement Tax income can be made. In addition, the roller skating rink, listed as out-of-business in 1936, was again operating in these later years, offering an increase in Amusement Tax income for the city. While estimated expenses for 1953 do

³² Land and licensing taxes are not included in this estimate, as it would be pointless for the city to collect land taxes on the building if it were to assume ownership. Licensing fees may have continued to be a source of income from other businesses, such as concessions, restaurants, etc., in the building, provided they too were not taken over by the city. Also absent from this ledger is the potential revenue from renting the building for events, and to tenants. See below and discussion of the 1953 proposed acquisition of the stadium, at that point city finance officers were more aware of how money could be made through stadium ownership.

³³ See tables 4-6 and 4-7 below for more information regarding 1928 and 1953 tax assessments.

³⁴ Missing from the implied list of costs is advertising as well as miscellaneous operating costs. The Royals did advertise in the newspapers, and may have sought other means of attracting fans that cost the club money.

exist, inflation and other economic vicissitudes over the 17-year gap make it unreasonable to assimilate them into the 1936 figures.

THE AMUSEMENT TAX AND MUNICIPAL PROFIT ON SEAT SALES

The city of Montreal holdings of Amusement Tax records are sparse. Recorded on a monthly basis, many of the records for the 1930s and 1940s are general statements of revenue based on the tax.³⁵ These offer only a sum total of Amusement Tax revenue with no indication of particular establishments. Detailed records—broken down per business, with attendance, tax collected, and provincial surtax indicated—were found for seven non-consecutive months from July 1938 to August 1940 (see Table 4-5). During this period, records indicate collection from the baseball stadium on six occasions—two of them during the off season—as well as four times for the roller rink located in the building. Since the primary use of the stadium was baseball, figures for the in-season months—July and September 1938; and July and August 1940—are assumed to reflect only baseball admissions.³⁶

Table 4-5 Amusement Tax Records For Delorimier Downs, 1938-1940.³⁷

Month	Business	Attendance	Tax Collected	Tax per ticket	Ticket value
31-Jul-38	Stadium Baseball	48,876	\$3,039.14	\$0.0622	\$0.622
30-Sep-38	Stadium Baseball	49,725	\$3,311.32	\$0.0666	\$0.666
	Roller Rink	10,000	\$ 300.00	\$0.0300	\$0.300
31-Oct-38	Stadium Baseball	413	\$ 18.39	\$0.0445	\$0.445
	Roller Rink	12,000	\$ 400.00	\$0.0333	\$0.333
31-Dec-38	Roller Rink	4,000	\$ 140.00	\$0.0350	\$0.350
29-Feb-40	Stadium Baseball	8,048	\$ 252.87	\$0.0314	\$0.314
31-Jul-40	Stadium Baseball	28,907	\$1,949.86	\$0.0675	\$0.675
31-Aug-40	Stadium Baseball	48,228	\$3,272.47	\$0.0679	\$0.679
	Roller Rink	2,497	\$ 24.97	\$0.0100	\$0.100

³⁵ Note: the Amusement Tax was charged on all tickets to all amusement venues in the city.

³⁶ In particular, the July 1940 figures are assumed not to include the National Festival. If this were included, baseball attendance figures for that month would be inconsistently lower than other months.

The average monthly baseball attendance was 43,934, with an average ticket price of \$0.66.³⁷ These two averages lead to an average in-season baseball Amusement Tax amount of \$2893.20 per month. Naturally the month-to-month attendance figures would have varied according to the number of home games, thus offering an explanation for the comparatively low attendance of July 1940. Considering a six-month baseball season, and allowing for slightly lower attendance, a figure of \$17,000.00 represents a modest estimate of the annual Amusement Tax revenue generated by the Royals.³⁸ Table 4-5 also indicates two other months, during the baseball off-season, when events were held in the stadium. The attendance of 413 in October 1938, seems rather insignificant, but the 8,048 in February 1940, suggests there was a large event. Since it was winter, it could only have been an indoor event, perhaps the Auto Show, or some other event as suggested by Walter Hapgood in 1928.⁴⁰

In addition to baseball games, the roller rink contributed to the monthly Amusement Tax revenue from the building. Listed as out-of-business at the time of the 1936 liquidation, the roller rink was back in business during the period reflected in Table 4-5. Using the four months available, the average municipal income generated by the rink was \$213.75 per month. Whether this facility was open year-round is unknown, but assuming it operated six to twelve months a year, it would have generated between \$1282.50 and \$2665.00 in Amusement Tax revenue after reopening.

These figures allow for a modest estimate of \$20,000.00 in Amusement Tax revenues. Taken in consideration with the minimum annual municipal revenue from the

³⁷ Tax per ticket and ticket values are estimates based upon Amusement Tax being ten percent of ticket value.

³⁸ This number varies from month-to-month according to the section of the stadium where the most number of seats were sold.

³⁹ Figure calculated by multiplying the average monthly Amusement Tax amount by six months—the length of the baseball season—and truncating it to the nearest thousand.

⁴⁰ See above, and Roberts "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 59.

site, calculated in Table 4-3, the city would have made over \$50,000.00 before expenses. This amount does not take into account the possibility of profits from the roller rink, nor the dance hall or garage, listed as out-of-business and empty in 1936. In addition, it must be considered that the city would subtract from this profit the amount of property tax that would no longer be collected if it were to own the facility; it would not charge itself property tax. With the 1936 property tax set at \$8,473.07, the \$50,000.00 revenue estimate drops to just over \$41,500.00. Provided the expenses absent in Table 4-3 were less than this amount, the city, as owners of the stadium, could have turned a small profit even during the Depression. Private ownership, however, would not benefit from the additional \$20,000.00 brought in by the Amusement Tax, lowering the estimated pre-expenses income for the Exhibition Company to \$21,500.00. Clearly the lack of this income is what differentiated between the failure of the business under private ownership, and the potentially profitable operation if the city had taken over.⁴¹ Despite the chance for profitable operation of the stadium, the city remained uninterested, at this point, in assuming ownership of the property and its business.

PROPERTY TAXES

Further details of municipal tax revenues generated by the stadium are few. The Valuation and Assessment rolls do not, with 1928 as the exception, indicate how much the company owed the city. While the liquidation process in 1936 revealed how much tax was owing, and the 1953 proposal to purchase the stadium estimated the property tax at \$11,836.00,⁴² further details are available for only 1928 and 1937. The roll for 1928 indicates a number of taxes for which the Exhibition Company was responsible.

⁴¹ The Amusement Tax is similarly assumed to contribute to the stadium budget by city financial officers.

⁴² See Table 4-4.

Table 4-6 1928 Taxes Owing for Montreal Exhibition Company Ltd.

Item	Amount
Land	\$174,000.00
Building	\$529,550.00
Total Value	\$703,550.00
Property Tax	\$ 9,497.93
Special Tax	\$ 281.42
Paving Tax	\$ 668.37
School Tax	\$ 8,442.60
Frontage Tax	\$ 35.01
Total	\$ 18,925.33
Reductions	\$ 4,027.50
Taxes Due	\$ 14,897.83

There are no explanations for either the Special Tax or the Reductions listed in Table 4-6. These may be unique to the first year of the facility's existence, and may have applied to any similar situation in the city. School tax was assessed with the site listed as "neutral," meaning that unlike neighbouring homes whose owners declared which denomination's school board—Protestant or Catholic—they chose to contribute to, the stadium did not have a denomination.

Nine years later, while the liquidation process was nearing completion, the Arrears Department issued a manifest of street and sidewalk taxes owing for the stadium, adding an additional \$2,500.00 to the taxes already owing for 1936. Table 4-7 details the amounts owing for the improvement of the streets—Delorimier, Ontario, Larivière, and Parthenais—surrounding the stadium.

Table 4-7 Details of 1937 Street and Sidewalk Taxes

Year	Item	Particulars	Amount
1937	Property value		\$283,000.00
1936	Tax assessment		\$ 8,473.07
1936	Interest as of May 18, 1937		\$ 356.16
1937	Tax owing		\$ 8,829.23
1936	Paving – Ontario Street	Assessed 1/20 of value of \$1731.58	\$ 86.58
1937	Interest on overdue payment	Assessed on balance owing	\$ 41.56
1937	Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$ 3.66
1937	Total Ontario Street Paving		\$ 131.80
1936	Paving – Delorimier	Assessed 1/20 of value of \$4766.60	\$ 238.33
1937	Interest on overdue payment	Assessed on balance owing	\$ 257.40
1937	Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$ 10.07

1937 Total Delorimier Street Paving		\$	505.80
1936 Sidewalk – Delorimier	Assessed 1/10 of \$4471.19	\$	447.12
1937 Interest on overdue payment	Assessed on balance owing	\$	107.31
1937 Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$	18.90
1937 Total Delorimier Street Sidewalk		\$	573.33
1936 Sidewalk – Larivière	Assessed 1/10 of 2962.92	\$	296.29
1937 Interest on overdue payment	Assessed on balance owing	\$	71.11
1937 Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$	12.52
1937 Total Larivière Street Sidewalk		\$	379.92
1936 Sidewalk – Ontario Street	Assessed on 1/10 of \$2971.40	\$	297.14
1937 Interest on overdue payment	Assessed on balance owing	\$	71.31
1937 Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$	12.56
1937 Total Ontario Street Sidewalk		\$	381.01
1936 Paving – Larivière Street	Assessed on 1/20 of \$3370.67	\$	168.53
1937 Additional interest	Assessed on overdue	\$	7.12
1937 Total Larivière Street Paving		\$	175.65
1937 Total Owing To City		\$	10,976.74

Adding the extra \$2,500.00 to the tax assessment still falls short of the municipal tax amount calculated by Rice a year earlier, and seems inconsequential compared to the apparent profit the city could have made with ownership of the stadium. Assuming again that the city would not tax itself, this tax, removed from the profits, leaves \$39,000.00 to cover expenses.

It is reasonable to assume that stadium income based on attendance and concessions sales would have fallen during the Depression. The evidence provided by the Amusement Tax records, however, suggests a steady number of people attended games despite the economic downturn. One should note, nevertheless, that while the Amusement Tax records indicate the number of tickets purchased, some of those may have been given away by the baseball club. Even if tickets were free, the Amusement Tax had to be paid.⁴³ It is plausible that people unable to pay \$0.55 for a bleacher ticket would have paid \$0.05 if the ticket was otherwise free.⁴⁴ Having a crowd, paid or not,

⁴³ During the Royals' opening home stand in 1928, children were admitted free to the May 10, 1928 game, provided they were accompanied by their school teacher, and the Amusement Tax was paid for their ticket(s). *Montreal Gazette*, May 10, 1928.

⁴⁴ Note: these prices include the integrated Amusement Tax. For example, a \$1.65 box seat was \$1.50 plus 15 cents (ten percent of the ticket value) Amusement Tax.

may have helped the team through difficult times. Another explanation for the low average ticket price is a reduction in their cost. In order to avoid a more disastrous decline in attendance, the club could have reduced prices to attract fans. One of these cases helps to explain the apparently low average purchase price per ticket calculated in Table 4-5. That average, of \$0.66 per ticket, seems low compared to advertised 1928 ticket prices of \$1.65 for box seats, \$1.10 reserved seats, and \$0.55 bleachers. According to the *Gazette* there were 1,264 box seats and more than 6,000 bleachers making up part of the 22,000 seats at the ballpark.⁴⁵ These numbers suggest that if tickets were purchased on a regular basis during the Depression, then most of them were bleachers. The assumed predominance of bleacher seat sales suggests a less affluent crowd than seems to have been interested in the team in 1928. In addition, the club's revenue would have been reduced from a decline in concessions sales. Lower ticket prices, or free admissions aside, concessions income would reflect the decrease in the disposable income of the team's patrons, and would not remain relatively constant compared to attendance.

Despite the ups and downs faced by stadium owners, the city of Montreal was willing to go to great lengths to ensure that the business continued to operate—specifically so the Royals could continue to play baseball in the city. Primary in the city's motivation for ensuring the survival of the team was civic pride. In 1935 the Royals played at nearly .600, winning the regular season International League pennant for the first time since 1898, and offering a bright light to a city that was otherwise suffering heavily from the Depression. While the team lost in the playoff finale to Syracuse, and then finished a dismal sixth in 1936, keeping the team alive for 1937 benefited the city's

⁴⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, April 18, 1928 and April 30, 1928. There is little ticket information for the 32 years the Royals played at Delorimier Downs. A photo of reserved seat tickets from 1957 appearing in Brown's history of the Royals shows a value of \$1.50 on each ticket, a marginal increase of 40 cents since 1928.

bankroll and contributed to maintaining civic morale.⁴⁶ In the end, the Royals managed to survive the Depression in better condition than the city of Montreal itself. Montreal went bankrupt as the Depression ended.⁴⁷ Now, the team needed another saviour, and the Brooklyn Dodgers became just that.

In 1937, the Royals were loosely affiliated with the Pittsburgh Pirates, but Montreal club President Racine found the Pittsburgh arrangement unproductive and unprofitable. In 1938 Racine sought another major league affiliation, and found it in the Dodgers. Racine also found Dodgers GM Larry MacPhail easier to get along with than the people in Pittsburgh. "The Dodgers," writes William Brown, "had no Double-A affiliate, and MacPhail was interested in acquiring one. That led to MacPhail and Racine negotiating a working agreement by the end of 1938."⁴⁸ The most important aspect of the deal meant Montreal would acquire better players without paying for them as they had done in the past; players were now on the Dodgers' payroll, saving more money for the Montreal club. The Dodgers bought the club in 1940, further reducing the obligation of Montreal-based capital to support the operating finances of the team. But that did not necessarily mean a better team would be fielded. Former Royals field manager Clyde Sukeforth recalled to William Brown that MacPhail still tried to save money for the club. "We got a lot of undesirables at half price," he told Brown, "players the other teams didn't want."⁴⁹ In 1945, with Branch Rickey at the helm of the Dodgers, the parent club

⁴⁶ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 39-55, *passim*.

⁴⁷ The city attempted to solve its financial woes through a two percent sales tax and heavy borrowing. These were unsuccessful maneuvers, and the city "was placed under trusteeship by the Quebec government in 1940." Paul-André Linteau et al., *Quebec Since 1930, (Le Québec depuis 1930*, Boreal, 1986), trans. Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmaise, (Toronto: Lorimer, 1991), 38. Also see Linteau's *Histoire de Montreal depuis la Confederation*, (Montreal: Boreal, 1992), 413-417, wherein Linteau discusses the autonomy and the financial difficulties of the city after the Depression, leading to its "mise en tutelle" from 1940 to 1944.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 55. See also, Seymour *The Golden Years*, *passim*.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 77.

consolidated its ownership of the team, buying Delorimier Downs, and promising a strong team.⁵⁰

POSTWAR PROFITS: THE CITY OF MONTREAL TRIES TO BUY DELORIMIER DOWNS

Records for the period during which the team and the stadium were owned by the Dodgers are difficult to locate. According to Brooklyn Dodgers Hall of Fame curator Marty Adler, financial records from the Dodgers' ownership of the Royals and Delorimier Downs are non-existent. He suggests that major league baseball owners may not have documented certain financial information as a manner of avoiding player strikes for money.⁵¹ What does exist, however, that helps to further understand the business of running Delorimier Downs, particularly within the context of Dean Baim's discussion of the stadium as municipal investment,⁵² are documents pertaining to the city of Montreal's 1953 attempt to purchase the Royals and the stadium.

As the 1953 American League season progressed, St. Louis Browns owner Bill Veeck became increasingly unhappy with the situation in his city.⁵³ The Browns and the National League Cardinals shared the same park and fan base. And while it seemed Baltimore was the place Veeck would take his club, the city of Montreal was keen to attract Veeck and the Browns to Delorimier Downs. The move for municipal ownership of the stadium also put Montreal on the cutting edge of stadium developments. Earlier in 1953 the first municipally owned major league ballpark opened in Milwaukee, to host the

⁵⁰ The promise was kept, and the Royals began a streak of 12 seasons in which they made the playoffs. Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 183.

⁵¹ Telephone conversation, April 1998.

⁵² Dean Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, Contributions in Economics and Economic History Series, number 151, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

⁵³ Veeck had tried to move to Baltimore at the end of the 1952 season, but the American League did not approve the move. It was only then that Montreal became interested.

newly relocated Braves.⁵⁴ That Montreal only needed to purchase an already existing stadium was a positive asset in its the bid for the Browns.

While a preexisting stadium had not been necessary for Montreal to acquire a minor league team in 1927, Delorimier Downs gave Montreal a distinct advantage in its 1953 attempt to lure the Browns to the city, but Baltimore also had a stadium. Existing stadiums remain among the most important factors in securing a major league baseball franchise. What has changed, Baim adds, is “in most cases since 1953, the facility used to attract the franchise is not owned by a private entrepreneur but rather a government agency.”⁵⁵ Government owned facilities offer greater financial stability than those privately owned, as the chances of financial ruin are arguably less when a stadium is backed by government funding. There was, however, one problem for the city of Montreal: it did not own a stadium.

On September 24, 1953, Montreal City Council gathered for a special meeting to consider the purchase of Delorimier Downs. Once the meeting was called to order, councilors quickly took up debate on a document concerning the purchase, leasing, and operation of the stadium. Most were concerned with the \$2.35 million asking price set by the Dodgers. Two councilors motioned the city reject the offer, as it represented six times the current value of the property—\$332,000.00 according to a recent municipal evaluation. During a lengthy debate an offer of \$1.5 million was proposed, but the issue was tabled for the Executive Committee to consider as the council could not decide. While six members of the council opposed deferral of the debate, all present favoured Montreal being represented in the major leagues.⁵⁶ The bid ended, however, when the

⁵⁴ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 21.

⁵⁵ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 1.

⁵⁶ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-105400, Minutes of meeting of the Montreal City Council, September 24, 1953. My translation. Executive Committee president and meeting chair J-O Asselin asked the council “are the members of the council in favour of Montreal being represented in a major baseball league?” All of the members present responded that they were in favour.

Dodgers would not accept a lower price. In 1955, when the Dodgers offered the stadium for sale at \$1.6 million, it was too late; the municipal government was no longer interested.⁵⁷

The proposal to buy the stadium, the team, and the land had received a great deal of consideration by the city prior to the special meeting. Three councilors—Dozois, Hanley, and Hamelin—travelled to the United States to research the proposal.⁵⁸ At the same time, detailed plans and a ledger were prepared. Income calculated from attendance was based on the average American League ticket price of \$1.60. This estimate reflected the research conducted by councilors Dozois, Hanley, and Hamelin, while the other figures in table 4-8 represent 1952 expenses and revenues of the Montreal Baseball Club.

Table 4-8 Estimated Income For Stadium Prepared for 1953 bid for Municipal Ownership.⁵⁹

Item	Attendance:			
	600,000	800,000	1,000,000	1,200,000
<u>Revenue</u>				
Baseball Attendance	\$41,760.00	\$55,680.00	\$69,600.00	\$83,520.00
Other Events	\$9,500.00	\$9,500.00	\$9,500.00	\$9,500.00
Roller Rink	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
Revenue Subtotal	\$54,260.00	\$68,180.00	\$82,100.00	\$96,020.00
<u>Concessions</u>				
Baseball	\$7,500.00	\$8,750.00	\$10,000.00	\$11,250.00
Roller Rink	\$750.00	\$750.00	\$750.00	\$750.00
Restaurant	\$750.00	\$875.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,125.00
Concessions Subtotal	\$9,000.00	\$10,375.00	\$11,750.00	\$13,125.00
<u>Other Income</u>				
Other Rents	\$40,080.00	\$40,080.00	\$40,080.00	\$40,080.00
Total Revenue	\$103,340.00	\$118,635.00	\$133,930.00	\$149,225.00
<u>Expenditures</u>				
Light	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00
Heat	\$12,600.00	\$12,600.00	\$12,600.00	\$12,600.00

⁵⁷ *Montreal Star*, February 8, 1955.

⁵⁸ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-105400, Minutes of meeting of the Montreal City Council, September 24, 1953. My translation.

⁵⁹ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-105400, draft lease for Delorimier Downs Stadium, September 24, 1953.

Maintenance	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
Pay Roll	\$14,000.00	\$14,000.00	\$14,000.00	\$14,000.00
Total Expenditures	\$58,600.00	\$58,600.00	\$58,600.00	\$58,600.00
Profit	\$44,740.00	\$60,035.00	\$75,330.00	\$90,625.00
Amusement Tax ⁶⁰	\$28,374.00	\$44,566.00	\$60,758.00	\$76,950.00
Subtotal	\$73,114.00	\$104,601.00	\$136,088.00	\$167,575.00
Property Tax ⁶¹	\$11,836.00	\$11,836.00	\$11,836.00	\$11,836.00
Net Profit	\$61,278.00	\$92,765.00	\$124,252.00	\$155,739.00

If Veeck and the Browns took up the offer, they would rent the entire stadium: "the ground, the fence, the stands and that part of the buildings actually occupied for baseball purposes and the space occupied by the roller skating rink." The lease would last for ten years, with an escape clause allowing the lessee to break it if, after five years, "he can show unprofitable operations."⁶² It appears, however, that no one expected major league baseball to be a losing business in Montreal. Section four of the draft lease explained the efforts the city would make to ensure Delorimier Downs met the standards of other American League ballparks, and would expand the facilities to meet the needs of the Browns if the need arose. Updating the stadium to American League standards would induce income levels to rise to American League standards as well. In addition, the lease provided for the stadium hosting the major league All-Star game, and the World Series, indicating the city not only thought of all potential developments, but expected the team to be of a high calibre.⁶³

For cities with, or looking to attract a major league club, Baim suggests, "a stadium investment is viewed not only as a way of providing employment, but it may attract funds from non-residents as well." Moreover, "to the extent that a professional

⁶⁰ No formula indicated for this calculation. Previous Amusement Tax information, indicating a ten percent tax on the value of a ticket does not lead to these numbers.

⁶¹ Based on property value of \$332,000.00. See Table 4-4.

⁶² VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-105400, draft lease for Delorimier Downs Stadium, September 24, 1953.

⁶³ VMA, file 03-30-20-VM-1-105400, draft lease for Delorimier Downs Stadium, September 24, 1953. The Browns would be charged \$2,000.00, or an amount stipulated by the major league Commissioner's office, for each of these extra games if they took place.

sports team draws fans who would otherwise spend their entertainment dollars outside the city, the city's economy benefits from the increased economic activity..." Since his study is based on American cities, he adds that each municipality collects income tax from the players and staff of the baseball club, as well as sales taxes on concessions. While that was not the case in Canada, nor with respect to Montreal in this study, "there is," he concludes, "little doubt that a city treasury receives increased [property] tax revenues when a sports franchise moves into town."⁶⁴ Moreover, while the city would not benefit from the income and sales taxes directly, the provincial government would indeed enjoy increased income and sales tax revenues if the city became major league.

Making the move from minor to major league would have had a notable impact on the Montreal economy. Arthur Johnson, in *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development* suggests the following differences between league levels:

A major league team is capable of attracting millions of fans to a stadium in one season, whereas even a successful minor league team rarely draws more than a few hundred thousand fans. A major league team attracts many fans from beyond its local [area], especially for post season play, but this is not the case with a minor league team. Employees salaries of a major league team are significantly higher than those of a minor league team, most of whose employees are seasonal. A major league team brings national recognition to a city, but it is arguable that the average minor league team brings even regional recognition to its host community.⁶⁵

In addition, Baim suggests a host of "positive externalities," which may come as part of a city becoming major league. A boost in civic pride is obvious, he suggests, not only because fans will have a more positive image of the city, but also "if... non-sports fans have a more positive image of their city because of the sports team." He agrees with Johnson that cities gain national recognition through major league sports, explaining that they gain notoriety through mention in newspaper and television sports reports, drawing

⁶⁴ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 2.

⁶⁵ Arthur T Johnson, *Minor League Baseball and Local Economic Development*, Sport and Society Series, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 7.

attention to other city businesses as a result. As a minor league city, Montreal was an exception to the notion that minor league clubs draw less attention. As the first club in the organized baseball hierarchy to hire black players, it enjoyed a level of popularity above normal minor league levels.⁶⁶ In addition to the usual developments associated with professional sports teams, Baim suggests a reduction in crimes committed by urban youth: "Sports, says this argument, provide legal alternatives to criminal behaviour, teach the virtues of living by the rules, and present positive role models for the youngsters."⁶⁷ In more ways than may be readily apparent, even this last development would have positive economic effects.

These indirect stimuli to municipal revenues aside, Delorimier Downs contributed a fair amount to the city's income from the moment it opened in 1928.⁶⁸ While the Exhibition company lost money and failed to pay its taxes over the next eight years—costing the city over \$25,000.00 in lost property tax—the city had more pressing losses during the Depression. During the 1940s and 1950s when the Royals were winning International League pennants, championships, and a handful of Junior World Series titles, the city enjoyed not only the tax benefits of a stadium that rebounded from its declining value, but also an increase in Amusement Tax revenues as attendance figures rose to and maintained relatively high levels as far as the International League was concerned (see Table 4-9).⁶⁹ The ball club itself enjoyed similar success, as winning seasons and high attendance throughout the 1940s brought about an increase in

⁶⁶ Jackie Robinson alone attracted most of this attention to the club.

⁶⁷ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 5.

⁶⁸ See table 4-6 for details of 1928 municipal tax assessment.

⁶⁹ Delorimier Downs was a large stadium for the minor leagues. Its attendance figures for most of the 1940s and 1950s rival current International and Pacific Coast League teams.

revenue. Baim suggests that cities and their businesses also benefit from the influx of baseball fans who would not otherwise spend their entertainment money in the city.⁷⁰

Table 4-9 Attendance Figures After World War II.⁷¹

Year	Attendance
1945	397,517
1946	400,298
1948	477,000
1953	< 300,000
1954	190,000
1955	200,000
1960	130,000

As the 1950s began, however, baseball popularity started to wane, not only in Montreal, but across the minor leagues. As with most of baseball historians, University of Waterloo professor Patrick Harrigan suggests baseball popularity boomed after the Second World War: "...[experiencing] a renaissance... at both the major- and minor-league levels. Major-league attendance increased by 71 per cent in a single year from 1945 to 1946 and by 94 per cent from 1945 to a peak of nearly 21 million in 1948. *The Sporting News* heralded its review of 1948 with the headline 'Gate Marks Smashed.' Minor-league attendance burst from 10 million in 1945 to more than 40 million in each of the years from 1947 to 1949"⁷² After that period, however, television broadcasts of major league games combined with many major league teams reducing their minor league operations, contributed to the declining popularity of the minor leagues.⁷³ The dwindling number of minor league clubs affected Montreal after the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles. In 1958, the Dodgers, playing their first season in California, moved their west coast Triple-A club, the Los Angeles Angels, to Spokane, Washington, designating it their top farm club. Hitherto, Montreal had been the senior club's number one Triple-A

⁷⁰ Baim, *The Sports Stadium as a Municipal Investment*, 2.

⁷¹ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, *passim*. For 1946, *Montreal Daily Star*, September 7, 1946.

⁷² Patrick Harrigan, *The Detroit Tigers: Club and Community, 1945-1995*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 13.

team. The change in status signaled the beginning of the end for the Royals, and attendance began to tumble. Interestingly, however, the value of the stadium continued to rise from its Depression low.⁷⁴ While the baseball club again faltered financially, the city continued to benefit from its presence in the city—maintaining tax collection for the stadium, earning more revenue as its value steadily rose. As attendance fell in the late 1950s, the rising value of the property would have compensated, at least where the city was concerned, for the relative decline in Amusement Tax revenue. Only in the late 1960s, after the stadium became the property of the Commission des Ecoles Catholiques de Montreal, did the city no longer make money on the property: a deal was struck with the school board to avoid the taxes.⁷⁵

As Delorimier Downs approached its last days, it was no longer making money for the institution that owned it, nor was it profitable for the city of Montreal. With one last gasp, the site provided work for those men who razed it and built Ecole Polyvalente Pierre Dupuis in its place. The stadium had seen many ups and downs in its 41 years. Nearly bankrupted by the Depression, it was saved by shrewd management and the support of the Brooklyn Dodgers. During the late 1940s, the stadium was surely generating strong profits for the club and the city, as minor league baseball was very popular. Montreal in particular benefited from the presence of future Dodgers' stars Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe, and Duke Snider, who all played their last minor league games with Montreal before moving to the big leagues. As a business, the stadium and the baseball club that operated in it for 32 years were largely profitable endeavors. It was only the Great Depression, in the 1930s, and the movement

⁷³ Harrigan, *Club and Community*, 36-37.

⁷⁴ See Table 4-1. The tax roll value of the property is inversely related to the success of the franchise in the 1950s, as opposed to the 1930s and 1940s, when the value was directly related to the success of the team as a business and on the field.

⁷⁵ VMA, 1968 City of Montreal Valuation and Assessment Roll, St. Eusébe Ward, 333. The CECM reportedly paid \$2,717,238.00 for the stadium in 1966, *Montreal Daily Star*, August 22, 1969.

of the Royals parent club in the late 1950s that forced the business into decline.

Municipal ownership, contemplated but never a reality, may have been able to attract a major league club to the city, but there was little it might have done to prevent the demise of the Royals in 1960.

* * *

EPILOGUE: SELLING BASEBALL IN 1990S MONTREAL

In 1997, the Montreal Expos of the National League, who have called the city home since 1969, announced plans for a new, downtown Montreal stadium. Having first sought support from the government of the Province of Quebec, which was denied,⁷⁶ the club continues to seek funds through corporate investment and seat licensing. Seat licensing involves the sale of seats, not including tickets to games, for a one-time fee ranging from \$10,000.00 for the best seats to \$500.00 for the cheapest.⁷⁷ In addition, luxury boxes are available for \$100,000.00 and \$110,000.00 depending on their location in the stadium. In addition to the pre-construction sale of seat licenses, the Montreal Baseball Club has secured \$100 million dollars, at a rate of \$5 million per year, beginning in 2001 (the proposed opening of the new park) from Labatt Breweries in exchange for the name of the stadium: Parc Labatt. The description of the new park is not unlike Delorimier Downs in that it is a "classic" ballpark. It will have a small, "intimate" capacity slightly less than 35,000, seven thousand less than the baseball capacity of the club's current home at Stade Olympique in the city's east end. Unlike many of today's behemoth stadiums, built in the 1960s and 1970s, to accommodate over 50,000 fans, Parc Labatt will resemble baseball parks gone by—Shibe Park, Ebbets Field, Comisky

⁷⁶ See Brenda Branswell "Bottom of the Ninth," *Maclean's*, 28 September 1998: 21.

⁷⁷ This approach has proved problematic in that the club has only targeted big business in the Montreal area as potential seat license customers. Individuals have not been targeted in the advertising campaign. Complaints about this approach come from within the Expos ownership consortium. *Montreal Gazette*, September 1998, and Branswell, "Bottom of the Ninth."

Park—as well as a host of neo-classic stadiums opened since 1990 in Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, Denver, and Arlington, Texas. All of these parks boast smaller, more intimate seating capacities than their predecessors, the post-modern, multi-purpose facilities such as Houston's Astrodome, Seattle's Kingdome, and Toronto's recently bankrupted SkyDome.

The Expos' sales pitch, different from what George Stallings used to secure the investment in the Royals in 1927,⁷⁸ is one of urban renewal with undertones of civic pride. The club boasts that the stadium's proposed location will revive a part of the city otherwise disconnected from the downtown core: "Due to the strategic location of the block where [the stadium] will be erected, the new ballpark will provide the crucial missing link between the actual downtown area to the North, the business sector and Old Montreal to the East, and the Lachine Canal to the South, where plans to build public facilities along the banks will soon be underway." Furthermore, the club claims the stadium will revive the social and economic life of the city, "[enabling] the development of the sector by creating the need for new businesses and generating significant returns for retailers, restaurants and hotels in the area."⁷⁹ As always, baseball is perceived as an economic boost for the host city. In Montreal, this remains as true in 1998 as it was in 1928 when Delorimier Downs opened to a sell out crowd of 22,000.

⁷⁸ Stallings premised his appeal on entrepreneurial profit. The Expos ownership of course seeks to gain economically, but their strategy is more diversified and operates at different levels than Stallings.

⁷⁹ Club de Baseball de Montreal, 1998.

Chapter 5 – The Ball Park as Cultural Centre—Delorimier Downs, From Ball Park, to Wedding Chapel, to High School, 1928 – 1969

Delorimier Downs was more than a ballpark. During its 41-year life, the park hosted more than 2000 baseball games, dozens of football games, as well as soccer, boxing and wrestling matches; circuses, carnivals, religious meetings, a monarchist rally, and a mass wedding. It hosted a rally to welcome home troops in 1945, and even served as the headquarters for a political party. In addition, the building housed a roller rink and a dance hall, as well as a concourse large enough for trade shows and other exhibitions. Primarily a ballpark, Delorimier became a multipurpose facility: at once a cathedral of folk (or mass) culture, it was a makeshift religious forum, sports arena, and eventually a school. The present chapter surveys the other-than-baseball events that took place within the confines of Delorimier Downs from 1928 through 1969, focussing on the 1939 monarchist rally and mass wedding, the 1940 to 1942 National Festivals, the impact of the park on the life of one-time Montreal Royals player Kermit Kitman, gambling in the stands, and the ambience in the crowd at professional sports events.

While the ballpark was indeed built as home for the new Royals baseball club, it was also conceived of as more than home to a baseball team: before construction began in December 1927, the *Montreal Gazette* explained that "plans for... the stands have already been completed... and ample accommodation will be provided in the exhibition building [beneath the stands]. Several good shows have already been booked."¹ By June of 1928, plans to take advantage of the exhibition space were coming to fruition.² The playing field was also booked for other-than-baseball use: in mid-April 1928, two weeks

¹ *Montreal Gazette*, December 1, 1927.

² See chapter three, and Leslie Roberts "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," *Maclean's*, July 15, 1928, 16-17, 59.

before the baseball season opened in Montreal, an exhibition soccer match featuring the Scottish League Champion Glasgow Rangers was arranged, and before the end of June, the park also hosted a boxing match.³ Naturally, the first event held in the stadium involved the Royals and the return of the International League to Montreal.

OPENING WEEK

Leading up to the home opener, the Royals organization sought the advice of fans regarding game times at Delorimier Downs. The club polled a select group of Montreal businessmen, no doubt its season ticket holders, for the best start time for weekday afternoon games.⁴ Royals business manager Walter Hapgood explained, however, that the club wanted the opinion of a wide range of fans: "we do not want to confine opinion to any one class... one fellow's vote carries as much weight as the next." Weekend and holiday games would start earlier, Hapgood added, "because on those days everybody is free the entire afternoon."⁵ While the team hoped to attract fans from all classes, its ticket pricing policy may not have helped. During the week, only the box seats would be reserved, with the remainder of the grandstand unreserved at \$0.85 and bleachers at \$0.55. On weekends, however, when more people were free to attend, half of the grandstand was reserved at \$1.10 per seat; surely this discouraged some fans from attending.⁶

Montreal's first professional baseball game in eleven years was scheduled for the afternoon of May 1, 1928, but a series of rainy days caused it to be postponed until May 5. During the delay the team's board of directors, along with the Kiwanis club, hosted a

³ *Montreal Gazette*, April 17, June 14, and June 18, 1928.

⁴ Evening games were five years in the future at this point. See below for more on lights at Delorimier.

⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, April 19, 1928.

⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, April 23, 1928.

luncheon with major league baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis as guest of honour. Landis had planned to remain for the game, but the rain delay was too long for his liking, and he returned to work in Chicago. Rain also put a damper on the parade scheduled to go from the luncheon to the ballpark in time for the first game.⁷ While most ballparks would have endured the slight rainfall, Delorimier's playing field was not yet covered with grass and would not be until season's end; as it was, the field was covered with sand that quickly turned to mud in the rain.⁸ When the rain let up, and the grounds dried enough to hold the game, an open house was attended by more than 1000 eager fans. "Local fandom," a *Montreal Gazette* writer suggested, "is apparently eagerly awaiting the league opening."⁹

Indeed Montrealers were eager for the return of professional baseball, and the expectation of an overflow crowd was met on opening day. Several hundred fans were relegated to a special standing room only section roped off in centre field.¹⁰ Baseball's popularity wore off quickly: after two home games the total attendance approached 35,000, one month and 18 more home games later, the club had attracted 90,000 for an average of 4,500 per game.¹¹ The popularity of the Royals had already risen and fallen before the team was two months old. Over the years, baseball's popularity ebbed and flowed with the on-field exploits of the team and the economy: losing teams were not box office successes, and the Depression made it tougher for fans to afford the price of attending.¹²

⁷ *Montreal Gazette*, April 30 and May 2, 1928.

⁸ Roberts, "Base Pelotte' Comes Back," 17.

⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, May 5, 1928.

¹⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, May 7, 1928.

¹¹ *Montreal Gazette*, May 7 and June 6, 1928.

¹² For more on the financial tides, see above, chapter three.

One solution to slumping crowds was night baseball. During the Depression, professional baseball across North America began to be played at night, with huge lamp standards erected on the roofs and along the outfield walls of many ballparks. At Delorimier, the first night game was held on July 18, 1933, at 9:15 p.m., so it would be dark enough to maximize their effect. The importance of the lights extended beyond baseball games.¹³ Events such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique cultural pageant, the National Festivals of 1940 through 1942, and a host of other evening events, would not have been possible had Delorimier Downs not been modified with lights. Lights also facilitated the increased attendance of workingmen who were unable to attend afternoon baseball games. While night games were scarce in the 1930s, they continued to rise in popularity, particularly after the Second World War when the game rose in popularity, and more people enjoyed sufficient disposable income.

THE EBB AND FLOW OF BASEBALL POPULARITY IN THE POSTWAR ERA

In the 1940s, following the end of the Second World War, Delorimier Downs experienced the Royals's most popular period. While postwar enthusiasm for the game extended through all of organized baseball,¹⁴ Montreal became one of the most popular teams in the vast minor league system. In 1946, the season after the team's first pennant win since 1935, and only its third including 1898, the Montreal Royals were already popular. Adding to off-season interest in the club was the October 23, 1945 signing of Jackie Robinson to play for the team in 1946. While members of the English Montreal media were at first unconvinced of Robinson's ability to draw crowds, as we

¹³ William Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 36.

¹⁴ See Patrick Harrigan, *The Detroit Tigers: Club and Community, 1945-1995*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 13; and Bruce Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 100.

have seen, his play along with the team's strong showing brought record numbers through the ballpark's gates.

The Robinson-led Royals won the International League pennant for the second consecutive year, and followed the club's best season ever with a Governor's Cup—International League playoff—victory and its first ever Junior World Series win. During the 1946 post-season, Montrealers jammed Delorimier Downs even when it was colder than expected. Reports in the *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Star* during the club's Junior World Series victory run place well over 15,000 in the grandstand for each home game. Interest in Robinson was not muted by the team's success. From the first home game of the season, when he was surrounded by autograph seeking fans, to the post-game celebration of the Junior World Series win, fans rooted for him like no other player.¹⁵ Robinson's year in Montreal was special, and with the exception of 1948, when the club attracted more fans, it was the most popular year in the team's history.

In the 1950s, the Royals found themselves less attractive. Their waning popularity was part of a North-America-wide decrease in minor league interest. The advent of major league games on television brought the big leagues into the homes of those who could afford to purchase a television.¹⁶ In addition, Montreal was renowned for supporting only winning teams, and when the Royals started to lose, attendance dropped significantly. Despite pennants in 1951, 1952, 1955, and 1958, local fans began to see the team as a loser when the Dodgers started making plans to move to Los Angeles. In 1958 the Royals won the International League pennant and the Governor's Cup with far from the best players the Dodgers could supply, and even though the team was winning, Montreal lost interest. In 1959 and 1960, the club slipped from first to sixth

¹⁵ See above, chapter three.

¹⁶ See Harrigan, *The Detroit Tigers: Club and Community, 1945-1995*, 36-37. Don McGowan also pointed out that despite once weekly broadcasts of Royals games on Montreal television the

and then eighth. By this time fan interest had declined severely.¹⁷ Royals chronicler William Brown notes the dramatic demise of fan interest in 1959. On opening day, a mere 5,800 showed up to see the team.¹⁸ A year later, nearly 9,000 came to the ballpark on opening day, but interest was limited. Among the reasons for the team's poor attendance was the hype surrounding the recently completed National Hockey League season and playoffs. The Montreal Canadiens had just won their fifth consecutive Stanley Cup, and "the Montreal sports pages were filled with news [of the Canadiens's exploits], so there was little mention of the Royals."¹⁹

Royals General Manager Fernand Dubois anticipated poor attendance before opening day, and invited Fidel Castro to Montreal to throw the ceremonial first pitch (Havana had a team in the International League at the time). The Cuban leader declined, but, Brown points out that, "Dubois came up with another stunt: he vowed not to shave until the team won a game. When the Royals finally ended the 14-game skid by winning the first game of a doubleheader against Buffalo, Dubois, looking a bit like Castro himself... had his whiskers shaved by a barber at home plate between games." Additional fan-attracting gimmicks included a \$10,000.00 prize if a player hit a ball through a softball-sized hole in the homerun fence.²⁰ Combined with a lack of interest on the part of the Dodgers, who at the time maintained three Triple-A farm clubs, fan disinterest in the Royals brought four decades of baseball to an end in Montreal, and the International League transferred the team to Syracuse for 1961. Long-time Royals

availability of major league games curbed interest in the local minor league team. McGowan interview, February 10, 1998.

¹⁷ The *Montreal Gazette* reported on September 7, 1960, that just over 1,000 fans attended the club's final 1960 home game; leaving over 21,000 seats empty.

¹⁸ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 171.

¹⁹ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 174.

²⁰ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 175.

reporter Lloyd McGowan remarked “baseball isn’t dead in Montreal... it’s just taking a recess.”²¹

THE ROYAL VISIT OF 1939

On May 18, 1939, when King George VI and Elizabeth (today’s Queen Mum) arrived in Montreal as part of their Royal visit to Canada, the entire city, it seems, poured into the streets, swelled temporary sidewalk grandstands, and flocked to the city’s two stadiums to wave Union Jacks at the monarchs. Municipal work crews were out before dawn to put the finishing touches on grandstands across the city. One of these, erected near Park Avenue Station, where the Royal train arrived, was reported as 300 feet long, with a capacity for 1200.²² The *Montreal Star* reported that “many of the very poorest in the city... somehow managed to provide themselves with small flags” to wave as the Royal procession passed them by.²³ Yet even the cheapest flag, Montreal historian William Weintraub explains, “entailed a sacrifice, in a city that was in the grip of the Great Depression, where people often went hungry.” Despite widespread poverty—and the support for the visit by the poor—the procession route carefully avoided the poorest areas. Even so, the monarchs did visit the Delorimier Downs in the East End, one of the less affluent regions of the city.²⁴

At Delorimier Downs, forty-five thousand Catholic school children and their teachers, most of them French-Canadian from the surrounding East End neighbourhoods, packed the stadium to see the King and Queen. The motorcade toured

²¹ *Montreal Star*, September 7, 1960.

²² *Montreal Gazette*, May 19, 1939.

²³ *Montreal Star*, May 19, 1939.

²⁴ William Weintraub, *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and '50s*, 2 ed., (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), 11. The *Montreal Gazette* published a map of the Royal parade route on May 18, 1939. The route avoided areas such as St. Henri and St. Anne where the working poor had lived for decades.

the stadium in less than two minutes. As it passed through the narrow route carved out of the throng, the children sang and shouted "God Save The King." In the grandstand 900 children dressed in red, white, and blue were strategically seated to form a large Union Jack, while along the passageway, "smartly clad cadets from the Plateau, St. Stanilas, and St. Viateur schools formed the guard of honour."²⁵ The *Montreal Gazette* described the Delorimier Downs crowd as "truly French-Canadian," noting that the children began arriving at the park at 11:00 a.m., with overcrowded tramway cars shuttling them from their schools to the stadium.²⁶ Across town at McGill University's Percival Molson Stadium, 15,000 Protestant school children and their teachers awaited a fleeting glimpse of the King and Queen. Back at Delorimier, the hype did not subside: the children continued to celebrate after the motorcade left the stadium.²⁷ While French Canadians may or may not have related to the British Monarch, for one day in Montreal, and the previous day in Quebec City, they were all loyal subjects and vehement supporters of the monarchs—all of them in their best dress and on their best behaviour.²⁸ The experience of seeing Their Majesties extended beyond the two minutes (or less along city streets) the Royal couple was in sight. It is reasonable to suggest the children and their teachers—clergymen and nuns in the Catholic schools—began preparing for the Royal Visit well in advance. Moreover, it is plausible the children were taught to behave in a manner akin to attending a mass; the Royal visit was indeed a special occasion.

²⁵ *Montreal Gazette*, May 19, 1939.

²⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, May 19, 1939. According to the itinerary accompanying the map of the motorcade route, the stadium was full of enthusiastic children more than three hours before the Royal procession arrived.

²⁷ *Montreal Gazette*, May 19, 1939.

²⁸ Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada, 1900-1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 315,

Seeing the King and Queen was special for all Canadians, as it was the first time a Monarch had visited the country. "The Royal Standard of a British Sovereign," the *Montreal Gazette* noted, "flew yesterday afternoon from the top of Mount Royal for the first time in history, while beneath the waving banner King George and Queen Elizabeth looked down upon a city that was welcoming them as it had welcomed no other man and woman in its long existence...."²⁹ The historical significance was not lost on the children whose enthusiasm reflects their having been taught the importance of the event. Moreover, very few children likely forgot the event before they could recount their participation in the spectacle to children and grandchildren many years later.

As John Bale suggests in *Sport, Space and the City*, participation in spectator events provides "a physical-educative function including the inculcation of the ideal of fair play and the example of sporting role models."³⁰ As spectators during the Royal visit, the children assembled at Delorimier Downs were not implicitly taught the virtues of sportsmanship, but they were witness to the virtues of disciplined behaviour. Their wild, yet moderated cheering was greeted with smiles and waves from the Monarchs, the gestures tacit approval of the children's proper behaviour. In addition, Bale upholds the notion that stadium events are spectacular not only for their on-field events—in this case the drive-by greeting of the King and Queen—but also for the crowd—this time the brightly dressed, well-behaved school children shouting and waving their greetings to the passing Royalty.³¹ There was much more to the spectacle that May afternoon than the brief appearance by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

The Royal Visit, the newspapers generally hinted, was a support-building mission for the expected outbreak of war. And for Delorimier Downs, as one of the brief stops

²⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, May 19, 1939. Bothwell, Drummond, and English also note the country-wide enthusiasm which greeted the Royal couple (*Canada, 1900-1945*, 315).

³⁰ John Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, (London UK: Routledge, 1993), 18.

³¹ Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 10.

along the Royal tour, the visit was harbinger of post-war celebrations to welcome home Montreal-based troops in the fall of 1945. More than 2,500 soldiers and airmen arrived in Montreal over the weekend of October 27 and 28, 1945, where they met with a grand reception. Arriving at Bonaventure Station in the downtown area, the war veterans were paraded through the city to Delorimier Downs where a crowd in excess of 10,000 braved chilling weather to cheer the return of Les Fusiliers Mount-Royal. The parade, according to the *Montreal Star*, pushed its way "through streets crowded as they usually are for St. Jean Baptiste Day parades."³² Accompanying the article, a photograph shows a packed Delorimier stadium, with the troops aligned for inspection on the playing field. Six and a half years after the Royal visit—to drum up support for the war—Delorimier was home to the ceremonial end of the conflict for thousands of Montrealers.

'RENEWING THE PURE NATION': THE MASS MARRIAGE OF 106 COUPLES AT DELORIMIER DOWNS

Two months after the Royal Visit, on July 23, 1939, Delorimier Downs hosted the simultaneous marriage of 106 couples, all of them members of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique.³³ The wedding spectacle was part of the organization's Second General Congress, which took place in Montreal that weekend.³⁴ "Never before," the *Montreal Herald* explained before the ceremony, "has such an attempt been made to glorify the sanctity of the marriage vows and to reestablish in the minds of youth the prestige which the sponsors of the ceremony believe marriage has lost with the modern generation."³⁵

³² *Montreal Star*, October 29, 1945.

³³ To give an idea of how youthful the group was, the *Montreal Herald* reported the average age of the brides was 23 and the grooms 26 years of age (July 18, 1939).

³⁴ *Montreal Herald*, July 24, 1939. Note: the reported number of couples ranges from 104 to 110 in Montreal newspapers. The present work maintains 106 (as reported by *La Presse*) except within citations.

³⁵ *Montreal Herald*, July 18, 1939.

William Weintraub notes the extent of fear that youth had lost respect for marriage, citing a *Montreal Gazette* columnist who deplored the behaviour of many young Montreal women who were intimate with sailors as they came and went from the city's port. The mass wedding, in Weintraub's estimation, reaffirmed "the sanctity of marriage... in an event that rivaled the Royal Visit in terms of the public enthusiasm it aroused."³⁶ The rite was not initially planned to take place in the stadium. A week prior to the rite, the *Montreal Herald* reported the event would be held in the city's Nôtre Dame Cathedral.³⁷ The reason for the relocation to the stadium is not clear, although it likely had much to do with space.

The Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique, the organization responsible for the mass wedding, was a youth labour movement associated with the Catholic church. As such, the organization was something of a mystery to anglophone readers of the *Montreal Herald*. In an effort to inform readers, the paper endeavored to answer, "What exactly is the J.O.C.? ...What are its aims? What is it accomplishing?" The Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique appeared as an enthusiastic group driven by ideology and hero worship. Their hero was Father Henry Roy, founder of the movement, and its chaplain. When Roy first conceived of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique in 1931, membership included one parish, by the time of the mass wedding more than 36,000 young Catholic workers had joined the association. "The aim of the J.O.C." the report suggests, "is to improve the lot of working youths in the province morally and physically. To this end, the organization seeks to work with employers, but not against them... [Moreover,] if the young Catholic worker in a mill or factory seems to be 'going wrong' [i.e., against the employer], the J.O.C. seeks to provide him with a friend who will be a good influence on his character." In addition, an out-of-work member could count on food, lodging, and help in the job hunt

³⁶ Weintraub, *City Unique*, 20.

³⁷ *Montreal Herald*, July 18, 1939.

from the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique. Some members worked at the organization's St. Denis headquarters for nothing more than room, board, and other provisions. The group was self-sustaining: each member paid dues of ten cents a month. "One interesting point," the *Herald* report concluded, "is that the membership is three fifths feminine. 'The girl workers seem easier to organize,' [an] official explained."³⁸

The mass wedding was part of the day-long Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique general congress that started with the nuptials and ended with the organization's cultural pageant held in the evening at the stadium. The *Montreal Gazette* wrote that the wedding took place,

In a colourful and typically French-Canadian atmosphere and with all the pomp and ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church, 105 couples were married simultaneously... at an open air service which awed 25,000 curious but devout spectators in the Montreal baseball stadium. Spectacular yet solemn and impressive; stirring although lacking the simplicity and intimacy which characterize single weddings, the mass marriage left an indelible impression on the throngs who braved a scorching sun to view a scene which could hardly be reproduced.³⁹

Emphasis on the colours of the ceremony was not lost on anyone. Thorough descriptions of the "colourful" affair are given by most papers—including many reminders of the grooms wearing the customary blue of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique, and the brides, as with wedding tradition, all in white. In addition, there were more than 100 priests performing the rites, among them the colours of the Redemptionists, Oblates, Franciscans, Jesuits, White Fathers, and other missionary orders, with banners representing them held aloft by the members of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique surrounding the ceremony.⁴⁰

Montreal's *La Presse* emphasized the importance of marriage to the maintenance of the working class in Quebec. Before the masses assembled in the

³⁸ *Montreal Herald*, July 22, 1939.

³⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

stadium, Archbishop coadjutor Monsignor Gauthier declared: " Today we throw a seed of Christ into humanity, to regenerate the working class."⁴¹ The stadium gave special meaning to the event, allowing it to take place outdoors, on display for God and the thousands of wedding guests. Continuing the bubbly missionary rhetoric of Monsignor Gauthier, *La Presse* explained the formative role these marriages would have in the future of French-Canadian labour:

In the open air, under a clear sky, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique reaffirmed its faith in the sanctity of marriage. On this golden Sunday, under the supervision of the bishops, it presented for the world to see, the nuptial benediction of these 106 couples. All of whom spent a long time preparing to become the foundation of a new City of God; and each of these new families, born of Christ today, is a stone in that foundation.⁴²

Their long preparation involved a year-long study of Pope Pius XI's *Casti Connubii*. Also known as the *Encyclical of His Holiness Pius XI on Chastity in Marriage*, the document addressed many of the issues and expectations involved in marriage.⁴³ Naturally, many of the ideals explicated in the *Casti Connubii* were common-sense morals in marriage; their public glorification in the mass wedding at Delorimier Downs served to underline their importance in a time when people were thought to be straying from propriety. The marriages also marked the beginning of a five-year study by Father Roy, "who plan[ed] to determine within the next five years what contribution this phase of social work [the teaching of the *Casti Connubii* by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique] can make to his attempts towards the betterment of Catholic working youth."⁴⁴ In the course of those five years, Roy planned to carry on the relationships he developed with the couples during

⁴⁰ Montreal *Herald*, July 24, 1939.

⁴¹ Montreal *La Presse*, July 24, 1939. All citations from French-language sources are my translations.

⁴² Montreal *La Presse*, July 24, 1939.

⁴³ For more on the *Casti Connubii*, see Gerald Carr Treacy ed., *Five Great Encyclicals: Labour, Education, Marriage, Reconstruction of the Social Order, Atheistic Communism*, (New York, The Paulist Press, 1939).

⁴⁴ Montreal *Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

their study of the *Casti Connubii*, and remain in their lives as both friend and counsellor.⁴⁵

Once the marriage ceremony concluded, the couples, Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique members, officials, and clergy retired to Île Ste.-Hélène, where, amid the large playing field, they sat to enjoy a wedding luncheon. The Montreal Tramways Company managed transportation for the couples and their guests, shuttling them between the stadium and the island—via the Cartier Bridge—with relative ease; they also returned to the stadium via transit for the evening's Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique pageant.⁴⁶ Before leaving the park on Île Ste.-Hélène, the assemblage was addressed by Roger Gelineau, General Treasurer of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique. He explained to the group, under the rubric of "A Pure Nation is a Strong Nation," that "sins against morality have filled jails and asylums," and called for government action as the remedy to urban slum conditions wherefrom came crime and vice.⁴⁷

Upon their return to Delorimier Downs, the delegates pledged themselves to Gelineau's speech and the reestablishment of a Pure Nation, "working 'so the joy of Christ may enter into the hearts of all workers.'"⁴⁸ But it was not the open pledge to revive a morally circumspect society that enlivened the crowd. It was the public disavowal of swing music which excited them most. Led by a Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique member, symbolically clad in overalls, the crowd cheered his outburst against swing and broke into a march, keeping time with "a potpourri of the best known French-Canadian airs."⁴⁹ Joining the proud labourers were their recently married friends

⁴⁵ Montreal *Herald*, July 24, 1939.

⁴⁶ Montreal *Herald*, July 24, 1939.

⁴⁷ Montreal *Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

⁴⁸ Montreal *Gazette*, July 24, 1939. In this instance, the 'Pure Nation' should not be confused with French-Canadian nationalism; the 'Pure Nation' called for and pledged to by the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique membership that day was one of moral purity rather than one of corruption and crime.

⁴⁹ Montreal *Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

and fellow Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique members, while Montreal mayor Camillien Houde looked on. Unfortunately the excitement combined with the tortuous heat of the July evening caused more than 400 delegates to succumb to heat exhaustion. Of 150 taken to nearby hospitals, all but four were released after treatment.⁵⁰

Mayor Houde was there to address the throng of Catholic workers, and began his speech with the borrowed words of well-known historian and Catholic priest, Lionel Groulx. "We [French Canadians] are all mystics," Houde told the audience of workers, "and such we must remain. We are mystics surrounded by materialists, and we should strive to become realists, without however, ceasing to be mystics." As he continued, Houde explained to the young workers the importance of their place in Quebec society:

Actually we [French-Canadians] dominate here by our greater numbers. That's not enough. We must try to dominate in the field of economics—and play the role that is properly ours. I heard Her Majesty the Queen say at Ottawa that her fondest wish was to see a happy relations [sic] existing here between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians as those in Great Britain between the Scottish people and the English.

Our problem, though, is not the same. There they have one language, one religion. Our problem is more than of southern Ireland where a century-long battle for religious rights was staged...

When you see great credit organizations holding back money from provincial and civil authorities—there you see the danger of economic encirclement. But, we have faith and will-power and, I know, we'll win through.

Our constitution does not allow our statesmen always to defend our people as they sometimes would wish. All right, then, I say let us change the constitution, modify it, or—throw it overboard!

I give the Jocists the title of 'Army of the Right.' We'll need them, we public men, and I hope we'll always find this youth standing firm. Never neglect the occasion to assert yourselves. Sing the songs of "chez nous" and pray Providence to keep us French and Catholic in this North America. Pray!⁵¹

This Army of the Right, however, was not Houde's call for the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique to align with the political right; rather it was his affirmation of their pledge to the creed, "A Pure Nation is a Strong Nation."

⁵⁰ *Montreal Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

⁵¹ *Montreal Gazette*, July 24, 1939.

While alignment with the right may not have been on the agenda that day, William Weintraub suggests many of the couples were subjected to a brand of right-wing thought when they honeymooned in St. Agathe. The small town situated in the Laurentian Mountains north of Montreal was site of the infamous sign telling Jewish people to stay away.⁵² The newlyweds who stayed there long enough to hear the July 30, 1939, mass of Canon J.B. Charland would have heard the priest endorse conservative values and expulsion of Jews from the town. In his mass, the priest stressed—in rhetoric similar to Houde's the week before—the need for French Canadians to remain "maîtres chez nous," further explaining that St. Agathe residents "must be taught to rent their [cottages] in summer to other Christians and not to Jews." He did not advocate physical harm of Jewish people, but underlined his point by adding French-Canadian people "must not give up [their] best traditions."⁵³ Whether the couples connected Charland's message with Houde's speech at Delorimier Downs remains uncertain, but it is quite possible they did. As they set off on their new lives together, Delorimier Downs remained with them not only for the memories of their wedding, but also the rhetoric of the clergy and the Montreal mayor; they had a mission, and Delorimier was its departure point.

FROM MORAL PURITY TO VICE: GAMBLING IN DELORIMIER DOWNS

While the mass wedding and the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique pageant saw the public espousal of moral purity, Delorimier Downs was not necessarily a place free of vice. Gamblers were and remain commonplace in baseball crowds across North

⁵² For a photograph of the sign see Linteau et al., *Quebec Since 1930*, 81.

⁵³ Weintraub, *City Unique*, 20-21. A fair number of the couples also headed directly to their homes, preferring to accept the advice of Father Roy, who suggested they postpone honeymoons until better economic times were upon them. For more on anti-Semitism in Quebec during the 1930s, see Esther Delisle, *The Traitor and the Jew* (Montreal: Robert Davies Publishing, 1994).

America, and Delorimier Downs was no exception; nor was Montreal, where gambling was a thorn in the city's side during the 1940s. William Weintraub explains:

In Canada where virtually all forms of gambling were forbidden, where there were no legal casinos or lotteries, Montreal was an oasis in the desert for men and women who wanted to try their luck. The map of the city was studded with establishments that offered horse betting, sports betting, roulette, blackjack, chemin de fer, baccarat, craps and, of course, barbotte, the hugely popular dice game unique to Montreal.⁵⁴

American baseball historian Richard L. Miller notes the prevalence of gamblers in major league parks: "these 50-cent bettors," he writes, "were the truest fans of all. They always sat in the same place and never missed a game, betting on every pitch, every hit, and every batter. '50 cents he hits! Two to one he misses!'"⁵⁵ Lifelong Montrealer Larry Fredericks, who started watching Royals games in the early 1940s, and later became their radio play-by-play announcer in the late 1950s, recalls bets being taken in the stands at Delorimier. "I used to see people gambling... it was small bits [*sic.*], a couple of dollars here and there, [on things like] how many innings the pitcher would get a no-hitter, who was going to get the first hit... you would see a little bit of gambling like that... in the crowd."⁵⁶

Montreal Royals President Hector Racine was deeply concerned about gambling in the stadium. William Brown notes in his history of the Royals that the general postwar rise in fan interest, combined with the excitement surrounding Jackie Robinson brought bigger crowds to Delorimier, and those bigger crowds attracted increasing numbers of gamblers. By this time, however, gambling was old hat in the Delorimier grandstand. According to Brown, "Montreal lawyer Conrad Shatner remembers attending games in the 1930s with his uncle, a bookie who would take bets during the game. 'In those days

⁵⁴ Weintraub, *City Unique*, 61.

⁵⁵ Richard L. Miller, "The Baseball Parks and the American Culture," in Alvin Hall ed., *Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and the American Culture (1990)*, (Westport CT: Meckler Publishing, 1991), 180.

⁵⁶ Fredericks interview, February 2, 1998.

people used to bet by the inning,' Shatner recalls, 'are the Royals going to get any hits, any runs? If the team was down a by a couple of runs you could get better odds on the game.'⁵⁷ Brown cites Racine as thinking that gambling was out of control in the ballpark, with fans occasionally promising players money for a hit or a homerun.⁵⁸ In 1946, however, when news broke of widespread gambling in the stands, both General Manager Melvin Jones and President Racine quickly denied its rampancy.

Jones laughed at reports of \$60,000.00 changing hands at a recent Royals doubleheader. "Somebody got too many zeroes on the line," he explained, "we don't know of course, but the figure might be closer to \$600.00." Jones also admitted hiring three undercover spotters to keep a watch for gamblers, and that he personally had removed three gamblers from the grandstand during a recent game. Efforts to curb the illegal exchange of money at the ballpark extended to ticket scalping, which Jones estimated took place on a minor scale.⁵⁹ Former Royals player Kermit Kitman acknowledges he knew gambling went on during games, but that players were not involved.⁶⁰ While Kitman and his fellow Royals stayed clear of gamblers, especially off the field, it was an encounter with a Montreal bookie that changed his life.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 106.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 106. This practice is not necessarily related to gambling. Fans were known for making offers of primes to players for hits and especially for home runs. Robin Anderson, among others, discusses this aspect of the game in "'On the Edge of the Baseball Map' with the 1908 Vancouver Beavers." *Canadian Historical Review* 77, 4 (December 1996): 556. In addition the "hit it here" sign was prevalent in baseball at all levels in the 1940s. Oftentimes hitting the sign meant a prize for the player who completed the feat. Lawrence Ritter points out the "Hit This Sign and Win A Siebler Suit" placard above the left field fence in Cincinnati's Crosley Field was typical of classic-style ballparks. Ritter, *Lost Ballparks: A Celebration of Baseball's Legendary Fields*, (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1992), 47.

⁵⁹ *Montreal Star*, May 28, 1946. Brown notes that the Royals initiated the placement of spotters in the crowd after offers of cash to players for their performance began to be made via the public address system (Brown, *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, 106).

⁶⁰ Kitman interview, June 18, 1998.

PLAYERS AND FANS: KERMIT KITMAN IN MONTREAL⁶¹

When Kermit Kitman arrived in Montreal he was only 22 years old, and had one season of Class B professional baseball to his experience. For Montreal writer Mordecai Richler and his Jewish schoolboy friends, Kitman was an instant hero, as he was the only Jewish member of the team. "Our loyalty to the team was redoubled," Richler reflects, noting that he and his friends had been frustrated when many of their favorite players were promoted to play for the Dodgers.⁶² Kitman's first experience with local fans came during his first week in the city. During the team's third home game, Kitman asked a Jewish fan seated along the first base side of the stadium where he might get a shave and haircut. Directed to a downtown Jewish barbershop, Kitman showed up the next day for his grooming. While on the chair, lathered up and about to be shaven, a customer recognized him as a Royals player. At this time the team had only played three home games, and Kitman was thrilled to be recognized. As he stood to offer his hand to the stranger, he was rebuked. The man explained he had lost a \$500 bet when Kitman was caught off second base during a double play the day before. Kitman was reluctant to talk further with the bettor, as he feared what might happen should the vigilant commissioner's office hear of his meeting with someone who could be a bookie.⁶³

His moment in the spotlight apparently over, Kitman was further surprised when the barber told him his son wanted to meet him. The barber's son became Kitman's life-

⁶¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the following comes from my interview with Kermit Kitman, June 18, 1998.

⁶² Mordecai Richler, "Up From the Minors in Montreal," in William Humber and John St. James eds., *All I Thought About Was Baseball: Writings on a Canadian Pastime*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 257. "Up From the Minors in Montreal" was originally penned for *The Ultimate Baseball Book* in the 1970s. In contrast to Richler's suggestion that fans were angry over player promotions, Don McGowan suggested Montreal baseball fans took pride in their city's role in the careers of players on the rise to major league status. Fans understood, he said, that these players were only on the Royals roster until they were ready for the Dodgers (McGowan interview, February 10, 1998).

⁶³ For more on the impact of gambling on baseball, especially when it involved players betting on their games, see Harold Seymour *Baseball: The Golden Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), *passim*; and Charles Alexander *Ty Cobb*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), *passim*.

long friend, and even introduced the young ballplayer to the woman who less than a year later became his wife. Kitman's wife was a friend of the young man's wife. Upon reflection, Kitman says he is glad his life was so influenced by his baseball career. He never made it to the major leagues, and retired after the 1946 season to start his own Montreal-based business in the garment industry.

When he arrived in Montreal, Kitman quickly became associated with the Young Men's Hebrew Association. There he posted notice of his need for room and board for the summer, and soon after found it for \$30.00 a month at the corner of St. Joseph and Bordeaux streets in the East End. His landlord, he suspected, was a bookie, but never mentioned gambling to Kitman; he did, however, remind the young Royal of his curfew, as Royals manager Bruno Betzel maintained a one o'clock AM curfew for his players. Kitman reminisces fondly of his lodgings, remembering a beautiful room, good food, and the landlord's wife providing laundry.

As the 1945 season progressed, Kitman became increasingly involved with the local Jewish community. In response to questions about whether he was ever offered a prime by fans inciting him to get a hit, he replied he never received such an offer, but that the best-known Jewish bookie in the city arranged a night for him at Moishe's Restaurant (a well known Montreal establishment, but relatively new in 1945). The Jewish people of the city were especially warm to Kitman, and that night at Moishe's, when they passed a hat in his honour, over \$600.00 was raised, nearly the equivalent of a month's salary for the young ball player.⁶⁴ Kitman was not the only Royals player to be

⁶⁴ He explained that he made \$650.00 a month as a Royal, and that his salary was above average. He was well paid not only because of his baseball skills, but also because of his college education. The following season, another, more famous Montreal Royals rookie, Jackie Robinson would earn the same pay, again, because of his education. He also mentioned that the local fans in Trenton, New Jersey (home to a class B club in the Dodger organization) had welcomed him, and other players, with similar festivities in 1944.

fêted by a local ethnic community: a year later, Al Campanis received similar treatment from the local Greek population.⁶⁵

As a member of an ethnic minority group, Kitman says he never felt unwelcome nor experienced discrimination in the city. "Rarely," he adds, "did I ever hear a slander against a Jew at the ballpark." He admits a teammate once uttered an anti-Semitic slur at a bookie, but in response to the betting man harassing the player for not living up to his wagers' expectations. Moreover, Kitman adds, "he promptly apologized to me," for the remark. Not only was the local group of baseball fans and the Jewish community welcoming for Kitman, he generally found Montreal friendly to young athletes, and characterized it as a great place to start a career as a professional athlete.

With his marriage approaching, Kitman spent the winter of 1945-1946 in Montreal to be close to his fiancée, which allowed him time to play basketball with the YMHA in a local amateur league.⁶⁶ Throughout the winter basketball season, a photo of Kitman—as a Royal—accompanied most articles reporting on YMHA basketball. From that winter onwards, Kitman became a Montrealer. His interest in local sports extended to coaching baseball, continuing to play basketball, and, according to the *Montreal Star*, he tried out for the Montreal Allouettes football team in the fall of 1946 after his return from Asheville where he played the 1946 baseball season.⁶⁷ He has since remained an avid supporter of amateur and professional sport in Montreal.

⁶⁵ *Montreal Star*, June 5 and June 17, 1946. Campanis was given a radio-phonograph and his wife flowers in a June 16, 1946, pregame presentation following a soirée in their honour the previous evening.

⁶⁶ *Montreal Star*, November 19, 1945.

⁶⁷ *Montreal Star*, September 25, 1946. Kitman was transferred to Asheville, North Carolina, on April 16, 1946, on the eve of the new season. *Montreal Gazette*, April 17, 1946.

THE NATIONAL FESTIVAL AND OTHER EVENTS AT DELORIMIER

In the summer of 1940, Delorimier Downs hosted the first of three annual National Festivals, organized as part of Montreal's three hundredth anniversary celebration scheduled for the summer of 1942. The first two festivals were dress rehearsals for the third, which would be part of the official celebrations. On July 17, 1940, the first National Festival, which Montreal's *Le Bien Public* called "les Jeux du III Centenaire," was witnessed by thousands of Montrealers. The festival, *Le Bien Public* noted in advance, "will have at once a sportive and musical character. The first part of the programme, the sports half, will begin at 8 PM and continue for one and a half hours; from 9:30 PM to 11:00 PM, there will be different musical acts."⁶⁸ A pictorial spread in Montreal's *La Presse* depicted some of the many athletes who took part in the event, including a shot of diver Aurele Thomas, Canadian champion, soaring above both the diving platform and the grandstand canopy.⁶⁹ The crowd, estimated at more than 10,000, witnessed displays of softball, volleyball, basketball, ping pong, track and field events, cycling, gymnastics and the aforementioned diving. Tickets were moderately priced—compared to baseball tickets—and ranged from 15 cents for children to 50 cents for box seats.⁷⁰

The following year, between 12,000 and 15,000 filled the stadium for the final pre-tercentenary extravaganza.⁷¹ Like the previous practice run for the 1942 celebratory festival, this one included both musical acts as well as sports demonstrations. Montreal's *La Presse* explained that the festival was "presented with the goal of heightening youthful interest in music and sports," adding that "as preparation for celebration of Montreal's three-hundredth anniversary, the National Festival offered a well balanced

⁶⁸ *Le Bien Public*, June 13, 1940.

⁶⁹ Montreal *La Presse*, July 18, 1940.

⁷⁰ *Le Bien Public*, June 13, 1940.

program of athletics and music.⁷² Once again the sporting repertoire featured many Montreal youths performing in track and field, swimming and diving, and feats of strength. Of the sports on display, gymnastics received the most exuberant applause from the crowd. The musical presentation included the National Conservatory of Music Choir as well as the Conservatory's orchestra, which rendered many well known musical works for the crowd. The musical acts were rounded out by a number of soloists—both vocal and instrumental.⁷³

The 1942 National Festival at Delorimier Downs drew one of the largest crowd's in the building's history; an estimated 16,000 to 20,000 in attendance.⁷⁴ With local "folklore on display,"⁷⁵ the festival offered spectators a selection of dancing, musical, and sports events. The only sport not on display was baseball, but "javelin throwers, bicycle riders, swimmers, boxers, wrestlers, and ever other known form of summer athlete... performed for the benefit of [the] fans."⁷⁶ The 1942 festival saw the extension of the evening into three parts, with 'history' being added to the night's agenda. After the sports display, "the arc lights went out and the camera threw an enormous beam on the scoreboard. The crowd was lavish in its applause all night but as the famed, familiar faces in Montreal's history—Maisonneuve, Cartier, and the rest—flashed up by the hits, runs and errors sign, that was the signal for general ovation."⁷⁷

The events held at Delorimier Downs each July from 1940 through 1942 were more than celebrations of Montreal's tercentenary: they also served as celebration of Montreal culture; a culture diverse in its inclusion of various amateur sports and fitness

⁷¹ *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal La Presse*, July 22, 1941.

⁷² *Montreal La Presse*, July 22, 1941.

⁷³ *Montreal La Presse*, July 22, 1941.

⁷⁴ *Montreal Gazette*, *Montreal Star*, *Montreal La Presse*, July 14, 1942.

⁷⁵ *Montreal La Presse*, July 14, 1942.

⁷⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, July 14, 1942.

activities, as well as diverse musical talent. On those evenings the stadium became a showcase wherein the participants and spectators could learn to appreciate the exploits of the on-field acts.

A SECOND ROYAL VISIT: BOASTING FOR THE PRINCESS

Nine years later, in preparation for a second Royal Visit to Delorimier Downs, this one by Princess Elizabeth in October 1951, the city of Montreal wrote a brief history of the stadium to inform her majesty of its role in the city's life:

While the Montreal Stadium... is the favorite spot of baseball fans, it also serves as a theatre for entertainment and meetings not connected in any way with baseball. The assembly of 20,000 French-speaking students at the Stadium on the occasion of the royal visit constitutes neither a precedent nor an anomaly.

In addition, the city boasted, the ballpark admitted more than a million spectators a year. With Royals' attendance never exceeding 500,000 during the regular season, this total, while potentially an exaggeration, also reflects the diversity and frequency of other-than-baseball events. "Before long," the briefing suggested, "it will be necessary to enlarge the stadium's seating capacity." The building itself, Elizabeth was informed, served as much more than home to the ball diamond: "the building which dominates the entrances and the grandstands houses several businesses and also contains a huge exhibition hall. It is to this hall that the Automobile Show has, in the past, attracted throngs of Montrealers. In this hall were also held many of the more colourful pre-war [dance] marathons." Not only was the city proud of the building's grandeur, it also reveled in the diversity of events it housed: "the park... serves as the open air setting for many spectacles. Great religious celebrations, historical pageants, outstanding boxing matches, and usually large political meetings are held there." Not only was the park the

⁷⁷ Montreal Gazette, July 14, 1942.

site of all these events, but it was the choice of students when it came to holding gymnastics and other athletic contests, Delorimier Downs was deemed the appropriate meeting place for the 20,000 students who greeted Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh.⁷⁸ Bruce Kuklick notes that Shibe Park was also chosen for similar civic events. In general, he suggests, ballparks were chosen for these events because of their seating capacity.⁷⁹

As the 1950s progressed, however, Delorimier Downs became less and less popular. After the city attempted to buy the property in 1953, with the hope of attracting the St. Louis Browns,⁸⁰ the vibrant life of the stadium and the popularity of the Royals went into steady decline. By 1960, when the Montreal Royals played the last game in franchise history, a mere 763 fans entered the stadium to see the home team lose to the Buffalo Bisons. Throughout the decade that followed—leading up to Delorimier's demolition beginning in 1969—the park became less and less used for cultural events, and was virtually abandoned by sporting events.

AMBIENCE AND CROWD BEHAVIOUR

What was it like to sit in a seat at Delorimier Downs for a ballgame, a football match, or another event? Four Montrealers were available to answer that question, including Kermit Kitman, who continued going to the stadium after his playing days ended. All four are men, and all four attended mainly sports events as spectators. In addition to Kitman, Graeme Decarie, professor of history at Concordia University, was a boy in the area and attended many football and occasional baseball games at Delorimier; Larry Fredericks is a lifelong Montrealer who started attending Montreal

⁷⁸ Above and citations from unpublished document entitled "Montreal Stadium," held by the city of Montreal Archives. Ville de Montreal Archives, file R.3329.2.20.12. No author credited.

⁷⁹ Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season*, 82.

Royals games in the early 1940s and later broadcast their games on radio in the late 1950s; Don McGowan was a television journalist in Montreal for thirty years leading up to his early 1998 retirement, who attended baseball games in the 1940s and 1950s with his father, Lloyd McGowan, who covered the Royals for the *Montreal Star*.

Among the more striking features of the Delorimier crowd was the way in which it was divided within the stadium seating arrangement. As John Bale observes, two types of segregation tend to exist within the confines of a stadium. Explicit segregation includes ticket prices and fences or separate structures; implicit segregation is the choice of the spectators themselves, who segregate themselves through seat selection.⁸¹ Delorimier was home to both varieties of crowd division.

Notable in many photographs of the stadium, and remembered by the men interviewed, was a fence separating the bleachers along both sides of the ball diamond from the rest of the seats.⁸² Don McGowan recalls the fence was merely designed to prevent children from having the run of the stadium: "Yes there was, a wire fence— [between the reserved and] the cheap seats—to keep the kids from coming over. Like any stadium... the kids would wander into the more expensive seats...." Yet upon reflection, McGowan "cringes" at the thought of this type of separation.⁸³ As a boy attending games with his father, he sat in box seats close to the playing field. From his vantage point the fence may have seemed or have been explained as a barrier for wandering children, yet the fence was permanent, and not merely present for baseball games. It separated anyone who could only afford a bleacher seat from the rest of the crowd. While many ballparks separate the bleachers as a distinct structure, the simple

⁸⁰ See chapter three.

⁸¹ See chapter two.

⁸² The fence is noticeable in photos throughout William Brown's *Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals*, as well as Lawrence Ritter's *Lost Ballparks*, (New York: Viking, 1992), 121-124.

⁸³ McGowan interview, February 10, 1998.

chain link fence at Delorimier was a harsh reminder of who could afford higher priced tickets and who could not.

While fans who could only afford the 50-cent bleachers were separated by the fence, those in the reserved, unreserved, and box seats tended to divide without enforcement. Both Kermit Kitman and Don McGowan recalled an imaginary dividing-line behind home plate. On this line hinged the separation of French- and English-speaking fans, with the latter congregating along the first base side of the grandstand. Moreover, there was a religious aspect to this division, with nearly all of the French-speaking crowd being Catholic, and the English-speaking crowd a mix of Protestant and Jewish adherents.⁸⁴ Bale also notes that soccer fans in Marseilles divided based upon where they resided within the city, while English soccer fans tend to divide around loyalty to a certain team.⁸⁵ The crowd at Delorimier Downs, while described by Kitman and McGowan as self-dividing along language lines, would also have been divided relative to urban quarters. Montreal was and remains divided along linguistic, ethnic, and religious lines.

Asked about the gender make up of the Delorimier crowd, all four men recalled there were women present at sporting events, but they disagree on their prominence. Graeme Decarie admits he attended more football than baseball games, and recalls women were scarce at such contests:

[there were] occasional Ladies' days or Ladies' nights... the women as much as they were noticed, were essentially decorative. Not in the sense of cheerleaders, because I remember there were none. But, one of the features of the game, was that some women, usually in a pair, would seemingly be changing seats, or going somewhere, and would walk down the entire length of the sideline [during football games], and the whole

⁸⁴ McGowan interview, February 10, 1998; Kitman interview, June 18, 1998.

⁸⁵ See above, chapter one, and Bale, *Sport, Space and the City*, 24-26. With respect to team loyalties, this also occurs in baseball, fans of the home team congregating behind the local club's dugout.

audience's attention would be riveted on them, with the usual catcalls... that was almost the only extent to which you noticed women at games.⁸⁶

Ladies' nights were commonplace for baseball, and oftentimes meant reduced cost or free admission for women. Throughout the decades, Montreal Royals home games advertised in the *Montreal Star* and *Montreal Gazette*, note Thursday night was Ladies' Night.⁸⁷

Don McGowan remembers many women at games: "Yes [there were many women], and well dressed. My mother would go from time to time, of course she was interested in sports. Males may have dominated, and they probably did, but it wasn't exclusively male. It was just like the Forum on a Saturday night. A night game in the summer, as I recall, it was a well dressed crowd. Even the sports-writers... my father went in shirt, tie, sports jacket, straw hat... all the sports-writers [were well dressed]—very often I would go up in the last three innings and sit with my father in the press box..."⁸⁸ Kermit Kitman recalls groups of women at games mostly because his fiancée sat among the wives and girlfriends of players in a special section reserved for that purpose. He also recalls well dressed, and "very lady-like" women among the mostly male crowd, particularly on Thursday nights. There were, he adds, a fair number of young women—"groupies" he called them—who came to games in the hope of striking up a relationship with a ballplayer.⁸⁹

Larry Fredericks recalls Ladies' Night as a regular feature at Delorimier Downs, but notes that despite these and other "gimmicks" to attract a female crowd, women remained relatively scarce in the stadium crowd. "In the 1940s," he notes, "you did not

⁸⁶ Decarie interview, Montreal, February 9, 1998.

⁸⁷ Kermit Kitman also recalls Thursday was Ladies' Night.

⁸⁸ McGowan interview, February 10, 1998. His mother was Myrtle Cook, sports-writer for the *Montreal Star*. As an athlete she was a track and field star, a gold medallist at the 1928 summer Olympic games.

⁸⁹ Kitman interview, Montreal, June 18, 1998.

see that many women at the games. You only started seeing women... show up in 1969 when the Expos moved into Jarry Park. Of course there was a long gap of ten years [between pro teams in the city, so it was hard to gauge female interest] but I don't think there was a lot of female interest in it here. It was more a man's sport; they tried to promote [the game for women to view] but I don't think it caught on."⁹⁰ Indeed, aside from the Royals game ads, women were never mentioned in conjunction with the games unless in reference to a player's wife. Fredericks's evaluation, that baseball was a man's sport, remained true for most of professional sporting events hosted in the stadium. The limited presence of women as these men remember it, only speaks for sports events. Other spectacles no doubt attracted more or less women depending on the display. One expects the crowds at the 1940-1942 National Festivals, were close to if not evenly distributed, in terms of male-female crowd participation, and judging from the dominantly female membership of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique, it is reasonable to assume that other than among the married couples, there were more women than men in the grandstand for the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique general congress cultural pageant in 1939.⁹¹

Some commentators on baseball and stadium history note the presence of women at sporting events was encouraged as a means of preventing disorderly male behaviour. This was particularly the case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and one suspects might have been among the motivational factors for events such as Ladies' Night at Delorimier Downs. Colin Howell notes that women were not only important influences on male behaviour in the stands, but also on the field.⁹² Robin

⁹⁰ Fredericks interview, Montreal, February 2, 1998.

⁹¹ See above.

⁹² Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 15-17, and 76-77. In addition, see Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era*, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 27-28.

Anderson underlines this in his essay on the Vancouver Beavers baseball team, noting the players also played better baseball when more women were present. Many associated with Vancouver Beavers baseball felt women were a positive influence on the calibre of play.⁸³ As Kermit Kitman points out, there were always women in the Delorimier crowd trying to attract the attention of players, which makes plausible that Royals management may have arranged Ladies' Nights to improve the level of play.

At football games, and occasionally baseball games, crowd behavior was problematic whether women were present or not. Graeme Decarie maintains "the crowd could get raucous. There was always a sense that a fight in the crowd could break out at any moment. Somebody would be drinking, he'd throw a bottle and there would be howls of protest at this unseemly behaviour. Somebody getting in a fight because the guy in front of him was cheering for the wrong person [or team, was not uncommon]."⁸⁴ Bottles were something for the crowd to be wary of at baseball games as well. In June 1946, Lloyd McGowan suggested, "Frank Shaughnessy, in acting to curb bottle throwers in International League Parks, could direct some attention to the Royal Yard... Last night a bottle was thrown from well up in the stand on the third base line. It was directed at Umpire Tatler who had called Les Burge out at second base." Royals General Manager Melvin Jones said the negligent fan would have been arrested if caught, and that the ushers would be more vigilant in the future. McGowan also noted that "a few stones were thrown into the park over the leftfield fence. One fan was struck... [and] the police were notified, but the guilty ones had departed when they reached the street back of the wall."⁸⁵ Respectable behaviour was on order for fans the moment they entered the grandstand; there they could see large signs painted on the outfield walls saying "pas

⁸³ Anderson, "'On the Edge of the Baseball Map'," 564.

⁸⁴ Decarie interview, February 9, 1998.

⁸⁵ *Montreal Star*, June 28, 1946.

des gageurs”—no spitting—reminding them of the city’s by-law prohibiting spitting in public.⁹⁶

In the 1960s, after the Royals ceased to be and the Allouettes began playing football at McGill’s Molson Stadium, Delorimier was increasingly unused, and owners resorted to booking events such as demolition derbies to keep the business alive. One of these derbies, however, precipitated a riot when a power outage caused it to be cancelled after fans had entered the park. “Discontent,” *Le Matin de Montréal* reported, “spread like lightning. More than 800 people, led by a small crowd of youths, 20 to 25 years of age, talked of ransacking the concourse.” Police were called to the scene, and managed to quell the uprising, but not before facing some difficulty. The rioters were focused on a demolition of sorts taking place; they were finally subdued after a group of police officers “backed the most recalcitrant rioters into a corner.”⁹⁷

THE END OF AN ERA: ECOLE POLYVALÉNTÉ PIERRE DUPUIS SUCCEEDS DELORIMIER DOWNS

As the 1960s progressed, Delorimier Downs faded from liveliness. With another owner—Rolland Faucher—facing financial difficulties, the stadium was again on the auctioning block in 1963,⁹⁸ and soon after became the home of the Montreal Cantalia Soccer Club. The Cantalia Club played in a league with other Montreal and Toronto clubs, many of them representing local ethnic communities in both cities. Chances were the grandstand would not be overwhelmed for Cantalia games; six were scheduled for local television and the rest local radio broadcasts.⁹⁹ By this time, the park was no longer as large as it had been during the Royals tenure in the city. By autumn 1962, it had been

⁹⁶ Many of the photos in Brown’s *Baseball’s Fabulous Montreal Royals*, depict these signs. Interestingly these were among the very few French-language signs in the ballpark (McGowan interview, February 10, 1998).

⁹⁷ *Le Matin de Montréal*, September 22, 1962.

⁹⁸ *Montreal Star*, March 8, 1962.

reduced to only 10,000 seats (less than half its previous capacity), and the playing field leveled to accommodate soccer; the pitcher's mound was long removed when the Cantalia team chose the stadium as its 1963 home.¹⁰⁰ With little else going on in the once grand ballpark, the building became home of the fledgling Quebec political party, Parti Républicain du Québec—a party supporting Quebec independence—in late 1963.¹⁰¹

A year after the Parti Républicain's occupied office space in the stadium, news came that it would soon become a school. *L'Est Centrale* reported rumors of the ballpark's purchase by the Montreal Catholic School Commission in March 1965.¹⁰² Already in use by the school commission, announcement of its purchase was indeed forthcoming. In late 1966, the Catholic School Commission announced it would purchase the property, continuing to use the concourse as a makeshift school, and proceed with plans to raze the structure, replacing it with a new, modern high school. The *Montreal Star* explained that the "commission already rents the existing structure where it finds room for 1,000 high school students who are in the commerce course or the trade initiation section... the future capacity of the school will be in the vicinity of 5,500 to 6,000. The stands which now still exist and the space underneath which is at present used for schooling purposes will be demolished when the new school is built."¹⁰³ It would take nearly three years for demolition plans to come to fruition, but eventually Delorimier Downs was leveled. *Montreal Star* reporter Ken Whittingham mourned the loss of the historic ballpark:

⁹⁹ *Montreal La Presse*, April 13, 1963.

¹⁰⁰ *Montreal La Presse*, November 29, 1962. Despite the park's shrunken stature, late 1962 news on the park was mostly concerned with further attempts to bring professional baseball back to Montreal. Park owner Rolland Faucher suggested he would demolish the structure if baseball did not return for the 1963 season.

¹⁰¹ *Montreal L'Est Centrale*, April 23, 1964.

¹⁰² *L'Est Centrale*, March 23, 1965.

¹⁰³ *Montreal Star*, October 7, 1966.

It's been nine years now since they closed the gates of Delormier Downs and the hoarse cry 'play ball' was silenced across those horseshoe stands... But time hasn't been enough to erase the memories of Sunday afternoons watching Jean-Pierre Roy, Duke Snider, and, of course, Jackie Robinson, the man who broke the color line in professional ball... they are no more than memories and soon the Downs themselves will be the same... Demolition work on the 41-year-old stadium is now well under way to make room for a \$7,000,000 composite high school scheduled to open on the site in July, 1971....¹⁰⁴

As planned, Pierre Dupuis High School opened to thousands of Montreal students in time for classes to begin in September 1971.

Delorimier Downs was no more. Unlike Shibe Park in Philadelphia, which sat unused for years after professional baseball abandoned it, Montreal's stadium, died with dignity, continuing until the end to serve some kind of purpose for the city. Shibe Park was left to rot after the Phillies moved to Veterans Stadium in 1971, and was not demolished until 1976.¹⁰⁵

Throughout its 41-year life, Delorimier Downs was site of many captivating events, from baseball games to religious meetings and worker festivals. The ballpark was a place where people expressed and shared their cultural lives with the crowd. Most famous as the place where Jackie Robinson began the "Great Experiment," the park witnessed the beginning of 106 marriages, and influenced the lives of countless others who came and went through its turnstiles as spectator to the ongoing cultural extravaganza. When the stadium was razed, having last been a makeshift high school, its legacy was one much deeper than the ephemeral moments of athletic prowess and cultural celebration.

¹⁰⁴ *Montreal Star*, August 22, 1969.

¹⁰⁵ See Bruce Kuklick, *To Every Thing A Season: Shibe Park and Urban Philadelphia, 1909-1976*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 177-189.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Conceived of primarily as a ballpark and showcase of the investment wealth of a group among Montreal's "beauty and chivalry," Delorimier Downs became much more to the city of Montreal during its 41-year life. Remembered most as the place where Jackie Robinson signed the first organized baseball contract for a black man in the twentieth century, it stood as a successful business for most of its four decades, and served as an important cultural gathering place for thousands of Montrealers.

As the public witnessed the exploits of Robinson during his year as the Montreal Royals's second baseman, Delorimier nurtured the increasing acceptance of black ballplayers for the city's anglophone media. While the local press largely doubted Robinson from the moment of his signing, once they had a chance to see him play, develop a reporter-player relationship with him—in both the stadium locker room and on the train as the team travelled from city to city—and further got to know him on a more personal level, they came to like and support him. On the field Robinson silenced all his pre-season critics with fine defensive play and league-leading batting; even the most doubtful of his detractors could not help but begin liking the player as he led the Royals to the best record in the team's history.

During the 12 months between his contract signing and Montreal's Junior World Series victory, Robinson went from Negro to ballplayer in the eyes of the anglophone Montreal media. Between October 23, 1945, when he signed his contract with the Royals, and the end of spring training in mid-April, 1946, Robinson was never referred to without reference to his skin colour. With a penchant for alliteration, Montreal writers called Robinson the "Coloured Comet", "Dark Dasher", "Dark Danger"; in less creative moments, he was described as the "Dark Poison" for opposition; and in reference to his stellar play at second base, he was colourlessly described as "Keystone King." Signs of

the local media gradually accepting the player include the disappearance of the many colourful, perhaps racist, characterizations of the black ball player. Writers at the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Montreal Star* liked to call Robinson the "Coloured Comet," and continued to use this designation throughout the later months of the season. But by the time the 1946 playoffs started Robinson was a ballplayer first and foremost.

In addition to the gradual cessation of racially ordered nicknames for Jackie Robinson in the Montreal newspapers, there was also the year-long policy of silence at the *Montreal Gazette*, where the sportswriting staff was conspicuous by its relative silence. No indications of a policy of silence made it into the pages of the paper. *Gazette* sports editor Dink Carroll was often the only writer to mention Robinson, and he was unambiguously supportive of the black player from the moment of his signing at Delorimier Downs. Despite this support, as the 1946 season progressed, Carroll and his colleagues seem to overlook instances when Robinson's play carried the Royals to victory. By comparison, the *Montreal Star*, particularly its main baseball writer Lloyd McGowan, regularly celebrated Robinson's on-field feats. Baz O'Meara, among the leading doubters, mentioned the second baseman more than Carroll and the *Gazette*. Only in moments of extreme jubilation did the *Montreal Gazette* offer headlines and articles to fête the exploits of Jackie Robinson, and despite those exceptions, the daily was notably calm about the Royals's Junior World Series win, and the part played by Robinson in securing the victory.

The anglophone Montreal media may have accepted Robinson somewhat reluctantly, but local fans welcomed him from the start, and appeared at Delorimier Downs in droves. While Dink Carroll and his *Gazette* colleagues played down Robinson as a drawing card, it was obvious he was indeed a fan magnet. From the near sell-out crowd who witnessed his first Montreal appearance, to the nearly 20,000 who braved chilling cold weather to watch the Royals clinch the Junior World Series in October 1946,

Montreal fans were vociferous supporters of Jackie Robinson. Cornered for autographs after his first home game in the city, and chased down the street as he left the stadium after his last—because fans wanted to spend more time with him—Robinson was a season-long fan favourite in the city, and he was never forgotten.

The year Robinson played in the city was no doubt a financial success for the club owner—the Brooklyn Dodgers—and the city of Montreal who would have collected record Amusement Tax revenues from sales of Royals tickets. Indeed, Delorimier Downs was a successful business for most of its 41 years. The stadium was an instant moneymaker in its first season. Soon after, however, the Depression weakened the financial viability of the stadium and professional baseball in the city. The 1936 liquidation of the Montreal Exhibition Company Limited, indicates the negative impact of the Depression on the stadium as a privately run enterprise. Yet the liquidation process revealed the ballpark might have been profitable under municipal ownership.

Bureaucrats at City Hall in Montreal considered municipal ownership of Delorimier Downs in 1936, and recognized money could be made if the property were operated tax free—which would be the case if the city owned it. While there is ample evidence the city could have operated the stadium at a surplus, it chose instead to sell it to Mr. Raoul Lefebvre, a local entrepreneur. Lefebvre paid the city less than it was owed by the now defunct Montreal Exhibition Company, and the municipal debt remaining was struck from the records. That loss would likely have been easily eradicated had the city decided to take over the stadium.

Records show significant attendance at Delorimier-hosted events throughout the Depression, events whose Amusement Tax revenues would have helped the city compensate for the loss. Moreover, eliminating the need for the stadium's proprietors to pay property tax would have turned an ailing business into a profitable one despite the exigencies of the Depression. For the period 1938 to 1940, Amusement Tax revenues

indicate a steady attendance of more than 45,000 baseball spectators a month, enough to generate \$17,000.00 in annual Amusement Tax revenue. In addition, the city would have earned the ticket and concession revenue generated by this steady crowd, enough to pay off the loss on the Exhibition Company debt, maintain the ballpark, pay utilities and staff, and continue to have a surplus.

Seventeen years later, the city of Montreal seriously considered municipal ownership of Delorimier Downs. With news of Bill Veeck's desire to relocate his St. Louis Browns, the city of Montreal joined other cities, including Toronto, in vying to become the next home of the American League team. As it was, Veeck had hoped to move the franchise to Baltimore a year earlier, after the 1952 season, and again settled on Baltimore when the American League approved the transfer in 1953. Montreal's 1953 bid for ownership of the stadium, however, further illustrates the potential for profit offered by municipal ownership of Delorimier Downs.

The city commissioned an extensive study of the income potential of the stadium. This study revealed the possibility of Delorimier Downs becoming highly profitable. The city understood, but did not overestimate, the elevated interest a major league team would generate, should the 1953 bid to secure a major league franchise have been successful. Modest estimates show that after all expenses were paid, the city would have made money if the stadium was filled to only thirty-five percent capacity during the 1954 season.¹ With reason to believe attendance would be notably higher, the city pursued purchasing the stadium from the Brooklyn Dodgers, who owned the team since 1940 and the stadium since 1946. The Dodgers, however, wanted far more for the stadium than its estimated worth, and the city lost interest.

¹ The city expected a profit of \$61,000.00 from attendance of 600,000. Based on a 77-game home schedule, this would have meant an average attendance of 7,800 per game, well below the 22,000 capacity of the stadium.

Despite the city twice coming close to purchasing the stadium, but never actually securing ownership, study of City of Montreal records show Delorimier Downs was—at least potentially—a moneymaking business throughout its life. The Depression did force the Montreal Exhibition Company into liquidation, but not because of net losses in stadium operation; the company failed because its earnings were not sufficient to pay property taxes. After several years of defaulted payments, the city had little choice but to foreclose. Municipal ownership of Delorimier Downs, this thesis suggests, would have made for an increasingly profitable business, and perhaps managed to keep professional baseball in the city during the time between the demise of the Royals in 1960, and the arrival of the Expos in 1969.

As a cultural centre, Delorimier Downs offered Montrealers a vast array of spectacles. Beginning with the wide range of sporting events at which they learned the values of good sportsmanship and fair play, and extending to the cultural fairs such as the National Festivals, the Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique general congress, and Royal Visits, Delorimier Downs gave Montrealers a chance to experience mass culture in a large forum unavailable prior to the stadium's construction.

In addition to offering a large setting for outdoor cultural events, the stadium also housed a dance hall, a roller rink, and exhibition space large enough for the auto show and other trade fairs. Moreover, as the stadium evolved, keeping up with baseball standards which allowed for baseball to be played at night, the addition of field lighting made possible many more events. The Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique cultural pageant, as well as the National Festivals of 1940 – 1942 were all held in the evening. Initially installed as a means to induce more fans to attend baseball games during the 1930s, the lights vastly expanded the possibilities for the ballpark. Indeed, the ballpark continued to expand its capacity to host diverse events into the 1960s. While the level of cultural events slipped from the early 1940s National Festivals, which were put on to

encourage appreciation of amateur sport and the performing arts, to events such as demolition derbies, the building last served as a high school. In the end, thousands of Montreal children spent their days in the ballpark's converted concourse, learning the skills necessary to enter the workforce.

Delorimier Downs became much more in its 41 years than was ever imagined by George Stallings when he first proposed the International League return to Montreal; it became more than entrepreneurs expected—the large interior concourse capable of housing more than the tradeshow they hoped for. On a personal level, the ballpark affected the lives of on-field performers as well as spectators. One time Royals player Kermit Kitman's life changed forever after he sought advise on where to get a haircut from a fan in the grandstand. Kitman became a Montrealer for life after his single season with the Royals, and feels Delorimier Downs and the city of Montreal was an especially welcoming place for a young man to live and play as a professional athlete in the 1940s.

Delorimier Downs was a dynamic and important part of Montreal life for more than 40 years. Montreal would have remained a culturally vibrant city without it; with it, the city partook of 32 years of baseball and four decades of other events further enhancing it's cultural life. From the day fans first toured the grandstand in 1928 until the last student left the makeshift school, Delorimier Downs was truly a cathedral of mass culture as well as an important economic stimulus to the city.

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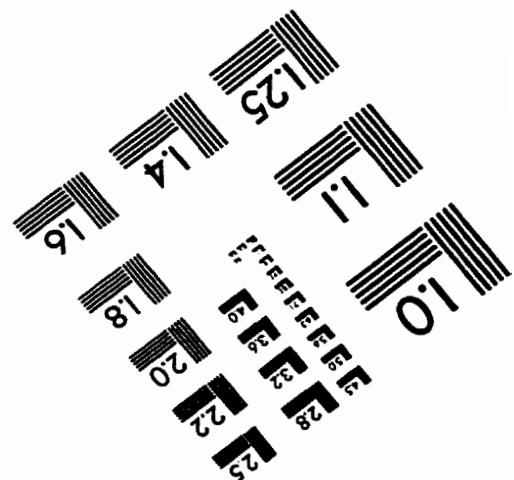
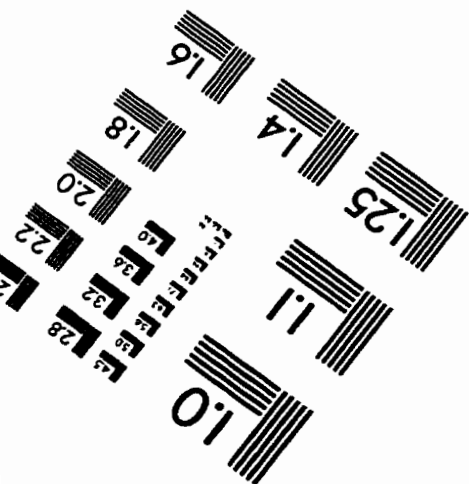
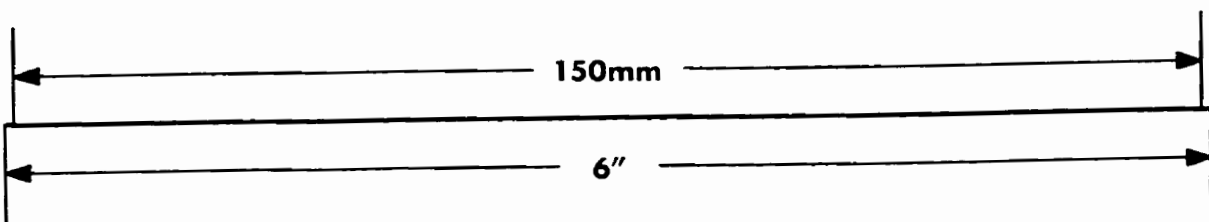
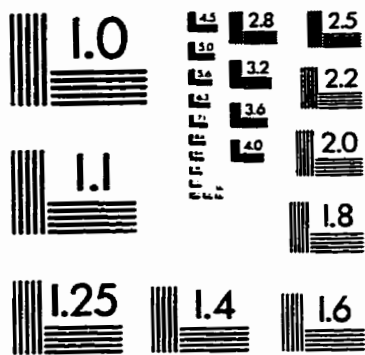
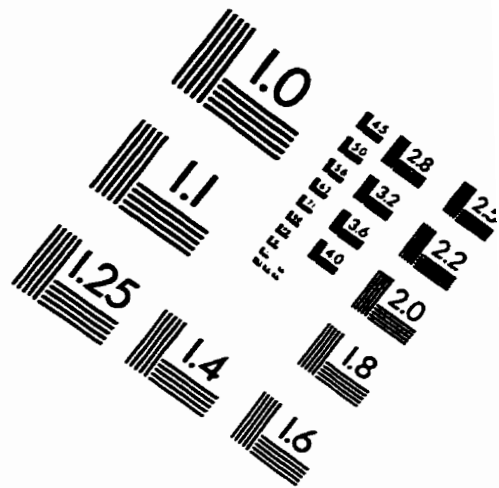
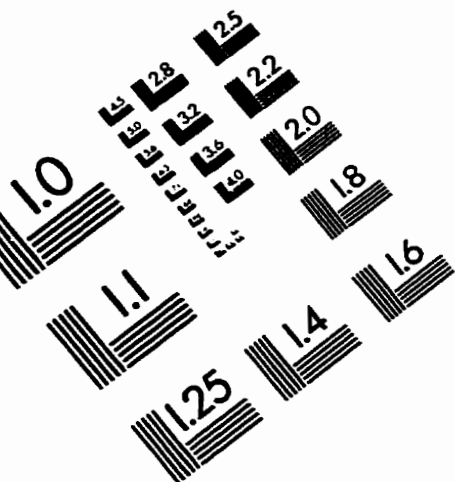
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