

THE QUARANTINE COLLECTION

A Special Collection in

The Archives and Library of

THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

75 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island, New York 10301

Arranged and Described by

Eloise Beil

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#### PROVENANCE:

The Quarantine Collection was established in the 1880s by William T. Davis, Arthur Hollick, and other founders of the Natural Science Association of Staten Island. John C. Thompson, grandfather of William Thompson Davis, and Dr. Frederick A. Hollick, father of Arthur Hollick, had taken an active part in the Quarantine Controversy. Hollick and Davis had each inherited a few papers, legal briefs and bits of correspondence, and a few pamphlets, broadsides, and newspaper cuttings. These they deposited in the archives of the NSASI; Lot C. Clark, William Olliffe and N.J. Wyeth donated similar materials, and a description of the collection was published in *Proceedings NSASI* Vol. V p. 8.

Subsequent staff members of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences—Mabel Abbott, Hugh Powell, and others—added to the collection clippings from newspapers, research notes and references transcribed from printed sources.

In all cases, the decision to place materials in the collection was made on an informal basis. Therefore, the condition of the material varies, and no discrete series exist.

#### HISTORICAL NOTE:

In 1799, the New York State Legislature relocated the Quarantine Establishment of the Port of New York from Governor's Island to a 30-acre site on the northeastern tip of Staten Island, in the present communities of St. George and Tompkinsville.

By 1849, infectious diseases from the Quarantine were epidemic among residents of the surrounding area. Appeals to the Legislature for relief led to the appointment of a Study Committee, which recommended that the Quarantine be removed from Staten Island to Sandy Hook. However, no action was taken.

In 1857 another Act for Removal of the Quarantine was passed, and again implementation failed to occur. The Quarantine Commissioners ignored injunctions by the local Board of Health, and Yellow Fever again infested the neighborhood.

On September 1, 1858, the leading citizens of Castleton and Southfield banded together, broke into the Quarantine grounds, removed the patients from the Hospital, and set several buildings on fire. The following night, the remaining buildings were burned to prevent reestablishment of the Quarantine at that location.

Following the fire, New York State brought suit against John C. Thompson and Ray Tompkins as instigators of the arson; sizeable fines were levied against the Supervisors of Richmond County; and the Quarantine was removed to Prince's Bay, in the town of Westfield, Staten Island/

The Quarantine at Westfield was promptly eradicated by fire, and in 1860 a "floating hospital" of ships anchored in the Lower Bay was established as an interim measure, pending completion of the artificial Islands, Swinburne in 1866-1870 and Hoffman 1868-1873.

In 1870, the headquarters for Quarantine office work was removed to Rosebank, Staten Island. The buildings housed the Quarantine staff dormitories, offices, and an observation post until 1971, when plans to relocate the office in Manhattan were announced.

Hoffman and Swinburne Islands were used for Quarantine purposes until the late 1920s, after which they housed programs for underprivileged children in the 1930s, and merchant seamen training from 1938-1946, and Navy salvage divers training in 1953. New York City bought Hoffman and Swinburne Islands in 1957, for a landfill and recreation area program. This has not been implemented.

#### SCOPE & CONTENT:

This collection comprises 2 cubic feet and is dated 1845-1971. The bulk of material in the Quarantine Collection is primary: printed material, often annotated or inscribed by participants in Legislative and Legal actions relating to the Quarantine, and manuscript letters, meeting minutes, and drafts of published material. Secondary material in the collection consists of contemporary newspaper accounts of early attempts to relocate the Quarantine; of the fire and of subsequent legal and legislative action; newspaper clippings saved by SIIAS staff members describing alterations to the Quarantine sites at Hoffman and Swinburne Islands and Rosebank, as well as retrospectives, and research notes.

No original series existed. However, two major subgroups were readily distinguished. "Lawsuits" (Box 1 Folders .5-.21) includes printed legal briefs and manuscript notes arising out of the Quarantine burnings. "Legislation, New York State" (Box 2 Folders .1-.13) includes both appeals from Richmond County to the Legislature and proposals by the Legislature for relocation of the Quarantine, as well as legislative actions in response to the Quarantine fires.

Separated from the above subgroups by their more personal and unique nature are two groupings of Letters: "Letters re: Quarantine Lawsuits" (Box 2 Folders .14-.18) and "Letters re: Quarantine Legislation" (Box 2 Folders .19, .20). These letters were written by prominent Staten Islanders personally involved in the post-arson furor, and offer an interesting supplement to the more formal documents which precede them.

The widespread popular involvement which characterized every phase of the Quarantine controversy is attested to by the meeting notices and reports in the subgroup "Public Meetings." A contemporary manuscript report and Public Meeting Notice were supplemented by SIIAS staff members with accounts of meetings transcribed from newspapers and photographic reproductions of broadsides and posters (Box 2 Folders .22-.27).

The collection includes a few contemporary documents generated by the workings of the Quarantine, i.e.: Annual Reports, a report of the night inspector. These and other contemporary accounts of the Quarantine are arranged under the heading "Quarantine Hospital" (Box 2 Folders .29-.33). Retrospective accounts headed "Quarantine Hospital: History" follow in folders .34-.37.

Twentieth-century clippings documenting the fate of Quarantine establishments at various locations include Hoffman and Swinburne Islands (Box 1 Folders .2-.4); Quarantine Station,

Rosebank (Box 2 Folder .38); and Quarantine Burying Grounds (Box 2 Folder .28). Xerox copies of these clippings are filed for research. The originals have been preserved for reproduction or exhibition (Box 2 Folders .41-.44). Box 2 Folders .39-.40 contain contemporary "Views of the Quarantine," reproduced as Photostat or photograph. Further views of the Quarantine housed in the SIIAS Print Collection are listed on the "IAM" sheet in this finding aid.

The above mentioned subgroups, and the few items in the collection which could not be incorporated into any subgroup were then placed in two one-cubic-foot storage boxes in alphabetical order by heading. Thus the first item in the collection is the "Atlantic Telegraph Cable Celebration" Programme, deposited in the collection because the Atlantic Cable Celebration revelry diverted official attention from the burning Quarantine until the buildings were past saving. The last items in the collection are the "Views of the Quarantine."

Oversized materials are housed in Printbox and Mapcase storage, arranged under the same headings as the standard-sized materials (Printbox folders P.1-.3, Mapcase 4 Folders M.1-.6). See box lists for details.

QUARANTINE COLLECTION

Box Inventories:

Box 1/2

Folders

1-21

Quarantine Locations; controversy over Quarantine; the burning of the Quarantine; lawsuits

1858-1941

Box 2/2

Folders

1-21

Legislation, New York State

1849-1867

14-21

Letters re: lawsuits

1858

22-27

Public Meetings

1857-1861

28-45

Quarantine Burying Grounds and Hospitals

1857-1939

Map case lv: a 7

1-6

Quarantine Hospital: map, history

1845-1905

Print box 1

1-3

Bonds re: Quarantine Hospital

IAM

1-32

Prints of Quarantine

1856-1879