

Guide to the Recreation Rooms and Settlement Collection 1994.014

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Summary Information

Repository	Brooklyn Historical Society
Creator	Recreation Rooms and Settlement.
Title	Guide to the Recreation Rooms and Settlement Collection
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1953-1991
Date [inclusive]	1905-1991
Extent	2.5 Linear feet in 4 boxes
Language	English
Language of Materials	Materials in English.
Abstract	<p>The Recreation Rooms and Settlement Collection documents the work of the settlement, originally established to provide educational and recreational opportunities for Jewish immigrant women, from its early years on the Lower East Side of Manhattan through its current activity in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. While material in the collection spans from 1905 to 1991, the bulk of the records are from the period 1953-1991. Included in the collection are: board of directors minutes and appended administrative reports, by-laws, annual reports, program files, executive director correspondence, flyers, news clippings, photoprints, fundraising records, budgets, histories and brochures.</p>

Preferred Citation

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Historical Note

During the late 1800s the United States experienced a dramatic increase in immigration, as millions of people entered the country seeking new opportunities and economic advancement. Among these immigrants were tens of thousands of European Jews, many of whom settled on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The dense concentration of this new population exacerbated many urban problems that had long faced the city: poor housing, inadequate health care, lack of educational opportunities, crime, and unemployment all became more pronounced.

Earlier in the nineteenth century numerous Jewish philanthropic and social service organizations had been established in New York to address the needs and problems of the city's Jewish population. Institutions such as The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, United Hebrew Charities and the Young Men's Hebrew Association offered Jewish immigrants financial assistance, job—training, language instruction, acculturation programs, athletic facilities and other services. But the dramatic growth of the Jewish population at the end of the century presented these social welfare institutions and their supporters with many new challenges.

It was just such an increase in the social problems attending urban growth that had led reformers and philanthropists in England to establish Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house. The settlement model, originally distinguished by a commitment on the part of its educated upper and middle—class workers to “settle” in working class communities to understand their problems firsthand, was imported to the United States in 1886. American settlement houses were in the vanguard of efforts to educate and provide social services for impoverished residents in their neighborhoods through programs such as kindergartens, day care, hot lunches, health clinics, visiting nurses, camps, playgrounds and arts education. In addition, the settlements were deeply involved in Progressive-era reform movements advocating improvements in housing, public health, and sanitation.

While most settlement houses were ostensibly secular institutions whose services were available to all neighbors regardless of creed, many did bear close affiliation with particular religious denominations and some included religious education among their programs. Some protestant churches, for example, sponsored settlements that combined missionary work with the traditional range of settlement programs. Philanthropists and reformers in the New York's Jewish community were impressed by aspects of the settlement model and worked to establish their own settlements. Typically these institutions were open to all their neighbors, but maintained a specific commitment to meet the social and educational needs of the Jewish population.

It was in this context that the council of Jewish Women rented rooms at 79 Orchard Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side during May 1899 (although a few documents suggest May 1898 as the founding date) to provide educational and recreational opportunities for Jewish immigrant women. Encouraged by Felix Adler, leader of the Ethical Culture society who helped to establish several settlement houses, the Council soon incorporated “Recreation Rooms and Settlement” with Mrs. Cyrus Sulzberger as its first board president. Other early board members included Mrs. Aaron Kohn, Mrs. Isidor Straus, Mrs. Daniel

Guggenheim and Mrs. Jacob H. Schiff. Some of these women or their husbands were prominent on the boards of other settlements such as Educational Alliance and Henry Street Settlement.

The first “Head Worker” of Recreation Rooms and settlement, Miss Cyd Betteiheim, and her successor Dr. Bertha F. Lubitz, oversaw typical settlement activities such as sewing, cooking and art classes, a circulating library and mother’s meetings. In 1905 the settlement moved to 186-188 Chrystie Street. By this time it had expanded its programs to include an evening “Boy’s Brigade” as well as lectures, open debates, and a literary society. The following year the settlement conducted an “Exhibition for the Prevention of Tuberculosis” visited by 6,500 people.

Recreation Rooms and Settlement’s first connection to Brooklyn is reported in the Annual Report for 1914—1915. Head Worker Gertrude Mautner wrote that “One entire girls’ club has left us to become the working group of a small settlement in Brooklyn. A majority of the members of this Club have moved to Brooklyn, and into a neighborhood where they felt that they might bring the influence that had been brought to them in our settlement.” (Preliminary research has not shown whether this incipient settlement was ever in fact established.) By that same year, the settlement had expanded its programs to include a visiting nurse service, and Camp Wildwood based at Central Valley NY on property donated by the Straus family. Additional camping facilities — Camp Recro and Camp Mikan — were opened several years later on the grounds of the Palisades Interstate Park.

In 1930 New York City condemned the buildings at 186-188 Chrystie to make room for the proposed Roosevelt Park, and the settlement moved to the former quarters of College Settlement at 84-86 First Street. In this neighborhood the settlement began to work with Italians as well as its traditional Jewish constituency. A 1940 Annual Report also cites the membership of “a single Negro child... and several Albanian Mohammedan families.” Programs then included W.P.A. job placement, surplus food ticket distribution and a health clinic.

During the 1940s and 1950s the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) built many public housing projects for low and middle income tenants. An innovative feature of these projects was the inclusion of space for community centers and recreational facilities. At several of its sites NYCHA invited established social service agencies and settlement houses to operate programs in these facilities. Recreation Rooms and Settlement was among them, and in 1950 began its work at the Lillian Wald Houses on Avenue D in Manhattan. Initial activities included a senior citizen center and youth recreation, and would grow to include drug counseling, after school programs, day care and adult education.

In 1955 NYCHA invited the settlement into its Breukelen Houses site in Canarsie, Brooklyn. At this location the settlement developed a community center, day care, arts and theater programs and eventually ran a Head Start program. The continuing challenge of working with new populations in the housing projects brought the board to affirm in February 1956 that the settlement “provides the opportunity for all races, colors and creeds represented in the membership of the [Breukelen Houses] project to get acquainted with one another and work together for the good of the community.” In 1955 the settlement also moved out of its First Street location (which it rented and later sold to another settlement, Christodora House) and consolidated all programs at its NYCHA sites. During the 1960’s programs would include collaboration with Mobilization for Youth and other government-sponsored anti-poverty programs. The work at the upstate camps continued through this period as well, offering children living in the housing projects an opportunity to get out of the city for several weeks each summer.

From its inception, Recreation Rooms and Settlement had enjoyed the financial support of Jewish philanthropic organizations, a relationship eventually formalized through membership in The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies (FJP). It was also a longstanding member of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), an umbrella group of New York City settlement houses. During the late 1980s and early '90s, however, disputes between Recreation Rooms and Settlement administration and FJP and UNH respectively caused the settlement to lose its membership in these organizations. In the course of these disputes Recreation Rooms and Settlement relinquished control of its Lillian Wald Houses site (which was subsequently operated by another settlement house and FJP-member, Educational Alliance). With this change, and having closed its upstate camps for financial reasons during the 1980s, all of the settlement's work was then consolidated in the Canarsie area. In 1994 this included day care, Head Start, senior services and an affiliated kindergarten and pre—school program at the Starrett City residential complex.

Important figures in the settlement's history include head workers and executive directors Mildred Gutwillig, Rose Miller and Rahil Goulding. Appointed headworker of the settlement in 1921, Gutwillig held that position (and its later equivalent executive director) until 1953. She then supervised the camp operations and remained active on the board of directors for many years. An obituary lists her among the founding members of United Neighborhood Houses. Rose Miller was executive director from 1955 until 1968. Miller had previously served as headworker at Grand Street Settlement and was involved in community organizations such as the Lower Eastside Neighborhoods Association (LENA). She was succeeded by Rahil Goulding in 1968. Goulding had long experience at the settlement, having worked for many years as director of its Breukelen site. She remained as the agency's executive director at the time the collection was processed in 1994.

Scope and Content Note

The Recreation Rooms and Settlement Collection documents the work of the settlement from its early years on the Lower East Side of Manhattan through its current activity in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. While material in the collection spans from 1905 to 1991, the bulk of the records are from the period 1953-1991. Included in the collection are: board of directors minutes and appended administrative reports, by-laws, annual reports, program files, executive director correspondence, flyers, news clippings, photoprints, fundraising records, budgets, histories and brochures.

These records most heavily document the programs and activities of the settlement in its Lillian Wald Houses and Breukelen Houses sites. The most comprehensive picture of the settlement's day to day activities is provided by the board of directors minutes, which often include appended program reports and statistics. The commitment of the settlement to its adopted community in Canarsie is well documented in program files from that site. A subject file on the planning of the Flatlands Industrial Park highlights the role of executive director Rose Miller in public discussion of economic development in the Canarsie area. Records of the "Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project from the early 1980s demonstrate a commitment to the preservation of community identity in the neighborhood. The

settlement's connection to the Jewish social service tradition is evidenced by correspondence with the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, particularly that of executive director Rahil Goulding. During the 1980s this correspondence includes Goulding's "Trends and Developments" reports, which provide excellent summaries of all areas of the settlement's work in this period.

Unfortunately there are few records of Rahil Goulding's predecessors as executive director in the collection. In fact documentation from the settlement's founding through the early 1950s is generally thin — there are just a few annual reports and other items from these years.

Arrangement Note

Organized into seven series: Series 1. Administration; Series 2. Executive Director Papers; Series 3. Program Sites and Activities; Series 4. Alphabetical Subjects; Series 5. Affiliated Organizations; Series 6. Press Clippings; Series 7. Photographs and 16mm Film.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Brooklyn Historical Society November-December 2004

Conditions Governing Access

Open to researchers without restriction.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright held by the Brooklyn Historical Society. Permission to publish or reproduce must be secured from the repository.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donated by Recreation Rooms and Settlement, Rahil Goulding, Executive Director.

Processing Information Note

The collection was processed during November and December of 1994 by James Moske and Holly MacCammon of the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives New York City Settlement House Records Survey

Project, which was funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The finding aid was written by James Moske.

Related Materials

Separated Materials Note

Photographs, negatives and a film were separated from the collection and are identified within the Brooklyn Historical Society Manuscript and Archives Collection as VC 1995.1.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Brooklyn Council for Social Planning.
- Christadora House.
- Citizen's Housing Council of New York.
- Clara de Hirsch Literary Club.
- Council of Jewish Women (U.S.).
- East Side Tenants League.
- Educational Alliance (New York, N.Y.).
- Emergency Committee to Save Public Housing.
- Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.
- Lower East Side Neighborhood Association.
- Mobilization for Youth.
- National Jewish Welfare Board.
- National Multiple Sclerosis Society (U.S.).
- New York (N.Y.). City Planning Commission.
- New York City Housing Authority.
- Recreation Rooms and Settlement.
- Recreation Rooms and Settlement.
- Rivington Neighborhood Association (New York, N.Y.).
- United States. Works Progress Administration.

Genre(s)

- Correspondence
- Motion pictures (visual works)
- Negatives (photographic)
- Photographs

Geographic Name(s)

- Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)
- Brooklyn (New York, N.Y.)--Charities
- Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.)

Personal Name(s)

- Adler, Felix, 1851-1933
- Berger, Graenum
- Davis, Gloria
- Koch, Ed, 1924-

Subject(s)

- Community centers--New York (State)--New York
- Jews--Charities
- Social settlements--United States

Series 1 - Administration

Collection Inventory

Series 1 - Administration 1905-1991 Includes administrative histories, by-laws, board of directors files, legal and financial records, annual reports, and staff records.

	Box	Folder
Histories 1957-1990	1	1
Certificate of Incorporation and By-Laws 1905-1965	1	2
Annual Reports and Brochures 1905-1918	1	3
Annual Reports 1940-1972	1	4
Board of Directors, Biographical Information 1912-1990	1	5
Board of Directors, Minutes 1953-1961	1	6
Board of Directors, Minutes 1962-1965	1	7
Board of Directors, Minutes 1966-1969	1	8
Board of Directors, Minutes 1970-1971	1	9
Board of Directors, Minutes 1972-1973	1	10
Board of Directors, Minutes 1981-1987	1	11
Budgets and Financial Reports 1985-1991	2	1
Financial Memos and Correspondence 1959-1977	2	2

Series 2 - Executive Director Papers

Fundraising and Donations 1906-1991	2	3
Proposed Merger with Hebrew Education Society 1989-1990	2	4
Proposed Merger with Hebrew Educational Society 1991	2	5
Real Estate 1921-1948	2	6
Real Estate - Lease and Sale of Property to Christodora House 1955-1958	2	7
Staff Profiles, Manual and Organization Charts 1956-1962	2	8

Series 2 - Executive Director Papers 1953-1991 Correspondence, memos and biographical information of three of the settlement's executive directors: Margaret Gutwillig (1921-1953), Rose Miller (1955-1968), and Rahil Goulding (1968- ca. 1994). The Gutwillig files contain only material created after tenure as headworker and executive director.

	Box	Folder
Mildred Gutwillig - Correspondence, Speech and Obituaries 1953-1986	2	9
Rose Miller - Correspondence, Speech and Biographical Information 1960-1969	2	10
Rahil Goulding - Incoming Correspondence - Federation of Jewish Philanthropies 1978-1991	2	11
Rahil Goulding - Outgoing Correspondence - Federation of Jewish Philanthropies 1969-1991	2	12
Rahil Goulding - Outgoing Correspondence - Miscellaneous 1979-1989	2	13

Series 3 - Program Sites and Activities

Rahil Goulding - Outgoing Correspondence - Miscellaneous 1976-1990	2	14
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Series 3 - Program Sites and Activities 1941-1991 Correspondence, flyers, memos, reports and clippings documenting the programs and activities of the settlement at its Lillian Wald Houses and Breukelen Houses sites, as well as its camp programs located in upstate New York.

	Box	Folder
Breukelen Recreation Rooms - Correspondence, Memos, Clippings, and Announcements 1952-1971	3	1
Lillian Wald Recreation Rooms - Lease, Correspondence, Memos, Reports, and Announcements 1949-1979	3	2
Camps - Histories 1941-1967	3	3
Camps - Administration 1947-1981	3	4
Camps - Alumni Events 1960-1970	3	5
Camps - Correspondence 1960-1991	3	6
Camps - Flyers and Brochures 1953-ca. 1972	3	7
Camps - Songbooks 1950-ca. 1960	3	8
Day care - Correspondence, Reports and Brochures 1955-ca. 1970	3	9
Drug Counseling 1969-1990	3	10
Russian Immigrant Problems 1975-1991	3	11

Series 4 - Alphabetical Subjects

Senior Citizens 1959-1986	3	12
Theater Programs 1960-1963	3	13
Miscellaneous Program Correspondence and Flyers ca. 1970-1987	3	14

Series 4 - Alphabetical Subjects 1941-1991 Correspondence, memos, reports and printed material on special events and issues of concern to the settlement and community that are not addressed by its regular program or administrative functions.

	Box	Folder
Bailey Memorial 1989	3	15
Related Archival Materials note		
For additional material see Series 7 - Visual Materials.		
"Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project - Oral History Interviews 1981-1982	3	16
"Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project - Oral History Interviews 1981-1982	3	17
"Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project - Oral History Interviews 1981-1982	4	1
"Canarsie Chron"Canarsie Chronicles" Neighborhood History Project - Research Materials No date	4	2
Related Archival Materials note		

Series 5 - Affiliated Organizations

For additional material, see Series 7 - Visual Materials

"Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project - Research Materials 4 3

Related Archival Materials note

For additional material, see Series 7 - Visual Materials.

Community Organizations ca. 1950-1968	4	4
Flatlands Industrial Park 1959-1962	4	5
Housing 1941-1954	4	6
Lower East Side Community Corporation 1967-1976	4	7
United Neighborhood Houses 1959-1991	4	8
"What Remains" Exhibit 1982	4	9

Series 5 - Affiliated Organizations 1976-1989 Administrative records, memos, correspondence and flyers of the Recreation Rooms and Settlement - Starrett City Early Learning Center an independently incorporated kindergarten and pre-school program in the Starrett City residential development in Brooklyn.

	Box	Folder
Recreation Rooms and Settlement - Starrett City Early Learning Center - Correspondence, Board Minutes and Reports 1976-1989	4	10

Series 6 - Press Clippings

Series 6 - Press Clippings 1949-1989 News clippings about settlement activities, programs and administration.

	Box	Folder
Press Clippings 1949-1989	4	11
Press Clippings 1949-1989	4	12

Series 7 - Photographs and 16mm Film ca. 1950-1989 Photographs, negatives and a film documenting settlement programs and program participants, staff and special events. These materials have been separated from the collection and are identified as VC 1995.1.

	Folder
Bailey Memorial - Photographs 1989	1
"Canarsie Chronicle" Neighborhood History Project - Photographs ca. 1981-1982	2
Luke Bragg show at Breukelen Recreation Rooms and Settlement, May 11, 1971 - Photographs 1971	3
Recreation Rooms and Settlement Programs, Staff and Activities - Photographs and Negatives ca. 1950-1989	4
WCBS Television Community Affairs, "Camp Wildwood" 16mm Film No date	5