

JANE ADDAMS



"The child becomes largely what he is taught; hence we must watch what we teach, and how we live."

JANE ADDAMS worked to end child labor, supported women's and worker's rights, helped people in poverty, and encouraged respect for all cultures. She established Hull-House, the nation's first settlement house, to aid those in need. In 1931, Addams became the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

EARLY YEARS

Jane Addams was born on September 6, 1860. She was the youngest child in a family of nine children. Her family's roots went back to William Penn, who founded the colony that became Pennsylvania. The family had Quaker roots and followed Quaker beliefs in working hard, respecting the rights of all people, and opposing war.

Addams's mother died when she was two. Her sisters took care of her and often spoke about their mother and her strong beliefs and teachings. Addams's father was a wealthy businessman, bank owner, and state legislator. He was a friend of President Abraham Lincoln. Addams adored her father and always wanted to make him proud of her.

When Addams was six and on a trip to Freeport, Illinois, with her father, they passed streets with broken-down, crowded houses. It was Addams's first encounter with people living in poverty. It made a



Jane Addams as a young girl



John H. Addams, Jane's father



Jane Addams as a young woman

big impression on her. She told her father, “When I am a grown woman I am going to buy a big house. Then the poor children can come and play in my yard whenever they want.” Little did she know how her early words would one day come true.

Addams was always an avid reader. Her house was filled with books, and her father encouraged her to

read. She loved Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, and essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson when she was older. All these books influenced the way she saw the world.

GROWING UP

When Addams was eight, her father married Anna Haldeman. It was hard to adjust to a new stepmother. Addams didn’t like her stepmother’s rules and often avoided her so they wouldn’t get into arguments. She missed her father’s constant attention, but she liked her new stepbrother, George, who was close to her in age and became her playmate.

Although people thought Addams was pretty, she was self-conscious about a back problem. It made her bend over when she walked, and she felt it made her look ugly and crippled.

Addams was self-disciplined from the time she was young and would wake up early to read and study. She was a good student and liked helping other students. When she grew up, Addams was eager to attend Smith College, one of the few schools to offer women a bachelor’s degree. But her father was opposed and sent her instead to the Rockford Female Seminary. Addams excelled at Rockford. She rose to the top of her class, was voted class president, and became head of the literary society, editor of the school newspaper, and valedictorian of her graduating class of 1882.

Addams didn’t want her studies to stop there. She applied to medical school—a radical decision for a woman of her time. Her parents were again opposed. They believed that the main role of a woman was to get married and have children. They thought that becoming a doctor would get in the way of her finding a husband. But Addams was determined to attend medical school, despite their disapproval.

In 1881, Addams’s father unexpectedly died. She was devastated and lost all interest in her medical studies. To make matters worse, she was experiencing terrible back

pain. One physician told her that she wouldn't live a year in her condition. Addams had painful surgery and for six months after was flat on her back. She was also forced to wear an uncomfortable, heavy brace for a year.

After she recovered, she traveled to Europe. Wealthy young women of the day often toured Europe with family or friends to learn about art and culture. Addams toured with her stepmother and a few friends. She marveled at all the sights and enjoyed visiting the museums and sitting at cafés. But she was appalled at the poverty she saw in cities like London. The horrible conditions that poor families endured were heartbreaking, and Addams was stunned by how many wealthy people she met who ignored the plight of the poor.

Addams toured Europe for two years, and when she returned home, she didn't know what to do next with her life. She was distraught that she had no purpose or goals. She'd always felt that she would do something to make a positive change in the world, and now she was twenty-seven years old and she hadn't accomplished anything yet.

A JOURNEY AND A PURPOSE

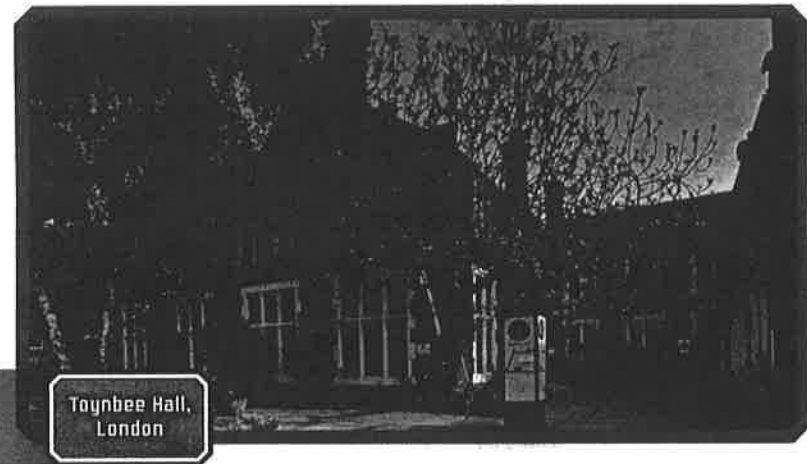
Although she was still unsure of her direction, Addams decided to travel to Europe again. Luckily, she'd inherited enough money from her father so she could afford to travel.



Drawing of a
London scene
of poverty

This time she'd travel with a former classmate, Ellen Starr. The friends shared a love of literature and art, but they had different temperaments. Starr was lively and expressive of her feelings. Addams was even-tempered and steady.

When the two women landed in Madrid, they attended a bullfight. Starr was horrified by the bloody, brutal show she witnessed in the ring and left. Addams stayed and was stunned to discover that she enjoyed the event. Later that day, she was horrified by her reaction. How could she sit there and watch creatures being killed so brutally and not do anything? It made her aware of how much needless suffering there was in the world. It made her realize she wanted to do something to help people—not just travel around the world. She shared her feelings with Starr, and



Toynbee Hall,
London

her friend was eager to help people in need, too. So when Addams visited Toynbee Hall in London a month later and met university students who were helping the poor by providing places for them to live, it gave her an idea. She and Starr would start a similar **settlement house** back home in Chicago.

HULL-HOUSE

When Addams returned to Chicago, she and Starr looked for a place they could turn into a settlement house similar to Toynbee Hall. The house in Chicago had to be big; easy to reach; and in the middle of a poor, multicultural neighborhood. In 1889, they found a house at the corner of Polk and Halsted that they thought would work. It had been built as a country

house for Charles Hull in 1856. It was a sprawling two-story redbrick mansion that stood between a saloon and a funeral parlor. Some people believed it was haunted.

Addams's and Starr's aim was to create a place of acceptance, comfort, continuing education, and help with basic needs. Addams believed that everyone in society would benefit when the poor had better lives and access to education so they could find good jobs—not just menial, low-paying work. She wrote: “The good we seek for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secure for all of us.” Helen Culver, who had inherited the house, allowed them to use all of it for their settlement house and offered it to them rent-free.



Hull-House,
Chicago

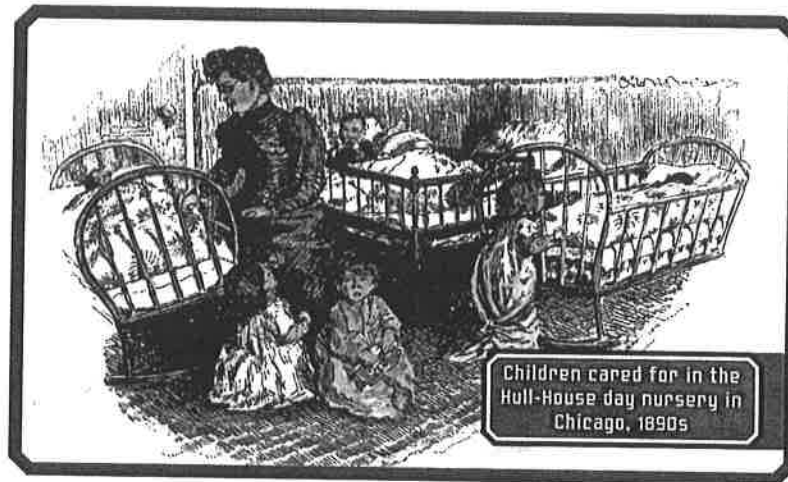
Some of the members of Addams's family, especially her stepmother, were shocked by her involvement with Hull-House and her plans to live among the poor. They felt it wasn't proper for an unmarried woman of her class to live this way. Even those who supported her goals thought she'd probably never succeed. Despite the opposition and the huge task of cleaning up the neglected old house, Addams and Starr persisted.

But it wasn't just Addams's relatives who were unenthusiastic about Hull-House. At first, many of the local people were skeptical about these two wealthy young women who'd moved into the neighborhood. Small boys threw stones at the house. Some people thought that Addams and Starr were missionaries who wanted to convert them to a different religion.



Addams with children
in Hull-House

Slowly, curiosity drew people into Hull-House. And when they came, many embraced the settlement house. Working mothers were happy that there was a safe place to leave their small children while they worked. Older children liked the social clubs and



Children cared for in the
Hull-House day nursery in
Chicago, 1890s

art classes. The hungry found a place where they could purchase good food cheaply. Addams and Starr were delighted that Hull-House was becoming a vital center in the neighborhood. They were also amazed at the generosity of so many, who although poor themselves, came to the aid of a neighbor or friend who experienced illness, death, or hard times.

For the first few years, Addams poured her own money into Hull-House. Addams and Starr worked tirelessly, organizing classes, keeping the house in shape, and fundraising for Hull-House. Addams also used her contacts among the wealthy in Chicago to raise funds. She soon realized that it made sense to delegate her daily work at Hull-House so she could spend more time raising money.



Hull-House
Choir, 1910

She knew that raising money was crucial to keep programs running at Hull-House. Addams's own fortune was dwindling.

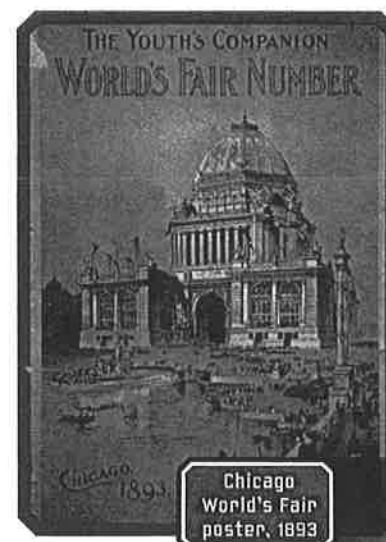
PART OF THE COMMUNITY

Within a few years of opening, Hull-House became an integral part of the community called the Nineteenth Ward of Chicago. The neighborhood was mostly made up of Jewish, German, Greek, and Italian immigrants. The settlement house offered classes in literature, English, music, and drama. It also provided a variety of clubs, a gym, a coffee house, and a library. Eventually twenty-five women would reside at Hull-House.

A few years after opening Hull-House, Addams realized that although the house provided vital services to the

community, it was equally essential to change laws that made poor people's lives difficult. Soon, Addams began to speak up publicly against **sweatshops**, where people worked long hours in terrible conditions for little pay, and the widespread use of child labor. She also advocated for better city services in poor areas.

Addams helped organize the Congress of Social Settlements held at Hull-House. In her talks, she insisted that not only conditions but also laws that affected the poor had to be changed. By 1892, her speeches received national attention, and more people became aware of the work that settlement houses were doing in communities around the United States. When the Chicago World's Fair brought thousands of people to the city in 1893, many came to visit Hull-House, and its fame grew even greater. There were soon nineteen more settlement houses around the United States, mostly in big cities like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Hull-House was the largest. It had expanded to three buildings and now included an





Unemployment
line, circa 1890

art gallery, which was a gift from a trustee. In only four years, Hull-House had blossomed from an idea into a well-known and respected organization.

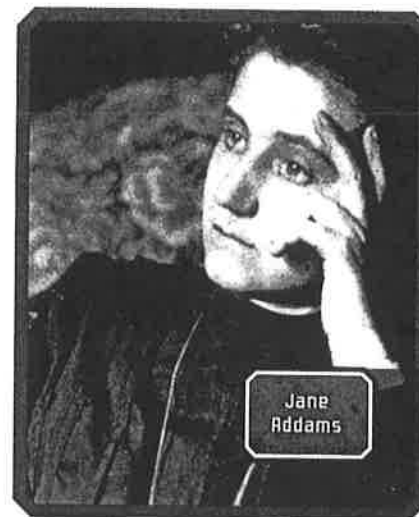
TOUGH TIMES

That summer, there was a severe economic depression in the United States, and many people in the Nineteenth Ward lost their jobs. It was terrible to see so many people unemployed. People had already made little money and often lived paycheck to paycheck, but the economic downturn made conditions worse. Times were tough and so many people were unemployed that some people felt hopeless and even ashamed that they couldn't find work. Addams used

much of her energy and time to help the unemployed.

But it wasn't just Addams and Starr who worked at Hull-House. It attracted young women, often from well-to-do homes, who were eager to change conditions. They believed that the best way to help the poor and unemployed was through action, and many got their start working at Hull-House. Alice Hamilton, who was trained as a doctor and in 1919 was the first woman appointed to the faculty of Harvard University, worked in industrial medicine, where she tried to improve conditions in factories. Louise deKoven Bowen worked to establish the nation's first juvenile court so that young people weren't tried as adults. Florence Kelley threw her energy into changing the miserable conditions in sweatshops.

Six years after opening Hull-House, Addams took on an additional and essential job: She became the garbage inspector for the Nineteenth Ward. She knew how crucial it was for people to live in a clean environment. She wanted to help people stay as healthy as they could, despite living in crowded, unsanitary buildings.



Jane
Addams

In her new role, Addams rose at dawn to make sure that the wagons hauled away the garbage properly and on time. She recognized that it was easy to get sick, especially when you lived in dirt-filled streets, were overworked, and didn't have the proper nutrition. Addams felt that her job was to prevent that from happening in the best way she could. That message hit home especially hard when Addams herself came down with typhoid fever.

CHALLENGES

Addams's doctor insisted she rest and regain her strength. A colleague from Hull-House took over her garbage inspector duties. When Addams recovered, she took time off and traveled abroad. It was an exciting trip. She was thrilled to meet the famous writer and humanitarian Leo Tolstoy

in Russia, although she felt uncomfortable when he chided her for wearing fashionable clothes. He also told her that the important thing in life was to live simply and work hard.

When she returned to Chicago, Addams tried to follow Tolstoy's example



Fourteen hundred men and women paid tribute to Addams at a dinner given in Chicago on January 20, 1927

and do more chores around Hull-House. She soon realized that her most effective role was to speak out against injustice and to stand up to politicians like Johnny Powers from the Nineteenth Ward, who tried to buy people's votes. She also continued to give talks about helping the poor and reforming unjust laws against women, children, and workers. Her speeches were often mentioned in the press, and Jane Addams became famous around the world.

In 1898, as Addams was about to give a lecture in Iowa, a U.S. ship called the *Maine* was sunk in Havana, Cuba. Americans were outraged at the way Spain treated the citizens of its colony Cuba. Spain was blamed (unfairly it turned out) for sinking the *Maine*. That anger led to



Jane Addams at an anti-war rally in 1915

war with Spain and eventually war over control of the Philippines, which Spain also occupied. Addams spoke up against the war. Many disagreed with her.

After meeting black reformer and writer Ida B. Wells, Addams also spoke out against **lynching**—the horrible practice, mainly in the South, of brutally killing black people unjustly accused of crimes. Although Wells was glad that Addams opposed lynching, Wells strongly disagreed with the way Addams presented the facts. Wells claimed the issue was not just that lynching was brutal, but also that the men were innocent.

Addams ran into more controversy when she stood up for treating everyone fairly, including **anarchists**, a group who didn't believe in the rule of government. Addams stood by her position, even after an anarchist shot President William McKinley in 1901. Despite the angry comments she received from people claiming she was sympathetic to the anarchist point of view, Addams saw it simply as an issue of fairness.

BOOKS AND HONORS

In 1902, Addams published her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics*. She continued to lobby and speak up against child labor and helped pass laws prohibiting children under the age of fourteen from working. Some states had

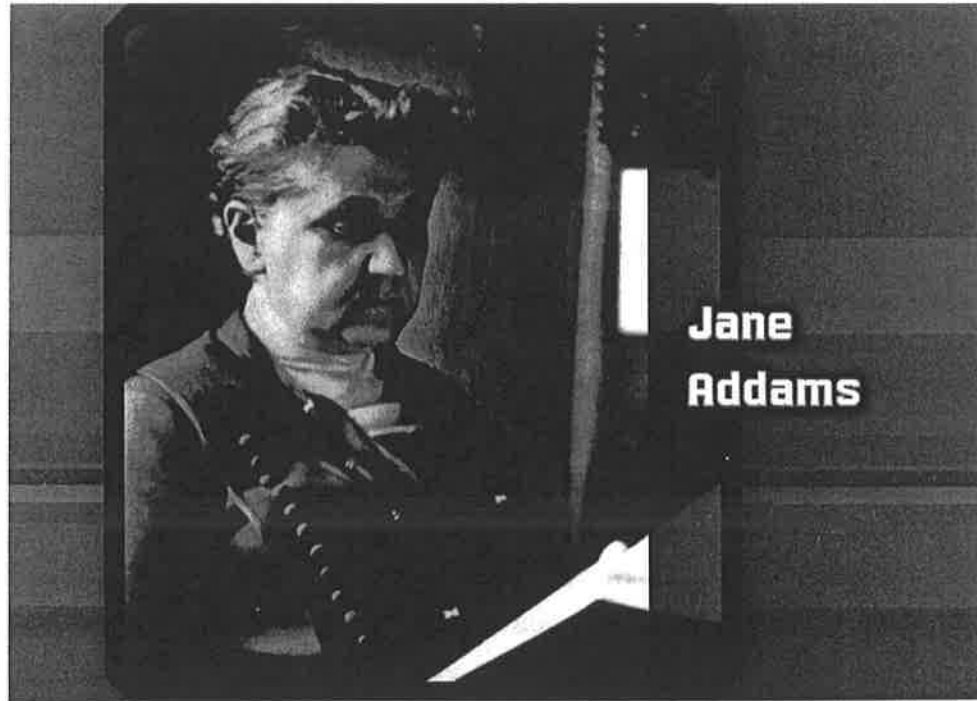
laws on the books against child labor, but many were not enforced. In the South, children as young as five often worked in mills.

In 1905, she was appointed to the Chicago school board. In 1907, she published another book, *Newer Ideals of Peace*, and became more involved in the movement for women's rights. In 1909, she helped found the **NAACP**, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1910, she received the first honorary degree ever granted to a woman by Yale University. That same year, she published her autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. The book became a bestseller.

WORLD WAR I

In 1914, the assassination of Austrian Archduke Ferdinand by a Serbian sparked World War I. Long-simmering land disputes and rivalries inflamed the leaders of Europe, and soon Germany, Austro-Hungary, and eventually Turkey





were at war against the Allies, which included Britain, France, and Russia. It was a war that started with dreams of glory but was fought in long, drawn-out battles with heavy losses on all sides.

Addams, who didn't believe in any war, opposed World War I. Her views evoked sharp criticism. Despite the harsh comments, Addams helped Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover provide food for America's European allies at the end of the war in 1918. But when she traveled to Berlin

in 1919, the suffering of the starving children in Germany stunned her. Even though the Allies had fought the Germans in the war, Addams believed now was the time to help their former enemies recover. Many disagreed with her, and she was again criticized again for her opinions.

But that didn't stop Addams. In 1919, she became president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Over the next ten years, Addams continued promoting peace and equal rights for all. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the constitution was finally ratified, granting women the right to vote. In 1926, Addams suffered a heart attack and her health began to fail, but she continued writing about her life, her work, and her views.

In 1931, Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, making her the first woman given the honor. The same year she had surgery for a tumor.

Jane Addams died on May 21, 1935, of cancer.