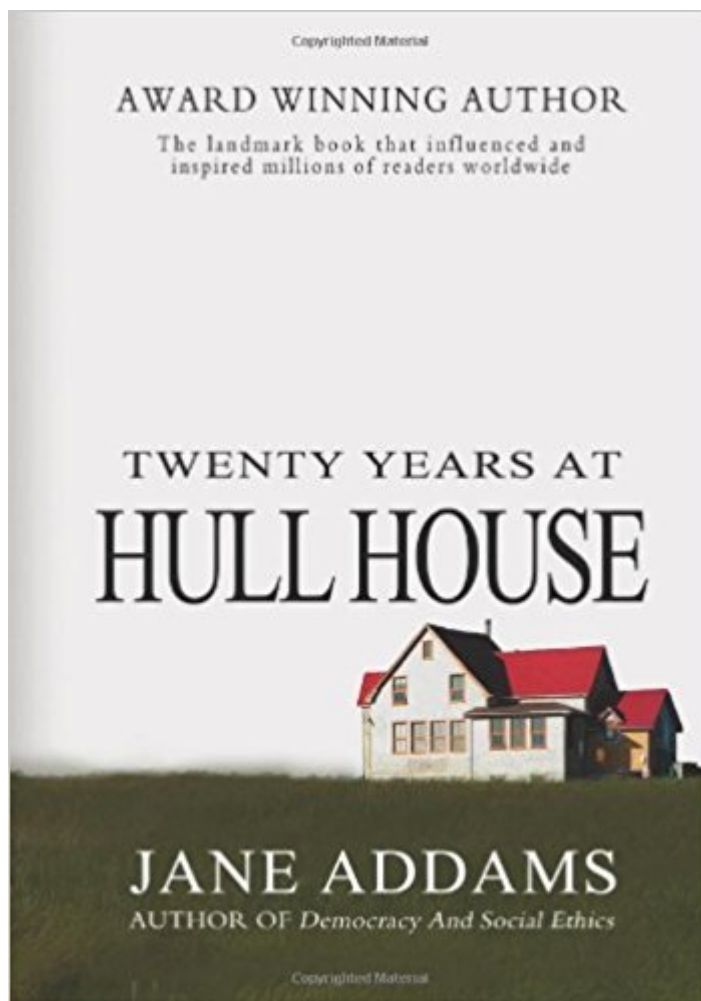


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# Twenty Years At Hull House



## Synopsis

Hull House was a settlement house co-founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. Located in Chicago, Hull House opened its doors to early European immigrants. With its innovative social, educational, and artistic programs, Hull House became the gold standard for the movement. Addams ran Hull House as head resident until her death in 1935, and in this book she documents her experiences there.

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## Customer Reviews

In 1889 Jane Addams and friend, Ellen Gates Starr, co-founded Hull House in Chicago, Illinois, the first settlement house in the United States. The house was named after Charles Hull, who built the building in 1856. When starting out, all of the funding for the Hull House came from the \$50,000 estate she inherited after her father died. Later, the Hull House was sponsored by Helen Culver, the wealthy real estate agent who had initially leased the house to the women. Jane and Ellen were the first two occupants of the house, which would later be the residence of about 25 women. At its height, Hull House was visited each week by around 2000 people. Its facilities included a night school for adults, kindergarten classes, clubs for older children, a public kitchen, an art gallery, a coffeehouse, a gymnasium, a girls club, bathhouse, a book bindery, a music school, a drama group, a library, and labor-related divisions. Her adult night school was a forerunner of the continuing education classes offered by many universities today. In addition to making available services and cultural opportunities for the largely immigrant population of the neighborhood, Hull House afforded

an opportunity for young social workers to acquire training. Eventually, the Hull House became a 13-building settlement, which included a playground and a summer camp. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

This is a landmark book on American social problems and the best way to address them. It is also one of the most thoughtful memoirs I've ever read. Jane Addams' observations of life in an immigrant neighborhood in turn of the century Chicago are keenly penetrating. She really knows the life she describes, because she lived among these immigrants, befriending them, involving herself in their personal difficulties, learning their aspirations, and helping them to further their education and boost their access to what America could offer them. Addams also differs from almost every other social activist I know in her willingness--almost a compulsion--to rethink her positions once being confronted with evidence that she has misunderstood the reality around her. This is a woman who never stopped thinking and growing, and who was constantly building and improving the settlement house she founded. Moreover, she always always gave credit to those who joined her in the work, originating projects she would not have thought of on her own and carrying through work she could not do alone. I give the book less than five stars only because the edition does not do full justice to the book. There is no introduction to the text, and nothing to provide biographical background on the extraordinary woman who wrote it, Jane Addams. Happily, the typeface is readable, and the illustrations, reprinted from the original edition, are large enough to add value to the book. But a great text like this one, written in a late Victorian style, and containing allusions to events of its day that are no longer familiar to readers, could use a few footnotes. However, there are biographies of Addams and online websites that can supply this need. One should not fear to read the book--there's plenty here to think about and learn from, even if some of the facts remain a little unclear.

If you are interested in the life of Jane Addams, Sociology, or in turn-of-the-century Christian Humanism, then this is a good book to read. The book has the pre-WWI optimism still found in the Social Gospel movement, but clearly written by an anti-evangelical author. Great insights into not just the work that was done at Hull House, but also a lens into all of humanity's collective response to marginalized populations.

Jane Addams is the best of the best American heroes. Her writing sparkles with wit, kindness, and the sobriety of lived experience. If you think of Jane Addams as a Christian do-gooder from the dark

ages before the Great Society think again. She was a flesh-and-blood freethinker and truth-teller for the ages who walked her talk with rare courage and humor. Read this book if you want to see how much like 2017 the first decades of the 20th century were. There's nothing old-fashioned in her thinking--20 Years at Hull House is one of those back-to-the-future stories that should be required reading before you cast a vote.

Just over one hundred years ago when she wrote this memoir, Jane Addams was an internationally famous social reformer, speaker, and writer. At a time known as "The Gilded Age," when wealth was celebrated by so many as a sign of God's favor, and you couldn't be too rich or powerful--the days of the Carnegies, Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and their ilk--Jane Addams dedicated her life to improving the lot of the people who actually made all that wealth and power possible: working people and their families at the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum from the oligarchs and the plutocrats. For Jane Addams, a native of northern Illinois, that would mean living among the European immigrants and their families who lived in one of the largest and most diverse cities in the United States, Chicago. But she did it in a new and different way. Based on a then new model of social improvement created in England and known as the settlement house movement, in 1890 she and a few like-minded souls established Hull-House. Hull-House started out literally as an old if large residence, and would grow into quite a complex of adjacent and nearby buildings covering parts of several blocks. Settlement residents were largely, like Jane Addams, educated professionals who were either independently wealthy (like Addams herself, though modestly so) or who supported themselves in their professions--law, education, medicine, business, etc.--and did their "settlement work" in their off-duty hours. And that settlement work was varied, to say the least. The residents and volunteers engaged in a dizzying array of activities. They did child-care, taught English to immigrants from all over the European world, engaged in training for various trades, taught former rural peasants basics like cooking and sewing, taught classes at almost every level from kindergarten through graduate school, and they served the city, county, and state in many different capacities, including ground-breaking work as social workers, probation officers, health inspectors, and more. Because they understood something lots of people today seem to have forgotten or never learned--that humans are more than just what they do for a living, more than the sum or the lack of a bank account--they took a very holistic approach to living. In other words, they had lots of clubs and made sure there were lots of activities for people of every age and interest. To make that possible, they built spaces for

gymnastics, plays, concerts, and other kinds of activities, including spaces both for art production and display. Their clubs covered every possible interest from sewing to debating to science, folklore, and almost anything else you can think of; they took field trips to local and regional museums and even did excursions on the Rock River and other nature settings. And because they were in the neighborhood they were, they did it in an almost unbelievable variety of languages and dialects. From our vantage point today, most Americans think of immigrants as

“Italian” or “German” or “Spanish.” In fact, each of these countries had different dialects or even languages, so there was no guarantee that two people that Americans saw as “Italians” could understand each others’ speech. Chicago was a veritable Babel! What a place and time. The same year that Jane Addams opened Hull-House, the pioneering photojournalist Jacob Riis published another one of the landmark studies of that age, *How the Other Half Lives*, which told and showed what life was like in the tenements of New York City. *Twenty Years at Hull-House* takes a different angle, but does indeed help us to learn about “the other” in important ways. Yes, Industrialization and its effects, including urbanization, led to improved lives for lots of Americans. But it had its dark underbelly too, and those should not be ignored. The people who helped us to see that dark underbelly should be better-known than they are. Reading this book a hundred years after it was first published, I can’t help but be struck by a strong and very sad feeling of *deja vu*. Within a few decades of this book’s publication many of the terrible things wrong with society that were cataloged in this remarkable memoir either improved significantly or even largely disappeared because of the concerted efforts of people like Jane Addams. The country experienced terrible calamities, hardships, and two world wars, but out of these Franklin Roosevelt and so many who had been admirers and supporters of Jane Addams fashioned the New Deal. Addams died before that work was done, but it began to right so many of the wrongs that she wrote about so forcefully in this book and other writings and speeches. Folk wisdom warns us that good times and success are not always ultimately good for us. Post-war success eventually, too put it baldly, took us from Franklin Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan and the rolling back of so much of the New Deal and its successor, the Great Society. And then, of course, came more wars, and then the great crash of 2007. Reading *Twenty Years at Hull-House* today is a very different experience than it would have been in 1957, 1967, or 2007. It is sobering to see how much of what she says about economic, political, and intellectual realities from 1890 to 1910 sound like they are hot off the press, or, more likely in our time, the internet. Today we often hear that one person or even a group of people just can’t make a difference, and shouldn’t even try.

Jane Addams and the others who took up residence at Hull-House, and all the people in Chicago, and across the county, and around the world who supported the work of Hull-House proved just how wrong that kind of thinking is. This book is not only a valuable glimpse into the lives of our long-ago ancestors, it is also a place for us to look for good ideas about how to deal with the problems so many are facing today. I haven't mentioned anything about Jane Addams personally, but she was an inspiring individual in so many ways, and she tells us enough of her life story for glimpses of it to shine through. Her father was a friend and political ally of Abraham Lincoln during the creation of the Republican Party. Her mother died when she was young, and she suffered from curvature of the spine. She grew up non-denominational but in the Quaker tradition, which influenced her in profound ways. Her love for learning and experiences in the kind of schools and education available to females of her age and social class are very interesting to learn about, as well as how that was changing during her young adulthood and later. Because of her socioeconomic status she was able to travel across the country and Europe, also interesting. And I'll let the curious reader discover on her or his own how interesting her private life was by reading this book, and hopefully more about her. In trying times and places for so many, Jane Addams was part of the solution, not the problem. Her life and work deserve to be better-known and emulated. This book is as important today as it was when it was published.

I did enjoy the book but it really made me want to do additional research. Many of the clients Jane Addams described in her book I felt I needed to know more and find out how their stories ended. I was also wanting to know more on the day to day financial operations of Hull House, how long it stayed in existence, etc. Overall I would say this is a great beginning book if you have interest in that period of our history.

Content is A- And I personally was not a fan of her verbosely eloquent writing style, though I definitely think it is highly effitive in recounting the history of hull-house from a first person point of view.

I expected this to be very dated, and in many ways it was. However, I was frequently struck with the impression that some things have changed very little. Only the names have been changed: we still vilify and fear that which is different.

A classic social work text.

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