Guide to the Parks Department records relating to the Zoo

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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.
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