



# The New York Public Library New York Public Library Archives

Guide to the

## **Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library records**

1912-1996

### **Summary**

**Creator:** New York Public Library. Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

**Title:** Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library records

**Date:** 1912-1996

**Size:** .33 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Transferred from Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

**Abstract:** Reports, memos, clippings and administrative files documenting operations of Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

**Preferred citation:** Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Compiled Jim Moske; machine readable finding aid created by FAKER.

### **Creator History**

The New York Free Circulating Library for the Blind was established in 1895 by Richard Randall Ferry, a wealthy hat manufacturer who suddenly became blind. This library merged with The New York Public Library on February 21, 1903. It occupied a neighborhood parish house at 121 West 91st Street until 1906, when it moved into the St. Agnes Branch at 444 Amsterdam Avenue. In 1911 it moved into quarters at the Library's new Central Building at 5th Avenue and 42nd Street. Library staff provided home braille instruction and free delivery of books to those persons who were unable to travel to the Central Building's reading room.

In 1931, federal legislation authorized an annual appropriation to the Library of Congress for the production of braille books for blind adults, to be distributed nationally through a system of regional libraries. The New York Public Library was one of the 19 original participants in this newly established network. Three years later, talking books on LP phonograph records were introduced into the program.

Space constraints at the Central Building led the Library to move the braille and talking book collections to an annex facility located at 137 West 25th Street in 1938. The library moved to more substantial quarters at 166 Avenue of the Americas at Spring Street in 1953.

During the 1960s, the collection continued to grow, and recorded media formats such as open-reel tapes, audiocassettes, and flexible discs gradually emerged. While automation of circulation procedures and patron files provided a major service enhancement, this building's insufficient shelving capacity led to the eventual removal of the braille collection to a library unit located off-site. Architectural barriers precluding wheelchair access, as well as a lack of space for public reading rooms, underscored the Library's overwhelming need for a new facility. In 1966 service was extended to those with physical handicaps that interfered with reading, and in November 1967 the name of the library was changed to Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

In 1978, The New York Public Library became the first public library system in the world to offer Kurzweil Reading Machine service. This optical scanning device converts printed text into synthetic speech—thus extending the thousands of books and periodicals not available in braille or recorded formats to a whole new population of readers. Other electronic reading aids, such as closed-circuit television magnifiers, allow the user to adjust the size, contrast, and brightness of the letters on a page. An audio book Studio opened at the 58th Street Branch of The New York Public Library in 1981. Created to supplement the holdings available in the national collection by recording talking book titles of local interest, the Studio recruited and trained a talented team of volunteer narrators, monitors, and reviewers.

On December 12, 1991, the Andrew Heiskell Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped opened its doors at 40 West 20th Street. The new building was named in honor of Andrew Heiskell, the former Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Today the library is known as the Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

## **Scope and Content Note**

Reports, memos, clippings and administrative files documenting operations of Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

## **Key Terms**

### **Names**

New York Public Library. Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library.

## Container List

### Andrew Heiskell Braille and Talking Book Library Records 1912-1996

- b. 1 f. 1 Book Lists n.d.
- b. 1 f. 2-7 Brochures 1912-1990s, n.d
- b. 1 f. 8-9 Building Dedications 1953, 1991
- b. 1 f. 10 Catalogs of Music in Braille 1930-1936
- b. 1 f. 11 Centennial 1996
- b. 1 f. 12 For Those In Schools 1992
- b. 1 f. 13 For Those Served By Institutions 1992
- b. 1 f. 14 Forms 1958
- b. 1 f. 15 History n.d.
- b. 1 f. 16 "Improving Library Services to the Blind, Partially Sighted and Physically Handicapped in New York State," Sam Prentiss 1973
- b. 1 f. 17 Keller, Helen 1931
- b. 1 f. 18-20 Leaflets 1960s-1980s, n.d
- b. 1 f. 21 "A New Building for the Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped: Proposal to New York State," 1986
- b. 1 f. 22 News clippings v.d.
- b. 1 f. 23 Newsletter 1978-1994
- b. 1 f. 24 100th anniversary 1995
- b. 1 f. 25 Program Fliers 1992-1996