



City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division

# Guide to the Parks Department records relating to the Zoo

Finding aid prepared by Tom Keville

This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

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**Repository:** City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division  
**Title:** Parks Department records relating to the Zoo  
**Collection No.:** 4400.006  
**Dates:** 1947-1957 (bulk, 1951-1957)  
**Quantity:** 0.25 Cubic feet

## TABLE OF CONTENTS    SERIES LIST

[Historical note](#)

[Series I: Correspondence](#)

[Scope and Contents note](#)

[Series II: Daily reports](#)

[Series III: Veterinarian reports](#)

[Series IV: Financial records](#)

[Series V: Reports and publications](#)

[Series VI: Photographs](#)

## Historical note

The Franklin Park Zoo was founded in 1912 as a part of the Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace Park System. The zoo was managed by the city of Boston until 1958 after which control was transferred to the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). The MDC retained control of the park until 1991, when then Governor William Weld signed legislation to create the private Commonwealth Zoological Corporation (currently Zoo New England as of 1997) who manage it to present.

The first exhibit was opened to the public on Oct. 3, 1912 and drew over 10,000 patrons. The park continued to

flourish in its early years, drawing close to 2,000,000 visitors in 1920 alone. Success and expansion came to a halt from 1930 to the end of 1940 from limited funding due to the Great Depression and World War II. The park continued to fall into disrepair all the way into the 1960's and 70's when discussions began to shut it down. But, following the Franklin Park Coalition's efforts in the late 70's and 80's, interest in the park increased once again. The coalition organized clean up crews and a community watch to insure safety within the zoo. Due to these successes, the zoo was added as a historic landmark by the Boston Landmarks Commission in 1980. Then, in 1990, the zoo was accredited by the Association of Zoo and Aquariums.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

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## Scope and Contents note

The documents in this series are primarily correspondence between zoo workers, exotic animal suppliers, and zoo patrons. The dates range from 1951 to 1957 during which time James A. Walsh was deputy commissioner of the Boston Parks Department; therefore, the majority of correspondences are to or from him. During this time period, the park was in a period of expansion and many documents refer to the cost of purchasing animals as well as park supplies. A notable example of this is the file title "Correspondence - Purchase of 2 Jaguars" which contains correspondence between Mr. Walsh and the company Zoofauna Exportacao. The file contains financial records, correspondences with the animal supply company, and correspondence with the specialty freight company Air Express International. Additional documents include zoo daily reports, veterinarian reports, financial records, and funding proposals. This series includes several black and white photos of animals.

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

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### Series I: Correspondence

Box	Folder	
1	1	Purchase of two jaguars, 1951-1952
1	2	With businesses, 1951-1956
1	3	James A. Walsh with individuals, 1951-1957
1	4	Parks department
1	5	Miscellaneous

[Return to the Series List](#)

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### Series II: Daily reports

Box	Folder	
1	6	1954-1957

[Return to the Series List](#)

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### Series III: Veterinarian reports

Box	Folder	
1	7	1952

[Return to the Series List](#)

**Series IV: Financial records**

Box	Folder	
1	8	Parks department, 1953-1954

[Return to the Series List](#)

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**Series V: Reports and publications**

Box	Folder	
1	9	Zoo related literature, 1947-1952
1	10	Meeting of the Zoological Society, 1952
1	11	Report to Mayor of Boston John B. Hynes on zoological installations, 1952

[Return to the Series List](#)

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**Series VI: Photographs**

Box	Folder	
1	12	circa 1951-1957

[Return to the Series List](#)