

A Municipal Tail:

The Rise of Animal Control in Los Angeles, 1880-1909

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Traditionally, scholars have portrayed the Gilded Age state as being starkly different from that of the Progressive Era. Historian Susan J. Pearson argues that while the Gilded Age has typically been understood as the peak of the laissez-faire policy, only during the Progressive Era did reformers realize that state power was the only force capable of protecting society through regulation. Nevertheless, Pearson believes that the transition from the Gilded Age's deficit of state power to the Progressive Era's strong federal presence is more nuanced. "These conceptual blinders," she argues, "prevent scholars from detecting the tremendous range and depth of governmental activity throughout United States history, much of it occurring at the local and state level." By directing our attention away from the federal state to local governance, a Gilded Age "state-building fluorescent" is illuminated that reveals how the Progressive state was formed.ⁱ

The emergence of animal control in America's cities at the end of the nineteenth-century supports Pearson's argument. Changes in public perspectives of animal welfare combined with pressure from reform organizations to act as the impetus for modern systems of municipal animal control. The contemporary animal welfare movement in America was rooted in spiritual and philosophical currents that preceded it by centuries. These facets were shaped by epochal-changing events such as the Civil War and industrialization. They culminated in the Gilded Age, when private individuals formed reform groups to put pressure on the state at its most local levels, highlighting how the Progressive State emerged *out* of the Gilded Age and not as a response to it.

The formation of municipal animal control in Los Angeles illustrates this process of state expansion. As the public became influenced by the emerging animal welfare movement, expectations for animal control changed. People took notice of the suffering of animals, which resulted in public outcry against traditional systems of animal control. Meanwhile, private animal welfare organizations put pressure on municipal government to initiate reforms. City leaders then enlisted these organizations and together they experimented within the framework of the public's new expectations for animal

control. Nevertheless, officials' reliance on outsiders to shoulder this responsibility ultimately led them to conclude that animal control in the twentieth century city, with its expanding population of both humans *and* animals, was something only local government could handle.

The exposition of this argument will coincide with the telling of a story that unfolded in a series of articles from the *Los Angeles Times*. Articles mentioning animal control increased in such frequency during the first decade of twentieth century that there was at least one every month, sometimes one every week, and occasionally multiple articles in one day. Newspapers and periodicals chronicle the public's growing interest in issues of animal control. This synergy of public opinion, publication, and new attitudes towards animals is understood when one looks at the history of the animal welfare movement in America.

The origins of the American animal welfare movement are found in the Colonial era of the eighteenth-century. Puritans and Quakers staunchly opposed blood sports like cockfighting and bull baiting, which they viewed as having a negative social effect. Quakerism developed its perspective of animal abuse to include spiritual components that deeply weighed an animal's ability to suffer. Yet the suffering of an animal was viewed in terms of how it corrupted social morality, not in terms of how it affected the animal experiencing it.ⁱⁱ

A new development in animal welfare came at the end of the eighteenth-century as part of an international move away from anthropocentrism. Philosophers began to embolden the definition of the word "humane" and question the paradigm that allowed animals to suffer due to their lack of rationality. People like English philosopher Jeremy Bentham argued that it was an animal's sentience that should prohibit its suffering. This moral shift occurring alongside socioeconomic changes set the stage for a new mindset of reform.ⁱⁱⁱ

The emergence of market capitalism during the early nineteenth-century had a profound effect on how people understood their relationship not just with animals, but with suffering in general. Traditionally, households had been the center of production, with children and animals taking on labor roles in the family unit. Industrialization increasingly moved these centers to factories. A newly emerging ideology of domesticity pervaded American households, in which pets and children were linked with new conceptions of the family. New ideals of affection were established that opened people's eyes to a broader understanding of suffering. Ending suffering eventually became viewed as a moral responsibility that began at home but could be projected onto larger antebellum issues, such as animal welfare or abolition.^{iv}

This new social awareness for suffering was expressed in contemporary periodicals. In 1854, the *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage...* investigated a dog pound that it called a "melancholy spectacle." The articles describe dogs of all sizes and colors bound with ropes and chains and awaiting execution. One lone pound keeper is described as whipping them into obedience, and when that failed, "hapless" victims were grabbed by the nape of the neck, clubbed to death, and tossed on an offal-cart, ending their "piteous howls." Dogs were described as being "horror-stricken" with the bloody scene and "confounded with the never-ceasing yelps, howls, groans and unearthly cries" that surround them. The article is steeped in sentimental language and messages that feature contemporary rhetorical devices of reform that were employed to combat suffering.^v

Sentimentalism was a literary device that anticruelty reformers adopted during the antebellum era. Pearson describes sentimentalism as a "philosophically rooted genre that positions affect, or feeling, as the grounding of both our common humanity and our morality." Sentimentalism, with its emphasis on virtue and sympathy, fit perfectly within the new moral framework of antebellum society.

Famous contemporary reformers like Harriet Beecher Stowe employed sentimentalism as a rhetorical device to communicate their messages. Reformers were equally inspired by the Second Great Awakening, which provided a moral foundation for antebellum reform arguments. Its teleological message of social perfectibility through righteous moral uplift inspired reformers to crusade against social injustice.^{vi}

Animal welfare reform was largely sidelined during the build up to the Civil War because anticruelty reformers were predominantly focused on abolition, which in their eyes was justifiably the most notorious social injustice of the day. Nevertheless, the legacy and tool kit of the antebellum anticruelty movement would be employed by animal welfare reformers during the second half of the eighteenth century to further their cause.^{vii}

Following the war, antebellum anticruelty reform was reconfigured by new ideologies that emerged as the country tried to heal itself. Slavery's death knell inspired a sense of liberalism among reformers that sparked a call for rights to those who suffered. In their minds, the emancipation of slaves was only the beginning. Pearson argues that the liberalism that emerged after the civil war combined with antebellum sentimentalism to create a new rhetoric that allowed reformers to reconcile "dependence with rights and pledged the use of state power to protect the helpless." Sentimental liberalism was used to express new affectionate perspectives on suffering that came out of domestication and war. Now more than ever, reformers, periodicals, and the public passionately called out not only to end the misery of those who suffered, but also for a codification and defense of their rights.^{viii}

The end of the Civil War also resulted in a secularization of the Second Great Awakening's evangelical mission of teleological perfection. Historian Janet M. Davis labels this "a gospel of kindness,"

which she suggests became the “foundation of a new world rising phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Civil War—a moral rampart to defend, strengthen, elevate, and unify a fractured country.” While the roles of some animals became based on affection, those animals on which society still relied for food, materials, and scientific research were moving further and further away from public view. The suffering of the animals that remained observable in the expanding metropolises of the late nineteenth century became a social problem. For anticruelty reformers, the extension of mercy towards animals constituted the first step towards attaining their ultimate goal of ending global suffering. With this motivation, the first animal welfare reformers emerged.^{ix}

On April 10, 1866 in New York City, Henry Bergh founded the country’s first animal welfare organization: the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). Prior to this, Bergh served in the Lincoln administration as a diplomat stationed in Russia. While there, he witnessed carriage drivers brutalizing their horses, which had a profound effect on him. One day Bergh had had enough and intervened. The animal abuser cowered once he noticed Bergh’s uniform. Bergh claimed that it was at this moment he realized that only the power of the state could end animal suffering. An aristocrat from birth, Bergh was able to use his influence to secure a charter for the ASPCA and draft a law against animal cruelty. Furthermore, state legislators granted his organization the ability to work with police to investigate and arrest suspected animal abusers. His passion for the cause attracted like-minded individuals, and the ASPCA grew into a veritable army of animal control officers and lawyers who were mandated to rid the city of animal suffering. Bergh initiated a chain reaction of concern for animal welfare that quickly spread across the country, and in the following months new organizations were established that worked with legislators to pass anticruelty laws.^x

Animal welfare organizations initially emphasized the horse as the animal most likely to endure suffering, due to its omnipresence in urban cityscapes as a beast of burden. Animal-power was eventually replaced by electricity, however, and by the 1890s the horse had begun to disappear from

city streets. The affectionate roles assumed by animals resulted in a new trend of pet keeping, which drastically increased stray dog populations. Welfare organizations shifted their priorities to dogs as a result. Bergh's preoccupation with ending labor animal abuse and blood sports led him to neglect the growing stray dog problem. Other more perceptive reformers, however, soon recognized the importance of urban animal control.^{xi}

As early as 1870, animal welfare reformer Caroline Earle White realized that urban dog populations faced insurmountable suffering due to their association with rabies. As stray populations increased, so did the fear of the disease. Not until the 1880s did European scientists associate the disease with germ theory. Nevertheless, even after the scientific community understood the disease misconceptions continued to proliferate well into the twentieth century. For example, people believed that the disease was most common during the warmer months of the year. During the "dog days of summer," city leaders placed bounties on stray dogs and the city's poor, many of them children, participated in rounding them up to be taken to rudimentary pounds for execution. Bounties were problematic because there was a thin line between a stray dog and someone's beloved pet and unscrupulous dog catchers often stole dogs to claim the reward. Reformers like White realized that this system not only inflicted mass suffering on animal populations, it also was detrimental to the city's youth by inviting them to participate in animal cruelty.^{xii}

In 1867, White was instrumental in the securing the state charter for the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA). Her efforts to extend the principles of animal welfare to dogs was unparalleled among the early reformers. Because of preexisting social conceptions about the roles of women as reformers, White and the other women of the organization were relegated to a Women's Branch. To answer the call of her city's suffering stray dogs, however, White and the Women's Branch defiantly shattered these gender roles and became pioneers of modern animal control.^{xiii}

In 1870 the Women's Branch took over municipal animal control responsibilities in Philadelphia and created the first animal shelter in America. They were subsidized by the government, given control of the dog round up, and erected a shelter that provided space for dogs to run, free access to water, plenty of food, and access to outdoor areas. The Branch worked to improve the tools used to catch dogs, including replacing lassoes with scoop nets and adding shock-absorption to the dogcatcher's wagons. Prior to the Branch's reforms, strays could expect a merciless and brutal death at the hands of an indiscriminate pound keeper. The Branch researched and implemented the most humane methods of euthanasia available to them: suffocation by carbonous gas. Abandonment contributed significantly to the city's stray dog problem, and to combat this the Branch innovated a system of pet surrender and adoption. The humane animal control pioneered by White and her Women's branch slowly spread across the country. As this happened, the public's growing expectations for animal control did not go unnoticed by local leaders.^{xiv}

The spirit of animal welfare reached Los Angeles in the early 1880s. Prior to this, however, city officials had traditionally tried to keep the pound out of sight by frequently moving it and placing it in out of way locations such as riverbeds. The city's residents had opened their eyes to the suffering of its animal population and officials could no longer hide the fact that the large numbers of dogs that entered these hellish pounds would never be seen again.^{xv}

In 1883 residents of the Turner and First Street neighborhoods charged their local pound's staff with cruelty. They claimed that strays were captured, taken to the pound, confined in a singular pen that was exposed to direct sunlight, and denied food and water for two days. At that point they were mercilessly slaughtered by shooting or poisoning. The dogs' executions were often botched, and in the case of shootings, some dogs had to be shot multiple times before they finally died. The residents complained that pitiful howling permeated the neighborhood at all hours. Reporting on the charges, the

Los Angeles Times concludes that the “city should immediately take steps to put a stop to the unnecessary cruelty.”^{xvi}

As animal welfare became a pressing social issue during the 1880s, it was reported on with more frequency by the *Times*. One article from February 9, 1889 contained an investigation into a pound proclaimed by the article to be “one of the filthiest holes in the city.” The reporter remarked that the cruelties he witnessed had a profound emotional effect. Dogs were slaughtered every day and were either shot or placed en masse in a large tank and drowned. The article illuminates the operations of a traditional pound in Los Angeles prior to animal welfare reform. “Poundkeepers” were paid fifty cents per dog executed, but they also took advantage of the newly emerging petkeeping culture to make money on the side. The article describes how a poundkeeper would “pass a mangy cur any time to get his hands on a high-toned ‘doggie,’ for he knows that the master or mistress of the well-kept animal will give up \$2 or \$3 to keep the pet out of the pound.” The article concludes with the stern message that anyone who visited the pound would be convinced of the failings of the current system of animal control. “The whole system is wrong,” the article declares, “and something should be done by the authorities.”^{xvii}

People in Los Angeles began to weigh animal suffering with animal welfare, and out of this confluence the city’s first reform organizations formed. The Humane Society came to the city in 1885 and would file its articles of incorporation the following year. The organization was precipitated by the arrival of Asa A. Clark to the city, who was an influential member of the Cincinnati SPCA. As an example of the western spread of animal welfare that had occurred since Bergh’s founding of the ASCPA in 1866, Clark brought his experiences to the city’s like-minded reformers and immediately began a crusade to end suffering. The organization initially preoccupied itself with cases of child abuse but as the public’s outcry against the ineffectiveness of the city’s animal control began to be captured in overly sentimental stories in the *Times*, the attention of the reformers began to shift towards the dog problem.^{xviii}

Only a few months after the publication of the *Times'* expose of the pound, the Humane Society began to put pressure on the city for change. In August of 1889, the organization's president met with the city council to discuss the creation of an official office of "Humane Officer," which would exist as an apparatus of the Chief of Police. The organization had been paying a single officer forty-dollars a month to assist the city with policing cases of cruelty towards animals and children. The organization had hoped that once the position received official status, the city would assume this cost. The organization's proposition was met with opposition because the city council was undergoing retrenchment at the time. Despite newspaper coverage, public outrage, and the Humane Society putting pressure on city leaders to reform animal control, little changed. That is, until the reign of poundkeeper George Vacher.^{xix}

Vacher became pound-master in 1886 and in the same year was involved in a scandal that would become the first of many that would mar his reign and result in city leaders taking steps to abolish the traditional pound style of animal control. In July of that year, a pet owner named R.J. Montgomery appeared before a judge accusing Vacher of stealing his dog, which he valued at forty-five dollars. According to Montgomery, the dog was licensed and had tags on his collar. Rather than pay Vacher the fee to get the dog back, the pet owner filed an official complaint, which resulted in a warrant for Vacher's arrest for petty larceny. A few days later Vacher was called to a meeting with Chief of Police John Glass. Glass reprimanded him so harshly in the meeting that Vacher resigned from his dog catching duties.^{xx}

Vacher's resignation did not end his animal control corruption. The poundkeeper and his minions simply switched the focus of their practice of larceny and extortion from dogs to livestock. Almost a year after the fateful meeting with Chief Glass, the *Times* published an exposé on May 1, 1897 that accused the pound of exploiting newly enacted animal laws. These laws, passed by the city council on March 26, 1897, regulated the grazing of the city's livestock. They stipulated animals were to be staked on private lots and tied to a rope that did not extend beyond the property line. If animals were

found in violation of this, the poundkeeper and his animal-catchers would take them to the pound where owners could get them back for one-dollar plus an upkeep fee that accrued daily. Eye-witness testimony claimed the pound regularly housed upward of five-hundred horses daily, many captured illegally. One witness claimed, "I have seen the pound deputies ride their horses into the vacant lots on Sixteenth street and race back and forth across them among the staked-out stock: if any animal was frightened into breaking away it was promptly lassoed and carried off to the pound."^{xxi}

Vacher was incensed with the *Times* over the article. He reached out to the publication to defend his deputies but could not refute the details of the eye-witness accounts. The *Times* covered Vacher's response in an article published two days after the exposé. It claimed that "at first Vacher was disposed to enter a general denial, but when he considered the article in detail, he admitted that many of the instances were correctly reported, and that possibly the deputies had been over zealous." According the article, Vacher jettisoned his responsibility by claiming that he should not be held accountable for the actions of his deputies. Caught red-handed, Vacher promised to offer refunds and to work with the City Attorney to ensure proper adherence to the new ordinance.^{xxii}

Things quieted down for Vacher and his minions for the rest of the 1897, and by 1898 they resumed their dog-catching duties. Old habits die hard, and Vacher was soon embroiled in yet another scandal. He had employed his son Will at the pound, and one day Will and a fellow dogcatcher got in an altercation while chasing a dog. The dog's owner confronted Will and his cohort but was assaulted by the dogcatchers. The owner followed them back to the pound, paid the fee to get the dog back, and promptly went to the police station. A warrant was issued, and both dogcatchers were arrested for battery.^{xxiii}

The scandal precipitated a visit from the mayor, who was appalled at the suffering occurring at the pound. He observed first hand seventy-five dogs crowded in a single ten-foot square execution

chamber, where one-by-one they were shot by a .22 caliber rifle. It was becoming clear to city leaders that something needed to be done. Rabies scares were resulting in hundreds of dogs being sent to the pound and the city's attempts to combat this problem through new animal laws and licensing was being mishandled by Vacher's corrupt reign. What was once something that could be hidden away in river bottoms and under bridges had become a social problem covered by newspapers and witnessed by city officials.^{xxiv}

The onset of the twentieth century marked the end of Vacher's stint as poundkeeper. He struggled to stay out of trouble, but scandals continued to bring him unwanted attention. In 1902 a court justice was investigating a horse whose ownership was being disputed by two men. One of the men claimed he had obtained the horse from someone who had purchased it from Vacher's pound. Upon examination of Vacher's record book, the justice discovered evidence that the record of the purchase had been recently altered to support the claim that the horse was purchased from the pound. Nevertheless, eye-witness testimony reported that the horse had not been at the pound the day the record books claimed it was purchased. Vacher argued that he had nothing to do with the fabrication, but the incident further sullied his tarnished reputation.^{xxv}

By 1903, the *Times* regularly depicted Vacher as an inept villain who relished the suffering of dogs. One article from February 21 told a tale of a dog named "Snowball" who Vacher's dogcatchers had stolen from its yard. According to the *Times*, "Vacher, the dog-catcher, and his despised minions rode triumphantly into Eleventh street and swooped down upon Mrs. Ada P. Whitting's spitz dog." Mrs. Whitting rushed to the pound just in time to see Vacher locking the dog away, slamming its tail in the door in the process. A dispute ensued, and Vacher refused to turn the dog over. The article claims Mrs. Whitting grabbed onto a horse and refused to let go until the dog was returned. Vacher folded and returned the dog to Mrs. Whitting. The article portrays Snowball as the victim, Mrs. Whitting as the hero,

and Vacher as the villain. Furthermore, it confirms the notorious reputation Vacher's pound had earned with the public.^{xxvi}

Vacher's and his corrupt regime were finally taken to task after he found himself in yet another scandal in April of 1904. Two dogcatchers were accused of shooting a licensed Great Dane for barking at them. Public outrage over the cold murder of a high-bred dog erupted immediately. City officials admonished the dogcatcher who fired the shot for having a gun, which they argued he had neither a right to possess nor to use. The incident attracted the attention of the Humane Society, which immediately served notice to the pound employees to cease their cruelty towards dogs or face litigation. The organization pressured city officials to have the dogcatcher arrested, and used the opportunity to level wide-ranging criticisms against the pound system.^{xxvii}

A *Times* article from Sep 26 captured the spirit of animal control reform that followed the shooting of the Great Dane. "Humanitarians," it declares, "have joined in an insistent demand that the dog-catching department of the city administration be placed in the hands of the Humane Society." The article argues that the organization would avoid the problems that plagued Vacher's stint as poundkeeper since it was grounded in a commitment to animal welfare. Moreover, it noted approvingly, enlisting the Humane Society would free the city of the responsibility of animal control. More interesting, however, is the mention of the "indisputable rights" of dogs which evokes the evangelical rhetoric of sentimental liberalism that east coast reformers pioneered nearly thirty years prior. The article explains that "man, the noblest creation of God, has a direct responsibility in protecting those rights, and in giving to all animals the kindly guardianship which they deserve and which the Creator manifestly intended should be given to them by mankind."^{xxviii}

The article also calls for an extension of state power to be granted to reform animal control while simultaneously condemning the brutality of the current system. The "dog-catching spectacle," it

argues, “tends to bring out the worst instincts in human nature.” It explicitly mentions the harmful effect that witnessing its “violence and brutality” has on children, and by doing this, places the suffering of dogs within the familial framework of the domestic ideology. The article fully demonstrates that the ideas and perspectives of animal welfare that had started in the east had become firmly established in Los Angeles.^{xxix}

The article concludes by affirming that the Humane Society should be granted the responsibility for the city’s animal control. While the organization had pressured the government for this responsibility since 1889, by 1904 it was not the only animal welfare organization in the city. As it became obvious that Vacher’s days were numbered, more and more competition for the position emerged.

The SPCA had also hoped to secure the responsibility for itself. Mrs. L. E. Giese, the organization’s attorney, and prominent city leaders inspected the pound in early August of 1904. They communicated their findings to the *Times*, which ran a lengthy column detailing the failings of Vacher’s pound. The article described claustrophobic kennels with no ventilation where dogs were crammed in beyond capacity. After describing the horrific nature of the pound, the article quoted Giese who proclaimed: “we have no hesitation in saying that the conditions at this pound are a disgrace to the city, and that there is urgent need for a better pound, modeled on those plans that have been approved in other cities, and placed under efficient management.” Using the *Times* as her mouthpiece, Giese called upon city leaders to update the city’s animal control, and suggested that it entrust her organization to handle it.^{xxx}

The article attributes Vacher’s failings to him being a relic of an outdated system. Indeed, one of the city leaders who accompanied Giese in the inspection, Dr. W. A. Lamb, argued that the blame should not fall on Vacher: “He is no doubt doing the best he can under the circumstances, but we want to see the city pound brought up to the standard of other large city pounds and managed in a clean and

humane manner.” Lamb then compared Los Angeles to San Francisco, Chicago, and New York; all cities that were “far ahead” of Los Angeles in their animal control and that utilized private animal welfare reform organizations.^{xxx1}

Los Angeles experienced significant growth beginning in the early 1880s. The 1880 Census ranked the city the 187th largest city in the country. In his landmark history of the city, *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis describes it at this time as being a mere “tributary to imperial San Francisco, with little water or capital, and no coal or port.” By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, it had become the biggest city in the west. For many of its turn-of-the-century residents, it was a time of romantic postulation of what could be.^{xxxii}

Understanding Vacher in this light seems to support Lamb’s forgiving tone. The disgraced poundkeeper embodies the worst elements of the Gilded Age west. The form of animal control he represented both neglected the wellbeing of animals and impeded the extension of state power to enact reform. Reform organizations like the Humane Society and the SPCA, on the other hand, were the representations of the animal welfare movement’s western dissemination from the urban hubs on the east coast. They brought with them methodology and ideology with proven results in the very cities that Los Angelenos now looked to as models for their own metropolis. The city’s perception of animal welfare had passed Vacher by, and now residents demanded a system of animal control appropriate to a growing city entering a new century of modernity and promise.

The *Times*’ support for a union between reform organizations and government is reflected the growth of public support for such a step. City leaders gave into the pressure from reform organizations and settled on one to contract out the responsibility of animal control. Despite the fact that the SPCA and the Humane Society each had an established legacy on both local and national levels, city leaders instead chose to work with an entirely new organization.

The Humane Animal League filed its articles of incorporation on August 8th, 1908. Its first president, Dr. W. A. Lamb, had served on the city's playground commission and had accompanied SPCA officials on their visit to the pound the previous year. The League openly declared that it would not compete with the other animal welfare reform organizations and stated its intention was to focus on humane education and children.^{xxxiii}

Just over a month later, however, the League met to appoint committees to prepare to assist the city in the care of animals. Each committee had its own subject, which included civic drinking fountains, entertainment, education, publication, dog tags, horse rest, and finance. This move only hinted at the animal control coup d'etat that would come the following month.^{xxxiv}

On November 8th the *Times* published an article celebrating the League's securing of a contract that would give it responsibility for the city's animal control. Employing the trademark sentimental tone of animal welfare rhetoric, it proclaimed "Old Dog Tray, Tabby Cat, Charley Horse and Muley Cow are facing the Millennium. They met Dr. W. A. Lamb, president of the Humane Animal League at the City Hall yesterday. He is to be made pound-master under the new pound system, and all agreed that his plans and those of the league will mean an uplift for the animal kingdom."^{xxxv}

The article described how the contract was primarily ushering in a change of system since the League would continue to use the same pound on Santa Fé and Ninth that George Vacher had run. Furthermore, the article makes it clear that while Lamb would serve as poundmaster, this would be a figurehead position while Thomas B. Vacher, the son of the infamous poundkeeper, would manage the day-to-day operations. Dr. Lamb promised that despite the pound's notorious past, the League would make structural improvements to ensure that it met humane standards.^{xxxvi}

The League's proposal for animal control prioritized the relationship between the organization and the public. "What we want," Dr. Lamb said, "is for the public to understand... .. that we are the

friends of the dogs and their owners and not their enemies.” Under the new system, if the League captured a licensed dog, they would consult their records and return it to the owner. If the dog was unlicensed, the League would grant the owner ten days to procure one, after which point a fine would be issued. In order to identify the owners of unlicensed dogs, the League proposed a system of rewarding the public with gifts in exchange for information. The new contract abolished the system of premiums on dogs captured and killed. Only dogs described as “worthless” would be euthanized via humane cyanide asphyxiation. Healthy and well-bred dogs would be adopted out. Emphasizing the role that pets played in domestic ideology, the League promised that it would provide financing to poor families who could not afford the fees. “This is reversing the old order,” Dr. Lamb explained, “which heartlessly tore the children’s pets from them because there were fees to be earned.”^{xxxvii}

The contract gave the League three years to implement its vision. Funding would come from three-quarters of license fees collected, which was projected to be about nine-thousand dollars annually. Most importantly, however, no profit would be made from the death of animals. Even their remains would be incinerated as opposed to being sold to rendering plants.^{xxxviii}

The *Times*’ favorable coverage of the contract matches the ambitious nature of League’s plans. The talk of “new days” and “millenniums” conveyed the city’s hopeful optimism as it entered the twentieth-century. This hope fit in perfectly within the narrative of social perfection and up-lift that characterized animal welfare rhetoric. Nevertheless, infighting and accusations of corruption would cause the League to struggle and ultimately falter before it had accomplished its goals. As this happened, it lost not only the support of city officials, but also that of the public.

Still, in November of 1908, there was no indication of the League’s future problems, and it continued to consolidate roles as it prepared to assume responsibility for the city’s animal control. It signed an additional contract that ended the policy of profiting from adoption. Dogs would be given

away to potential adopters who were willing to pay the licensing fees. The contract also approved a formal lease of the old pound from its owner, who was none other than George Vacher. The League hired George L. Lawson to be its secretary, a figure who later played a significant role in the organization's downfall. An Advisory Committee to President Lamb that included E.S. Field and Helen Mathewson, both of whom would also play important roles in the League's future struggles. At the moment, however, the organization's prospects looked bright.^{xxxix}

Problems began early the next month when the League realized that its drive to end profitability in animal control conflicted with the penuriousness of the city's auditors. The city refused to give the League any money from license fees until a surety bond was provided. "Suppose the city should pay this money," argued City Auditor Mushet, "and in a month or so Dr. Lamb should resign and the league should abandon its contract. Where is the city?" The League approved the bond, but the incident demonstrates the limited extent to which city officials were willing to trust the League.^{xl}

This distrust was well-founded because over the next year infighting caused the League to implode. By mid-December, Dr. Lamb had resigned from his position as president and poundmaster due to disagreements with other League officials, particularly Mathewson. Lamb accepted a minor role within the League and returned to his position on the Playground Commission. The League chose Mathewson as his replacement for president and Lawson as his replacement for poundmaster. These appointments contributed significantly to the League's downfall over the course of the next year as Mathewson and Lawson became extremely polarizing figures.^{xli}

Mathewson associated Lawson with Lamb's *ancien regime* that refused to acknowledge her leadership. On January 26th, the League held a meeting and agreed to ask Lawson to resign in order restore harmony within the organization. The meeting had the opposite effect, however, when a verbal altercation erupted between Mathewson and vice-president Mrs. Rufus L. Horton. Horton described

Mathewson's continued reliance on the Vacher family as abetting the very pound system the League was trying to modernize. "The Vachers are sending murderers about in the wagon that bears in letters of gold 'Humane Animal League,'" Horton exclaimed. She accused Mathewson of supporting the Vachers without consulting the rest of the League. Lawson and the Vachers became two sources of division for the League, with Lamb and his people on one side and Mathewson and her people on the other.^{xlii}

While Mathewson asserted her authority within the League, Lawson entrenched himself as poundmaster. He rejected the League's request for his resignation. The League in turn went to the mayor hoping that he would forcibly eject Lawson from the position. The mayor, frustrated with the organization's squabbling, told both parties to work out their differences or face the rescission of the city's contract. Lawson rebuked both the mayor and the League by asserting that he would claim all pound fees collected since he took the office, which put him in direct conflict with the League which claimed the right to collect the fees as its own. The schism eventually got bad enough that the mayor revoked Lawson's appointment. Mathewson and her supporters had pushed the mayor to appoint her poundmaster but were denied. The position held the requirement of being an elector, which Mathewson could not be due to her gender. Instead, the League chose E. F. Field as Lawson's replacement.^{xliii}

The League garnered still more negative publicity when Mathewson's autocratic behavior drove four League directors to resign. The *Times* covering the incident in an March 4, 1909 article, entitled "Despotism at Dog Pound?," explored both sides of the issue. The article alleged that since losing his position as poundmaster, Lawson had been actively campaigning against Mathewson to other League members. He hoped to shift the power balance in his favor in order to get reinstated. Mathewson was accused of holding an illegal meeting the week before to pad her base of support by electing twenty new members favorable to her position. She gained a two-thirds vote requirement needed to pass new by-laws which gave her even more power. One of the directors who resigned claimed that "while

philanthropic and zealous, [Mathewson] is dominant in the extreme and wholly unfitted for the position of president.”^{xliv}

Mathewson argued that the resignation of the directors, which included her former nemesis Dr. Lamb, occurred because of differences of opinion between the four and other League members. She welcomed their departure and claimed that with their resignations the infighting would come an end. With the agitators gone, Mathewson believed the League could finally continue its projects, which included establishing a modern animal shelter. Nevertheless, the article contrasted Mathewson’s version of events with claims of the resigned directors who hinted at future dissent from other disenfranchised League members. The article concludes with a somber reminder that the mayor had threatened the League with the rescission of its contract following the Lawson debacle, and questioned whether the four director’s resignation could precipitate such action.^{xlv}

Mathewson’s shrewd politicking and domineering control of the League did little to stymie Lawson’s attempt at vengeance, and his ejection from the position of poundmaster was only the beginning. On April 1, 1909, Lawson filed a lawsuit against the League for \$299.99 of back salary he claimed was due him for his time as poundmaster. Lawson told the *Times* this was merely the first step in a full-on legal assault against the League, as he intended to file an additional \$20,000 slander suit against Mathewson. Lawson alleged that Mathewson held yet another secret meeting during which she proclaimed that Lawson had stolen League funds, an accusation which he denied. When Mathewson was approached by the *Times* to respond to Lawson’s plans to sue her, she retorted, “oh well; let him!”^{xlvi}

Despite the impending litigation, Lawson’s removal from the League did bring a moment of peace that enabled it to make strides in modernizing the city’s animal control. The new poundmaster, E.S. Field, oversaw successful day-to-day operations that earned praise from the *Times*. In an article from May 13,

the *Times* reported that during the month of April the League received 121 complaints about animal problems, investigated 145 cases, examined 118 animals, suspended nineteen overworked animals from labor, and prosecuted eleven people for violating humane laws. The article praised efforts to help the city's animal owners rather than punishing them. Along with the League's program for financing license fees for poor families, the article praised its system of swapping out overworked animals with fresh ones. Under this program, households that depended on animal labor were able to rest their animals while not having to worry about suffering economic setbacks. The *Times* article demonstrates that even though the League's internal squabbles may have damaged its public perception, there was still optimism and hope for the League's success. As legal troubles persisted, however, the latter would begin to decline as well.^{xlvii}

The legal proceedings for Lawson's suit began in late May, and with it came a maelstrom of negative publicity for the League. The *Times* reported archly that "everything, from the Constitution of the United States to the value to the city of the death of a flea-bitten cur, was discussed." The very nature of the contract between the League and the city was called into question by Lawson's lawyers, who pointed out that it stood in direct contradiction with a preexisting ordinance that had never been repealed. The League's lawyers argued that Lawson had accepted the position knowing the contract's terms: that all fees were to go to the League. The old ordinance, however, explicitly stated that the fees were to go to the poundmaster. When League officials took the stand, they testified that Lawson gave a verbal agreement to the terms when offered the position after Lamb's resignation. Lamb, it was noted, had also served under the same terms, which stipulated that the poundmaster was to receive no compensation. This discrepancy in the League's contract with the city opened up the floodgates for criticism, and its legitimacy was further dissected as the case went on.^{xlviii}

Criticisms of the contract brought the procurement of the pound into question. While on the witness stand, poundmaster Field divulged that prior to the contract's creation, he and Dr. Lamb had visited George Vacher at the pound to inquire about renting the facility. Field claimed that Dr. Lamb

propositioned Vacher without the knowledge of the city or League officials, offering Vacher \$100 a month to rent the facility, but \$125 if they managed to secure the contract with the city. Lamb interrupted Field's testimony, vigorously denying the claim, which resulted in a verbal ballyhoo between the two that did not end until the mayor restored order to the court. The *Times* reported on the incident, adding that several members of the city council were alleged to be friends with the Vachers and had supported the League's contract only because it took care of the them.

The Vachers, of course, were hardly in the good graces of other animal welfare organizations. Indeed, the relationship between the League and the Vachers greatly offended SPCA stalwart Mrs. L. E. Giese, who had first butt heads with George Vacher back in 1904 when she inspected the pound. Giese then jumped into the fray, charging that Thomas Vacher, George's son and pound deputy, had been fraudulently appointed. A police commission spent two hours hearing testimony over the matter but voted unanimously to dismiss Giese's claims. As the Lawson trial neared its conclusion, Giese returned to the SPCA war room to plan her next move against the League.^{xlix}

The trial between Lawson and the League ended on June 18 in a pyrrhic victory for Lawson. The Judge awarded him ninety-two dollars, but denied his right to further compensation. According to the ruling, Lawson had accepted the position of poundmaster willfully and with full acknowledgement of the League's terms, including the stipulation that the position would receive no salary. Lawson broke away from these terms when he broke with the League in January, which was within his rights as poundmaster. The League's contract with the city was not reconciled with the old ordinance, however, and many of the issues that came to light during the trial forced observers to question its validity.^l

The trial was the fatal blow for the League's contract with Los Angeles. It would slowly hemorrhage over the summer as city leaders began to shift away from a modern system of animal control run by a private reform organization to one the city itself administered. The League would linger on for a

few more months, the subject of negative public opinion and target of ire from competing reform organizations. All the while, city leaders worked to formulate a new framework for municipal animal control.

In light of the revelations produced by the Lawson suit, the SPCA filed an injunction against the city on July 6 to halt payment to the League for its share of June's license revenue. It argued that city leaders had been in the wrong when they entered into agreement with the League because their dealings with the organization had not been transparent. Furthermore, the city did not allow bidding from other organizations. Where previously SPCA had been content to attack the League, its new strategy of questioning the scruples of the city had significant effect on the policy makers.^{li}

City leaders had much to reflect on when planning the future of Los Angeles's system of animal control. The League's fiscal year ended the previous month, and it had come to light that it had collected a total of \$24,648 in license fee revenue. This was much more than city officials had anticipated, and many in the municipal government expressed displeasure with the League's three-quarter share. Furthermore, the League had caused more problems than it had solved. A renewal of the contract would mean more revenue loss but also more Mathewson, more Geise, more Lawson, more Lamb, and in general more of the warring factions that were making a mockery of the city in its newspapers.^{lii}

While the SPCA and the League battled over who would be awarded the next contract, the city was already planning to make animal control a public office. Time was of the essence however, because with each passing month more money flowed into the League's coffers that the city could have collected for its new program. July marked the beginning of the "dog year," when the bulk of licenses were renewed. If the city allowed the League to continue the course of its contract, it would lose that revenue. There was also a problem concerning the League's members who worked at the pound, since they remained unpaid as long as the injunction was in place. Giese, who spearheaded the injunction

campaign, made it clear through her attorneys that any attempts to pay the League members would be met with further injunctions.^{liii}

Disregarding the urgency of the city's situation, the mayor took his time in deciding how the city would approach its version of humane animal control. On July 20, the city council created a commission charged with planning a municipal animal control system. Councilmen worked with the mayor to search for candidates who combined a willingness to serve the public with a desire to modernize the city's animal control infrastructure. Most importantly, however, potential candidates had to be free of any connection to the competing factions of former poundmasters and reform organizations.^{liv}

On September 2, 1909, the *Times* published an article entitled "Start New Deal For Canines: Humane Animal Commission To Play Lone Hand" that publicly announced the city's first attempts to set up municipal animal control. This moment marks the end of an important chapter in the city's animal history. The League agreed to release the city from its contract in return for full payment of all the city's financial obligations to the organization, which included license fees and nearly three months of unpaid wages for the pound workers. Even though it failed to secure a contract with the city, the SPCA viewed the end of the League's contract as enough of a victory to stop its injunctions. Even the Vacher's were satisfied with the outcome due to the financial compensation they would gain from the League's settlement with the city. Private animal control organizations would continue to work with city leaders to assist in animal control, but they would never have the power that George Vacher or the League had once wielded.

The emergence of municipal animal control in Los Angeles is an example of Gilded Age state building. The transition from city pound to private reform organization to municipal animal control happened because reformers in Los Angeles realized that the success of early animal welfare organizations relied on state power. Furthermore, the change in public perceptions of animal welfare

combined with the efforts of reform organizations to shape an extension of state power at the local level that became municipal animal control.^{lv}

ⁱ Susan J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Animals and Children in Gilded Age America*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 17-18

ⁱⁱ Bernard Oreste Unti, "The Quality of Mercy: Organized Animal Protection," PhD diss., (American University, 2002) 15-18

ⁱⁱⁱ Unti, "Quality," 28-33

^{iv} Pearson, *Rights of the Defenseless*, 29, 32, 48

Unti, "Quality," 65-66

^v "THE NEW YORK DOG-POUND.," *Spirit of the Times; A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage...* Sep 30, 1854; 24, 38; American Periodicals, pg. 393

^{vi} Pearson, *Rights*, 29, 10

Janet M. Davis, *The Gospel of Kindness: Animal Welfare and the Making of Modern America*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 27-28

^{vii} Unti, "Quality," 70

^{viii} Pearson, *Rights*, 136, 4, 15

^{ix} Davis, *Gospel*, 23, 14, 6, 33

Pearson, *Rights*, 4

^x Ernest Freeberg, *A Traitor to His Species: Henry Bergh and the Birth of the Animal Rights Movement*, (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 25, 12

^{xi} Unti, "Quality," 436, 438, 467, 486

^{xii} Freeberg, *Traitor*, 188-192

^{xiii} Unti, "Quality," 152-154

^{xiv} Unti, "Quality," 169-175

^{xv} *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1883

^{xvi} *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1883

^{xvii} *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1889

^{xviii} *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1885

Los Angeles Times, March 7, 1886

^{xix} *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1889

^{xx} *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1896

Los Angeles Times, July 31, 1896

Los Angeles Times, June 3, 1897

^{xxi} *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1897

^{xxii} *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1897

^{xxiii} *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1898

^{xxiv} *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1898

Los Angeles Times, April 3, 1904

^{xxv} *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1902

^{xxvi} *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1903

^{xxvii} *Los Angeles Times*, April, 19, 1904

^{xxviii} *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1904

^{xxix} *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1904

^{xxx} *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1904

^{xxxi} *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1904

^{xxxii} Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, (New York: Verso, 1990) 21

^{xxxiii} *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1908

^{xxxiv} *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1908

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- xxxv *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1908
- xxxvi *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1908
- xxxvii *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1908
- xxxviii *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1908
- xxxix *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 1908
- xl *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1908
- xli *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1908
- xlii *Los Angeles Times*, January 27, 1909
- xliii *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1909
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- Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1909
- Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1909
- xliv *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1909
- xlv *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1909
- xlvi *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 1909
- xlvii *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1909
- xlviii *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 1909
- xlix *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1909
- ¹ *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1909
- ⁱⁱ *Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 1909
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1909
- ⁱⁱⁱⁱ *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1909
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- ^{liv} *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1909
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