



BHC-MSS 0237

## Guide to the Records of the Connecticut Audubon Society October 2022

### **Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Connecticut Audubon Society

**Title:** Records of the Connecticut Audubon Society

**Dates:** 1898-1982

**Quantity:** ca. 12 linear feet

**Abstract.** The Connecticut Audubon Society was founded by 1898 and received its first land donation in 1914 from Annie Burr Jennings. From there, the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary grew into the one of the foremost places dedicated to conservation in the state of Connecticut. While not a comprehensive collection of the organization's records, this group of select inactive office files document key eras of the group's history. Of particular note are the late 1910s observation books of birds and the environment at the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary in Fairfield, Connecticut, along with early membership rolls, office files, and scrapbooks focused on outreach and events.

**Language:** English

**Repository:** Bridgeport History Center

### **Biographical History:**

The Connecticut Audubon Society was founded in 1898 by a group of Fairfield women, including Mabel Osgood Wright, with its first land donation in 1914 gifted to the Fairfield based organization by Annie Burr Jennings. Since this first donation, it has gone on to operate many more bird sanctuaries throughout the State of Connecticut, and exists as an independent organization outside the usual National Audubon Society chapters. It has saved thousands upon thousands of birds, contributes actively to state environmental initiatives, and citizen outreach and education.

The history of the Society is entwined with Mabel Osgood Wright, a passionate environmentalist born on January 26, 1859. Her family was well off, and her father, Samuel Osgood, was a widely prolific writer and Unitarian minister. The family had a summer home in Fairfield, Connecticut, known as Mosswood. Spending summers and later living at Mosswood full time greatly influenced Osgood and impacted her work with the Connecticut Audubon Society.

While Mabel had ambitions of being a doctor and studying at Cornell, her father disapproved. She married her husband James Osborne Wright, a rare books seller, in September 1884. Much like her father, Mabel Osgood Wright wrote a great deal, with her earliest works being nature essays published in publications like the New York Times. Her husband helped to publish them.

Most of Mabel's works were focused on nature, but her first major work was "Birdcraft: A Field Book of Two Hundred Song, Game, and Water Birds." Reprinted nine times between 1895 and 1936, the book was one of the earliest bird manuals meant for a general audience. In addition to her own keen eyes and interest, Wright was also friends with then-curator of the Museum of

Natural History, Joel Allen, and his assistant.

The Connecticut Audubon Society began under Wright's stewardship in 1898. With the goal of limiting hunting and the use of feathers in the fashion industry, the organization flourished. In 1895 she became the assistant editor of "Bird Lore", now Audubon magazine.

Annie Burr Jennings, also a resident of Fairfield, gifted the society its first land in 1914. This became the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary, which still operates today and is a National Historic Landmark. While situated now off of the Interstate 95, at the time the space was wide open and quiet, attracting birds of all sorts, along with ambitious cats and other predators. In the beginning, the space was only for bird watching. However, thanks to the work of taxidermist Frank Novak and the realization that mounted birds could also serve an educational purpose, a museum was created as well. Birdcraft is adjacent to I-95 and in fact lost about half its acreage when the highway was built. Connecticut Audubon created the Larsen Sanctuary, on Burr Street, north of the Merritt Parkway in Fairfield, in response to what happened to Birdcraft.

Mabel Osgood Wright died in 1934. Her commitment to birds and environmental protection has been fostered and expanded by generations of directors, employees, volunteers, and visitors to the original Birdcraft location in Fairfield and beyond. In 1971, the Center at Fairfield opened, followed by a center in 1981 at Glastonbury ([which was closed in 2020](#)). Since then, additional locations in Milford, Pomfret, Sherman, and Old Lyme have also been opened and operated under the Connecticut Audubon Society's supervision. They actively participate in bird banding for study and conversation.

Outreach activities over the years have included birdwatching, educational outreach to children, trips to additional locations, lectures, and modern citizen scientist initiatives in the state. The organization itself has placed great emphasis on Mabel Osgood Wright's legacy as a part of ensuring wider recognition for her work.

### **Bibliography**

"Mabel Osgood Wright: The Bird Woman of Fairfield, Connecticut," New England Historical Society, 2022. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/mabel-osgood-wright-bird-woman-fairfield-connecticut/>

Rose, Elizabeth. "State Lines: Birdcraft" Connecticut Explored, fall 2017. <https://www.ctexplored.org/site-lines-birdcraft/>

"The History of the Connecticut Audubon Society," Connecticut Audubon Society, undated. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.ctaudubon.org/our-history/>

Van Der Ae, Kathleen. "International Women's Day 2021: Our Founder, Written by Our Board Chair," Connecticut Audubon Society, 2021 March 8. Accessed September 2022. <https://www.ctaudubon.org/2021/03/international-womens-day-2021-our-founder-written-by-our-board-chair/>

### **See also**

Mabel Osgood Wright Collection, MS 54, Fairfield Museum and History Center, Fairfield, Connecticut. <https://www.fairfieldhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Wright-Mabel-Osgood-Ms54.html>

**Scope and Content note:**

The contents of the Records of the Audubon Society are not a comprehensive collection of the organization into the current era. Rather, they represent select inactive office files that were donated to the Bridgeport History Center over the years, documenting select eras of the group's history.

The minute books, along with the contents of series II, focus primarily on the early days of the organization and Birdcraft specifically. Of particular note in series II is the correspondence between Mabel Osgood Wright and Annie Burr Jennings, which is a key relationship that helped the Birdcraft museum and sanctuary get off the ground. The daybooks of observation of birds in that same series is an invaluable resource for examining environmental changes over the past century. Similar material is located in series V, publications, with both early publications of the organization and the Connecticut Audubon Society's newsletter from the late 1960s into the mid-1970s.

Both the regular and the financial subject files cover a large swath of time, and are focused more on the day-to-day running of the organization rather than the specific environmental work undertaken by the society. The scrapbooks provide a comprehensive overview of the group's activities and outreach from the 1960s into 1982.

**Arrangement note:**

The collection consists of four series. The first contains minutes of the board and the executive committee, arranged in chronological order.

Series II, Mabel Osgood Wright and the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary, focuses exclusively on the early days of the Connecticut Audubon Society and the work of Mabel Osgood Wright. Membership rolls from 1898-1913 have been placed first, as they signal the time before the creation of the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary in Fairfield. Correspondence from Mabel to others follows, and includes Annie Jennings and John Perry. Correspondence is followed by daybooks for the museum and sanctuary, offering observations of birds, noteworthy nature events, and the environment from 1914 to 1920. Also included is a guest book from a museum housewarming event in 1917 printed, featuring Japanese inspired imagery along the borders.

Subject files arranged in alphabetical order comprise series III, whereas series IV features financial subject files, also in alphabetical order. Series V contains material published by the organization including journals, flyers and events, and other information. The final series, VI, contains scrapbooks.

**Administrative information:**

**Provenance:** Accessions 1978.18, 1984.12, 1988.12 from the Connecticut Audubon Society

**Preferred Citation:**

Records of the Connecticut Audubon Society (BHC-MSS 0237), Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

**Names and Subject Tracings**

*Personal names*

Wright, Mabel Osgood

*Corporate names*

Connecticut Audubon Society

*Subject tracings*

Bird watching

Birds

Conservation

**Detailed box/folder listing**

Series I, Minutes

Box 1

1. Minutes, 1913-1914
2. Minutes, board, 1914-1959
3. Minutes, executive committee and joint meetings, 1914-1959
4. Minutes, executive committee, 1957-1962

Series II, Mabel Osgood Wright and the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary

Box 2 – Membership roll, adults, 1898-1913

Box 3 – Membership roll, patrons, 1898-1913

Box 4 – Membership roll, junior, teachers, 1898-1913

Box 5

1. Correspondence, 1912-1926
2. Correspondence, Annie Jennings, 1914-1918
3. Correspondence, Annie Jennings, 1923-1933
4. Correspondence, John Perry, 1914-1920
5. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary and decoration; maintenance, 1914-1918
6. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1914-1915
7. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1915-1917
8. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1916
9. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1917
10. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1917

Box 6

1. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1918
2. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1919
3. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1919
4. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1919
5. Birdcraft museum and sanctuary daybook, 1920
6. Birds found dead at the sanctuary, 1914-1917

Box 7 – Birdcraft housewarming guest register, May 1917

Series III, Subject files

Box 8

1. Annual reports, 1899-1924
2. Bird and nature notes, undated
3. Board of directors, 1956-1964
4. Bridgeport Land and Title Company, 1920-1926
5. Birdcraft sanctuary map, 1960
6. Building plans, undated
7. Bulletins, 1935-1949
8. Burr Street sanctuary, 1957-1966
9. Bylaws, 1960-1966
10. Changing bylaws, 1966
11. Club paper flowers, undated
12. Connecticut, state of, 1928-1955
13. Correspondence, 1905-1929
14. Correspondence, 1930-1935

Box 9

1. Correspondence, 1932-1934
2. Correspondence, 1936-1956
3. Correspondence, 1940-1945
4. Correspondence, undated
5. Correspondence, Mary Glover, 1918, undated
6. Correspondence, Frances Hurd, 1923-1948
7. Correspondence, Charlotte and Melton lacey, 1920-1924
8. Correspondence, E. Von Wettberg, 1920-1923
9. Correspondence, legal, 1962-1963
10. Deed, 1914
11. Education committee, 1960
12. Educational building, 1962, 1971
13. Florence Francis legacy, 1933-1958
14. Greenwich Audubon Center, 1960
15. Heating, 1949
16. Incorporation, 1914
17. Lectures, 1942-1954
18. Legislation, 1961
19. Maps, 1961

Box 10

1. Membership records, 1920s
2. Membership, 1958-1962, undated
3. Meeting notices, 1898-1947
4. Misc., 1910s-1960s
5. Misc., 1910s-1960s
6. National Audubon, 1913-1962

7. Nature clubs of Connecticut, 1957
8. Nature conservancy, 1962
9. Newspaper clippings, 1890s-1970s

#### Box 11

1. Newspaper clippings, 1890s-1970s
2. Newspaper clippings, 1890s-1970s
3. Notebook, undated
4. Notes on birds, undated
5. Notes on birds, undated
6. Officers, 1950-1951
7. Organization history. 1959-1957
8. Other organizations, 1900s-1970s
9. Papers of John Reiger, 1986-1988
10. Pictures, undated
11. Plumage provision tariff bill, 1936
12. Printed information, 1960s
13. Publicity, 1960-1962
14. Residence, Burr St. estimates and contracts, 1961-1962
15. Resignations, 1960-1964
16. Ribbons and badges worn by executive committee, undated
17. Sparrow traps, 1915
18. Statistics, 1965
19. Thank you letters, 1961-1963
20. Trapping on rainy sanctuary, 1939
21. Traveling school librarians, undated
22. Treasurer's reports, 1942-1950

#### Box 12

1. Work reports

#### Series IV, Finance subject files

2. Bacon Wakeman and sons, 1924-1926
3. Bridgeport City Trust, education fund reports, 1936-1951
4. Bridgeport City Trust reports, 1939-1962
5. Bridgeport City Trust reports, 1939-1962
6. Bridgeport Hydraulic Company, 1918-1926
7. Bridgeport Savings Bank, 1921-1926
8. C. Buckingham Co., 1918-1926
9. William Dalling, 1919-1925
10. Fairfield Hardware, 1919-1926

#### Box 13

1. Fairfield realty, 1918-1923
2. Fairfield Trust Co., 1925
3. Fairfield National Bank, 1918-1930

4. Fairfield National Bank, 1918-1930
5. Fairfield National Bank, 1918-1930
6. E.J. Flanagan, 1919-1924
7. Joseph Gorham, 1918
8. Insurance, 1924-1927

Box 14

1. Insurance policies, 1915-1927
2. Investments, 1935
3. Ives and Garrison Electric Company, 1919-1926
4. D.J. McCoy, 1922-1926
5. Misc., 1919-1965
6. Frank Novak, 1918-1965
7. SNET Co., 1919-1929
8. South Norwalk Trust Company, 1918-1919
9. Stamford museum and nature center, 1959-1961
10. James Staple and Co. Bankers, 1921-1922
11. Treasurer's reports, 1921-1927, 1964-1969
12. United Illuminating Company, 1918-1926
13. Wheeler and Co., 1923-1926

Series V, Publications

Box 15

1. Bird Lore, 1915
2. Birds and Trees, undated
3. Business and Industry membership, undated
4. Connecticut Audubon Bulletin, 1969-1972
5. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s
6. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s
7. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s
8. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s

Box 16

1. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s
2. Flyers and events, 1940s-1970s
3. Nutmeg Naturalist, 1974-1979
4. Promotional pamphlets, 1980s
5. Topical pamphlets, 1899
6. Other organizations, 1910s-1970d
7. The Value of Birds by Fairfield Garden Club, undated

Box 17

1. Newspaper clippings, 1910s-1950s
2. Bulletin Board, 1967-1969

3. Connecticut Audubon Bulletin, 1975-1977
4. Connecticut Audubon Bulletin, 1977-1978

Box 18 Treasurer's book, 1891-1914, 1918-1936

Series V, Scrapbooks

Box 19, folders 1-3, Scrapbook, 1940s-1960s

Box 20, Scrapbook, 1969-1973 [1984.12]

Box 21, Scrapbooks, 1972, 1977-1978; 1984.12

Box 22, Scrapbook, 1973-1976; 1984.12,

Box 23, scrapbooks, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1984.12