celebrated appearances, the family is on the roof of their house, poised to reward a band of Christmas carolers below by tipping onto them a caldron of what appears to be boiling oil. This ensemble became the touchstone Addams cartoon and created a pervasive image. "An Addams house, an Addams family, an Addams situation are archetypes that we see all around us," wrote New York Times art critic John Russell; and Addams, Russell said, was "an American landmark, one of the few by which one and all have learned to steer." Addams died in New York City.


ROBERT C. HARVEY

ADDAMS, Jane (6 Sept. 1860–21 May 1935), social reformer and peace activist, was the daughter of John Huy Addams, a businessman and Republican politician, and Sarah Weber. Born on the eve of the Civil War in the small farming community of Cedarville, just outside Freeport, in northern Illinois, she was the youngest of five children, four of whom were girls. Her mother died during pregnancy when Jane was two years old. The Addams family was the wealthiest, most respected family in the community. Jane's father owned the local grain mill, was president of the Second National Bank of Freeport, had interests in a local railroad and a local insurance company, taught Sunday School, and was active in local Bible societies. A founding member of the Republican party and supporter of Abraham Lincoln, he was elected to the Illinois State Senate as a Republican in 1854 and served in that capacity until 1870. In 1866 John Addams married Anna Haldeman, a widow with two sons and pretensions to gentility. Under her parents' tutelage, Jane Addams acquired liberal principles regarding individual rights and republican principles regarding community responsibility, and she grew up believing that both Christian ethics and the arts were key civilized agents.

As a student at Rockford Female Seminary between 1877 and 1881, Addams was among the first generation of college-educated women in the United States. She was an exemplary student and a charismatic campus leader, serving as class president for four years, editor of the school magazine, president of the literary society, and valedictorian. Ultimately, Addams was the first student to receive a bachelor's degree from Rockford, an event that marked the school's transition to collegiate status. Rockford's pious, missionary atmosphere only deepened Addams's own skepticism about formal Christianity and strengthened her desire for a career in community service. In the 1880s school-teaching and missionary work were the two main occupations open to women seeking a public role, but Addams was not interested in teaching or proselytizing. For eight years after graduation in 1881, she struggled to define a secular life mission in a society with little use for educated women and in a family that expected its youngest daughter to serve at home. During those difficult years, Addams developed a close friendship with Ellen Gates Starr, a former Rockford student, traveled extensively in Europe, and gradually came to understand the tension women faced between what she would later call the "family claim" and the "social claim."

Addams's travels during the 1880s, in conjunction with her immersion in the social philosophy of John Ruskin and her exposure to London's premier settlement house, Toynbee Hall, inspired her to open a settlement house in Chicago, a city that exemplified the industrial, urban problems of the late nineteenth century. In partnership with Starr, she rented a rundown mansion that had been built in the 1850s by Charles Hull. At first, all financial support for the Hull-House settlement derived from income on the $50,000 estate Addams inherited on her father's death in 1881, but eventually Hull-House benefited from the sponsorship of wealthy women in Chicago who became Addams's allies in civic reform. Hull-House expanded over an entire square block at Halsted and Polk streets, encompassing thirteen different buildings that encircled a playground for the neighborhood's children. Hull-House was the second settlement house to open in the United States, and of the four hundred settlement houses opened around the country before World War I, it was by far the most famous, most influential, and most innovative.

The rapid expansion of programs offered at Hull-House during the 1890s mirrored the rapid development of Jane Addams's own thinking about the purpose of a settlement house. Influenced by Ruskin and Toynbee Hall and inspired by Thomas Carlyle's elitist philosophy that the rich had a duty to the lower classes, Addams and Starr originally envisioned the settlement as a place where educated women could share their knowledge of art and literature with the working poor.

Soon after opening Hull-House, however, Addams and Starr came to understand that the project's success depended less on poetry readings than on the provision of very practical social services, including a day-care center for the children of working mothers and English literacy classes for those seeking U.S. citizenship. After only three years on Halsted Street, Addams was able to describe the evolution of her mission. In two lectures, "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements" and "The Objective Value of the Social Settlement," she set forth her growing conviction that
the value of the neighborhood settlement house lay in its "flexibility, its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand." Addams saw Hull-House less as an agent of cultural uplift than as "an information and interpretation bureau." She insisted that the settlement should have a "sterner and more enduring aspect" than mere philanthropy. She saw the provision of legal services, visiting nurses, a meeting place for ethnic clubs and labor unions, a boarding house for working girls, and a group of middle-class residents ready to mediate between neighbors and the city bureaucracy as evidence that Hull-House was a "commission merchant," the middle agent uniting a cross section of Chicago residents around common civic goals.

Addams never abandoned her liberal faith in the power of the individual and never doubted her republican belief in the individual’s responsibility to the community, but contact with her neighbors on Halsted Street shifted her focus from social stewardship by an elite to political and economic empowerment of all members of the community. Her interest in the contemporary philosophy of pragmatism increased with her experience; elitism, she found, was not effective in achieving social reform. "Democracy," wrote Addams in 1902, must be regarded "not merely as a sentiment . . . but as that which affords a rule of living as well as a test of faith." For this reason, she insisted, "the only cure for the ills of Democracy is more Democracy."

The depression of 1893 and the Pullman strike of 1894, coinciding with the arrival of Florence Kelley as a resident at Hull-House, served to sharpen Addams's definition of her mission. During the 1890s and 1900s, Addams encouraged Hull-House residents to expand beyond direct service to the neighborhood and to lobby the city and state for improved sanitation, factory legislation, municipal playgrounds and citywide kindergartens, a juvenile court system, and enforcement of antiprostitution and antidrug laws. In this way Hull-House participated in the Progressive Era's redefinition of the role of government in a democratic, capitalist society.

Sponsorship of Hull-House Maps and Papers, an innovative social survey of the conditions in the settlement's immigrant neighborhood published in 1895, was just the beginning of Addams's involvement with the era's growing enthusiasm for social science. She was closely aligned with faculty members at the University of Chicago, especially John Dewey, Sophonisba Breckenridge, and Edith Abbott, and played an active role in the founding of the School of Social Work at that institution. Addams opposed the idea that social science should only investigate, not advocate. In her view, a settlement house should not be a "sociological laboratory" in which people were studied but rather a source of "data for legislation" and a means to help "secure it."

Mediation was the keynote of both Addams's political ideology and her leadership style. From adolescence on, she insisted on cooperation and compromise in her personal and public relationships. She welded her experience as the peacemaker in a family of volatile personalities together with her reading of Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other "non-resistant" thinkers. "The most outstanding fact in the temperament of Miss Addams," said her contemporary Floyd Dell, was her "passion of conciliation." She became the first among equals in progressive circles not by argument but by consensus-building. This was as true in her writing as it was in her daily negotiations with political and business leaders. In nearly a dozen books, hundreds of articles, and thousands of speeches, Addams disarmed opponents by presuming general agreement with her views. She could be harsh in her description of social problems, but her tone changed in discussing solutions. There, her method was to ignore conflict, to assume shared principles, and to foresee a harmonious outcome. She spoke and acted as though maximum participation by all involved in any given social problem would elicit a spirit of cooperation, that a negotiated settlement would inevitably derive from the democratic climate of goodwill, and that this process would inevitably result in justice.

Addams's determination to always stake out the high ground of arbitration occasionally caused problems. In 1894 she was frozen out of attempts to end the Pullman strike when George Pullman refused all pleas for arbitration. In 1898 she naively thought she could lead a high-minded challenge to the political power of her local ward boss without becoming soiled by electoral mudslinging. As a member of the Chicago school board in the early 1900s, she alienated the city's teachers by attempting a compromise on their meager salaries. In these and similarly polarized situations, Addams's reluctance to take sides earned her more enmity than respect. In other cases, however, she was regarded by all parties as the quintessential honest broker whose commitment to fairness lent credibility to a variety of progressive efforts at civic cooperation.

At the peak of her popularity in the years between 1909 and 1915, Addams became the first woman president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction (later the National Conference of Social Work), a vice president of the National-American Woman Suffrage Association and pro-suffrage columnist for the Ladies' Home Journal, a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the author of six books, including her bestselling autobiography, Twenty Years at Hull-House (1910).

Addams made an uncharacteristically partisan foray into national politics in 1912 when she supported Theodore Roosevelt for president on the Progressive party ticket. Roosevelt endorsed the domestic platform put forth by the National Conference of Charities and Correction, and Addams agreed to deliver the seconding speech at the Progressive party convention. The campaign tested Addams's commitment to compromise
because her social welfare agenda had to coexist with Roosevelt’s racism, militarism, and approval of big business.

Three years later Addams and Roosevelt were bitter opponents in the national debate over U.S. participation in the Great War in Europe. Ironically, it was her firm belief in arbitration that ultimately forced Addams to take an uncompromising stand on this public issue. She was among the small handful of American intellectuals and activists who refused to support U.S. participation in World War I, disavowing what she later called the “pathetic belief in the regenerative results of war.” She viewed the war as a twofold threat to human evolution: it halted progress toward civilized methods of conflict resolution and it diverted resources away from community projects and toward military spending. For the sake of pacifism, Addams sacrificed her popularity. Newspaper editors and politicians denounced her as a traitor and a fool. Teddy Roosevelt, her old ally in the Progressive party, dismissed her as a “Bull Mouse.” During the war Addams chaired the Woman’s Peace party and an International Congress of Women at The Hague in April 1915. Following that conference of one thousand women from twelve nations, Addams led an international delegation of women in a tour of all the warring nations, meeting with heads of state and attempting to mediate a peace. After the war Addams and her colleagues in the women’s peace movement supported the League of Nations and, in 1919, formed the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, of which Addams was the first president.

Before World War I, Addams had been the most famous and most respected American woman of her day. In 1906 the British labor leader John Burns called her “the only saint America has produced.” In 1912 the Philadelphia North American called her “probably the most widely beloved of her sex in all the world.” In 1913 the Twilight Club of New York asked three thousand “representative Americans” to name America’s most socially useful Americans and Addams was listed first on over half of the ballots. That same year, the Independent asked its readers, “who among our contemporaries are of the most value to the community?” In that poll Addams came in second to Thomas Edison. As a result of her pacifism during the war, however, Addams’s public image was transformed from saint to villain, and during the reactionary 1920s, many conservatives in the United States regarded her as a dangerous radical with suspicious ties to subversives.

During the last fifteen years of her life the criticisms of Addams darkened but did not defeat her political activism. She continued to lead Hull-House but spent increasing amounts of time and energy on international peace efforts. In her capacity as president of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom she traveled often to Europe and Asia, meeting with a wide variety of diplomats and civic leaders and reiterating her Victorian belief in women’s special mission to preserve peace. Recognition of these efforts came with a gradual thaw in the U.S. political climate, and by the late 1920s Addams had regained her stature as a beloved public figure. The culmination of this restoration came with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Addams in 1931. As the first U.S. woman to win the prize, Addams was applauded for her “expression of an essentially American democracy of spirit.”

Age and ill health prevented Addams from playing an active role in the New Deal, but she did serve on the Chicago advisory committee of the housing division of the Public Works Administration and was one of the vice presidents of the American Association of Social Security. She was dismayed by the depression’s widespread poverty but welcomed the opportunity it provided to expand public responsibility for the common welfare.

Addams died of cancer in Chicago, ten days after a banquet in Washington celebrating the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and its founder. Thousands attended her funeral in the courtyard of Hull-House and agreed with Walter Lippmann’s editorial eulogy declaring her career “the ultimate vindication of the democratic faith.”

- The most extensive collection of primary materials on Addams can be found in The Jane Addams Papers, ed. Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (1985). These eighty-two reels of microfilm include Jane Addams’s correspondence and records from her various organizational affiliations. Addams’s own published works not mentioned above include Democracy and Social Ethics (1902), The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets (1909), A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil (1912), The Long Road of Woman’s Memory (1916), Peace and Bread in Time of War (1922; repr. 1960), The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House (1930), The Excellent Becomes the Permanent (1932), and Jane Addams: A Centennial Reader (1960).

The best existing biography of Jane Addams is Allen F. Davis’s American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams (1973). The authorized biography by her nephew, James Weber Linn, Jane Addams (1935), contains interesting anecdotes, and John C. Farrell’s Beloved Lady (1967) offers useful insights on Addams’s political ideology. 100 Years at Hull-House, a collection of observations and recollections of life in the settlement on Halsted Street, has been intelligently edited by Allen F. Davis and Mary Lynn McCree Bryan (1990). Christopher Lasch’s observations on Addams in The New Radicalism in America, 1889–1963: The Intellectual as Social Type (1965) still bear consideration, as do his introductions to Addams’s writings in The Social Thought of Jane Addams (1965). Anne Firor Scott’s introduction to the 1964 reprint of Addams’s Democracy and Social Ethics (1902) remains among the best essays on Addams’s character and career.


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