



## History of Women's Animal Center

Society in the 1860s was much different than today. Light was provided by gas lamps, neither TV nor radio existed, horses were the main mode of transportation and women did not yet have the right to vote.

That last fact didn't stop a group of 30 determined women, lead by Caroline Earle White, from striking out on their own, speaking their minds about how animals should be treated and changing how society thought about the animals that shared their lives.

Mrs. White discovered that there were others interested in beginning a humane society and joined with them to form the Pennsylvania SPCA in 1867. Although Mrs. White and her friends were instrumental in the founding of the Pennsylvania SPCA and raised a significant amount of money for that society, they were denied places on the board of directors simply because they were women.

As the need to promote humane treatment of animals was so great in the city at that time, Mrs. White and her friends followed the advice of Morris Waln, president of the Pennsylvania SPCA, and formed their own society. The Women's Branch of the Pennsylvania SPCA was formed on April 14, 1869 by Caroline Earle White and 29 other women. Although the organization was called a "branch," it was totally independent from the beginning, having separate leadership and accounts.

The women's initial goals were simple: the wanted to employ an agent to inspect horses for harness sores and to make sure that they were not beaten, lame or exhausted while working. Two agents were hired during the first year and their workload quickly expanded to include cases of abuse and cruelty to dogs and other animals. Eventually, Women's Branch agents would be located in counties throughout Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

The Women's Branch was openly criticized for focusing their efforts on animals at a time when animals were not held in high esteem. Mrs. White replied to the critics who thought her group should work for human causes, saying,

"But are we not working for human beings? Are we not constantly striving to make men and women more humane and disposed to all kindly feelings and to teach children to become gentle and merciful? Is not everything which tends to elevate man in the mortal scale a benefit to him, and is it not rendering him incalculable service to teach him to control his passions, as we do when we prevent him from wreaking his anger upon his horses?"

In 1870, the women took over the management of the Philadelphia Dog Pound and were the first humane group ever to assume such responsibilities. They quickly put an end to the practice of clubbing, shooting or drowning stray dogs to death. Instead they opened the nation's first animal shelter and kept the dogs clean, well fed for a period of time in order to allow their owners to find and claim them. However, because of the severe animal overpopulation problem, those animals that weren't claimed were eventually euthanized using the more humane method of the time, carbonic gas.

It's not clear when adoptions were started, but from time to time, someone would ask if they could adopt one of the stray dogs and eventually a formal adoption program was put in place. Cats were not in as much demand as dogs then and were not originally included in the adoption program.

Legislation pertaining to animal welfare was another area the Society concentrated upon. The women worked diligently to pass laws which regulated the treatment of horses pulling city trolley cars, and the shipping of cattle by rail. While the Women's Branch constantly petitioned city council and trolley company owners to improve their conditions of their horses, most of their pleas fell upon deaf ears. The women found that the trolley owners were very adept at promising to change their ways while actually doing nothing and that the trolley passengers were unconcerned about the burden being placed on the horses.

The women were more successful in improving the condition of cattle being transported to slaughterhouses. After lobbying for more than two years, the women saw the passage of an 1873 bill that aimed to prevent cruelty to cattle and other animals being shipped by rail from the west to eastern states. The new law required railroads to provide a minimum amount of food and water to the cattle and to design cars that allowed the cattle sufficient amount of room to rest.

Teaching children to be kind to animals was also at the heart of the women's efforts, and in the 1870s the women began their humane education program in earnest, passing out leaflets in schools and holding essay competitions. Although there had been information groups in the schools for several years, the American Bands of Mercy, a humane organization specifically aimed at boys was officially formed in 1882. Mrs. White believed that, "the only way of making the mass of mankind humane is by impressing upon their minds, while they are children, sentiments of mercy and kindness." While this group was limited to boys, as the women felt that men were more likely to be responsible for violence against animals, groups for girls were later formed.

Early on it seemed as if pressure came at the Women's Branch from all directions, but the women seemed tireless in their pursuit of just care and use of animals. In 1871, doctors at the University of Pennsylvania found out just how formidable an opponent Mrs. White could be when they insisted that they be allowed to remove animals from the shelter for scientific experimentation. With the backing of the mayor, Mrs. White told the doctors that her organization would never allow animals to be used for such a purpose. After this battle Mrs. White became a strong advocate of the anti-vivisection movement and founded the American Anti-Vivisection Society in 1883.

Concurrent with these achievements was the continued focus on the working horses and mules of the city. By 1900 the Women's Branch had changed its name to the Women's Pennsylvania SPCA (WPSPCA) and continued to forge its own identity. WPSPCA and its supporters had

watering fountains installed at busy intersections throughout the city and surrounding areas. These would provide fresh water for horses, wandering small animals, birds and even humans. Clean drinking water was not easily found before these fountains were installed. Sometimes horses would drop in harness for lack of water on sweltering summer days. At its peak, WPSPCA had over 50 under its care.

In 1907 Women's PSPCA bought property at the corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and Clearfield Streets, building their headquarters and the most modern animal shelter at that time. From here the wheels of progress continued to roll fairly rapidly.

The 1908 death of Miss Annie L. Lowry, a prominent board member, provided funding to continue expanding services throughout the city. With these funds WPSPCA was able to increase the network of fountains and horse watering stations and in 1909 open the Caroline Earle White Dispensary on South Chadwick Street.

This Dispensary was based upon a model Mrs. White visited while traveling in Italy. It was the first of its kind in the United States and it provided free veterinary care to horses and other animals belonging to city residents unable to pay for a private veterinarian. The existing horse ambulance was also relocated to this facility.

And to fulfill the last portion of her bequest in 1912, WPSPCA was able to open the Annie L. Lowry Home for Smaller Animals, a satellite shelter in southwest Philadelphia. This facility had a home for the supervisor, a barn with dog runs, and dog play area, plus a free dispensary with waiting area, an operating table, dressing table, and a stall for horses. The veterinarian held office hours here every Saturday morning.

Through the years, Women's SPCA grew steadily, not just in membership and funds, but in influence as well. It became a model for beginning societies all over the world. A good example of this was a reaction to a speech Mrs. White gave in Brussels, Belgium in 1880. Her description of methods employed at the Society generated so much interest that she wrote an article which was sent to every kindred society around the world.

In addition to the City Shelter, which eventually was absorbed by the main headquarters of WPSPCA, the Caroline Earle White Dispensary and the Annie L. Lowry Home for Smaller Animals, WPSPCA began various branches in the greater Philadelphia area including the Delaware County SPCA, the Chester County SPCA, the Montgomery County SPCA, Morris Animal Refuge, and others.

Seeking to differentiate itself even further by accentuating the role our founders played in the humane movement, WPSPCA changed its name in 1988 to Women's Humane Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Realizing the need for shelter and humane services in the Lower Bucks County/Far Northeast section of Philadelphia, Women's Humane Society moved to our present location in Bensalem in 1994. Here we have continued as the only open admissions shelter in the area. We have also expanded the services offered at our veterinary hospital, and have improved our shelter by offering much more engagement for the animals who reside here temporarily.

And now, in honor of our 150th Anniversary, we have unveiled our new name, "Women's Animal Center." •