ASPCA papers, 1868-1889, 12 bound volumes and 2 boxes (2 linear feet)

Descriptive Summary
Creator: Henry Bergh, Sr. (1811-1888), Henry Bergh, Jr., Edwin Bergh, Jr.
Title: ASPCA papers
Dates: 1868-1889

Abstract: The ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) papers consist of the business correspondence of the early years of the ASPCA, and include correspondence to and from Henry Bergh, Sr., the founder and President of the Society; his nephew Henry Bergh, Jr., Secretary and succeeding President; and nephew Edwin Bergh, Assistant Secretary.

Extent: 12 bound volumes, 2 boxes (2 linear feet)
Accession numbers: 50.181
Language: English
Biographical Note

Henry Bergh, Sr., founder of the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), was born 1813 in New York City to prominent shipbuilder Christian Bergh (1763-1843), and spent much of his early years leading an appropriately aristocratic life as expected of a man of his position. It was while holding a diplomatic post to Russian Czar Alexander II that Henry Bergh first became interested in the welfare of animals. On his journey back to the United States, he stopped in London to pay a visit to the Earl of Harrowby, President of the Royal Society for the Prevention to Cruelty to Animals, founded 1840. Upon reestablishing himself in New York City, Bergh began advocating for the rights of animals, and on February 8, 1866, delivered a moving speech on that topic at Clinton Hall. Bergh's audience included some of Manhattan’s most powerful social, business, and government leaders, but he stressed that the duty to protect animals crossed party lines and class boundaries.

Shortly following Bergh’s speech at Clinton Hall, the New York State Legislature approved a charter to incorporate the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals on April 10, 1866, and the ASPCA was charged with the mission to enforce the state’s anti-cruelty laws, including the power to prosecute and arrest offenders. The Society had jurisdiction solely within New York State, and local branches were established throughout. Other states began to establish their own Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Henry Bergh was often consulted as they worked to develop their organizations. By Henry Bergh, Sr.’s death in 1888, 37 of the 38 states of the Union had approved anti-cruelty laws.

The ASPCA’s early efforts focused on horses and livestock, addressing the conditions under which they were housed, worked, and slaughtered. In 1867 the ASPCA introduced the first ambulance for injured horses, and a sling for rescuing horses and other animals by 1875. The Society also censured railroad and livestock companies for conditions under which animals were transported from field to slaughterhouse, sometimes kept in cramped railway cars for eighteen or more hours at a time with no food, water, or means to rest or move. Another notable achievement of the ASPCA was the installation of drinking fountains throughout the city that provided fresh drinking water for horses, people, and domestic animals such as cats and dogs, alike. Bergh is also known for introducing the clay pigeon in substitute for live pigeons at shooting events and advocating against dog and other animal fights arranged for sport.

As the years went by, the ASPCA’s efforts expanded to establishing acceptable living conditions for dogs and cats, and in 1894 the Society was charged with the city’s animal control duties. It established shelters, addressed the problem of “hydrophobia,” otherwise known as rabies, and began issuing dog licenses in order to fund these endeavors. By the early 1900’s, the ASPCA shifted its focus from horses and livestock to small animals. It opened a veterinary clinic in 1912, and began working on preventative medicine by the mid-1900’s.

Henry Bergh, Sr. died March 12, 1888, and was succeeded as President of the ASPCA by his nephew, Henry Bergh, Jr., who had been operating as Secretary up to that time.
entirely to appear as an author of any of the letters. Around this time, his other nephew, Edwin, begins to take a more active role in the Society, as Assistant Secretary.

The majority of the correspondence deals primarily with complaints documenting animal abuse and cruelty from concerned citizens, correspondence regarding ongoing prosecution of offenders, letters to donors and supporters, and letters to editors of local publications. Bergh also corresponded with other New York State branches of the Society, as well as representatives of other state’s societies who often sought his advice or requested his presence at a speaking engagement or event. The ASPCA employed numerous “Special Agents” who actually carried out the duties of enforcing the anti-cruelty laws. The correspondence with the Special Agents provides a unique glimpse of city life during the time period, as they report many of the atrocities they witnessed as they went about their day-to-day work. This collection also illustrates the bureaucracy of the time, and the amount of effort involved in order to see many of the ASPCA’s endeavors through to fruition.

This collection contains correspondence from notable figures from the time period, including ASPCA Executive Committee members Frank Leslie, Peter Cooper, and August Belmont. Additionally, Bergh corresponded with several New York City Mayors – William Frederick Havemeyer, A. Oakey Hall, John Thompson Hoffman, Smith Ely, Jr., and Abram S. Hewitt. The loose letters also include correspondence from future President, then New York State Assemblyman, Theodore Roosevelt, dated March 8, 1883. Bergh corresponds with P.T. Barnum throughout the collection regarding the animals at his American Museum and circus performances. Other notable correspondents include Hamilton Fish, former U.S. Senator and Secretary of State, and various members of the Vanderbilt family.

**Arrangement**
The collection is arranged chronologically.

**Language of Materials**
Materials are in English

**Access and Use**
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Administrative information

Acquisition history
This collection was acquired in 1950 from the ASPCA, located in New York City.

Custodial information
The Museum is not aware of the custody of these papers prior to their transfer from the ASPCA to the Museum in 1950, but assumes they were held by the Society up to that point.

Preferred citation
Title, date. ASPCA Papers. Museum of the City of New York. Accession #.

Processing information
This collection was already arranged in chronological order, and has not warranted re-processing.

Related material
A license, pin, badge, book, drawing, and pamphlet relating to Henry Bergh and ASPCA which are not included with the ASPCA Papers resides in the rest of the Museum’s collection. The Museum’s Belmont papers hold a significant number of items related to Mr. August Belmont, Jr., an Executive Committee member of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Related Collections in Other Repositories
Library of Congress
• Henry Bergh Papers (2 items), 1866
  o http://lccn.loc.gov/mm79000181

New York Historical Society
• Miscellaneous Manuscripts Bergh, Henry – 3 letters 1866-1881
• Itzler Collection – 1 letter, 1882
• Prize Essays Collection - essay on Christian and Henry Bergh, 1933
  o www.nyhistory.org

Columbia University
• Elbridge T. Gerry papers, (2.5 linear ft.), 1856-1912 - Served as counsel to the ASPCA and also President of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which Bergh assisted in founding
  o http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=4078804

The ASPCA is the primary record holder of ASPCA archives; however, they are not open to the public.

Access Points
Personal names:
Bergh, Henry (1813-1888)
Bergh, Henry Jr.
Bergh, Edwin Jr.
Gerry, Elbridge T. (Elbridge Thomas), 1837-1927

Corporate names:
American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Topical subjects:
Animal welfare
Sanitation

Geographic subjects:
New York (N.Y.)

Container List
Bound copybooks with correspondence sent from Henry Bergh/ ASPCA

0358: December 15, 1868 – December 25, 1969
0357: December 2, 1869 – January 24, 1871
0359: November 6, 1872 – October 10, 1876
0360: October 16, 1876- September 25, 1879
0361: September 25, 1879- April 5, 1882
0362: April 5, 1882 – January 13, 1883
0363: January 13, 1883 – March 10, 1884
0364: March 10, 1884 – May 25, 1885
0365: May 25, 1885 – April 29, 1886
0366: April 25, 1886 – March 29, 1887
0367: March 29, 1887 – March 26, 1888
0368: March 26, 1888 – October 24, 1888

Box 0369
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1866
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1867
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1868
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1869
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1870

Box 0370
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1871
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1872
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1873
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1874
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1875
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1876
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1877
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1878
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1879
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1880
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1881
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1882
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1883
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1884
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1885
Correspondence to Henry Bergh/ ASPCA  1886, 1887, 1888