



New York State Archives

**Testimony and reports regarding special investigations
A2076**

New York State Archives
222 Madison Avenue
Albany, NY 12230
archref@nysed.gov
URL: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>

Table of Contents

Overview of the Records 3

Arrangement 3

Administrative History 3

Scope and Contents 4

Other Finding Aids 5

Use of Records 5

Administrative Information 5

Access Terms 6

Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	Testimony and supporting materials document investigations into conditions at the institution including inmate violence, cruelty of officers, discipline, malfeasance and mismanagement. In addition to letters, statements, affidavits, and reports there are also lists and charts of payroll, prices, payments and dispersals (primarily foodstuffs and provisions).
Creator:	New York House of Refuge
Title:	Testimony and reports regarding special investigations
Quantity:	1.1 cubic feet
Inclusive Date:	1902-1911
Series:	A2076

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

Chronological.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative History

The 1867 law establishing the State Board of Charities (originally called the Board of Commissioners of Public Charities) authorized it to visit and inspect custodial institutions receiving state aid. A law of 1896 gave the Board oversight of houses of refuge and other juvenile institutions and authorized it to order the managers of such institutions to modify treatment of inmates or other conditions.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Content Note

Testimony and supporting materials document four investigations into conditions at the institution.

In March 1902, the Board of Managers appointed a Select Committee to investigate the concerns of School Committee Chairman James J. Higginson regarding inmate violence. Records include: minutes of School committee meetings, January 18 and 22, concerning threats and attacks on teachers by inmates; letter to a member of the School Committee from the school principal outlining threats and attacks on teachers over the past year; Higginson's letters to the Board of Managers requesting an investigation of alleged mismanagement causing inmate violence; letter to the president of the Board of Managers from Superintendent O.V. Sage refuting Higginson's charges; letters, statements, and affidavits from employees regarding inmates' behavior; transcript of testimony taken by the Select Committee from Higginson and institution officials and employees; and committee's report rejecting Higginson's charges.

On September 26, 1903, the President of the Board of Managers, in response to press criticism of the management of the institution, requested the State Board of Charities to investigate. The Board's Committee on Reformatories conducted hearings, taking testimony from the president and members of the Board of Managers, officers, employees, and inmates of the institution. This series contains the Committee's summary report to the Board of Charities concluding that: the House of Refuge should be entirely state-owned and operated instead of its present status as a privately owned institution funded by the state and located on city-owned land; girls should not be confined in the same institution as boys; and the state should appropriate more funds to provide adequate food, clothing, and maintenance at the institution.

In 1908, after receiving an anonymous letter from an "inmate" of the institution charging officers with cruelty, Governor Hughes requested the State Board of Charities to investigate. The Board's Committee on Reformatories again took testimony from officials, employees, and inmates. Records include: transcripts of testimony concerning treatment of inmates; list of officers dismissed from the institution with cause (e.g. drunkenness, cruelty, etc.); correspondence regarding the investigation and the treatment of inmates; report of the Committee on Reformatories concluding that some cruelty charges were sustained by the evidence, the managers did not provide adequate personal supervision, and the management was not in accordance with state policy on care and treatment of juvenile delinquents; letter from the Board of Managers to the Board of Charities refuting criticisms of the management; and news clippings summarizing the report of the Board of Charities.

In 1911, the Board of Managers appointed a committee to investigate discipline at the institution. This series contains transcripts of the testimony taken by the committee from institution officials and employees.

A2076-97: This accretion consists of a letter and supporting documentation of a claim of malfeasance and mismanagement at the New York House of Refuge at Randall's Island. The

letter was apparently written to Governor Dix to provoke action by his special investigators of conditions at state institutions. The letter, dated May 19, 1911, is from William B. Wemple, steward in the financial department of the House of Refuge. Much information in the letter reiterates allegations given earlier in Mr. Wemple's testimony, found in transcripts dated April, 1911. Wemple's primary complaints are the mismanagement, chronic intoxication, and cronyism of the institution's senior staff.

Other documentation in this accretion (1907-1911) includes numerous lists and charts of payrolls, prices, payments, and dispersals (primarily foodstuffs and provisions) that pertain to Randall's Island and apparently relate to charges in Wemple's letter. It is unclear if this documentation was provided with the letter or subsequently. It is also unclear when, how, and by whom this information was brought together.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Other Finding Aids

Available at Repository

A2076-77: Alphabetical name index to 1908-1909 transcripts of testimony; name index (in order of appearance) to 1911 transcripts of testimony.

A2076-77: Folder list.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Use of Records

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the material.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

The Dept. of Correction placed these records on loan to the Syracuse University Library from 1960-1977.

A2076-97: This accretion was transferred to the Archives from Manuscripts and Special Collections of the New York State Library.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Access Terms

- Fiscal records
- Juvenile delinquents--Rehabilitation
- Correctional personnel--New York (State)
- Prison administration
- Corruption investigation--New York (State)
- Transcripts
- New York (State)
- Juvenile delinquency
- Documenting correctional facilities
- Lists (document genres)
- Randalls Island (N.Y.)
- Reformatories
- Testimony
- Juvenile detention homes
- Reports
- Whistle blowing--New York (State)
- Juvenile corrections
- Investigating
- Monitoring youth
- New York (State). State Board of Charities
- Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New York
- Wemple, William B.
- 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