

## The Early Years: 1899-1929

***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*** —Margaret Mead



From May to October of 1893, Chicago played host to the world at the Worlds Columbian Exposition. Over 27 million people traveled to Chicago's shimmering White City to marvel at man's progress and visions for the future. Yet the utopian ephemeral White City was a sharp contrast to the Chicago's poorer neighborhoods that lay a short distance from the fairgrounds. The United States was in the midst of an economic depression. Hoards of immigrants, spurred by the industrial revolution, flocked to Chicago and other urban centers in search of work only to find themselves poor, starving and huddled in crowded tenements. Raw sewage ran through the streets and epidemics of typhoid and other diseases often ravaged the city. The social unrest that would lead to the deadly Pullman Strike in 1894 was on the rise.

As the century drew to a close, this grim climate and a deepening fear of these growing urban masses lead to the rise of progressive social reforms in Chicago and other urban centers. The middle and upper class women of the day were the driving force of this movement. Since the rise of the Suffrage movement in the 1850s, many women had become increasingly dissatisfied with their designated place in society and wished to play a more active role in bringing about needed change. In Chicago, many such women took the lead in establishing ground breaking social institutions and reforms. Jane Adams opened Hull House in 1889 to provide social services to immigrants and the working poor. Chicago's Women's Clubs formed charitable organizations and reform committees in response to the needs of the city's poor, neglected and

abused. In 1899 a small group of Chicago women turned their attention to a forgotten group of suffering creatures - the city's animal population.

These humanitarians faced an uphill struggle to overcome the hardship, neglect and cruelty all around them. A large percentage of the city's estimated 50,000 workhorses were old, sick, and ill cared for. Many dropped under heavy burdens, only to be savagely beaten by insensitive drivers. The burgeoning Union Stock Yards and the slaughterhouses demonstrated little concern for the livestock they handled and incidents of inhumane butchery practices were common. Homeless dogs and cats wove their way through crowds of people in the streets in search of morsels of food and temporary shelter.

A deep concern for the welfare of these helpless creatures led five Chicagoans to the home of Mrs. Theodore Thomas, wife of the city's symphony conductor, on the evening of January 19, 1899. A second larger meeting at the residence of Mrs. Joseph Winterbothom on March 7, 1899, led to the formation of The Anti-Cruelty Society. This meeting saw the adoption of by-laws and election of Mrs. Thomas as the group's first president. As the president of The Anti-Cruelty Society, Mrs. Thomas became one of the first women to head a Humane Society.



This small band of dedicated volunteers set high goals: to suppress cruelty to animals, to educate the public on humane treatment and to create a refuge for strays. The Anti-Cruelty Society opened its first small animal shelter in 1904 at 1898 North Clark Street. By 1905, it had instituted watering troughs throughout Chicago for thirsty workhorses. On December 6, 1906, The Anti-Cruelty Society received a charter from the State of Illinois to conduct protective work with animals and children. In addition to its work with animals, the Society was directly involved in the handling of child welfare cases for the next decade. The Society also instituted a humane education campaign organizing children's chapters, distributing humane literature and providing lectures.



The Society opened a downtown office headquarters at 90 North LaSalle Street in 1907. A motorcycle with a cage attachment for transporting stray dogs was purchased the following year, and a horse named Beauty and her attendant were posted at the Rush Street Bridge over the Chicago River to help heavily loaded horses up the steep incline. For a short time, the Society maintained "Horse Haven," a south side rest farm for sick and worn-out workhorses. In 1908, the Society joined representatives from major meat packing houses in a series of meetings that lead to the development of voluntary guidelines for humane butchery.

In 1910, the Society acquired a permanent home at 155 Indiana Avenue (now Grand Avenue). The building housed a kennel, administrative offices, classrooms and a humane library. That same year, 5,000 posters detailing the proper care of horses were distributed to stables across the city.

By 1914, the Society had its first four wheeled small animal rescue vehicle. Two years later, a new better equipped ambulance was purchased. Its first Charity Clinic opened its doors in 1916, at a time when veterinary facilities for small animals were almost nonexistent.

Society volunteers worked tirelessly on behalf of the city's horses during 1917. July and August brought a record heat wave. In addition to maintaining the watering troughs throughout the city, a man with a watering hose was stationed in



front of the Society's headquarters to wet down the horses as they came to drink from the three fountains in front of the facility. It was reported that about 2,000 horses a day made their way to the Society's fountains during the heat spell. During the cold icy winter the same year, the Society's volunteers came to the aid of poorly shod horses that were having difficulty on the icy streets by distributing shoe covers made of canvas and old carpet.

With the onset of World War I, Chicago humanitarians formed a Red Star Animal Relief Chapter. Red Star Chapters raised funds for animal relief equipment and recruited volunteer veterinary corps including ferrriers, blacksmiths and stable men to care for the estimated 700,000 American Army horses in Europe. When prohibition closed taverns in the 1920s, the Society took over the maintenance of the horse troughs in front of many of these establishments often paying for the water tax and repairs. In April of 1920 in honor of Be Kind to Animals Week, the first ever Humane Day was held in Chicago's public schools. The Society furnished 8,000 booklets to the schools containing humane education exercises. The Society provided Chicago "Moving Picture Houses" with special lantern slides showing pictures of a child and dog and the message "Be Kind to Animals". In the mid 1920s, the Society observed its first Horses Christmas with deliveries of food and blankets to the city's workhorses.

In addition to two animal ambulances that covered the city every day picking up animals, the Society placed ads in the newspaper urging Chicago citizens to place sick or injured animals in a taxi cab and instruct the driver to take it to The Anti-Cruelty Society. The cab fares were paid by the Society from a fund set up by Mrs. George M. Wisner. In 1922, the Society hired Mr. Louis Krueger as its first full time Humane Investigator. Educational activities also expanded in 1924; the Society and Chicago Board of Education held pet shows at school playgrounds.

By the 1920s, The Anti-Cruelty Society was taking in over 20,000 animals a year. A rabies epidemic in 1928 forced the Society to limit the number of dogs that would be kept at the refuge to no more than 150 on any given day for the duration of the crisis. The practice of keeping a kennel card for each dog, that is still used today, was initiated at that time so that the health of animals could be better tracked. In 1928, The Anti-Cruelty Society assisted Mrs. Frederick McLaughlin in founding the "Orphans of the Storm" animal refuge in Deerfield, Illinois by providing a third of the necessary funds. The creation of this facility helped to ease some of the demand on the Society's refuge.

By the end of the 1920s, what had started as the dream of a "small group of thoughtful and committed citizens" had grown into a force to be reckoned with. The Anti-Cruelty Society had gained national respect and recognition. Its leadership and volunteers would have great influence in bringing about additional reforms in Chicago in the years to come.

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