CHAPTER XII

"DRAWN FROM THE MISERABLE MULTITUDES": ANIMAL CONTROL, THE HUMANE SOCIETY, AND THE COMPANION ANIMAL

Even as the horse began to pass from the city's streets, the dog and cat proliferated. In fact, their numbers exploded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as pet keeping increased along with the expanding human population, and stray animals multiplied through abandonment and unchecked reproduction. While the popularity of pet keeping generated a pressing need for enhanced veterinary care services, abandonment contributed to the immiseration and protracted suffering of animals on the streets. In response, humane societies shifted their focus away from work involving the horse and other laboring or producing animals whose interests they had guarded during their first half-century of activity. Instead, they directed their attention and energies toward the challenges posed by the stray dog and cat population, and the acute need for companion animal veterinary care in their communities.

From Municipal Pound to Humane Shelter

The example of the animal shelter formed by the Women's Branch of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WPSPCA) in Philadelphia loomed large. During the quarter century that followed the formation of the dog shelter in Philadelphia, advocates in many other communities adopted the same approach, attempting to reform, and in some cases to assume responsibility for, local
animal control work in their communities. Humanitarians in every city concluded that municipal pounds were grim, dreadful places, usually maintained by uncaring and sometimes corrupt workers, and believed that they could do a better job. They had the same low opinion of dogcatching methods.¹

One measure of the WPSPCA's success in handling animal overpopulation lay in the statistics of death. Between 1874 and 1882, the WPSPCA destroyed 30,000 animals.² By 1892, shelter managers killed an average of 3,900 dogs each year. In 1900, they put down over 5,700. By 1911, a reporter estimated that the Philadelphia society had disposed of 100,000 dogs in four decades. In 1919, the annual death total for dogs in the WPSPCA's "charcoal vault" exceeded 8,000.³

Death, of course, was not the whole story. The WPSPCA had also created efficient and systematic approaches for the capture and disposal of stray dogs. The dogcatchers' wagon was divided into compartments that allowed for the separation of large, small, male, and female dogs, and nets had replaced lassoes as a means of capture. The pound kennels contained such features as indoor and outdoor areas, heated sections,

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running water and proper drainage, and platforms for bedding. Sanitary precautions were taken with equipment and utensils, and a regular cleaning and disinfecting of critical areas was standard. 4

Independently incorporated in 1899, the WPSPCA faced two serious challenges in the next decade. Since 1870, the year that the Women’s Branch took over animal control functions in Philadelphia, the organization had occupied the same site, leased from the city at low cost, and undertaken a number of building projects. In 1900, with property values rising in the neighborhood, the city reclaimed the land on which the WPSPCA shelter and related structures stood. After negotiation the city permitted the shelter to remain, but White had to raise money to reconstruct the facility to accommodate the cutting of two new streets that transected the property. Then, five years later, in June 1906, the city ordered the WPSPCA to vacate the land altogether. White had been expecting this setback for some time, as development had driven up real estate values. Now she determined that the WPSPCA would own the land upon which it built its next shelter. Seeking a location where the dogs would not disturb their neighbors, White found suitable land in the city’s Nicetown section. She hired a builder to construct an up-to-date pound and shelter operation; together, purchase and construction costs amounted to $16,000. 5

Not all animal protectionists could marshal the resources that the WPSPCA did. Moreover, in some places, humane advocates were unable or unwilling to assume

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5 “Report of the President of the WPSPCA,” JOZ 10 (Feb. 1901), 17; Caroline Earle White, “A Severe Blow,” JOZ 16 (July 1907), 80-81; and “Salve Lectores,” JOZ 17 (Jan. 1908), 7.
responsibility for municipal animal control, and, as a result, reform was slow in coming. In 1885, at the District of Columbia pound, the humane agent killed 3,000 dogs by shooting. In 1891, over fifteen years after the Women’s Branch in Philadelphia had begun to use gas for euthanasia, the pound in Pittsburgh was still drowning 25 dogs at a time in a large cage that the poundmaster lowered into a tank full of water. In 1913, Alabama humanitarians were still struggling to prevent Birmingham dogcatchers from using a brutal wire noose. 6

It was not only in smaller communities that crude animal control practices persisted. In New York City, change was also slow to come. There, the municipal government retained control of the pound into the mid-1890s, and a steady flow of unpleasant stories about dog roundups, rabies, stolen animals, brutal dogcatchers, and canine death appeared in the city’s newspapers. Henry Bergh criticized many aspects of city policy, but he refused to let the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) become involved with the work of rounding up animals. The issue haunted his 22-year career, however, usually surfacing every summer as the threat of rabies supposedly increased.

In 1866, the year that Bergh formed the ASPCA, New York authorities dealt with the surplus canine population and the perceived rabies menace by allocating $5,000 for a roundup, setting a bounty of fifty cents per dog. This sum supported a small army of

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boys and men, who turned collection into a business, going so far as to stockpile and even to breed animals in anticipation of the roundup season’s mid-June opening. Dog brokers stimulated the trade, standing outside the gates of the pound, buying up as many dogs as they could get. Frequently, the sellers were young boys who elected to accept ten to forty cents a dog, rather than take the poundkeeper’s check for fifty cents, which they could only redeem at a municipal office located elsewhere.7

As the roundup rendered dogs ever scarcer in New York City, youthful entrepreneurs and unscrupulous adults invaded neighboring communities to gather animals. As one commentator noted, “The boys who are in the business are ever on the lookout, and woe to any dog running loose in the street.” No dog was safe, as the boys did not, “by any means, always respect the sanctity of private enclosures, but will watch their opportunity and enter a yard or even a house, and untie and carry off their coveted prey.”8

Anxious pet owners had until 4 p.m. of the following day to reclaim animals. However, an owner could only reclaim an animal upon payment of a fee, and, quite often, he might arrive too late, his dog redeemed by another party seeking a pet. Anyone taking an animal away from the pound had to be wary of the boys, too, for they might “mark” his animal companion for subsequent theft. This threatening possibility gave rise to an


urban legend in which a man was said to have paid protection money to ensure that his
dog would not be taken during the season. 

By employing arguments about the rarity of rabies and the inefficiency of the
summertime roundup, Bergh succeeded in limiting or stopping the canine bounty hunt
altogether in some years. In 1868, the ASPCA persuaded Mayor John T. Hoffman to
halve the reward to 25 cents, and to forbid persons under the age of eighteen from
participation. This saved the city money, without increasing confirmed cases of rabies.
Health authorities affirmed some of Bergh's conclusions, especially the claim that
hydrophobia was no more prevalent in summer than in any other season. Moreover, at
least one subsequent mayor, A. Oakey Hall, preferred to relinquish all responsibility for
policy to the Board of Health, which thought the roundup a superstitious pursuit.

Rabid or not, however, stray animals remained a nuisance, and some editorialists
still called for their rapid extermination. Bergh could never take the cancellation of the
roundup for granted, and, in some years, he could not convince authorities to call it off.
Bergh sympathized with public distress about the roundup and the pound, and he worked
to mitigate their associated cruelties. Drawing on the Philadelphia example, he promoted
such alternatives as scoop nets for gathering animals and the construction of a city facility equipped with carbonic acid gas.¹¹

Above all else, it was the public drowning of the dogs in the river that disturbed many commentators, and, by 1873, New York newspapers were urging the “Philadelphia Plan” upon municipal authorities. One early attempt to employ carbonic acid gas, however, resulted in horrible suffering due to leaks in the apparatus. Animals were left half-dead, gasping for air, and, sometimes, those being taken away for rendering, presumed dead, revived during transport and made desperate efforts to escape. Authorities actually arrested the poundkeeper for cruelty in the wake of the June 1874 scandal triggered by the gas leaks.¹²

While not volunteering to take over its administration, Bergh regularly remonstrated with officials about the necessity of reform at the pound. In the mid-1870s, he pressured the city into erecting a suitable new facility, as well as the purchase of appropriate wagons for dogcatching. He forced the issue of watering and feeding of the animals there, as attendants often neglected those scheduled to die. ASPCA agents

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New York's dogcatchers, 25 in all by the mid-1870s, could be a rough lot, and they were hard on animals and people. In August 1877, two women filed complaints of assault and battery against dogcatchers, after altercations over the licensure and ownership of their dogs. That same year, Bergh and his agents began to prosecute city dogcatchers for cruelty. By the end of 1880, they had successfully brought charges in 43 cases.\footnote{14}{"A Violent Deputy Dog-Catcher," \textit{N. Y. Times}, 2 Aug. 1877, 8; "Another Dog-Catcher in Trouble," \textit{N. Y. Times}, 8 Aug. 1877, 3; ASPCA, \textit{Ann. R. 1885}, 19; and ASPCA, \textit{Ann. R. 1881}, 15.}

Bergh drew criticism for declining to interfere with the drowning of unwanted strays once the city returned to that method, however, citing his own experience of near drowning in support of the view that it was "the easiest way out." As early as 1868, and again in 1886, Bergh told a reporter that the use of electricity as a means of euthanasia struck him as the most promising solution. The city did not move in this direction, either, but in 1888, the year Bergh died, his successors persuaded the city to abandon drowning in favor of a lethal chamber into which chloroform or gas was introduced.\footnote{15}{"A Modern Philosopher," \textit{New York World} [hereafter \textit{N. Y. World}], 5 Apr. 1868, 6; "Mr. Bergh's Present Views: Dogs and How to Kill Them," \textit{N. Y. Tribune}, 17 Jan. 1886, 9; and ASPCA, \textit{Ann. R. 1889}, 12.}
Following Bergh's death, ASPCA officials also debated the merits of entering the arena of animal control. Matters came to a head under John P. Haines, who succeeded Henry Bergh's nephew as president in 1890, after board member James M. Brown's brief custodial tenure. In 1896, under Haines's leadership, the ASPCA built an impressive home at the corner of 26th Street and Madison Avenue. The perceived extravagance of the building project attracted criticism within the movement.

Haines also demonstrated antipathy toward independent activists, typically women, who worked outside the ASPCA network to collect homeless, sick, and injured animals and destroy them. In 1893, Haines supported the prosecution of Sarah Edwards, a member of the self-styled "Midnight Band of Mercy," who admitted to having roamed the streets luring cats to their deaths by chloroform. Unfortunately, in her zeal, Edwards seems to have killed some pets.

In defense of his stance, Haines pointed out that the ASPCA's status as an organization with enforcement power might be compromised by individuals and groups acting as Edwards had done, creating the potential for an "unseemly conflict of authority." However, Haines's imputations caused resentment among those who supported more aggressive action to curb the homeless cat population. In the absence of

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16 Haines kept cattle and maintained a kennel on a farm in Toms River, New Jersey. He was also a competitor in the bench shows of the Westminster Kennel Club. See “John P. Haines,” Frank Leslie’s, 1 Feb. 1890, ASPCA-NY, SBK 10: 198; “James M. Brown,” N. Y. Tribune, 21 July 1890, ASPCA-NY, SBK 10: 235; and “Death of John P. Haines,” NHR 9 (Sept. 1921), 173.


effective action on the part of the ASPCA, why should other organizations anxious to ameliorate the suffering of stray animals be barred from the field?\textsuperscript{19}

The very next year, in 1894, the ASPCA sought and secured an “Act for the better protection of lost and stray animals,” which abolished the city dog pound and empowered the ASPCA to carry out its provisions. The ASPCA took up the responsibility for the licensing of dogs in New York City. The legislation also provided legal sanction (for the first time ever) for the capture of cats, and the requirement that they carry an identification tag. The ASPCA erected a facility at 102\textsuperscript{nd} Street and East River for the accommodation and destruction of lost and stray animals. The following year, at the request of its mayor, the law was amended to include Brooklyn, and the ASPCA took over animal control functions there too.\textsuperscript{20}

The numbers of animals killed in New York City at the end of the nineteenth century, and the numbers estimated to be running at large, were prodigious. In late 1898, Haines announced that the destruction of small animals, mainly dogs and cats, had


\textsuperscript{20} “The Dog Pound is No More,” N. Y. World, Undated article, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1880-1902; and ASPCA, Ann. R. 1902, 154-55. Instead of license revenues going to the city, they now went directly to the ASPCA, which began to employ salaried agents who looked out for unlicensed dogs. It also led to protracted legal struggles with citizens who challenged the ASPCA’s right to collect the impost. In 1911, the New York Supreme Court in a 1911 upheld the constitutionality of the license law. Charles Andrews, “Legal and Constitutional Status of the ASPCA,” ASPCA, Ann. R. 1905, 143-57; “Dr. Parker Sailed Away Leaving Dog Tax Unpaid,” Brooklyn Eagle, 29 Apr. 1908; “President Wagstaff Reverts to the Old Days,” Brooklyn Eagle, 4 May 1908, ASPCA-NY, SBK 12: 1; “Justice Kelly Strikes at the Dog Licenses,” Brooklyn Eagle, 5 Oct. 1908, ASPCA-NY, SBK 12: 85; “The Dog License Law,” ASPCA Bulletin 11 (Oct. 1911), 105-7; and McCrea, Humane Movement, 50-53. The ASPCA’s right to perform license and shelter work also survived a poorly drawn bill extending licensing authority to other humane societies in the state, and one that proposed to bring animal control once more within the patronage system. See “The Dog in Politics,” OAF 33 (Mar. 1906), 293-96.
reached its highest level—91,535—some 75 times greater than a dozen years before. In 1908, the ASPCA killed 77,067 homeless dogs and cats, and had forty dogcatchers in the field every day. In the fourteen years since 1894, when the ASPCA took over animal control, it had killed an estimated 800,000 cats and 200,000 dogs. In summer 1909, the ASPCA killed over 25,000 animals a month.21 Such numbers notwithstanding, animal protectionists believed that the humane society’s willingness to take in unwanted animals provided a necessary service. Adoption and destruction were cast as the alternatives to death from starvation, disease, exposure, or mischief on the streets of the city.22

**New Players and New Approaches: Rescue, Relief, and Veterinary Care**

In some cities, the work of dealing with stray animals and providing veterinary care to companion animals became so great, and the perceived necessity of new approaches so pressing, that a second round of humane society formation began. Most of these organizations sought incorporation without enforcement power, and devoted themselves solely to providing shelter, veterinary care services, and humane euthanasia. Women founded virtually all of these second wave groups. Boston’s Animal Rescue League and Chicago’s Anti-Cruelty Society began their work in 1899. The Woman’s League for Animals in New York started as an auxiliary of the ASPCA in 1906. These and other rescue leagues prided themselves in making it easier for people to cooperate in

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relinquishment. They established depots and receiving stations at settlement houses and other locations, and sent agents out to collect animals. Caroline Earle White thought the trend a good one, observing, “It is often the case that one is not enough, and that a second organization can repair the failures and supplement the successes of the first one.” Perhaps fittingly, just two years after White’s death, a rump caucus within her own WPSPCA decided to form the Animal Rescue League (1918), abandoning prosecution in favor of a full investment in caring for stray and unwanted animals.23

In some instances, the new organizations made a significant impact. By 1908, the Animal Rescue League of Boston, which employed twenty people, had secured the responsibility for taking up unlicensed stray dogs in the city, a job that the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) had never sought. The League introduced many innovations, aiming to reduce and eliminate the cruelty and corruption often found in municipal pound operations.24

In New York, the ASPCA management did not welcome the new organizations, and sometimes it attacked them. In 1904, it attacked Flora Kibbe’s Bide-A-Wee Home, founded the year before. President Haines responded with even greater energy when critics came together in 1905 to form the Henry Bergh Humane Society. The group’s organizers were disappointed at the ASPCA’s failure to take action when icy conditions led to considerable suffering on the part of the city’s horses. Its incorporators, David


Belais and Henry Maurer, tried to secure the same enforcement privileges that the ASPCA had. The ASPCA blocked their efforts by securing legislation that prohibited the formation of any new anti-cruelty society in ten counties of the state. The ASPCA also forced Belais and Maurer (under threat of prosecution) to rename their organization the New York Humane Society, while their retaliatory initiative to rescind the law favoring the ASPCA failed.\(^{25}\)

In 1906, steady sniping and criticism finally led to Haines's resignation. The Board replaced Haines with Colonel Alfred Wagstaff, Jr. (1844-1921), a gunner and fly fisherman, who, while serving in the legislature during the 1870s, had assisted Henry Bergh. Wagstaff sponsored the 1873 bill to suppress pigeon shooting, became an ASPCA member in 1872, and joined the Board in 1882.\(^{26}\) As president, Wagstaff discontinued publication of Our Animal Friends and made plans to lease out part of the ASPCA's palatial structure in an effort to save funds for urgent animal relief work.

Among the projects contemplated were the establishment of a veterinary dispensary and

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hospital for the animals of the poor, and a farm for the care of police, fire, and draft horses normally consigned to the uncertain fate of the auction yards.  

Major hospitals for animals were rare at the turn of the century. All of the private veterinary colleges, some of which had operated hospital clinics, had gone out of business, their prospects for servicing the horses of the urban industrial economy having dwindled. Among university veterinary schools, only Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania had hospitals, and the Cornell operation was mainly devoted to livestock. Moreover, while affluent citizens could afford the services of a private veterinarian for dogs, cats, and other small animal pets, such care remained outside the reach of many people.

The creation of a hospital was the earliest priority of Henry Bergh, Jr., upon succeeding his uncle as president of the ASPCA. Although Bergh, Jr.'s tenure was a short one, the idea of an animal hospital continued to attract supporters. The ASPCA Board was slow to approve such a project, however, and the idea languished until pressure and competition arose from a group associated with the organization's women's auxiliary. The Women's Auxiliary of the ASPCA formed in 1906 under the leadership of Ellin Speyer. Within a few years, Speyer grew impatient with the all-male Board of Managers' reluctance to assume responsibility for treating the pets of the poor. Together

27 "Under New Direction," JOZ 16 (Apr. 1907), 40; and "Comments and Reflections," JOZ 16 (Sept. 1907), 160.


with other women in the auxiliary, Speyer founded the Women’s League for Animals, incorporating in early 1910 with the blessing of the ASPCA Board. At the same time, Speyer’s group launched a free dispensary for treating the animals of the indigent, handling 6,020 cases in the first year. In 1912, the Women’s League for Animals moved to construct a hospital. It was a three-story building with exercise space on the roof, mange and distemper wards, and a lethal chamber.30

Meanwhile, changing with the times, the ASPCA opened its own dispensary, shelter, and ambulance house in 1912, in a building separate from its headquarters. It was a modern facility, with horse, dog, and cat wards, and isolation areas for all three species. This was the start of something positive. By 1920, after a series of expansions, the ASPCA veterinary department was conducting significant clinical research on animals, including work on the radium treatment of cancer.31

In Massachusetts, plans for the nation’s most ambitious animal care facility began to emerge in 1910, when Francis Rowley succeeded George Angell as president of the MSPCA. By then, demand for a place where the citizens of Boston and surrounding communities could bring their animals for sound advice and treatment had greatly risen. A rental property was outfitted as an animal dispensary and two veterinarians hired to


staff it. In just half a year, the MSPCA handled over 3,000 cases, making it clear that something on a larger scale was necessary. Before the year was out, the MSPCA began plans for the construction of the Angell Memorial Hospital on a site near the Harvard Medical School and four human hospitals. Rowley cast the hospital as a living memorial to George Angell, and a natural expansion of his founding vision. Its projected costs of $225,000 were to be partly met with two dedicated bequests amounting to $75,000, a result of Angell's unrealized efforts in the 1890s to finance a central building for humane work.32

The time was ripe, Rowley argued, for the provision of scientific care to sick and injured animals comparable to that which human beings received. Noting the emergence of similar institutions in England and Europe, and the ASPCA's plan to build a hospital in New York, Rowley predicted that humane work was moving decisively in this direction.33 Work did not commence until the fall of 1913, and the building was finally dedicated in February 1915. By 1915, the MSPCA was operating with a staff of 40 people and a budget of $7,000 per month. Permanent funds provided only 25 percent of the necessary funds and the organization relied heavily on bequests. The hospital quickly became one of the most important veterinary medical institutions in the world. Rowley was highly sensitive to insinuations that the hospital was a rich man's institution and not


a place for the animals of the poor. Its initial policy was to turn no one's animals away. The exceptions were animals with incurable illnesses, whose owners were advised to have them destroyed. Sometimes, the MSPCA accepted even these animals, holding them for several days until such time as the owners could be convinced of the need for their destruction. No charge was made for such service.\(^{34}\)

In the summer of 1917, the MSPCA took possession of a farm at Methuen, the gift of Mrs. David Nevins. In this case, however, the farm was seen not so much as a final haven for superannuated horses as a complement to the hospital. Animals could be taken there for boarding or convalescence, thus freeing up space in the Boston facility. By mid-1924, the MSPCA employed five veterinarians at the hospital, and had treated 39,289 animals there. Its free dispensary had handled 50,948 cases during the same period, making a total of 90,237.\(^{35}\)

Pennsylvania humane societies lagged behind those of New York and Boston when it came to the shift into veterinary care. In Philadelphia, the presence of a major university veterinary school with a hospital made the situation different. The Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA) forged a friendly reciprocal relationship with the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School, and supported its hospital in a variety of ways.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{35}\) "MSPCA Vacation Farms at Methuen," \textit{ODA} 50 (Sept. 1917), 52-53; "1868—Our Semi-Centennial—1918," 123; and \textit{ODA} 56 (May 1924), 188.

The WPSPCA, on the other hand, was uneasy about the school's veterinary hospital, especially about its relationship to vivisection within other divisions of the university. The editors of the Journal of Zoophily imagined an institution in which "every possible care and attention is to be bestowed on the lower floor on those animals, whose owners are, we suppose able to pay for their treatment," while on the upper floor, "poor, homeless, miserable dogs, that have led a vagrant existence and never known anything of comfort in their wretched lives are to be mutilated and tortured until death comes to their relief." Beyond such ambivalence, White's intense participation in general anti-cruelty campaigns relating to vivisection, cattle transportation, and other concerns kept her too busy to contemplate a capital campaign to raise an animal hospital from the ground up.

Even so, the need for affordable veterinary care services in the city was obvious. In 1909, White decided to devote half of the sizeable bequest left by longtime supporter Annie Lowry to a dispensary for the poor. The dispensary approach, which offered free veterinary care to the indigent, would provide another avenue for the circulation of sound advice on animal care and treatment to laborers who worked with horses. It would also help to counter the charge (groundless in her opinion) that the organization was tough on the laboring poor when it prosecuted them for cruelty.

Not all parties were happy with the animal protection groups' shift toward providing advanced animal care. Veterinarians, reinventing themselves for the age of

horseless travel, viewed the new facilities as threats to their livelihood. In 1928, the American Veterinary Medical Association passed a resolution "condemning hospitals conducted by humane societies which conflicted with the practice of veterinary medicine." 39

The Destruction of Animals

As always, the relative advantages of various methods for destroying small animals were a regular matter of discussion in humane circles. This debate focused on both shelter euthanasia and "curbside" destruction, still quite prevalent in the first decades of the twentieth century. The most commonly discussed means were illuminating gases, charcoal fumes, sulfur, cyanide, chloroform, strychnine, carbon monoxide, and electricity. 40

In the field, some SPCA agents employed cyanide, which they forced the animals to swallow. In many instances, the revolver was still the most efficient method of destruction. After the advent of the automobile, agents and others commonly killed smaller animals by confining them in a compartment, wagon, or metal barrel where a connection to the exhaust pipe could be rigged up, making use of carbon monoxide to do the deed. 41


Chloroform, of course, had been the favorite of many curbside advocates and do-it-yourselfers for decades. However, by the early 1900s, William Stillman and others were calling its humaneness into question. It was slow to take effect, they objected, and animals alarmed by its odor often put up desperate struggles. It could only be sanctioned in the case of very small animals or birds, or in situations where a person could administer the anaesthetic to a sleeping or a restrained animal not inclined or able to resist. Moreover, as White, Stillman, and others agreed, gas and chloroform did not work as well with newborn kittens or puppies, since they apparently needed only a small amount of oxygen to survive. In these cases, drowning in warm water was considered the best method.

As late as 1921, the MSPCA still advised do-it-yourselfers to kill cats with chloroform-saturated cotton or rags, slipped into a box that could then be placed over the animal. Authors advised the public to drown kittens. The job was to be done within a few days of their birth, and before their eyes had opened. The recommended method involved submerging the kittens in a bucket of warm water, being sure to do so outside the presence of their mother, and leaving her one alive. Of course, the deed should never be done in the presence of children.

The WPSPCA had pioneered in the application of carbonous oxide gas, and many discussions of shelter-based euthanasia revolved around this approach. In 1903, Albert

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44 "Putting Kittens to Sleep," ODA 54 (Aug. 1921), 40; "Use of Chloroform," National Humane Journal 10 (Feb. 1922), 38; and Do Not Leave Your Cat to Starve (Boston: American Humane Education Society, n. d.)
Leffingwell and Stillman, both medical doctors, recommended carbonic acid gas as the most humane and effective way to kill small animals. It was inexpensive and non-flammable. Its use did not alarm the animals as chloroform did, and its sedative and stupefying effects were established. Chloroform’s use, they asserted, should be circumscribed to those cases where animals were asleep or tame enough to be taken upon the lap and soothed into unconsciousness. The expense of chloroform also militated against routine reliance upon it.  

Sometimes, the humane societies also employed illuminating gas and charcoal fumes to produce “death by sleep.” The ASPCA avoided the use of charcoal fumes because they caused death through suffocation or asphyxia. Instead, it used illuminating gas in its lethal chamber. “The inhalation of this gas causes anesthesia or a paralysis of sensibility and a cessation of respiration and heart action,” Superintendent W. K. Horton reported. “Illuminating gas is quicker and more destructive in its action upon animals than all other forms of anesthetics, and causes them no pain or inconvenience. They are rendered unconscious after the fourth or fifth time, and death follows quickly, depending upon the physical condition of the animal.” Stillman and Leffingwell were less enthused, believing that illuminating gas, while effective, was dangerous to handle, especially in its odorless forms. Its flammability presented another risk factor.

From the earliest, the various risks and drawbacks of gas, and its rising costs, led humane advocates to search for other methods. In the late 1880s, Thomas Edison and his


colleagues electrocuted a number of animals in order to demonstrate the relative risks of alternating vs. direct current. Their research, and the knowledge gained from several accidental electrocutions, soon began to influence debates over capital execution and the best method for killing animals. In 1888, the New York State Assembly commissioned ASPCA counsel Elbridge T. Gerry and two other men to investigate and report on the most humane and practical method of carrying out the death sentence. In suggesting the substitution of electrocution for hanging, Gerry and his colleagues cited a series of experiments carried out in Buffalo at the local SPCA. Some of the dogs were vivisected in order to demonstrate the efficacy of the method in stopping the heart. Later that year, a cover illustration in Frank Leslie’s showed electricity being “tried on the dog” at the Columbia School of Mines, to demonstrate that the alternating electric current used in incandescent lighting was more dangerous than continuous currents of greater power. ASPCA Superintendent Charles Hankinson stopped this demonstration after one dog died an obviously painful death.47

Enthusiasm for electrocution as a method of euthanasia did not end there. In January 1904, the Coney Island Electric Company electrocuted the rebellious elephant Topsy in a grand spectacle. Thousands of men, women, and children crowded into the
amusement park to watch technicians send 6,600 volts of electricity shooting through the
four-ton pachyderm, who had killed two keepers and a third man in four years. The
ASPCA even sent out a veterinarian, who pronounced the death in every way humane.\footnote{48}

The foregoing events provided the context for the routine usage of electrocution at
animal shelters. After a decade of work in helping his wife with the management of the
Animal Rescue League, Boston’s Huntington Smith developed an automatic electric cage
“for the humane, safe, sanitary, and economical destruction of animals.” The animal was
placed on a zinc plate, and a metal collar with electrodes was fitted around his neck.
Early reports of the cage’s efficiency boasted that an experienced operator could kill
close to 100 dogs per hour. For a time, electrocution even gained an international vogue.
The RSPCA assumed the rights to the Smith invention for the United Kingdom, and the
electric cage was installed in the municipal pound at Rome in 1919. Stillman became a
booster of the apparatus, and it replaced the use of gas at the shelters of his home
organization, the Mohawk and Hudson Humane Society, around 1916. In 1926, about 40
societies were using the electric cage.\footnote{49}

Over time, however, reports of bungled human executions and accidents
involving electric shock led Francis Rowley and others to question whether electrocution

\footnote{48}“Big Elephant Electrocuted.” \textit{Newark Evening News}, 5 Jan. 1904. Dunlop describes a similar
episode in \textit{Gilded City}, 253-71.

\footnote{49}For detailed discussion, see Huntington Smith and William L. Puffer, “Killing Animals by
Sleep,” \textit{NHR} 3 (Nov. 1915), 245; “Electric Cages for Animals,” \textit{NHR} 7 (Feb. 1919), 37; \textit{AHA, Ann. R.}
1912, 61-62; and \textit{AHA, Ann. R.} 1917, 8-9. Other notices include Caroline Earle White, “A New
Invention,” \textit{JOZ} 21 (May 1912), 325-26; \textit{JOZ} 22 (Jan. 1913), 9-10; \textit{JOZ} 22 (Feb. 1913), 23; “Electric
Cages,” \textit{JOZ} 24 (Feb. 1915), 28; “The Electrocuton of Animals,” \textit{NHR} 5 (Oct. 1917), 193; and
“Huntington Smith,” \textit{Boston Transcript}, 23 July 1926, ASPCA-NY, SBK Feb. 1927-1 Apr. 1931. For
Stillman’s endorsement, see “Humane Killing Methods,” \textit{NHR} 8 (Oct. 1920), 194.
was an efficient or humane method. Its use at shelters almost certainly ended as a result of inquiries tied to humane slaughter reform, where electricity failed badly. For prominent slaughterhouse reform advocates like Rowley, a series of experiments conducted in an Omaha, Nebraska slaughterhouse in 1924 caused unsettling questions. The humane delegation in attendance was greatly alarmed by the findings of the head of the New York State Veterinary Association, who attended as an ASPCA representative. His examination of the animals suggested that they had experienced utter torture, for while "the current did produce more or less effectively motor paralysis, it did not produced paralysis of the sensory portion of the cerebrum or forebrain, which controls the sense of feeling, as was manifested in the remaining reflexes of the eyes and eyelids of the animal several minutes after being shocked." As Rowley noted, "to lie upon the slaughter floor, to be hoisted, and to have the throat cut, while powerless to move but still keenly alive to pain, is a horror one vainly tries to imagine." Survivor accounts of accidents with electricity also fueled doubt about the humaneness of its use. Electrocution soon fell out of favor as a method for pound and shelter euthanasia, and gas-based approaches became the dominant means of destroying unwanted animals. 50

The Modern Companion Animal

As humane societies became ever more involved with companion animal concerns in the early decades of the twentieth century, the SPCA movement became

increasingly identified with pet keeping. Adoption was one of the solutions humane advocates promoted in their efforts to reduce animal overpopulation. The humane societies also contributed to the expansion of pet keeping by providing low cost care, veterinary instruction and advice, and other services.

Animal organizations endorsed the keeping of pets and did their best to promote the practice. In Philadelphia, for example, the WPSPCA defended the rights of working class pet owners. Among other actions, it contested the high pound redemption fees charged by the city, which represented a hardship to the poor, and frequently subsidized or assumed payment of these charges. In an 1880 report, Adele Biddle took note of the many touching relationships between humans and dogs that the work had brought to light. Biddle called it “a wrong judgment that decides that a dog is a luxury which should only be enjoyed by the rich,” assuring supporters that “the Society has, in many cases, mitigated the harshness of the law by aiding the poor from its own treasury,” helping to restore animals to their owners.  

Animal protectionists generally resisted mandatory licensing on the same grounds. In many cases, humane society officials would release animals without requiring payment of the redemption fee. In general, humane advocates opposed legislation, regulation, and overzealous animal control activities that interfered with the pet keeping of the lower classes. George Angell led the drive to reform Boston’s dog roundup through the addition of a holding period that would allow owners several days to retrieve any captured pets. He also fought proposals to tax male dogs in the state.

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of Massachusetts on the grounds that the poor would be compelled to kill their companion animals rather than pay the fee.\(^{52}\)

The promotion of companion animal care crept into the work of the SPCAs in the early 1870s. Early pamphlets combined information about food, exercise, and grooming with the humane society perspectives on rabies, muzzling, and the destruction of sick, old, unsuitable, or unwanted animals. Gradually, humane literature began to include an even wider range of information concerning animal welfare.\(^{53}\)

As they took over the management of pounds all over the country, humane advocates turned to adoption as an alternative to destruction of unwanted animals. By the first decade of the century, the animal shelter had established itself as a source for pets, especially dogs. In promoting adoption, advocates celebrated the mongrel dog, who became a beloved figure in popular culture. Humane advocates characterized their canine constituents as “drawn from the miserable multitudes of the lost and stray, the stolen and tortured—literally the ‘under-dogs’ of their world.” Nor did they neglect to acknowledge celebrity animals who had begun their lives as foundlings.\(^{54}\)


The movement also enthusiastically celebrated canine service, devoting story after story to guard, police, and Seeing Eye dogs. The greatest acclaim was for those dogs who had served in war. Although the U.S. Army did not use dogs in WWI, other combatants did, and humane publications served up a steady diet of stories concerning these dogs' heroism. They ran similar stories about the courage and loyalty of American canine mascots. In addition, the Red Cross used American dogs, and their service also inspired numerous articles and news items. Some humane publications made a special point of arguing that America had a duty in the postwar era to take better care of its canine population, in light of animals' contribution to the war effort. Several anti-vivisection groups advanced wartime service as the grounds for a canine exemption from the laboratory.

For many years after the war, humane publications celebrated the happy fate and lives of American mascots, usually dogs who had traveled to Europe with the doughboys or returned with them after being adopted by members of the A.E.F. Some went on to achieve considerable post-war fame, like Stubby the bulldog, who became the

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Georgetown University mascot upon his return. These crowd-pleasing animal celebrities also appeared at benefit events for local humane societies. 57

Unlike the kennel club snoots of their day, humane society workers were not at all preoccupied with animals of high breeding, nor did they favor the excessive fawning and doting over animals that they associated with breed fanciers. On the contrary, humane advocates deplored such conduct and attitudes. Most were too involved with the relief and rescue of disadvantaged animals to devote themselves to dog fancy. They were, moreover, more conscious than the general public of the many hidden cruelties—like cropping—that lay behind the kennel club shows. 58

In fact, SPCAs in many cities sponsored “Plain Dog Shows” that deftly subverted the eugenicist snobbery of the kennel club, and glorified the “all-American Mutt.” In these democratic competitions, adopted mongrels and strays, irrespective of their breeding, received their due. While breeds were haphazardly represented, pedigree and show class counted for nothing. The award categories focused not on breed but on best dog owned by a driver, newsboy, scout, postman, teamster, or watchman. Human

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competitors related stories of rescue, sacrifice, heroism, and faithfulness on the part of their animal friends.59

The promotion of pet keeping also shaped the evolution of humane education outreach. Animal protectionists frequently asserted that children’s pets represented the best medium for the encouragement of humane sympathy and accompanying positive actions. According to George Angell, the keeping of animal companions provided a desirable socialization, one that society overlooked at its peril. “Out of two thousand criminals inquired of in American prisons, some years ago,” Angell claimed, “it was found that only twelve had any pet animal during their childhood.” Another animal protectionist similarly asserted, “Statistics have proved that not one criminal out of a hundred ever knew what it was to have a pet.” Progressive era advocates of nature-study also encouraged the keeping of pets. It was essential to accommodate the natural impulses of children to become acquainted with other forms of life, and it would be difficult to substitute for such experience in later life.60

Eventually, such convictions led humane societies to stage pet shows, in which children could exhibit their animal companions. The concept first surfaced in San


Francisco SPCA in 1905, and the movement drew endorsements from such notables as Luther Burbank, David Starr Jordan, Jack London, and Maria Montessori. While the staging of children's pet shows became an important part of humane work, it also generated a debate over the harm that children often caused to animals in their care. The issue of pet keeping in the classroom invoked much the same debate.\footnote{Exhibition of Pets,” ODA 48 (Nov. 1915), 89; Matthew McCurrie, “Children’s Pet Exhibitions,” National Humane Journal 12 (Sept. 1924), 168; “Pets for Children,” ODA 48 (Feb. 1916), 136; and Krows, Hounds of Hastings, 168. For Edward Everett Hale’s approval of the practice, see “Animal Pets in School,” Our Fellow Creatures 8 (May 1900), 140-41. For the qualified positions of nature-study, see Clifton F. Hodge, Nature Study and Life (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1902), 32-33, 36. For an endorsement of pet keeping in the classroom, see Laura B. Garrett, Study of Animal Families in Schools (New York: Bureau of Educational Experiments, 1917).}

Humane workers defended heartfelt expressions of sentiment for companion animals, even when they extended beyond the earthly vale. They looked with approval upon those who had gone so far as to provide for surviving companion animals after their own deaths. Some SPCA members held animal funerals when cherished companions died, and humane publications carried notices of services and ceremonies, such as the one in which a railroad mascot was borne to the grave in a casket carried by an engine car draped in black. Moreover, animal protection journals were a rich source of epitaphs and memorial rituals.\footnote{Bolton, Our Devoted Friend, 326-30; “Flora Bell’s Funeral,” All Day City Item, 23 July 1886, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1880-1902; “A Dog’s Impressive Funeral,” N. Y. Times 13 Mar. 1891, quoted in ODA 23 (Apr. 1891), 127; “Epitaphs on Animals,” QAF 29 (Apr. 1902) 178-80; “Story About a Dog,” ODA 51 (Feb. 1919), 134; “Epitaph for a Dog,” ODA 52 (Aug. 1919), 38; and “Pet Cat Is Buried with Much Ceremony,” Public Ledger, 19 Sept. 1921, PSPCA-PA, SBK Mar. 1917-Nov. 1922.}

Animal cemeteries surfaced at the turn of the century, both as private ventures and as part of humane society operations. Between 1896 and 1907, three were organized in New York State, including the one at Hartsdale. Both the Animal Rescue League of
Boston and the WPSPCA of Philadelphia created cemeteries for pets during this period. The idea caught on with other organizations as well. As their focus shifted increasingly toward dogs and cats, humane societies invested their energy in a range of issues relating to petkeeping. They provided veterinary advice and practical care. They screened prospective owners to ensure that animals were discharged to families and individuals who would do right by them. They investigated and attempted to thwart dog theft. They recommended rational and careful measures in cases of suspected rabies, and helped to administer licensing programs. They fought off the occasional bill to authorize farmers and shepherders to kill predatory dogs on sight, and underscored the pocket-lining character of compensatory programs that aided sheep farmers who claimed damages. They supported legislative initiatives that gave owners added rights to protect their companion animals as personal

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66 “If the Dog Appears Mad, Don’t Kill Him,” ODA 54 (Mar. 1922), 152.

property, and carefully followed court cases bearing on this and related questions. They fought legislation that prohibited immigrants from keeping animals. They underscored the morally and socially beneficial effects of positive interactions with animals. They worked hard to ensure that owners would not impose hardships, like interminable periods of being chained up without exercise, upon their dogs. They recognized as special heroes those who had acted to help or rescue animals.

The Rise of the Feline

In 1910, noting how much more popular the dog was than the cat, Walter Cannon, a physiologist involved in the defense of animal experimentation, privately proposed a movement to shift laboratory usage to the feline. For several reasons, this would not prove a sound proposal, and, before long, in a significant historical transition, the cat’s fortunes would begin to rise. However, Cannon’s observation of the cat’s status was not far wrong, for only a few years later the Animal Rescue League’s Anna Harris Smith judged that the cat had been unjustly targeted by shooters, overzealous bird defenders, and


70 “Dogs Must Have Exercise,” ODA 51 (Dec. 1918), 105.

and rumor-mongering health authorities intent upon scapegoating the species for a variety of problems.\footnote{Walter Cannon to W. W. Keen, 26 Feb. 1910. William Williams Keen Papers. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA; and Anna H. Smith, “Getting at the True Worth of the Cat,” NHR 3 (June 1915), 126-27.}

Moreover, as Smith and other humane advocates knew, the life of a cat, particularly in the urban environment, was often hard. A cat sometimes needed nine lives, hunted by dogs, shot, stoned and tortured by mischievous boys, destroyed by tradesmen, or given over to servants or employees with the instruction to dispose of the animal.\footnote{Cats were so vilified that one was blamed for infanticide and others were used as alibis in child abuse cases. “Accused of Child Murder,” N. Y. Times, 29 Dec. 1885; and O. L. Dudley, “Saving the Children: Sixteen Years’ Work Among the Dependent Youth of Chicago,” in History of Child Saving in the United States (Boston: George Ellis, 1893), 102-3.} Cats did not often figure in early SPCA prosecutions or relief work. The rare exception proved newsworthy, as when Henry Bergh forced workers to remove a building front to save one feline from entombment. An act of extreme sadism, if it involved cats, certainly commanded attention. Nevertheless, during Bergh’s career, cruelty to cats was rarely punished, even in cases that made it into the courts.\footnote{ASPCA Ann. R. 1870, 12-13; “Shooting Cats Unlawful,” N. Y. Times, 29 Jan. 1874, 8; “Cruelty to Cats,” ODA 9 (Mar. 1877), 77; “Mr. Bergh’s Triumph,” Unsourced, undated article (Oct. 1879), ASPCA-NY, SBK 8: 93; “Cruelty of a Fishmonger,” ODA 12 (Jan. 1880), 63; “Cruelty to a Cat,” Brooklyn Eagle, 11 May 1882, ASPCA-NY, SBK 1881-87; and “Shelter for Animals,” JOZ 7 (Sept. 1898), 99-101.}

By the 1890s, the humane societies had begun to undertake anti-cruelty work on behalf of cats. The harassment of cats with dogs surfaced as a common offense in the ASPCA’s annual reports. In 1895, humane agents tracked down a serial killer of cats who was setting his bulldogs on felines. In 1899, the ASPCA described an agent’s rescue of a cat who had gotten stuck between the walls of two adjoining buildings. During the
early years of the twentieth century, some humane societies also intervened against individuals' efforts to exterminate cats in private campaigns.75

The real trouble with cats lay in their prolific rates of reproduction. Abandonment, fecundity, and scavenging ability combined to produce an explosive growth of vagrant feline populations in urban areas. The surplus of cats, which urban residents who fled the cities in summer exacerbated through seasonal abandonment, brought annual pleas for humane action from the earliest days of organized concern.76 At the same time, cats constituted a nuisance, and some citizens deplored their caterwauling, predatory incursions, and destruction of backyard plants and flowers. Proposals for licensure and taxation, and for extermination of cats without collars or licenses, regularly surfaced.77

In New York, overpopulation was serious enough by 1880 that the Board of Aldermen considered a proposal requiring the capture and destruction of stray felines within three hours if unclaimed. Bergh's support for this measure generated striking public criticism. It also drew censure from the MSPCA, which thought a three-day

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minimum in the case of healthy animals who might be claimed by their owners was warranted, and from Philadelphia humane advocates concerned with the issue.78

Humanitarians were decidedly pragmatic in dealing with the surplus of felines created by abandonment, straying, and unchecked proliferation. Death was always the humane solution, since it left the animals—as the pseudonymous Philofelis, a self-proclaimed “cat lover,” wrote in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*—“safe forever from all of the chances of a world, which can hardly be called a kind one to superfluous kits or cats.” Many humane advocates operating on their own were quick and efficient in putting the cats they collected to sleep.79

Since the 1850s at least, women in several cities had been trying to relieve the suffering of homeless and stray cats. Animal control, pound, and shelter operations concentrated mostly on dogs, while cats proliferated without much attention. By the 1880s, however, Elizabeth Morris could note with pride that cat rescue was coming into its own.80 The first cat “shelters” were usually informal operations, almost always run by women.81 Sometimes, these people were “collectors,” or “hoarders,” who amassed

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dozens of animals in their homes. In 1893, a cat home in New York survived for a little less than six months. On the other hand, the Morris Refuge in Philadelphia, a pioneering cat facility that enjoyed the strong support of Caroline Earle White’s WPSPCA, received nearly 18,000 cats in the same year.

New York’s cat overpopulation problem was admittedly the worst. During 1900, the ASPCA put to death more than 257,000 cats, and by 1911 the figure reached 362,000. That year, a series of raids on the city’s tenement district brought in over 50,000 “ash-barrel” cats. The ASPCA’s average annual homeless cat kill during 1914-1916 was approximately 229,000, and this figure did not include animals relinquished by their owners.

In Boston, the Animal Rescue League destroyed 210,090 cats in a ten-year period between 1905 and 1914, and the number of animals taken in increased more than 200 percent over that span of time. Huntington Smith, the League’s managing director, cautioned that such figures did not necessarily signal an increase of cats in Boston.

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however, but reflected greater popular cooperation with collection efforts, and enhanced efficiency on the part of the organization’s agents and receiving stations.85

Feline immiseration caused by the unchecked multiplication of strays was one problem; the perceived threat those animals posed to the human population was still another. Public credulity made the charge that cats could act as carriers of medical disease a serious one. Many European immigrants, for instance, brought with them the superstitious belief that cats were predisposed to leap onto the bodies of sleeping infants to smother them, and the admonitions of physicians and public health authorities about the transmissibility of disease from non-human animals to humans did not help the situation. In the summer of 1916, an infantile paralysis scare led to the wholesale abandonment of cats by their owners, who rushed to police stations and humane society depots to give up their animals. In one day, the ASPCA in New York destroyed over 6,500 cats, and during the month of July close to 90,000 were killed.86 Reviewing the panic, Francis Rowley called for restraint in assessing the real risk posed by animals as transmitters of disease. He also pointed out that there were other risk factors “much more to be feared” than cats.87

85 Forbush, The Domestic Cat, 20-21.


Medical scares aside, the strongest objections to cats came from lovers and defenders of bird life, who emphasized the destructive impact of cats on bird populations, and were strong critics of letting cats roam out of doors. Such demonization reached its apogee in a full-length work by the state ornithologist of Massachusetts, Edward Forbush. "The Fireside Sphinx, the pet of the children, the admired habitué of the drawing-room or the salon by day," he underscored, "may become at night a wild animal, pursuing, striking down, and torturing its prey."

Abandoned and left to fend for themselves, Forbush wrote, hundred of thousands of cats had reverted to their wild state. They and their offspring became a menace to smaller animals, insectivorous birds, and poultry. Forbush was not alone in his opinions, and other ornithologists concurred in his assessment of the cat as the scourge of bird life. Some of his colleagues took decisive action in the struggle. During a three-year period between 1912 and 1915, agents of the New York Zoological Society trapped and destroyed over 600 feral cats living and hunting within its confines, and the Botanical Garden reported a similar result.

In 1917, the Ladies' Home Journal opened its pages to an intensive assault on the reputation of the cat, vilifying the species for the destruction of birds. Among its recommendations were a feline curfew and the attachment of belled collars on all cats. There were less shrill attacks, too, however, and bird protectors sometimes lamented the inability of the two factions to reach agreement upon a system for reducing the feline

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88 Forbush, The Domestic Cat, 7; and Bucher Bowdish, "Birds and Cats," NHR 10 (Aug. 1922), 159.

population and ensuring the safety of birds. Such articles often appeared as part of the regular debate on the pros and cons of licensing, which Audubon Society activists and medical authorities who believed the cat was a carrier of deadly disease generally supported. By the 1920s, the debate reached several state legislatures, where humane advocates faced licensing proposals backed by bird preservation groups.

The main opposition to licensing by humane advocates stemmed from their concern that poor or resentful citizens would not acknowledge ownership of their cats, and that this would lead to an increase in the number of homeless animals. Another reason for humane societies’ opposition to the licensing of cats was the necessity for collaring it imposed. Humanitarians considered it cruel and dangerous to place collars or ribbons around the necks of cats, pointing to the risk of strangulation and other injuries resulting from efforts to shed them.

Animal advocates also believed that proposals for licensing did not address the problem of reducing cat numbers directly enough. The best measure was the prompt and humane destruction of newborn kittens. The debate over licensing even generated one proposal for a system of taxation and registration biased against female cats, designed to

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92 Anna H. Smith, “Why I Oppose a Cat License,” OFF 11 (June 1912), 12-13; “Cat License,” OFF 11 (March 1913), 8; “Cat License Inhumane,” NHR 4 (Mar. 1916), 55; Do Not Leave Your Cat to Starve; and “Concerning Cats,” Starry Cross 31 (June 1922), 91.
make male cats the lords of every home. For some time, it was the policy of Boston’s Animal Rescue League and the New York-based ASPCA to adopt out only gelded male cats; all females were destroyed.  

Humanitarians also tried to counter anti-cat discourse by working to enhance the feline reputation. They celebrated the formation of cat homes and rescue organizations. They emphasized the admirable maternal affections of cats, their heroism, and even the fact of their having on occasion inspired important scientific invention. Cats, they pointed out, could be loyal and devoted pets, especially with training, and greatly contribute to human happiness. Cats had even performed wartime service as mascots, ratters, and gas detectors.

Animal protectionists were not alone in their efforts, either, as the cat had many devotees. One sign of the growing popularity of cats was the emergence of an ailurophilic literature. Among the books produced were several that reviewed the familiar scenarios of cruelty and neglect involving cats. Stories chronicling the

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93 “Cat Licenses Open to Criticism,” NHR 3 (Feb. 1915), 30; Mary C. Yarrow, “How to Destroy Kittens Humanely,” NHR 3 (Sept. 1915), 215; and Forbush, The Domestic Cat, 21.

94 “Hill-Top Home for Cats,” JOZ 23 (May 1914), 70.


97 “Cat in the Trenches,” NHR 3 (Nov. 1915), 255; “She is Only a Cat, But Her War Record is Lenghthy,” Starry Cross 29 (May 1920), 69; and “Cats in War,” NHR 8 (Jan. 1920), 11.

98 Miranda Swan, Daisy, Autobiography of a Cat (Boston: Noyes Brothers, 1900); S. Louise Patteson, Pussy Meow (George W. Jacobs, 1901); Agnes Repplier, The Fireside Sphinx (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1901); and A. Frances Friese, The Nomad of the Nine Lives (Boston: Sherman, French, and Co., 1914).
attachments of historical figures to their feline friends became staples of humane publications.\textsuperscript{99} So too did poetic laments about the feline condition.\textsuperscript{100}

In a more direct defense, animal protectionists pointed out that destruction of habitat, shooting, mischief, and the epicurean and fashion vanities of humans were responsible for greater decimation of bird populations than were cats.\textsuperscript{101} Even so, animal protectionists were quick to encourage cat lovers to restrain their feline companions and train them not to destroy bird life, through scolding and mild punishment. Advocates also recommended trimming cats’ forepaws back, making it harder for them to climb trees where they might catch and harm birds.\textsuperscript{102}

The cat’s utility was the final line of defense offered by humane advocates, who frequently had to refute claims by Forbush and others that cats were actually very poor “ratters” and that they transmitted serious diseases to human beings.\textsuperscript{103} In reply, animal protectionists pointed out that cats were the best check on the nation’s rat population.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{99} H. M. Hobson, “The Cat in the Literary World,” \textit{ODA} 50 (Aug. 1917), 45; and “Cats and Authors,” \textit{ODA} 50 (Feb. 1918), 140.


\textsuperscript{101} “Care of Our Useful Friends,” \textit{OFF} 10 (Apr. 1911), 10; “Puss has a Defender,” \textit{ODA} 54 (May 1922), 182; and “Sound Advice About Cats and Birds,” \textit{NHR} 11 (Sept. 1923), 180.

\textsuperscript{102} “Our Cats,” \textit{ODA} 48 (Dec. 1915), 104; and “On Rendering Cats Harmless,” \textit{NHR} 6 (Apr. 1918), 75.

\textsuperscript{103} “Objects to Cats,” \textit{ODA} 47 (Mar. 1915), 157; and Forbush, \textit{The Domestic Cat}, 63-68, 82-87.

At the same time, advocates had to couple their claims that cats were excellent destroyers of rats and mice with assurances that cats were not carriers of contagious human disease. Moreover, bowing to public health concerns, humane societies also advised that animals be restricted from entering the rooms of the sick. 105

In the early years of the twentieth century, only a few SPCAs even collected cats as part of their duties. By 1913, this had begun to change, and humane societies began to assume the practical and financial burdens of handling and destroying cats. 106 Over time, urbanization, and especially the advent of large-scale apartment living, pushed the cat up the ladder of popularity. In many circumstances, the cat, her predatory instincts and indiscriminate breeding brought under control, became the better companion for the home. However, this rise in the fortunes of the cat was a slow one, and yesterday’s cat was not nearly so well regarded as today’s.

## Conclusion

As the horse disappeared from the streets, the dog and cat increasingly became the subject of humane societies’ relief and law enforcement activities. As the city pound gave way to the animal shelter, with its novel concept of animal adoption and more caring approaches to animal control, the work of the humane societies gradually came to center on the dog and cat, and advocates found themselves increasingly preoccupied with abandonment, overpopulation, cruelty, and pet care. With the rationalization of shelter work came the expanded dissemination of veterinary advice, the provision of veterinary

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medical care, and the mediation of problems centering on companion animals. Key issues in animal care and welfare—such as rabies, euthanasia, neutering, licensing, taxation, destruction, and veterinary medical service—gradually came to dominate the agenda of the SPCAs.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, a number of SPCAs opened dispensaries and hospitals that offered free animal care to the poor. This directly subsidized pet keeping by the less affluent, while helping to ensure that their animals would be well cared for and free of diseases that might threaten humans or animals. This commitment to animal care also facilitated the wider dissemination of common sense veterinary advice to the public, an estimable benefit for humans and animals alike. Such services steadily expanded over the years.¹⁰⁷

Although humane advocates shifted toward dog and cat work consciously and willingly, this new emphasis made it more difficult to address the suffering of animals in transportation, slaughterhouses, laboratories, captive settings, and the wild. The more resources the local societies invested in animal control, the less they were able to devote to other issues. The broad-gauge agenda of kindness-to-animals waned, as municipal animal control became the movement’s principal preoccupation.