

HISTORY

OF SOCIAL WORK

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1889 Jane Addams Settlement work in North America



Jane Addams (1860-1935) was born in Cedarville, Illinois in a well-off Quaker family. After her studies, she visited Toynbee Hall in London and was inspired to develop a very similar initiative in Chicago in 1889. Together with her friend Ellen Starr, she started *Hull House*, the first settlement house in Near West Side, a neighbourhood with plenty of European immigrants. It quickly developed into a real action centre with plenty of room for children, education for adults, culture and focus on social progress. Following the model of Toynbee Hall, "Addams refused to call her neighbors clients or cases and could not fully respect younger social workers, for whom service meant an eight-hour day and a home far from the slums." (Franklin, 1986) Addams not only worked with the poor but also engaged in political action aimed at establishing new laws to protect them.

Addams assembled a group of very committed young women. They became the female face of the democratisation movement in the Progressive Era. From 1900 onwards the United States saw a wave of interest in women's emancipation, new social laws and attention paid to social and racial tensions. The Hull House group professionalised the contribution of women in social work. With their neighbourhood work, they contributed to a more structural political focus.

They started from a profound analysis of real situations and by doing so contributed to later social science research. In the Hull House maps and papers they reported on the effects of concentration of different ethnicities and their living conditions, about labour circumstances in the sweatshops, about child labour. This work carried out by Julia Lathrop and Florence Kelley, among others. This approach to 'mapping' contributed to the emergence of the famous Chicago school in urban sociology with key figures like George Herbert Mead and Robert E. Park. For the academic researchers, Addams and her colleagues may have been seen just as data collectors, but for their own purposes their research was a tool and starting point for social action.

With the strong combination of professional interventions and structured research, Addams succeeded in establishing a specific basis for American social work which raised international interest. From the very beginning, Hull House received numerous visitors from abroad and many initiatives were launched there. Julia Lathrop later became the first director of the Children's Federal Bureau (1912). She succeeded in raising concerns about child labour and child deaths.

The power of the settlement work translated to a broad social engagement of Jane Addams in which she combined here work for Hull House with a comparably passionate contribution to the peace movement during the First World War. That earned her the nickname Saint Jane. Four years before her death, she received the Nobel Prize for peace (1931).

Extra

The work of Jane Addams' is still actively remembered in the US. Hull House is [a museum](#) and in Illinois, the 10th of December each year is celebrated as Jane Addams Day. The social work department of the University of Illinois at Chicago is named after her: [Jane Addams College of Social Work](#).

Read more

- [Allen, J. D. \(2008\), *Jane Addams \(1860-1935\): social worker and peace builder*. Social work & society, 6\(2\)](#)

Additional information

- [Addams, Jane \(1910\), *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. New York: Macmillan](#)

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This initiative also exists in Dutch, where it covers the history of social work in the Netherlands, in Flanders, and internationally.

See www.canonsociaalwerk.eu

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- Davis, A. F. (1973), *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams*, Oxford Press: New York.
-  Deegan, M. J. (1986), [*Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School*](#), New Brunswick N. J.: Transaction Books.
- Lundblad, K. S. (1995), *Jane Addams and Social Reform: A Role Model for the 1990s*, *Social Work*, 40 (5), 661-669.
-  Franklin, D. L. (1986), [*Mary Richmond and Jane Addams: from moral certainty to rational inquiry in social work practice*](#), *Social Service Review*, 60(4), 504-525. (subscription needed to access full text)

Links

- [Hull House museum in Chicago](#)
- [The urban experience in Chicago: Hull House and its neighbourhoods](#)

Google Earth

- [Hull House in Chicago](#)

(this option only works if Google Earth software has been installed on this computer)



edited by [Jan Steyaert](#)
design by Anne Van De Genachte
built by [Dutchlion](#) 2009