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Addams, Jane

By [Kathi Coon Badertscher](#)

Addams, *Jane*

Leader of American settlement movement, social reformer, pacifist

Born 06 September 1860 in Cedarville, USA

Died 21 May 1935 in Chicago, USA

Jane Addams co-founded Hull House, the most famous of America's 400 social settlements. Addams led the settlement movement and successfully championed many Progressive-era reforms. She received the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy work for international world peace during and after World War I.

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1. Settlement Founder and Social Reformer

Jane Addams (1860-1935) was born in 1860 into a prominent Quaker family from Cedarville, Illinois. Her father was a prosperous miller and Illinois state senator. Addams graduated in 1881 as valedictorian from Rockford Female Seminary, today Rockford College. Over the next six years, Addams endured her father's death, hospitalization for a congenital spinal defect, and a failed attempt at medical school. She traveled to Europe in 1887-1888 with Rockford classmate [Ellen Gates Starr \(1859-1940\)](#). Addams and Starr visited London's Toynbee Hall, a social experiment, the first settlement house, and forerunner of today's community centers. Addams and Starr decided to pursue a similar scheme of living among the poor.

Addams and Starr chose Hull House, a run-down mansion in a Chicago neighborhood where impoverished immigrants lived. Hull House was to serve two interrelated purposes: to provide an outlet for the talent and energy of college-educated young people and to help those trapped in poverty. Hull House gradually expanded to conduct a myriad of activities and include a dozen buildings that sprawled over a city block.

The settlement philosophy emphasized community organization, mutual aid, and social action. The concept exploded. By 1910 there were over 400 settlements in America and Addams had become the leader of a national movement. Other women gradually took over running Hull House, allowing Addams to travel, speak, and write extensively on social reform. She successfully championed a plethora of reforms: child labor legislation, housing and sanitation reform, immigrant welfare, temperance, women's suffrage, and labor mediation.

Addams became widely recognized for her expertise and influence on social issues. She became the first woman president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction (1909). A pillar of the Progressive movement, she seconded the nomination of [Theodore Roosevelt \(1858-1919\)](#) as the 1912 Progressive Party presidential candidate. When war broke out in Europe in 1914, Jane Addams was a very well-respected woman and the most prominent social worker in America.

2. Peace Advocate

War contradicted all Addams' theories of humanitarianism, community, democracy, and social justice. She had thought deeply about war and peace for many years, had met with [Leo Tolstoy \(1828-1910\)](#) at his Russian farm in 1896, attended peace conferences, and published *New Ideals of Peace* (1907). Addams and her social work colleagues were appalled at the human cruelty and brutality of war, but were even more dismayed by the damage to cooperative relationships among peoples and nations that war implied. They feared that war would undermine all their efforts to achieve social justice and democracy.

Addams risked her prestigious reputation by opposing World War I. She lent her support to the American Union Against Militarism (AUAM) in which her settlement colleagues [Lillian Wald \(1867-1940\)](#) and [Florence Kelley \(1859-1932\)](#) were deeply involved.

Addams' primary [pacifist](#) work, to construct a moral basis and structure for international relations, relied on the empowerment of women. She chaired the Women's Peace Party and presided in 1915 over the first International Congress of Women at The Hague, Netherlands. She then met with heads of [neutral](#) and warring nations to convey the congress' resolutions of liberal peace terms and the establishment of a permanent international court. Upon her return from Europe, Addams addressed a large audience at Carnegie Hall. In her remarks and call for peace, she observed that soldiers bolstered their nerves with alcohol before going in to battle. Even though the US was still a neutral nation, the media vilified her for openly opposing not only the war, but also the ideals of heroism and patriotism.

Even after public opinion shifted and forced Addams out of the mainstream, she continued to advocate for world peace. She advised [Henry Ford \(1863-1947\)](#) prior to his departure on the Ford Peace Ship (her health prevented her from traveling with him). In 1916, Addams testified in support of disarmament before the Military Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.

When the AUAM split into two factions in 1917, with the AUAM remaining moderate and the National Civil Liberties Union (NCLU) pursuing aggressive anti-conscription tactics, Addams supported all pacifist efforts, albeit in the background. When the NCLU's [Roger Baldwin \(1884-1981\)](#) went to prison for violating the [Selective Service Act](#), Addams disagreed with his actions but still admired his pacifist stance. After the NCLU emerged as the post-war American Civil Liberties Union with Baldwin at the helm, Addams served on its national committee.

After the war, Addams spent less time at Hull House, retreated from public life, and traveled abroad. She helped to establish the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1919) and served as its president for the rest of her life. As the publicity crisis waned she received numerous awards and a dozen honorary university degrees. Then, after several nominations Addams became the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (1931), which she shared with [Nicholas Murray Butler \(1862-1947\)](#). She donated her prize money to the Women's International League. Jane Addams died in 1935 in a Chicago hospital following cancer surgery.

Kathi Coon Badertscher, Indiana University

Section Editor: [Lon Strauss](#)

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