

Archives & Special Collections, Columbia University Health Sciences Library

Vivisection Papers

VIVISECTION PAPERS.

1875-1932, 1947 (bulk 1892-1909)

.75 cubic feet (3 boxes)

#M-0190

SUMMARY: Correspondence and a large variety of printed matter relating to the fight over vivisection legislation, largely in New York, but also including New Jersey, and the District of Columbia, and generally dating from 1892 to 1909. The papers seem to have originated with John G. Curtis (1844-1913) and Frederic Schiller Lee (1859-1939).

ORGANIZATION: Organized in two series: I. Correspondence; II. Printed matter.

SCOPE AND CONTENT: The Vivisection papers document an opposing response to two distinct campaigns for anti-vivisection legislation in New York State: the first in the late 1890's and the second, which makes up the bulk of the collection, the 1908-9 period of the proposed Davis-Lee bill in New York. The collection is primarily correspondence concerned with coordinating the efforts of national medical organizations to distinguish "useless brutality and abuse" from "legitimate scientific work" and to focus public sentiment on the former. Besides large numbers of physicians and scientists, many correspondents are media figures and legislators. The collection is filled with drafts and copies of form letters and laws as well as pamphlets, booklets, handbills, etc. both pro- and anti-vivisection. In addition, there is a smaller amount of material relating to campaigns against similar bills in New Jersey and the District of Columbia.

John G. Curtis, Professor of Physiology at the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Columbia University, and his colleague, Associate Professor Frederic Schiller Lee, led the pro-vivisection efforts. Not only is the bulk of the correspondence from or to these two figures, but in their role as coordinators they received copies of letters sent to other prominent figures in the battle, in particular Simon Flexner of the Rockefeller Institute. There are also many drafts of pamphlets and organizational statements that reveal the authorship of Curtis and Lee, though the items were often published anonymously or under collective signatures.

Series I includes two runs of correspondence, the first largely (though not exclusively) created by Curtis and dating from 1875-1909 (Box 1, f.1-3), and the second created by Lee and limited to 1908-09 (Box 1, f.4). The Curtis correspondence is arranged chronologically; the Lee, alphabetically. Researchers should be aware that letters to and from Lee can also be found in the Curtis correspondence. The series also contains several folders of printed legislative material, form letters, handbills and flyers relating specifically to anti-vivisection legislation in New York, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia.

Important correspondents include Henry P. Bowditch of Harvard (largely in Box 1:1); Dr. Albert Vanderveer, who coordinated pro-vivisectionist actions in Albany (throughout the correspondence); Albert Leffingwell, a prominent American anti-vivisectionist (Box 1:3); Frederick L. Bellamy, counsel for the Society for the Prevention of Abuse in Animal Experimentation (Box 1:4); Walter B. Cannon of

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Harvard Medical School and Chairman of the Council on Defense of Medical Research of the AMA (Box 1:4); and Simon Flexner of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and the AMA Council (Box 1:3-4). In addition, there is an interesting exchange of letters in 1892-93 between Curtis and Georgina Schuyler (sister of social reformer Louisa Lee Schuyler) in which Curtis tries to persuade her out of her anti-vivisectionist opinions (Box 1:1).

Throughout much of the correspondence are letters from press agents who were employed by the pro-vivisectionists to provide stories to newspapers around the state regarding the fight.

Series II includes a wide variety of printed matter relating both to the Davis-Lee Bill and to the larger controversy over the use of animal vivisection in medical research. Dating from 1880 to 1947, with the bulk spanning 1890-1910, the material includes pamphlets, flyers, handbills, reprints, legislative bills, and newspaper clippings from both sides of the conflict. Though largely American in origin, it does include British material. Also included are several runs of anti-vivisection periodicals, the most complete of which is *Our Dumb Animals* (1893-1901), a monthly published by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: John Green Curtis (1844-1913) born New York City, Harvard, A.B. 1866, M.A. 1869, Columbia University College of Physicians & Surgeons, M.D., 1870. Upon graduation, Curtis joined the faculty of P&S teaching anatomy. He was Secretary of the Faculty 1876-1890, and professor of physiology and department head 1883-1909. Curtis was a scholar of the early history of physiology.

Frederic Schiller Lee (1859-1939) born Canton, N.Y., St. Lawrence U., A.B. 1878, Johns Hopkins, Ph.D.(biology) 1885. Lee taught physiology at St. Lawrence and Bryn Mawr before becoming adjunct in 1895, professor of physiology in 1905, and Department Head in 1909 at Columbia University. He wrote and edited extensively, was President of the Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine. Active in many professional and other organizations, Lee worked for the recognition of physiology as a scientific rather than exclusively medical study in universities.

PROVENANCE: While no record explaining the origin, accession or arrangement of these records has been found, it is clear from internal evidence that they were created by Curtis and Lee. They may have come to the library as part of Lee's personal library (donated by Lee in 1917) or they may have resided in the Dept. of Physiology and been acquired at a later date. The library owned them by 1962 when these papers, which were then part of the Lee Papers, were transferred to the Rare Book and Manuscript Library on the Morningside Campus.

The papers appear to have been processed in the late 1980s-early 1990s and called the "Curtis-Bowditch-Lee Vivisection Papers." Additional printed material belonging to the collection was discovered in 1998 and added to the collection. Because of problems of arrangement, the collection was reprocessed in Spring 2000 by Stephen Novak.

The records, especially the Curtis part of them, are extremely brittle and still somewhat sooty, suggesting a long period in an attic or basement.

RELATED COLLECTIONS: The Frederic Schiller Lee Papers have additional correspondence regarding the vivisection controversy after 1909; the nine-volume Vivisection Scrapbooks, 1908-1914, 1920-23, which may have been created by Lee, have extensive newspaper and magazine coverage of the issue.

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In addition, there are a large number of anti-vivisection publications in the both Special Collections and in the general Health Sciences Library collection. This material is accessible through CLIO.

Box 1

Series I: Correspondence

- 1) Correspondence, 1875-1909 (bulk 1899-1909): mostly to and from Curtis
- 2) Legislation correspondence, 1891-1904: also includes clippings, laws, resolutions, handbills.
- 3) Davis-Lee Bill, 1907-09: correspondence, notes, drafts, speeches, laws, reprints (largely Curtis, but also including Lee material)
- 4) Davis-Lee Bill, 1907-09: correspondence to and from Lee (in alpha order)
- 5-6) Davis-Lee Bill, 1907-09: legislative publications, form letters, letters to the editor, drafts, notes, etc.

Box 2

- 1) Davis-Lee Bill: Stenographic transcript of NY State Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, March 24, 1909
- 2) Davis-Lee Bill: miscellaneous notes, correspondence, reports, etc., 1908-09

Series II: Printed matter

- 3) Newsclippings, 1890-94, 1908-09
- 4-5) Printed Matter, 1880s-1890s
- 6) Printed Matter, 1900-47
- 7) Printed Matter: oversize, 1900-47
- 8) Printed Matter: pro-vivisection, 1880-1931
- 9) Printed Matter: anti-vivisection periodicals, 1892, 1895, 1932
- 10) *Our Dumb Animals*, v. 25 #5 (June 1893) – v.29 #12 (May 1897) [incomplete]

Box 3

- 1) *Our Dumb Animals*, v. 30 #12 (May 1901) – v. 33 #12 (May 1901) [incomplete]