



New York State Archives

New York House of Refuge Inmate Case Histories A2064

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Table of Contents

Overview of the Records	3
Arrangement	3
Scope and Contents	3
Other Finding Aids	5
Use of Records	6
Administrative Information	6
Access Terms	6

Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	The New York House of Refuge was the first juvenile reformatory in the United States. During its existence from 1825 to 1935, the institution implemented many innovative programs for the detention, education, and rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. This series contains detailed information, including personal, family, and criminal history, regarding each inmate (male and female) admitted to the institution.
Creator:	New York House of Refuge
Title:	New York House of Refuge inmate case histories
Quantity:	70 cubic feet
Quantity:	106 volumes
Inclusive Date:	1824-1935
Series:	A2064

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

This series is arranged chronologically by admission date. Case histories are numbered consecutively.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Content Note

This series provides detailed information regarding the personal, family, and criminal history of inmates admitted to the New York House of Refuge during its one hundred and ten years of operation. The format and contents of the histories vary over time, reflecting the implementation and revision of standard forms used to gather data. Certain data is found in the bulk of the histories: age and place of birth; education; habits; criminal history; parents' names and addresses; description of home (after 1878); parents' occupations (after 1878); conduct

after discharge (after 1878); physical description (after 1907); and parole and recommittal information (after 1907).

From 1824 to 1878 (volumes 1-37), most of the case history was compiled in narrative format at the time of admission. These narrative histories include parents' names, address, and nativity; inmate's age, place of birth, and former residence; inmate's prior involvement with the criminal justice system; inmate's prior education; name of court or other agency that made the commitment; "bad habits" such as patronizing theaters or circuses or staying out late; and keeping "bad company," especially with other inmates.

Narrative histories written prior to 1860 often include estimates of an inmate's character and intelligence, including notes on the inmate's grade level and habits of school attendance or truancy. Histories compiled beginning in the 1870s reflect increased concern for literacy and vocational aptitude, and information can be found regarding the inmate's prior work experience and parents' occupations.

These narrative histories are supplemented by "remarks" containing information about the status and progress of an inmate after admission. Remarks relate to a wide variety of topics: punishments or improvements in behavior; indentureship, including master's name, residence, occupation, and occasional reports on inmate behavior; escapes and recommitments; visits and letters from former inmates; and school and vocational training progress.

Beginning in 1878 (volume 38), the narrative histories are supplemented by a printed standard form titled "Examination of the Home." Filled out by a parole agent at the time of admission, these forms contain the following information: inmate's name and age; examiner's name and date of visit to inmate's home; inmate's home address and whether or not it was a tenement; description of the residence, including number of rooms, level on which an apartment was located, quality of furnishings, and number and ages of family members living there; parents' or step-parents' names, occupations, and habits regarding alcohol; indication of whether or not mother and father lived together and if living separately, the reason for separation; inmate's level of education and habits regarding attendance or truancy; and record of inmate's prior arrests.

The standard forms also feature a space for "remarks" regarding the inmate's home environment. Relatives or neighbors are often noted as the source of information in this "remarks" section. Finally, the forms contain a section titled "Examination after Discharge" used for entering information about the former inmate's adjustment to home, school, and/or job after release from the institution. However, this part of the form is rarely completed beyond the name and address of the former inmate, and frequently there is a notation that the former inmate could not be found.

Case histories compiled during the period from 1907 until the close of the institution are recorded on elaborate, four-page standard forms. The first page contains basic admission data; the second page contains information on home examinations; the third page updates previous information after a recommittal; and the fourth page, titled "Notes while under supervision or parole," contains short narrative entries. Beginning in the late 1920s, few entries were made after the first page.

The first, or admission page includes the following information: admission date; house and case history number; judge, court, and details of offense; age at admission and year when twenty-one years old; assignment data, including original assignment to a division and subsequent transferrals; appearance, including skin color, hair color, build (rarely filled in), and facial features; height; identifying marks, scars, and tatoos; parents' names, whether or not still living, nativity, duration of United States residence, occupation, whether living together, religion, and alcohol or tobacco habits; comments on home conditions; home address at admission and subsequent changes; previous arrests, including number and offense; school record prior to commitment, including attendance record, whether literate in English, grade level in public school, grade assigned in reformatory and subsequent promotion; and siblings' names, sex, age, school attendance, whether employed, and whether living at home.

The second page contains information on home examinations, usually including a pre-parole examination and another examination after parole. Data includes name of parole officer and date of visit; general characteristics of the home environment, such as "very good, well kept, neat"; more extensive notes on the home environment; a section titled "pre-parole work examination" with spaces for entering information about employer's name and address, the character of the business, the type of work to be done by the parolee, and the terms of the parole; and a section for information about bank accounts opened for inmates or personal property held in trust by the superintendent. The third page of the standard form contains information entered when a paroled or discharged inmate was recommitted. The entries on this page provide updated information gathered from new home, pre-parole, and parole examinations.

The final page of the standard form is a blank, lined sheet titled "Notes While under Supervision on Parole." This page contains very brief narrative entries, probably made by the parole officer. Entries include the following types of information: notes on interviews with the inmate; orders for a home examination; notes on time remaining until discharge; decisions that the inmate is "unfit" due to chronic physical or mental health problems or behavioral disorders; notes that a parolee was arrested or otherwise abused parole privileges; and cross references to pages in parole journals.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Other Finding Aids

Available at Repository

Each volume in the series includes a name index. Cumulative alphabetical indexes covering volumes 1-31 (1824-1869) are available in original paper format only.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Use of Records

Access Restrictions

Inmate case records are generally disclosable 75 years after date of discharge, but some information in case records of any date may be exempt from disclosure pursuant to Freedom of Information Law, or FOIL (Public Officers Law, Article 6), sect. 84-90; and Personal Privacy Protection Law, or PPPL (Public Officers Law, Article 6-A), sect. 91-99. For this reason, microfilm containing case records less than 100 years old is not available through interlibrary loan.

Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

Microform is available at the New York State Archives through interlibrary loan.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

The Department of Correction placed these records on loan to the Syracuse University Library from 1960-1977. The department's successor agency, the Department of Correctional Services, reacquired the records and subsequently transferred them to the State Archives.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Access Terms

- Paroling
- Juvenile delinquents--Rehabilitation
- Inmate records
- New York (State)
- Juvenile delinquency
- Female offenders
- Reformatories
- Juvenile delinquents
- Juvenile detention homes
- Case histories
- Admitting

- Juvenile corrections
- Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New York
- New York (State). Department of Correction
- New York (State). Department of Correctional Services