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History 1493

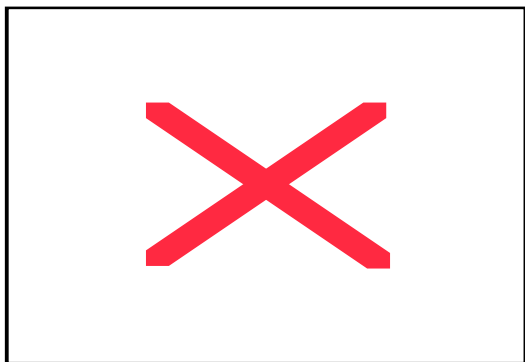
Robert Griswold

### The Hull House, its Co-Founders, and the Progressive Era

Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr were the co-founders of the first settlement house in Chicago. This home, the Hull House, provided a plethora of amenities, clubs, and academic classes for poverty-stricken people in the city of Chicago. The Hull House operated for one hundred and twenty-two years; the house opened its doors in September of 1889 and just recently filed for bankruptcy in 2012. Despite the unfortunate ending, the Hull House was revolutionary in its time. According to Addams, the house was a success; the Hull House was an important addition to Chicago's economy and set the standard for a Progressive Era full of peaceful activism and influential reformation. Immigrants frequented the Hull House, they used the services the house offered to their advantage. Some examples would include medical aid, food assistance, English-language classes, and clubs for both children and adults. Addams and Starr enlightened the lives of impoverished immigrants that stepped through the doors of the Hull mansion. Despite the good the Hull House provided, there were a few Americans wary of the presence of the settlement house in urban Chicago. They questioned the co-founders' sanity and spread rumors. Regardless of these setbacks, Addams and Starr brought settlement houses to America, gained a platform for activism during the Progressive Era, and offered culture and opportunity to the urban population in Chicago. The co-founders devoted their lives to the Hull House; Addams resided in the mansion until her death in May of 1935. Both Addams and Starr

reshaped the immigrant experience in Chicago during Progressive Era through the services they offered at the Hull House.

Jane Addams held many impressive titles; not only was she known for her creation of the Hull House, but she was also a women's rights advocate, philanthropist, anti-war pacifist, and peace activist. Born September 6, 1860, Addams was the eighth of nine children born to a wealthy state senator. She graduated from seminary school in 1881 and began medical school, but soon realized she preferred traveling the world. When she was 27 years old, Jane Addams traveled to London, England where she visited the infamous Toynbee Hall with her friend Ellen Gates Starr.<sup>1</sup> The two women were extremely impressed by the settlement house in London and dreamed of creating their own in Chicago. Luckily, their dreams became a reality. The Hull House impacted the city of Chicago, the people in it, and Addams' legacy. After establishing the



**Figure 1: American delegates in the Netherlands at the International Congress of Women.**

Hull House, Addams became the first female president of the National Conference of Social Work. In 1915, she became the chairman of the Women's Peace Party and soon after became the president of the International Congress of Women.<sup>2</sup>

The photograph on left captured the American delegates holding up a flag at the International

Congress of Women, these women were internationally respected for their peace activism.<sup>3</sup>

Before she passed away, she was the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Addams

<sup>1</sup> "Jane Addams." Biography.com. April 02, 2014. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://www.biography.com/people/jane-addams-9176298>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Nobel Peace Prize 1931." Nobelprize.org. Accessed November 23, 2018. <https://nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1931/addams/biographical/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Peace Delegates on NOORDAM -- Mrs. P. Lawrence, Jane Addams, Anna Molloy*. 1915. Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

was not only an advocate for peace, but also social welfare. Addams was committed to advocating for a better America for the lower economic classes, which is apparent through her work outside of the Hull House. Addams had many remarkable feats, but she did not accomplish them on her own. For starters, she would not have been able to establish the revolutionary Hull House and mold Chicago's immigrant life without the assistance of her close friend, Ellen Gates Starr.

Ellen Gates Starr was equally as crucial to the process of founding the Hull House as Jane Addams was, but unfortunately gets little recognition for her work. In 2002, a book of Starr's essays was published to "restore a significant figure to her rightful place in American social history." In the book titled *Ellen Gates Starr on Art, Labor, and Religion*, it was written that "Addams is perhaps the most famous woman in American history... but Starr remains virtually unknown."<sup>4</sup> As the co-founder of the Chicago Hull House, Starr played an important role in America and the Progressive Era that is not known by many. She was born on the 19th of March in 1859 to a modest farmer family. She was interested in education and art from a young age. That interest continued throughout her life, she worked as a school teacher for a decade then founded the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society that labored tirelessly to bring art to Chicago Public Schools. Starr contributed to the betterment of America, just in different ways than Addams. She was an activist involved with a multitude of unions, two examples of these include the Women's Trade Union League and the Women's Bookbinders' Union.<sup>5</sup> She supported and defended striking workers, adorning the title of Chicago's "Angel of the Strikers."<sup>6</sup> She was especially

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<sup>4</sup> Starr, Ellen Gates. "On Art, Labor, and Religion." Google Books. Accessed November 24, 2018.

[https://books.google.com/books?id=NehOusjMnn4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=NehOusjMnn4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>5</sup> *Peace Delegates on NOORDAM -- Mrs. P. Lawrence, Jane Addams, Anna Molloy*. 1915. Bain Collection, Library of Congress.

<sup>6</sup> "One Dead, Three Hurt, in Strike Riots 'Angel of Strikers' Bears News of Killing to Hull House." *Chicago Tribune* 27

involved in clothing workers' strikes and Sidney Hillman, a labor leader and president of Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, told her, "you were one of our best little soldiers in the fight".<sup>7</sup> In addition to this, Starr was a religious social reformer that worked to change child labor laws and industrial working conditions in Chicago. Starr and Addams had different purposes for establishing the Hull House, but regardless of their motives, they combined their strengths to provide a revolutionary settlement house that transformed immigrant life in Chicago during the Progressive Era.

The Progressive Era took place from 1890 to 1920. It was a movement dominated by social reform issues concerning education, working conditions, female suffrage, unionization, urbanization, and immigration. One of the main goals of the Progressive Era was to put an end to America's corrupt government. While fighting the fraudulent government, America experienced an influx of immigration from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. 20 million immigrants fled to the US during the Progressive Era to escape religious persecution and seek new economic opportunities. The US had a hard time absorbing the newcomers, the cities became extremely crowded and as a result, the government officials failed to keep up with the flow of the immigrants.<sup>8</sup> Most of the people who migrated to America during the Progressive Era did not speak English, were uneducated, and had very little money. These immigrants held underpaid factory jobs and struggled to make enough money to put food on the table. Fortunately, many American citizens began assisting and advocating for these immigrants, there was an "universal

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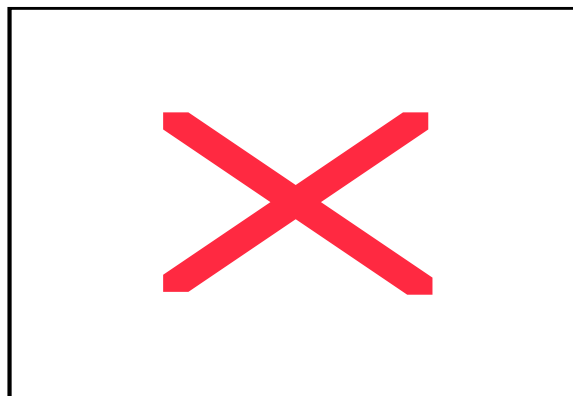
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<sup>7</sup> Starr, Ellen Gates. "Ellen Gates Starr Papers, 1659-1940 Finding Aid." Five College Archives & Manuscript Collections. Accessed November 24, 2018.  
[http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss64\\_main.html](http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/sophiasmith/mnsss64_main.html).

<sup>8</sup> "Immigrants in the Progressive Era - American Memory Timeline- Classroom Presentation | Teacher Resources." Planning D-Day (April 2003) - Library of Congress Information Bulletin. Accessed November 24, 2018.  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/progress/immigrnt/>.

brotherhood” mentality circulating through the Progressive Era that encouraged young and educated people to serve others.<sup>9</sup> The attempt to apply the social principles of Christianity to modern industrial life, which was known as Christian Socialism, was also popular at the time. This belief turned the Hull House into a center for social reform.<sup>10</sup> These views caused the young and educated Addams and Starr to establish the Hull House in 1889. Addams’s motives behind creating the settlement house were based on her needs of being a “good neighbor,” while Starr envisioned social settlement work as a religious act that sought for harmony through art, community, and labor.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of why the house was created, the doors to the Hull House opened on September 18, 1889, ready to dutifully serve the immigrants in the bustling city of Chicago.

Earlier that year, Addams and Starr leased a mansion built by Charles J. Hull.<sup>12</sup> The two friends soon moved into the dilapidated home in the Chicago slums, the crumbling house is pictured on the right, with hope of fulfilling their purpose of providing “a center for higher civic and social life; to institute and maintain education and philanthropic enterprises and to investigate and improve the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago.”<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 2: The Hull House in 1889.**

<sup>9</sup> Addams, Jane. "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements." Infed.org. May 1998. Accessed November 24, 2018. <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/addams6.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> "Hull House." Social Welfare History Project. February 26, 2018. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/hull-house/>.

Starr, Ellen Gates. "On Art, Labor, and Religion." Google Books. Accessed November 24, 2018. [https://books.google.com/books?id=NehOusjMnn4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=NehOusjMnn4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>12</sup> "Hull House." Social Welfare History Project. February 26, 2018. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/settlement-houses/hull-house/>.

<sup>13</sup> Addams, Jane, *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes*. New York Macmillan, 1910.

The co-founders quickly accomplished their purpose. The settlement house became instantly famous and at its height of popularity, Addams and Starr hosted two thousand people each week. The two women took to the streets to raise awareness, money, and volunteers. The Hull House expanded quickly and transformed from one building into thirteen in 1911. By 1920, there were 500 other settlement houses scattered across America. Addams wanted to bring society, fellowship, local tradition and public spirit to the immigrants on the lower economic side of Chicago. She wanted to cultivate the working class and give them social advantages that they never had before.<sup>14</sup> A multitude of amenities were added to the Hull House, these included an art gallery, public kitchen, coffee house, gymnasium, swimming pool, cooperative boarding club for girls, book bindery, art studio, music school, drama group, circulating library, employment bureau, and a labor museum.<sup>15</sup> The Hull House hosted kindergarten classes, club meetings for older children, and a night school for adults. The settlement home also provided work for the unemployed. Addams had a special fund of five thousand dollars meant specifically for providing work for the unemployed in the winter.<sup>16</sup> There were few permanent residents of the house; instead, it was used for immigrants to gather to eat, learn, and acquire the tools necessary to put down their roots in a new country. Immigrants would come and go from the Hull House as they pleased, but many were impacted by small blessings the settlement home provided. For instance, there was a Russian immigrant named Solly that wanted to learn how to play the piano, but his father did not have enough money to pay for the lessons. He visited the Hull House, where there was a teacher that wanted to give Solly free lessons. He soon brought home a card

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<sup>14</sup> Addams, Jane. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Age: Introduction*. Accessed November 24, 2018. <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/history/eamerica/media/ch24/resources/documents/addams.htm>.

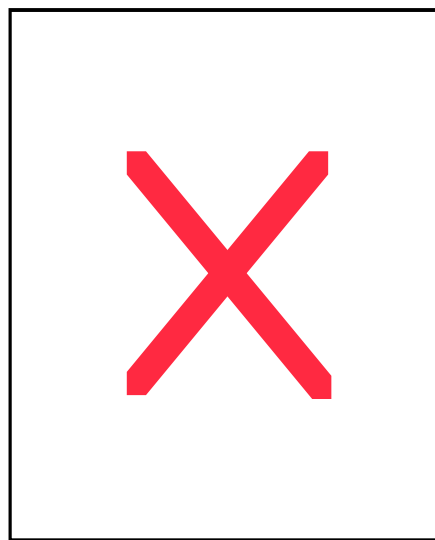
<sup>15</sup> "The Nobel Peace Prize 1931." *Nobelprize.org*. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1931/addams/biographical/>.

<sup>16</sup> Addams, Jane. "Summary of Hull-House Activities, 1915." *Jane Addams Digital Edition*. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://digital.janeaddams.ramapo.edu/items/show/8417>.

announcing his piano recital at the Hull House Music School. Solly became a musician and made his father unbelievably proud.<sup>17</sup> The Hull House and the founders wanted to create a place where any type of person, no matter how much money they had, was able to access programs they would otherwise never be able to pay for.

In its early days, the Hull House faced some opposition. Addams recalled in “Twenty Years at Hull-House,” her memoir, that “one man... used to shake his head and say it was ‘the strangest thing he had met in his experience.’”<sup>18</sup> Understandably, the Hull House was bound to be misunderstood; the settlement home was revolutionary in its time and the older generation of Americans had not decided if they approved yet. In addition to the public eye’s misconception of the settlement house, there were also eerie ghost stories circulating. It was believed that the man who originally built the settlement house, Mr. Charles J. Hull, moved out of his mansion after his wife died in the second-floor bedroom. When Addams moved into the Hull House in 1889, she even admits to being skeptical of the haunted attic.<sup>19</sup> Another old wives’ tale that spread around Chicago in 1916 concerned a devil-baby, complete with two horns and a spiked tail, that was living in the Hull House. There were variations of the rumor, but Addams received a

multitude of telephone calls every day asking about the baby. Addams continually denied the



**Figure 3: Addams serving the children of the Hull House in 1930.**

<sup>17</sup> America's Library. Accessed November 24, 2018.

[http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/addams/aa\\_addams\\_piano\\_1.html](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/addams/aa_addams_piano_1.html).

<sup>18</sup> Addams, Jane. "Excerpt from Twenty Years at the Hull House." Teach in History. Accessed November 24, 2018.

<http://www.teachtnhistory.org/file/addams>.

<sup>19</sup> Addams, Jane. "TWENTY YEARS AT HULL-HOUSE WITH AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES." The Story of My Life. Accessed November 24, 2018.

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/addams/hullhouse/hullhouse.html>.

existence of the demon child, but she eventually had to publish an article in *The Atlantic* to further explain the nonexistence of the child.<sup>20</sup> Not only did Addams and Starr face opposition and rumors that tried to ruin the Hull House's credibility, they also struggled with health problems that threatened to damage the women's hard work. Addams was diagnosed with cancer at age 75 that ended up being the cause of her death and Starr had to move out of the settlement house because of a back surgery that left her paralyzed.<sup>21</sup> The photograph above displays an elderly Addams continuing to serve the children in the Hull House, despite her withering appearance. The picture was taken in 1930, just a few years before her death in 1935.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of complications and old age, the women left their legacy at the Hull House and helped acclimate immigrants to urban Illinois.

Addams and Starr played a crucial role in bettering the immigrant living situation during the Progressive Era, their goal was to share beauty and culture with the impoverished residents of urban Chicago but ended up providing the migrant population with a better lifestyle. These two women reformers spurred a contagious passion and determined drive in other people across the US; they encouraged American women to fight for social reform issues like bettering working conditions, education, female suffrage, unionization, and so much more. The Hull House gave the co-founders a platform for voicing their opinions and fighting towards a better life for the working class. Addams and Star both fought valiant political and social battles, but never did they forget about their precious settlement house and the people involved in it. Jane Addams' nephew, James Weber Linn, said it best in his 1935 biography of his aunt, "Her quest for beauty, her dream of bringing beauty into even the ugliest and most miserable of lives about her, did not

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<sup>20</sup> Addams, Jane. "The Devil-Baby at Hull House." *The Atlantic*. October 01, 1916. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1916/10/the-devil-baby-at-hull-house/305428/>.

<sup>21</sup> "Nobel Peace Winner Jane Addams Dies..." Timothy Hughes Rare & Early Newspapers - Historic Newspapers. Accessed November 24, 2018. <http://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/567734>.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Addams. 1930. Underwood & Underwood, Library of Congress.



cease, but it accompanied by a more passionate quest... for social justice.”<sup>23</sup> The Hull House was just the beginning of an influential era full of social justice for the working class, the settlement home sparked a domino effect of women fighting for a better and brighter America.

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<sup>23</sup> "Jane Addams." Google Books. Accessed November 24, 2018.  
[https://books.google.com/books?id=SXM\\_zMK3u4YC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=%](https://books.google.com/books?id=SXM_zMK3u4YC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=%).