

TRAILBLAZER



Louisa Lee Schuyler

It all began in New York city. On May 11, 1872, a distinguished group of New Yorkers gathered together at 19 West 31st Street, the home of Louisa Lee Schuyler's parents. The granddaughter of Philip Schuyler and Alexander Hamilton, Miss Schuyler organized the group, which included William Cullen Bryant, Frederick Law Olmstead and other national figures. Sitting around the dining room table, they founded the State Charities Aid Association (SCAA). Now known as the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, it continues to be referred to as the SCAA. The State Library's collection, "Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy Records, 1872-2004," traces Miss Schuyler's insightful leadership in the formation and growth of this powerful agency designed to improve the appalling conditions at hospitals and other

health and welfare institutions.

Miss Schuyler's effective activism harks back to the Civil War and her leadership in the organization of the Women's Central Association of Relief, forerunner of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, and a major factor in the development of the International Red Cross. The Sanitary Commission addressed the squalid medical conditions and nutritional deficiencies endured by Union soldiers.

Several years after the war ended, Miss Schuyler read reports documenting the deplorable conditions at hospitals and poor houses and began visiting these institutions. She recognized the need to change such wretched places and initiated committees to inspect them and bring about improvement. Recognizing the size and complexity of the problem, Miss Schuyler called the meeting in May to expand these efforts.

The SCAA worked fast. Through its efforts, Bellevue Hospital established the nation's first nursing school in 1873. By 1875, the state legislature passed the Children's Law removing children from state poorhouses, and in 1881, the Right of Entrance Law guaranteed SCAA visiting committees a legal right to inspect state facilities. Motivated by the SCAA, the legislature also passed the State Care Act making the state responsible for care of the insane in 1890. It

was the most sweeping legislation for the insane in the nation.

From the beginning, advocacy was SCAA's mission. Finding funding for eleemosynary institutions was never part of its purpose. The word "charities aid" in its title created confusion. And so in 1967, maintaining its well known initials, SCAA, the agency changed its name to the State Communities Aid Association. In 2000, the name was changed again to honor Louisa Lee Schuyler, founder and major influence in its formation and success.

SCAA continues to be a powerful force in advocating legislation for public health and welfare. The State Library's collection documents the SCAA's many accomplishments and the forward looking people who made them possible.

You can access the finding aid at: <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/msscfa/sc19816.htm>.

A timeline of SCAA milestones from 1873-2003 is available online at <http://www.scaany.org/about/milestones.php>. For more information, call (518) 474-6282.

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