

**Working *Madames* in Canada's Sin City:
The Lives and Businesses of Montreal's Brothel Owners and Workers in
the 1930s and 1940s**

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Abstract

Working *Madames* in Canada's Sin City: Montreal's Brothel Workers in the 1930s and 1940s

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Sex work has held an important yet marginalised space within Montreal society, with a pervasive culture of vice living alongside a selectively implemented legal framework. This thesis examines the lives and legal status of the women who owned and worked within brothels in Montreal during the 1930s and 1940s, as well as how brothels operated as small businesses. Women at all levels within the brothels, from sex workers to housekeepers to brothel owners, exercised agency in different ways. Many of Montreal's brothels during this period were run as female small businesses that both interacted with and circumvented the police and municipal authorities. The main sources for this thesis are the depositions of twelve sex workers before Montreal's 1954 Caron Inquiry, which provide an insider perspective on Montreal's sex work industry in this period. These sources also shift the perspective from seeing sex workers as "existing" on the margins of society, criminalised and stigmatised for their methods of procuring a living and brings their work into Canadian workers history as a form of labour. Using a history from below approach, this thesis reads hostile state documents against their grain to piece together the lives of sex workers and to situate their stories within the context of the period's legal framework surrounding sex work and cycles of relative toleration and repression. Through biographies of the women who were deposed before the Caron Inquiry, this thesis contextualises and humanises sex workers as workers and Montrealers with multi-faceted lives.

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Introduction

On October 8, 1954, Judge François Caron released his report as head of the “Enquête sur le vice commercialisé à Montréal” and concluded that there had been systemic tolerance of sex work and gambling within the Montreal police and city authorities in the 1930s and 1940s.¹ This judgment came after the \$500,000 four-year-long official inquiry under the Quebec Superior Court, from 1950 to 1954, into the corruption of the Montreal police that interviewed 373 witnesses.² This investigation stemmed from a petition filed by Pacifique Plante, a renowned Montreal lawyer who had worked for the Montreal police.³ Plante accused the police of having turned a blind eye to vice and organised crime in the city in the previous decades of the 1930s and 1940s. The petition was signed by 74 citizens, mostly from the “Comité de Moralité Publique des Citoyens de Montréal” (CMP), after Plante published a lengthy newspaper series, called *Sous le règne de la pègre*, in *Le Devoir* in 1949 and 1950 about the corruption of the Montreal police and the prevalence of vice in Montreal.⁴ Plante’s exposé alleged that those in charge of the Montreal underground were bribing police officers, especially those higher up in

¹ On the Caron Inquiry, see Mathieu Lapointe, *Nettoyer Montréal: les campagnes de moralité publique, 1940-1954* (Québec, Québec: Septentrion, 2014) and Jean-Paul Brodeur, *La délinquance de l'ordre: Recherches sur les commissions d'enquête*. LaSalle, Québec: Édition Hurtubise HMH, 1984; Ignace-J. Deslauriers, *La Cour supérieure du Québec et ses juges: 1849-1er janvier 1980*, (Quebec City: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1980), 167. Justice François Caron was a Quebec Superior Court judge who was admitted to the Bar in 1926 and was appointed a Superior Court judge in 1948. Hereafter I will refer to the inquiry as the Caron Inquiry.

² Mathieu Lapointe, “Une police intègre?” Encyclopédie du MEM, September 9, 2019, <https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/memoiresdesmontrealais/une-police-integre>. There is a long history of inquiries into the corruption of the Montreal police such as the 1925 Coderre Police Commission; Pacifique Plante, Alain Stanké, and Jean Louis Morgan, *Pax, lutte à finir avec la pègre; un portrait-robot du célèbre incorruptible Pacifique Plante*. (Montréal, Québec: La Presse, 1972), 29.

³ Maryse Bédard, “Pacifique Plante, l’incorruptible.” Encyclopédie du MEM, September 9, 2019, <https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/memoiresdesmontrealais/pacifique-plantel-incorruptible>. Pacifique Plante was a lawyer focused on driving vice and corruption out of Montreal and personally set out to do so of his own volition.

⁴ Pacifique Plante, “Sous le règne de la pègre,” *Le Devoir*, Jan 3, 1950, 1; Maude-Emmanuelle Lambert, “Pacifique Plante.” The Canadian Encyclopedia, December 9, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/pacifique-plantel>.

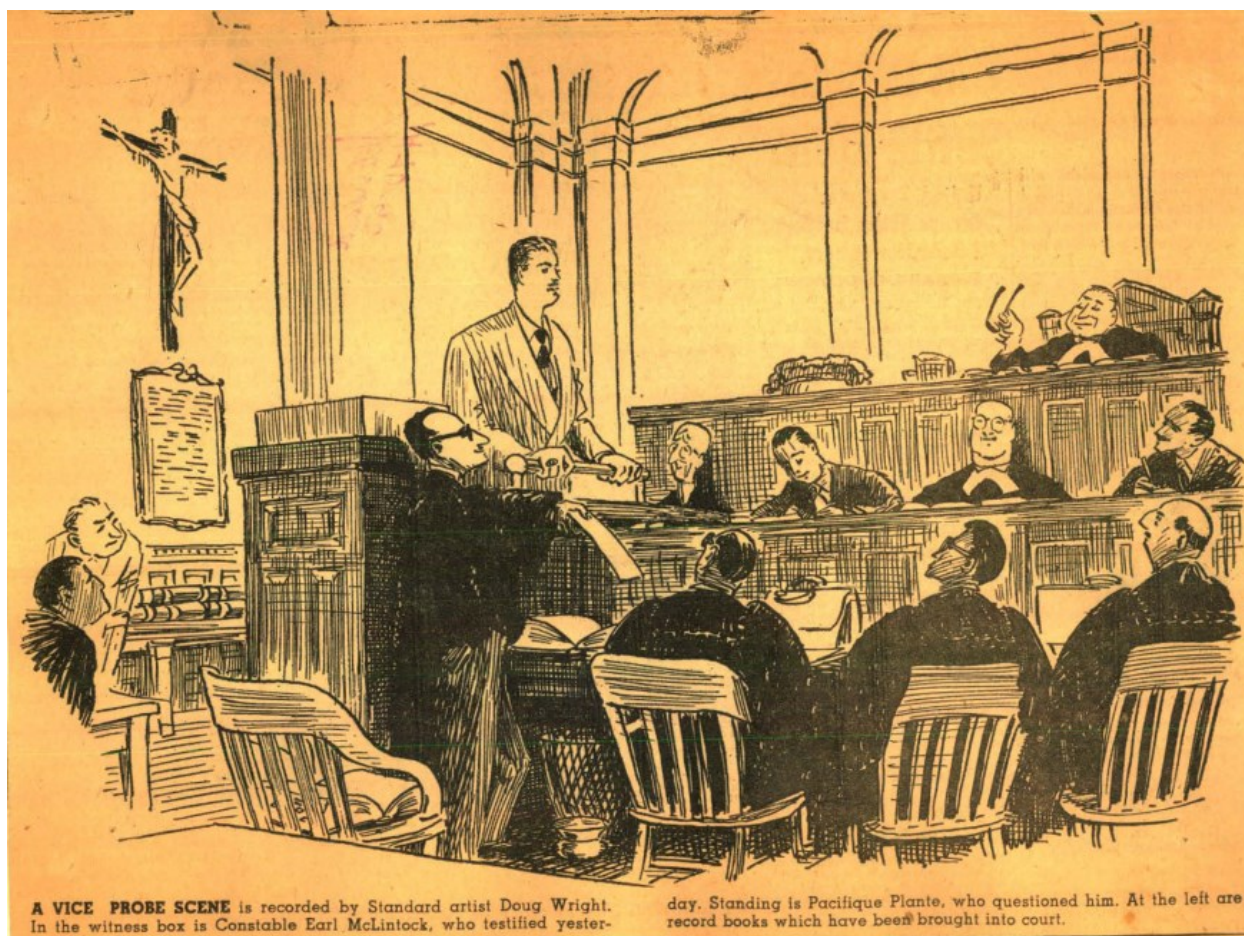


Figure 1: Doug Wright, *Vice Probe Scene*, Montreal Standard, October 14, 1950, drawing, <https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/memoiresdesmontrealais/lenquete-caron>.

the ranks, not to raid places of ill repute such as brothels, blind pigs, and gambling and betting houses. Under pressure from the CMP and *Le Devoir*, the Quebec government then called for the inquiry, which attempted to uncover how the corruption was taking place and to identify the underground civilian players bribing the police. It was especially concerned with investigating the police officers on the morality squad, as Plante, the main investigator of the inquiry, had been fired from the morality squad just as he was trying to root out the corruption within the department. This led to further suspicions that he was onto something and that he had been fired to prevent the dismantling of said corruption.

The Caron Inquiry contains the testimony of over a dozen sex workers, brothel housekeepers, and brothel owners who were questioned by the authorities on the inner workings of the Montreal sex trade. This source helps identify some of the people in the Montreal sex trade and provides a glimpse into their lives, as well as shedding some light on Montreal's brothel operations in the 1930s and 1940s. These records have allowed me to build microhistories of the lives of Montrealers who were commonly marginalised, often criminalised, and deeply stigmatised for their work. The focus of this thesis is an analysis of the body of sources which is available online at the Archives de Montréal in the *Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron*.⁵ Fundamentally, the main questions that I will explore are how the women interviewed in the 1954 Caron inquiry navigated the sex work industry in Montreal during the 1930s and 1940s, how female sex workers, housekeepers, and brothel owners engaged with and circumvented the authorities, and what their daily lives entailed. These questions will give us a view into the social situation of sex workers in this period, shedding light on women's illicit labour within the city.

This thesis will discuss the lives of the brothel owners, housekeepers, and sex workers in the Caron Inquiry depositions by considering brothels as small businesses run by women. I will contemplate how such a focus contributes to rethinking sex work as work, rather than as criminality, while also examining the lives and employment of these women from the perspective of viewing their work first and foremost as labour. I argue that many of Montreal's brothels of the 1930s and 1940s were operated as female-run small businesses that saw police arrests, fines, and bribery as an operational cost. This argument is demonstrated by the testimonies of women associated with brothels within the Caron Inquiry. These women's voices

⁵ Archives de Montréal, Fonds P043. "Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron: 1925-1957."

reveal that brothels were highly organised businesses that had to navigate around and with authorities through bribery, which was viewed as another expense and obstacle within their businesses. As we will see in Chapter One, the legal framework in Quebec was still unfriendly towards women in commerce. However, female brothel owners were widely present in the city's underground economy. Thus, women who worked in Montreal's brothels, along with using sex work as a subsistence strategy, exercised their agency by using illicit businesses such as brothels to advance themselves financially either by ownership or employment.

My historiographical position is to view sex work as work, a political position that I will expand on further in this introduction. This position foregrounds my analysis, which will examine, as accurately as possible, how these illicit businesses functioned and what working in a Montreal brothel during the 1930s and 1940s was like, providing an internal perspective of these workplaces. This research serves as a microhistory of Montreal's brothel-keeping at large during this period. In contrast to larger studies that make general broad findings about wide-ranging groups and events, microhistories can dissect peoples' lives within a larger cultural experience.⁶

⁶ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 133.

Central to my research into these sex workers' lives is to work within and around the limitations of the sources, particularly their testimonies. I will examine how these women discussed information that they were asked, what information they volunteered beyond the

DELICATO

Q It is not true ?

A Never; my house is my house; my private house is a private house.

Q There was never a reception given by your or your husband -- ?

A Never.

Q Let me finish the question. On the occasion of the marriage of one of your girls ?

A No, sirree.

Q Or girls, in your brothels ?

A No.

Q You swear to that ?

A I swear.

Q There never was a party ?

A I could swear to that. That, I remember; my house is my house; eh!

Q Is it possible that your husband could have acted as a witness ?

A Listen!

Me CAMIRAND : Votre Seigneurie !

Me PLANTE : I want to make it clear.

Q You swear that, to your knowledge ?

A Not to my knowledge; certainly; I am sure; nothing like that at my house.

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Archives de la Ville de Montréal

Figure 2: *Page from the deposition of Lucie Delicato, 1951, deposition, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957, Archives de Montréal.*

questions that were asked during the depositions, and how they reacted to antagonistic lines of questioning (see Figure 2). Their emotional retorts and sarcasm to intrusive questions can shed light on the culture of these women's workplaces as well as their personalities. Workers would often find themselves in situations out of their control. I am interested in understanding how these women created agency in their resistance and how they tried to control these precarious legal situations. Creating and retaining agency when up against the state is difficult, nevertheless they persisted as this agency was a form of survival for many of these women. I will be showing different kinds or degrees of agency being exercised by women in different places in the hierarchy of the brothels.

Although the sources on which this thesis is based are state documents, we can obtain a view of how employees and employers experienced and viewed sex work at this time and place. These depositions are part of a wider investigation into the corruption of the Montreal police, but



Figure 3: *Pacifique Plante (left) and Jean Drapeau (right) the day the Caron Report was released, October 8th, 1954, photograph, The Montreal Star, Library and Archives Canada.*

within that, Plante and Jean Drapeau (see Figure 3),⁷ the former of whom was also a principal lawyer in the inquiry, were also interested in how brothels operated, who was at the head of these operations, and who these people working within the sex trade were. These brothel owners and workers were questioned at length about these topics in their depositions, taking the stand and answering to state authority.

My research is also important for gender considerations. Female voices within judicial records need to be amplified as male voices are prevalent within the Quebec courts in this period since men occupied all of the positions of authority within legal proceedings. The Caron Inquiry archives are extensive and wide-ranging. Therefore, I have limited the scope of this thesis by curating a select few women whose testimonies and lives I will view and analyse. I chose women who worked in Montreal brothels and whose depositions were long enough to have information about themselves and the inner workings of these brothels. Some of these women, especially the brothel owners whom Plante questioned at length, sometimes for multiple days, have rich depositions and historical footprints within public archives. For several women, there are hundreds of pages of deposition and days of newspaper reporting each. The depositions are sworn testimonies in a question-and-answer style, with Plante being the main examiner and Judge Caron interjecting at times. The strength of the depositions is that they give voices to persons, mainly women, who, although deeply integrated in their community, were publicly marginalised for their profession as sex workers, housekeepers, and brothel owners. I intend to read the Caron Inquiry for the “structural” data it offers about the history of sex work in 1930s and 1940s Montreal and for the voices of female sex workers that can be heard in the witness

⁷ Annick Brabant, “Jean Drapeau,” Encyclopédie du MEM, January 14, 2016, <https://ville.montreal.qc.ca/memoiresdesmontrealais/jean-drapeau>. Jean Drapeau was a lawyer and was the mayor of Montreal from 1954 to 1957, and from 1960 to 1986. Interestingly, his involvement with the Caron Inquiry helped him acquire enough prominence to become mayor.

testimony. I will investigate their operations and their fraught, yet vibrant existence, within a punitive legal framework.

Other primary sources that will be used include genealogical records on the Ancestry website. I have utilised this source to track down and piece together the lives, cultures, and heritage of the women deposed in the Caron Inquiry. Unfortunately, this source reveals less about the sex workers and housekeepers as they tended to use fake names. However, as the brothel owners were infamous, I was able to obtain quite a bit of genealogical information about them.

It is important to note that the documents of the inquiry that I will be analysing are Quebec state documents, and thus are biased, mediated sources that must be read against the grain, as the state was historically hostile toward sex workers and viewed them as criminals. Concerning reading this inquiry against the grain, the depositions reveal the authorities', mainly Plante's, biases about society and morality. Plante held a negative bias towards the witnesses he was deposing, being hostile towards sex workers, whom he views as criminals, and not treating them with the respect he would have likely shown a conventional worker. The questioning by both Plante and Judge Caron took a hostile approach towards the witnesses, likely because of their place in society as so-called deviant women, but also possibly because of the attitudes they had during questioning. As with all legal sources, the depositions were produced within the larger inquiry for the particular purpose of getting the most information on corrupt police officers out of sex workers, and Plante, as the questioner, was trying to shape the inquiry, especially these depositions, along those lines.

There is necessarily much conjecture in this thesis, as information can be unreliable at times and those deposed can contradict each other or give differing information. Within the

depositions, the people deposed were being asked about their involvement in a criminalised profession. Since some women were not forthcoming and their answers were at times sarcastic, the workers may have been hiding information from the authorities and the owners were likely evasive to cover themselves, which has created a gap in knowledge for some aspects of Montreal brothels. Workers were likely kept in the dark on purpose about the intricacies of operations, so they were probably not lying when at times they said they could not answer his questions. This creates issues about the reliability of the inquiry as a historical source and signals why it is vital that this source not be taken at face value, and instead be read against the grain, taking into account the hostile environment that surrounded it. I have verified facts and information as much as possible, but as testimonial narrators can be unreliable, there are limits on the verification of information, especially that taken from the depositions. This unreliability is caused by several factors. Some workers were not told information because the sex work industry is part of the Montreal underground, information was given on a need-to-know basis. Those deposed could also not want to incriminate themselves or others or simply could not remember because of the time that had passed in some cases.

However, we can obtain reliable information despite these problems. In what follows, I have trusted the women's voices unless other sources have contradicting information, yet even then I use educated guesses and context to establish the most plausible interpretation by distinguishing reliable information from what is self-interested or fabricated. This notion has been used by Natalie Zemon Davis; Davis's work teaches us to be skeptical of your sources' intentions, as what they say may not be fact, but story created in order to manipulate and formulate a narrative that the author of the source needs in order to change an outcome.⁸ I have

⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 3.

analysed these women through biased state documents yet despite the circumstances of the production of these biased sources, these records are nevertheless informative. This thesis gives a view into Montreal's brothels in the 1930s and 1940s within the context of the information available; the picture it paints is unfinished.

In this thesis, I have taken a deliberate political stance of thinking of sex work as labour that is criminalised instead of simply viewing it as a crime. The perspective of viewing and analysing sex work as labour shifts attention from sex workers as “existing” on the margins of society, criminalised and stigmatised for their methods of procuring a living, to regarding them as part of Canadian and Quebec labour history, as historian Mary Anne Poutanen has done. Viewing sex work as work can serve to demarginalise sex workers by revealing the centrality of labour in a very old industry. Overall, I wish to contribute to the normalisation of sex work as another form of labour, to shift the narrative from criminalisation to labour rights. In this regard, it is important to note that I employ the term “sex worker” for a reason. This umbrella term does not include the housekeepers or brothel owners unless they also engaged in the act of being paid for sexual acts, yet they are still within the sex work industry. When I use the term “sex worker” I am referencing the women who worked in brothels and were paid for sexual acts. As Poutanen has done in the postscript of the French translation of her book *Beyond Brutal Passions*, I am foregrounding these women as workers, which showcases their human agency in an attempt to lessen the stigma surrounding this labour.⁹

Some feminists and historians (sometimes termed Sex Work Exclusionary Radical Feminists or SWERFs) reject the decriminalisation and regulation of sex work, arguing that sex work “epitomized the exploitation of women by men; even if sex work could be regulated to

⁹ Mary Anne Poutanen, “Postface à l’édition française” *Une histoire sociale de la prostitution: Montréal, 1800-1850* (Montréal: Les éditions du remus-ménage, 2021): 403-406.

ensure the safety of workers, it was harmful to women in general since it perpetuated the ideas of male sex right and of women as objects for male consumption.”¹⁰ This is unconvincing to me. As for safety, there are dangerous aspects to sex work such as security and health concerns, yet other employment can also be physically dangerous yet remain legal. Interestingly, many of these physically dangerous professions have historically been male-oriented and have not been criminalised whereas sex work, which has historically been female-dominated, has had periods of both criminalisation and toleration. This gender bias is flagrant. While sex workers can be harmed and exploited, criminalising sex work is not the answer to harm reduction for sex workers, as criminalising sex work results in more harm such as sex workers not being able to rely on the protection of police officers for fear of being arrested. The choice and agency that sex work can create is more important.¹¹ As for the feminist and moral aspect, sex-positive feminists such as Gayle Rubin have argued that the existence of sex work is a feminist issue as it challenges sexual repression and puritanical morality, restrictive norms that have historically stifled sexual pleasure for both women and men.¹²

I have not been able to explore race and sexual orientation among Montreal’s sex workers because the inquiry did not call on people of colour and did not consider sexual orientation. I have identified ethnicities where possible, but the absence of women of colour in this study, especially Indigenous women and women of African descent, does not mean they were not involved in sex work. Systemic racism and a colour line likely had an important impact on the inquiry and even sex work itself, and white women might have been favoured to take the stand

¹⁰ Chloë Taylor, *The Routledge Guidebook to Foucault’s The History of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017). 147.

¹¹ Ibid, 149.

¹² Rubin, Gayle. “Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality.” In *“Culture, society and sexuality: a reader”*, 1984 (pp. 150–187). London: Routledge, 2008, 16-17.

and were possibly even favoured during hiring in the brothels. Women of colour could also have been concentrated in street sex work.¹³ Racism likely impacted brothels by favouring women whom white male clients would have found more physically attractive, typically women who were white or white passing, because racial and multicultural intermixing was not yet socially acceptable in the 1940s. Some men may have preferred Indigenous women or women of African descent because they may have deemed them exotic, but I could not find these cases. The same goes for those who were 2SLGBTQI+, as they have been present throughout history but I could not determine if any of the women deposed were not cisgender heterosexual women.

The information obtained from the women who were deposed shows that, aside from the clients, many Montreal brothels in the 1930s and 1940s were female-dominated spaces. Men are not at the forefront of this thesis. It is possible that there were male brothel owners who were not deposed because they were better protected by police corruption. However, because of this police corruption and the secrecy of the Montreal underground, this is impossible to verify. Men are at the periphery of this world, being husbands, lawyers, prosecutors, judges, and landlords. In this study, however, I present women as entrepreneurs, since they owned and managed numerous brothels in Montreal during this period, subverting the traditional patriarchal narrative within legitimate businesses.

What follows is divided into three chapters. In Chapter One, I provide context about the important themes to be developed in the rest of the thesis. These themes include women's relationship with business in the 1930s and 1940s, women's legal status in Quebec during this period, Montreal's nightlife, the public morality campaigns that brought attention to Montreal's brothels, how Canada and Quebec dealt with sex work legally, and the Canadian military's role

¹³ Streetworking is not part of this thesis because the Caron Inquiry was not focused on this. It arose in the Inquiry, only when sex workers were asked what they did after the closure of the Red Light district.

in the mass closure of Montreal's brothels in 1944. In Chapter Two, I present detailed biographies of the women involved in the business of Montreal brothels in the 1930s and 1940s. I have divided the biographies into the three hierarchical business tiers: the brothel owners, the housekeepers in the brothels, and the sex workers. In Chapter Three, I analyse the business of Montreal's brothels in the 1930s and 1940s through information found in brothel owners' and workers' depositions. Lastly, a conclusion addresses the state of the Red Light after the mass closure in 1944, as well as some of the political implications of this thesis.

Chapter One: Women, Sex Work, and Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s

In the 1930s and 1940s, Montreal was Canada's sin city, the capital of vice.¹ The city was home to vigorous licit and illicit nightlife including cabarets, blind pigs, gambling houses, and brothels.² Yet despite the glitzy surface, times were difficult economically, especially during the Great Depression and World War II. This chapter explores the social, legal, and economic positions of women in Montreal, and particularly the women deposed for the Caron Inquiry. Contextualising these women's lives within their broader socio-political environment aids in comprehending the complex conditions surrounding their lives as revealed in their depositions. This can help in understanding them as sex workers, brothel managers, or brothel owners, but also assists in viewing them as women living within the events of this period.

Women in Labour and Business

The brothels that are the focus of this thesis were female workspaces, so it is important to begin by situating women within Montreal's business world and among female business owners during this period. Montreal women have had a long history as artisans, and some women also took over men's businesses as widows. Female brothel owners fit into this tradition, as they were still businesswomen even if their businesses were illicit.³ Although female-run businesses were not completely anomalous, there were important legal and social barriers to women becoming business owners. These barriers likely played a part in driving women towards illicit businesses.

¹ Stephen Schneider, *Iced: The Story of Organized Crime in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 237.

² William Weintraub, *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and '50s* (Toronto, Ontario: Robin Brass Studios, 2004), 235.

³ Bettina Bradbury, *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws, and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2014), 234.

Before getting into this topic, it must be noted that there is a gap in the literature on Quebec businesswomen in the first half of the 20th century, a gap that this study of illicit businesses will help fill. Additionally, it is vital to remember that women's legal status in Quebec lagged behind the rest of Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In Ontario, for example, women were able to keep their salaries separate from their husbands since 1872 and received the right to administer their business and financial affairs as they wished in 1884.⁴ In Quebec, women did not automatically hold these rights until 1931 and 1964 respectively.⁵

The beginning of the period studied in this thesis coincided with the Great Depression, which made for a difficult economic situation in the 1930s. At its peak in February 1934, 62,000 workers were unemployed in Montreal.⁶ One-fifth of the Canadian labour force was out of work.⁷ As unemployment rose for men more than women, women within the workforce were criticised and condemned, being accused of “‘stealing’ the jobs of hard-working fathers” and thus were labelled as the cause of many families’ poverty.⁸ As a result, conservative elites and union leaders called for women, especially married women, to leave the workforce.⁹ During the 1940s, women were faced with the economic uncertainty of World War II, and, with much debate, were again called back to factory jobs when men were at war.¹⁰ As factories were dangerous because of a lack of safety measures at the time, it is understandable that women

⁴ Thierry Nootens, *Genre, patrimoine et droit civil: les femmes mariées de la bourgeoisie québécoise en procès, 1900-1930* (Montreal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 20.

⁵ Ibid, 20.

⁶ Paul-André Linteau, “Montreal,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, April 7, 2009, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/montreal>.

⁷ Graham D. Taylor and Peter A. Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1994), 371.

⁸ Denyse Baillargeon, *A Brief History of Women in Quebec*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 107.

⁹ Ibid, 107.

¹⁰ Renée Morin. ‘Women after the War’, *Canadian Affairs*, Canadian Edition, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1 March 1945.

would look elsewhere to provide for themselves and their families.¹¹ These difficulties help explain some of the pressures on women to go into business generally, and to look to illicit business more particularly.

According to the Canadian census, Quebec women made up 19.7% of the labour market in 1931 and 21.9% in 1941, demonstrating a very gradual increase, which is in line with the predominant social views of the time that women needed to stay within the home.¹² The wages for women during this period, compared to men's, also help demonstrate the state of affairs for women economically. In 1945 in the print and publishing industry in Montreal, for example, bindery girls, who were skilled workers, made 38¢ per hour, while male bookbinders made 91¢ per hour.¹³ Across sectors, unskilled male factory labourers made 57¢ per hour.¹⁴ Obtaining a skilled licit occupation meant making almost a third less than what men in similar positions made and a little more than half of what unskilled male labourers made. This likely helps explain why the women deposed during the Caron Inquiry had gravitated towards the sex trade. As we will see in Chapter Three, remuneration for sex work was far above 38¢ per hour. Instead of finding employment in factories, some women who rejected domestic work because of long isolated hours, would be attracted by the possibility of earning much higher wages as a sex worker.¹⁵

¹¹ Sarah Van Vugt "“Keep Your Mind on Your Job” Women Workers, Beauty Culture, and Dangerous Bodies in the Wartime Industrial Workplace,” in Glassford, Sarah Carlene, and Amy J. Shaw, eds. *Making the Best of It: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the Second World War*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020, 248.

¹² Government of Canada, Seventh Census of Canada, 7, 1931 (1933), 2; Government of Canada, 7 Eighth Census of Canada, (1941), 2. I took the total women working and divided by the total number of workers and multiplied this number by 100.

¹³ Statistics Canada, “Canada Year Book Historical Collection,” Average wages per hour for specified occupations in certain cities, 1945, August 7, 2009, https://www65.statcan.gc.ca/acyb02/1947/acyb02_19470652034-eng.htm.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Andrée Lévesque, *Résistance et transgression: Études en histoire des femmes au Québec* (Montréal, Québec: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1995), 62.

Women business owners were much less prominent than male business owners, as this was traditionally a male domain.¹⁶ According to Melanie Buddle's study of twentieth-century women business owners in Canada, women who were self-employed during the first half of the 20th century were more likely to be older women who were married, widowed, or separated; they were not the single spinsters who rejected traditional values that can be seen in some presentist portrayals in mass media today.¹⁷ Women ran businesses during this time because they were in financial need, they needed to support families, and they were not able to find work as wage-earning women; they were not necessarily rebelling against a society that said their place was within the home caring for children and men.¹⁸ Family duty and responsibility were driving forces in female entrepreneurship, as the presence of children and the presence or absence of a spouse played an important role.¹⁹ In other words, operating small businesses that were likely within their own home allowed women to carry out their domestic chores and childrearing whilst earning a living. Subsistence business-owning allowed many women to agitate traditional society and modernise business by simply inserting themselves into the business world.

As we will see, however, the Montreal female business owners in this study were already rejecting mainstream societal values by operating brothels, therefore it is possible that some of these sex workers were intentionally subverting social values as well (as we will see, their responses in their depositions often show rebelliousness). However, these female brothel owners were also subverting gender roles by simply existing as female business owners, as self-employment and independence were considered to be male traits by societal standards.²⁰

¹⁶ Melanie Buddle, *The Business of Women: Marriage, Family, and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901-51* (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2011), 2. Although Buddle's main subject is women in business in British Columbia, her introduction compares BC to Canada as a whole, and she sometimes references Quebec.

¹⁷ Ibid, 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid, 3.

²⁰ Ibid, 6.

Unfortunately, the percentage of Canadian women who were self-employed within the female labour force severely declined from 1921 to 1951, from 13.1% to 4.7%, and the effect was magnified because the female workforce was growing during this period.²¹ This decline in the presence of female business owners meant that they were a small minority within not only the male sphere of business owners but also the sphere of working women at all levels. Although a minority, the highest-class level that these women generally could attain was members of the petite bourgeoisie since their businesses were usually small in size and many did not have employees and therefore were in a different world from men, who were dominant in large-scale businesses.²²

Women's Legal Status in Quebec

The overall legal status of women in Quebec during the period was subordinate, which contributed to this economic precarity. An important aspect of women's legal status during this period is that they did not hold the right to vote until halfway through the period covered, and therefore held little political influence, unless they were from the elite class where they had the "ear" of male political elites.²³ Women also had to have their husband's permission to legally enter into commerce, and if their husbands would not sign off they had to petition a judge; there were options for women, but they are not the default and permission of men was needed.²⁴

A significant issue that contributed to women being in financial need is their husbands' desertion or non-support of their families. In 1912, a Montreal police magistrate reported that he saw approximately four or five non-support cases per day, and we can estimate that in reality,

²¹ Buddle, *The Business of Women*, 28, 81.

²² Ibid, 16.

²³ Elizabeth Kirkland, "Mothering Citizens: Elite Women in Montreal, 1890-1914" (dissertation, 2011), 33.

²⁴ John E. C Brierley and Paul-A. Cr  peau, eds., *Code Civil, 1866-1980:   dition historique et critique* (Montr  al: Chambre des notaires du Qu  bec, 1981), arts, 179, 180.

this number was higher as not every woman would have reported her husband.²⁵ A year later in 1913, section 242 of the *Criminal Code* was amended in section 242A to extend the definition of non-support, striking out the requirements of “death, danger, or permanent injury” for a man to be brought up on non-support charges, instead specifying that the “failure to provide the necessities of life” was enough for a summary conviction.²⁶ In section 242B, cohabitation was also now *prima facie* evidence of lawful marriage, and any kind of recognition by the father of children as his own was also *prima facie* evidence that they were legitimately his kin.²⁷ Therefore legislation was made more inclusive towards relationships that did not involve marriage, meaning more women could report their husbands for failure to support the family, which made it easier to convict cases of non-support as it was now a summary conviction offence.²⁸ This change of legislation demonstrates that there was enough of an increase in family abandonment by men that legislators increased not only the severity of punishment, but also the criteria of abandonment. However, lawmakers rejected reformers' proposals of having the convicted men work while in jail in order to provide for their families, which would have solved the financial burden placed upon women in these cases.²⁹ Despite these changes to the *Criminal Code*, women still needed to find ways of supporting themselves and their children, which resulted in more women joining the workforce as wage-earners or sometimes as business owners. The precarity of women's financial status could drive some women to look after themselves, and with low employment rates, some women chose to enter the sex trade in order to provide for themselves or their families, especially when laws existed which either did not give women

²⁵ James G. Snell, “‘The White Life for Two’: The Defence of Marriage and Sexual Morality in Canada, 1890-1914,” in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* (Toronto, Ontario: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992), 382.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 391.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 391.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 391.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 391.

agency, responsibility, or failed to take women into consideration at all. The direct effect of such laws on women's livelihoods likely explains the motivations of some of the women seen in the next chapter.

As for the *Civil Code of Lower Canada* during this period, a married woman was “virtually without legal identity and subject to her husband's authority in almost every respect.”³⁰ Some important examples of this were that, legally, a wife's domicile was chosen by her husband, she had to obey her husband, she could not work without her husband's permission, she could not enter into most legal contracts, she could not undertake judicial proceedings in her own name without special permission, only her husband administered the couple's property, and a husband's adultery was not itself sufficient grounds for separation unless he also moved his mistress into the matrimonial home.³¹ Women were also not allowed to be public traders without the authorisation of their husband or a judge, and if a judge did authorise so, husbands were protected from their wives' businesses so that they would not be financially responsible for any debts the wife incurred.³² In short, there were protections for men but none for women. Only if a husband was absent, interdicted, or unable to make his will known was the wife able to get authorisation from a judge to contract and appear in judicial proceedings, meaning that either way, only a man could legally authorise her to seek to become self-sufficient.³³ The vast majority of these laws stayed in place until the 1960s.³⁴ Because of these laws, women were not legally afforded much financial stability if their husbands did not pull their weight or were absent. This led to some women pursuing illicit subsistence strategies such as sex work.

³⁰ Peter Gossage and J. I. Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec: Tradition and Modernity* (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2018), 182.

³¹ CCLC, arts. 83, 174, 177, 178, 181, 188.

³² CCLC, arts. 179.

³³ CCLC, arts. 180.

³⁴ Gossage and Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec*, 183.

Although Quebec women gained independent rights much later than in other provinces, Quebec civil law held certain stipulations that gave Quebec women certain limited rights early on. One of these arrangements, called *séparation de biens* (“separation of property”), was used in marriage contracts or was set up afterwards in cases where a couple wanted to keep their finances and property separate.³⁵ If no special stipulations were made, the default *communauté de biens* (“community of property”) would apply, which meant that the husband had full management and control of the assets and finances of the community and property acquired during the marriage was split evenly between the husband and wife if they were to separate.³⁶ Separation gave the wife more control of her own property, but during the marriage, men could spend the household income as they desired. To go even further, certain articles within the civil code protected the husband in these types of marriages where women had control over their own finances. For example, article 1317 CCLC states that “The wife who has obtained a separation of property must contribute in proportion to her means and to those of her husband, to the expenses of the household as well as to those of the education of their common children. She must bear these expenses alone if nothing remain to the husband.” Although these rights were marginally better than what non-Quebec Canadian women held in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, Quebec would stagnate in their advancement of women’s rights until the Quiet Revolution, where the proverbial coin flipped and Quebecois women became an important force in women’s rights.

³⁵ Nootens, *Genre, patrimoine et droit civil*, 20.

³⁶ Ibid, 20.

Montreal's Night Life and Sex Work Scene

Montreal's nightlife was in full swing and at its height during this period. When Canada prohibited gambling in 1892, the reaction was an expansion of the underground industry to sate both Montrealers and tourists' appetite for risk and vice.³⁷ Montreal had also positioned itself as a city of vice during the prohibition era, as many Canadian and American tourists would travel to

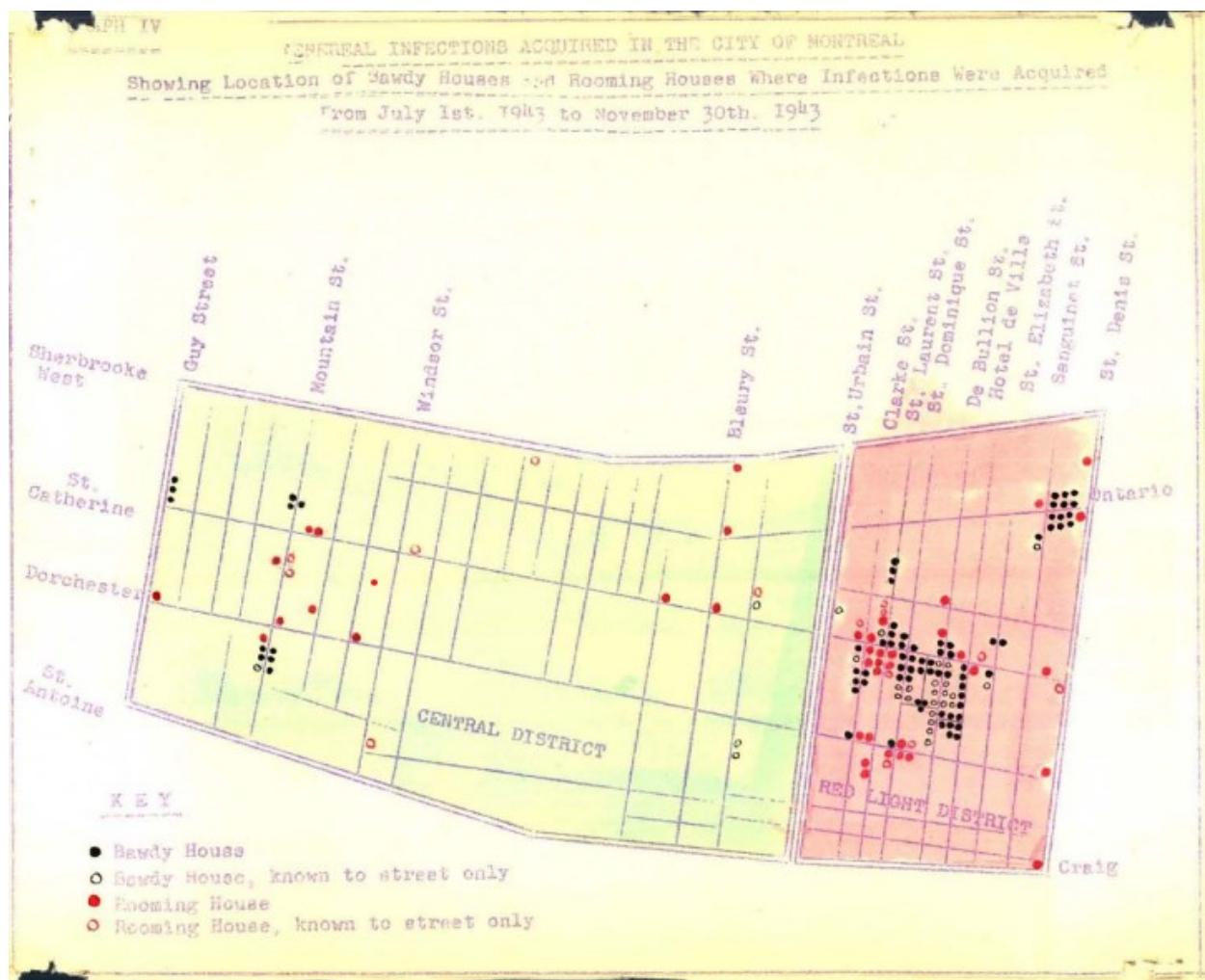


Figure 4: Map of venereal infections central and Red Light districts, date unknown, typewritten ink on paper, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron, Archives de Montréal, https://archivesdemontreal.ica-atom.org/uploads/r/ville-de-montreal-section-des-archives/1/5/152465/P43-4-2_2-1op.pdf.

³⁷ Magaly Brodeur, *Vice et corruption à Montréal, 1892-1970* (Québec, Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2011), 39.

the city in search of alcohol, gambling, and sex, and Montreal's businesses welcomed them.³⁸ Bars, nightclubs, theatres, and other entertainment establishments were abundant in the downtown area, with celebrities such as Sammy Davis Jr and Lili St. Cyr making appearances.³⁹ Montreal was viewed as the "wide-open" city within a more prim Canada because of the city's tolerance of vice.⁴⁰ Organised crime was also dominant in the city as a result of this tolerance, and bribery of officials was common. For example, in 1933 six agents of the Montreal police morality squad were fired for accepting bribes from a brothel owner, who had paid \$180 per week for the police to leave nine of her "racoleuses" alone in order to attract clients.⁴¹ Montreal's sex work scene was nothing new during the 1930s and 1940s, having existed alongside other businesses in the Red Light since the nineteenth century.⁴²

Addresses found in the Caron Inquiry's documents demonstrate that brothels were concentrated primarily in the Red Light district but could be found in almost any other borough in Montreal (see Figure 4).⁴³ Montreal's Red Light district was a section of downtown, close to the port of Montreal to attract sailors looking for leisure, especially vice. The boundaries of the district were Sherbrooke street to the north, Craig street to the south, St Denis street to the east and St-Urbain to the west, with the centre being the intersection of St-Catherine street and St-Laurent boulevard.⁴⁴ Brothels were a dominating presence in the Red Light, alongside other illicit establishments such as blind pigs and gambling houses, yet this district also held the city's

³⁸ Aline Gubbay, *A Street Called the Main: The Story of Montreal's Boulevard St-Laurent* (Montreal, Quebec: Meridian Press, 1989), 102.

³⁹ Ibid, 103-104.

⁴⁰ Weintraub, *City Unique*, 61.

⁴¹ Pierre de Champlain, *Histoire du crime organisé à Montréal de 1900 à 198* (Montréal, Québec: Éditions de l'Homme, 2014), 85.

⁴² Karen Herland, Mathieu Lapointe et Mary Anne Poutanen, "Des voix étouffées: le travail du sexe à Montréal, d'hier à aujourd'hui" in Annick Germain, Valérie Amiraux et Julie-Anne Boudreau (dir) *Vivre ensemble à Montréal: Épreuves et convivialités* (Montréal: Atelier 10, 2017), 104.

⁴³ Lévesque, *Résistance et transgression*, 124. Also see Figure 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 62.

most popular cabarets and cafés.⁴⁵ The district was also home to many boarding houses, and the line between them and brothels blurred, since some boarding houses involved themselves in the sex trade in hard times, and brothels often used the status of boarding house as a cover. Several thousand women were involved in sex work in Quebec, most of them concentrated in Montreal.⁴⁶ This included both sex workers in brothels and those working in public.

Catholicism, Public Morality Campaigns and the Public

Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s was strongly conservative Catholic, owing to the history of the province's close ties to the Catholic Church. The people of the province clung to this religious ultraconservatism with the election of Maurice Duplessis, whose policies involved maintaining Catholic values and traditions, putting the better interest of Quebecers below that of the Catholic Church.⁴⁷ In this period before the Quiet Revolution, Catholicism was tightly woven into the fabric of Quebec's culture and society. The Catholic Church's views of women's sexuality and promiscuity were very conservative, with chastity being imperative and contraception and sexual relations outside of marriage going against the teachings of the church.⁴⁸ These religious teachings on sexual morality were observed by a large number of Catholics in the city as during this period, the Catholic Church provided a massive network of services to the public, such as hospitals, schools, and cultural organisations.⁴⁹ Those who passed judgment on sex workers and those involved in the sex trade were moulded by these Catholic teachings and morals, thus this

⁴⁵ Greg Marquis, *The Vigilant Eye: Policing Canada from 1867 to 9/11* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 93.

⁴⁶ Lévesque, *Résistance et transgression*, 62.

⁴⁷ Alexandre Dumas, *L'Église et la politique québécoise, de Taschereau à Duplessis* (Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 3-4.

⁴⁸ Aline H. Kalbian, *Sex, Violence, and Justice: Contraception and the Catholic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 34.

⁴⁹ Paul-André Linteau, *Quebec since 1930* (Toronto, Ontario: J. Lorimer, 1991), 60.

religious point of view impacted sex workers when they were apprehended by the law, as well as when their profession came to the attention of public society.

More broadly, first-wave feminists and religious leaders worked together in social purity campaigns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, calling for “more stringent laws and stricter law enforcement as part of a plan to eradicate prostitution altogether,” aiming to ‘purify’ cities and the city lifestyle.⁵⁰ An aspect of this phenomenon was the ‘white slavery’ panic, as Canadian society was afraid of young white women’s moral purity falling prey to the ‘white slave trade’ through marriage scams and other means of men seducing young women who had moved away from their traditional social networks to the city for work.⁵¹ Instead of helping women fight for better wages and working conditions, reformers concentrated on fighting for harsh laws criminalising sex work, often through the logic that all sex work was exploitative and defiling women.⁵² Sex work was central to the moral reform of social purity for several reasons: firstly because it put sexuality on public display outside the confines of one’s home, secondly because it was the main face of female vice, and thirdly because it evoked the “powerful symbolism of the whore of Babylon.”⁵³ When police forces focus on arresting sex workers, it is because of public pressure to “clean up” neighbourhoods and city streets, which depends on the political and social climate of the time and the public’s moral standings.⁵⁴

Although women’s rights progressed in the 1940s with the right to vote and be political candidates, there was pushback from the Catholic Church, which made great efforts to hold back women’s rights in Quebec. For example, the archbishop of Quebec, Cardinal Jean-Marie

⁵⁰ Helen Boritch, *Fallen Women: Female Crime and Criminal Justice in Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: ITP Nelson, 2003), 105-106.

⁵¹ Ibid, 106.

⁵² Ibid, 107-108.

⁵³ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925: With a New Introduction* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 77-78.

⁵⁴ Boritch, *Fallen Women*, 90.

Villeneuve, expressed that women's suffrage would damage "family unity and hierarchy" as well as expose women to the sordid world of politics.⁵⁵

In March of 1950, as a result of city officials' tolerance of vice in the previous decades, the "Comité de Moralité Publique des Citoyens de Montréal" (CMP) was formed, a grouping of French-Canadian religious leaders, nationalists, intellectuals, businessmen, and community members fighting for moral reform in Montreal.⁵⁶ They were formed to demand and eventually help finance an inquiry into the Montreal police's tolerance of vice; their pressure led to the formation of the Caron Inquiry. Their inspiration was Pacifique Plante's newspaper series in *Le Devoir*, seen in the Introduction. The leaders of the CMP included Plante and future mayor Jean Drapeau, who both were chosen as prosecutors in the inquiry, as well as J.-Z.-Léon Patenaude from the "Ligues du Sacré-Cœur", which was a Catholic group formed in Montreal in 1909.⁵⁷

Sex Work and the Canadian and Quebec Legal Systems

The legal framework surrounding sex work during the 19th and 20th centuries demonstrates the ebb and flow of the debate between the two distinct legal approaches to sex work: first, that sex work is here to stay and should be regulated, and second, that sex work is immoral and should be eradicated.⁵⁸ Sex work has been viewed as unlike other crimes because it is what Helen Boritch has called the "quintessential female crime", having the reputation as the 'oldest female profession'.⁵⁹ Looking at Figure 5, we can see that "Bawdy House Keepers and Inmates" made

⁵⁵ Gossage and Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec*, 209.

⁵⁶ Montréal (Québec). Centre d'histoire de Montréal. *Scandale! : Le Montréal illicite, 1940-1960*, 219. The inclusion of businessmen within the CMP is interesting. The absence of English Montrealers is also of importance and this furthered the community divide in the city along linguistic lines.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 220; "Rapport Du Premier Congrès d'apostolat," *Canadiana*, December 5, 1909, <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.72005/10>.

⁵⁸ Boritch, *Fallen Women*, 99.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 89.

Convictions of Keepers and Inmates of Bawdy Houses as a Percentage of Female Convictions, Quebec, 1928-1939

1928	61%	1934	76%
1929	66.3	1935	75.2
1930	57.8	1936	73.9
1931	44.5	1937	76.8
1932	82.9	1938	72.2
1933	81.9	1939	87

Figure 5: Andrée Lévesque, *Convictions of Keepers and Inmates of Bawdy Houses as a Percentage of Female Convictions, Quebec, 1928-1939*, 1995, Table, *Résistance et transgression: Études en histoire des femmes au Québec*.

up an average of 73%, with a high of 87%, of female convictions in Quebec, a significant percentage. Sex work has been morally linked with depravity and “the image of the ‘fallen’ or ‘criminal’ woman”, setting the negative standard, thus at the same time defining its opposite, the concept of a ‘good’, decent, modest, and respectable woman.⁶⁰ Legal treatment of sex work by police and law enforcement has also varied because of the lack of real victims of the crime, aside from societal morality and members of the public who bear witness.⁶¹ Punishment for engaging in the sex trade was reserved for women, as punishing men would be dangerous to society. As Constance Backhouse notes, the man “discharges important social and business relations, is as father or brother responsible for the maintenance of others, has commercial or industrial duties to meet. He cannot be imprisoned without deranging society.”⁶²

Federal, provincial, and local laws all addressed aspects of sex work. Federally, several sections of the *Criminal Code* applied to sex work during this period. Sex workers were subject to the summary conviction offence of being “found in” a disorderly house, which carried a

⁶⁰ Boritch, *Fallen Women*, 89.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 90.

⁶² Constance Backhouse, “Nineteenth-Century Canadian Prostitution Law: Reflection of a Discriminatory Society.” *Social History* 18, no. 36, 1985, 422.

penalty of \$100 and costs or two months' imprisonment in the default of payment, or the indictable offence of being an "inmate of any common bawdy house," which carried the same penalty, but with the alternative being twelve months imprisonment.⁶³ Brothel owners and housekeepers were subject to the indictable offence of keeping a common bawdy house. Penalties increased upon subsequent convictions, with the first being one years' imprisonment, and after the third conviction, imprisonment between three months and two years.⁶⁴ They were also subject to the indictable offence of "procures, or attempts to procure or solicits any girl or woman to have unlawful carnal connection," which carried the penalty of ten years' imprisonment, with subsequent convictions also liable to whipping.⁶⁵

Provincially, Quebec's *Disorderly House Act* of 1925 further criminalised brothel owning, which subjected houses and buildings to padlocking if they were repeatedly used as brothels.⁶⁶ Sex workers were further targeted through Quebec's venereal diseases laws. The *Venereal Diseases Prevention Act* of 1941 instated mandatory forty-eight hour reporting of all cases of venereal diseases from all physicians to the Director of the Venereal Disease branch of the Department of Health and Social Welfare.⁶⁷ It further stated that all physicians had twenty days to report patients who refused treatment and could transmit venereal diseases.⁶⁸ This would result in the director having the right to send a medical officer to the patient's address to inquire and examine them, and if they were infected and there was a possibility of transmission, they

⁶³ *Act Respecting the Criminal Law*, R.S.C. 1927, c. 36, arts. 225, 228, 229 [*Criminal Code*]. Article 225 of the *Criminal Code* defines a bawdy house as: "a house, room, set of rooms or place of any kind kept for purposes of prostitution or for the practice of acts of indecency, or occupied or resorted to by one or more persons for such purposes."

⁶⁴ *Criminal Code*, art. 229.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, art. 216.

⁶⁶ *Disorderly House Act*, R.S.Q. 1925, c. 270, s. 3, 9.

⁶⁷ *Venereal Diseases Prevention Act*, R.S.C. 1941, c. 186, s. 3. The Act defines venereal disease as "syphilis, gonorrhoea, chancroid or inguinal lymphogranulomatosa."

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, s. 4.

could “have the latter isolated in a hospital, gaol or other place of detention as long as may be needed.”⁶⁹ If the patient remains at large, the provincial police were instructed to apprehend them and detain them until release is authorised by the Director.⁷⁰ Sex workers and housekeepers, when apprehended, would be subject to a venereal disease examination by the gaol’s physician; if venereal disease was found, patients could be isolated and were subject to mandatory treatment as mentioned above.⁷¹ If sex workers transmitted venereal diseases, they were liable to summary conviction, with a penalty of up to \$200 or imprisonment up to three months.⁷²

Municipally, sex workers were targeted by some Montreal by-laws regarding loitering at night without cause, which could especially affect streetworkers or brothel workers in transit.⁷³ Therefore, sex workers were prosecuted at all three levels of government.

The Canadian Military and the Red Light Mass Brothel Closure in February 1944

During World War II, venereal diseases in soldiers who were stationed or passed through the city were alarmingly elevated. This led to a military campaign against venereal diseases that villainized women, both sex workers and women having casual sex, and resulted in the military threatening “to have sections of the city declared off-limits to off-duty servicemen unless police adopted stronger measures against brothels.”⁷⁴

This issue caused Major-General E.J. Renaud of Military district 4, which encompassed Montreal, to organise and chair a conference held on January 15th, 1944, at which he threatened

⁶⁹ *Venereal Diseases Prevention Act*, s. 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, s. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, s. 6.

⁷² *Ibid*, s. 10.

⁷³ Eric H. Reiter, *Wounded Feelings: Litigating Emotions in Quebec, 1870-1950* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 145-146.

⁷⁴ Greg Marquis, *The Vigilant Eye: Policing Canada from 1867 to 9/11*, 93.

to bar soldiers from Montreal if nothing was done about venereal diseases in the Red Light and central districts.⁷⁵ The conference included three branches of the military (the Canadian Army, the Canadian Navy, and the Royal Canadian Air Force) as well as representatives of all three levels of government: municipal authorities, including Montreal mayor Adhemar Raynault and the city Recorder, provincial representatives such as Quebec's Assistant Deputy Minister of Health and the Director of the provincial police, and federally, representatives for the Department of Pensions and National Health and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.⁷⁶ Interestingly, the Montreal police were not present.

During the conference, the three branches of the Canadian military communicated alarming statistics about venereal diseases in soldiers present in Montreal. According to Canadian military statistics from the Caron Inquiry, infections in Military district 4 accounted for 16% of all venereal infections in the Canadian army between January 1, 1940 and December 31, 1943.⁷⁷ This figure was shocking as Military district 4 only represented 8% of the Canadian military.⁷⁸ Furthermore, 32% of the venereal infections were acquired in Montreal's brothels.⁷⁹ For comparison, the Canadian Army's venereal rate was double that of the American Army.⁸⁰ In the Royal Canadian Air Force, 20% of venereal disease cases were associated with Montreal.⁸¹ The Canadian Navy had the most elevated figure. Although the naval representative did not prepare an official report like the others, he stated that 95% of venereal diseases could be traced back to Montreal.⁸² Renaud summarised the military's issue, stating "Sick men cannot work -

⁷⁵ Archives de Montréal, Fonds P043. "Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron: 1925-1957", Travaux de la Commission, Documents de référence, Maladies vénériennes, P43-4-2_2-1, 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 12.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 14.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 7.

⁸¹ Ibid, 17.

⁸² Ibid, 22.

much less fight.”⁸³ The vast amount of venereal disease in soldiers going through Montreal created issues for the Canadian military as they had to expense healthcare and treatment for the soldiers, and personnel would also be on medical leave from active service while they healed, resulting in fewer soldiers to fight in World War II. From January 1, 1940, to July 1, 1944, venereal disease treatment and hospitalisation linked to Montreal sex work cost the Canadian Army \$400,000 and added up to 36,000 days of lost duty.⁸⁴ Montreal was a major east coast port through which many Canadian soldiers would travel, both returning home and leaving Canada for the European front. The proximity of the port to the Red Light district made access to brothels easy and meant both that soldiers brought venereal diseases with them from Europe and into Canada or that they contracted them in Montreal and spread venereal diseases among troops and sex workers in Europe or elsewhere in Canada.⁸⁵

As a result, the Recorder’s Court also started to crack down on sentencing for the offences of being found in and working in a bawdyhouse and the Montreal police more regularly started padlocking brothels for six months at a time.⁸⁶ In other words, the Montreal police started doing their jobs and enforcing disorderly house laws. In 1944, judges started sentencing women to four to six months of jail time instead of fines.⁸⁷

Between military campaigns, pressure from public morality campaigns from the public and the church, and the courts and police cracking down, this meant the end of the peak of the Red Light, with the district being largely diminished and the status of brothels more precarious. This also meant the end of female-dominated brothels in Montreal, leading to fewer brothels and

⁸³ Fonds Commission Caron, Travaux de la Commission, Documents de reference, Maladies vénériennes, 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁸⁵ “Life on the Homefront: Montréal, Quebec, a City at War,” Canadian War Museum, accessed December 19, 2024, https://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/montreal_e.html.

⁸⁶ Archives de Montréal, Fonds P043. “Fonds Commission d’enquête présidée par le juge François Caron: 1925-1957.”, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-017, 3263-3264.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 278-279.

more street sex work after this period. This winding down of this supposed mecca of sin meant the end of the arc of the stories in this thesis. The Red Light had been a place for women to be business owners, which was taken away by male authorities and drove women to the streets where it was much more dangerous to work.

Chapter Two: Women's Lives: Brothel Owners, Housekeepers, and Sex Workers

In 1937, brothel owner Lucie Delicato and restaurateur Angelo Bisanti legally separated their property from one another. When he was deposed for the Caron Inquiry in 1951, Bisanti stated that he initiated the separation of their finances, a process formally known as *séparation de biens*. He claimed he had officially made this change due to her affiliation with brothels.¹ However, the likelihood of his not knowing about her businesses is low; instead, it is more probable that he was trying to keep his current and future business ventures licit or at least to appear that way to the authorities. Looking further into his businesses, his linking the separation to his disapproval of his wife's brothel-keeping appears quite hypocritical since he was himself the landlord of several properties that were used as brothels.² He was also a member of the Controni crime family, which gave him power in the Montreal underground crime network.³ Bisanti's restaurant, the American Spaghetti House, which opened in 1941 and was situated at the corner of St-Catherine street and Berger street in the middle of the Red Light district, was also a known meeting place for sex workers at the time and was formally investigated by the Montreal police as a site of criminal activities.⁴ A few questions arise when we begin to look further into the relationship between Bisanti and Delicato. Could Bisanti have felt emasculated by his wife and retaliated since Delicato was one of Montreal's most renowned and successful brothel owners during this period and thus was a puissant businesswoman? Did he have a sudden

¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-098, 2, 5.

² Montréal (Québec). Centre d'histoire de Montréal. *Scandale! : Le Montréal illicite, 1940-1960*, 121.

³ Ibid, 121.

⁴ Lapointe, *Nettoyer Montréal*, 126.

(though apparently temporary) shift in morality regarding illegal activity? Was their financial separation only to get the authorities off their backs since she was associated with brothels and he might have been trying to give the impression that his business was clean and licit? Or could he truthfully have been kept in the dark and been ignorant of her affiliations with the sex trade?

As Thierry Nootens has shown, *séparation de biens* was sometimes used by couples to defraud authorities and protect family assets from creditors.⁵ Therefore this move could have been a charade to separate Delicato's tainted assets in preparation for Bisanti's future restaurant business. This also could have been a strategy to throw off the authorities to the possible laundering of her brothel money through his businesses, given that whitewashing money through bars, clubs, cafés and restaurants was very common.⁶ Although Bisanti did not own The American Spaghetti House during this time, it is possible that he was setting himself up as he had just sold a restaurant and likely was looking to purchase another one.⁷ However, if he was laundering their money through her brothels, this meant that Delicato would still be at his mercy financially, which did not guarantee her control of the funds obtained from the brothels as she would be dependent on him for the laundering of her money. This would counteract any beneficial aspects that *séparation de biens* had for the rights of women, although in this instance it is the illicit aspect of Delicato's business that might have negated the agency that this separation of finances may have had. However, in normal circumstances without fraud, separating a couple's finances could provide financial freedom to women as they had more control over their financial wellbeing.

⁵ Nootens, *Genre, patrimoine et droit civil*, 19.

⁶ Montréal (Québec). Centre d'histoire de Montréal. *Scandale! : Le Montréal illicite, 1940-1960*, 155.

⁷ "Attempted Murder Enquete Is Held," *The Montreal Gazette*, August 30, 1929, 4.

It is difficult to ascertain the true motives for this separation, but nevertheless, their relationship highlights the complex situations and marital issues that female brothel owners faced in a period when men were the main proprietors and managers of household wealth and business. Delicato's business and her independent agency were linked legally, socially, and personally to her husband. Most importantly, if this separation went beyond just dividing finances and indicated actual marital distress and discord between them, and not a plot to fool authorities, this demonstrates that women exercised their agency over their financial lives by separating from their husbands and making businesses of their own, in this case, illicit businesses. With the legal separation of their assets, Delicato could now deal in commerce and she was in control of her commercial and personal finances. This both liberated Delicato from her husband's financial authority and also protected Bisanti if she went bankrupt or had any debts, and vice-versa. This was not a right that was automatically afforded to women as they usually had to cope with how their husbands managed their finances, being at their mercy.

One of the avenues through which women could have agency over their finances was through underground black market means, including, for some, brothel ownership. Although some men may have been brothel owners, from the information obtained from the Caron Inquiry, this was a domain that was dominated primarily by women.

Biographies of the Women in Montreal's Brothels

The Bisanti separation is one of many ways to examine people's lives through the Caron Inquiry depositions. The depositions act as a window into people's lives and allow researchers to reconstruct them further through genealogical resources such as parish records, census returns, and immigration records. This inquiry and the corresponding documents represent rich sources of information about the lives of sex workers, housekeepers, and brothel owners. Several brothel

owners were of different ethnicities other than French Canadian or English Canadian: Delicato, for example, was Italian and Ida Katz, who was Jewish. In terms of ethnicities, the 1941 census states that 62.6% of Montrealers were French-Canadian, 24.7% were descended from immigrants from the British Isles, 5.6% were of European Jewish descent, 2.2% were of Italian origin, and 4.9% were listed as “other”.⁸ During the 1930s and 1940s, women like Delicato and Katz would have different day-to-day lived experiences than their coworkers who were of British or French origin, being racialised for being working-class Italian and Jewish women. Many historians have an image of sex work that it is not merely a job, but a whole identity.⁹

Brothel Owners

Brothel owners were female entrepreneurs who funded and occasionally ran their brothels. Most of these women had been sex workers who had accumulated enough capital to start their own brothels. This would entail renting or buying a residence in the Red Light district, furnishing it, usually hiring a housekeeper, and sometimes hiring sex workers themselves.

As we discuss these illicit businesses, it is important to understand that although I use the term businesswoman, I am specifically speaking of women who own illicit businesses. While these women had wealth similar to other petite bourgeois Montrealers, they had one distinct difference that they had to contend with: they were working in Montreal’s underground illicit society without any legal protection for their business ventures. Despite their wealth, they were in a precarious situation since police tolerance could be withdrawn at any moment, exposing them to the *Criminal Code* offences. While authorities viewed them as criminals, I aim to tell the stories of these women, humanising them as savvy businesswomen and workers instead of the

⁸ Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 29.

⁹ Boritch, *Fallen Women*, 91.

criminals they have been made out to be throughout history. The reasoning behind giving these women their own chapter is to give them a voice and also to create a space for them to be remembered and studied in a new light, focusing on their humanity instead of their criminal status, and also showing how they negotiated the difficult terrain of running an illicit business. These descriptions humanise these women by discussing their backstories as complex women finding ways to make a living in their multifaceted lives. These women were mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers, neighbours, and members of their communities and should be recognised as such, alongside recognising how they were successful businesswomen in the Montreal underground of the 1930s and 1940s.

Lucie Delicato

Lucie Delicato was a first-generation Canadian, both of her parents having been born in Atina, Italy.¹⁰ She had six brothers and sisters: John, Joe, Louis, Juliette, her twin Antoinette (who also married a Bisanti, likely Angelo Bisanti's brother), and her sister Carmen, who was the owner of Carmen's Beauty Parlor, situated at 1236 De Bullion street, which also housed her mother on the same street where they all grew up.¹¹ Delicato had a close relationship with her mother and sister



Figure 6: *Mugshot of Lucie Delicato*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

¹⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 4-5.

¹¹ Ibid, 4-5.

Carmen as she frequently visited them when doing business in the Red Light district.¹²

Delicato's father, Henry Delicato, immigrated to Canada in 1893 from Atina, Frosinone, Italy, meaning he was an early Italian immigrant, as the surge of Italian immigration to Canada started in 1900.¹³ Montreal was a popular Canadian city for Italian immigrants, thus the Delicato family would have helped form the second-largest Italian community in Canada.¹⁴ From genealogical records, we know that Delicato was baptised as Lucia Delicato on March 6th, 1906, at Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel, Montreal's first Italian church.¹⁵ The church had opened the year prior in the parish of Mont-Carmel, which was in the section of downtown stretching from St-Laurent boulevard to St-Denis street, with Dorchester boulevard (now René-Lévesque boulevard) as its most southern point, which was in proximity to the Red Light district. Delicato admits in her depositions that she did not speak French very well, and her English phrasing in the depositions was awkward at times, therefore it is probable that her first language was Italian and her second was English since her deposition was in this language.¹⁶ She was also a mother: her daughter Bella Bisanti was born in 1945 and died in 2001.¹⁷ Fellow brothel owner Ida Katz stated that she was positive that Delicato's mother kept a "nice, respectable house" meaning that she was never involved in her daughter's business.¹⁸ At the moment when she was deposed in 1951, Delicato

¹² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 2693.

¹³ Ibid, 1951-099, 4; Bruno Ramirez, "Montreal's Italians and the Socio-Economy of Settlement, 1900-1930: Some Historical Hypotheses," *Urban History Review* 10, no. 1 (June 1981), 39.

¹⁴ Sonia Cancian, *Families, Lovers, and Their Letters: Italian Postwar Migration to Canada* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 10.

¹⁵ Lucia Delicato, baptismal record, 1 Apr. 1906, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/2842255:1091?tid=&pid=&queryId=1126c49eb841cc62efd99f3de75073b3&_phsrc=Rjp1&_phstart=succesSource; "Who We Are," Mont Carmel Parish, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://www.mont-carmelo.com/about-1/>.

¹⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 19; Ibid, 1951-098, 1.

¹⁷ "Death: Bisanti, Lucie," *The Montreal Gazette*, March 9, 1966, 25; Bella Bisanti, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/86019018/person/46534315208/facts>.

¹⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 170.

had come a long way from her family home on De Bullion street as she was a 44-year-old housewife living in the upscale neighbourhood of Outremont with her husband.¹⁹

Angelo Bisanti was born in Galluccio, Conserta, Italy in 1895 and emigrated to Montreal in 1901 with his mother and siblings through New York on the ship SS Lombardia.²⁰ Bisanti was previously a foreman and mechanic who owned the Casino de Parée, and later the American Spaghetti House restaurant in the downtown district.²¹ Bisanti's deposition was in French, but in the census, we learn he spoke both French and Italian, therefore we can assume that the couple spoke Italian at home.²² Delicato and Bisanti were married in 1927, went through the aforementioned rough period ten years later, only to reconcile in 1942 when she allegedly agreed to give up her illicit businesses.²³ Bisanti maintained that there had been serious arguments because he claimed not to have known about her profession as a brothel owner until after they were married.²⁴

During Delicato's time as a brothel owner, she and her husband had been living at 847 Stuart avenue in Outremont in a seemingly newly constructed duplex owned by Bisanti until the separation, when he moved to his parent's residence at 965a Wiseman street, which was the next street over.²⁵ They also had a tenant above their garage on Stuart avenue.²⁶ The couple clearly amassed some wealth throughout the years, allowing them to buy a house at 29 Maplewood

¹⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 1.

²⁰ Angelo Bisanti, immigration record, 4 Oct. 1901, available in "New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1892-1924," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/mediaui-viewer/collection/1030/tree/161773361/person/112460020770/media/7279d86e-8925-4169-9ec8-426f4f0b34d3?_phsrc=Rjp5&usePUBJs=true&galleryindex=1&sort=-created

²¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 1; Angelo Bisanti, available in "1921 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/4456741:8991?tid=&pid=&queryId=950cea189a1b7d01ed8d6cb66955e7b6&_phsrc=Rjp3&_phstart=successSource

²² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-098, 1.

²³ *Ibid*, 1951-098, 2, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 1951-098, 2, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 1951-099, 27-28.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 1951-099, 27-28.

avenue, which is where they resided during their depositions, in a much tonier part of Outremont, which had a steeply sloped walkway on the Côte-Ste-Catherine road side of the property that was decorated with “nice” flowers.²⁷ This wealth also allowed Delicato to house her mother at 1236 De Bullion street, down from her brothels at 1234 and then at 1240 De Bullion.²⁸ At the time of the Caron Inquiry, Delicato and Bisanti were vacationing in Florida and delayed coming back due to Bisanti receiving medical treatment there, another sign of their significant wealth.²⁹ Jeanne Balcé, one of Delicato’s housekeepers, mentioned in her deposition that Delicato had a villa that she lived in, and also that her brothel on 2034-2036 St-Laurent street was “beaucoup plus beau” than other brothels as it had at least four rooms and a double staircase.³⁰ This indicates that not only was she spending her accumulated wealth on herself, but also putting her money back into her business, indicating good business sense. Her nickname around the Red Light district was “La Bourgeoise” because of how rich and opulently she dressed.³¹ From Bisanti’s deposition, it seems that Delicato used lawyers to threaten him legally to sign off on their *séparation de biens*, which interestingly occurred after she claimed to have given up her brothels. He stated “...quand elle a vendu les propriétés, j’étais obligé de donner la permission à ma femme pour avoir la paix. Ils m’ont ‘magané’, ils voulaient faire des procédures à la Cour, je voulais avoir la paix. J’ai signé pour avoir la paix.”³² Could she have started her brothels after the beginning of her marriage because he wasn’t supporting her financially? Was she living above their means and needing a supplemental income? As there are arrest records of her after 1937, it is likely that she still had brothels after their financial separation, and they likely

²⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 1-3.

²⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 25.

²⁹ “Two in Florida Ruled in Contempt, Probe Judge Set \$40-a-day Fine,” *The Montreal Gazette*, April 6, 1951, 3.

³⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2705-2719.

³¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2235.

³² Ibid, 1951-098, 7.

benefitted from this situation as they were both entrepreneurs and would not be liable for the other's business decisions.³³

Throughout her career, Delicato owned at least four brothels; however, the timeline of when she started in sex work is unclear. When deposed in the Caron Inquiry, she claimed that she started her career around 1935 by going straight to owning four brothels at once and that she was never a sex worker, stating “I was never in the business. How could I be a girl?”³⁴ Ida McDonald, another of her housekeepers, stated in her deposition that she had seen Delicato at her husband’s restaurant, the American Spaghetti House, from time to time when she dined there but did not interact with her as a housekeeper and only knew Delicato was the owner of the brothel she worked in because her head housekeeper Simone Berlangue told her.³⁵ Delicato would use her mother’s house on De Bullion street to meet women interested in working for her.³⁶ Her criminal record at the time of the Caron Inquiry reveals that in 1943 she had been convicted of being found in a disorderly house numerous times, as she would sometimes get caught visiting her brothels when raids would occur.³⁷ Other legal incidents include in 1937



Figure 7: *Mugshot of Lucie Delicato*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

³³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 47.

³⁴ Ibid, 1951-099, 17, 21.

³⁵ Ibid, 1950-15, 2757-2758.

³⁶ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, 2709.

³⁷ Ibid, 1951-099, 47.

when the Quebec Provincial Police convicted her as a housekeeper on four counts and fined her; she was acquitted on another count.³⁸ In 1938 she was arrested twice as a found-in, and in 1941 she was booked as a found-in six times.³⁹ When she was arrested, she would give the name Rose-Marie Delicato.⁴⁰ Delicato was also brought before the juvenile court for employing minors in her brothels but was found not guilty as they had told her they were 21 years old.⁴¹

While being deposed, Delicato's combative and uncooperative attitude reveals itself. Examples of this are when Judge Caron asked her who else was in the business of owning brothels in Montreal and she replied "Other people."⁴² Plante repeatedly asked if her husband had been the witness for one of her employees' weddings, which, according to Plante, took place at the Delicato/Bisanti home; she firmly replied "no" and disagreed several times, finally yelling at Plante "Listen!"⁴³ Plante also asked about her mother living in proximity to her brothels, about which Delicato became defensive, stating that her mother was dead and that the dead should be left alone.⁴⁴ She was reprimanded for this outburst by the judge, who told her not to remark on questions, and to only answer the questions directed at her.⁴⁵

Delicato passed away on March 6th, 1966, at the Montreal General Hospital at only 60 years of age, leaving her 20-year-old daughter without any living parents, as Bisanti had died in 1961.⁴⁶

³⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 9-10.

³⁹ Ibid, 1951-099, 9-10.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1951-099, 10-11.

⁴¹ Ibid, 1951-099, 13.

⁴² Ibid, 1951-099, 18.

⁴³ Ibid, 1951-099, 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1951-099, 25-26.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 25-26.

⁴⁶ "Death: Bisanti, Lucie," *The Montreal Gazette*, March 9, 1966, 25.

Anna Beauchamp

Although she had already passed away at the time of the Caron investigation, Anna Labelle, also known under her married name of Beauchamp, was an important figure in the Montreal underground during this period due to her status as one of the most renowned brothel owners alongside Delicato. She was born on June 5th, 1899 to a French-Canadian family in Montreal.⁴⁷ Her father, Adrien Labelle, was a labourer, and her mother Mélodie Coutu was likely a housewife; they both could read and write and could speak English and French, but their mother tongue was French thus they likely spoke this at home.⁴⁸ Beauchamp's family self-identified as Catholic on the 1901 Canadian census.⁴⁹ In 1901, they lived in the St-Jacques ward of Montreal and Beauchamp seems to have been the only child of her family.⁵⁰ She likely stayed within the same neighbourhood and thus grew up there. On November 6th, 1918, at the age of 18, she



Figure 8: *Mugshot of Anna Beauchamp*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

⁴⁷ Anna Labelle, available in "1901 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/8826/images/z000156018?pid=14386148>; Anna Labelle, baptismal record, 6 Jun. 1899, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/8907886:1091?tid=&pid=&queryId=509d550a-977f-4d77-a19d-b56f35cb367f&_phsrc=Fmd2&_phstart=successSource

⁴⁸ Anna Labelle, available in "1901 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

married Émile Beauchamp at the Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal.⁵¹ Émile was a carpenter from the Saint-Louis district, who was also born in 1899.⁵²

In late September 1931, Beauchamp filed for authorisation from a judge to bring an action in *séparation de biens* against her husband.⁵³ This suggests that Émile likely opposed her wanting to file for separate finances, as they were living together at 1250 De Bullion street according to that year's census and thus her husband was still around.⁵⁴ It is possible that she had already or was planning to purchase properties to open brothels and he did not like the idea. Knowing that the Great Depression had hit the city and many Montrealers were either on government assistance or unemployed, one possible scenario is that Émile had lost his job and Beauchamp, despite his protests, wanted to support them by opening her own brothels after possibly having been a sex worker herself. On February 5th, 1932, much like Delicato, Beauchamp filed the action for separation as to property from her husband.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, as she had died on April 17th, 1944, before the Caron Inquiry depositions, we do not have access to as much information about her.⁵⁶ However, some of the other women

⁵¹ Anna Labelle, marriage record, 6 Nov. 1918, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/13181301:1091?tid=&pid=&queryId=616dff11e301ae4cdb7ec6bb99df22e5&_phsrc=yaB37&_phstart=successSource; Émile Beauchamp, available in "1901 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/8826/images/z000158314?pid=14398073>

Although searching genealogical and historical records does not turn up anything about this couple, there is another couple by the same names in Montreal at the same time. Instead of a carpenter, this other Émile was a lawyer and a WWI veteran and had a child who likely did not survive infancy but died in 1928 and thus could not be the Émile married to the brothel owner Beauchamp even if they are buried in the same cemetery. This issue demonstrates the difficulties in genealogical and historical research, as using these records is challenging and corroboration is important to make sure that different people are not being conflated.

⁵² Anna Labelle, marriage record, 6 Nov. 1918, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*; Émile Beauchamp, available in "1901 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*.

⁵³ "The Civil Courts," *The Montreal Gazette*, February 6, 1932, 4. "Ester en justice", indicating that she had to get the permission of her husband or a judge (in the civil code) to separate as to property from her husband.

⁵⁴ Anna Beauchamp, available in "1931 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/discoveryui-content/view/9563999:62640?tid=&pid=&queryId=a631f20b33a85a42d421967fa3f72bcc&_phsrc=ftD8&_phstart=successSource

⁵⁵ "The Civil Courts," *The Montreal Gazette*, September 30, 1931, 4.

⁵⁶ Anna Labelle Beauchamp, grave marker, Cimetière Notre-Dame-des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, *Findagrave.com*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/121410750/anna-beauchamp#view-photo=93851015>

who were deposed mentioned her multiple times and also spoke about her businesses as she was one of the most prominent brothel owners of her time and many had worked for her.⁵⁷ For example, we know from Annette Gosselin's deposition that before her death, Beauchamp lived at 1225 De Bullion street, meaning she had moved down the street at some point between 1931 and 1944.⁵⁸ We also know that she owned a two-story stone cottage at 219 Sherbrooke street.⁵⁹ She was wealthy enough to employ a uniformed chauffeur, a man named Henri Forgues, who drove her around in her blue Cadillac.⁶⁰ When going to court to bail out her workers, Beauchamp would wear a brown mink coat in the winter, and overall dressed very "chic" and "luxe."⁶¹ Plante stated that Beauchamp was seen going to court with a "belle sacoche rouge" and also that she was "à l'aise" in court when bailing out her workers.⁶² She seems to have proudly displayed her wealth in public, likely having a sense of accomplishment from having acquired such wealth since she was born into the working-class and had worked her way up. Her laissez-faire attitude towards authority was possibly because of this wealth and also because of her status as one of the most renowned brothel owners in Montreal. According to her housekeeper Paulette Derry, Beauchamp was a loveable and sensible person.⁶³ Additionally, she was said to have taken good care of those working for her.⁶⁴ Gosselin also mentioned that she was invited to vacation at Beauchamp's country house in Rivières-des-Prairies in the summer, which she visited a couple of times on Sundays.⁶⁵ This information, aside from reinforcing that she had enough income to

⁵⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2695.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 1950-15, 2699.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1402.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 1950-15, 2699, 2702. Archives de Montréal, "Pièces Déposées à La Commission d'enquête Caron, 1950-1953," June 5, 2013, <https://archivesdemontreal.com/2013/06/05/pieces-deposees-a-la-commission-denquete-caron-1950-1953/>; Plante, Stanké, and Morgan, *Pax, lutte à finir avec la pègre*, 133.

⁶¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2233-2234.

⁶² Ibid, 1950-14, 2680.

⁶³ Ibid, 1950-13, 2090.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 1950-13, 2090-2091.

⁶⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2702. This former brothel is now a comedy club by the name of "Le Bordel", an acknowledgement of the history of the site.

purchase a vacation home, demonstrates that Beauchamp forged personal relationships with her workers, inviting them to her vacation home and treating them with respect. In the early 1940s, before her death in 1942, Beauchamp had approximately ten brothels, owning more brothels in the Red Light district than Delicato and likely any other person, making her seem almost legendary in terms of underground black market success stories.⁶⁶ Beauchamp also acquired 312 Ontario street, the most prestigious upscale brothel in the Red Light district.⁶⁷ She passed away a few months after the closure of the Red Light district, as Mary O'Brien testified that she was working for Beauchamp when she discovered that most of the brothels in the district had shut down.⁶⁸ It seems that her last residence was at 713 Gouin boulevard east.⁶⁹ She is buried at the Notre-Dame des Neiges cemetery in Montreal alone but her gravestone does mention her husband.⁷⁰ Although online searches for his grave were unsuccessful, it is possible that Émile remarried and was buried with another wife.

⁶⁶ Montréal (Québec). Centre d'histoire de Montréal. *Scandale! : Le Montréal illicite, 1940-1960*, 118.

⁶⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2671-2672.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 1950-14, 2685-2686.

⁶⁹ "Mrs. Beauchamp Freed of Receiving Charge," *The Montreal Gazette*, September 29, 1939, 3.

⁷⁰ Anna Labelle Beauchamp, grave marker, Cimetière Notre-Dame-des Neiges, Montreal, Quebec, *Findagrave.com*.

Ida Katz

Ida Katz, also known under the alias “Liliane ‘La Juive’ Brown”, was born in Šiauliai, Lithuania in 1897 and was of Jewish descent, likely speaking Yiddish as well as English.⁷¹ She had an older sister named Annie Roth who was also born in Lithuania around 1890, having immigrated to Montreal in 1907.⁷² Katz immigrated to Montreal in 1913, her sister having likely helped her immigrate to Canada.⁷³ She mentioned in her English-language deposition that she could not read or write.⁷⁴ Her address from 1925 to 1950 was 59 Verchères street, and she is listed as a Spinster in her depositions.⁷⁵ When she was deposed in 1951 by the Caron Inquiry, she was approximately 53 years old.⁷⁶



Figure 9: *Mugshot of Ida Katz*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

⁷¹ Ida Katz, grave marker, Baron de Hirsch de la Savane Cemeteries, Montreal, Quebec, *Jowbr.org*, <https://jowbr.org/record.cgi?dir=BdH/C6&loc=B2:P&padnum=>; Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2692-2693, 2698-2699.

⁷² Annie Roth, available in “1931 Census Canada,” *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/search/collections/8991/records/4522588?tid=&pid=&queryId=c2c39b9b-2227-44f2-99f6-453f758b9df4&_phsrc=Fmd34&_phstart=successSource; Annie Roth, grave marker, Baron de Hirsch de la Savane Cemeteries, Montreal, Quebec, *Jewishgen.org*, https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/jowbr.php?rec=J_QC_0007061

⁷³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 155.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 1951-069, 187.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 1951-069, 158,160; Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces déposés, P43-3-2_V07_E137-E138, 60.

⁷⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 154.



Figure 10: *Kaiser German soldiers in Šiauliai*, date unknown, photograph, History of Šiauliai, <https://en.siauliuiistorija.lt/2018/01/29/miestas-skestantis-karo-liepsnose/#1517249519509-17fd2318-3846>.

As a Jewish woman who emigrated in 1913, Katz was likely fleeing escalating antisemitism in pre-war Lithuania.⁷⁷ In the coming years during World War I, her hometown would be set ablaze by Germans and then Russians, with the Jewish population, which made up over half of the city, plummeting from 8000 to 500 people.⁷⁸ A significant number of Jews were immigrating to Canada at the time, with Pierre Anctil coining the years between 1900 and 1919 the “Great Jewish Migration”.⁷⁹

Katz was a brothel owner for over ten years, starting in 1932 when she was about 35 years old until the closure of the Red Light district in 1944; she testified to never having any

⁷⁷ Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2015), 74.

⁷⁸ Šiauliai Tourism Information Center, “The Beginnings of the Formation of a Jewish Community in the City,” Šiaulių Istorija, <https://siauliuiistorija.lt/2018/01/23/zydu-bendruomenes-kurimosi-mieste-uzuomazgos/>.

⁷⁹ Pierre Anctil and Judith Woodsworth, *History of the Jews in Quebec* (Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 2021), 61.

connection with brothels or sex work before this.⁸⁰ She used the alias Lilian Brown not only during arrests and on the leases of her brothels but also in her everyday life and with friends.⁸¹ She likely chose an English name to integrate herself into Quebec culture, possibly hiding the fact that she was Jewish and Lithuanian to authorities and the public to bypass discrimination as well as not wanting her family name associated with brothels.⁸² For example, when Judge Caron asked her about using another name, she started explaining “[...] I use it, because I didn’t want for –” at which point Caron cut her off stating “I understand,” indicating that it was commonplace for those operating in the Montreal underground not to use their real name as a type of protection for themselves and their families, since an association like this would sully their societal reputations.⁸³ Unfortunately, she discovered that this tactic did not work as well as she thought, as Plante let her know that both of her names were on the city’s water tax bill.⁸⁴ Despite this, she was still known as “La Juive” around the Red Light district.⁸⁵ Katz was arrested approximately 15 times and was once kept imprisoned for eight days waiting for a medical exam.⁸⁶ Some of her other brothels included 1153-1155 Clark street which she opened in 1933, 1197-1199 Clark street, which she expanded between 1934 and 1935, and 1203 Clark street, which she only operated for three months likely because she was unable to acquire a neighbouring address.⁸⁷ She also operated for a few months out of 1297 St-Dominique street, which she rented, and then went on to own and operate 170-172 Dumarais street in 1937.⁸⁸ Aside from owning 170-172 Dumarais street, she also owned two other houses, one on Hutchinson

⁸⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1951-069, 155-156.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1951-069, 183.

⁸² Ibid, 1951-069, 183.

⁸³ Ibid, 1951-069, 183.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 1951-069, 184.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 1950-017, 3256.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 243-244.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 156-158, 160, 170, 189.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 156-158, 160, 170, 189.

street and one in Outremont.⁸⁹ Both of these had three apartments that she rented out, and together were worth about \$15,000 to \$18,000 at the time. Curiously, however, she did not own the house that she lived in on 59 Verchères street.⁹⁰

Her deposition showcases her strong demeanour: she did not hold back her annoyance towards authorities and the inquiry in general, several times quipping back at Pacifique Plante as he questioned her. For example, as Plante went through a list of people she might know, she stated that she did not know Angelo Bisanti's bookkeeper Mr. Travella, and further exclaimed "You don't have to meet everyone, Mr. Plante."⁹¹ Overall, she was resistant and sassy towards Plante and Caron, which resulted in her interrupting Plante frequently, at times making the stenographer repeat his questions.⁹² Judge Caron kept commenting that he didn't believe her or her story, which seemed to irritate her as time passed and her comments became more frequent as the deposition went on. Plante asked her to describe Clark street and as they went back and forth about specifics she asked "Right Mr. Plante?", giving the impression that she was sassing him, annoyed that the judge and Plante did not believe her.⁹³ Plante did not reply and she interrupted his next question, repeating herself, which triggered Judge Caron to yell "Listen!" to her; this was not the first or last time that Judge Caron would yell at those deposed.⁹⁴ When Plante spoke about the number of raids that occurred in her brothels, she sarcastically replied "They done very good."⁹⁵ At one point, Judge Caron threatened to detain her for two days to make her remember and she replied "If you don't remember, if you keep me here for six months,

⁸⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 294-297.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 1951-069, 294-297.

⁹¹ Ibid, 1951-069, 178.

⁹² Ibid, 1951-069, 161, 224.

⁹³ Ibid, 1951-069, 232.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 1951-069, 232.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 1951-069, 222.

you don't remember."⁹⁶ She was one of the few witnesses who had counsel present during her deposition, a Maître Gross, who intervened several times in her favour, to point out that Plante and Judge Caron did not understand her answers, and also to reinforce that if she did not remember then she simply did not remember.⁹⁷ She was not cooperative with the inquiry in general as many of her answers to the questions were that she did not know or did not remember.⁹⁸

She passed away on January 28th, 1968, at the age of 71, and is buried in the Baron de Hirsch cemetery in Montreal.⁹⁹ Her headstone is inscribed "beloved sister and dear aunt", indicating a close relationship with her family despite not marrying or having any children.¹⁰⁰

Blanche Allard

Blanche Lilly Allard, also known under the alias of Blanche Gauthier, was born on November 4th, 1905, either near Champlain, New York, or in Saint-Jacques-le-Mineur, Quebec.¹⁰¹ She was a French-Canadian woman, being listed in the 1911 census as Roman Catholic and as speaking French, and she used much French slang (*joual*) in her deposition.¹⁰² This use of slang and dialect demonstrates her working-class origins. She had five siblings: Eva, who died at the age of 28 in 1929, Louis, who died as an infant, Paul, and Mary and Rose who were both younger than her.¹⁰³ She also had two older half-siblings, William and Henry, who were from her mother's first marriage to Victor Tessier in Champlain, New York in 1894, when her mother was only 13

⁹⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 238-239.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 163, 193, 260.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 229.

⁹⁹ Ida Katz, grave marker, Baron de Hirsch de la Savane Cemeteries, Montreal, Quebec, *Jowbr.org*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-017, 3251; Ibid, 1950-017, 3251-3252.

¹⁰² Blanche Lilly Allard, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/8543699/person/-930615796/facts>; Rose Allard, available in "1931 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/8947/images/e083_e002073316?pid=1201523.

¹⁰³ Blanche Lilly Allard, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*; Rose Allard, available in "1931 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*.



Figure 11: *Mugshot of Blanche Allard*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

years old.¹⁰⁴ Her father, Louis Allard, was listed as a driver on the 1911 census, working for a cartage company.¹⁰⁵ He was identified as a cook on his 1916 military record and then worked for the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada at the time of her marriage in 1923.¹⁰⁶ Her mother, Rose Blais, was likely a housewife.¹⁰⁷ Both of Allard's parents were born in Champlain, New York.¹⁰⁸ They appear in the 1900 United States Federal Census, and her father Louis can also be found in the 1870 and 1880 United States censuses living with his parents in Champlain.¹⁰⁹ Although her family is listed, I have not been able to locate Allard in the 1911 Canadian census.¹¹⁰ Her parents ended their relationship sometime before 1920, presumably divorcing in New York state as they would not have been able to in Quebec. Her father Louis

¹⁰⁴ Blanche Lilly Allard, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*.

¹⁰⁵ Louis Allard, available in "1911 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*,

https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/8947/images/e083_e002073315?pId=1201523

¹⁰⁶ Blanche Allard, marriage record, 19 Jan. 1923, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*,

https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/1091/images/d13p_11420691?pId=13148404; Louis Allard, attestation paper, available in "Canada, World War I CEF Attestation Papers, 1914-1918," *Ancestry.ca*,

<https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/1086/images/well1-205599a?pId=771366>.

¹⁰⁷ Blanche Allard, marriage record, 19 Jan. 1923, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*; Louis Allard, attestation paper, available in "Canada, World War I CEF Attestation Papers, 1914-1918," *Ancestry.ca*.

¹⁰⁸ Rose Allard, available in "1900 United States Federal Census," *Ancestry.ca*,

https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/7602/images/4114492_00263?pId=18605936

¹⁰⁹ Blanche Lilly Allard, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*.

¹¹⁰ Rose Allard, available in "1931 Census Canada," *Ancestry.ca*.

remarried a woman named Sara Langlois in the parish of Ste-Hélène, Quebec, near Montreal, in 1925, and her mother Rose remarried a man named John DiDona after 1920 and likely relocated to New York.¹¹¹ Her father died the same year that he remarried.¹¹² This demonstrates much upheaval, travel and relocation between Quebec and New York during Allard's formative years. As previously discussed in Chapter One, divorce was difficult to obtain in this period, and as her mother likely moved back to New York, there must have been great difficulties between the couple, with the possibility of Allard's childhood home life being tumultuous. Allard herself first appeared in online genealogy archives when she married Léopold Guérin, a labourer, on January 19th, 1923, at the age of seventeen in the town of Saint-Jacques-le-Mineur, Quebec, listing her profession as a housewife.¹¹³ They had one child.¹¹⁴ Since she married in Quebec, we can assume that she lived with her father when her mother remarried since there was a strong presumption of paternal authority over children according to the Quebec Civil Code during this time.¹¹⁵ Thus she likely stopped living with her mother at the age of 15 and married two years later.

Allard stated that she started in the sex work industry when she was 24 years old, around 1929 and continued for 15 years until the Red Light district was closed down.¹¹⁶ Allard was first convicted in 1932 when she was 27 years old and working for Mamie Smith, a Jewish brothel owner.¹¹⁷ She was also a housekeeper for Katz for seven years.¹¹⁸ When she herself became an

¹¹¹ Louis Allard, marriage record, 4 Apr. 1925, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*, https://www.ancestry.ca/imageviewer/collections/1091/images/d13p_1187b0440?pid=13459429; Rose Blais, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/search/collections/61632/records/1289070?tid=8543699&pid=-724692000&ssrc=pt>

¹¹² Louis Allard, family tree, *Ancestry.ca*, <https://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/8543699/person/439405046/facts>

¹¹³ Blanche Allard, marriage record, 19 Jan. 1923, available in "Quebec, Canada, Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968," *Ancestry.ca*.

¹¹⁴ Although private, her ancestry family tree indicates that they had a child.

¹¹⁵ CCLC, arts. 200.

¹¹⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-017, 3257; *Ibid*, 1950-017, 3256.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 1950-017, 3257. Unfortunately, I could not find more information about Mamie Smith.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1951-069, 207.

owner, Allard acted as both the housekeeper and owner at the same time, operating only one brothel to do so.¹¹⁹ Additionally, while housekeeping, she would sometimes fill in as a sex worker if the men asked for her.¹²⁰ This made Allard stand out from the rest of the brothel owners, as she was hands-on with her business, taking on every task available if needed. This versatility would mean that she could take over every position if workers did not show up for their shift.

An important observation drawn from these female business owners' biographies is that through this illicit underground business, some of these entrepreneurs could amass an important amount of wealth and notoriety by being brothel owners while holding complex lives and relationships. Lucie Delicato went from a working-class household to being a prominent brothel owner who acquired upscale business and personal properties while having the means to travel to places such as Florida. As they garnered much wealth, their mugshots display expensive clothes, jewellery, fashionable hair and makeup, emulating the fashion of the upper-class Montrealers.¹²¹ Most importantly, they were also able to support their families and remove themselves from either poverty or the working-class. Mary O'Brien stated that you could tell brothel owners were wealthy from the way they dressed, as they dressed better than the workers.¹²² However, there was a distinction between bigger and smaller brothel owners as smaller owners like Katz and Allard did well enough to own smaller properties, but they did not have an abundance of wealth.

It is fascinating that two of the most prominent and profitable brothel owners of the 1930s and 1940s both had separate finances from their husbands, one with authorisation from her

¹¹⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-017, 3252.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3316.

¹²¹ Each brothel owners' mugshot demonstrates fancier attire than the rest. Beauchamp has feathers, Katz has a fur shawl, Allard has intricate embroidery on her top, and Delicato has elegant jewellery. See Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11.

¹²² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-14, 2678.

husband after some convincing and the other having to go through a judge. They used the legal system to have power over their own finances at a time when men were automatically in charge, and possibly protected their husbands from any debts they would incur. This demonstrates that these women were determined enough in their endeavour for financial gain to use legal channels to their financial advantage. It is also possible that these women were using *séparations de biens* to protect their husbands from *Criminal Code* violations as technically before separating their finances, these men were living off the avails of sex work as they shared their finances with their wives. All in all, brothel owning was a lucrative underground business for women in Montreal during the 1930s and 1940s.

The Housekeepers

Housekeepers were intermediaries between clients and sex workers and brothel owners and sex workers. Their main tasks were to answer the brothel door when clients arrived, fix pricing depending on the type of men who came in, collect the money from the clients, and manage the sex workers.¹²³ Housekeepers were usually older women, distinct from sex workers who were younger adults.¹²⁴ Delicato stated that the housekeepers normally would not be sex workers because “they were always a little too old; some of them were fifty, forty-five years old.”¹²⁵

Within a business context, housekeepers were akin to middle management, overseeing the workers and the operation as a whole. However, from the perspective of a brothel owner, the most beneficial aspect of having a housekeeper was that it was they who would get arrested during raids, shifting the legal burden onto the housekeeper and allowing owners to avoid arrest charges. Nevertheless, the owners did not avoid fines, as they would bail out their housekeepers

¹²³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2115.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 1951-069, 211-212.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 68.

and workers from jail the morning after a raid. As we have seen with Allard, owners who only had one brothel sometimes did not hire housekeepers, instead taking on these duties themselves, which would save them money but put themselves in the position of being arrested during raids. Thus, while housekeepers were not essential for the business (except in cases where the owner was running multiple brothels) they provided an important scapegoat and manager for the owners.

What follows are brief biographies of four housekeepers. As the Caron inquiry was mainly focused on bribery between the Montreal police and brothel owners, housekeepers and sex workers were not asked many questions about themselves, and therefore, unfortunately, their personas and lives have less detail than the previously discussed brothel owners.

Jeanne Balcé

Jeanne Balcé was 72 years old at the time of her deposition, in 1950, making her date of birth around 1878.¹²⁶ Her deposition was in French.¹²⁷ She described herself as presently without employment, which leads me to believe that she was not retired, possibly not being able to afford



Figure 12: *Mugshot of Jeanne Balcé*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

¹²⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2704.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705.

to.¹²⁸ In 1950, she lived at 330 De la Place Christin in Montreal, which, if she had lived there while she was a housekeeper, would have been very close to the brothels she worked at.¹²⁹ She was employed by both Beauchamp and Delicato at different times: working for Beauchamp during at least 1940 and 1941, and for Delicato for three months in 1942.¹³⁰ According to her arrest record, she was apprehended at one of Beauchamp's brothels on Charlotte street in 1943, yet Balcé stated that she never worked at nor was she ever found in this brothel.¹³¹ However, due to her age and her mentioning having kidney pain during her deposition, it is possible she genuinely did not recall.¹³² She was terse and sassy in her replies during questioning, possibly because of her pain or because of her disdain for the authorities. For example, when Plante asked her where Beauchamp's largest brothel was situated, she responded "Ousq' elle est bâtie".¹³³ She was also arrested as a housekeeper at 1255 St-Dominique street on March 4th, 1941, again at 1250 St-Dominique street on August 20th, 1941, and as a brothel owner at 1252 St-Dominique street, but she stated that she was never a brothel owner.¹³⁴ From these arrests and the information she provided, we can deduce that she at least spent her sixties in Montreal, but I was unable to verify whether she was born in Montreal or elsewhere.

¹²⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2705

¹²⁹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705

¹³⁰ Ibid, 1950-15, 2709-2710.

¹³¹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2711-2712.

¹³² Ibid, 1950-15, 2708.

¹³³ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2713.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2707.

Annette Gosselin



Figure 13: *Mugshot of Annette Gosselin*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Annette Gosselin was 52 years old at the time of her deposition and lived at 1249 Saint-Dominique street in Montreal; she also listed herself as a “femme de peine” when she was deposed, which means that she performed strenuous work, likely doing odd jobs.¹³⁵ Her deposition was in French, likely her first language.¹³⁶ She worked in Beauchamp’s brothels first as a cleaning lady for a short period and then was hired as a housekeeper during the day.¹³⁷ She knew of Blanche Allard as she lived beside her and also knew of Ida Katz under the name “Liliane ‘La Juive’ Brown”.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2692.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 1950-15, 2692.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 1950-15, 2692-2693, 2698-2699, 2701.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 1950-15, 2692-2693, 2698-2699.

Paulette Derry



Figure 14: *Mugshot of Paulette Derry*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Paulette Derry was 47 years old during her deposition in 1950, meaning she was likely born sometime in 1902.¹³⁹ She stated that she could not read or sign her name, likely receiving a very rudimentary education.¹⁴⁰ She was from the Gaspésie region of Quebec, having moved to Montreal when she was around the age of 19.¹⁴¹ Derry was the last name on her arrest records but in her deposition, which was in French, she indicated that her real name was spelled Derry.¹⁴² She likely Gallicised her surname to avoid using her real one, but it is peculiar that she would have changed it so slightly and not simply chosen a new surname. At the time of her deposition, she was working as a maid and nanny for her brother because her sister-in-law worked and they had a child who needed care.¹⁴³ She had a room in apartment 10 at 1243 Saint-Dominique street in Montreal at the time where she resided on the weekends, but she stayed at her brother's place on Dandurand street between Bordeaux street and De Lorimier boulevard during the week.¹⁴⁴ She lived at 2048 Saint-Denis street while working as a housekeeper, which was located in the

¹³⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2073.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2274.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2073.

¹⁴² Ibid, 1950-13, 2073.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 1950-13, 2276.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 1950-13, 2073, 2277.

Red Light district, close to her work.¹⁴⁵ Her entry into the world of brothels began when she was 28 years old.¹⁴⁶ She stated that a sex worker had approached her and asked if she wanted to work in a brothel.¹⁴⁷ She was initially a sex worker for two years from 1930 until 1932 in Madame Rose Palmer's brothel, who was deceased at the time of the inquiry, at 2040 Saint-Laurent street.¹⁴⁸ She then started working as a housekeeper for Madame Beauchamp for twelve years until Beauchamp's death in 1944.¹⁴⁹ She was first a housekeeper at 1235 De Bullion street, transferring to 1225 De Bullion street after three months, then settling at 105 Charlotte street, where she worked the longest.¹⁵⁰ She was arrested a total of 58 times beginning in 1933 and only received fines until 1941 when she was sentenced to prison for four months.¹⁵¹ Her last arrest was at 1175 Hotel de Ville avenue in 1944.¹⁵² After the brothels closed that same year, she started working in the wartime factory named Villeray Works in Ville Saint-Laurent, which was a fuse-assembly plant, working there between a year to a year and a half on "la presse."¹⁵³ In April 1948, two years before her deposition, the Montreal police received a complaint that she was operating a brothel at her house, 1259 Saint-Dominique street, and she pleaded guilty, receiving a suspended sentence and promising to leave Montreal and return to Gaspésie and "mener une bonne vie."¹⁵⁴ She did travel back to Gaspésie but had to return to Montreal when she became ill and needed care only available in the city.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2075.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 1950-13, 2076.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 1950-13, 2076.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 1950-13, 2076-2077.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2076, 2081-2082.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2082-2083, 2090, 2191.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2075, 2203-2204.

¹⁵² Ibid, 1950-13, 2266.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 1950-13, 2269-2270; U. S. Department of Commerce, *Industrial Reference Service: Volume 5, Part 2*, Google Books (Washington, D.C.: Office of International Trade, 1947), https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=XVMVlj2oJWEC&pg=GBS.PP2&hl=en_CA.

¹⁵⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2271-2275.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 1950-13, 2271-2275.

Ida McDonald



Figure 15: *Mugshot of Ida McDonald*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Ida McDonald was 50 years old at the time of her deposition and listed herself as a housewife living at 1247 Saint-Dominique street in Montreal since 1940.¹⁵⁶ Although she did not speak about her family, this categorisation, coupled with her age, demonstrates that she was married, but she had a family to provide for while she was a housekeeper. As she has an Anglophone name and spoke English during her deposition, she is likely of Scottish or Irish descent, but this cannot be confirmed as I was unable to locate her in archival sources. McDonald was a housekeeper periodically between 1936 and 1944, initially hired by Simone Berlangue.¹⁵⁷ For eight or nine months out of the year, she worked at two of Delicato's brothels, 1240-1242 and 1245-1247 De Bullion street, as the daytime housekeeper, leaving at 7 p.m., with Simone taking over as the nighttime housekeeper.¹⁵⁸ If McDonald lived at 1247 Saint-Dominique street while she was a housekeeper, this would mean that she also lived in proximity to her place of work, which would have been useful. During the end of her deposition, Judge Caron stated that he did not believe her, telling her "You are too ignorant" and immediately turned to Plante and stated

¹⁵⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2754.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 1950-15, 2757-2758.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 1950-15, 2758-2759.

“The person is not in that business for eight years without knowing what is going on. [...] she is a conscientious objector to remembering. Do you want to cross-examine this person who does not remember anything?”¹⁵⁹ McDonald was one of the last women deposed for the Caron inquiry. At the end of her deposition, Plante asked Judge Caron if he had heard enough women, and the judge replied that they had discussed Beauchamp's, Delicato's and others' brothels for long enough.¹⁶⁰

A common theme with these four housekeepers is that they all lived near the brothels they managed, which could indicate that this may have been a job requirement, as it would be faster for them to get to work if there were any issues and be easier for them to commute to work if needed. There seems to be a diversity in their employment origins, as some initially cleaned brothels or were former sex workers who knew the environment while others were directly hired as housekeepers. This profession required specialised skills as they were trusted key employees, and therefore competent housekeepers would have been in high demand. The handling of the money coming into the brothels before handing it over to the brothel owners required trust on the part of the brothel owner, which signals the importance of this role. Even if some brothel owners did not hire housekeepers and took on the role themselves, the management of brothels was a vital responsibility that held much power, which we will expand on in the following chapter.

The Sex Workers

The sex workers deposed during the Caron inquiry were regrettably asked even fewer questions about themselves and their experiences than the housekeepers. Plante and Caron must have judged them of little importance. Another issue is the fact that these sex workers used completely

¹⁵⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-15, 2781-2782.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 1950-15, 2782-2783.

different names than their own because of the stigma that came with being a sex worker. The inquiry also did not verify the sex workers' names thus at times it is difficult to ascertain if they were using their real names or their sex work pseudonyms. However, information that the inquiry does document includes the fact that a variety of women were hired to cater to a diverse clientele, so there was variation in age and body types.¹⁶¹ Sometimes sex work also involved family ties; Derry spoke of two sisters, named Germaine and Kathleen, who were both sex workers.¹⁶²

Berthe Lacroix



Figure 16: *Mugshot of Berthe Lacroix*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Berthe Lacroix was not her real name, but she gave this name when arrested.¹⁶³ At the time of her deposition, which was in French, she was married and lived with her husband.¹⁶⁴ She was likely French Canadian. She worked for Madame Delicato from 1937 to 1941 and stopped being a sex worker ten years before her deposition.¹⁶⁵ In her deposition, we can see a sense of camaraderie between sex workers; Lacroix recalled attending the wedding of one of her

¹⁶¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 53, 66,68.

¹⁶² Ibid, 1950-13, 2173-2174.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 1950-14, 2525.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 1950-14, 2525, 2542.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 1950-14, 2530, 2528, 2533.

colleagues, a sex worker who worked for Delicato, at the Nativité-de-la-Sainte-Vierge Church at Ontario and Dézéry streets at which Angelo Bisanti likely stood in as the father of the groom.¹⁶⁶ She was not forthcoming with information about the wedding which demonstrates that Lacroix was either protecting Delicato or was afraid of the possible repercussions of giving information to the authorities.

Greta Lefebvre



Figure 17: *Mugshot of Greta Lefebvre*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Greta Lefebvre, her pseudonym, indicated that she did not use her real name because she loved her parents, implying that she either did not want them to know about her profession or she was sparing them from stigma by not having their surname associated with sex work.¹⁶⁷ Her chosen surname and the fact that her deposition was in French makes it likely that she was a French Canadian woman. She indicated that she was unemployed at the time, lived at 1252 Saint-Dominique street, and was unmarried yet lived with a man named Louis Sarazin.¹⁶⁸ She started working as a sex worker in 1940 at 1424 Guy street and then at 1726 Sanguinet street.¹⁶⁹ She then worked at 1247 De Bullion street for Delicato and then went on to 101 Charlotte street to

¹⁶⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2530-2531, 2537.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 1950-10, 1275.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 1950-10, 1275, 1278, 1313.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1343.

work for Beauchamp.¹⁷⁰ She worked as both a street sex worker and at brothels.¹⁷¹ However, she did not last long on the street as arrests were too frequent.¹⁷²

Like Katz, Lefebvre also had legal counsel present during her deposition, a Mr. Ertrich, K.C.¹⁷³ Many of her responses during her deposition were that she could not recall, eventually disclosing that she had memory problems from an accident, stating that “[...] depuis ce temps là, j’ai eu un accident, j’ai pu de mémoire pantoute, j’ai perdu la mémoire complètement.”¹⁷⁴ This accident occurred five years prior to the deposition, as she fell on a table and had to have an operation.¹⁷⁵ During her deposition, Plante yelled at her, stating that she was lying when she said that the housekeepers would not inform sex workers when raids would occur.¹⁷⁶ Plante had information that Lefebvre and Benoit were the go-betweens for Beauchamp and the corrupt officers of the morality squad, but she denied that this was true.¹⁷⁷ At the time she was deposed, she was awaiting a hearing, having been charged with “flâner la nuit”, an aforementioned municipal offence, which suggests she either was still engaged in sex work at the time of the deposition or she may have been profiled walking home at night.¹⁷⁸ Plante asked her if her male friend Sarazin was living on the avails of her sex work and she stated that it was rather the opposite, as he supported her for a year when she was sick and could not work.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-10, 1343.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1413.

¹⁷² Ibid, 1950-10, 1414.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 1950-10, 1411.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 1950-10, 1281.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 1950-10, 1287.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 1950-10, 1306.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 1950-10, 1413.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 1950-10, 1416. This charge is referenced in Chapter One.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1417.

Mary O'Brien



Figure 18: *Mugshot of Mary O'Brien*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

Mary O'Brien's deposition was in French, which along with her Irish name suggests either that she was only part French Canadian or was using an Irish name to hide her real background.¹⁸⁰ At the time of her deposition in 1950, she was the owner of a "maison de chambres" and lived at 1246 St-Dominique street.¹⁸¹ O'Brien stated that she began her career as a sex worker fifteen years before her deposition, likely around 1935.¹⁸² She was employed by all four of the previously profiled brothel owners, Beauchamp, Allard, Katz and Delicato.¹⁸³ The first place she worked was 1225 De Bullion street.¹⁸⁴ She had also worked for Beauchamp at 105 Charlotte street.¹⁸⁵ O'Brien worked both at night and during the day.¹⁸⁶ The last time she was arrested in a brothel was at 1250 Saint-Dominique street on July 20th, 1943, and she was arrested seven times for homelessness after this.¹⁸⁷ The inquiry officials linked this abrupt end of her arrests in

¹⁸⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2659.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 1950-14, 2659.

¹⁸² Ibid, 1950-14, 2664.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 1950-14, 2661, 2663.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 1950-14, 2664,

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 1950-14, 2686.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 1950-14, 2667.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 1950-14, 2684.

brothels with the closure of the Red Light in 1944.¹⁸⁸ She stated that one day she went to work for Beauchamp and everything was closed.¹⁸⁹ She says she did not work for the large brothels because she wasn't pretty enough.¹⁹⁰ O'Brien was arrested as a streetworker in September 1944, after the closure, demonstrating the shift from brothel work to street work that occurred after the mass closure of brothels in 1944.¹⁹¹ She was also arrested and charged as a street walker for using luxe rooms at 1164 Saint-Dominique street for sex work in 1945, having her sentence suspended.¹⁹²

Pierrette Robert

Pierrette Robert was 40 years of age at the time of her deposition, likely making her birth year 1910.¹⁹³ She was from Montreal and was unemployed.¹⁹⁴ She lived at 1452 Sainte-Elizabeth street in Montreal with her "servante" Yvonne Charbonneau, and previously her grandmother who had recently passed away.¹⁹⁵ She stated that prior to her death, she was her grandmother's



Figure 19: *Mugshot of Pierrette Robert*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

¹⁸⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2684.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 1950-14, 2685-2686.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 1950-14, 2689.

¹⁹¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces déposés, P43-4-2_2-2, 164.

¹⁹² Ibid, 164.

¹⁹³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-013, 2001.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 1950-013, 2001.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 1950-013, 2001. I could not determine what the relationship was between Robert and her "servante". I am unsure if she was helping out a friend or if she was wealthy enough to afford a maid.

primary caregiver, who was blind.¹⁹⁶ Her deposition was in French, and she was likely French Canadian.¹⁹⁷ She started as a sex worker by meeting Beauchamp on De Bullion street and asked her for a job as she was looking for work.¹⁹⁸ She was a sex worker in Beauchamp and Allard's brothels, starting for the former at 24 years old in 1934.¹⁹⁹ She was a sex worker for twenty years in brothels.²⁰⁰ Plante stated that she was deposed for being involved in sex work since 1928, and she confirmed having been arrested in bawdy houses many times over her career and also more recently for street working when most brothels closed in 1944.²⁰¹ She claimed to have stopped working in brothels when most brothels closed in 1944.²⁰² However, arrest records indicate that she was still working in 1950.²⁰³ She testified to having met thousands of men and women in her career.²⁰⁴ She had grandparents in Saint-Joseph de la Rive, which is where she was when the Red Light district closed in February of 1944.²⁰⁵ When she came back from her grandparents she worked for some time until she was arrested in April; after this arrest, she stopped her sex work career because she was afraid of being sentenced to prison as police raids were growing more frequent and judges were giving out harsher sentences.²⁰⁶ When she was arrested in April, she took a chance and worked as the housekeeper and a sex worker at the same time because there were not enough workers since the closure.²⁰⁷ She was charged as a found in many times between September 21, 1933 and June 19, 1950.²⁰⁸ She was arrested in March 1950 but asked for

¹⁹⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-013, 2331.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 1950-14, 2525.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 1950-013, 2020.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2009, 2019.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 1950-013, 2046.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2004-2005, 2056-2057.

²⁰² Ibid, 1950-013, 2031.

²⁰³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces deposees, P43-3-2_V42_E611-E687, 121.

²⁰⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-013, 2052.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 1950-013, 2320-2321.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 1950-013, 2326, 2329.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 1950-013, 2325.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 1950-013, 2005.

clemency since she had her grandmother with her whom she explained she was supporting and instead received a \$200 fine.²⁰⁹ However, she was arrested again two months later and was jailed for a month.²¹⁰ She stated that she had another job when she was working as a sex worker, thus she supplemented her income.²¹¹ She worked under housekeeper Paulette Derry and knew her well, stating that she liked her a lot.²¹²

The inquiry officials suggested that Robert had “pull” because she had a couple of arrests dismissed, but in each case, she had good excuses (such as being out late after work, after eating, etc.)²¹³ She refuted the suggestion and asked how she could have had any “pull” if she was getting wrongly arrested.²¹⁴ She was told to respond “sans faire la fanfaronne” when she told Plante to not exaggerate dates.²¹⁵ Further into the deposition, she was told to check her tone of voice, with the judge stating “Un instant. Je tiens à vous dire d’être polie, et dans votre intonation et dans vos paroles. Vous n’êtes pas dans une position pour vous permettre d’être effrontée.”²¹⁶ Although she was being insolent, he was being patronising. Plante was also hostile towards her, stating she was either an imbecile or a liar: “Vous avez à choisir entre être une imbécile ou idiote, et ne pas vouloir dire la vérité; c’est à quoi j’en viens.”²¹⁷ In her defence, he kept asking the same questions and forgetting or ignoring what she had already told him.

* * *

Overall, sex workers were usually younger women who also lived complex lives. Some supported their families, but they were all in this occupation to support themselves. Most of the

²⁰⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-013, 2025.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 1950-013, 2025.

²¹¹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2032.

²¹² Ibid, 1950-013, 2050.

²¹³ Ibid, 1950-013, 2057.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 1950-013, 2057.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 1950-013, 2286.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 1950-013, 2313.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 1950-013, 2314-2315.

information about sex workers in the Caron inquiry is from their arrest records, which demonstrates that they bore the brunt of the legal burden for the business that they worked for. Housekeepers also bore this burden, but their numbers are lower as there was one housekeeper per brothel. Although they did not have to pay their fines, their arrests accumulated in their criminal records, which would create a bias in future interactions with the police, brothel-related or not. This could be dangerous as they would have likely had little protection from law enforcement if needed as brothel owners were the ones bribing police, not sex workers. The closure of the Red Light district greatly impacted sex workers, as they then had to scramble to find other means of employment, sometimes turning to street working, which poses more risks than working in a brothel. Although housekeepers would keep a portion of sex workers' earnings, brothels provided protections for them, ranging from shelter from the elements, vital in Montreal's harsh winters, to keeping them and their work out of the public eye and away from patrol officers. Although part of the success of the owners is usually due to informal arrangements with the Montreal police, front-line sex workers would be arrested from time to time, while the owners would usually not be put out of business.

In this chapter we have explored the biographies of the women who were brothel owners, housekeepers, and sex workers in Montreal in the 1930s and 1940s, delving into their lives and families and humanising them as community members with community ties. In the next chapter, we will discuss how these brothels operated and what work was like for these women in this environment.

Chapter 3: Montreal's Brothel Business Operations in the 1930s and 1940s

Historian Andrée Lévesque has demonstrated that there was a traditional hierarchical business structure to brothels in the 1920s in Montreal; we will see that this trend continued into the following decades.¹ The owners were at the top, the housekeepers middle management, and the sex workers the labouring force. The depositions of the Caron Inquiry allow us to examine three main themes about the business operations of Montreal brothels; the workspace itself, the management and working conditions, and relationships and connections. The workspace covers how the owners seen in the previous chapter operated their brothels, it also considers the brothels' locations and descriptions, their security, and the different ways in which these owners solicited their services. Management and working conditions relate to hiring, worker shifts, the number of workers, operational costs, transactions, worker pay, and the clothing that was worn in these brothels. Lastly, the relationships and connections include relations within the neighbourhood, with the authorities, with physicians, and, at the end of the period, with the Canadian military and its order to close the Red Light brothels.

Given that the information laid out in the depositions may be unreliable, I have cross-referenced data obtained from these depositions with public records and other academic publications where I could. This unreliability is in large part due to the illicit nature of these businesses: the women may have falsified their testimonies in order to protect themselves and those around them from the authorities. Although many of the women asked for the protection of the court at the beginning of their depositions, it is likely that they were afraid that other state

¹ Lévesque, *Résistance et transgression*, 124.

operatives could use the information they provided against them, their families, or others in their communities.² Hostility is noted not only in the way these women would answer questions, as we saw in Chapter Two, but also in the length of the depositions. It sometimes took several days of long periods of questioning to get the information from those deposed as they were reluctant to answer Plante and Judge Caron. Brothel owners were less likely to disclose information as they would have more at stake than sex workers, therefore the depositions of brothel owners are much shorter than the rest.

Their life stories and testimony we examined in the previous chapter will be used to illustrate how brothel owners started and maintained their businesses from the 1930s until the closure of the Red Light district brothels in 1944. An important aspect observed from researching the business operations is that the brothel owners deposed during the Caron Inquiry can generally be categorised roughly into two types. Delicato and Beauchamp make up the first type, as hands-off brothel owners who hired housekeepers to run the day-to-day brothel operations, only going to their establishments to collect money or infrequently to replace their housekeepers. Ida Katz and Blanche Allard represent the second type, having a more hands-on approach to their businesses as they were both housekeepers and owners, generally having fewer smaller brothels and dealing with the exchange of money themselves.

The Workspace

Opening Brothels

To set up a brothel, these owners needed to consider the clientele that they wanted to attract; choose the location and the type of building; acquire furniture and décor; devise a security strategy; and depending on which type of brothel owner they were, either hire a housekeeper to

² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-14, 2659.

oversee the operation, take this job on themselves, or both. They also needed to consider the type of brothel they were opening so they could cater to the corresponding class, making sure that the furnishings, dress code, sex workers and other features of the brothel corresponded to the social class they wanted to attract. They also had to decide on the location: downtown Montreal or the Red Light district.

As for their operations, Delicato and Beauchamp demonstrated that they were hands-off brothel owners by generally only going to their brothels to collect their profits, occasionally filling in for their housekeepers, and by operating many brothels in different sections of the downtown area, mainly in the Red Light or downtown core. Within the Red Light, Beauchamp had the most brothels, with Delicato giving her stiff competition, although Delicato's brothels were not necessarily more "chic" than Beauchamp's.³ As they operated many brothels at the same time, Delicato and Beauchamp would also have had more complex business operations, having to hire more housekeepers and sex workers. By contrast, Katz and Allard were more hands-on, as they were usually their own housekeepers, and owned fewer brothels which were in the lower, more modest section of the Red Light district, closer to Craig street: Katz owned four brothels here and Allard had no more than two at a time sometimes, working as a sex worker in her own brothels as well.⁴

An underground economy of inside sales conducted through word of mouth existed between brothel owners. When these women started out, they often did so from opportunities for advancement presented to housekeepers and others by retiring or moving brothel owners, and they would often take over leases instead of buying when starting out. For example, when Delicato started out in 1935, she took over the lease and bought the furniture in the houses at

³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-13, 2110.

⁴ Ibid, 1950-14, 2670.

1234 and 1240 De Bullion for \$200 from a Mrs. Manda, who was running a brothel in these houses.⁵ Delicato later operated 401-403 Mayor street, taking over the lease and buying the furnishings from the previous tenant, brothel owner Blanche Cornut.⁶ Cornut approached Delicato about taking over her business because she was sick and she also knew that Delicato already had brothels; Delicato paid \$500 for the brothel furnishings.⁷ Delicato stated that she sold the same furnishings to one of her housekeepers named Lola Martin when she supposedly left the business; Martin came to her when she heard the furnishings were for sale.⁸ When Katz started renting 1197-1199 Clark street, she bought the furniture from a Mrs. McGuire who had come to see her about bureaus, beds, and tables; Katz intended to live there herself but then hesitated for a few months before opening a brothel instead and staying where she lived.⁹

An important aspect of starting a business is the large amount of capital needed to do so. Brothel owners who had accumulated capital purchased properties to operate as brothels in order to cut out the landlord as middleman and to not be vulnerable to landlords who might increase rent, end the lease, or want access to sex workers at no cost. The padlocking issue would also mean an increased risk for a licit landlord. These women displayed good financial sense by being able to save considerable sums of money to fund their illicit businesses. If brothel owners did not have the start-up capital, they would begin renting and save up to purchase property. Ida Katz began her brothel-keeping in 1932 with \$2000, which was a significant amount of money at the time, but she did not own any property at the start of her career.¹⁰ She was adamant in her testimony that she never had any business partners.¹¹ Allard bought 1243-1245 Saint-Dominique

⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 23-24.

⁶ Ibid, 1951-099, 34.

⁷ Ibid, 1951-099, 35.

⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 35-36.

⁹ Ibid, 1951-069, 217-219.

¹⁰ Ibid, 1951-069, 292-294.

¹¹ Ibid, 1951-069, 166.

street in 1942 after having rented it for a while, and paid \$3450.¹² Delicato bought 1444-1448 De la Montagne street for \$8000 in the early 1940s, which was much more expensive than the others, demonstrating her wealth.¹³ Owning property added to their financial manoeuvrability and could be used as rental property should they decide to leave sex work.

When they had garnered enough capital to purchase their own properties, these women displayed good business acumen by purchasing properties that were repossessions or that needed repairs; this also may have helped them customise these buildings to include hiding spaces or double doorways.¹⁴ For example, Delicato took six to seven months to renovate 2034-2036 St-Laurent street and she bought 1444-1448 De la Montagne street from the Royal Trust Company.¹⁵ The fact that she bought this house as a repossession and had other houses which she needed to repair before she opened them indicates that she was looking for bargains, speaking to her good business sense. De la Montagne street was located outside of the Red Light district, which indicates that she was also trying to expand outside of the district, looking for more opportunities in other sections of the downtown Montreal area.

Location and Descriptions of Brothels

The majority of these brothels were located in the Red Light district (see Figure 20). Allard indicated that there were about fifty brothels in the Red Light.¹⁶ Sex worker Annette Gosselin mentioned that, since the women working in brothels were a part of the local community, frequenting local shops and restaurants, the public knew that the eastern section of downtown was populated by brothels, which typically had double doors with a small light between them to

¹² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-017, 3276.

¹³ Ibid, 1951-099, 49-51.

¹⁴ Ibid, 1951-099, 26-27. Delicato had to repair 1245-1247 De Bullion before she opened her brothel there.

¹⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 30-31.

¹⁶ Ibid, 1950-017, 3305. 1950-017, 3305.

signal that they were an open brothel.¹⁷ Plante was adamant that there was a neon sign at 401-403 Mayor street, since a committeeman named Richard Quinn had officially complained about it, but Delicato denied this occurred while she operated from this address.¹⁸ Interestingly there seems to have been a class divide along Sainte-Catherine street; as Danielle Lacasse has noted, brothels to the north of Sainte-Catherine street catered to a higher class clientele than those below it.¹⁹ Delicato and Beauchamp both had brothels above and below this divide, indicating

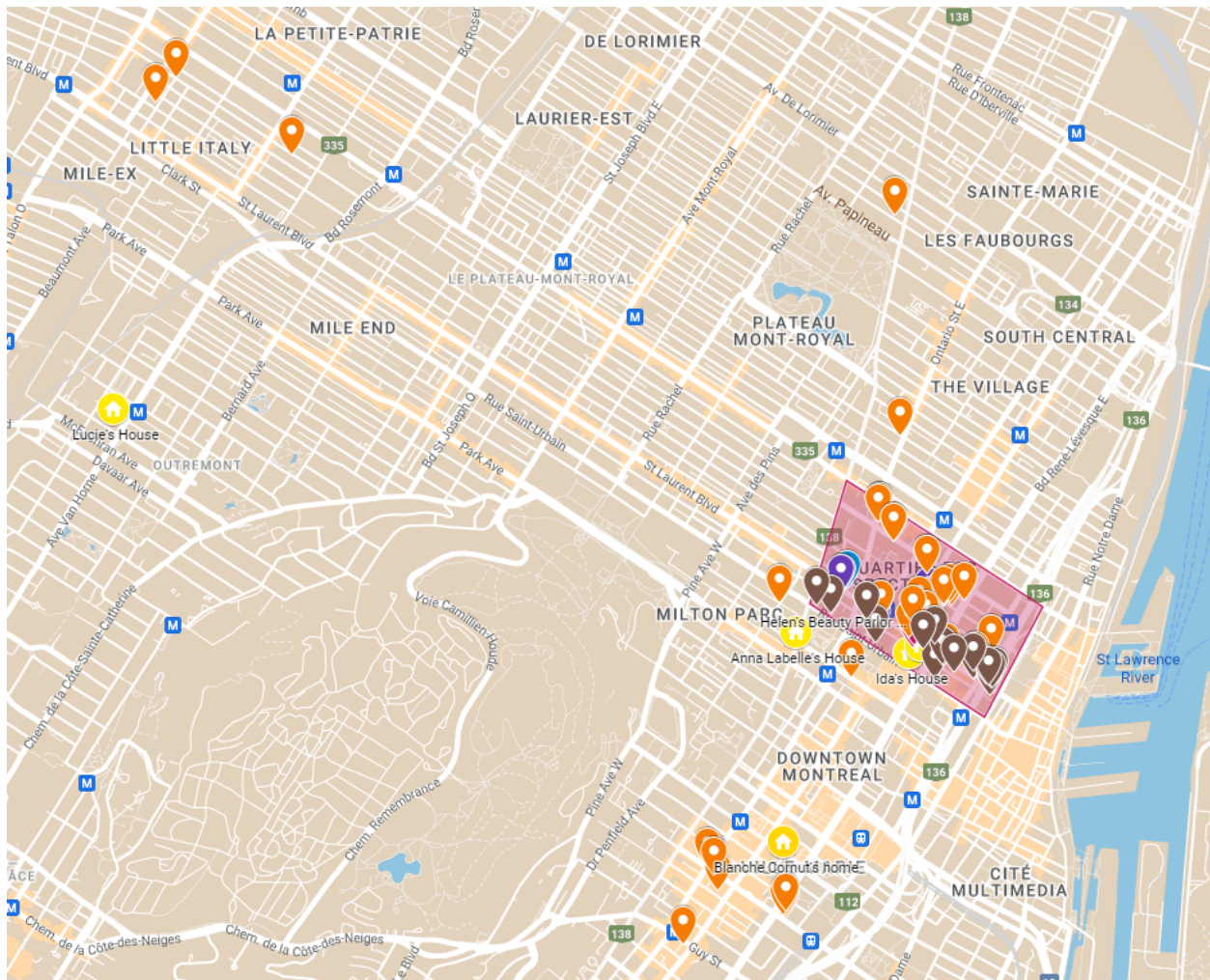


Figure 20: Map of brothels listed in the Caron Report, 2024, digital photograph of map made by author, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1FE1vuoA4x9fWP6S0PwSFfo2EYrk8iP6H&usp=sharing>.

¹⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-15, 2698, 1950-13, 2095.

¹⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 41.

¹⁹ Danielle Lacasse, *La prostitution féminine à Montréal, 1945-1970*, (Montréal, Québec: Boréal, 1994), 62-63.

that brothel owners worked up to owning and renting brothels in more lucrative areas. For example, Delicato's brothel at 2034-2036 St-Laurent boulevard was for the "more fortunate" as it had "all nice carpets [...], very beautiful furniture; not the same class at all" as the brothels on De Bullion which were all below the divide; the 1444-1448 De la Montagne street brothel, although outside of the Red Light was above St-Catherine street and so followed this rule as well, being large enough to have seventeen rooms.²⁰ Balcé mentions that Delicato's brothel at 2034-2036 St-Laurent boulevard, also above the divide, was "beaucoup plus beau" than the rest of her brothels as it had at least four rooms and a double staircase, and Lefebvre stated that it was "une des plus belles maisons" that she worked in.²¹ Other large-scale brothels, operated by both Delicato and Beauchamp above St-Catherine street, included 312 Ontario street, 1424 Guy street, and 1444-1446, 1468 De la Montagne street (sometimes they owned the same address at different times).²² Brothels on Charlotte street and St-Dominique street were less "chic", but they still made the same amount of income.²³

²⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 49, 69.

²¹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2715-2718, 1950-10, 1338.

²² Ibid, 1950-14, 2671-2672.

²³ Ibid, 1950-10, 1342.

Padlocking and the Double Address Practice

As we saw in Chapter One, padlock laws like the *Disorderly House Act* were in full force during this period. Padlock laws famously targeted communists, but those who threatened the “economic-political-religious establishment” were also singled out, especially sex work, which threatened Catholic morality.²⁴ This greatly affected operations for brothel owners and impacted the type of buildings they would rent or own. An underground network helped these women to choose the types of buildings that countered the Montreal police’s tactic of padlocking brothels



Archives de la Ville de Montréal

Figure 21: Image of a brothel using the double address practice, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

²⁴ Ross Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance: Canadian Human Rights Activists, 1930-1960* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 9-10.

and gambling houses. The addresses of most brothels had two civic numbers and were usually two separate apartments (see Figure 21). For example, Delicato had learned early on the importance of having two doors by observing other owners' tactics and asking around within the underground network of brothels.²⁵ She occupied eight dwellings, yet only operated four brothels, meaning that for every brothel that was open, there was another dwelling attached to it, usually two civic numbers apart, that was kept closed but ready to be used if the first brothel was padlocked by the provincial or municipal police.²⁶ Delicato always used this practice.²⁷ In relation to having two addresses, Ida Katz stated: "Mr. Plante, 1155 was never open the house together [sic]; they were separated; I never used the two houses together; it was only one number I used. [...] For the lock; when we used to get the lock for one, we used to make use of the next one."²⁸ A similar building concept is seen at Allard's 1243-1245 Saint-Dominique street, which had a communal entrance but two separate doors.²⁹ Like her fellow owners, she specifically purchased two dwellings with side-by-side or adjoining entrances because if the police locked one address, she would open the other side.³⁰

When police padlocked one door, Ida Katz' lawyer would receive notice from the police; she would then hire men to move all of the furniture to the other brothel, emptying the one that was about to be padlocked (by going from 1155 to 1153 Clark street, etc.) sometimes up to once per month.³¹ The furniture was moved during the day as most clients would show up at night.³² The corruption of the Montreal police further aided the brothel owners in avoiding padlocks, as

²⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1951-099, 38-39.

²⁶ Ibid, 1951-099, 21.

²⁷ Ibid, 1951-099, 37-38.

²⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 179.

²⁹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3252-3253, 3272.

³⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3253.

³¹ Ibid, 1951-069, 256, 262.

³² Ibid, 1950-13, 2119.

officers would either not padlock the residence they were supposed to or they would go inside and padlock closets or cupboards, which demonstrates that padlocking was likely for show.³³ At 1245-1247 De Bullion street, Ida McDonald mentioned that she had seen 1247 De Bullion street padlocked once, and 1245 De Bullion street padlocked several times, yet they were never padlocked at the same time, further indicating padlocking was likely mostly for show.³⁴ McDonald worked out of 1245 most of the time, while 1247 only opened up if 1245 was padlocked by the police.³⁵ Only a few times did it happen that both addresses were padlocked; this occurred more often towards 1944.³⁶ Robert corroborated this, as she only witnessed authorities padlocking both addresses when they were shutting down the Red Light in 1944.³⁷ When the police would take the padlock off, they would not notify anyone and the business would operate from the address they had moved to until that one was padlocked.³⁸ Brothel owners used different tactics to deal with the possibility of being padlocked. For example, some women, such as Allard, kept both addresses furnished, making it more expensive but which omitted having to wait for movers.³⁹

Security and Protection

Owners used various methods to protect their businesses. At a primary level, they were careful about whom they trusted and what information they divulged. Delicato testified that you could not trust people to give you their real names in the business so she was never 100% sure of who was who.⁴⁰ Although people knew each other by face and maybe by name (at least the ones that

³³ Brodeur, *La Délinquance de l'ordre*, 156-157.

³⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-15, 2766.

³⁵ Ibid, 1950-15, 2766.

³⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 267.

³⁷ Ibid, 1950-013, 2043.

³⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 269.

³⁹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3278.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 1951-099, 40.

they went by, which may or may not have been their real names), women were being discreet about their personal lives. Ida Katz did not give the authorities information about other brothels and brothel owners, stating that discretion was of utmost importance in this profession. In her deposition, when Ida was asked if she knew if Delicato was also a brothel owner, she claimed to not know; and when Plante reminded her that she was under oath, she stated “I am not suppose[sic] to hear what anybody else is doing. I know what I am doing.”⁴¹ She also pointed out Plante’s involvement with the Recorder’s Court and that he should be aware of what happened since he worked there at the time: “[...] when we went to court, we met a lot of women, but we never ask any names. We never asked questions. Mr. Plante, you know that.” To which he replied that he did not know that.⁴² Directly after this, she reiterated to Plante “You were in recorder’s court, Mr. Plante; you heard it; we never asked any names. They never ask you questions; one is doing only his affairs.”⁴³ Judge Caron seemed to be dissatisfied with her answers as he exclaimed “I don’t believe you, there; and you know it.”⁴⁴ Ida McDonald also testified that the women working in brothels would give different names to the police and also to employers, changing names from brothel to brothel during their careers.⁴⁵ She also could not identify by photo several housekeepers and sex workers who were arrested in the brothels she worked at, further demonstrating the secrecy within each business operation.⁴⁶

Another discretionary tactic that was used by brothel owners was to limit their exposure to their own brothels in order to keep people from knowing and confirming their status in the Montreal criminal underground. Lacroix stated that Delicato hid that she was the brothel owner,

⁴¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 167.

⁴² Ibid, 1951-069, 172.

⁴³ Ibid, 1951-069, 172.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1951-069, 173.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 1950-15, 2771-2772.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 1950-15, 2775.

making sure to not be at the brothel much, but she stated that after three years workers get to know who the owner is.⁴⁷ Robert confirmed this by stating that owners were not at the brothels a lot.⁴⁸

Although the depositions in the Caron Inquiry offer much insight, their silence about certain topics speaks volumes. One example is the authorities' lack of concern about workers safety. Plante and Judge Caron barely asked questions about how these women took care of their security; most information was obtained by chance as some women volunteered information while answering other questions. Brothels were female spaces, and thus it was up to the women to employ the necessary security strategies. Allard would leave the outer door ajar in order for clients to see the light, but locked the inner door so men could not barge in.⁴⁹ Derry indicated that bouncers did not exist, and therefore usually clients were the only men present.⁵⁰ She never called the police to maintain order as they were operating an illicit business and could not rely on officials to help them, possibly an indication that she may have not been bribing police officers.⁵¹ Some owners lived fairly close to their brothels and could quickly walk over if something were to happen.⁵²

Another security strategy involved hiding spaces. When questioned about why raids at her brothels ended up with very few women arrested, Ida Katz explained that clients and sex workers could hide in brothel clothes cupboards with hidden panels and some workers would run away from the police or be out to lunch or supper.⁵³ She stated that hiding places in brothels

⁴⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2548.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 1950-013, 2012-2014.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3275.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2098.

⁵¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2098.

⁵² Ibid, 1951-069, 158.

⁵³ Ibid, 1951-069, 301-302, 320.

were fairly common.⁵⁴ Double walls were built for this purpose in 170-172 Dumarais street, and workers in that brothel could also use a chair to access a hiding place between the ceiling and the roof in the bathroom; there were also hiding places outside and in the kitchen, with there being five or six places in all, hiding up to fifteen workers and clients.⁵⁵ It was possible to hide before the police could get inside. For example, Katz always had a worker watching from a window for police; the lookout changed every four hours.⁵⁶ When the raids occurred, the watch girl would see the police car approach and stop, allowing her to warn everyone and run away.⁵⁷ This surveillance of police and hiding places was the only ‘protection’ in Katz’s brothels.

Soliciting

As they were trying to prove specific rumours, the Caron Inquiry’s prosecutors were narrow sighted about how the brothels advertised their services. This meant that they rarely deviated from their narratives. They were trying to prove that women would openly solicit in entryways and windows, and that taxi drivers were being bribed to advertise certain brothels. For example, Lacroix would solicit at the door, stating that it was normal at small houses.⁵⁸ Derry stated that workers would not always solicit at the windows as this type of soliciting would usually only occur when it was not busy.⁵⁹ On the other hand, some of those deposed contradicted this. McDonald and Lefebvre stated that during their shifts, the workers would not solicit at the door.⁶⁰ As for taxi involvement, O’Brien stated that small brothels did not have affiliations with

⁵⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 309.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 1951-069, 303-307.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 308, 310-312.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 308, 310-312.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 1950-14, 2545-2546.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2251-2253.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 1950-10, 1345, 1950-15, 2773.

taxis.⁶¹ O'Brien also stated that the brothels where she worked did not have business cards.⁶² As previously mentioned in Chapter One, some brothel owners bribed police officers to leave their "racoleuses" alone in order to attract clients.

Brothel owners would have to make their businesses known to attract clients. Part of this was selecting the appropriate location and building, as seen previously, which was mostly in the Red Light district. Lacasse indicates that there are several streets in and out of the Red Light district where brothels tended to congregate, such as De Bullion street, Berger street, and De la Montagne street.⁶³ O'Brien stated that brothels operated openly, not in secret, therefore it was likely obvious where brothels were located.⁶⁴ Sometimes men would ask for women by name, therefore word of mouth and return clients were an important source of work.⁶⁵

Operational Costs

As the lawyers of the Caron Inquiry were more focused on the criminal aspects of brothels and asking people to implicate others, the depositions do not have much information about operational costs. However, the Caron Inquiry was interested in associations between licit businesses and brothels. On this subject, Plante argued that suppliers knew there was a connection between Delicato's brothels and her husband's restaurant, the American Spaghetti House, and would seek payment from her husband if they could not collect from her. Delicato insisted that suppliers never went Bisanti's restaurant if bills were not paid as it was a respectable place.⁶⁶ The laundering of linens was another aspect of costs: towels would arrive early in the

⁶¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2675.

⁶² Ibid, 1950-14, 2667.

⁶³ Lacasse, *La prostitution féminine à Montréal*, 62.

⁶⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2666.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 1950-10, 1299.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1951-099, 76.

morning, indicating that a person or company was hired to do this work.⁶⁷ Allard said that the other bills she had aside from court fines and bribes were her rent, the water tax, and her lawyers (which cost \$15 per arrest).⁶⁸ The owners who were not also housekeepers would only show up to their brothels to collect money.⁶⁹

Another aspect of operational costs was bribery. Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish how much money each brothel owner paid to the Montreal police, or whether all brothels participated in this bribery. Nevertheless, these bribes resulted in many benefits. According to the Caron Inquiry's findings, brothel owners would not have their brothels padlocked, would only be subject to planned regular raids that they were aware of, would not have their possessions seized, and the police would not go after their real housekeepers.⁷⁰ The overall tolerance of brothels by the Montreal police and the Recorder's Court in the interwar years until 1944 meant that they mainly issued fines instead of jail time, which made those fines into an operational cost or tax. Allard agreed when Plante asked if fines were just a tax for operations, stating "c'était normal, il y a toujours eu des maisons de désordre, c'était pas nouveau."⁷¹

Management and Working Conditions

Hiring

Hiring sex workers occurred in different ways. Some women would go up to brothels, knock on the door, ask for employment; others would use word of mouth to arrange a meeting with a housekeeper or a brothel owner. Greta Lefebvre went to the housekeeper for a job.⁷²

⁶⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 76.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 1950-017, 3317-3318.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2014.

⁷⁰ Jean Turmel, Yolande Frenette, and Jean Archambault, *Le Service de police de la cité de Montréal, (1909-1971): étude rétrospective sur son organisation* (Montréal, Québec: Université de Montréal, 1974). 188.

⁷¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-017, 3280.

⁷² Ibid, 1950-10, 1284.

Allard stated that workers would see the Red Light between the two doors and that was how she hired workers.⁷³ She sometimes kept the same workers for up to nine years.⁷⁴ When asked about her workers, Delicato mentioned “You’re not married to them”, which demonstrates the ease of movement between employers.⁷⁵ Were sex workers moving to other brothels in search of higher wages and better working conditions? Katz stated that workers would not be purposefully shifted around her brothels, but they might quit one of her brothels to work at another of hers.⁷⁶

Meeting locations for hiring purposes included a variety of places. Delicato hired workers by having them come to see her in person; sometimes she would go to the Chinese restaurant at 1269 St Dominique street and they would come to talk to her there.⁷⁷ She used to regularly sit and have a cup of tea or a Coke, and sometimes ate there so the women knew where to find her.⁷⁸ The restaurant was only used by Delicato to hire women, no other brothel business occurred there.⁷⁹ On other occasions, Delicato would use her mother’s house on De Bullion street to meet women interested in working for her.⁸⁰ Lacroix recalled that women would be approached in restaurants in the Red Light district to work for brothels.⁸¹

To change employers one only had to go ask for a job.⁸² Workers would change brothels to see if they could make more money in other places.⁸³ Greta Lefebvre would sometimes follow fellow workers to other brothels.⁸⁴ Owners did not care if workers changed between their own

⁷³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-017, 3274.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 1950-017, 3289.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 72.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 194.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 1951-099, 73-74. 1950-14, 2542.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 74-75.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 1951-099, 75.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2709.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1950-14, 2537.

⁸² Ibid, 1950-14, 2689.

⁸³ Ibid, 1950-10, 1293.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 1950-10, 1307.

brothels, they could go back and forth.⁸⁵ However, Mary O'Brien stated that she did not work for the large brothels because she wasn't pretty enough, therefore mobility would be limited to factors such as desirability.⁸⁶

Ida McDonald stated that women changed brothels often.⁸⁷ As mentioned in Chapter Two, she was initially hired by a woman named Simone Berlangue, who was Delicato's head housekeeper.⁸⁸ This indicates that housekeepers had considerable independence, as sometimes brothel owners would entrust their housekeepers with hiring sex workers and other housekeepers. Overall, we can see the competitive nature of sex work in keeping valued housekeepers and sex workers.

Housekeeper services

Housekeepers were extremely important to brothel owners as they were the managers of the business. Loyalty and trust were very important, with most housekeepers working for the same brothel owner for their whole careers. Robert stated that housekeepers did not change a lot, suggesting they were key figures and close to the owners.⁸⁹ Housekeepers were meant to be trusted by the workers but also needed the owner to trust them.⁹⁰

Over the years, Lucie Delicato hired housekeepers to manage her businesses. Although not deposed in the inquiry, Simone Berlangue was Delicato's main housekeeper at the Berger street brothel and was responsible for collecting all of the money. Delicato herself would sometimes not visit her brothels for a month at a time and then would only visit to collect the

⁸⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-10, 1343.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 1950-14, 2689.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 1950-15, 2771-2772.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 1950-15, 2757-2758.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2011.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 1950-013, 2010-2011.

proceeds and leave quickly.⁹¹ The fact that she felt comfortable leaving the brothel's revenue at the brothel with the housekeeper is an indication that Delicato had some kind of protection, likely from the Montreal police from bribes, but possibly from her husband's aforementioned affiliations with the Controni crime family. This level of trust also indicates the significance of loyalty and trust in the housekeeper profession. Delicato said that the housekeepers would pay the bills they received and then would invoice the owner.⁹² Ida Katz also stated that the housekeepers would take care of the bills.⁹³ She stated that she had two housekeepers at each brothel, a daytime and a nighttime housekeeper.⁹⁴ Her housekeepers did not change much on Clark street, some staying up to seven or eight years.⁹⁵ However, her housekeepers would change often on Dumarais street.⁹⁶ Katz stated that her housekeepers hired the sex workers as she was less involved in the day-to-day business operations.⁹⁷ She also indicated that she was not very aware of what went on in her brothels as she only went once in a while, and the housekeepers took care of everything, further demonstrating the importance of housekeepers and how much trust was put in them to run the entire business for their owners.⁹⁸ Gosselin mentioned that housekeepers would answer the door, not workers.⁹⁹ As a housekeeper, Derry would open the door, collect the money from the clients, and serve as an intermediary between the workers' and the clients, showing the clients which workers were available.¹⁰⁰ She would give the cash to Beauchamp at the end of the week and with Beauchamp living at 1252 De Bullion street in the

⁹¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 51. I'm unsure if this was a regular practice or if this only occurred while she was away.

⁹² Ibid, 1951-099, 75.

⁹³ Ibid, 1951-069, 186.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 1951-069, 206.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 1951-069, 206-207.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 208.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 182.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 193.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2698.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2080-2081.

Red Light, this made it easy for her to deliver the money.¹⁰¹ As this was during the Great Depression, she would only bring Beauchamp \$200 to \$300 per week in 1935, likely for fear of being robbed as this was a much lower amount than usual.¹⁰²

Allard, who had smaller brothels, worked 12 hours a day, doing the night shift tending to workers' needs and also cleaning and keeping up the brothel and business during part of the day.¹⁰³ She would change housekeepers frequently at certain brothels because she did not trust them, and she would have to replace her housekeepers if they were sick and she could not find a replacement.¹⁰⁴ There were some outliers, such as at 1234 De Bullion street, where housekeepers came and went, indicating that it was sometimes difficult to find housekeepers that owners would trust.¹⁰⁵

Worker Hours and Shifts

The number of women working each shift varied by the size of the brothel; larger more upscale brothels typically had more workers and catered to more clients. According to Greta Lefebvre, one of the largest brothels, 1726 Sanguinet street, had up to ten women working at night.¹⁰⁶ However, on average brothels had between two and four workers during the day and four to six working at night.¹⁰⁷ Katz corroborates this information by stating that she had up to six workers employed at a time at each brothel, with two working during the day and four to six working at night.¹⁰⁸ In Delicato's De la Montagne street brothels, there were usually four sex workers during

¹⁰¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2083-2084.

¹⁰² Ibid, 1950-13, 2084.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 1950-017, 3282.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 1950-017, 3284.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 54.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 1950-10, 1295-1296. Unfortunately, I could not determine who owned and ran the brothel at 1726 Sanguinet street.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 182, 190. 1951-099, 73.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 182, 190.

the day and between five and six at night.¹⁰⁹ Allard would have three to four workers working at a time.¹¹⁰ There were also the same number of workers on weekdays as on weekends and brothels were open at all times.¹¹¹

Workers could come and go as they pleased, so occasionally there were as few as three workers at a time.¹¹² Workers could do as little as four hours and have enough money to be satisfied and leave.¹¹³ Lefebvre stated that “Moi, j’ai jamais resté aux heures, quand je faisais trois, quatre heures, je m’en allais.”¹¹⁴ Brothel workers had set hours but could leave after they had made enough money they were satisfied with, which is much more flexible than the standard job.

There were two shifts but workers would earn more at night.¹¹⁵ The two shifts would be 7 pm to 7 am and 7 am to 7 pm.¹¹⁶ Brothels had about twenty-five to thirty clients per night, with clients still showing up at five or six o’clock in the morning.¹¹⁷ Delicato mentioned that when multiple workers of the same brothel were sick and could not work, workers from her other brothels would sometimes help and work at the brothel that needed it.¹¹⁸ Depending on the place, sometimes brothels would have assigned bedrooms, or sometimes the worker would take any open bedroom.¹¹⁹ At Beauchamp’s brothel at 1235 De Bullion street there were four bedrooms

¹⁰⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 73.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3313.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2764, 2767.

¹¹² Ibid, 1951-099, 73.

¹¹³ Ibid, 1950-10, 1294.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 1950-10, 1294.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 1950-13, 2097.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 1950-13, 2097.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 1950-13, 2094-2095, 2091.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 60.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1300.

and they were sometimes all occupied.¹²⁰ The two busiest times were Friday and Saturday nights.¹²¹

Clothing



Figure 22: *Mugshot of unknown housekeeper*, date unknown, photograph, Fonds Commission d'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron 1925-1957.

In the high-end brothels, Delicato insisted on uniforms.¹²² In her brothel on St Laurent boulevard, and the housekeeper “wore a white and black uniform, with a nice white organdy apron.”¹²³ At her more upscale brothels, sex workers did not wear streetwear, brassieres, or street dresses, instead they donned evening gowns, a “nice long dress [...] It was too much of a nice place for that” (meaning brassieres or shorts).¹²⁴ The workers bought the dresses themselves, for about \$10 to \$12, the cost of a “nice long dress.”¹²⁵ Delicato stated that “It wasn’t difficult, for a person who knew something about the business, to make the difference between the girls and the keeper. [...] The housekeeper is dressed in white, with an apron; the girls were dressed maybe

¹²⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2099.

¹²¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2246.

¹²² Ibid, 1951-099, 69.

¹²³ Ibid, 1951-099, 69. Figure 22 is an example of this uniform, unfortunately, I could not find this housekeeper’s name.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 1951-099, 70.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 1951-099, 70.

with a bathing suit, or a silk bluse[sic] – it wasn't the same at all.”¹²⁶ Not all of her housekeepers wore official uniforms, but they would usually have a blouse, skirt, and a short apron in front, having a neat aesthetic.¹²⁷ Ida Katz's workers would sometimes wear dresses, but sometimes they would only wear undergarments.¹²⁸ She did not make her housekeepers wear a uniform.¹²⁹ Allard however had a special costume for her workers, being “petits set courts [...] une petite robe courte, faite circulaire”, a small short skirt, with a blouse, and sometimes “une robe de rue.”¹³⁰ She also had a special uniform for the housekeeper, usually involving an apron.¹³¹ Derry said the housekeepers at Beauchamp's 2034-2036 St-Laurent boulevard brothel used costumes, black with white wrists but the workers would wear normal clothing.¹³² All in all, clothing varied depending upon the type of brothel a keeper wanted to establish.

Transactions

The exchange of money for sex is a fundamental aspect of sex work. The transaction started when a client (all men in the Caron depositions) entered the brothel. If the client did not request a specific worker, the available workers would gather in the entrance of the living room and the client would choose the worker that they wanted to be intimate with.¹³³ Workers who were not on shift or were taking a break stayed in the kitchen, to which clients did not have access.¹³⁴ The housekeeper would determine the price in front of the worker and the client, which depended on how the men presented themselves, such as how they were groomed and dressed, and if the

¹²⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-099, 55.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 1951-099, 68-69.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 209.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 1951-069, 208.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3290.

¹³¹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3290.

¹³² Ibid, 1950-13, 2112.

¹³³ Ibid, 1950-10, 1300. 1950-10, 1299.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 1950-10, 1300.

housekeeper knew the client from previous transactions.¹³⁵ The information available about pricing only comes from Delicato and Beauchamp's brothels, but they both had large upscale and smaller more modest brothels. Location was also an important factor of the pricing of sex. The lower south-western half of the Red Light held cheaper more modest brothels, whereas the upper north-eastern half of the district held the larger more lavish brothels.¹³⁶ It is also likely that housekeepers would have favourable pricing for regular customers.

The usual price at Delicato's brothels ranged from \$5 to \$10, but never less than \$2.¹³⁷ However, her brothel on De Bullion street was more modest and cheaper, with the minimum price being \$1.¹³⁸ For Beauchamp's brothels, Derry stated that there was no fixed price, but they would start at \$1 in the 1930s, which was increased to between \$3 and \$5 in 1942.¹³⁹ Naturally, if the men stayed longer, the workers' services would be more expensive.¹⁴⁰ The clients would present the agreed upon amount of money to the housekeeper after entering and selecting the worker they wanted and the housekeeper would ask the workers "Tu restes-tu pour ce montant là?"¹⁴¹ Clients then paid the housekeeper.¹⁴²

Workers had a very informal way of keeping track of how much each client paid. They recorded transactions on makeshift scraps of paper: Robert stated that they used "N'importe quoi, on déchirait un morceau de carton, sur un paquet de cigarettes."¹⁴³ Sex workers would keep

¹³⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-10, 1297; 1951-099, 70; 1950-10, 1301-1302.

¹³⁶ Lacasse, *La prostitution féminine à Montréal*, 63.

¹³⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1951-099, 70.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 1951-099, 71.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2091-2092; The Honourable Gordon Churchill, Urban Retail Food Prices, 1914-59 § (1960), 23, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS62-514-1960-eng.pdf. To compare, a quart of milk was 12¢ in 1930 and 1942.

¹⁴⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-13, 2091-2092.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1343.

¹⁴² Ibid, 1950-13, 2081.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 1950-013, 2028. 1950-13, 2082-2083.

their makeshift timecards at home and would give them to the housekeeper at the end of the week.¹⁴⁴

Housekeeper and Sex Worker Remuneration

Housekeepers made the least amount of money, but they had a more stable fixed income compared to sex workers. The low pay seems counterintuitive since their loyalty was important and they would also be vulnerable to arrest. It is possible that there was a stigma associated with the housekeeper profession because of the low pay. When Balcé worked for Beauchamp, she was paid \$20 to \$25 per week.¹⁴⁵ Derry, who also worked for Beauchamp and made \$12 per week in the 1930s, with an increase to \$25 per week in the late 1940s.¹⁴⁶

As for the sex workers, Lefebvre would take home about \$100 per week.¹⁴⁷ The workers would keep half of what the client paid, with the other half being collected by the housekeepers, which was then given to the owners, but the workers got to keep any tips they received after they finished with their clients.¹⁴⁸ The tips would amount to about half of their income, therefore if they made \$100, they would make about \$50 from tips with most clients tipping.¹⁴⁹ As previously mentioned, at one point Lefebvre worked for Delicato and her prices were between \$5 and \$10. If we average out the sexual transactions as \$7, that would mean approximately 28 transactions per week in Lefebvre's case. However, at smaller brothels such as Allard's, she indicated that her workers would sometimes only make about \$25 per week.¹⁵⁰ Theorising that

¹⁴⁴ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-10, 1419.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2714

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 1950-13, 2081-2082.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 1950-10, 1295.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 1950-13, 2092. 1950-017, 3256. 1950-10, 1294. 1950-10, 1296.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1296-1297.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3316.

Allard's prices may have been similar to Delicato's lower prices of \$2 because it was a smaller brothel, Allard's workers would similarly have had about of 25 transactions per week.

Although O'Brien did not elaborate on which owner she was speaking of, she indicated that some owners would charge \$5 per week for fees.¹⁵¹ Lacroix also stated that Madame Manda and other owners would take \$5 out of their weekly pay, theorising that it was for washing the linens the workers used such as sheets and towels.¹⁵² This meant that the money she earned from the first ten clients of the week covered the washing fee, which could be the first night or two, but this did not happen when she went to work for Delicato.¹⁵³

Beauchamp paid O'Brien herself as she would go to Beauchamp's house on 1225 De Bullion to get paid.¹⁵⁴ Delicato and Allard on the other hand went to the brothels to pay their workers and housekeepers.¹⁵⁵ Housekeepers and workers were both paid at the end of the week.¹⁵⁶

Raids and Arrests

Katz' brothels were mostly raided at night, between every two weeks to ten days.¹⁵⁷ As Katz had fake walls behind which workers and clients could hide, when police found clothing that had been left behind, they would take it.¹⁵⁸ From arrest records, we can see that police seized items such as "4 condoms, 1 tube de gelée vaginale, et 1 introducteur en vitre."¹⁵⁹ Allard had a similar

¹⁵¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-14, 2675-2676.

¹⁵² Ibid, 1950-14, 2546-2547

¹⁵³ Ibid, 1950-14, 2546-2547

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 1950-14, 2669.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 1950-14, 2669.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 1950-10, 1301.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 246, 318.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 1951-069, 316.

¹⁵⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces déposés, P43-3-2_V42_E611-E687, 121. It is difficult to ascertain what the "introducteur en vitre" was used for. It is possible that it was a vaginal lubricant apparatus or perhaps a treatment for venereal disease, but it was possibly a syringe for drug use, although one would think that this would be highlighted in raids, hence the difficulty.

frequency of raids, which occurred every three weeks.¹⁶⁰ Police would break her windows if she didn't answer the door quickly enough.¹⁶¹ The police seem to have been much more abrasive with her, possibly because her business was smaller and she did not bribe the police or pay for protection from the Montreal criminal underground. In Beauchamp's brothels, there would be about four police officers who showed up during raids and they would never speak to the women about the arrests or question any of them aside from asking their names.¹⁶² Workers would hide under beds during raids but police would find them and drag them out by their legs.¹⁶³ However, Derry stated that housekeepers did not hesitate to answer the door even if they would be arrested, because they wanted to minimise property damaged and they knew that they would be bailed out.¹⁶⁴ It is likely that Derry meant that whoever was designated to take the "pinch" would hurry to the door. When asked by Plante if taking the "pinch" was scary, Derry replied "Qu'est-ce que vous vouliez que je fasse" indicating that this was part of her job and she had no choice in the matter.¹⁶⁵ In the raids, police officers would assume that whoever opened the door was the housekeeper but in reality, this was not a hard and fast rule, and sex workers would be arrested as housekeepers fairly often. This could have been a strategy in some brothels for real housekeepers to avoid arrest.

During arrests, both Ida Katz and Jeanne Balcé indicated that different workers would sometimes use the same name in an attempt to mislead the police.¹⁶⁶ Derry stated that they took a taxi to the downtown police station instead of a police car because it looked better and

¹⁶⁰ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-017, 3268.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3279.

¹⁶² Ibid, 1950-13, 2215.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 1950-13, 2256-2257.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 1950-13, 2216.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 1950-13, 2217.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 197-199. 1950-15, 2705-2719, p 2711-2712.

Beauchamp paid for the taxi.¹⁶⁷ An officer of the morality squad accompanied them in the taxi.¹⁶⁸ Lefebvre was arrested about two to three times per month and she would plead not guilty.¹⁶⁹ Gosselin further stated that she was only arrested four times because the majority of raids occurred at night and the housekeepers were more likely to be arrested than the sex workers, as the workers could hide.¹⁷⁰

Bail, Jail, and Fines

Annette Gosselin stated that when workers were arrested, one of the workers or the housekeeper telephoned their brothel owner and informed them of their arrest and asked her to come to get them.¹⁷¹ The owner would then come to the jail, pay their fines and get them released.¹⁷²

Derry was always represented by a lawyer during arrests and would follow her lawyer's instructions.¹⁷³ Allard stated that she paid \$15 per arrest for the lawyer's fees.¹⁷⁴ O'Brien stated that she was not scared of going to prison because the owners had lawyers to represent the women, and they had confidence in them to keep them out.¹⁷⁵ She says that it was apparent that the "bourgeoises" (owners) were wealthy, so were not worried about getting good legal representation.¹⁷⁶

When bailing her workers out of court, sometimes Katz would go herself, but she would sometimes send her lawyer or a housekeeper.¹⁷⁷ Paulette Derry stated that housekeeper Gosselin

¹⁶⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2262.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 1950-13, 2263.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 1950-10, 1422, 1443.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 1950-15, 2701.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 1950-15, 2698, 2701.

¹⁷² Ibid, 1950-15, 2698, 2701.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 1950-013, 2335-2336.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 1950-017, 3318.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 1950-14, 2677-2678.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 1950-14, 2678.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 1951-069, 201.

sometimes came to bail out the workers instead of Beauchamp.¹⁷⁸ Derry also stated that a certain Jeanine would come and bail them out and go to court but when Jeanine died, Beauchamp would come herself.¹⁷⁹

Derry said that when she was imprisoned in 1941, Beauchamp paid her weekly salary.¹⁸⁰ Workers were remunerated either before or after they served their time, depending on what they asked.¹⁸¹ She also served nine months in 1944 and was paid by Beauchamp.¹⁸² This shows that owners took care of their housekeepers, paying them while in jail when they would not be obligated to. In this case, the underground economy seems to have operated on trust; since a housekeeper was arrested because of the owners' business and could not take the owners to court for back wages, owners likely made sure their housekeepers would return by paying them while in jail. When arrested, Derry would sleep at the women's prison on Fullum street and would be brought back to court the next day.¹⁸³ Beauchamp would sometimes visit her workers in the cells to see if they needed money; those jailed could procure soft drinks and cakes themselves but they could not smoke.¹⁸⁴ Delicato also went to see her workers in jail.¹⁸⁵ McDonald would sometimes go see the workers "en bas" while they were arrested, and sometimes owners would visit the women held for the night for medical exams.¹⁸⁶

McDonald also mentioned that she never paid the fines she incurred when arrested herself, she was never sentenced to jail time, and she always pleaded guilty when she went to

¹⁷⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-13, 2194.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2319-2320.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2205-2207.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2205-2207.

¹⁸² Ibid, 1950-13, 2209-2210.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 1950-13, 2229.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 1950-13, 2239-2240.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 1950-13, 2241.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 1950-14, 2681. I'm unsure where she means by "en bas".

court.¹⁸⁷ However, Lefebvre stated that housekeepers would pay the workers' fines and get them out of jail, indicating a differentiation in how brothels managed fines.¹⁸⁸ The individual fines Allard paid were between \$25 to \$50, which cost her around \$100 to \$200 per month; she would bring \$200 with her to court.¹⁸⁹ The most workers she bailed out at once was four.¹⁹⁰ She would pay her workers' fines and also the lawyer fees.¹⁹¹

Relationships and Connections

Relationships within Brothels

Relationships within brothels varied. Brothels were like any licit business in that they were organised hierarchically, but differed in that they had the added stressor of illegality and workers had no legal recourse for workplace issues. However, between sex workers, one could find friendship. Greta Lefebvre was friends with Andrée Benoit, another sex worker deposed during the Caron inquiry. Benoit was in court during Lefebvre's deposition, likely for moral support, which indicates that although technically competing against each other, sex workers forged relationships and bonds within brothels.¹⁹² Berthe Lacroix also attended the wedding of one of her colleagues, indicating that camaraderie between sex workers existed.¹⁹³ However, the depositions more frequently indicate clashes between workers. Mary O'Brien stated that she was not liked by her coworkers.¹⁹⁴ Pierrette Robert often switched brothels as she would get into fights.¹⁹⁵ She stated that she would frequently feud with other workers, mentioning that she had a

¹⁸⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-15, 2774.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 1950-10, 1315.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3311.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 1950-017, 3312.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3286.

¹⁹² Ibid, 1950-10, 1347.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 1950-14, 2530-2531, 2537.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 1950-14, 2673.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 1950-013, 2009.

“vilain caractère” and sarcastically remarked that she was “tellement aimable” that she had to switch often.¹⁹⁶

The relationship between housekeepers and sex workers was complex, as housekeepers took care of sex workers’ needs by providing them with certain provisions yet were also seen as authority figures as they managed the sex workers. However, housekeepers could forge working relationships with sex workers as they played cards while waiting for clients and had the opportunity of friendship.¹⁹⁷ As previously mentioned, sex worker Derry and housekeeper Robert were friendly. Housekeepers’ relationships with other housekeepers could also sometimes be strained by the illegalities of the work. For example, Derry thought that the reason she was arrested so often was because after three weeks of not being raided, other housekeepers would suspect that a raid was coming and have her replace them for certain shifts, duping her into getting arrested.¹⁹⁸

At times, relationships between sex workers and brothel owners were strained. Derry indicated that she did not work for Delicato for very long because she simply did not like her.¹⁹⁹ Berthe Lacroix once had a fight with Delicato because Delicato called her a “goddamn whore”; she then went to collect her pay at her house immediately and likely quit.²⁰⁰ These examples relate to Delicato, which could be an indication of her character, or it could reveal the general nature of brothels as workplaces. However, as seen in Chapter Two, Beauchamp had a reputation of forging personal relationships with her workers.

¹⁹⁶ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-013, 2050. 1950-013, 2284.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 1950-017, 3294.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 1950-13, 2225.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 1950-13, 2140.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 1950-14, 2534-2535, 2538.

In sum, the tensions that existed in brothels related to diverse problems: the illicit nature of the work, hierarchy within the establishment, clashing personalities, and relationships based on these factors. While some of the tensions are common to any workplace, the illegal nature of the business added stress which may have exacerbated the other factors. Keeping in mind that brothels are businesses, brothel owners exploited sex workers' labour to make a profit by taking half of their earnings. While sex workers would understand this relationship, they would have known that it was their work from which the owner derived great profits. These profits were clearly visible in the brothel owner's clothing and stylish makeup and hair, as well as in the cars they drove and the house they owned and lived in. The owners showed up at the brothel to collect the money, dressed to the nines, and in a car that sex workers could not afford. The sex workers could see what the profits of their labour paid for.

Neighbourhood Relations

Brothel owners had to establish relations with their neighbours. They were integrated into the local economy and community, so much so that the district (Red Light) was named for its sex businesses. There was familiarity between those who worked in and owned brothels and the different businesses surrounding them. The Red Light district had a rich and diverse community. Many different types of businesses operated in this neighbourhood, such as restaurants, taverns, grocery stores, and pharmacies, which brothel owners, housekeepers, and workers likely frequented. For example, Mary O'Brien said that sometimes sex workers would go to the American Spaghetti House in the morning after work to eat.²⁰¹ Berthe Lacroix stated that the workers went to the Chinese restaurant in the Red Light; they got to know the waiters and had

²⁰¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-14, 2682.

them deliver food to the brothel.²⁰² While workers were at the Chinese restaurant, Delicato would buy them soft drinks or a small treat.²⁰³ Delicato would have forged many working relationships with different businesses in the district, but also had her family within it, deeply intertwining her within the community.

Brothel owners were also intertwined throughout their community on a personal level. Delicato's sister had a beauty salon, Carmen's Beauty Parlor, at 1236 De Bullion street, and their mother lived in the same building.²⁰⁴ Delicato's brother-in-law Roland Lachance, who was likely Delicato's sister Juliette's husband, was Katz's landlord at 1197-1199 Clark street.²⁰⁵ Katz also mentioned that she knew Angelo Bisanti, stating "Everybody knows him."²⁰⁶ This indicates that Delicato and Bisanti were well known in the district. Housekeepers and possibly owners would also have to develop relationships with those who laundered their linens, as clean linens were a vital part of the operation and would likely have to be laundered every day from an outside source. In sum, these marginalised members of the community were connected both to the Montreal criminal underground economy, as well as to the legitimate Montreal economy.

Relations with the Montreal Police

The relationship between brothels and the Montreal Police was complex as those working within brothels were raided and arrested, yet brothel owners were bribing officers in the morality squad. The bribes were both to reduce the number of raids and to also induce police to look the other way about practices such as the double address method. For example, in the depositions, Plante remarked that Delicato was often acquitted on charges, inferring that this was suspicious and was

²⁰² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1950-14, 2549.

²⁰³ Ibid, 1950-14, 2549.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 1951-099, 4; Ibid, 1950-15, 2693; John Lovell & Son, Limited, "[Collection d'annuaires Lovell de Montréal et Sa Région, 1940]" (Montréal, n.d.), 137.

²⁰⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépositions, 1951-069, 175.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 1951-069, 177.

likely a result of her bribing the Montreal police.²⁰⁷ Interestingly, Derry stated that Beauchamp's brothels used the double address method, but in all her 10 to 12 years of being a housekeeper for Beauchamp, she never noticed a padlock on any of Beauchamp's doors.²⁰⁸ This indicates that Beauchamp was paying off the police. However, despite some degree of reciprocity in the relationship between owners and police, workers and housekeepers were often roughed up by police officers during arrests. Women were slapped, dragged, laughed at, mocked, and called names such as "chienne."²⁰⁹ With this treatment and the obvious authority held by the police over workers and housekeepers, the contrast between how owners interacted with the police and how workers and housekeepers interacted with them indicates that housekeepers and workers derived much less benefit from this arrangement. The Montreal police held discretionary power and applied this power according to the circumstances, such as if bribes were paid.

Venereal Diseases and Healthcare

As seen in Chapter One, legislation at this time regulated various venereal diseases (see Figure 23). The venereal diseases present and known at the time were syphilis, gonorrhea, chancroid, and inguinal lymphogranulomatosa.²¹⁰ According to the 1941 *Act for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases*, anyone apprehended for "a sexual offence or as a prostitute, street-walker or vagrant", would legally have to submit immediately to a physician's examination for venereal diseases and if an infection was found, they were held for treatment with no option for refusal.²¹¹ These exams

²⁰⁷ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1951-099, 14.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 1950-13, 2119, 2087.

²⁰⁹ Eric H. Reiter, *Wounded Feelings: Litigating Emotions in Quebec, 1870-1950*, 146.

²¹⁰ *Act for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases*, R.S.Q. 1941, c. 186, s. 2.

²¹¹ Ibid, c. 186, s. 6; Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-13, 2198.



Figure 23: Harry Mayerovitch, *Careful You Can't Tell Who Has It!*: sensitivity campaign against venereal disease, date unknown, drawing with print, Harry Mayerovitch fonds, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?idnumber=106979&app=FonAndCol>.

were unspecified physical examinations that included a blood test and were usually done the morning after the arrest.²¹² This would include everyone found in the brothel, including clients, workers, housekeepers and owners, although since owners only infrequently visited their brothels, they were rarely subject to these tests. All who were arrested were held until the results of the exam before being released.²¹³ The longest time Paulette Derry spent waiting on her test results was two nights, one night at the Montreal Women's Prison on Fullum street and the second "en bas, au centre."²¹⁴ As previously mentioned, Katz was once kept imprisoned for eight days waiting for a medical exam. Physicians were also legally mandated to report any person who had a venereal disease to the "medical director of the venereal disease branch of the

²¹² Ibid, 1950-13, 2230. See also Eric H. Reiter, *Wounded Feelings: Litigating Emotions in Quebec, 1870-1950*, 147.

²¹³ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-13, 2198.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 1950-13, 2230. I'm unsure where she means by "en bas".

Department of Health and Social Welfare.”²¹⁵ Penicillin was first used for the elimination of venereal diseases in 1943.²¹⁶ Before then, treatments were meant to control outbreaks, and usually involved arsenical drugs which took minimum eighteen months to treat.²¹⁷

As for prevention and treatment of venereal diseases before arrests, Allard stated that she would have a physician come to the brothel once per week to do venereal exams and once a month for blood tests.²¹⁸ On average, one worker would be sick once every two months and they would be given time off for two to three weeks before returning to work at the brothel.²¹⁹ Derry stated that they would have the physicians visit every Monday, usually at 7:15 p.m. after the shift changed in order to examine all workers; it would take four days to receive the results yet the workers would not stop working while they awaited their results.²²⁰ Both Pierrette Robert and Greta Lefebvre stated that the workers paid the physicians for their examinations and treatment.²²¹ Another facet of protection was that sex workers used forms of birth control. During raids and arrests, condoms were found in brothels, protecting workers from venereal diseases as well as pregnancies, which would have been very problematic.²²²

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This chapter has demonstrated that women worked within a system of tolerance by being savvy businesswomen and bribing corrupt authorities. It also demonstrates that women ran brothels much like other licit businesses, having similar inner workings and hierarchy. The on-

²¹⁵ *Act for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases*, R.S.Q. 1941, c. 186, s. 2, 4.

²¹⁶ Adriane Gelpi and Joseph D Tucker, “A Cure at Last? Penicillin’s Unintended Consequences on Syphilis Control, 1944–1964,” *Sexually Transmitted Infections* 91, no. 1 (January 21, 2015), 1.

²¹⁷ Theodor Rosebury, *Microbes and Morals; the Strange Story of Venereal Disease*. (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), 249-250.

²¹⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-017, 3281.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 1950-017, 3281.

²²⁰ Ibid, 1950-13, 2247-2249.

²²¹ Ibid, 1950-013, 2024. 1950-10, 1314.

²²² Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces déposés, P43-3-2_V42_E611-E687, 121.

the-ground practice of toleration and the disorderly house and venereal disease laws seem to be contradictory. However, laws such as the padlock law were selectively enforced: authorities applied them when it served their purposes and overlooked them when they sought to personally profit from their positions. The power of the state could act on brothels at any time, and the police had much discretionary power. Women were dependent upon their relationship with the police to avoid harsh penalties and keep working, but they had learned how to navigate this system to make it work for them.

The Caron inquiry indicated that the hierarchy seen in Andrée Lévesque's work on the Coderre inquiry in the 1920s was still in place during this period, with little to no change over time.²²³ Brothel workers' conditions were better than street sex workers because they had a roof over their heads, were warm during cold Montreal winters, were less likely to be arrested, were able to control the hours they worked, could be more selective of their clientele, received higher compensation, were generally safer during sex work, and had a more respectable public image within the trade. However, they were held to a higher standard with respect to appearance, needing to be of a higher physical standard as well as dress better.²²⁴

Before the closure, the overall working conditions of sex workers were also superior to the average female factory worker, which made sex work an appealing profession for some women. This is because of the aforementioned low pay of female factory workers compared to sex workers, and also because of the increase of the risk of workplace accidents caused by industrialisation, as well as the long hours.²²⁵ Although women could contract a venereal disease

²²³ Andrée Lévesque, "Le Bordel: Milieu de Travail Contrôlé," *Labour / Le Travail* 20 (1987), 15.

²²⁴ Helen Boritch, *Fallen Women: Female Crime and Criminal Justice in Canada*, 117-118.

²²⁵ Magda Fahrni, "La lutte contre l'accident": Risque et accidents dans un contexte de modernité industrielle," *Pour une histoire du risque*, May 10, 2012, 193-194. The "Ligue de sécurité de la province de Québec" was created by concerned Montrealers noticing an incline in not just workplace accidents, but accidents in general because of industrialisation.

as a sex worker, they could lose limbs or their lives in industrial factories with the low level of security measures during the 1930s and 1940s.

The mass closure of brothels in 1944 indicates that the Montreal underground took the military's threat seriously as soldiers were likely involved in other underground businesses such as gambling and their departure would mean a greater economic impact to the underground than closing many of the brothels. The possible impact on Montreal's licit businesses was also an issue for the city authorities. This closure suggests a serious link between Quebec government officials, either provincial or municipal, and the Montreal underground, as there can be no other explanation for the mass closure of brothels after the conference between the military and government. The links brothels had made within the police department and more precisely within the morality squad were likely diminished after the closure of the Red Light district.

Conclusion

The businesses of the women profiled in this thesis did not survive the mass closure of the brothels in 1944. Owners such as Ida Katz closed her business, not wanting her employees and herself to serve time.¹ Katz closed on February 2nd, 1944, turning her house on Dumarais into a boarding house.² Blanche Allard closed her brothel because she was afraid of doing time in prison, as her lawyer, a certain Maître Richard, told her that if she reopened she would definitely be sentenced to jail time.³ Mary O'Brien stated that after the closures, Allard had become a maid.⁴

The mass closure of brothels in February of 1944 affected housekeepers the most. As housekeepers were usually older women, turning to street sex work would not have been as profitable. Annette Gosselin stated that she did not go back to housekeeping after the mass closure of brothels, also stating that many women had to find other work.⁵ She mentioned that this meant that many former housekeepers and sex workers were then “en chômage.”⁶

As for sex workers, a shift to much riskier streetworking is evident after February 1944. Pierrette Robert stated that she turned to street sex work after the brothels closed.⁷ Mary O'Brien was also arrested as a streetworker in September 1944, after the mass closure.⁸ Overall, many women left the sex trade, as its heightened criminality pointed to actual jail sentences instead of fines.⁹ Danielle Lacasse argues that as a result of this switch to street sex work, a shift in power

¹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1951-069, 278-279.

² Ibid, 1951-069, 281, 305.

³ Ibid, 1950-017, 3304.

⁴ Danielle Lacasse et al., “La fin d'un univers féminin: l'Enquête Caron et la prostitution, 1945-1965,” in *Les Bâtisseuses de la Cité*, ed. Éveline Tardy (Montréal, Québec: Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences, 1993), 103.

⁵ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-15, 2700.

⁶ Ibid, 1950-15, 2700.

⁷ Ibid, 1950-013, 2056-2057.

⁸ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Pièces déposés, P43-4-2_2-2, 164.

⁹ Fonds Commission Caron, Tenue des audiences, Dépôts, 1950-013, 2329.

within the Montreal sex industry also occurred because while brothels were a women's space, street sex work was often controlled by male pimps, which led to an increase in violence in sex work.¹⁰ The closure of the brothels in the Red Light district thus created a power shift from women to men in terms of who controlled sex work, as the female-dominant space of brothels was greatly reduced, which resulted in a sharp decline in working conditions for sex workers in Montreal.

This study has attempted to reframe our existing understanding of sex work by highlighting its business aspects and demonstrating that sex work operated in some ways similarly to other types of business. Thus, sex work should be studied and understood as labour. I have contributed to challenging the discipline of history in regard to sex work to direct further analysis in this field toward one using a labour approach. As Boritch has stated, "The social conception of sex work ultimately relies on a judgment, based on a rather vague set of moral prescriptions, that at some point or other a woman has "too many" sexual partners and/or has chosen "too indiscriminately" and for the "wrong" reasons."¹¹ This shifting in narrative will help to better integrate sex work into other forms of legitimate businesses, thus allowing for a more nuanced understanding of female-owned businesses. The women studied in this thesis showed agency over their financial well-being and should be viewed as successful (or sometimes unsuccessful) entrepreneurs. Sex work must be classified and normalised as labour because sex work is work, not immorality or crime. The moral, often conservatively religious twentieth-century viewpoint that defines sex work as criminal is problematic as these workers deserve the rights of any other workers. This type of moral judgement on a woman's sexual agency should be left in the past.

¹⁰ Lacasse et al., "La Fin d'un Univers Féminin: L'Enquête Caron et La Prostitution, 1945-1965," 105-106.

¹¹ Boritch, *Fallen Women*, 93.

Canada and Quebec's regulation of sex work has been unstable over the course of the country's history. This can be seen through the broad yet direct vagrancy laws inherited from England that criminalised sex workers to the more recent indirect laws stemming from the 2013 *Bedford* Supreme Court challenge that provoked changes to the *Criminal Code* towards mainly treating sex workers as victims.¹² Although sex work can at times be exploitative as it can come about from coercion or necessity, this case legally turned clients into exploiters. Thus, Canadians engaging in the sex work industry have been (and continue to be) relegated to the margins of society and criminalised and victimised to different degrees. However, these laws have existed alongside a certain culture of permissiveness, as sex work has had an important historical presence in cities such as Montreal, contributing to its economic and social functions, and to the city's reputation as a den of immorality and vice or as a mecca of pleasure, depending on one's perspective. In this den or mecca, the police shared space with sex workers, walking and patrolling the same streets, and thus were acutely aware of the vices happening in front of them, having much discretionary power in whom they arrest, harass, or possibly accept bribes from. Whether a den or a mecca, the world of Montreal's brothels in the 1930s and 1940s was a place where Montreal women could exercise agency within a female-operated space and had the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families, sometimes advancing up the ladder to owners, where they could accumulate enough wealth to be considered members of the petite bourgeoisie.

¹² *Canada (Attorney General) v Bedford*, 2013 SCC 72, [2013] 3 SCR 1101.

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