

Finding Aid to the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) Records, 1874-Present

This finding aid was produced using Microsoft Word 2011, 2020-07-08

Finding aid written in English

Finding Aid format adapted from Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)



The NYSPCC Archives
The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC)

161 William St., 9th Fl.
New York, New York 10038-2607

Email: cfrank@nyspcc.org
Tel: 212.233.5500 ext. 214

Table of Contents

Descriptive Summary	3
Information on Access & Use	5
Historical Note	5
Collection Overview/ Scope and Content Note	8
Collection Organization/ Arrangement	8
Collection Inventory	9
SERIES 1: ANNUAL REPORTS, 1875-PRESENT	9
SERIES 2: CASE RECORDS, 1874-2011	11
SERIES 3: CHILD PERFORMER CLIPPING BOOKS, 1880-1911	13
SERIES 4: CHILDREN'S COURT CLIPPING BOOKS, 1901-1904	15
SERIES 5: CONVENTION MINUTES, 1890-1904	16
SERIES 6: COURT DECISION CLIPPING BOOKS, 1880-1919	18
SERIES 7: EMPLOYEE REGISTERS AND PERSONNEL FILES, 1874-PRESENT	19
SERIES 8: HISTORICAL RECORDS, 1874-PRESENT	21
SERIES 9: MANUALS FOR OFFICERS, 1875-PRESENT	22
SERIES 10: NYSPCC MINUTES BOOKS, 1874-PRESENT	23
SERIES 11: SELECTED CASES, 1881-1912	25
SERIES 12: VISITORS BOOKS, 1877-1960	26

Descriptive Summary

Creator	The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
Title	The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) Records, 1874-Present
Dates	circa 1874-Present, 1875-Present
Identification	001
Extent	approximately 110 linear ft. *See Series-level notes for breakdown of physical extent.
Collection Abstract	The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) Records, 1874-Present, documents the origins, history, and development of the child protection movement. Archival holdings include digital copies of case files from The NSPCC's incorporation in 1875 to the present, including more than half a million files concerning as many as two million children. The records in this collection are arranged chronologically, when applicable, and include the annual reports, historical records, personnel files, and meeting minutes of the Society. A handbook for officers, as well as court case files, clipping books of child performers and legislative results, and a visitors book are also included.

<p>Historical Abstract</p>	<p>Established in 1875, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) was the first child protection agency in the world. Throughout its distinguished history, The NYSPCC has sought to develop and implement innovative mental health, legal and educational programs that protect children from harm and ensure their healthy development.</p> <p>The NYSPCC maintains The NYSPCC Archives, which serve as one of the nation’s most valuable repositories of original and compiled material on the origins, history, and development of the child protection movement.</p>
<p>Language</p>	<p>Material in English.</p>
<p>Location</p>	<p>Collection holdings are stored on-site. Please contact the Archivist for more information.</p>
<p>Repository</p>	<p>The NYSPCC Archives The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children</p> <p>161 William St., 9th Fl. New York, New York 10038-2607</p> <p>Tel: 212.233.5500 ext. 214 Email: cfrank@nyspcc.org</p> <p>https://nyspcc.org/our-work/george-sim-johnston-archives/</p>
<p>Processing Notes</p>	<p>Collection processed by archivist, Joseph Gleason using Original Order, 1993. Finding aid created by archivist, Chelsea Frank & Rosalie Montenegro, July 2020; formatting adapted from DACS.</p>

Information on Access & Use

Conditions Governing Access

The NYSPCC Records Collection contains both items that are open for research and have no restriction on their access intermixed with items of a sensitive and private nature that may not be accessible. Conditions governing access to specific materials in this collection are also defined in the Scope and Content notes for each Collection Series.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright restrictions apply. The materials in this collection are subject to copyright and intellectual property restrictions. It is the responsibility of the researcher to understand and observe copyright law and to identify and satisfy the holders of all copyright. Researchers must obtain written permission from the copyright owner(s) if they wish to publish materials from this collection. Questions concerning copyright and permission to publish should be directed to The NYSPCC Archive, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC).

Preferred Citation

The NYSPCC Archive, New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC)

Publication Statement

The NYSPCC Archive
The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC)

161 William Street
9th Floor
New York, NY 10038
Email: cfrank@nyspcc.org

Digital Collection

The original material from this collection is digitized as Tiff images. Please direct any requests for digitized collection content to the archivist, Chelsea Frank, cfrank@nyspcc.org.

Historical Note

The incorporation of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) in New York State in 1875 marked the legal incarnation of organized child protection. The catalyst for the founding of the NYSPCC was the rescue of "Mary Ellen," an abused child who lived in the impoverished "Hell's Kitchen" neighborhood of New York City. A landlady reported the abuse of the child to a church home visitor, Etta Wheeler. Unable to enlist the authorities to intervene on the child's behalf, Mrs. Wheeler turned to Henry Bergh, founder and president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Mr. Bergh promptly turned to ASPCA legal counsel, Elbridge T. Gerry. Acting as private citizens, they established legal standing to intervene, filed a petition, obtained a warrant for the child's protective removal, successfully established their case at trial and, assisted by Etta Wheeler, ultimately secured a suitable family placement for the child. The publicity generated by their intervention resulted in numerous requests on behalf of other abused and neglected children and in renewed calls for an organization that would do for children what the ASPCA was accomplishing on behalf of animals. Mr. Bergh and Mr. Gerry, in conjunction with John D. Wright and others, founded the first child protection agency in the world in New York City in 1874 for this purpose:

"...to rescue children from the cruelty and demoralization which neglect, abandonment and improper treatment engender; to aid by all lawful means in the enforcement of the laws intended for their protection and benefit; to secure by like means the prompt conviction and punishment of all persons violating such laws and especially such persons as cruelly ill treat and shamefully neglect such little children of who they claim the care, custody or control."

The history of the NYSPCC may be considered as divided into five stages:

I. Formation and Response to Unmet Needs, 1875 to 1900:

NYSPCC efforts focused on obtaining legislation which mandated basic standards of custodial care; segregation of minors from adults when arrested; and regulating areas of child employment and prohibiting the sale of intoxicants, tobacco and firearms to minors. NYSPCC services emphasized investigation and crisis intervention on the law enforcement model. Ultimately, almost all cases concerning children in New York City (Manhattan and annexed areas which are now part of the Bronx) were referred to the Society by the courts and the police as well as the general public. The work was more encompassing, however. From the first, the NYSPCC selectively undertook other related service initiatives until such time as other agencies were able and willing to provide them. These services included the operation of a temporary shelter for abused, neglected, lost and runaway children until their cases were resolved; enforcement of child entertainer laws (1880-1945); transportation of children for court appearances and delivery to institutions by court order (1878-1948); investigation of missing persons reported to the police (1880-1950); investigation of petitions for court ordered institutional placement of children (1880-1903); investigation of requests for the return of children from institutional placement (1887-1936); inspection of

infant boarding and foster homes 1880-1886) and the collection and enforcement for the City of New York of court ordered support for children in placement (1880-1931).

The NYSPCC became so fully integrated into New York City's service delivery system that all manner of incidents involving children were routinely reported to it, whether its services were engaged or not. Quickly, states across the United States and abroad began to use The NYSPCC model and established their own SPCC's.

NYSPCC operations were normally confined to Manhattan and annexed areas of the Bronx, but there are some instances in which The NYSPCC conducted operations in upstate New York counties and in other states. During this period, law revisions clearly and expressly included SPCC officers and agents as law enforcement officers, and in 1899 New York State's highest court defined the NYSPCC as a law enforcement agency, rather than a charity.

II. Growth, 1900 to 1925:

This period saw the establishment in New York City of a separate Children's Court (1901), the development of the concept of "juvenile delinquency" the role of The NYSPCC in probation services until a professional department was organized, and the expansion and modernization of the temporary children's shelter.

III. Continuity, 1925-1950

During this time, the responsibility for many of the ancillary and incidental tasks, undertaken by The NYSPCC, including the operation of a temporary children's shelter, was shifted to city agencies. The NYSPCC survived "The Great Depression," but many child protection agencies did not.

IV. Adaptation, 1950-1975

Three events occurred in this period which revolutionized child protection and altered the role of the NYSPCC: the publication of Dr. Kempe's research into "battered child syndrome" which led to the recognition of the crucial role of the physician's examination in child abuse cases (1962); the establishment of the Family Court in New York, which provided a civil court system and body of law as a more effective and rehabilitative alternative to the criminal system in cases of child abuse and neglect (1962); and the allocation of federal funds to the states to encourage the development and operation of statewide systems of child protection. At the request of the new Family Court, the NYSPCC undertook to conduct foster care investigations (1973-1978).

V. Innovation, 1975 to the present

The recognition of child protection as a public responsibility and the establishment of a statewide system using a social services model radically altered the role of The NYSPCC.

Relieved of sole responsibility for child protective interventions, yet continuing to provide child protective services (high-risk child protection cases for the City of New York, 1988-1992; guardian ad litem investigations and legal services for the courts), The NYSPCC assumed a leadership role in the preventive aspects of its mission, providing the following service initiatives, many in partnership with private and government agencies, some as pilot projects: training and certification of mandated professionals in the recognition and reporting of child abuse and neglect (since 1990); supervised visitation and parent education (since 1992); home-based, prevention services (Best Beginnings, 1994-2000); child custody/visitation mediation in the courts (1995-2003); child-focused education for divorcing and separating parents (PEACE, 1999-2004); trauma recovery services for child victims of abuse and domestic violence (since 2001); and permanency planning mediation in the courts for abused children in foster care (since 2005).

Collection Overview/ Scope and Content Note

The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (The NYSPCC) Records, circa 1874-Present, document the origins, history, and development of the child protection movement. Archival holdings include digital copies of case files from The NYSPCC's incorporation in 1875 to the present, including more than one-half a million files concerning as many as two million children. The records in this collection are arranged chronologically, when applicable, and include the annual reports, historical records, personnel files, and meeting minutes of The NYSPCC. A handbook for officers, as well as court case files, clipping books of child performers and legislative results, and a visitors book are also included.

More detailed scope and content notes are provided at the Series level description.

Collection Organization/ Arrangement

This collection was processed at the series-level; collection materials are organized into 12 series, and arranged thereunder chronologically or alphabetically.

Collection Series:

- SERIES 1: Annual Reports, 1875-Present
- SERIES 2: Case Records, 1874-2011
- SERIES 3: Child Performer Clipping Books, 1880-1911
- SERIES 4: Children's Court Clipping Books, 1901-1904

SERIES 5: Convention Minutes of New York State Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty, 1890-1904

SERIES 6: Court Decision Clipping Books, 1880-1919

SERIES 7: Employee Registers and Personnel Files, 1874-Present

SERIES 8: Historical Records, 1874-Present

SERIES 9: Manuals for Officers, 1875-Present

SERIES 10: NYSPCC Minutes Books, 1874-Present

SERIES 11: Selected Cases, 1881-1912

SERIES 12: Visitors Books, 1877-1960

Care was given to maintain the original order of the materials in each series, if applicable. Detailed descriptions for the arrangement of the collection materials are found in the description for each collection Series.

Collection Inventory

SERIES 1: ANNUAL REPORTS, 1875-PRESENT

Scope and Content Note:

The Annual Reports of the New York Society for the Prevention of Children (NYSPCC) are paper cover booklets summarizing or illustrating the activities of The NYSPCC during the year preceding publication. The NYSPCC archives have at least one copy for each year of operation since its incorporation in 1875, occupying less than two cubic feet. These reports are intended for the general public as well as for NYSPCC members and donors.

Annual Reports, especially those published between 1876 and 1925 contain a wealth of child protection statistics, detailed case summaries, membership and donor information, the expansion of organized protection, and miscellaneous significant events and issues.

Annual Reports for the years 1875-1927 contain all or most of the following:

- a list of NYSPCC corporate officers and directors;
- the President's address or report;
- the Board of Directors' Report;
- the Treasurer's report; the Chief Executive Officer's report;
- approximately twenty to forty selected case summaries, some with extensive detail and some with photographs;
- detailed statistical and tabular reports concerning the nature and disposition of cases, placement agencies, and descriptions of the population served according to race, nationality, religious affiliation, gender and age;
- the attorney's report; lists of NYSPCC annual and life members;

- lists of benefactors, living and deceased;
- obituaries of NYSPCC directors and the names, locations and founding dates of other societies for the prevention of cruelty to children.

The first Annual Report runs to 55 pages. The others average between 100-130 pages. The case summaries in the Annual Reports for the years 1875 through 1906 identify victims and perpetrators by full name; those from 1907 through 1924 continue this practice with one modification the surnames of victims are not revealed. From 1886 through 1924 these summaries are also identified by their NYSPCC case number. Case summaries for all subsequent years omit all identifying information. .

Annual Reports for the years after 1927 are notably thinner in content and detail. The typed reports for 1937-1957 and 1973-1987 contain between five to twenty-five double-spaced letter-size pages; those for the years 1928-1936, 1958-1972 and 1988 to the present average approximately ten pages. They identify the corporate officers of the NYSPCC, provide a general overview of The NYSPCC's works, some statistical information concerning the number of cases handled and the number of children served and a few case summaries illustrating the nature of NYSPCC activity. Since 1997, Annual Reports have resumed the publication of donor lists. Since 2000, Annual Reports have resumed publication of a financial report.

Annual Reports for the years 1875 through 1927 clearly distinguish between the year of activity and the year of publication. Care must be taken, however, with the dating of all subsequent issues, because the system of dating is not consistent throughout. Some are dated according to the year in which they were written rather than the activity year to which they refer; others are dated according to the activity year. Some clearly indicate what the date refers to and others do not. It is sometimes necessary to examine an annual report internally in order to ascertain the activity year to which it refers.

Dates:

1875-Present

Extent:

This series consists of original and duplicate material occupying 18 leather-bound volumes; about 40 typewritten reports; and approximately 80 paper cover booklets, occupying 4 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement:

The first Annual Report of The NYSPCC was published in 1876, the year immediately following the activity year to which it refers. All subsequent annual reports have usually followed this pattern, but the method of dating is not consistent throughout. Some are dated according to the year in which they were published and the year to which they refer. Others are dated only by the year of activity to which they refer, and others only by

the year of publication. It is sometimes necessary to examine a report internally in order to determine the year of activity to which it refers. At some time a copy of each annual report was placed in the folder of the historical file corresponding to the activity year being reported, but this is no longer the case. At a time or times undetermined, copies of individual annual reports from 1876 through 1928 were published in sets of numbered leather-bound volumes. All annual reports have been gathered together and now form a distinct series of the overall collection.

Accessibility and Use:

Annual Reports are intended for the general public in addition to NYSPCC members and donors and there are no restrictions on access to their content.

Alternative Formats Available:

Digital.

SERIES 2: CASE RECORDS, 1874-2011

Scope and Content:

The Case Records of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) are records of cases referred to the NYSPCC for investigation or services. These cases include child protective interventions for alleged and suspected violations of criminal and civil laws concerning custodial care by families and institutions, physical and sexual maltreatment, endangering, regulated employment and theatrical performances, admission to prohibited or regulated places and prohibited sales of intoxicants, drugs and weapons. These cases include child protective interventions for material witness protection, temporary shelter care, transportation to courts and institutions, lost, runaway and "missing persons," juvenile probation, court-ordered child support for children in placement and foster care reviews. These cases also include preventive interventions and services for children and families such as home visitation, custody mediation, supervised visitation, permanency planning mediation and trauma recovery services.

Case Records are records of NYSPCC investigations, interventions and services relating to the following: child abuse and neglect, endangerment and exploitation, sex crimes and assaults (from 1875; child performer application and appearances (1876-1978); the conditions of infant boarding and foster homes (1880-1886)); children reported as missing (1880-1950); court petitions for voluntary placement of children (1880-1903); child support collection and enforcement in cases of court-ordered child placement (1880-1931); petitions and requests for the return of children from court-ordered

placement (1887-1936); temporary shelter care and transportation of abused, neglected, destitute, lost, runaway and delinquent children (1880-1948); child labor, "baby farming," prohibited sales to minors of tobacco, drugs and weapons, attendance of minors at bowling alleys, billiard parlors, skating rinks and movie theaters and home investigations of pregnant juveniles (various periods, 1875-1980); juvenile probation (1900-1906); foster care (1973-1977); guardian ad litem services (from 1976-2005); court-ordered supervised visitation (from 1992); voluntary home visitation (1994-1999); court-ordered child custody/visitation mediation (1995-2004); court-referred child permanency mediation (from 2003) and trauma counseling for child victims of abuse and domestic violence (from 2004).

From 1875 until 1976, care records with few exceptions almost exclusively refer to children resident in New York County (Manhattan and Marble Hill and, before 1916, those areas of Bronx County west of the Bronx river. From 1976, case records include increasing numbers of children and families living in other boroughs of New York City, other parts of New York State and outside the state.

Dates:

1874- Present

Extent:

This series consists of approximately 72 linear ft. of hard copy (4,940 case records).

Provenance/ Arrangement:

The Case Records of the NYSPCC originate in hard copy. Between 1953 and 1954, in the interest of preservation and space, the Case Records for the years 1875-1941 were microfilmed and the hard copies, with the exception of the "Mary Ellen" case, were destroyed. Between 1977 and 1979, in the interest of space, the contents of Case Records for the years 1942-1952, were removed and destroyed except for the " family pedigree sheets" providing basic identifying information. This process was discontinued. In 1992 a Case Record management policy was established, providing for the digitization of Case Records. Case Records are retained for a period from five to eight years, after which they are digitized. The hard copies are then destroyed.

This collection series is numbered chronologically, beginning with the 1874 "Mary Ellen" case, which preceded but was the catalyst for the founding of the NYSPCC. In addition to the "Mary Ellen" case, which is preserved in its original hard copy as well as digital, this series is now organized as follows:

- 553,500 case records for the years 1875-1941, numbered 001 through 553,000, on 793 rolls of microfilm/digital;
- 96,559 case records for the years 1942-1994, numbered 553,001 through 650,059, on 255 rolls of microfilm/digital;

- approximately 4,000 case records for the years 1995 to the present, numbered from 650,060 onward.

Accessibility and Use:

The Case Records are records made by the NYSPCC in the ordinary course of business in fulfillment of its mission to children and their families. Closed Case Records are maintained and preserved by The NYSPCC at its own discretion and expense for use in potential litigation, as background information in cases of re-referrals, for limited research, and as a service to the individuals and families on whose behalf they were made. With one exception, it is the policy of the NYSPCC to maintain the strict confidentiality of Case Records and limit their accessibility.

The Case Records may identify persons other than those on whose behalf the records were made, no one but The NYSPCC archivist may search and examine the contents of Case Records and copies of such records are not provided. Upon written application, a search of the Case Records and a report of findings may be provided to the following persons only: those who as children were the subjects of such records; relatives and descendants of such persons; legal representatives of such persons or of their estates, and professional researchers engaged by any of the preceding.

Exception: The confidentiality of case records was not always valued, maintained or deemed necessary. From 1876 through 1928, NYSPCC Annual Reports included pages of case summaries, often identifying people by name and cases by number. The Annual Reports were intended for the public and those published from 1876 through 1928 were reissued in bound volumes and may be available in other repositories as well as at the NYSPCC's Archives. Access may be granted to a researcher if the Case Files are 75 years or older with redactions to maintain confidentiality. Please contact The NYSPCC's Archivist for questions about these exceptions.

SERIES 3: CHILD PERFORMER CLIPPING BOOKS, 1880-1911

Scope and Content:

The Child Performer Clipping Books of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children contain clippings of contemporary newspaper reportage of the efforts of The NYSPCC and other such societies to enforce the laws regulating both the participation of children in public entertainment and the conditions of such employment.

The eighteen leather-bound volumes of this series collection, each entitled "Children of the Stage," document the news reportage of the efforts of The NYSPCC and other similar child protection agencies to enforce the laws regulating the participation of children in

public entertainment and the conditions of their employment. Elbridge T. Gerry was a strong advocate for regulation and enforcement, and he presented and defended his position and the actions of The NYSPCC in speeches and writings. The purpose of these efforts was to protect children from the evils of abuse, neglect, exploitation and endangerment to health and morals that were all too common before the enactment of regulatory legislation. Statistically, the enforcement of child entertainer laws was a relatively minor NYSPCC activity. What made it appear broader and, at the time, controversial was the very extensive, excessively critical and highly sensational coverage provided by the press at a time when newspapers were increasingly relying on advertising, including theatrical advertising, as a significant source of revenue.

Volumes 1 through 15 contain newspaper clippings of child performer interventions spanning a period of thirty-one years from 1880 through 1911. Each of the other three volumes in this collection focuses on the press coverage of a single intervention: the Corrine Case, 1881, the Josef Hofmann Case, 1889 and the Hannele Case, 1894.

Dates:

1880-1911

Extent:

The series consists of 18 leather-bound volumes, occupying 3.5 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement:

This series consists of 18 leather-bound volumes of contemporary newspaper clippings, each volume titled "Children of the Stage." Fifteen of the volumes are numbered from 1 through 15 and each of these is marked to indicate, in chronological order, the year or years of newspaper reportage it contains. Each of the three remaining volumes is dedicated to the newspaper coverage of one particular instance of NYSPCC intervention. The volumes are not indexed.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on access to the contents of these volumes, which are a series of published newspaper reports. Most of the volumes are in very fragile condition. Many volumes have decayed, cracked spines and cover boards are coming apart. At the present time, hands-on access to many of the volumes in this series may not be granted, due to their fragile condition. Digital copies of the reports are available to researchers.

SERIES 4: CHILDREN’S COURT CLIPPING BOOKS, 1901-1904

Scope and Content Note:

The Children’s Court Clipping Books of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children are scrapbooks of newspaper clippings relating to the establishment of the first Children’s Court in New York City, the role of The NYSPCC in that undertaking.

The first Children’s Court in New York City was established in 1901 as a separate part of the criminal court then known as the Court of Special Sessions. It handled the cases of children accused of committing crimes. Elbridge T. Gerry, who had long advocated for the separation of children from adults in criminal proceedings, supported the establishment of this court, which became operational in 1902, one year after Gerry resigned from the presidency of the NYSPCC, while remaining its chief legal counsel. The central role of The NYSPCC in the daily operation of the Children’s Court is reflected in some of the contemporaneous news reportage. For example, the court is sometimes referred to as the “Gerry Society Court.” Ernest K. Coulter, who was the founder of the Big Brother movement (1904) and a General Manager (Chief Executive Officer) of the NYSPCC for 22 years (1914-1936), was the first clerk of the Children’s Court. The Children’s Court was the forerunner of New York State’s Family Courts, established in 1962.

The operation and activities of the New York City Children’s Court is the major, but not the exclusive, focus of Book Two. The Index in Book Two indicates that clippings in both books included news reports about the establishment of courts for children and juveniles in cities throughout New York and in other states.

Dates:

1901-1904

Extent:

This series consists of 1 volume -- Book II, only.

Provenance/ Arrangement:

This collection originally consisted of two books, but now contains only one book, labeled "Children's Court Book Two." Book Two is a cloth cover scrapbook of newspaper clippings. One clipping is dated 1901, several are dated 1903 –1904, and the rest are dated 1902. The arrangement of the clippings, with several exceptions, is chronological. Book Two includes a subject index for Book One and Book Two. A note in Book Two describes Book One as smaller in size and locates it in the "Children's Court File," the whereabouts of which, if it still exists, has yet to be discovered.

Accessibility and Use:

There are no restrictions on access to the content of these clipping books. Although most of the corner page numbers are intact, the pages on which they are stamped and to which the newspaper clippings are pasted are highly acidic and in the process of becoming so brittle that the pages may flake when handled. Due to this fragile condition, at the discretion of the archivist, access to Book Two may be limited to viewing pages selected by the archivist and may be limited to the digital copy.

SERIES 5: CONVENTION MINUTES, 1890-1904

Scope and Content Note:

The Minutes of Conventions of New York State Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty are the minutes of annual conventions published by each of 14 conventions held annually from 1890 to 1904. Participation was voluntary and included organizations incorporated in the State of New York for the purpose of preventing cruelty to children, to animals, or to both.

Although the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (The ASPCA) was chartered and empowered with statewide jurisdiction and did exercise such jurisdiction, other SPCCSs or humane societies came into existence locally throughout New York State. From the beginning, Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children usually exercised county-wide or citywide jurisdiction, operating beyond those limits only in areas where no other SPCC was established. In some areas, humane societies were organized for the dual purposes of protecting both animals and children. From the beginning, the pros and cons of providing protection for animal and for children through separate or combined organizations was a matter of considerable debate, but the value of mutual cooperation was appreciated and found expression in the annual conventions reported in these minutes. Such cooperation continues nationally through the voluntary umbrella organization, the American Humane Association.

The annual conventions reported in the minutes of this collection series were attended by delegates of societies for the prevention of animal and child cruelty operating in New York State. The minutes provide the names and locations of these organizations and the names of the delegates representing them. In addition to the general addresses and reports, the work of the convention was conducted in two parts, one focused on child cruelty issues, the other on animal cruelty issues. The minutes document major issues of concern, report difficulties and successes, propose solutions and offer formal resolutions.

Topics relating to child cruelty include age of consent, theatrical performances, testimony of children in court, pending legislation and court decisions impacting upon the status, powers and operations of the anti-cruelty societies, legislative initiatives, selected speeches of Elbridge T. Gerry and convention addresses and expressions of opinion of the participants, including Elbridge T. Gerry and NYSPCC Superintendent E. Fellows Jenkins. The discussions, reports and deliberations reported in these minutes are lengthy and detailed and would afford a patient researcher with a wealth of information about the activities and concerns of the animal and child cruelty prevention movement in New York at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Dates:

1890-1904

Extent:

This series occupies 0.75 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement

The financial reports contained in the minutes indicate that the publication of minutes was a product of the conventions. Whether such conventions were held before or after the fourteen in the NYSPCC archival collection series is unknown at this time. The series now consists of four oversized bound volumes of typewritten minutes, but there is no information indicating when, or by whom, the sets of minutes were bound together in their present format. The volumes are numbered sequentially from 1 to 4 and the minutes are presented in chronological order. Volume 1 contains the minutes of four annual conventions held in 1890-1893; Volume 2 contains the minutes of four others held in 1894-1897; Volume 3 contains the minutes of four held in 1898-1901 and Volume 4 the minutes of three held in 1902-1904. Some of the minutes contain numbered pages and some do not. Only the minutes for 1894 are indexed. There is no general index.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on access to the Minutes of Annual Conventions of New York State Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty. At the present time, due to the fragile condition of the volumes, all of which have covers that are detached, missing or in danger of becoming detached, hands-on access for searching or browsing may be reserved to the archivist at the archivist's discretion. Digital copies are available for viewing.

SERIES 6: COURT DECISION CLIPPING BOOKS, 1880-1919

Scope and Content Note:

The Court Decision Clipping Books of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children comprise a series of three oversized scrapbooks containing selected newspaper clippings and typed pages of court decisions and opinions relevant to the activities and operations of The NYSPCC. This series of court decisions begins in 1880, five years after the NYSPCC commenced operations, and covers a period of 39 years.

The Court Decision Clipping Books cover a vast range of court decisions, from such matters on the setting of bail, the justification of NYSPCC officers in the making of an arrest, precedent-making decisions and the very nature of The NYSPCC. Many clippings are from The New York Law Journal, but cases from other newspapers involving other SPCCs in other jurisdictions, both in the United States and in other countries, are also included.

Dates:

1880-1919

Extent:

This series consists of 3 scrapbooks, occupying 0.5 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement

Based on internal evidence, the Court decision Clipping Books were produced to provide a ready reference to court decisions relevant to the activities and operations of The NYSPCC. It is likely that the newspaper clippings and other reports were routinely added to this collection series shortly after publication. The arrangement is chronological.

- Book One covers the years 1880-1903;
- Book Two covers the years from 1903-1905;
- Book Three covers the years 1906-1919.

Each book uses pagination. Book One contains alphabetical subject and surname indexes to “Supreme Court Cases chiefly Writs of Habeas Corpus and Certiorari.” The subject index indicates volume, page and NYSPCC case number. The surname index provides the NYSPCC case number only. These indexes refer to Book One and Book Two. Book Three has its own subject index.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on access to the contents of the Court Decision Clipping Books, as they are a series of public records and published reports. The archivist due to the fragile condition of the volumes may restrict hands-on access. The pages on which the clippings have been pasted are highly acidic and therefore are extremely brittle in nature and tend to flake when handled. Many of the corners where the page numbers are located have broken off, making it difficult to use the indexes. Digital copies available for viewing.

SERIES 7: EMPLOYEE REGISTERS AND PERSONNEL FILES, 1874-PRESENT

Scope and Content Note:

The Employee Registers and Personnel Files of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children are a series of documents that contain the names of former employees of The NYSPCC. In addition to identifying each employee, the registers and files variously record some or all of the following information: dates of employment; positions held; salary histories; references; health issues performance evaluations; promotions; demotions; suspensions; previous employment; reasons for leaving (voluntary and involuntary) and the badge numbers of those entitled to carry them.

The notebook entries in employee register books one through four (1874-1909) are in the handwriting of E. Fellows Jenkins, The Society’s first Superintendent (CEO). Books One and Two contain remarks and notations in the distinctive hand of NYSPCC co-founder, Elbridge T. Gerry, during his tenure as NYSPCC president and legal counsel.

Employee Registers and Personnel Files contain the names of NYSPCC employees from 1874 to the present. The content varies from section to section, each succeeding section generally containing an increasing amount of personal information. The notebooks numbered Book One through Four usually indicate an employee’s age and marital status

at the time of hiring, previous occupation or work experience, facility with a foreign language, starting position and promotions, shield number if a badge was issued, starting salary and increases and date and reason for cessation of employment. A few files contain relevant newspaper clippings and some contain handwritten notes of President Gerry. Subsequent sections include additional personal information in greater detail.

Dates:

1874-Present

Extent:

This series occupies 7 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement

This collection series is divided into three sections, corresponding to the time period during which they were made. The first section consists of five oversized cardboard-covered notebooks. Book One is dated and covers the years 1874-1894; Book Two is dated and covers the years 1894-1902; Book Three is dated and covers the years 1903-1907 and Book Four is dated and covers the years 1907-1909. Each of these books is chronologically arranged and each is indexed by surname. Information contained in these books may include age, place of birth, prior employment, entering position, salary and promotional history, shield or badge number issued, if applicable, date of and reason for cessation of employment.

Book Five is a chronological listing of all employees from 1874 through 1931 and has an alphabetical surname index. All the entries in Books One through Four appear to be in the same hand and on the basis of the information included for each employee, appear to be the original employee records from 1874 through 1909. Book Five (an index) is written with a different hand and was probably written after 1931, the last year it records.

The second section consists of a seven-drawer file of ten inch by four-inch upright containers holding folded forms and other documents, the majority in envelopes. The arrangement of these personnel files is alphabetical. There is no index and it is undated, but the contents indicate it was used from the 1890's into the 1980's. Persons named in this file between 1890 and 1931 are probably indexed in Book Five. The third section consists of personnel files of former employees from the 1950's to the present occupy a file drawer where they are arranged alphabetically. These are not indexed.

Accessibility and Use

Employee Registers and Personnel files are confidential records and are not available for browsing or searching, except that current and past employees may view the contents of

their own personnel file on request. In particular cases, and upon written application to and authorization of the Executive Director, information contained in the Employee Registers and Personnel Files may be made available to the spouses, descendants and estates of those to whom they pertain. The historic notebook and seven-drawer files of this collection series may be searched by the archivist in order to obtain data concerning salaries, positions, terminations and staffing which will not identify personnel by name, except in a particular case for good cause shown, at the direction or with approval of the Executive Director.

SERIES 8: HISTORICAL RECORDS, 1874-PRESENT

Scope and Content Note:

The Historical Records of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is an eclectic collection series of handwritten and typewritten documents, papers, correspondence, notices, reports, contracts, forms, booklets, pamphlets, statistics, and newspaper clippings relating to the operation of The NYSPCC from its founding up to the present.

This series spans the history of The NYSPCC. It contains original documents and correspondence, legislation, statistical information, legal papers, newspaper clippings, printed addresses, individual Annual Reports, and reports of investigations of The NYSPCC. This series also contains addresses presenting and explaining positions taken by the NYSPCC on controversial matters, such as child performers, the role of law enforcement in child protection and the admittance of children into motion picture theaters. The contents of this collection have not been indexed, but there is a folder-by-folder listing of what the contents should include for the period from 1874 through 1968.

Dates:

1874 to the present

Extent:

This series occupies 15 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement

The contents of the Historical Records collection series are contained in file folders labeled according to subject matter or year of origin. The arrangement, for the most part, is chronological. It is not known when this series was initially organized, but internal evidence and the personal knowledge of the archivist indicate that the series has been

rearranged at least several times. Some file folders are empty and some file folders do not contain the items indicated on their labels. Items that were part of this collection series have been removed. The series is not indexed, but there is a binder of approximately 100 pages containing a folder-by-folder listing of what each should contain for the period of 1875 through 1968.

Accessibility and Use

The Historic Records collection series contains both items that are public and have no restriction on their access intermixed with items of a sensitive and private nature that may not be accessible. Please contact the archivist for more information.

SERIES 9: MANUALS FOR OFFICERS, 1875-PRESENT

Scope and Content Note:

Manuals for Officers is a series of eight handbooks prepared from time to time for the use of The NYSPCC's Special Officers, Officers and Investigators, employees expressly invested with the legal authority to investigate, intervene, initiate court proceedings and enforce the law in matters relating to child protection. Five of the manuals are compilations of the existing laws setting forth the powers and duties of the NYSPCC and its officers, the criminal and civil laws enacted for the protection of children and the relevant legal forms. Relevant cases are cited. One manual is a compilation of instructions for officers and does not include statutes relating to the protection of children; another manual contains both instructions for officers and laws for the protection of children and the latest manual is a compilation of the laws relating to the protection of children and to the powers of SPCC agencies and SPCC officers.

The first Manual for Officers, dated 1875, (the year of The NYSPCC's incorporation), was compiled by NYSPCC co-founder and legal counsel, Elbridge T. Gerry, as were those dated 1896 and 1913. The 1913 manuals are imprinted, "Gerry's Manual." The manuals dated 1931, 1938, 1949 and in the late 1960's were revised by or under the supervision of the chief executive officers of the NYSPCC; General Manager Ernest K. Coulter, 1931, (former clerk of New York City's first Children's Court and founder of the Big Brother Movement); General Manager John F. Smithers, 1938 and 1949, and Executive Director Thomas T. Becker, 1960's. Sgt. Timothy J. Gleason, Training Officer-Instructor, New York State Court Officer Academy, (son of the former archivist, Joseph Gleason), compiled the 2004 manual.

The manuals dated 1875, 1896, 1913, 1938, the late 1960's and 2004 present the statutes setting forth the powers and duties of SPCCs and their officers and all the relevant civil and criminal laws relating to the protection of children. All of these manuals except that dated 2004 also contain the relevant legal forms. The 1931 manual sets forth instructions and procedures for officers, but does not contain laws relating to children. The 1949 manual includes both.

Extent:

This series occupies 1.5 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement:

The publication dates of all but the seventh manual are indicated. The first manual is a four by six-inch paper booklet of 83 pages, bound by staples and dated 1875. The archive has only one of these. The second manual, dated 1896, exists in both paper cover and hardcover. The paper cover manual is slightly larger than the 1875 manual and contains 176 pages, bound by staples. The hardcover edition, though larger, has the same number of pages and is in very good condition. There are five copies of the third manual, all in hardcover and all dated 1913. Three copies are pocket-sized, like the first manual. All have broken covers and pages partly detached or at risk of becoming detached from their bindings. The two larger manuals, however, are in very good condition. The fourth manual, dated 1931, is a pocket-sized paper booklet of 23 pages. There are four copies in the archives, all in good condition. Three are in their original paper cases. The fifth manual, dated 1938, consists of about 100 typed pages in an oversized binder. There are two copies, both in good condition. The sixth manual is dated 1949. It consists of over 200 types of pages in a binder. There is one complete copy, in good condition. The seventh manual, internally dated by the archivist to the late 1960's, consists of more than 200 pages in a binder and is in good condition. The eighth manual was compiled for the NYSPCC without reference to any of the preceding manuals. It consists of almost 100 typed loose-leaf pages in a three-hole binder. The archival copy is in good condition.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on access to the contents of these manuals. Handling and photocopying may be limited or prohibited at the discretion of the archivist, due to the fragile condition of the oldest manuals.

SERIES 10: NYSPCC MINUTES BOOKS, 1874-PRESENT

Scope and Content Note:

Volume 1 contains the handwritten minutes of meetings relating to the founding, organization, incorporation and early history of The NYSPCC. The earliest volumes are richer in detail than the latest, but taken together, the Minutes Books are an invaluable primary source for the history of the NYSPCC.

The NYSPCC Minutes Books are the official corporate record of the regular, special and annual meetings of the officers and directors of the NYSPCC and of its founders and incorporators. The Minutes Books provide information concerning election to NYSPCC membership and directorship, the election of corporate officers and record their deliberations and policy decisions.

Dates:

1874-Present

Extent:

This series consists of 19 leather-bound notebooks and binders, occupying 3.5 linear feet

Provenance/ Arrangement:

NYSPCC Minutes Books together comprise a collection series of 18 leather-bound notebooks and binders and one cardboard-covered notebook containing the official minutes of The NYSPCC from its founding as “The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children” on December 15, 1874, to the present. This series consists of two parts:

- Volumes containing the Minutes of Regular Meetings;
- Volumes of Minutes of Annual and Special Meetings.

The minutes of the regular meetings of the founders, officers and managing directors of The NYSPCC from 1874-Present are contained within 17 numbered volumes:

- Volumes 1 through 4 are leather-bound notebooks containing handwritten minutes and some printed documents pasted on the note pages. These volumes date from December 1874 through October 1910.
- In Volume 4, from 1892 onwards, the minutes are typewritten rather than handwritten, and are pasted on the pages.
- Volumes 5 through 17, which date from November 1910 to the present, are leather-bound binders of typewritten minutes.

The order is chronological throughout and the meetings are dated; there is no index.

The minutes of special and annual meetings are contained in two unnumbered volumes.

- Volume 1: The oldest of these volumes is an oversized cardboard-covered notebook. This book, in use from 1877 to 1975, contains handwritten minutes for 1877 and typed minutes pasted on the pages for all entries thereafter. It also

contains printed documents and printed paper-cover booklets of some of the Annual Reports of the chief executive officer.

- Volume 2: The second of these volumes is a leather-bound binder containing typewritten minutes of special and annual meetings from 1875 to the present.

Accessibility and Use

The NYSPCC Minutes Books are accessible to the corporate officers, directors, assistant secretary, executive officers and archivists of The NYSPCC. Professionals and others seeking historical information concerning the NYSPCC may consult the archivist regarding access.

SERIES 11: SELECTED CASES, 1881-1912

Scope and Content Note:

The Selected Cases series of The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Records Collection documents eight selected NYSPCC interventions, in the form of newspaper clippings, notes, and in some instances, court transcripts. The diversity of materials in this series of the overall collection is illustrative of the broad range of child protective activities undertaken by the NYSPCC.

All of these cases were undertaken under the presidency of NYSPCC co-founder Elbridge T. Gerry and with the exception of the first case, while he was NYSPCC legal counsel. Some of the volumes in this collection series contain notes and correspondence in his hand.

This series comprises of the following cases: an infant asylum case, 1881; an acrobatic family case, 1883; an elementary school negligence tragedy, 1883; a case of child rape, 1886; a custody case, 2 vols. 1888-1897; a custody immigration case, 3 vols., 1896-1902; an out of state habeas corpus case, 1901; and the case of the identification and custody of two children who survived the sinking of the Titanic, 1912.

The contents of these volumes vary, some containing only court transcripts and related legal documents, some containing only newspaper accounts and some containing both. Some also contain investigation reports and the handwritten notes and correspondence of Elbridge T. Gerry.

Dates:

1881-1912

Extent:

This series consists of 11 cloth and leather-bound volumes, occupying approximately 2.0 linear feet.

Provenance/ Arrangement

This collection series consists of 11 volumes concerning eight cases, one occupying two volumes, another occupying three volumes and the remainder occupying one volume each. They are dated and arranged chronologically by the year or years of NYSPCC intervention, but there is no indicate as to when they were bound. The bindings of the first four volumes (1881 –1886) are alike, as are the bindings of the seven other volumes (1888-1912), giving the appearance of two distinct sets. Since the greater portion of most of these volumes consists of contemporary newspaper clippings, it is likely that these volumes were put into their present form as the clippings were collected, or shortly thereafter.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on access to the published newspaper accounts. In instances where access to a particular volume might provide access to information inconsistent with NYSPCC policy concerning the confidentiality of its case records, access may be limited or denied. At the present time, access to a few of these volumes may be limited or denied due to the fragile condition of their bindings. Requests to examine these volumes or to have them searched should be addressed to the archivist. Digital copies available for viewing.

SERIES 12: VISITORS BOOKS, 1877-1960

Scope and Content Note:

The Visitors Books of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children consists of two books. The first book served as a general registry of visitors to the headquarters of The NYSPCC from 1877 through mid 1898 and thereafter, as a register of NYSPCC Officers and Directors until May 1960. The second book is also a general registry of visitors to NYSPCC headquarters and was used from 1917 through 1937. In

both registers the entries are in the handwriting of the visitors themselves. In addition to signatures, entries include addresses, affiliations and comments.

The first of the two Visitors Books contains the signatures of the founders, incorporators and first officers, managers and employees of the NYSPCC, including those of Henry Bergh, Elbridge T. Gerry, John D. Wright and Etta Wheeler. The second book contains the signatures of many Japanese visitors as well as those of Etta Wheeler and General John J. Pershing.

The Visitors Books do not contain the names of the children, parents, complainants, witnesses, police and others who came to The NYSPCC on matters concerning individual cases. The first of the two Visitors Books was initially used as a registry, by signature, of NYSPCC officers, directors, employees, donors, and guests who visited the headquarters of the Society from 1877 through 1898. From November 1898 through May 1960, this same book was also used as a register in order to become more familiar with the work of The Society. The second book, in use from 1917 through 1937, appears to have been used exclusively as a signature register of visitors and guests. In both books, all entries are in the handwriting of the visitors and frequently include addresses, affiliations and comments. Within these books may be seen the signatures of NYSPCC founders and incorporators, including Elbridge T. Gerry, Henry Bergh, John D. Wright and other persons of note, such as Etta Wheeler and General John J. Pershing.

Dates:

1877-1960

Extent:

This series consists of two books. The first book is an over-sized cloth bound book of 430 pages, in fairly good condition. The second book is a hardbound book of standard guest-book dimensions. Its spine is broken and the covers are detached; as a result, the pages are at risk of separating when handled.

Provenance/ Arrangement

The first of the two books in this collection series came into use during the third year of the Society's operation, in 1877. From 1877 through mid 1898, it was used as a general registry of visitors to the headquarters of The Society and from 1898 through May 1960, almost exclusively as a register of those NYSPCC officers and directors who attended the regular meetings of the Board of Directors. The second book was used as a register of visitors from 1917 through 1937. Nothing has been found with respect to the use of such registers for other years and no similar books are in use today. In both books, entries are chronological, many, though not all dated according to year, month and day.

Accessibility and Use

There are no restrictions on the material contained in the Visitors Books. They may be viewed by appointment. Because of the fragile nature of the second book, the archivist may not permit photocopying and may restrict its handling and searching to the archivist. Digital copies are available for viewing.