

Jane Addams and Hull House

Beggars were dying on city streets in the nineteenth century while others, like William Vanderbilt, lived like emperors. Why? Some people blamed the problems of poverty on immigrants. Many of them came to this country without money. Most couldn't even speak English. Some said it wasn't worth the effort to absorb them. They said that the American dream should be just for those who were already here. Or those with a certain color skin. Or a certain religion. But the newcomers and the old-timers shared something. It was the American dream of freedom and democracy and fairness to all. Could there be equal opportunities? It wouldn't be easy, but some people tried to make it happen. One of them was a woman named Jane Addams. She once said, "The struggle for existence is so much harsher among people near the edge of pauperism."

Born in Cedarville, Illinois, on September 6, 1860, and graduated from Rockford Female Seminary in 1881, Jane Addams founded, with Ellen Gates Starr, the world famous social settlement Hull-House on Chicago's Near West Side in 1889. From Hull-House, where she lived and worked until her death in 1935, Jane Addams built her reputation as the country's most prominent woman through her writing, settlement work, and international efforts for peace.

Social settlements began in the 1880s in London in response to problems created by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. The idea spread to other industrialized countries. Settlement houses typically attracted educated, native born, middle-class and upper-middle class women and men, known as "residents," to live (settle) in poor urban neighborhoods. Some social settlements were linked to religious institutions. Others, like Hull-House, were secular. By 1900, the U.S. had over 100 settlement houses. By 1911, Chicago had 35.

In the 1890s, Hull-House was located in the midst of a densely populated urban neighborhood peopled by Italian, Irish, German, Greek, Bohemian, and Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants. The first service Hull House developed for the neighborhood was a nursery school. The reasoning behind this was that many local women came to visit Hull House in its early days with young children, seeking help. As the year progressed twenty volunteers moved in and began unpaid work at Hull House. During Hull House's first year being open 50,000 people came looking for help. As time went on, Jane opened Hull House to new services, such as social workers. These were the first social workers in America. Jane Addams's ideas and hopes were finally coming true. These social workers had many jobs. They helped immigrants adjust to their new life in America, provided care for elders, taught children through books and lectures and fought for improvements in the city of Chicago. Hull House provided many "firsts" for Chicago. Some of these "firsts" were public baths, public playgrounds, a public gymnasium, a public kitchen, a public swimming pool and free art exhibits. For the first time in America, people started taking care of each other and American people started to open their eyes and see what they needed to do to make their country a better place. That was support social workers and put more effort into helping the less fortunate ease into making their lives better. Spreading Hull House ideas also had a great effect on the law. Hull House's constant demand for better treatment of fellow citizens caused the law to cave in and finally stand up for the rights of the less fortunate. Many new investigations were made in result of the new ideas of Hull House. In Illinois some of these investigations led to the first factory laws in the state and the first model tenement code. Many new Labor Unions were also formed at Hull House. For the first time in America people started to care about one another and we have Jane Addams and Hull House to thank for this.



Children of Hull House



Immigrant learning new skills that will help her in her new life in America at Hull House

