Sometime in 1870, reporting on a new institution in Philadelphia, the New York Tribune pointed, with amusement, to a "gush of sweet emotion" in the City of Brotherly Love. There, it seemed, dogs have suddenly been discovered to be the most precious heritage and wards of the Philadelphia public. The quality of mercy there is being strained... Verses in their honor are freely circulated in the public schools, and to every child who commits them a reward is given of the photograph of some noble cur. The ladies (God Bless Them) who lead this popular movement have petitioned Councils for $25,000 to erect an Asylum, or more properly speaking, a House of Entertainment, for such dogs as may have lost their way while pursuing their daily walks abroad.¹

In its rush to satirize, however, the Tribune told its readers very little about the new "Asylum"—America's first animal shelter—or the serious practical goals of its founders. Tipping its hat to Henry Bergh's humane endeavors, the article lamented the tendency of women to "get hold of a theory... and befrill and beruffle it... as they would a dress."

In fact, the women in question, members of the Women's Branch of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA), had gone well beyond Bergh in forging a new path for humane work. It was one that would alter the course of animal protection in the United States. Because of their efforts, the animal

shelter became a fundamental institution of the humane movement, and an important
locus for the transmission of its values.

Beyond this single accomplishment, moreover, Caroline Earle White, the pillar of
Philadelphia activism, became one of the most influential and by far the most important
female figure in American humane work. White devoted more than half a century to
animal protection, and was a pioneer in strategy, tactics, public education, litigation,
enforcement, and pragmatic care for animals. In many respects, her long-term influence
surpassed that of Henry Bergh and George Angell, the other members of the movement’s
founding triumvirate. ²

Finally, the Women’s Branch exemplified the inherent opportunities for women
in humane work. Concern for animals became an established domain of women’s social
activism, in part because the larger society deemed it an appropriate channel for feminine
sensitivities. The Women’s Branch members made the most of this assumption, and, in
their hands, concern for animals became not simply a suitable channel for women’s
energies but an important expression of social feminism.

The Origins of Humane Work in Pennsylvania

Within a week of Bergh’s incorporation of the American Society for the
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), Philadelphia newspaperman M. Richards
Mucklé published a notice soliciting the support of like-minded persons for an

² For biographical information, see Jane Campbell, “Mrs. Caroline Earle White. The Friend of the
Animal Creation,” Woman’s Progress 1 (June 1893), 113-23; idem, “Mrs. Caroline Earle White,
Reformer,” American Catholic Historical Review 33 (Mar. 1922): 28-51; “Women Leaders in Humane
Work,” Our Fourfooted Friends 11 (Oct. 1912), 2-3; and Mary F. Lovell and Mrs. John H. Easby,
“Caroline Earle White,” in Gertrude B. Biddle and Sarah D. Lowrie, eds., Notable Women of Pennsylvania
(Phila.: 1942), 186-87.
organization to pursue the same work in that city. From his office window at Third and Chestnut, Muckle often witnessed the mistreatment of animals who carried people and freight through the city, and he sometimes went into the street to remonstrate with drivers. Muckle had been considering the formation of an anti-cruelty society in the fall of 1865, but suspended his efforts for want of information concerning the movement in England.³

Other Philadelphians were thinking and acting along similar lines. Kate Covert had been taking in animals and trying to place them in homes since 1844. As early as 1858, Annie Waln and Elizabeth Morris, two women who would play significant roles in the Women’s Branch, began collecting strays with the same goal. Waln and Morris used chloroform to kill animals too ill or otherwise unfit for placement. In 1860, Waln’s brother, a prominent Quaker merchant, wrote to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) for information about starting a similar organization, but, as he later recalled, “the unhappy civil war . . . caused the plan to be deferred.” Instead,
Samuel Morris Waln made testamentary provisions to support the founding of such a society.4

In a late-life reminiscence, Caroline Earle White recalled that she had always loved animals, and that the frequency of animal abuse at intersections near her home caused her so much distress that she avoided those streets altogether. Years before she helped to launch the PSPCA, attorney Richard White, her Irish-born fiancé, suggested that with such affinities she should support the RSPCA.5 White read of Henry Bergh’s work while vacationing in the Adirondacks, and, in the summer of 1866, after visiting him in New York, she determined to gather support for a society to prevent cruelty to animals in her own city. Together with her husband, she began to secure signatures for a petition supporting its formation. It may have been Bergh who told her about Muckle’s interest, but, in any case, White and the newspaperman were soon working together. White’s husband helped them draft a charter with laws patterned after the New York model, and they soon gained the approval of all the judges of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, as well as the endorsement of other judicial officials in the state. By the end of February 1867, the state legislature had granted a charter, and the PSPCA was incorporated in April 1868. White, by one account, coaxed a $10,000 donation from S.

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5 Campbell, “Caroline Earle White, Reformer,” 37.
Morris Waln to endow the new organization. One year later, the PSPCA convened a public meeting at which Bergh spoke before 2,000 Philadelphians.  

Caroline Earle White descended from reform-minded Quakers on both sides. Her father Thomas Earle, an architect of the 1838 revision of the Pennsylvania Constitution, actively campaigned for Negro suffrage and the abolition of slavery. Earle was the Liberty Party’s vice presidential candidate in 1840. White’s mother Mary was also active in anti-slavery work. One uncle, Pliny Earle, was a psychiatrist and pioneering reformer in the care of the insane; another, John Milton Earle, was a Free Soiler and an ally of Charles Sumner. White’s brother, George Earle, was an attorney and abolitionist lecturer, who, like their father, took on many slaves and freedmen as clients. In her youth, White attended anti-slavery conventions, contributed money to the cause, and was a follower and admirer of the abolitionist and feminist Mary Grew. White endorsed the women’s suffrage movement, but devoted little of her own energy to the cause.

Although she was the principal force behind the organization of the PSPCA, it was her husband, not White herself, who was elected to serve on the board. Mary F. Lovell and Jane Campbell, who knew her well, believed that White had not initially expected “to take an active part in the administration of [PSPCA] affairs.” But male
leaders quickly “discovered that the cooperation of women was essential to the carrying on of the work.” Samuel Morris Waln, the PSPCA’s first president, “advanced enough to realize how useful women might be,” asked White to form a women’s division. The Women’s Branch of the PSPCA first met on April 14, 1869 at Waln’s home, with thirty women in attendance. Among those present was Adele Biddle, daughter of Nicholas Biddle, one-time head of the Bank of the United States and adversary of President Andrew Jackson. Biddle and Lovell, an English-born temperance activist, became White’s closest allies.

The formation of organizational auxiliaries was a common means for dividing men’s and women’s roles in benevolent work throughout the nineteenth century. In general, female auxiliaries functioned to raise money, and the women did no public lecturing, penned no pamphlets, and intervened only modestly in public life. By 1869, as the case of the Women’s Branch demonstrates, the strength of this model had waned. By the end of its first year, the Women’s Branch had close to 400 members, compared to 570 for the men’s society. The Women’s Branch recruited members through networks of kinship and friendship; its annual reports listed those who joined under the names of those who had solicited their support. Yet the Women’s Branch was anything but a

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9 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1870, 3.

10 On membership figures, see Mary F. Lovell, History of the Women’s SPCA From its Foundation April 14, 1869 to January 1908 (Phila.: 1908), 4. On the men’s society, see AHA, Ann. R. 1881, 60.
mere fund-raising section; it published a wide range of literature and its members actively participated in all aspects of humane work.

Women did, of necessity, adjust their tactics to avoid personally enforcing anticyrty statutes. Direct interference with offenders, the majority of whom were men, would have been exacting and sometimes dangerous for a woman. “If I were a man, I am quite sure that I should follow your example,” White once wrote Bergh, who prowled the streets of New York City directly challenging the mistreatment of animals, “but as it has pleased Almighty God to create me a woman, I must be satisfied with a more limited sphere of labor, and do the little good I can with my tongue.”

As it turned out, White did not settle for a limited sphere of labor, or restrict her efforts to the verbal good she could accomplish. Moreover, the gendered division of humane work in Philadelphia had more significant implications than the abstention of women from direct enforcement. Over time, the example of the Women’s Branch would have important consequences for the evolution of humane work in the United States.

The General Work of Humane Reform

In its early years, the PSPCA was very active in the reform of agricultural, stockyard, market, and slaughterhouse cruelties. The organization was vigorous in its attacks on “bagging,” the practice of allowing milk to collect in cows’ udders in order to make them seem more productive before sale. In 1870, the PSPCA’s attempted prosecution of a farmer was foiled by the judge’s charge to the jury that such practices

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were not "unusual." This occurred even though two physicians testified that "if the secretion of milk be so great as to distend the udder beyond its normal condition, pain and suffering to the animal must ensue." The PSPCA persevered in its prosecution attempts, but this was not the last time that the organization lost such a case. Bagging was prevalent in all of the counties surrounding Philadelphia.  

The PSPCA also tried to curb other agricultural and commercial cruelties. One was the tying of calves' legs en route to market, a common custom of butchers who traveled to farms to purchase animals. The organization also challenged the practice of bleeding calves 24 hours before slaughter in order to whiten their meat. In addition, the PSPCA policed the market districts for cases of cruelty to poultry shipped to the city, discovering shocking instances of misery, death, adulterated meat, and moral depravity. 

Both the men's and women's branches of the PSPCA focused on the cruelties of the stockyard and the slaughterhouse. In June 1872, the PSPCA's corresponding secretary Pliny Earle Chase (White's cousin) complained to the Philadelphia Board of Health that "cattle arriving at the Union Stockyard, West Philadelphia, on Friday and Saturday evenings, are frequently dead or in a dying condition, but they are nevertheless


dressed as if regularly slaughtered, and it is believed that their meat is offered for sale in our markets.”

The PSPCA lobbied congressional representatives in support of a federal cattle transportation bill, suggesting an amendment to prohibit the shipment of large and small animals in the same car. “In the trains which arrive at our drove yards,” Chase wrote Congressman William D. Kelley, “hogs and sheep are often crushed to death by larger cattle.” Under White’s leadership, the Women’s Branch took other measures to promote reform in the transportation of cattle for slaughter. Around 1876, White abandoned a planned prosecution effort after her organization secured the promise of the Pennsylvania Railroad to move cattle trains more expeditiously rather than shunt them aside in favor of freight cargo.

As Bergh had done in New York City, Philadelphia humanitarians confronted the horse car transportation interests of the city, most notably the Philadelphia Traction Company, forcing the removal of animals from work because of lameness or other ailments. In July 1869, the PSPCA secured a verdict against two employees of the Union Passenger Railway Company for overloading. Just a year later, the societies worked to pass legislation limiting the number of passengers on rail cars to thirty, but the effort failed. In 1872, a round of cases, some brought during that year’s devastating equine epidemic, revealed a problem that would hold back progress on this question for years—the hesitation of many magistrates to fine and punish drivers who argued that they were


15 Chase to William D. Kelley, 13 Dec. 1872, in PSPCA-HSP, LBK 1872-76; and AHA, Ann. R. 1884, 43-44.
merely following the orders of their supervisors or the heads of the railway companies that employed them.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1873, a woman passenger filed a complaint of cruelty against the Spruce and Pine Street Railroad, having witnessed the overburdening of horses on a day following a heavy snowstorm. She had taken the trouble to visit the railroad depot in an effort to redress the situation. In this case, the line’s superintendent was fined $20 for failing to add horses. The Philadelphia District Attorney actively opposed the PSPCA's efforts to promote prosecution of the street railway companies and their employees, however, asserting that the anti-cruelty statute was not meant to apply to such enterprise. He did the same thing the following year in a case where the Tenth and Eleventh Street Railway ran only two horses per car during a snowstorm.\textsuperscript{17}

In one particular, the situation in Philadelphia was worse than that in New York. The New York street railway lines generally took passengers on or let them off only at the principal crossings. In Philadelphia, frequent stops and sudden starts to accommodate passengers waiting just a few feet apart wore heavily upon the horses. The main offenders were women, because men were often in the habit of hopping on and off of the cars while they were still in motion. Many women, on the other hand, liked to have the


car stop at their doorstep. The Women's Branch specifically appealed to women to refrain from stopping the cars anywhere except the crossings.\textsuperscript{18}

During the 1870s, agents of both the men's and women's societies remained active on the streetcar issue. In the Centennial Year of 1876, it was their main focus. In January, the Women's Branch petitioned the state legislature to limit the number of passengers in the city's street railway cars, anticipating that the increase in visitors to Philadelphia would exacerbate the already serious problem of overloading. During the year, PSPCA agents removed 400 horses used to transport passengers to the Centennial exhibition grounds from harness, and distributed thousands of pamphlets to visitors. The situation worsened during a mid-summer heat wave, in which one of the lines going out to the Centennial site registered losses of 16 to 18 horses daily for a week.\textsuperscript{19}

However, humane agents did not arrest any drivers unless the animals “gave out,” thinking it futile. “The magistrates take the ground that if the horses are able to pull the cars, they are not overloaded,” White noted, “and they take no account of the cruelty that is inflicted in the endeavor to start the cars, and to draw them round a curve or up an ascending grade, of the tremendous spraining and wrenching of all the muscles and sinews of these noble animals, which it is so distressing to witness.”\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} “Stopping Cars at Street Corners,”\textit{ ODA} 9 (June 1876), 2; and “Stop Horse-Cars at Street Corners Only,”\textit{ ODA} 9 (Feb. 1877), 68.

\textsuperscript{19} Women's Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Jan. 12, 1876, WHS Papers; Women's Branch PSPCA,\textit{ Ann. R. 1876}, 9-10; and “The Excessive Heat,”\textit{ Phila. Press}, 13 July 1876, and “The Poor Car Horse,”\textit{ Phila. Inquirer}, 14 July 1876, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1866-1877.

\textsuperscript{20} Women's Branch PSPCA,\textit{ Ann. R.} 1877, 5-6; and “Early History of the Pennsylvania SPCA,” Undated article,\textit{ Phila. Ledger}, PBC-TUUA.
Some Philadelphia newspapers took an even harsher view of the magistrates. “One of the most serious obstacles to the good work of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is the opposition of the magistrates to bind over to answer at court the drivers of horses that are not in a physical condition to be worked,” one editorialist noted. “Whenever such a horse is owned by a railway company, these magistrates are more anxious to protect the companies than to punish them for cruelty.”

For their part, the streetcar companies preferred to let their drivers go to jail than to pay the fine. Some were profligate in their use of crippled horses. Moreover, they did not stand by while the humane societies interfered. The Lombard and South Street Railway was particularly adamant about defying humane restrictions. In 1891, streetcar companies made a bold effort to secure legislation that would have limited humane agents to taking down the names of offending drivers, prohibiting them from removing any animal from harness. In a close contest, animal protectionists fought the measure off.

Ultimately, as in New York, the street railway interests proved too powerful for the SPCAS. White’s moral authority was sufficient to have a recalcitrant and abusive driver dismissed by one concern, but none of the companies would consider voluntarily limiting their passenger load. White could not even secure their commitment to make stops only at intersections. Test cases proved inconclusive, most efforts to negotiate improvements failed, and all attempts at regulation of the transportation monopolies were

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defeated in either the city council or state legislature. Finally, as White noted, “our hands have in no wise been strengthened by the people themselves, who while complaining of the abuse of car horses, continue by overcrowding the cars to encourage and aid in it.”

**Animal Control: Rabies, and the Dog Roundup**

The distinctive character of organized humane reform in Pennsylvania did not rest merely upon the heightened participation of women. Rather, it centered on the introduction of the animal shelter, a concept that members of the Women’s Branch imported from England. Neither Henry Bergh nor George Angell envisioned shelters for loose-running canines as a part of humane work. Nor were the establishment of an animal shelter and the assumption of a role in animal control among the original goals of the male-dominated PSPCA. Credit for the creation of an institution that would rationalize animal control, enhance the prospects for animals’ adoption into new homes, and guarantee the option of a merciful death belonged to the women of Philadelphia.

The inception of the animal shelter in the United States proceeded directly from the dread of rabies, or hydrophobia, which generated powerful anxieties. Beyond an understanding of the classic bite-wound chain of transmission, nineteenth-century knowledge was inadequate, and many innocuous conditions in the dog were mistaken for rabies. The belief that the disease carried a fatal prognosis for its human victims

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heightened the sense of fear that drove public debate and municipal extermination campaigns.25

While the perceived threat of rabies caused great anxiety, and inspired exaggerated actions designed to control its spread, it was a disease of relatively minor importance from a scientific and medical perspective, occurring quite rarely in humans. The sequence of breakthroughs that led to an understanding of rabies came in the 1880s with the work of Louis Pasteur (1822-1895). Pasteur’s study of rabies opened up the field of germ theory—the study of microorganisms in the causation and spread of disease. Yet, in the judgment of many epidemiologists, Pasteur’s work saved very few lives, leading one biographer to conjecture that Pasteur selected it for study as a romantic problem, one that “had long had a firm hold on public imagination and was the epitome of terror and mystery.”26

Pasteur was particularly interested in demolishing the theory of spontaneity—the notion that rabies could occur de proprio motu in any being, human or animal, at any time. Pasteur would not publish his first paper on rabies until 1881, although Henri Marie Bouley (1814-1885) had asserted by 1870 that the cause of rabies could be found in the saliva. Symptoms of the disease in humans, as Pasteur and others had observed it,

25 The term “hydrophobia” reflected the belief that the affected individual, human or non-human, suffered from a morbid dread of water. Today we know that while rabies is fatal in dogs, it is not invariably so in humans. Indeed, humans are not extremely susceptible. Not every exposure results in infection, even when the exposure comes in the form of a rabid animal’s bite. Viral particles in the saliva of a rabid dog penetrate the victim’s skin, through the bite, and then incubate in the tissues. They then travel rapidly to the central nervous system, where they cause acute encephalitis. The key determinant is whether the rabid animal was secreting the virus in its saliva at the moment it bit someone. An infection can only be presumed to have occurred when an individual actually develops rabies.

consisted of “spasms, restlessness, shudders at the least breath of air, an ardent thirst, 
accompanied with an absolute impossibility of swallowing, convulsive movements, fits 
of furious rage . . . horrible suffering.”

Pasteurian science precipitated a major social transformation, spurring a dramatic 
redefinition of hygiene, science, and medicine, both in relation to one another and within 
the larger social matrix. Through its elucidation of rabies and the development of a 
vaccine, Pasteur’s work transformed the human-animal bond, making petkeeping a much 
safer practice. Joseph Ernest Renan, welcoming Pasteur into the Académie Française, 
portentously remarked, “Humanity will owe to you deliverance from a horrible disease 
and also from a sad anomaly. I mean the distrust which we cannot help mingling with the 
caresses of the animal in whom we see most of nature’s smiling benevolence.”

Some observers constructed rabies, like cholera, as a threat posed by the urban 
poor, their irresponsible habits, and the filthy environment in which they lived. Rabies 
was different from cholera and other medical threats, however, because it was not the 
urban proletariat but rather their dogs who carried pestilence, dirt, and disease into the 
world of more privileged classes. All persons, regardless of class or character, were 
vulnerable to the depredations of menacing canines who ran wild in the streets. In the

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28 DuBos, *Free Lance*, 332. Kathleen Kete points out that Pasteur’s fellow Parisians thought that rabies was caused by sexual frustration. Thus, it was necessary but risky to have to lock up one’s dog. See Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir: Petkeeping in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 103-4, passim.
popular imagination, such dogs threatened not only the individual but also the social body.\textsuperscript{29}

For their part, animal protectionists generally opposed the viral theory of rabies, probably motivated by the feeling that it did not improve the animals' case in the court of public opinion. Under the theory of spontaneity, it was easier to defend animals as innocent victims rather than marauding agents of danger, and to assert that the condition could threaten humans even when they had not been bitten. George Angell frequently published items skeptical of the viral basis of hydrophobia, and Samuel Morris Waln informed readers of one Philadelphia newspaper that rabies could "originate in the human system without the instrumentality of any animal."\textsuperscript{30}

Humane advocates also entered the public debate over muzzling as a preventive measure against the threat. They argued that muzzling was a cruel practice that prevented animals from using their open mouths to breathe and perspire, and caused them severe discomfort. Because of the irritation and aggravation it caused, muzzling, far from preventing rabies, was more likely to induce it. It did this, they sometimes alleged, by arresting the natural secretions of the body, turning them inward, and corrupting the blood in such a way as to propagate the very disease it was meant to prevent.


\textsuperscript{30} George Angell, "Hydrophobia and the Imagination," \textit{ODA} 6 (Aug. 1873), 15; and S. Morris Waln, Letter to the Editor, \textit{The Age}, 10 May 1870, WPSPCA-HSP, SBK.
Humanitarians also advanced the claim that hydrophobia was not only rare in its occurrence but no more prevalent in summer than in other seasons.\(^{31}\)

In Philadelphia, newspaper commentary on the dog roundup condemned its barbarities. For as long as many could remember, a group of African-Americans led by the infamous Jim Francis had done the dog catching. The rough and tumble chase scenes that followed attracted all sorts of hangers on, including the orphans at Girard College, located near the pound. Mischievous boys would set off the cry of “Mad dog!” and cause further panic. On occasion, a policeman might become involved in the chase and increase both the excitement and the danger by firing his revolver at fleeing animals.\(^{32}\)

The methods for catching and disposing of animals in Philadelphia, New York, and other municipalities varied in their details, but they were all violent operations. In Philadelphia, dogcatchers lassoed the animals with ropes that choked them, and then dragged them to their wagons, sometimes several blocks away. The men roughly tossed the dogs inside, often breaking their legs and necks. The animals were then taken to the pound, a dilapidated building with a dirt floor, where no food, water, or suitable bedding was available. After a waiting period of one to two days, attendants hung the dogs up on ropes and chains or tossed them into small pens, and then bludgeoned them to death with clubs. The crudeness of such methods meant that not all of the animals died.


immediately, and there were grisly reports of lingering deaths. Sometimes, dogs who appeared dead would revive and throw themselves off the "dead cart," struggling to escape further blows. The dogs were slaughtered in plain sight of one another, and an anonymous journalist described the scene at the Corinthian Avenue pound as a "feast for fiends." 33

In New York, the preferred means of disposal involved packing dogs inside an iron cage or barge, which dogcatchers lowered into a local river or a large tank of water. In the summer of 1859, New York disposed of close to 10,000 dogs in this manner. During the 1860s and 1870s, the city's newspapers conveyed the magnitude of the summer roundup. Parasol-toting women and their escorts lined up at one end of the Sixteenth Street Pound, while wagons full of dogs and numerous individual handlers with dogs in tow converged at the facility to exchange animals for monetary compensation. In New York, as in most cities, the pound maintained class distinctions. Dogs who appeared healthy and well cared for were presumed to be pets and thus received a few days' reprieve in anticipation of their owners' appearance with the redemption fees (two dollars in New York City and Philadelphia) and reimbursement for feeding and other care. Poundkeepers assumed that less healthy and poorly groomed dogs were abandoned or unwanted strays. They did not even bother to feed these animals, intending to kill

them, if unclaimed, within 24 hours. Hence, impounded animal companions of working class people had very little chance of survival.34

The Women's Branch and the Dog Shelter

Taking over municipal animal control responsibilities in Philadelphia and re-establishing the pound as a shelter or sanctuary where citizens could seek lost and adoptable animals, the Women's Branch set a precedent that would be widely emulated in other communities. Their assumption of duties at the pound built upon an informal tradition of animal rescue in the city, for some women associated with the Branch had been attempting to help stray dogs and cats for some years already. This ongoing rescue work set the stage for the involvement of Philadelphia women with the problems of rational animal control, the threat of rabies, and humane methods of extermination.

Once formed, the Women's Branch lost little time in placing municipal animal control at the heart of its agenda. In June 1869, at their third meeting, Branch members approved a motion to create "a Refuge for lost and homeless dogs, where they could be kept until homes could be found for them, or they be otherwise disposed of." The motion carried unanimously, and the women wrote to George Angell, then traveling in Europe,

requesting as much information as possible about the Dog Hospital in Paris, and the Home for Friendless Dogs in London,” two institutions performing similar work.35

The information gained from Angell and others helped to shape the response of the Women’s Branch to the challenge of animal control in Philadelphia. England’s Battersea Home, formed in 1860, established the basic rules that would guide most similar institutions in succeeding years. Angell reported that dogs brought to the London home “are kept several days to be reclaimed by owners: afterward if not claimed, [they] are given to such persons as wish for them and will undertake to properly care for them. If no one offers to take them, after a length of time, varying according to their apparent value, they are mercifully killed.”36

Inspired by Angell’s report, Branch members decided in November 1869 to “initiate measures that would promote our obtaining the control of the taking up and disposing of stray dogs.” The women resolved to seek complete authority over the existing city pound. This would guarantee their power to supervise the manner of killing the dogs, for so long as city employees managed the site, they believed, there could be no certainty in providing for humane death. Samuel Morris Waln, though dubious of their chances of securing control, promised the women $5,000 if they achieved their goal.37


36 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Nov. 29, 1869, WHS Papers. The rules in use at London’s Home for Lost and Starving Dogs in 1860 are in Cottesloe, Battersea Dogs’ Home, 20.

37 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Nov. 29, 1869, WHS Papers; Silver Festival of the Women’s Branch (1893), 5; and Caroline Earle White, “An Item of Past History,” 35-36.
The women’s social position undoubtedly contributed to the rapid success of their campaign, and mitigated at least some gender-related limitations. In early January 1870, Caroline Earle White met with Mayor Daniel Fox, and, just a few weeks later, he granted final approval of a plan to give the Women’s Branch charge over the dog roundup, although he reserved the right to pay and direct the dogcatchers. It was a little more difficult to persuade the City Council to direct funds usually earmarked for the work to the Women’s Branch, and the women had to make due with a smaller subsidy than expected.38

White later recalled that at the moment of their intervention the pound was “a miserable one story building with an earthen floor. Here, the unfortunate animals were confined, all thrown in indiscriminately together, without any food or water, for one to two days, at the end of which time, if not redeemed, they were killed.” This killing, White continued, “was inflicted in each other’s sight by men armed with bludgeons, who, after fastening them up to the beams of the building by chains, beat out their brains.”39

After the Women’s Branch took over, its officers introduced a series of humane innovations. Dogcatchers worked with scoop nets instead of lassoes, thereby avoiding the strangulation of dogs. In addition, the organization equipped the dogcatchers’ wagons with shock-absorbing “springs,” and partitioned them to protect the smaller dogs from the depredations of the larger ones.40

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38 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Quarterly Meeting, Jan. 5, 1870, and Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Feb. 23, 1870, WHS Papers; and “A Severe Blow,” JOZ 16 (July 1907), 80-81.

39 Silver Festival, 4-5.

The Women's Branch also began anew by relocating the pound to a property near Twentieth and Lehigh, on city-owned ground, where the shelter commenced operation in a building constructed sometime in 1870. The facility consisted of a yard divided into two parts, one dedicated to animals waiting to be reclaimed by owners, the other for unclaimed animals. (On several occasions, White indicated that the animals were separated by sex.) Roofed housing surrounded the sides of the enclosure, allowing the dogs to claim shelter or to have free run as they wished. Arbored grapevines provided shade and protection from the summer heat. At the center of the yard stood a pump and water trough, at all times accessible. All of the dogs were fed, regardless of whether or not they were to be killed. Their diet ordinarily consisted of "horse-flesh, in good condition, and in the summer, cracklings [crisps of fried pork skin and fat] and boiled corn meal." 

Significantly, the Branch leadership decided to capture animals throughout the year, rejecting the claim that the summer months constituted a special period of transmission, and believing that the most effective measure to reduce overall risk was to "clear the streets of all dogs running at large.” The vindication of their views about the proper means of addressing the threat of rabies was a goal that White and her coworkers took seriously.

41 "The Philadelphia Dog Shelter," N. Y. Times, 25 Aug. 1871, 2; Women's Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R 1881, 10-11; and "Quaker City Pounds—Ample Yards and Kennels Provided; How the Animals are Killed When It is Necessary to Execute Them," Undated article, New York Herald, WPSPCA-HSP, SBK.

42 "Philadelphia—The Dog Shelter—The Manner of Catching and Disposing of Dogs That Run at Large," Frank Leslie's, 30 Aug. 1873, 393; and Women's Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R 1881, 11.

43 Caroline Earle White, "Hydrophobia," The Age, Undated article, WPSPCA-HSP, SBK.
Others took the threat seriously as well. Indeed, concern that sentimentality and naïveté would overwhelm hard-nosed practicality in addressing the menace of hydrophobia accounted for much of the criticism directed at the Women’s Branch. Citing known and alleged cases of hydrophobia, the Philadelphia Inquirer insisted on an aggressive policy of killing loose-running animals in the public interest.44

One of the most important innovations the shelter managers introduced was that of voluntary relinquishment as an alternative to abandonment. They promoted the institution as a place to which people could bring animals suffering on account of age, illness, or accident for a painless death. The shelter also sold unclaimed dogs of value to subsidize its operations. Under the management of the Women’s Branch, the shelter became a safe and (sometimes) a redemptive social space, as well as a means for diminishing the disorder and cruelty of the stray animal roundups.45

Beyond the obvious demands of imposing order on a chaotic process—the catching, keeping, and killing of dogs—the Philadelphia women faced other challenges. For several years, the shelter concept continued to meet with cynicism and ridicule in some quarters. On occasion, newspapers criticized the Women’s Branch for doting on dogs in the midst of so much human misery. Disparaging a similar operation, the London Home for Lost Dogs, Harper’s Weekly painted a picture of secure and spacious accommodations and pampered, healthy inmates. Only the final paragraph betrayed the


45 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1870, 5; Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1873, 16; and “Philadelphia—The Dog Shelter,” 393.
truth of the animals' uncertain destiny. The Harper’s piece echoed one of the most common accusations leveled against animal protectionists—that their priorities were misordered. Calling the shelter “a mockery of Christian charity,” the article minced no words:

The feeling that prompted the establishment of such an institution is doubtless noble and humane; but isn’t it rather stretching sentimental humanity to care for dogs, and leave children to die of cold and hunger? A canine waif is carefully picked up and enviously tended until claimed by its owner or otherwise humanely disposed of; while a human waif, with an immortal soul to be saved or lost, is generally left to shiver and starve until it has done something for which it can be sent to jail.

Concern over adverse publicity prompted the managers of the Women’s Branch to mount an active campaign of letter writing concerning shelter practices, hydrophobia, and the charge of misanthropy. Even before the shelter began to operate, they changed its name, “The Home for Dogs,” to “The Temporary Shelter for Lost Animals” to avert misunderstanding and ridicule. Branch members specifically shunned use of the term “pound” because of the negative connotations generated by the city’s previous methods, and substituted “dog-shelter” at every opportunity. They even named the facility’s mascot “Shelter.”

White and her colleagues also marshaled whatever information they could to demonstrate the integrity and efficiency of the operation. Each year they provided statistics concerning the numbers of animals taken in by the dogcatchers and those relinquished by citizens, as well as those that the shelter sold, gave away, or euthanized.

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47 Caroline Earle White to All Day City Item, 25 May 1874; and Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Nov. 1874, WHS Papers.
There were decidedly human concerns at issue, too. One of the most important involved the honest accounting of funds, as prior evidence existed of policemen, dogcatchers, and poundkeepers "knocking down" redemption money for themselves. By one estimate, only a third of the money taken in had been going to the city under the old arrangement. The situation improved when White hired Philip Marett as shelter manager. Beyond tending to finances, the responsibility of helping White answer criticism also fell to Marett.\footnote{Women's Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Apr. 27, 1871 and May 16, 1872, WHS Papers; "The Dogs--Trouble and Statistics," Undated, unsourced article, WPSPCA-HSP, SBK; and "Rusticus' and the Superintendent of the City Dog Shelter," \textit{All Day City Item}, 18 Jan. 1873, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1866-1877.}

In time, the Women's Branch pursued a course of expansion for the operation. In 1874, Elizabeth Morris and Annie Waln established a depot and auxiliary in the heart of the city. Here, they took in stray and relinquished animals, transporting them as necessary to the larger shelter facility for redemption, adoption, or euthanasia. Eventually, the concept of depots or drop-off stations took hold in other parts of the city, helping to popularize humane and rational means of animal control. Within a few years, the need for defensiveness about the shelter's mission had diminished, and its efforts began to draw praise. Once satirized as the misguided product of women's sentiment, the animal shelter took its place alongside numerous other benevolent institutions, assuming the most practical of roles in urban life.\footnote{Women's Branch, PSPCA, \textit{Ann. R.} 1874, 8-9; Morris, \textit{Morris Refuge}, 3; and "Inhumanity to Man and Humanity to Beasts," \textit{Phila. Republic}, 28 Aug. 1870, and "The Dog Pound," \textit{Phila. Record}, 5 Jan. 1874, PSPCA-PA, SBK 1866-1877. The depot eventually took on independent life as the Morris Refuge Association for Homeless and Suffering Animals.}
“Painless Killing”

Whatever else humane treatment meant to nineteenth-century animal protectionists it did not necessarily entail sparing animals from death. In general, humane advocates sought only to improve the circumstances of animals’ deaths, not to prevent them. The quality of animal death was one of the most critical issues discussed in the early meetings of the Women’s Branch, and the members were not squeamish about it. At a June 16, 1869 meeting, “The Committee on inquiring into the least painful mode of killing” reported that it had solicited the opinions of eminent physicians (including S. Weir Mitchell) about the killing of dogs by suffocation with charcoal fumes. Although the Mayor and City Council had already approved this method after prior consultation, a motion to substitute chloroform, as a more merciful measure, was adopted.50

Subsequent deliberations resulted in a proposal for the use of carbonous oxide gas. Its sponsor, Coleman Sellers, was a prominent inventor and head of the Franklin Institute who with his wife took an active role in the affairs of the PSPCA and the Women’s Branch. Sellers reiterated his convictions about the superior humanity and efficiency of the new method, as well as his recommendations for refinements, in a series of communications.51 An illustration and detailed explanation of the euthanasia chamber

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50 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of June 16, 1869, WHS Papers.

51 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of May 29, 1872, June 5, 1872, Apr. 9, 1873, Apr. 30, 1873, June 25, 1873, and Dec. 31, 1873, WHS Papers; Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1875, 12; and Dictionary of American Biography (1935), “Sellers, Coleman.” Sellers almost certainly drew on his knowledge of other scientists’ work. In 1885, for instance, Benjamin Ward Richardson claimed that his experiments with carbonic oxide gas and other narcotic agents dated to 1850, and that he brought his conclusions before the Medical Society of London in 1871. See Benjamin Ward Richardson, “The Painless Extinction of Life,” Popular Science 26 (Mar. 1885), 641-52.
became fixtures of the annual report of the Women's Branch. The gas, generated in a
cask containing water, whiting, and sulfuric acid, was heated up in two charcoal stoves.
As the gas cooled, it was forced through a pipe into an airtight chamber, eleven feet by
four feet five inches by two feet eight inches in dimension. To draw the gas in more
efficiently, the operator had to open a small window for draft, leaving a wire screen in
place to prevent the dogs' escape. According to the report, "Not more than a minute
ought to elapse before the dogs fall insensible. After they are insensible they will utter a
cry and very soon cease to breathe; leave them in for 8 or 10 minutes, to make sure that
all life is entirely extinct."52

More than thirty years after the shelter began to euthanize animals, Mary F.
Lovell asserted the practical and benevolent advantages of the switch from carbonic acid
gas to carbonous oxide gas. Lovell noted that "it has been found far superior, and free
also from the danger to human life, which attended the use of vitriol and other chemicals
used in producing carbonic acid gas, being also less expensive." Still, she continued,
"The ideal method of depriving of life creatures so quick to anticipate danger, so
intelligently cognizant of human intent toward them as dogs are, has yet to be found."53

Lovell's comments touched on another question of considerable concern, the
practice of killing animals in front of one another. The Branch members did not require
evidence of the cognitive capacities of animals to spark their apprehensions concerning

52 Women's Branch, PSPCA, _Ann. R._ 1877, 18-23; and "The Philadelphia Dog Shelter," _N. Y. Times_, 25 Aug. 1871, 2. One proponent of electricity for killing questioned whether the animals' deaths were painless under the carbonic acid system. See "Dog-Killing by Electricity," _ODA_ 9 (July 1876), 11.

53 Lovell, _History of the Women's SPCA_, 10.
the dogs' awareness of death. They were convinced of the animals' terror at seeing death meted out to other canines. The elimination of this practice was consistent with their view that the quality of animals' deaths was an important matter.⁵⁴

Humane advocates did not abandon drowning and other methods for killing animals after the adoption of the gas chamber. Puppies, kittens, and cats still died by drowning at the Philadelphia shelter, at least in its early years. The decision by the Women's Branch to continue this method was characteristically pragmatic. Drowning had been a common way of killing younger animals throughout the centuries, and many considered it a viable one if others were inexpedient.⁵⁵

Humanitarians also recommended the use of chloroform for killing animals, especially cats. The method usually involved taking a sponge saturated with chloroform to the animal's nose, covering him or her with a blanket, and then soaking the sponge for a second time. Within a minute, the animal ceased to struggle and fell asleep, and, after several minutes more, his or her heart ceased to beat. An alternative method entailed shutting the animal inside a box with the sponge. Humane advocates endorsed both methods for use by individuals trying to dispose of unwanted cats and kittens.⁵⁶

The issue of killing newborn animals raised a maternalist dilemma. White and her colleagues adopted a firm policy with respect to both dogs and cats—to "leave the

⁵⁴ Women's Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of June 16, 1869, WHS Papers; and Silver Festival, 4-5.


mother one,” even as the other members of a litter were killed. This was more or less the standard counsel for dealing with the feline surplus. However, some humane advocates, who thought that many of these single kittens nevertheless ended up homeless and pitiable, disputed this instruction. If one took the kittens away immediately, they argued, the mother did not miss them at all.57

The development of the shelter was the single most important accomplishment of Philadelphia animal protectionists, setting a precedent for humanitarian intervention in municipal animal control that others throughout the country would emulate in later years. The Philadelphia women proudly advertised the shelter concept and the euthanasia technology, in annual reports, letters, and conference proceedings. They wanted to disseminate information about the shelter and their methods, not simply to earn local support, but to spur adoption of similar measures elsewhere. They specifically recommended an approach combining voluntary cooperation with city authorities. At an international conference in 1880, White agreed to write an account that could be used to promote the humane shelter concept. Her report was translated into French and German for broader distribution.58

At the time that White published her account, the Battersea Dogs’ Home, inspiration for the Philadelphia animal shelter, was still using prussic acid to kill dogs and cats, placing a drop on each animal’s tongue. This method, while almost instantaneous,


was not painless. Moreover, the administration of prussic acid to dogs and especially to cats could be hazardous for the humans who had to carry it out. In 1883, Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson, who had conducted relevant experiments since the 1840s, and encouraged the RSPCA to investigate the use of narcotics for painless killing, designed a lethal chamber employing carbonic acid gas for use at the Battersea home.\textsuperscript{59}

Some years passed before humane organizations in other American communities adopted the approach of the Women's Branch. The permanent substitution of other methods in place of drowning in New York City, for example, did not occur until after Henry Bergh's death in 1888, and only in 1894 did the ASPCA take on any municipal control duties. Moreover, only a handful of humane organizations elsewhere created shelters or assumed responsibility for their local pounds before 1900.\textsuperscript{60}

The methods employed by the Women's Branch did attract attention outside the animal protection community. During the last quarter of the century, the investigation of means for killing animals converged with deliberations concerning capital punishment, and with discussions of appropriate administration of anesthesia. In an 1878 address on "The Mode of Inflicting the Death Penalty," Dr. John Packard noted that the method of killing dogs in Philadelphia presented "many advantages on the score of humanity,"

\textsuperscript{59} Cottesloe, Battersea Dogs' Home, 68-72.

\textsuperscript{60} On the gradual diffusion of the animal shelter model nationwide, see William J. Shultz, The Humane Movement in the United States, 1910-1922 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 64-69.
propriety and efficiency." In 1885, moreover, the humane society’s techniques received mention in a medical textbook.\textsuperscript{61}

**The Gendered Bifurcation of Humane Work in Pennsylvania**

As the work progressed, the men’s and women’s branches in Philadelphia operated largely independent of one another, with separate bank accounts and programs. On occasion, however, the branches actually found themselves at cross-purposes, and the men’s board once required Pliny Earle Chase to advise his cousin that the Women’s Branch agents were undercutting the work of the men’s society at the Philadelphia stockyards.\textsuperscript{62} In 1874, the Women’s Branch took separate rooms from the men’s society for the first time, renting space elsewhere in the same building. Still, in 1875, all parties undertook serious negotiations for a reunification of the two divisions, and a proposal “that the Societies should unite on terms of perfect equality” received the endorsement of Bergh and Angell. Men and women were to be eligible to serve as managers of the PSPCA, on a board composed of fifteen. In the event that a woman was elected president, a man would serve as vice president, and vice versa. Significantly, the Women’s Branch was “to have sole charge of the Dog Shelter,” whatever the other outcomes of the merger. The gentlemen of the PSPCA, it seems, wanted no part of the


\textsuperscript{62} Chase to White, 17 Sept. 1874, in PSPCA-HSP, LBK 1872-76. Chase’s letter did not specify how one set of agents undercut the work of the other.
shelter operation. Ultimately, the women rejected the merger proposal, ending forever any attempts to unify the work of the two branches. 63

Nevertheless, between 1876 and 1884, White and four to five other women annually served on the Board of Managers of the PSPCA, although none held officers’ positions. This arrangement ended abruptly when a longstanding debate over the propriety of issuing membership cards to the Women’s Branch members boiled over into a full-blown dispute about the police authority of the Women’s Branch agents. By the charter granted to the PSPCA by the state legislature, the cards entitled the members “to call with authority upon the police to arrest any person who should violate the law for the protection of animals.” For some years, the power of humane agents to arrest had been delegated to the Women’s Branch through the men’s society, and several men on the PSPCA board were uneasy with this arrangement. The question was referred to counsel, who advised that the Women’s Branch was a branch in name only, and had all of the characteristics of a separate organization. In 1883, White and her coworkers sought and secured a special act of the legislature, giving all agents of the Women’s Branch (all were males) the right to make arrests. Even so, after almost fifteen years of responsible activity by White and her coworkers, some legislators opposed the grant on the grounds that it was inadvisable to put police power into the hands of women. 64

63 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Dec. 29, 1875, WHS Papers.

64 Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Minutes of Feb. 7, 1870, WHS Papers; Women’s Branch, PSPCA, Ann. R. 1884, 4-5; and Lovell, History of the Women’s SPCA, 27. Although the Women’s Branch did employ its own agents, the male-dominated PSPCA handled a much higher volume of cases. From 1867 through 1913, the PSPCA recorded 770,794 complaints, initiated 14,352 prosecutions, suspended 129,243 animals from work, and ordered the destruction of 17,351 animals. See “Animal Law is SPCA Victory,” Phila. Inquirer, 15 Feb. 1914, in Frederic Schiller Lee Papers, Archives and Special Collections, A. C. Long Health Sciences Library, Columbia University, New York, NY [Lee Papers], Vivisection SBK 6.
Finally, in 1898, after an inept attorney directed a bequest to the PSPCA instead of the Women's Branch, White and her colleagues took steps to rename and recharter their organization as a separate entity. Now, three decades after the de facto division between the two groups, the Women's Branch became the Women's Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (WPSPCA). It was a formal recognition of a long established fact. "We never should have been styled a branch of the parent society," White wrote in 1899, "as we were not one in reality."

One of the most important distinctions between the two organizations lay in their relationship to the University of Pennsylvania. In the late 1870s, key leaders of the PSPCA, especially Coleman Sellers and the prominent publisher Joshua Lippincott, became important boosters of veterinary education. The PSPCA men agreed that the challenge of caring for animals depended upon competent scientific instruction, and that veterinarians could play an important role in stemming cruelty to animals. Sellers and Lippincott were instrumental in the foundation and development of the university's School of Veterinary Medicine. Sellers led the drive to raise money for the school, and Lippincott, a Penn trustee, became one of its principal benefactors.

The members of the Women's Branch, on the other hand, did not invest any of their philanthropic energies in support of veterinary education. At this time, of course, women were not welcome in that profession. Veterinary educators believed that females

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65 "Under a New Name," JOZ 7 (July 1898), 87; and Journal of Zoophily Supp. 8 (Dec. 1899), 2.

would be more prone to affective ties with animals that could obstruct objective veterinary judgments. Moreover, from its inception, the School of Veterinary Medicine's instructors were cautious in their relations with the Women's Branch and later with the WPSPCA, perhaps in deference to their colleagues at the university's medical school. The members of the Women's Branch had always been less deferential to local scientists on the question of vivisection than the officials of the PSPCA. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Penn medical scientists clashed on several occasions with White and her colleagues over proposals to regulate vivisection, and to secure pound and shelter animals for use in experiments. In these skirmishes, they typically ridiculed the women--many of whom had helped White to found the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) in 1883--as sentimental neurotics who had taken a good idea too far.

Setting aside such highly partisan criticisms, assumptions about women's essential nature and talents generally worked to advance and solidify their position in the realm of animal protection. Although the gender ideology of the nineteenth century denied them full access to the public sphere, women used it to create the social and cultural space in which they could cultivate and develop their concerns about many aspects of public life. Animal protection, as much as any other benevolent cause of the mid-nineteenth century, provided a fruitful outlet for women's activism, because it welcomed and capitalized upon conceptions of women as the standard-bearers of moral

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67 On the gender bias of the profession, see “Female Veterinarians,” American Veterinary Review (Dec. 1897), 595-96.

68 White's confrontation with Philadelphia experimenters is discussed in Chapter VIII.
improvement and civilization. Prevailing notions about women’s capacity for empathy and uplift proved especially useful for ensuring their greater public influence through a movement that generally acknowledged and celebrated its sentimental motivations.

At the same time, the actions of the Philadelphia humanitarians in organizing the animal shelter offer a compelling example of women’s institution-building and their use of available opportunities to accomplish goals of social importance. Female advocates of humane reform in Philadelphia pursued their objectives by building a separate organization that permitted them to identify and address problems in their own way, assuming responsibilities and providing services that had once devolved upon local government. They gained clear support for their work from sources of male authority, even as they generally operated within the lines of demarcation that distinguished male from female political roles. Employing what Estelle Freedman calls a “separatist political strategy,” the Philadelphia women played their part in “redefining womanhood by the extension, rather than the rejection, of the female sphere.” They were, as Freedman might say, women who “held back from self-conscious feminism,” but “nonetheless assumed innovative roles as urban philanthropists.”

To carry out their work, female humane advocates in Philadelphia had to negotiate a complex matrix of Victorian-era conceptions concerning women’s social, political, and cultural roles. Developing a separate identity and institutional base, White and her colleagues pursued campaigns and strategies that differentiated the WPSPCA

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from other humane societies around the country. Until the time of her death, White’s organization stood at the movement’s vanguard. Above all, it initiated the first serious attempt by humanitarians to gain authority over municipal animal control, launching the process whereby the humane shelter became the fundamental institution of animal protection in the United States.

The overall legacy of the WPSPCA was much broader than this, however. During White’s half-century of leadership, the organization employed pioneering methods and tactics not simply in regard to the animal shelter, but also in relation to cattle transportation, slaughtering practices, vivisection, captive bird shoots, and many other questions. White and her supporters acknowledged and nurtured the more radical strains of animal advocacy that emerged during the 1880s and 1890s. In those decades, the WPSPCA explored and advanced progressive approaches and solutions to many humane problems, promoted alternatives such as vegetarianism and substitutes for fur and plumage, and pursued hard-nosed investigation and exposure of entrenched cruelties. As a female-led institution, the WPSPCA exerted a critical formative influence on the direction and the substance of humane work.