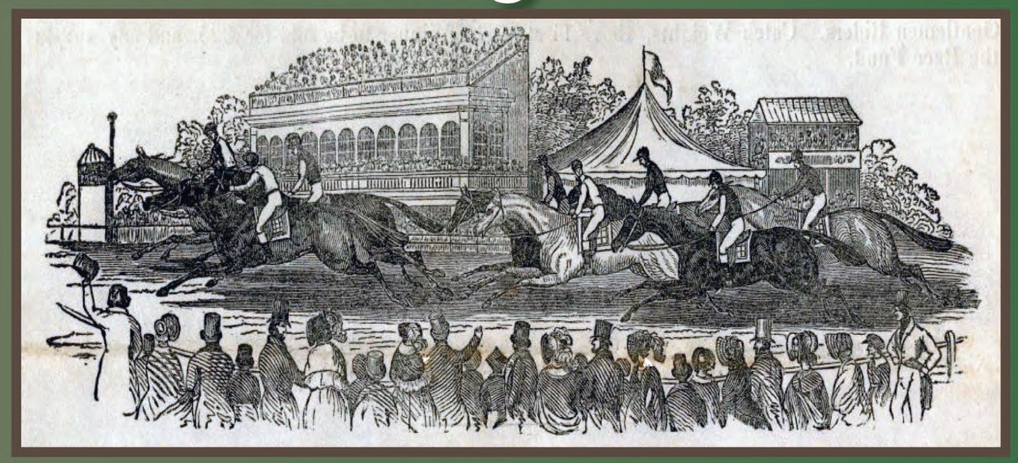
A day at the races

The history of horse-racing on Green Point Common



The original race stand of the South African Turf Club as it appeared in 1891, furthest picture below, as the clubhouse for the Metropolitan Golf Club in1906, middle, and today, much altered to meet the many different uses it has been put to since construction in 1851.

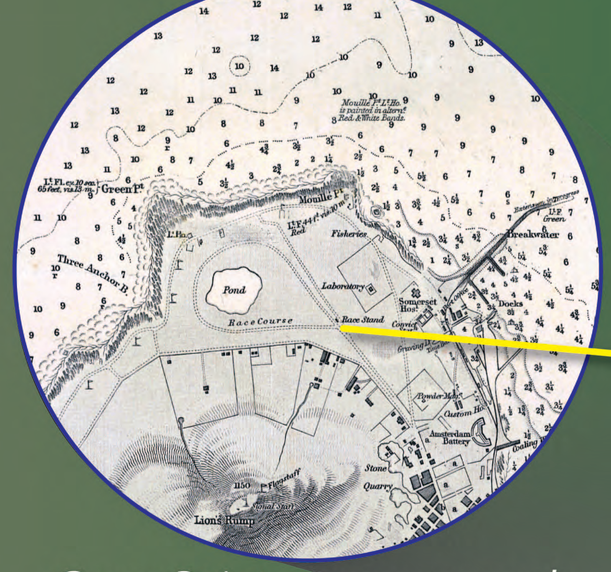
Horse-racing was introduced to Green Point Common in the early years of the First British Occupation of the Cape (1795-1803) .

The first races took place in June 1796 followed by the founding of the African Turf Club in 1797. With the Second British Occupation (beginning in 1806) horse-racing was soon revived with the African Turf Club re-forming in 1814 to become the South African Turf Club.

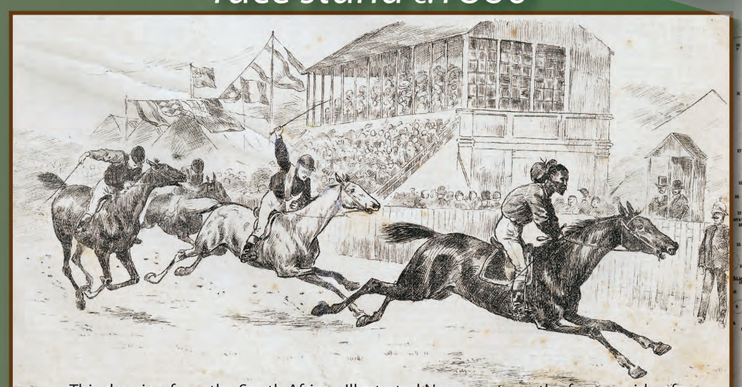
Race-meetings took place in spring and autumn each year and were enthusiastically supported by virtually every segment of society with many a fortune won and lost on race days. Spectators would line the course standing or in cabs, carriages and wagons - from which to obtain a better view of proceedings. In 1851 a race stand was built for club members which, although much altered, still exists.

Race days became famous for both thrills and spills as livestock and wild dogs, which frequented the Common, often strayed onto the track requiring an orange flag to be flown from the race stand to signal when the course was clear and racing could begin.

In 1882 the Turf Club amalgamated with the Jockey Club and moved to Kenilworth. While the track was being laid out at Kenilworth racing continued on the Common with the last event run in 1893.



Green Point racecourse and race stand c.1860



This drawing from the South African Illustrated News captures the famous ride of local jockey 'Plaatjies' who won the Metropolitan Handicap run at the autumn meeting of the South African Turf Club at Green Point Common on 2 May 1885. He rode the Cape-bred outsider, 5-year-old bay, Ariel.

CAPE TOWN GREEN POINT

SPRING MEETING
OF THE
South African Turf Club.

First Day, Monday, Sept. 19, 1859.

Same Day.

Black and white photographs and artwork courtesy: National Library of South Africa, Cape Town.