



Prairie Pages

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Education Services

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Jane Addams

Jane Addams is one of the best known women from Illinois. She worked with the poor, **advocated** peace, and pushed for social change.

Glossary

Advocate—to speak in favor of or to argue for a cause



Portrait of Jane and the children of Hull House by Robert Thom. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Jane Addams was born September 6, 1860, in Cedarville, Illinois. She was the eighth of nine children, but only two sisters and a brother survived into adulthood. Her parents were Sarah Weber and John Huy Addams. Her father owned a saw-mill and was president of the Second National Bank of Freeport. He also served as state representative for nine terms. When Jane was two years old her mother died, and she became very attached to her father.



Jane with her stepmother, Anna H. Haldeman, and her stepbrother, George Haldeman. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Jane was a very quiet and thoughtful child. When she was seven her father married Anna H. Haldeman. Her new stepmother encouraged Jane in her studies and her father, an **avid** reader, encouraged Jane to read. Jane enrolled in Rockford Female Seminary in 1877. She graduated at the head of her class, receiving her degree in 1882.

Jane traveled widely with her stepmother and her friend Ellen Gates Starr. During her travels Jane encountered firsthand the hardships of the poor. She

saw poor people looking through garbage cans for food and witnessed the terrible conditions in which they lived. While in London, Jane visited the Toynbee Hall, a **settlement house** for the poor. Toynbee Hall was opened in 1884 by students at Oxford University to help the poor. Jane took the settlement house idea back to Illinois and Chicago.

“When we came to Chicago, we had no definite idea what we were going to do.” Addams wrote in her autobiography, “we hoped that by living among the people we could learn what was needed.” In 1889, Addams and Starr moved into a house in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Chicago. With their own money, the two operated Hull House, named after the original owner. Hull House was a place where the poor and disadvantaged people of the area could live, receive food and an education, and participate in many social activities. Hull House also had a kindergarten, daycare, music school, theater, boardinghouse, art gallery, library, and gymnasium. It quickly became the center of the community.

Many different kinds of people gathered together at Hull House: the poor and the wealthy, immigrants of many nationalities, African Americans, and other minorities. Many of Addams’s upper-class friends lived and worked at Hull House,

Glossary

avid—eager or enthusiastic about something

settlement house—a community home for the poor and disadvantaged.

Glossary

depression—a period of great decline in the national economy marked by decreased business activity, falling prices, and unemployment.

Glossary continued next page.

each according to her or his own interests. Others helped to support Hull House when the **depression** of 1893 diminished Addams's financial resources.

Addams soon learned that providing these services was not enough to change conditions for the poor. She could control what was happening within Hull House, but not those things around it. Everywhere she looked there were unclean living conditions, unsafe working conditions, workers **exploited** and children in the work force rather than in school. Addams became convinced that in order to fix these things outside of the

home, women must have the right to vote. She worked hard for the right to vote and for the issues that that affected women, children, and the poor.

Addams lectured and wrote widely on her views. She published the first of many books, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, in 1902. She influenced children and women's labor laws, welfare procedures, industrial standards, workplace safety, and the juvenile court system. Addams and others from Hull House lobbied for passage of the 1903 child labor law and for mandatory school attendance laws, which helped get children out of the work force and into schools. Hull House supporters were vital to the passage of the federal child labor law of 1916 and the formation of the Federal Children's Bureau.



Jane and a young girl of Hull House around 1925. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Addams helped found the Chicago Federation of Settlements, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Woman's Peace Party. She served as Vice President of the Woman's Trade Union League and on Chicago's Board of Education, she seconded Theodore Roosevelt's nomination for

Glossary

exploited—to make use of selfishly or unethically.

prestigious—highly admired or esteemed.

President at the Progressive Party convention, and presided over the International Congress of Women at the Hague in the Netherlands.

Addams was also an important advocate for peace. She was deeply opposed to World War I, an unpopular view that resulted in her dismissal from the Daughters of the American Revolution. Despite this she continued to work for the things she believed in. She worked for peace by founding the Women's Peace Party (later renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). The Woman's Peace Party called for nations to come together to solve world problems rather than go to war. In 1931, Addams became the first American woman to win the **prestigious** Nobel Peace Prize.

Jane Addams received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931



Jane and companion campaigning for Peace. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Addams health began to decline in 1931 after she underwent surgery and suffered a heart attack. In 1935 she was diagnosed with intestinal cancer, and on May 21 at the age of seventy – four Jane Addams died. Thousands of people came to pay their last respects during her visitation at Hull House. She was buried in her hometown of Cedarville.

Jane Addams remains one of the most influential and well-known women of her generation. She stands as a shining example of the difference one person can make when he or she takes direct action and works for the things they believe in. Other settlement houses were organized as a result of Jane Addams' efforts. While the Hull House was in just one neighborhood, in just one city, its example and influence reached across the nation and the world.