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Hudson Guild Records, 1896-1990s

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SUMMARY INFORMATION

Creator

Hudson Guild

Title and dates

Hudson Guild Records, 1896-1990s

Abstract

The Hudson Guild Records document the institution from its origins in the 1890s, when it organized clubs for Chelsea boys, to its work a century later, when it provided a wide range of social services to West Side residents.

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History of the Hudson Guild

During the late 1800s the West Side Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea was transformed from a residential area for wealthy and middle-class property owners to a bustling community where tens of thousands of immigrant families lived and worked. These new Chelsea residents were predominantly Irish and Greek, but also included Italians and Germans, as well as African-American migrants from the south. They rented apartments in hastily constructed tenement buildings or in former one-family townhouses newly subdivided and refashioned as rooming houses. They took jobs as freight handlers, longshoremen, and factory workers in the , shipping and industrial area that sprang up west of Tenth Avenue and along the waterfront. In their leisure hours they established benevolent societies and fraternal organizations, attended .local churches, and participated in the thriving popular culture of the theaters and dance halls on 23rd Street and 6th Avenue.

But even as working class culture flourished in Chelsea, the dense population exacerbated a host of problems. Poverty, hunger, disease, crime, decrepit housing and unsanitary streets were pervasive here as elsewhere in New York, and in rapidly growing cities across the country. Such conditions dimmed the hopes of many immigrants. They also alarmed many wealthy and middle-class Americans who perceived in them threats to moral order, political stability and cultural progress. Early attempts to ameliorate conditions in a changing urban society included the creation of charity organizations, industrial training schools, and church missions.

In London, a similar increase in social problems led reformers in 1884 to establish the first settlement house, Toynbee Hall. The settlement model, originally distinguished by a commitment on the part of its college-educated volunteers to "settle" in working class communities in order to confront their problems first-hand and to contribute to the moral uplift of their neighbors, was quickly imported to the United States. In 1886 Stanton Coit, a devotee of Felix Adler's Ethical Culture movement and early observer of the experiment at Toynbee Hall, founded The Neighborhood Guild (later renamed University Settlement) on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Over the next several decades scores of settlement houses were established in cities across the country, staffed largely by recent college graduates, many of them young women eager to take an active role in public life. American settlements sponsored such programs as kindergartens, day care, social clubs, health clinics, visiting nurses, summer camps, arts education and vocational training. They provided bases of operation for sociologists, journalists, and other researchers of urban conditions. Many settlements provided forums for public debate of political issues, and galvanized popular opinion in support of progressive social legislation.

In March of 1895 John Lovejoy Elliott, another Felix Adler protégé inspired by the settlement model, rented rooms on West 25th Street and encouraged a small group of local boys to form a club under his leadership. Elliott, an Illinois native educated at Cornell University and in .Germany, had recently moved to New York to work with Adler in building the Ethical Culture movement. His Chelsea boys' club was successful, and others were soon formed for girls and adults under the guidance of Elliott and his Ethical Culture associates. In June of 1897 Hudson 2

Guild was legally incorporated, and programs including a kindergarten, vocational training, athletics, and a library were established by a growing staff of volunteers. The popularity of Hudson Guild programs prompted the settlement to move several times in its first decade. Eventually a permanent Hudson Guild building was erected at 436 West 27th Street. Its five stories housed a library, print shop, club rooms, and baths. Though Hudson Guild did not provide living quarters for settlement house "residents" in the conventional sense, many staff members, including John Elliott, made their homes in Chelsea.

The 1910 Annual Report of Hudson Guild describes the institution's work as an "attempt...to get the people of the district themselves to be the social workers and the regenerators of their own neighborhood... The purpose of the Guild is to bring about active co-operation between different individuals and different classes for a single aim --that aim being an attempt to learn how to live . in a city." Public involvement in neighborhood regeneration was fostered through the sponsorship of a "District Committee" comprised of block representatives who reported on housing, health and social conditions in the neighborhood and worked collectively to improve them. Hudson Guild supported campaigns that led to the creation of Chelsea Park in 1907, and a public bathhouse in 1915. Hudson Guild also promoted the democratic participation of its members in running the settlement itself through a "Clubs Council" that determined many institutional policies and programs.

Vocational training was one area of concern to Chelsea residents. In 1912 Hudson Guild collaborated with a typographer's union local and a business association of printers to establish a printer training program. This very successful enterprise was later incorporated into New York's public school system. During World War I, food shortages and inflation made it difficult for many families to make ends meet. Hudson Guild sponsored a cooperative store to ease the economic burden on Chelsea residents. Other popular activities in the settlement's early years were summer outings and camping trips to area beaches, parks and campgrounds, including an Ethical Culture Society facility in Orange County. In 1917 Hudson Guild secured its own permanent home for country programs when it purchased several hundred wooded acres in New Jersey's Watchung Mountains. At its new "Hudson Guild Farm" the settlement began the cultivation of environmental education and camping programs that continued to flourish over seventy-five years later.

During the 1920s Hudson Guild cultural programs were expanded with the formation of the Cellar Players, a theater group which performed in the settlement basement, and with the creation of music and art departments. A strong emphasis was placed on health care through medical, dental and maternity clinics. Such low-cost programs were essential to Chelsea residents whose incomes were reduced with the onset of the 1930s depression. In addition to causing widespread unemployment and hunger, the economic collapse exacerbated a longstanding housing crisis in New York. From its inception the settlement movement had advocated the regulation and improvement of tenements, and settlement leaders including John L. Elliott were among the earliest proponents of government-funded housing construction and management. Hudson Guild itself had helped form the Chelsea Homes Corporation which in 1915 sponsored "model 3 tenements" providing clean, affordable homes to Chelsea families. Soon after the passage of the United States Housing Act in 1937, Hudson Guild established the Chelsea Association for Planning and Action to galvanize community support for public housing construction on the West Side. Demolition to make room for the first Chelsea housing project was started in 1942, but the work was soon interrupted because of the financial pressures of the Second World War. The project was finally completed in 1947 and was named for John L. Elliott, whose death in 1943 brought Hudson Guild's first era to a close.

H. Daniel "Dan" Carpenter, an Ohio native who had first come to Hudson Guild in 1931 as boys' club worker, succeeded Elliott as Head Worker (the title was soon changed to Executive " Director). Under Carpenter's leadership during the war years Hudson Guild hosted USO activities, sponsored social programs for Coast Guard men temporarily encamped in the open field created by the halted public housing construction, cultivated food in "Victory Gardens" at the New Jersey farm, and initiated a veterans consultation service to help returning servicemen adjust to life at home. After the war new programs for senior citizens were created, as well as a child care center and mental health clinic.

During the 1950s New York's Puerto Rican population increased dramatically, and many thousands of these new immigrants settled on the West Side. Hudson Guild staff members, including Dan Carpenter, traveled to Puerto Rico to learn about the culture of the settlement's new neighbors. Spanish speakers were added to the staff, and programs oriented to the new community, such as English language instruction, were instituted. One frustrating episode in this period was a collaboration with the controversial, pugnacious community organizer Saul Alinsky. The Chelsea Citizen Participation Project, co-sponsored by Hudson Guild and Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation, succeeded in convening a "Chelsea Community Council" comprised of representatives from dozens of local organizations eager to participate in the planning of additional urban renewal and social service activities for the neighborhood. Unfortunately, disagreements arose among members regarding the Council's internal organization and policies, and an acrimonious public debate culminated in the dissolution of the Council in 1960.

Despite this setback, Hudson Guild continued to work for low and middle-income housing in Chelsea, supporting the International Ladies Garment Workers Union-sponsored Penn Station South Co-ops, and collaborating with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) in the development of community centers at its Fulton Houses and Chelsea Houses projects. This collaboration led to the replacement of the old Hudson Guild building with a facility in the bottom floors of NYCHA's Chelsea Houses Extension. Opened in 1968, the new Hudson Guild included a gymnasium, theater, and art gallery. From its public housing base the settlement continued to provide its traditional range of social services, as well as expanding its work with children and teens through participation in such federally-funded programs as Neighborhood Youth Corps, Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) and Head Start.

Dan Carpenter retired in 1973 and was succeeded by R. Edward Lee, a former Hudson Guild group worker with additional settlement experience at Goddard-Riverside Neighborhood House. Lee, and his successors during the late 1970s and 1980s, oversaw the growth of programs in vocational guidance, narcotics counseling, homeless counseling and shelter, and a highly successful Hudson Guild Theater that produced several plays which went on to Broadway. After celebrating its centennial in 1995 under the leadership of Executive Director Janice McGuire, Hudson Guild continued to provide needed social services to Chelsea residents.

Description

The Hudson Guild Records document the institution from its origins in the 1890s, when it organized clubs for Chelsea boys, to its work a century later, when it provided a wide range of social services to West Side residents. They offer a unique view of the first wave of the settlement house movement in America, and document social conditions, demographic change, political activity, and philanthropy in New York City.

Hudson Guild Records

The origins and early history of Hudson Guild House are best documented in Series 1 and III. Board of Directors minutes show the development of programs by John Lovejoy Elliott and his associates from 1896 to 1911, and are supplemented by annual reports reviewing a wide range of settlement activities for scattered years from 1910 through the 1920s. Unfortunately, there is a major gap in the Board of Directors minutes from 1911 to 1938. News clippings and promotional materials in Series III, items contained in scrapbooks in Series V, and reports in Series IV partially fill this gap. The resumed chronology of Board of Directors minutes provides the most comprehensive view of Hudson Guild activities from the late 1930s through the 1970s. These minutes are complemented by Hudson Guild Council files which document the attitudes and level of involvement of the settlement's neighbors in its day to day functioning and programs during the 1960s and 1970s.

The beginning stages of urban renewal in Chelsea and its impact on the Hudson Guild community are documented by records in Series II and III. These include records of other community organizations with which the settlement was affiliated during the 1950s and 1960s. Series IV contains proposals and reports which provide insight on the development of settlement policies and programs in response to demographic changes in the neighborhood during the same period. Researchers should also see the Dan Carpenter Papers for more information on this period.

All of these records are complemented by audio-visual materials including photoprints, slides and motion picture film showing a variety of activities at Hudson Guild from the early 1900s to the 1990s.

Additional archival materials related to the Hudson Guild Records are included in the Dan Carpenter Papers, as well as in the archival collections of the Ethical Culture Society.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in seven series.

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Series I: Board of Directors, 1896-1990. Folders within each subseries arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Subseries I.1: Committees. Includes agendas, minutes, and reports.

Subseries I.2 Members. Includes correspondence, membership lists, meeting notes.

Subseries I.3 Minutes. Includes meeting agendas, minutes, and appended correspondence and reports for monthly board minutes as well as the settlement's annual meeting.

Series II: General Files, 1916-1990.

Files on community and professional organizations with which Hudson Guild collaborated, and general subject files. Folders arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Series III: Hudson Guild Files, 1897-1990.

Folders in each subseries arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Subseries III.1 Alphabetical Subjects. Includes administrative memos, annual reports, constitution and by-laws, publicity materials, membership lists, news clippings, promotional materials, publications, staff manuals

Subseries III.2: Hudson Guild Council. Includes committee files, memos, minutes and Membership.

Subseries III.3: Publications. Includes annual and special reports, directories and periodicals published under Hudson Guild auspices.

Series IV: Programs, 1913-1990s.

Folders in each subseries arranged alphabetically. Documents arranged chronologically.

Subseries IV.1 Alphabetical File. Includes correspondence, memos, reports, statistical and narrative reports, news clippings, proposals, flyers and announcements. Folder 11 contains confidential case notes and is closed to researchers until 2030.

Subseries IV.2 Fulton Senior Citizens' Center. Includes correspondence, memos, reports, statistical and narrative reports, news clippings, proposals, flyers and announcements.

Subseries IV.3 Hudson Guild Farm. Includes correspondence, memos, reports, statistical and narrative reports, news clippings, proposals, flyers and announcements.

Subseries IV.4 Hudson Guild Theater. Includes correspondence, memos, reports, statistical and narrative reports, news clippings, proposals, flyers and announcements.

Series V: Scrapbooks, 1940-1977.

Chronologically compiled scrapbooks contain correspondence and memos, news clippings, photographs, program fliers and announcements.

[Series VI: Photographs, ca. 1900-1990.](#)

Black and white and color photoprints, negatives and transparencies. Subjects include settlement staff and program participants, neighborhood scenes, settlement buildings, and camp.

[Series VII: Films and Videotape, 1990 and \[n.d.\].](#)

[Name and Subject Index.](#)

Access and Use

Access

Series IV.1 Folder 11 contains confidential case notes and is closed to researchers until 2030.

This collection is shelved off site.

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ACQUISITION AND APPRAISAL

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PROCESSING AND OTHER INFORMATION

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Subject Headings

Hudson Guild Records

These papers have been indexed in the Columbia University Library online catalog using the following terms. Those seeking related materials should search under these terms.

Administrative records
Announcements
Annual reports
Articles of incorporation
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