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Boston's settlement housing: social reform in an industrial city

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BOSTON’S SETTLEMENT HOUSING:
SOCIAL REFORM IN AN INDUSTRIAL CITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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by

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ABSTRACT

Between the Civil War and World War I, American cities underwent dramatic changes: they changed in shape, they changed in size, they changed in terms of who was there, and how those individuals were distributed through the city. The driving force behind these urban morphological changes was industrialization – and the emergence of industrial slums on the edges of expanding business districts. These industrial slums were widely believed to breed disease, crime, intemperance, and immorality – external costs that were being born by the entire society. Yet American society and American philanthropic institutions were not prepared to deal with the by-products of the new industrial-capitalist economy (namely, extensive poverty and increased social segregation) or the rise of big cities. As a result, progressive social reformers developed new methods of helping poor, largely immigrant communities adjust to a rapidly changing, increasingly complex urban society.

One such effort was the settlement movement. Begun in London’s East End in 1884, the movement emphasized residence and the creation of community. The movement’s leaders worked to facilitate communication across class lines, provide cultural luxuries (like university level classes and art exhibits) to the poor, create functioning neighborhoods in the midst of blight, and spur others – primarily, idealistic, upper-class, college-educated men – to participate in social reform. The English settlement movement (and the American movement, which began in 1886) represented a new, alternative approach to helping the poor; mid-nineteenth century social reformers focused on moralism, and viewed poverty as the product of vice and moral failure. Settlement workers viewed poverty largely as an environmental problem that they could help solve through settlement-sponsored activities and amenities.
This research focuses on two settlement houses in Boston, Massachusetts in the 1890s and examines how settlement workers impacted the neighborhoods of the South Cove and the South End. The founders (and ultimately, workers) of the settlements had very different ideas on how best to help their communities, yet both made significant strides toward providing basic amenities to their neighbors in the form of libraries, baths, playgrounds, health clinics, daycare, and school classes, amenities that these neighborhoods otherwise would have been without.
CHAPTER I

THE PRICE OF URBAN EXPANSION

... It is every day clearer that the South End is to be the great metropolitan poor district of Greater Boston. It has many pleasant and respectable streets. But it has its large and thickly crowded tenement-house regions ... It has organized vice planting itself near the homes of the working people. It has the beginnings of a Bowery, with its glaring picturesqueness. Above all, it is more and more clearly marked off from the quarters where the well-to-do and the rich have their homes. (Woods 1895, 8)

The evils of the neighborhood are largely connected with drunkenness. Saloons and illegal kitchen bar-rooms abound ... There are very rarely bathrooms in the tenement houses, and there are no public baths except in the river... There is much destitution, especially this autumn, since employment has failed so many breadwinners ... not far away are very poor and even criminal districts. (Dudley 1893, 2)

Introduction

During the first wave of American industrialization (1820-1870), rates of urbanization climbed more sharply than ever before, signifying to Americans that their overwhelmingly rural society was transforming into an urban, industrial, capitalist society – especially in the Atlantic coastal cities. Yet industrialization manifested itself in the United States much as it had in Britain by a progressively lower standard of living, unsanitary and overcrowded housing, miserable wages, poor diet, insecure employment, and increasing social segregation.

British social observers foretold the story: reports by Edwin Chadwick (1842) and Friedrich Engels (1844) expressed concern about the health and hygiene of densely populated industrial cities and the structural effects of poverty. Social critics also pointed out an associated problem with laissez-faire capitalism – it caused social fragmentation within the city. In 1845, the Earl of Beaconsfield (later Prime Minister), Benjamin Disraeli, noted that due to industrialization, the social and spatial divisions within English cities were expanding, to the extent that there were two populations living completely separate lives, isolated and unaware of the other: “Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as
ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets. … The Rich and the Poor” (Disraeli 1845[1904], 93). Disraeli’s use of the term “nations” implied, significantly, that there were territorial boundaries associated with class divisions.

Many Americans, too, viewed the encroachment of urban industrialization as a potentially divisive force, but favored the segregation, since urban industrial centers were also centers of high mortality, high criminality, and high poverty. Moreover, urban residents were considered degenerate. Much of the fear and suspicion of cities in general was based on the fact that cities represented places where people might, for the first time, be exposed to dangerous influences, like saloons, gambling halls, and brothels. The city’s ways and forms were considered too artificial and of the wrong quality to support a moral lifestyle. Urban residents lived far removed from the social stability and watchful eyes of their families and their church communities. Men and women living in the city devoted their lives to the pursuit of “money, power, and happiness in a setting not made in the image of nature, but by the goals of the city itself” (Warner 1962, 12). Certainly, this setting was not conducive to good behavior. Josiah Strong, a Congregationalist minister, linked every danger threatening American democracy – poverty, crime, socialism, corruption, immigration, and “Romanism” – to the city (Gelfand 1975; Hays 1957). Foreign observers such as Alexis de Toqueville were as concerned about the moral and psychological threat of urbanization as were United States citizens. After a visit to the United States in 1831-32, de Toqueville wrote “I look upon the size of certain American cities, and especially on the nature of their population, as a real danger” (quoted in Boyer 1978, 3).

Furthermore, the “nature” of urban populations was changing. Beginning in the 1840s, massive waves of immigrants arrived in American cities – first the Irish and the Germans, then
the Polish, the Russians, the Hungarians, the Italians, the Armenians, and others. These groups tended to settle near the sources of unskilled employment – on the margins of the emerging central business districts, in residential areas that had been abandoned by their original tenants because of the encroachment of warehouse and commercial activity. These districts, often the most congested, least economically stable in the city, were increasingly associated with immigrants, who were blamed for importing the social problems of the Old World to the new. Charles Loring Brace, the founder of the Children’s Aid Society of New York, described immigrants as “the refuse of Europe [who] congregate in our great cities and send forth … wretched progeny, degraded in the deep degradation of their parents … to be scavengers, physical and moral of our streets” (quoted in Ward 1989, 16). In 1849, the Boston Committee of Internal Health described the Irish tenement district in the North End as a

Perfect hive of human beings, without comforts and mostly without common necessities; in many cases huddled together like brutes, without regard to sex or age, or sense of decency; grown men and women sleeping together in the same apartment, and sometimes husband and wife, brothers and sisters in the same bed. Under such circumstances, self-respect, forethought, all high and noble virtues die out, and sullen indifference and despair or disorder, intemperance and utter degradation reign supreme. (in Howard 1976, 66)

Thus, the immigrant poor, like the native-born urban poor, represented deviancy and a contagious moral threat to the rest of American society. Yet there was some ambiguity over whether the state should assume responsibility for protecting public morality. Since private philanthropic groups (many of which were evangelical) had previously taken responsibility for distributing charity and other public assistance, these same groups took on the moral recovery of the slum.
Reforming the Poor

Mid-nineteenth century reformers focused on combating urban poverty and pauperism – and at weeding out the undeserving, “unworthy” beggars (those who chose not to work) from the deserving poor (those who for one reason or another, were unable to work). At this time, it was assumed that the unworthy poor only had themselves to blame for their poverty – that they were lazy, drank to excess, and lacked self-discipline. The leaders of both the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor in New York and the Children’s Aid Society, philanthropic organizations founded prior to the Civil War, considered the main cause of poverty to be the moral deficiencies of slum residents. Further, both men firmly believed that the best solution to the social and economic problems of the city lay in shipping the poor off to the countryside, where they could enjoy clean living and steady employment without the temptations of the city (Davis 1967; Ward 1989).

The Charity Organization Society (COS) movement, which began in England in 1869 and was soon after introduced to America, brought efficiency to the distribution of charity and eliminated some of the duplications of assistance caused by an increase in philanthropic groups established to help the poor. Yet the charity organization societies, like their precursors, small religious organizations, were convinced that the cause of the rising poverty in cities lay in the individual failings and character flaws of the poor. Members of these societies set out to correct those flaws with a new brand of philanthropy: “scientific charity.” In cities across the nation, charity societies launched volunteer “friendly visitors” to the homes of the poor to provide badly needed moral and behavioral guidance – while at the same time collecting valuable social data through “scientific” methods (Davis 1967; Boyer 1978).
Charity organization societies limited their philanthropic efforts to home visits – no economic assistance was given, nor were any other services such as health care or job training deemed necessary. Instead, visitors reported back to the local COS headquarters on the family circumstances so that those responsible for dispensing financial assistance could decide who were the worthy recipients, and who were not. Jane Addams, arguably the American settlement house movement’s most prominent advocate, wrote a scathing review of the charity organization movement in her 1902 book *Democracy and Social Ethics*, where she noted that the visitor's dual responsibility of providing friendship and obtaining information for off-site relief decisions compromised the poor because they had to appear to welcome the visitor and comply with her suggestions to get other aid. Addams also questioned whether it was possible to provide meaningful friendship and interpersonal support from such an explicit posture of superiority on the visitor's part.

By the 1890s, certainly, it was clear that friendly visiting was an inadequate response to extreme urban poverty, especially that of immigrant families who could not speak English. The depression of 1893 had overwhelmed the resources of private charities and underscored the need for public relief. Moreover, private charity givers were both socially and geographically isolated from charity recipients, which made it impossible for them to accurately gauge levels of need. Another answer was needed to confront the fragmenting effects of the new modern social order. The solution, for some, seemed to be the settlement house movement.

**Settlements: English Beginnings**

The settlement movement in England was largely a reaction to the perceived failures of organized charity work. This new approach was a creative response to the fact that existing Victorian social structures were ill-equipped to address harsh urban conditions facing both
newly-arrived immigrants and residents living in neighborhoods impacted by poverty. Indeed, Victorian social reform was largely a backlash against the materialism of modern industrial society in Britain – and the fact that the state took little responsibility for public welfare. Nothing represented Victorian social and moral values as did Toynbee Hall, the world’s first settlement house. Established in 1884, the idea developed out of early social work experiments and was closely tied to Oxford University. In 1867, a young Oxford graduate, Edward Denison, moved into a London slum and for two years lobbied on behalf of the neighborhood for housing and sanitation reform. Denison, influenced by the writings of Thomas Carlyle, insisted that it was his responsibility – and the responsibility of other socially conscientious college graduates – to live and work amongst the poor. Denison claimed “I should be a thief and a murderer if I withheld what I so evidently owe” (Carson 1990, 6). He also argued that distributing food, clothing, and temporary shelter to the poor actually did them a disservice, for it transformed them into “irresponsible beggars.” Such negligent, insincere charity efforts could hardly benefit either the giver or receiver, for no personal relationship was established. Denison instead stressed the value of creating community amidst the slums of East London (although he viewed his role in neighborhood renovation to be that of a “disinterested authority” who served as moral role model to his neighbors) (Carson 1990).

Though Denison died in 1870, Arnold Toynbee, another Oxford graduate, subsequently moved to London’s notoriously impoverished, deteriorating, and crime-ridden East End (an environment of “bad whisky, bad tobacco, and bad drainage”) and began a series of lectures for local residents (Davis 1967, 6). Like Denison, Toynbee died young (at age 31). The year after his death, in 1884, the neighborhood vicar, Canon Samuel Barnett, proposed the establishment of a University Settlement (later called Toynbee Hall) in his parish so that privileged college
students and disadvantaged local residents could live together as neighbors and improve local conditions. He described the settlement as a sort of club house based in an industrial district, where the “condition of membership is the performance of a citizen’s duty; a house among the poor, where residents may make friends with the poor” (Barnett 1898, 26). Canon Barnett’s aim was to attack the root causes of poverty, which he saw as based in the division of society into classes (Briggs and Macartney 1984).

The concept of personal service to the poor intrigued Oxford students, who were disillusioned by the efforts of the Charity Organization Society and believed more direct assistance was needed. Thus far, attempts by the COS and the clergy to destigmatize the slum and encourage social interaction between the classes had failed. Toynbee Hall workers brought art, music, literature, and moral idealism to the East End, the same district where Jack the Ripper murdered five prostitutes four years later in 1888. Over a third of this population lived below the poverty line (Trolander 1987; Meacham 1987; Davis 1967).

Barnett had lived in this district for eleven years when Toynbee Hall opened, and perceived immense “spiritual and intellectual poverty” amongst the residents. In a lecture delivered at Oxford, Barnett asked the audience to consider the East End:

Who will save East London? asked one of our university visitors of his master. The destruction of West London, was the answer, and, insofar as he meant the abolition of the space which divides rich and poor, the answer was right. Not until the habits of the rich are changed, and they are again content to breathe the same air and walk the same streets as the poor, will East London be saved. (Barnett, quoted in Briggs and Macartney 1987, 6)

Barnett’s ultimate goal was to bring the cultural luxuries of the West End to the Whitechapel neighborhood; therefore, Toynbee Hall held art exhibitions, sponsored public lectures, and offered university extension courses. The refined, urbane atmosphere made Toynbee familiar
and comfortable to college students who came to reside there, including several future American settlement house workers (Davis 1967).

**American Settlements**

The earliest American settlement founders were steeped in the language and literature of Victorian England. Like Barnett’s Oxford recruits, they, too read Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Charles Dickens, and absorbed ideas of “social organicism” and community. They, too formulated liberal theories regarding the impersonal cruelties caused to the poor by laissez-faire industrialization. They saw the spiritual and social grimness of life in the industrial slums. Traveling through England in the late 1880s (most on post-college graduation tours), these young, middle-to-upper-middle class idealistic American students heard Barnett’s call to social service. One visit to Toynbee Hall convinced them that here was a chance “to be and to do,” to enrich their lives and those of their community (Carson 1990, 10). Jane Addams credited the future design for Hull House in Chicago to her first visit to Toynbee Hall:

> The first days there laid the simple foundations which are certainly essential for continuous living among the poor – first, genuine preference for residence in an industrial quarter to any other part of the city because it is interesting and makes the human appeal; second, the conviction – in the words of Canon Barnett – that the things which make men alike are finer and better than the things which keep them apart and that these basic likenesses, if they are properly accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed, and tradition. (Addams 1910, 5)

American students adapted the English settlement model to their perception of the social needs of poor and immigrant residents of American cities, and settlements “appeared almost simultaneously in several cities,” often with only hearsay knowledge of each other (Davis 1967, 10; Carson 2002).

The first American settlement houses were established in the industrial northeast, in cities such as New York (Neighborhood Guild, 1886; College Settlement, 1889; Greenwich House,
1893), Chicago (Hull House, 1889; Chicago Commons, 1894), Philadelphia (College Settlement, 1892), and Boston (South End House, 1891; Denison House, 1892). Most of these cities had similar social and economic problems: old urban centers had been transformed into busy retail and residential spaces, places where people were divided by language, religion, and culture, but “united in poverty and a pitiful lack of preparation for urban existence” (Boyer 1978, 24). While a large proportion of the growing urban population migrated from American farms, the majority migrated from Europe. By the 1880s, American cities had grown into bewildering conglomerations of people, mainly immigrants, who lived crowded together in wretched tenements, often five or six to one room. Life in these dark, damp, poorly ventilated structures was miserable. Several families shared a common sink and a common toilet, but no one had a bathtub. Potable drinking water was unavailable in the tenements, since the pressure was too low to lift the water above the first floor (Ward 1989). Thus, while most immigrants found life in the New World an improvement over life in the Old, many realized that the renowned American dream – the theory that with hard work, honesty, and a bit of luck, anyone could succeed – was rather a distant fantasy. One Romanian immigrant concluded, “This was the boasted American freedom and opportunity – the freedom for respectable citizens to sell cabbages from hideous carts, the opportunity to live in those monstrous dirty caves [tenements] that shut out the sunshine” (quoted in Trattner 1999, 166).

The American settlement movement began in part to deal with the multitude of adjustment problems recent immigrants faced upon arrival. English settlement workers did not consider ethnic differences so much as class differences – Barnett’s main objective was simply to restore communication among the diverse and isolated groups in English society. American settlement workers had to contend with a multitude of social issues specific to multiethnic
immigration. This factor, more than anything else, caused the American settlement workers to modify the English model. Of course, there were similarities: as in Britain, American settlement houses were established in part to challenge the methods and philosophy of organized charity. And as in Britain, settlement workers perceived industrialism, and the disorder, indigence, intemperance and vice that accompanied it, as symptoms of a deeper social malaise.

American settlements served not one, but two populations: the urban poor and a particular group of middle-class college graduates. This latter group consisted of socially motivated but somewhat bored and restless women and men, who were alarmed by the growing gap between the wealthy and poor and how such distance was manifesting itself in worsening social conditions and relationships. This privileged class of volunteers took residence, or “settled” in extremely poor neighborhoods in hopes of assisting the community and binding the social classes in a common cause. While all settlement workers ostensibly worked for social reform, their agendas differed. Some were municipal reformers who lobbied for sanitary codes and minimum wage legislation; some (using organic metaphors) spoke of the regeneration of neighborhoods; others concentrated on helping immigrants transcend their ethnic traditions (Crocker 1992; Lissak 1989).

American settlement workers by and large embraced environmental determinism – they viewed the social environment as the primary source of problems in a poor community, rather than the individuals themselves. Settlement workers were among the first urban reformers to look at the city as an organic body made up of neighborhoods of various groups and classes – classes that should be assembled together. Jane Addams argued that the first objective of settlements was to make the “entire social organism democratic” (quoted in Daniels 1920, 158).
Addams and other American settlement workers believed that industrialization fostered social (and racial, or national) segregation, which was at odds with the democratic ideals of the country (Lubove 1965). Settlement workers rejected the prevailing idea that all of society would benefit if individual men and women pursued their own self-interests. Instead, they stressed the interdependence of social groups – and the state – in an organically structured society. This progressive view of society led to their conviction that should the different classes live in physical and intellectual isolation from each other, the whole of society would suffer. As historian Paul Boyer (1978) asserts, American settlement workers – especially Jane Addams – inverted a classic charity organization formulation: the moral defects of the poor were not the cause of their poverty, but a consequence of their struggle for existence. This inversion shifted the next century’s discussion of the causes of poverty from an exclusive focus on the individual to environmental defects.

Revisionist interpretations (Crocker 1992; Lissak 1989; Katz 1989) suggest that both charity workers and settlement workers had one common goal: regulating the poor. While charity workers utilized the “moral uplift” approach and settlement house workers relied on scientific methods and social reform, both represented conservative responses to the social fragmentation brought on by urbanization and immigration. And both movements exposed the fear with which American natives perceived a changing, pluralizing society. However, the settlement approach was far more inclusive, more democratic, and represented one of the first attempts to create community within the modern city.

The American Revolution had ushered in a new concept of community, based on a desire to define national identity and to improve the new republic. This sense of group identity changed dramatically with the onset of urbanization. The transition from a rural society, wherein
a sense of community is built around family, an attachment to place, and cooperative action (what the German historian Ferdinand Tönnies called “gemeinschaft”), to an urban, industrialized society, wherein there is less sense of community, little attachment to place, and relationships tend to be impersonal, based on exchange of goods (“gesellschaft”) caused extreme distress to nineteenth-century Bostonians. The earliest settlement workers in Boston – at South End House (established 1891) and Denison House (established 1892) – recognized the need for a new sense of community in a city that was otherwise socially and spatially fragmented. Robert A. Woods, head resident and founder of South End House, had idealistic notions of the restorative potential of the settlement to industrial neighborhoods:

University settlements are capable of bringing to the depressed sections of society its healing and saving influences, for the lack of which those sections are to so large extent as good as dead. The settlements are able to take neighborhoods … and by patience bring back to them much of the healthy village life, so that the people shall again know and care for one another. (Woods 1892, 91)

Woods firmly believed that settlement workers could recreate the “moralized community action” common to late-eighteenth century New England villages through the nineteenth century “town-meeting hall,” the settlement. Nowhere was “moralized community action” needed more than the city of Boston, where the combined forces of industrialization and immigration had created some of the worst slums in the country in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

**Boston: Port City to Industrial Region**

Prior to the industrialization of the region, Boston functioned primarily as a port city. While the earliest settlers arriving in Boston from Europe in the 1600s had intended to become farmers, they quickly discovered that the region’s soil was not conducive to growing crops. Because Boston (unlike New York or Philadelphia) lacked a hinterland that could provide food surpluses for export, its chief function was to buy and sell other people’s goods. Conveniently,
the city was the ideal location for establishing a shipping industry because of its geographic location; a young writer described the harbor in 1633 as perfect for commercial trading:

This Bay is both safe, spacious and deep, free from such cockling seas as run upon the coast of Ireland and in the channels of and in the channels of England. There be no stiff running currents, or rocks, shelves, bars, quicksands... the surrounding shore being high, and showing many white cliffs, in a most pleasant prospect, with divers places of low land, out of which diverse rivers vent themselves into the ocean... It is safe and pleasant harbour within, having but one common and safe entrance, and that not very broad, there scarce being room for three ships to come in, board and board at a time; but being once within, there is room for the anchorage of five hundred ships. (Humphries 1633, 18)

Boston quickly emerged as the preeminent port in New England, and thereafter was known as a trader’s town (Conzen and Lewis 1976).

Until 1763, the city served as a part of the British imperial commercial system, primarily as a purveyor of rum to Africa and slaves to the West Indies (the great “triangular trade”). Much of the city’s commerce was concentrated in this industry, either in converting the West Indian sugar into rum or in ship production (Hakim 2003). After the Revolutionary War, direct trade between England and North America ended, and Boston’s trading business plummeted. However, by 1792 a new triangular trade was established: every fall, ships loaded with copper, iron, cloth, and clothing departed Boston for the coast of Oregon. Six months later, the crew arrived at the Columbia River, and spent the next eighteen to twenty months bargaining their merchandise for furs. The furs were then transported to Canton, China where the crew obtained Chinese teas, textiles, and porcelain (Handlin 1959).

In the 1820s, Chinese exports shifted almost entirely to tea. Since New York was a better market for tea than Boston, the city’s commerce with China slowed considerably. The declining

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1 Ships in the Triangle Trade carried goods and people between Europe, Africa, and the Americas – though not necessarily in that order. The Triangle Trade was highly successful – and profitable – because each region produced goods that were not produced elsewhere. Americans shipped cotton, sugar, tobacco, molasses, and rum to England, the English shipped manufactured goods (clothing, guns, and alcohol) to Africa, and African kings sent slaves to the West Indies and the American colonies (Bailyn 1977; Handlin 1959).
fur supply in the Pacific Northwest during the 1830s damaged the trade relationship further. Boston’s economic future looked grim; to stabilize, the city needed either a stable product for export, or a wider market within New England. Yet, as Handlin (1959) points out, Boston’s failure to develop ties to its western hinterlands undermined any chance of doing either. While other eastern port cities (such as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore) facilitated trade relations with the west through canals or railroads, Boston remained isolated, and refused to construct direct lines to the Great Lakes until after the Civil War. By that time, other ports had already established permanent contact with the west, and had preempted any trade that Boston might have enjoyed (Handlin 1959; Conzen and Lewis 1976).

Yet the capital amassed during the prosperous trading years had an important effect on Boston’s economic future: it made Boston a powerful financial center. In 1790, the city had but one bank. By 1800, there were three; by 1820 there were nine; by 1825 there were eighteen; by 1836, there were sixty banks in Boston. Prior to the panic of 1837, then, Boston’s financial strength and resources rivaled New York’s. These resources permitted vast industrial development in Boston’s hinterlands in the early nineteenth century (Handlin 1959).

Indeed, while the city itself had little industry to speak of in the 1830s and 1840s, the textile towns and mill towns outside Boston were experiencing tremendous industrial expansion. Following the War of 1812, shoes and textiles flowed out of Lowell, Lawrence, Lynn, and Fall River, produced with cotton from the south. Boston’s capitalists took advantage of the burgeoning industry and invested heavily in the new factory towns surrounding the city. Thus, by 1845, when the Irish arrived, Boston remained “a town of small traders, of petty artisans and handicraftsmen, and of great merchant princes who … used the city as a base for their far-flung activities” (Handlin 1959, 11-12).
Although Boston began producing ready-made clothes in the 1830s, the garment industry was strongest in New York, where the labor was cheapest. The situation changed, however, with the influx of the Irish after 1845. The Irish, more than any other immigrant class, lacked marketable skills. In Boston, initially, most Irish men worked day labor – as dockworkers, horse caretakers, and waiters – “employments involving an element of personal service and therefore repugnant and degrading to Americans” (Handlin 1959, 62). Young Irish women and girls were frequently forced to work as domestic servants to help support their families. Long-term employment opportunities, especially for men, were rare. As a result, there was a massive labor surplus in Boston’s Irish communities in the 1840s and 1850s (Warner 1962; Handlin 1959).

Manufacturers quickly learned that thousands of Irish men were willing to work at any wage. Within ten years, Boston clothing production surpassed that of New York’s, and the average product value was higher, while wages were lower. In addition, Irish men supplanted the “independent, militant, and impertinent” New England farm girls in the mills in Lawrence and Lowell and the shoe factories in Quincy and Lynn (Handlin 1959, 73).2 The Irish labor surplus in Boston combined with the mechanization of the local economy stimulated the industrialization process throughout New England: between 1845 and 1855, the total number of industrial employees in Boston doubled. The ready availability of cheap labor caused it to double again between 1855 and 1865. Within two decades Boston had become the nation’s fourth largest manufacturing city (Warner 1962; Handlin 1959).

The shift from commerce to manufacturing drastically altered the shape of Boston in the nineteenth century. Textile industries in the outlying regions required new storage facilities and

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2 Interestingly, the textile capitalists who developed Lowell, Massachusetts, required these girls to live in supervised boarding houses with a housekeeper to manage their non-working hours. Corporate supervision was rigid – disobedience of rules was punished by immediate dismissal. When the Irish men moved in, the paternalistic moral standards loosened (Crawford 1995).
wharves in Boston. At the same time, the geographical boundaries of the city were being expanded through the infilling of the Mill Pond, the Back Bay, and the South End (see Figure 1.1). Meanwhile, the annexation of the neighboring towns of Roxbury, Dorchester, Charlestown, and Brighton extended the city boundaries further. This southward expansion facilitated the exodus of the middle and upper middle classes out of the industrial district and helped to create Boston’s future social geography (Kennedy 1992; Whitehill and Kennedy 2000; Spirn 1984). By the 1850s, “the walls of residential segregation by occupation, income, and class” had begun to rise (Schultz, in Kennedy 1992, 57). In the next section, I review the changing morphology of the city of Boston in greater detail, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

**Boston’s Settlement Patterns and Changing Urban Form**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Boston could be characterized as a small city – a closely-knit, ethnically homogenous, insular community (see Table 1.1 – according to Handlin (1959), there are no records for the percentage of Boston’s foreign-born population before 1830, because it was so small and seemingly insignificant). Boston merchants lived close to their places of business, and there was little class (and virtually no ethnic/national) segregation. By the late 1700s, the town almost seemed stuck in time: “Tailors and cobbblers, butchers and grocers, went about the business of feeding and clothing the Bostonians much as they had a hundred years earlier” (Handlin 1959, 9). Industry was small in scale and local in character, even as late as 1845, when just 6 percent of the city’s population was engaged in industrial work. Moreover, industries that relied upon water power were simply not profitable in Boston – the waters of the Charles River could not provide as much power as the Merrimac.

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3 For a more detailed history of the infill process in Boston, see Whitehill and Kennedy 2000; Seasholes 2003; and Spirn 1984.
Figure 1.1. Shoreline of Boston in 1776, with Modern Shoreline Superimposed (Source of original map: The David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Cartography Associates).
Table 1.1: Population of Boston, 1790 – 1910 (from Handlin 1959, 239; Thernstrom 1973, 11, 113; Ward 1968)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boston’s Total Population</th>
<th>% foreign-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>18,038</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>24,937</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>33,787</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>43,298</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>61,392</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>93,383</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>136,881</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>177,820</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>250,526</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>362,839</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>448,477</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>560,892</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>670,585</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

River and the upper Charles. Finally, the mill and textile towns possessed far greater numbers of workers, many of whom were young farm girls, teenagers, who would gladly accept low wages and long hours to escape life on the farm (Handlin 1959).

Certainly, there was little to attract new residents to the city in the mid-nineteenth century: industry was non-existent, the culturally homogenous community was inhospitable to strangers, and space was extremely limited. The three main groups of immigrants arriving in Boston before the 1840s came from the British Isles, Germany, and the Maritime Provinces of
Canada (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island).\textsuperscript{4} These groups had similar backgrounds, habits, and religion as the resident population of the city, and acculturation was swift. Moreover, their cumulative numbers were small – before 1840, the annual number of immigrants landing in Boston only exceeded 4,000 once, in 1837 (Warner 1962). Between 1820 and 1840, barely 30,000 immigrants landed in Boston (Ward 1968).

Everything changed in the fall of 1845, when the potato blight struck Ireland – and lasted for five years. Subsistence-level Irish farmers could not pay their rent to their British landlords, and hundreds of thousands of peasants were evicted, many of whom boarded “coffin ships” bound for the United States. Irish immigrants migrating to Boston in the 1840s were joined by immigrants from Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Scotland – yet the Irish comprised the largest group, proportionally. Ward (1968) reports that while the number of foreign immigrants arriving in Boston in the late 1840s was much smaller than that of New York (but about the same as that of Philadelphia or Baltimore), the proportion of Irish immigrants was significantly higher: whereas the Irish accounted for 50 to 60 percent of the foreign populations of New York and Philadelphia (and approximately 30 percent of Baltimore), Irish immigrants comprised 83 percent of Boston’s foreign-born population in 1850 (Ward 1968; Handlin 1959).

When the Irish first arrived in Boston, the city hardly exceeded a two-mile radius from City Hall, and people navigated the streets on foot or by omnibus (an urban version of the stage coach, established in 1826). The steam railroad, in operation as of 1835, was expensive, the lines were limited, and the stops infrequent. Yet, despite transportation limitations, the city was already undergoing a spatial reordering according to class by the 1850s. As the town grew in population and transportation improved, the outlying districts became more accessible. By the

\textsuperscript{4} In fact, these same source areas provided New England with most of its immigrants from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s (Warner 1962).
mid-nineteenth century, the emerging middle class had moved to the developing suburbs, first the South End (where they forced out a small, poorer population), then South Boston, and finally Roxbury and Dorchester. Boston’s wealthiest stayed in Beacon Hill or moved to the rural suburbs, Roxbury or Dorchester (Warner 1962; Ward 1968; Handlin 1959).

In 1852, Boston’s first street railway began service between Harvard Square in Cambridge and Union Square in Somerville, an outlying suburb. Its success prompted real estate investors to build another line from downtown Boston to Roxbury in 1856. Between 1852 and 1873, the city’s areal extent expanded by 50 percent, from 12 square miles to 19, largely due to the horsecar. Despite the new developments in the outlying suburbs, however, the city’s poorest remained concentrated in the slums of the North and West Ends – “the wrong ends of the city” – where rents were cheapest (Antin 1912, 183; Wright 1981). These quarters also housed Boston’s immigrants, who were almost exclusively Irish in the 1850s (Ward 1968).

After 1860, with the further encroachment of the warehouse quarter, Irish immigrants moved further south, to the South Cove, and particularly, to South Boston, where new factories and terminal facilities provided growing employment opportunities. Thus, although the North End continued to house one of the largest immigrant populations in the city, the Irish population in that district declined from 93 percent in 1850 to 65 percent in 1875 to less than 10 percent in 1905 (Ward 1968). New immigrant groups, most notably Italians, filled in the North End where the Irish left. Smaller groups of new immigrants from Poland, Russia, Greece, Syria, and Portugal, like the Irish before them, settled near the industrial district in the tenements of the South Cove. The South Cove housed an extremely poor population between 1840 and 1920; this area was largely composed of filled land and was considered unhealthy and therefore undesirable to anyone other than the most desperate (Ward 1968).
The South End was developed in the 1850s and 1860s in part to serve the residential needs of the middle class population who had been displaced from the North End by the Irish immigrants. The South End development plan was a deliberate strategy by the municipal government to retain wealthy residents within city boundaries. Yet, Ward (1968) argues that the plan backfired for two reasons: first, improvements in local transportation opened up more distant areas for suburban developments, and second, the residential tastes of the middle class changed from terraces to single-family dwellings, set on their own lots. Further, Kennedy (1992) notes that in 1866, the city began clearing an adjacent slum neighborhood, Fort Hill, and those displaced moved to the South End, contributing to its decline into a transient neighborhood of lodging houses. As a result, the neighborhood, which “had never had a very marked character … soon lapsed into a slum region of tenements and lodging houses” (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000, 139).

These last two districts, the South Cove and the South End, are the districts within which the two case study settlements are located. This, then, was the scene when the first settlement workers at South End House and at Denison House arrived to set up shop. These districts had certainly undergone major economic change and urban restructuring before the settlers arrived, and would continue to do so. Moreover, clear patterns of spatial segregation were evident in Boston by the late nineteenth century, which resulted in certain neighborhoods having better access to public services and amenities than others. The settlement houses were established primarily to alleviate such social inequities.

**Research Objectives and Justification of Project**

Boston provides an ideal site for exploring the challenges of urban growth during periods of rapid industrialization and immigration. As both a primary receiving station of foreign
immigrants and one of the earliest beneficiaries of American industrial and commercial growth, Boston clearly exhibited the effects of sustained immigration and the expansion of the industrial district upon inner city residential districts. Indeed, Boston typifies nineteenth century American cities, with its expanding population, expanding boundaries, and increasing ethnic diversity. The city’s spatial divisions – its working class and elite neighborhoods – were clearly marked on the landscape by the mid-nineteenth century, and those divisions only became more distinct with time. Vestiges of the residential patterns that developed on the edge of the industrial district in the 1840s remain to this day.

Urban social geographers have studied such macro-scale topics as the socio-spatial structure of cities (Brunn and Wheeler 1971; Peet 1970; Jakle and Wilson 1992; Pacione 1997), the social meaning of the urban built environment (Zukin 1991; Sorkin 1992), urban livability (Walmsley 1988), and the politics of gentrification (Smith 1987; Ley 1994; Mills 1994). Other urban geographers have analyzed neighborhood change at the local scale (Ley 1973; Cybriwsky 1978; Aitken 1990). Several urban geographers have studied the spatial divisions of class and ethnicity in late-nineteenth century Boston and New York City (Conzen 1977; Lloyd 1981; Domosh 1996, 1998). Economic and political geographers have studied the changing distribution of poverty in the United States, focusing on the impact of economic restructuring on the inner city (Kodras 1997; Greene 1991).

David Ward (1968, 1971, 1989) has examined the emergence of immigrant ghettos – specific ethnic enclaves – at the edge of the central business district in nineteenth century Boston, and the changing conceptions of the slum in American society. Yet few geographers other than Ward and Paccione (1989) have looked at the problems of urban poverty and evaluated how specific social reform efforts have affected these problems at the local scale.
Likewise, few geographers (other than Ward, or Muller and Groves 1979) have studied newly industrializing cities and the social problems that immigrants have incurred upon arrival in these cities. This type of analysis, especially at the neighborhood level, lends itself to a geographical perspective. Moreover, it might in fact be relevant for immigrants arriving in post-industrial cities today – immigrants facing the same sort of social problems that immigrants faced a century ago. This research attempts to broaden the scope of urban social geography by looking at the social problems of urban poverty (caused by industrialization and immigration) and how two settlement houses approached those problems at the neighborhood level.

In essence, this project will look at how two groups – settlers at South End House and Denison House – appropriated certain Victorian social reform theories and ideas of civic responsibility and rearranged them to design two unique responses to the social welfare needs of two grimly poor, primarily immigrant industrial slums in late nineteenth century Boston: the South End and the South Cove. My reasons for considering these two sites are thus: first, the two settlement houses are within a mile of each other, and thus the neighborhood demographics are similar. Second, settlement workers established these two houses in Boston relatively early in the settlement movement (South End House was the sixth house in the country; Denison House was the eighth) and within a year of each other (South End House in December 1891; Denison House in December 1892). Third, the earliest settlement workers at South End House were all men, while the earliest settlement workers at Denison House were all women. These factors make for an interesting social and geographical comparison.

This dissertation will analyze how the settlement residents approached social reform in neighborhoods with very diverse populations. Further, it will explore the ways in which both institutions developed ideas of community and neighborhood development – concepts that were
unexplored at that time – during a period of unparalleled urban growth. To do so, a number of research questions are posed. First, what were the socio-economic conditions within nineteenth century Boston that prompted such a social reform response? What were the motivations of the founders of the settlement houses in deciding to live in the slum – an original approach, to say the least, to solving the social problems of the poor. Did the goals of the settlement workers change over time? How did the settlers determine the geographical boundaries of their communities – or did they? How did the settlement workers decide who to help? Were there any groups purposely excluded? What about Boyer’s (1978) and Lissak’s (1989) assertions that settlement workers engaged in “social control” – did these two groups of settlers try to “control” certain populations in the slum? How did the residents perceive their role in the creation of community? Did this role change over time? How did South End House and Denison House differ from each other, in terms of house goals, methods, and workers? Finally, how did these two settlements differ from the prototypical American settlement house, Hull House?

Methods

To answer my research questions, I first made a thorough review of the archives of both South End House and Denison House from their inception to the 1920s, the period which most social welfare historians (Chambers 1963; Trolander 1987; Katz 1989; Boyer 1978) agree was when settlements were in their prime. Luckily, both archives are largely intact – the South End House materials are stored at the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History Archives, and the Denison House materials are stored at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe Institute (Harvard University). The South End House archives include administrative records (annual reports, tabulated statistics on targeted populations, financial reports, bulletins), program files (daily activity reports, summer camps), scrapbooks, and articles written by or about Robert A.
Woods. The Denison House archives include similar collections of administrative records (minutes from meetings of Board of Directors, College Settlements Association and house staff, annual reports, financial reports), correspondence (to and from house residents), program files (daily activity reports), and scrapbooks. These house records and annual reports are invaluable sources as they contain some of the only existing information on daily life in these two late-nineteenth century slums as viewed from the local level, those who lived it (albeit from the headworker’s perspective, mostly). Of the archival materials, I relied primarily on the annual reports, since they provided the most detailed information on the settlements as well as the neighborhoods.

I then looked at social histories of Boston in the nineteenth century, to get some idea of what was happening in the city at the time, so that I could situate the houses within the right context. I examined nineteenth century concepts of social reform to better understand how the settlements differed from traditional approaches to the problems of poverty, social fragmentation, and immigration. I studied the literature on settlement houses to see if I could find any other interpretations of the two houses. Anything that referenced nineteenth century Boston was fair game – and several dusty political science textbooks on my shelf revealed additional information on one or the other house. I also briefly reviewed the histories and programs of other American settlement houses, for some basis of comparison outside of Boston.

Finally, I was fortunate enough to meet two former South End House workers – one woman who worked there in the 1940s, and another woman who was one of the managers of the settlement in the 1990s (now a neighborhood center called the United South End Settlements\(^5\)). I

\(^5\) Today, the United South End Settlements (USES) offers after-school programs, preschool, children’s art classes, a children’s summer camp, GED classes, and senior services (free hot lunch, arts and crafts classes, social hours, a walking club, computer classes, exercise classes, and emergency assistance).
interviewed both women as to their impressions of the settlement’s effect on the South End community, both past and present.

What makes this project especially valuable to the field of geography is that it is a study of urban processes (industrialization and immigration) and the continuities and differences in the forms of social assistance that were created specifically by Bostonians for Bostonians to cope with the rapid social and economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We can look to South End House and Denison House to better understand how American urban residents struggled to make the transition from a moral to a market economy, from a communal to an individualistic society.

The form of this dissertation will follow along rather conventional lines. In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review of the various nineteenth century humanitarian efforts that were designed to deal with the social problems caused by urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. I consider the changing definitions of poverty and pauperism, and how public and private agencies determined who was worthy of assistance, and who was not. In Chapter 3, I give a detailed history of the American settlement movement and discuss how the movement’s earliest leaders were influenced by the first English settlement house, Toynbee Hall. In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine the goals and motivations of the founders of my two case study settlement houses, South End House and Denison House, and review the various methods each facility developed to help their community. Finally, in Chapter 6, I offer some conclusions as to how and why the two settlement houses, established less than a mile apart, developed completely different programs geared toward neighborhood reform in late nineteenth century Boston.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although its influence cannot be measured, the guess may be hazarded that no other single institution did as much to counteract the dogma of individualism and restore the social principle to thought about civilization. (historian Charles Beard, writing about Hull House, quoted in Davis and McCree, 1969, 5)

In order to place the settlement house movement in the proper context within American social history, we need to examine what else was occurring in American society at the time, especially in the industrializing northeastern cities, where the settlement idea was initially put into action.

In this chapter, I first review other nineteenth-century humanitarian efforts: religious benevolence societies, moral reformation agencies, scientific philanthropy, environmental reform, and the social gospel movement, and consider how these efforts affected poverty in the city. I then analyze the changing attitudes toward poverty and pauperism, and the various public and private responses to each. Finally, I review the literature on settlement housing, beginning in the Progressive Era and continuing to the present.

Nineteenth Century Humanitarianism and Social Reform

Raymond Mohl (1970, 576) argues that the course of American humanitarianism in the early nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the “disturbing and unwholesome results” of urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth. These social forces brought disorder and overwhelming problems of destitution, problems the post-colonial society was unprepared to resolve. Concern about the spread of poverty centered on the fear of a breakdown in social control and a loss of social cohesion. In response, municipal governments and private philanthropists sought methods to restore the stable, orderly, and structured society of the eighteenth century. James Leiby (1978) and Paul Boyer (1978) contend that Christian ideas of
charity shaped the earliest methods of social control. During the Jacksonian era, social reform was led by evangelical leaders and backed by businessmen who tried to recreate rural ideals and close-knit communities as a way of dealing with the new urban form. Bible societies, tract societies, and Sunday schools were attempts to deal with public immorality – prostitution, drunkenness, and disorderly behavior. These efforts were reinforced by the revivalistic religious spirit of the early nineteenth century, which encouraged Americans to focus on personal salvation. Evangelicals like Lyman Beecher (Boston) lectured on the virtues of diligence, sobriety, and thrift until the economic depression of 1837, when declining funds and rising need overwhelmed most charities (Leiby 1978; Winston 1999). The depression lasted six years, and exposed the degree to which poverty was linked to the national and international economy. Yet the subsequent economic recovery did little to improve social tensions or distress, and slum conditions continued to worsen. As a result, new social reform agencies were established outside of the evangelical community – to focus on the “contrast between an idealized bourgeois domesticity and the immorality of the slum.” These new agencies reflected a more professional style of relief that would ensure strict standards of eligibility while more effectively confronting poverty and immigrants (Ward 1989, 24).

The New York Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor (NYAICP), founded in 1842, epitomized this new brand of philanthropic organization. The NYAICP considered monetary relief a last resort; instead, the agency sent trained visitors to poor districts to dispense advice on domestic issues and moral questions. By the 1850s, however, humanitarian efforts were complicated by the arrival of thousands of immigrants, who were increasingly thought to be a cause of the degenerating condition of the poor in general. In 1851, the NYAICP issued a complaint that the moral character of the poor had:
deteriorated of late years in this city from the immense influx of foreigners, many of them being of the most thriftless, degraded class, with whom begging is a trade[;] … only the counteracting influence of such an Association as this could check the growth of pauperism, or prevent the community from being overrun by swarms of the idle and dissolute. (Ward 1989, 26)

The burden that poor immigrants placed upon the newly formed and experimental relief agencies aroused serious concern. Irish immigrants, in particular, who fled during the famine emigration of the late 1840s, arrived in the United States penniless and sick and needed immediate charity and medical care.

While some nativist Americans responded to the influx of immigrants with demands of restricted immigration policies, others viewed immigration and the worsening social and environmental problems of the slums as an opportunity for reform. Indeed, by the 1860s, several philanthropic groups in New York City (the NYAICP and the Citizen’s Association, among others) began pressuring municipal officials to enact tenement house reform. For the first time, the urban environment itself – rather than individual moral failure, such as idleness, intemperance, and irreligion – was recognized as partly to blame for the pathology of the slum. By suggesting that the welfare of the tenement residents would improve if the physical characteristics of the housing were kept in repair, housing legislation implied that residents were victims of their environment. This theory contradicted popular opinion, which blamed the poor for their misery:

Myriads of inmates of the squalid, distressing tenement houses, in which morality is as impossible as happiness, would not give them up, despite their horrors, for clean, orderly, wholesome habitations in the suburbs, could they be transplanted there and back free of charge. They are in some unaccountable way terribly in love with their own wretchedness. (Harper’s New Monthly, cited in Jackson 1985, 117)

As Ward (1989) suggests, the new sensitivity to environmental causes of poverty depended upon scientific investigations of the physical processes of contagion. An outbreak of
cholera in 1866 aroused new interest in sanitary reform, and shortly after state boards of health were established in New York, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan (Trattner 1999). Yet environmental interpretations of the social costs of the slum reinforced negative perceptions of the poor, since it was widely assumed that a harsh environment resulted in a depraved, dependent population. Although the medical establishment diagnosed and verified the social costs of inadequate sanitation and overcrowded housing, the underlying moral interpretations of poverty remained (Ward 1989).

By the 1880s, cities had become increasingly socially and economically polarized: the middle classes, still hurting from the depression of the mid-seventies, had moved to new suburban developments while the upper and lower classes remained in the inner city. The wealthy lived in exclusive residential quarters now considered “historic” (and too pricey for the middle classes to afford), and the poor remained in the slum. The social problems that had plagued American cities in the antebellum period had not improved, and due to the rising levels of immigration, some of these problems were attributed to the new foreign arrivals. Moreover, these new immigrants came from different source regions – east Asia and southern and eastern Europe – and were therefore perceived to be a threat to American values and national identity. Some native-born Americans associated deviance, delinquency, and dependence with immigrants and their children. Others, who had experienced prolonged unemployment during the depression of 1873-78, worried that the immigrant community jeopardized the job prospects of the native-born labor force (Ward 1971; 1989).

Politically, this period – nicknamed the “Gilded Age” by Mark Twain – was marked by corruption, scandal, and raids on public treasuries (e.g. Tammany Hall). Trattner (1999) alleges that public relief agencies were no exception to the forces of corruption. At the same time, the
depression had generated such severe social and economic distress that philanthropic organizations, both public and private, proliferated across the nation. Soup kitchens, breadlines, and free lodging houses could be found in most cities. Clothing, coal, and occasionally, cash were distributed to poor families with little investigation of their level of need. Many charity workers viewed the abundance of material relief as potentially harmful; one philanthropist said, “Next to alcohol, and perhaps alongside it, the most pernicious fluid is indiscriminate soup.” (quoted in Trattner 1999, 92) Believing that public relief encouraged indolence, pauperism, and fraud, and that private relief agencies were simply too numerous, these workers argued for “scientific charity.” The application of rational, efficient charity work was overseen by a new agency, the Charity Organization Society (COS), established first in Buffalo in 1877, and within a decade in twenty-five other American cities. The COS (and other similar agencies, like the Detroit Association of Charities) pledged to limit the abuse of charity by using trained visitors to determine the circumstances of poverty and provide practical, positive influences rather than alms. The leading advocate for the COS, Josephine Lowell, defined the aims of the group as a three-pronged approach:

Three things are necessary: (1) Knowledge of facts; (2) adequate relief for the body; and (3) moral oversight for the soul. The COS should supply the knowledge of the facts. All relief giving is such an unnatural way of remedying the evils from which our fellow creatures suffer that, even when it is necessary, as it too often is, it tends to pervert and injure the character of those who receive it. (Ward 1989, 56-57)

Critics of the COS suggested that their image of urban society was not based upon eighteenth century notions of small-town stability but, like the Salvation Army, was instead based upon a militaristic view of poverty and vice as the “enemy,” the poor as the “infantry,” and the charity workers as “generals.” Visitation was intended to bring the rich and poor – the military commanders and the foot soldiers – into friendly contact with each other, which COS leaders
argued would reverse the effects of social polarization (Ward 1989; Trattner 1999; Winston
1999).

Scientific philanthropists were dedicated to collecting statistical information on the social
conditions of the slum and used this data to decide which families would receive assistance.
Visitors diagnosed the causes of destitution and classified them into two categories:
“misconduct” and “misfortune.” Cases of misconduct were generally linked to excessive alcohol
intake and were judged in need of visitation or discipline; cases of misfortune were more
complicated and were usually connected to unemployment, sickness, and old age. Ward (1989,
1990) suggests that the new statistical investigations of social conditions increasingly influenced
charity workers’ perceptions and understandings of urban poverty. Elaborate, detailed
tabulations of over twenty behavioral and environmental factors assumed to be the primary
causes of poverty became the accepted basis by which philanthropists judged eligibility for
relief. No generalizations were derived from these data on the scale and extent of slum poverty,
nor possible solutions (Katz 1989, 1995; Ward 1989). Yet scientific philanthropists promoted
social investigation as the foundation for rational public policy, an idea that was new in the
1880s. One large-scale scientific social survey, Charles Booth’s Life and Labour of the People
of London (1889-1903 – a 13-volume study) provided much more than categories of data,
however; instead, it offered detailed descriptions of the living conditions of the poor in a way
similar to Friedrich Engels’s The Conditions of the Working Class in England (1844). Life and
Labour included discussions of the social disorders and physical maladies of slum residents and
their wretched dwellings and filthy streets (Davis 1967). The first volume of Life and Labour
created a sensation in both England and the United States when it reported that 35 percent of
London’s population lived “at all times more or less in want” (quoted in Carson 1990, 33).
Booth’s work had lasting influence on social science in that it combined data collection with sociological and environmental analysis.

New York Tribune journalist Jacob Riis was among those environmental determinists who disagreed with the sterile data collection methods of the COS but agreed that slum residents – and their environment – needed attention. In 1890, Riis published a stark portrait of immigrant life on the Lower East Side of Manhattan: the sordid, damp, dark tenement buildings, the hordes of dirty children, the tramps and rag-pickers, the opium addicts, the “wrecks and the waste” on route to an asylum (How the Other Half Lives). Although his writing reflected ethnic prejudices and contempt for foreign cultures, his primary focus was on environmental conditions in the slum, not characteristics of a particular race or class. By illustrating how the overcrowded, unsanitary tenement conditions (worsened by greedy landlords and building speculators) created a class of people who were degraded, ignorant, and potentially dangerous, Riis exposed middle and upper class New Yorkers to the dreadful housing problem of the city. How the Other Half Lives precipitated the 1901 New York State Tenement House Law, the legislative basis for revision of city housing codes.6

Late nineteenth century liberal Protestant clergy responded to changing social conditions – rapid industrial growth, unprecedented levels of immigration, and rising levels of poverty – by calling for social service from their congregations. Mina Carson (1990) argues that these clergy forged a new Western intellectual Christianity, called Christian Socialism in England, and interchangeably called “social Christianity,” “applied Christianity,” and later, the “social gospel”

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6 Municipal public health reports had revealed the squalor of the slum and the potential for epidemics within tenement districts a century before. New York City was the first city in the country to enact housing legislation on the basis of public health studies after a series of yellow fever (1791, 1795, 1798) and bilious plagues (1796-97) tore through the slum. For more on New York City and early housing legislation, see Lawrence M. Friedman’s Government and Slum Housing: A Century of Frustration (1968).
in the United States, by combining religious beliefs, an acceptance of Darwinism, historicism, and scientific empiricism. William Jewett Tucker, an instructor at Andover Theological Seminary, called the social gospel “a stirring progressive movement in religion and social ethics” (Davis 1967, 13). In 1883, a group of theologians at Andover began to spread the social gospel in a new journal, the *Andover Review*. Over the next decade, the editors of the journal discussed the relationship between liberal theology, social science, and human welfare. Educators at Andover and elsewhere created a meeting ground for social theory and social action in the seminaries. William Jewett Tucker designed an elective program in social economics at the seminary and later became one of the founders of South End House in Boston. Tucker’s courses were organized around the evolution of three marginal groups: labor, the criminal classes, and the poor/disabled. Tucker’s program reflected his “rejection of charity organization and other forms in traditional philanthropy in favor of bolder social changes to bring about economic justice” (Carson 1990, 14). Likewise, another Congregational seminarian, Graham Taylor, helped found the Department of Christian Sociology at the Chicago Theological Seminary at the same time as founding the Chicago Commons settlement house (Davis 1967). The social gospel movement was hugely influential to other settlement house founders Vida Scudder (Denison House, Boston), Jane Addams (Hull House, Chicago), and Robert Woods (South End House, Boston). According to Carson (1990, 49), settlement houses were “parented” by the “new organismic ‘religion of humanity’ and the potent notion that social science would explicate and resolve the problems of urban industrial society.”

In the next section, I review the ways in which the interpretation of poverty in the United States changed from the colonial period through the settlement era.
Changing Notions of Poverty and Social Welfare Responses

American colonial responses toward poor relief were largely influenced by Elizabethan poor laws. In England, public responsibility for relief of destitution extended to the family and immediate community – the parish, town, or county. Outsiders who fell into need would be shipped back to their birthplace. Yet as migration and mobility increased in the eighteenth century, the distinction between “neighbors” and “strangers” became more difficult to determine. Michael Katz (1989, 11) relates the cruelty with which local authorities “shunted sick or old poor people from one town or county to another,” and the expense of transporting them (or defending against their claims in court) exhausted much of the tax money raised for poor relief. Meanwhile, ever-increasing industrialization and the spread of wage labor led to increasing social stratification, and the rates and costs of poverty rose: between 1760 and 1818, poor relief expenditures throughout England increased six-fold while the population almost doubled. Higher tax rates were enforced throughout the country, and poor relief was thought to be largely responsible (Trattner 1999).

The poor law system had also come under attack from laissez-faire economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who believed that poverty was the natural state of the laboring classes. If the possession and accumulation of property and wealth was a “natural right” of English citizens (with which the state had no legal right to interfere), then the poor law, which taxed the rich for the care of the needy, violated that right. In 1834, Parliament enacted the Poor Law Reform Bill, which centralized public assistance and cut further financial aid to able-bodied individuals except those in public institutions. As Trattner states, “the condition of all welfare recipients, regardless of need or cause,” would be “worse than that of the lowest paid self-supporting laborer … While relief should not be denied the poor, life should be made so
miserable for them that they would rather work than accept aid,” or enter an almshouse (Trattner 1999, 52). Passage of the bill reflected the punitive attitude toward the poor, an attitude that carried over to the United States.

As in Britain, American poor law officials struggled with determining who would receive aid and who would not. In Josiah Quincy’s 1821 report on the poor laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, he explained that the laws divided the poor into “two classes: the impotent poor; in which denomination included all, who are wholly incapable of work, through old age, infancy, sickness, or corporeal debility,” and, “the able poor … all, who are capable of work, of some nature, or other; but differing in the degree of their capacity, and in the kind of work, of which they are capable.” (Katz 1989, 12) While Quincy acknowledged that the state would assist the impotent class, he was uncertain about the able-bodied poor. Further, he questioned the ability of the existing pauper system to resolve the issue:

There must be, in the nature of things, numerous and minute shades of difference between the pauper, who through impotency, can do absolutely nothing, and the pauper who is able to do something, but that, very little. Nor does the difficulty of discrimination, proportionally, diminish as the ability, in any particular pauper, to do something, increases. There must always exist, so many circumstances of age, sex, previous habits, muscular, or mental, strength, to be taken into the account, that society is absolutely incapable to fix any standard, or to prescribe any rule, by which the claim of right to the benefit of the public provision shall absolutely be determined. (Quincy, quoted in Katz 1989, 12-13)

At this time, it was assumed that anyone who wanted employment could find a job, and that full-time employment would certainly support a family. The New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism issued a report in 1821 that declared “no man who is temperate, frugal, and willing to work need suffer or become a pauper for want of employment” (quoted in Trattner 1999, 54). Yet, increasingly, poverty and pauperism were interpreted differently. The Reverend Charles Burroughs lectured his Portsmouth, New Hampshire congregation in 1834 that
In speaking of poverty, let us never forget that there is a distinction between this and pauperism. The former is an unavoidable evil, to which many are brought from necessity, and in the wise and gracious Providence of God. It is the result, not of our faults, but of our misfortunes … Pauperism is the consequence of willful error, of shameful indolence, of vicious habits. It is a misery of human creation, the pernicious work of man, the lamentable consequence of bad principles and morals. (Burroughs, quoted in Katz 1989, 13)

Not surprisingly, early nineteenth century social reformers were more concerned with reducing pauperism – avoidable dependency, or dependency combined with criminal behavior – than analyzing the underlying roots of poverty. According to Schwartz (2000, 7), this made sense, since “it was easier to reduce dependency than to bestow nonexistent material abundance upon the poor.” Yet, the perceived differences between poverty and pauperism evaporated within a decade (Trattner 1999). As pauperism transmuted into a moral category, poverty, too, was increasingly understood to be a consequence of indolence and vice. Katz (1989, 1995) contends that the redefinition of poverty as a moral (or immoral) condition justified the castigatory treatment of the poor – and ultimately, helped ensure the supply of cheap labor in a capitalist economy based on unbound wage labor.

Concurrent with the intensified moralistic attitudes of the mid-nineteenth century was the growing belief that public assistance removed the incentive to work, rewarded impious behavior, and stimulated idleness. Where practical charity had been perceived previously as a “virtue,” now it was viewed as a “vice,” for it was thought to encourage and perpetuate poverty. Instead, some politicians argued that public relief ought to be limited to institutional care (also referred to as “indoor relief”), to almshouses and workhouses. Both the permanently disabled (the “worthy poor”) and the able-bodied poor (the “unworthy poor”) could be institutionalized in spaces where they could be isolated from the vices of society and their behavior could be controlled. Later, the definition of an institution broadened to include prisons, mental asylums, and juvenile detention
homes. According to David Rothman (1971, 58-59), institutions offered comfort to nineteenth
century Americans troubled by the disintegration of their stable society: controlling “abnormal
behavior promised to be the first step in establishing a new system for stabilizing the
community.”

Social, economic, and political stabilization was nearly impossible during the depression
of the mid-1870s. Three million laborers – most able-bodied and skilled – were without
employment, and forced to rely on soup kitchens and relief associations for food and shelter
(Trattner 1999). Yet dependency was still linked to moral delinquency, and there was some
concern that dependency could be transmitted across generations. After conducting a
comprehensive statistical study of the role of heredity in the persistence of dependency, the New
York State Board of Charities concluded in 1877 that

> by far the greater number of paupers have reached that condition by idleness,
improvidence, drunkenness, or some form of vicious indulgence … It is equally clear that
these vices and weaknesses are very frequently, if not universally, the result of tendencies
which are to a greater or lesser degree hereditary. The number of persons in our poor-
houses who have been reduced to poverty by causes outside of their own acts is, contrary
to the general impression, surprisingly small … The whole policy of the State should
move in the direction of caring for the really unfortunate and worthy sick poor in
hospitals, while a vigorous system of labor should be organized and administered for the
vicious and unworthy. (Tenth Annual Report of the State Board of Charities, 1877, cited
in Ward 1989, 55)

These findings suggested that degeneracy was largely inherited; thus, improving environmental
conditions would have no effect on the underlying moral causes of poverty (Ward 1989; Trattner
1999).

Those who applied the Darwinian theory of evolution to social conditions were called
social Darwinists. This group believed that poverty resulted from personal failings, and that
there was no remedy for extreme poverty except self-help. This group, too, condoned
immigration restriction as a defensive measure against the contagion of defectiveness in the
Anglo-Saxon race. Ward (1989) and Rothman (1971) discuss the ways state and local governments tried to segregate the most depraved individuals from the rest of society, efforts that eventually led to the elimination of publicly-funded outdoor relief except for the physically and mentally disabled. Thus, by the 1870s and 1880s, aid to those individuals who did not require institutional care was left to voluntary charitable organizations like the COS.

While the COS continued to interpret poverty as the result of individual moral failings, they also brought a new awareness of the environmental conditions of the slums. The COS, like the settlement workers after them, considered the causes as well as the symptoms of urban poverty – structural forces in the economy like low wages and involuntary unemployment. In this respect, the COS fostered a broader definition of poverty. By the turn of the century, settlement workers took the lead in gathering specific information on the causes of poverty and dependency, and had begun to push for municipal environmental reform in the way of playgrounds, public parks, public baths, public libraries, improved sanitation, and tenement housing legislation. American settlement workers focused on reforming urban society through neighborhood improvement. In the following section, I briefly examine the theory behind the settlers’ focus on the environmental conditions of the slum, and their hopes for creating a new social order in the city.

**Settlements, Organic Cities, and Notions of Community**

According to Woods and Kennedy (1922), American settlement workers were among the first generation of students who translated biological organic theory into social organic theory. Indeed, settlers believed they could recreate a living, communal organism in the city – the neighborhood – and that the settlement could serve as the node (or brain) of that organism. A
late-nineteenth century New York city settlement worker argued that the settlement house could help facilitate group loyalty in the neighborhood, and thus in the larger body, the country:

More should be done to relate individual to individual, group to group, and groups and individuals to the House, that the House may become an organism rather than an organization. Only thus can we develop a House that arouses a positive loyalty and only by loyalty to things known can we have loyalty to country. (Christina MacColl, worker at Christadora House on the Lower East Side, quoted in Veness 1984, 141)

Thus, settlement workers believed they could integrate their neighbors into a cohesive unit, a functional whole, a “natural” community.

The geographer April Veness (1984, 147) suggests that American settlement workers took an active role in shaping their environment (and for the most part, she admits, the settlements supported changes that directly benefited the neighborhood) in hopes of shaping “the interactions that occurred between the various groups of people in that area.” Trattner (1999), too, maintains settlement house workers saw the slum residents, their “neighbors,” as members of a larger group rather than as isolated human beings. As such, they concentrated their efforts on group improvement. Stanton Coit, the man who opened the first settlement house in the United States in 1886, Neighborhood Guild (New York), rejected the prevalent view that society would benefit if men and women pursued their own self-interests and instead believed in the interdependence of social groups in an organically structured society. Robert Woods argued that industrialism caused – and would continue to cause – cities to become increasingly fragmented, and considered the sensible solution to be to establish hundreds of villages (neighborhoods) within the larger social body (city). Woods (1898, 273-74) thought settlements could bring disparate groups together, “reestablish on a natural basis those social relations which modern city life has thrown into confusion.” The settlement effort to “soften and moralize” these groups, a
form of local “social reconstruction” would have larger consequences for the city. And it was the city, ultimately, that settlement workers wanted to save.

In the next section, I review the literature which was most influential to the American settlement founders. I then consider criticism of the settlement movement, beginning with the settlers’ own assessments, then moving on to other contemporary criticism. Finally, I examine the more recent interpretations of the movement.

**Traditional and Leftist Interpretations of Progressive-era Settlement Houses**

To better understand the social ideals of the settlement workers at South End House and Denison House, we can consider what literature was most influential to settlement house founders. Nineteenth century American settlement house reformers looked to English social critics for guidance. Publications such as Thomas Carlyle’s *Chartism* (1839), Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and London Poor* (1842), Frederick Engels’ *Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1845), and John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* (1862) marked the rise of class-consciousness in England and to some extent, awakened humanitarian feelings in the United States. While all four publications denounced the dehumanizing conditions of modern industrial labor, Ruskin’s criticism of laissez-faire political economy and production for profit was most influential among British and American social reformers of the nineteenth century. At heart an art and architecture critic, Ruskin’s economic philosophy had its roots in his aesthetic revulsion for the ugliness of industrialization, urbanization, and growing poverty of developing capitalist England. He scolded the English for contributing to capitalist production for profit; clearly, production should be for the common wealth and societal needs. “THERE IS NO WEALTH BUT LIFE,” he bellowed in *Unto This Last* (1862, 125).
Ruskin’s ideology resonated with settlement founder Vida Scudder, who claimed, after hearing about Toynbee Hall in London, “something within me stirred, responded, awoke … The point of my desire was an intolerable stabbing pain, as Ruskin and the rich delights of the place, forced me to realize for the first time the plethora of privilege in which my lot had been cast” (Carson 1990, 40). Two years after her visit to London, Scudder established the College Settlements Association, which sponsored three settlement houses in the northeast (Davis 1967; Carson 1990; Trolander 1987).

The geographer Denis Cosgrove (1979) suggests that Ruskin’s theories on the social problems associated with capitalist landscapes should be considered morphological. Cosgrove compares Ruskin’s careful, detailed reading of nineteenth-century urban industrial landscapes to Carl Sauer’s reading of cultural landscapes, and notes that both Ruskin and Sauer emphasized the importance of human agency in landscape transformation. Ruskin’s early landscape studies later influenced his ideas on political economy, and his ideas for social reform (e.g. free schools, free libraries) were widely embraced by late-nineteenth century progressive reformers and thinkers (Carson 1990; Clark 1964). While Ruskin never made specific reference to the settlement house movement, nearly all of the movement’s leaders made reference to Ruskin and his “consciousness of economic injustice” (Clark 1964, 263). Others took Ruskin's radical Tory reading of the industrial capitalistic landscape to heart as well; the historian John Rosenberg (1963) notes that Marcel Proust, Gandhi, Ezra Pound, Bernard Shaw, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Leo Tolstoy all claimed to be inspired to work for social justice after reading Unto This Last.

The earliest interpretations of the settlement house movement were largely complimentary, partly due to the fact that the earliest critics were settlement workers themselves. Indeed, our understanding of the settlement experience has relied on the narratives of the first

Certainly, there were critics of the settlement movement, and not least due to the fact that the movement was ill-defined. As Allen Davis (1967) notes, settlement leaders could not agree among themselves on the purposes and goals of the movement. When a committee of Chicago settlement workers assembled in 1898 to draft a working definition of the American settlement house, they gave up after several hours: all they could agree upon was that the settlement ought to become a “Social Center for Civic Cooperation” and a rallying point for social reform. Hull House worker Dorothea Moore noted that when an English settlement worker was asked to define a settlement house, he could only sputter, “Why, hang it, madam, we settle” as if that explained everything (Moore 1897, 630). Mary Simkhovitch, headworker of New York City’s

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7 Dr. Alice Hamilton is probably best known for her research on industrial diseases. She actively publicized the dangers to workers’ health from industrial toxic substances such as lead and mercury, and she contributed to the passage of workers' compensation laws and to the development of safer working conditions. From 1897-1919, Hamilton was a resident at Hull House in Chicago, where she ran a well-baby clinic (Sklar 1985).

8 Florence Kelley, social reformer and resident of Hull House (1891-99), served as the head of the National Consumers’ League from 1898-1932. In 1908, she helped to establish the ten-hour work day for women (the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Muller v. Oregon*, also known as the “Brandeis Brief.”) Kelley worked tirelessly for labor reform, especially for women and children. As the result of her research, the Illinois State Legislature passed a law in 1893 prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 14 in factories. Her translation of Engels’s *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* is still the preferred scholarly version (Sklar 1985).
Greenwich House, was more lucid about what a settlement house was not, rather than what it was. In 1912, an interviewer asked her to define a settlement; she stated that a settlement was “a family … living in a neglected neighborhood” who was expected to “take its full share in the development of the life of the community” but definitely not an institution, not a charity, and not a mission (Holden 1922, 190-91). William Jewett Tucker, one of the founders of South End House, in Boston, claimed that the settlement idea was “clear and definite. Moreover, it was logical” and offered as proof the fact that the settlement idea was contagious to the point that over 500 houses were established by 1916, from only 4 in 1891 (Tucker 1917, 640). Yet, the pragmatic approach and flexibility of the settlement movement “left it open to the charge that it was too vague to be meaningful;” it was most commonly attacked for being too radical or not radical enough (Davis 1967, 17).

Some of the criticism of the settlement movement came from the workers themselves. Florence Kelley, Hull House resident from 1891-1899 (and later one of the founders of the NAACP), applauded the settlement movement for its achievements in improving the neighborhood (parks, playgrounds, baths, gymnasiums, classes, child-labor and compulsory education laws, and school nursing), but called the founders of the movement to task for not recognizing the deeper problem of slum congestion. “When people are crowded, poverty, tuberculosis and crime arise among them … Instead of assenting to the belief that people who are poor must be crowded, why did we not see, years ago, that people who are crowded must remain poor, growing weaker and less capable of self-help from generation to generation?” (Kelley 1906, quoted in Pacey 1971, 74).

The social critic Thorsten Veblen accused settlement houses of being partly responsible for the growing social gap between the wealthy and the poor. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*
(1899, 341), he argues that settlements “serve to authenticate the pecuniary reputability of their members, as well as gratefully keep them in mind of their superior status by pointing the contrast between themselves and the lower-lying humanity in which the work of amelioration is to be wrought.” As evidence of this point, he refers to the punctilious regard the settlement workers had for proper manners and customs. Similarly, Sinclair Lewis developed a character in his novel Ann Vickers (1932, 224) who denounced settlements as “cultural comfort stations, rearing their brick Gothic among the speakeasies and hand laundries and kosher butcher shops, and upholding a standard of tight-smiling prissiness.”

Both Veblen and Lewis argued that settlement houses were overly sentimental and their approach simplistic and therefore unable to meet the tremendous social and economic needs of slum residents. They were not alone in this view; a review of The House on Henry Street (Wald 1915) in the New Republic contended that the term “settlement” conjured maudlin, sappy images:

It suggests an attempt to paint the wound of poverty with a camel’s hair brush dipped in a weak solution of Ruskin, Prince Kropotkin and Florence Nightingale. It suggests young ladies with weak eyes and young gentlemen with weak chins fluttering confusedly among heterogeneous foreigners, offering cocoa and sponge cake as a sort of dessert to the factory system they deplore. It suggests a rootless flower stuck with romantic incongruity in the mud. It suggests, in short, a womanly effort to pave the hell of poverty with the very prettiest of intentions. (New Republic – no author given – 1916, 255)

In the next paragraph, however, the reviewer admitted that this was not the image he had of the Henry Street Settlement, established on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1893, or Lilian Wald, headworker and nurse. While other settlements were charged with “lacking order,” chasing “the poisonous mosquitoes of poverty without ever seeking to drain the swamps,” Henry Street Settlement had a clear mission: to organize public and private agencies that would take responsibility for the squalor of the slum and do something about it. Thus, while the reviewer
found the book “inexpert in its anecdotes of the neighborhood, somewhat commonplace in its style and somewhat temporizing in many of its judgments,” he found Henry Street Settlement “an experimental station of astonishing service to America” (*New Republic*, 1916, 256). That the reviewer does not think other settlements – in New York City or elsewhere – fit in the same category is unsaid, but implicit.

Comparisons between the charity organization movement of the 1870s and the settlement movement of the 1880s and 1890s were inevitable; many charity workers, affronted by settlement workers’ criticism of their methods, publicly dismissed the settlements as sappy, unscientific, and ineffective. One charity worker compared a settlement worker to a man who, finding a homeless person in the gutter, said to him, “I can’t help you my friend, but I will sit down in the gutter beside you” (quoted in Davis 1967, 20). The settlement movement had friends and allies in the media, however. Jacob Riis described the successes of the settlements thusly: “We had substituted for the old charity coal chute, that bred resentment … the passenger bridge which we call settlements, upon which men go over not down to their duty” (quoted in Davis 1967, 20). Robert Hunter, an itinerant socialist who lived in settlement houses while working for charity societies, believed charity workers mistakenly emphasized the individual causes of poverty instead of the social and economic conditions that created poverty itself. While he admitted that settlement workers approached social problems with some naivety, he approved of their constant efforts toward progressive reform and criticized charity workers for their inaction. Hunter’s *Poverty* (1904) clearly reflected his conviction that destitution was the result of “deeply seated and fundamental economic disorders” and that action was necessary to resolve inequality and bridge class divisions (Hunter 1904, 331).
Settlement houses fell into decline in the 1920s, partly because the state had begun to provide amenities previously only provided by settlements: public libraries, public baths, public parks with playgrounds, and public museums. World War I, too, had divided settlement workers and split the movement into two factions: one, led by Robert Woods of South End House in Boston and Mary Simkhovitch of Greenwich House in New York City, favored militaristic progressivism and the American entrance into the war. The second (and smaller of the two), led by Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago, Lilian Wald of Henry Street Settlement in New York City, and Geraldine Gordon of Denison House in Boston, favored pacifistic militarism and “substitutes for war” (Carson 1990, 153). Allen Davis (1967) suggests that the disagreement over America’s role in the war permanently fractured the movement. In 1917, Mary Simkhovitch, the leader of the National Federation of Settlements (NFS), made one final attempt to unite the movement’s leaders in one common political stance. She called for the settlement pacifists to join the settlement militarists in supporting the war. Although the pacifists refused the invitation, the NFS adopted a resolution supporting American participation in the war. Simkhovitch later explained her reasoning behind the NFS’s break with Addams, Wald, and Gordon: “America cannot hold aloof … it cannot stand apart, but must rather die that the world may live.” (Simkhovitch, quoted in Davis 1967, 221)

The public’s interest in settlement house reform waned as a result of the general decline of the settlement movement. Thus, from the 1920s to the late 1960s, little was written on the settlement movement, other than newspaper articles documenting house events. Contemporary historiography of the settlement movement ought to be dated from Davis’s (1967) seminal work which locates settlement workers at the forefront of urban progressive reform at the end of the nineteenth century. Although somewhat outdated (he released a second edition in 1984, with
minor changes, in particular to the chapter on “Immigrants and Negroes”), Davis’s account offers the first comprehensive look at the major personalities behind the settlement movement in New York, Chicago, and Boston, and their activities in progressive education, the rising labor movement, and local politics. He compares the approaches of nineteenth-century charity workers and settlement workers, and after furnishing the reader with a mountain of evidence (settlement houses provided these three cities with the first public baths, the first public playgrounds, the first public clinics, the first public kindergartens, the first free art exhibits, the first college extension classes, and much more), he concludes that “the philosophy of the charity organization movement led to philanthropy, and the philosophy of the settlement movement led to reform” (Davis 1967, 19). Further, he argues that if the 1920s were the “seedtime” of New Deal social reform, then settlements produced many of the original seeds – settlement workers were influential in the founding of the NAACP, the ACLU, and the Women’s Trade Union League. Davis contends that, were it not for the settlement workers, many Americans would still believe that individual weakness, not social environment, was the greatest cause of poverty. On this point, he agrees with historians Clarke Chambers and Andrea Hinding (1968, 97-99), who find that charity organization workers persisted in the notion that the “undeserving” poor deserved their poverty through the early twentieth century, while settlement workers believed poverty was the result of “wrong social conditions” and an “unfavorable environment.” Despite Davis’s failure to take into account the impact the residents of the neighborhood had on the process of reform initiated by the settlement workers, he was the first contemporary historian to research the role of female settlement workers as social reformers.

The social-work historian Judith Ann Trolander continued analysis of the settlement movement where Davis left off. Trolander (1975; 1987) has written extensively on the
settlement movement – so much so that one feels that she’s appointed herself the chronicler of the movement, and its hopeful savior. In her first tome, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (1975), she considers settlement house social activism between the Progressive Era and the New Deal in an attempt to understand why activism declined in the 1930s. She argues that the primary determinant of whether a settlement was politically responsive during the New Deal was the type of funding that supported the settlement. Those settlements that were maintained by the Community Chest (which coordinated all philanthropic resources in a particular community to ensure fair distribution of funds among social welfare agencies) “ignored social issues,” while those still financed by their own boards (namely, those in Chicago and New York City) were more committed to “social action programs” (Trolander 1987, 50-63). Yet her hypothesis falls flat; she does not marshal sufficient evidence on behalf of her hypothesis. Where is the data demonstrating the pressures Community Chest leaders exerted on settlement house politics? Is it not possible that settlement workers in cities like Chicago and New York were idiosyncratic, that political involvement was simply more prevalent in these cities than elsewhere? Mina Carson (1990) finds evidence that settlement workers in Pittsburgh were extremely concerned about the effects of the Community Chest movement on the vitality of the settlement movement. She cites the headworker of Kingsley House in Pittsburgh as saying in 1928 that the Community Chest had become “very dangerous to social progress and to social workers … The urge of the Chest movement is to conformity and standardization, and the Settlement movement stands in the way of this” (Carson 1990, 183). Trolander neglects to include such primary source data indicating the control the Chest boards were able to assert over settlement policies and programs.
Further, Trolander fails to consider that 1930s settlement houses were run by a second (or third) generation of settlement workers who almost certainly had different agendas than those of the 1890s and 1900s. She also overlooks Clarke Chambers’ 1963 work, *Seedtime of Reform*, wherein he argues that settlement houses – and the impulse toward social reform – fell into decline in the 1920s due to the difference of opinion among social workers over the relative importance of psychological versus environmental factors in influencing social maladjustment.

Trolander’s next book, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to the Present* (1987), essentially details the story of the settlement house movement after World War II. In fact, despite the title, she spends almost no time discussing the early years of the movement. Instead, she continues to analyze the settlements’ decline and diminishing influence, particularly in the 1950s. Post-war problems were abundant: funding was increasingly limited, workers found it difficult to negotiate the racial and ethnic transformation of the neighborhoods, and the professionalized staff – trained social workers – saw little reason to live in the community. This last factor, suggests Trolander, irrevocably damaged the settlements’ reputation. Once the settlement workers were simply workers (and no longer neighbors, full-time residents), the program lost legitimacy – they were seen as distanced from the community. Instead of being available whenever needed, they made appointments and treatment plans. In addition, the political climate had changed; by the 1960s, the federal government sponsored many new local organizations that claimed to represent the neighborhood in policy debates, making the traditional role of the settlement house as neighborhood advocate untenable. Ultimately, Trolander finds the settlements guilty of not adjusting to urban social change. She believes the settlements still have a place in the twenty-first century city, and challenges them to become institutions that “serve as a crossroads, a place
where different groups of people can come together, exchange ideas, and reach consensus” (Trolander 1987, 242).

Like Trolander, Howard Husock (1992) argues that settlement houses could easily meet current social welfare needs and therefore ought to be considered in every American city. Since settlements are community-based organizations, run by and for the entire community, they could provide an alternative to the present categorical social welfare programs, those that provide job training, drug and alcohol treatment, or mental health care to specific populations. Husock contends that while these problem-based social programs offer sorely-needed services to troubled populations, only settlement houses offer a vehicle to link the social classes. According to Jane Addams, this was the original intention of settlements; in 1892, she delivered a speech to the School of Applied Ethics in which she claimed that settlements endeavor “to make social intercourse express the growing sense of the economic unity of society.” Furthermore, Addams argued that settlement houses were established “on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal; and that as ‘the social relation is essentially a reciprocal relation,’” settlements “gave a form of expression that has peculiar value.” (Addams 1893[1969], 1-2)

Beverly Koerin (2003) is in agreement with both Trolander and Husock: she considers settlement houses to represent a viable alternative to today’s community centers, in which she contends, there is very little “community-building” going on. She holds that settlement houses symbolized a comprehensive approach that strengthened both individual and community assets, and encouraged collective solutions to local social problems. However, Koerin recognizes the limitations of the settlement; she agrees with Chambers (1963, 17), who argued that despite the wide range of programs and classes offered, the settlements “could no more than nibble at problems whose solutions … required concerted action of the entire community.” This, she
maintains, led settlement workers to become social reformers – to lobby the municipal government to set aside land for public parks, build playgrounds, and improve sanitation systems. Koerin therefore asserts that the settlement house movement reflected a dual responsibility for social service and social reform, a very different approach to community service than is practiced by today’s community centers.

The year 1989 marked the centennial of Hull House, and as a result, three books celebrating the settlement’s history appeared within two years (Polachek 1989; Johnson 1989; and Bryan and Davis 1990). Hilda Satt Polachek’s memoir, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (1989), was compiled by her daughter, Dena Polachek Epstein. Polachek was a Polish immigrant to Chicago whose father died when she was twelve, leaving the family in terrible poverty. She dropped out of school at thirteen to take a factory job in order to support her family, and describes in vivid detail the horrific factory conditions and unsanitary housing which formed her daily existence. Polachek remarks that Hull House offered her opportunities to socialize and move up in American society: she found jobs through Hull House contacts, wrote and produced a play performed at Hull House, and despite only having a fifth-grade education, she was able to attend the University of Chicago for one semester through Hull House’s college extension program. Polachek clearly idolizes Jane Addams, yet her memoir is possibly the most extensive statement by a Hull House neighbor of what a settlement meant to her. There have been too few memoirs written by those who benefited (or did not) from settlement houses; despite the overwhelming amount of praise for Hull House, this is a valuable piece of literature.

Mary Ann Johnson (1989), the director of the Hull House Museum, collected sixty-two photographs, taken by Wallace Kirkland, of life in and around Hull House between 1923 – 1936.
and published them in *The Many Faces of Hull-House*. Many of the pictures were taken from Hull House promotional literature and yearbooks, and some show the Hull House complex that was demolished in 1963 to make way for the University of Illinois, Chicago. Mary Linn McCree Bryan and Allen F. Davis’s (1990) *One Hundred Years at Hull-House* is a revised and expanded edition of their *Eighty Years at Hull-House* (1969). Although much of the material is not new, the document includes some fresh information on Hull House after the War on Poverty. In addition, there is discussion of housing reform in the 1980s, the battered women’s movement, and the settlement’s recent funding decisions.

This collection of literature on the settlement house movement (Davis 1967; Chambers and Hinding 1968; Chambers 1963; Trolander 1975, 1987; Husock 1992; Koorin 2003; Polachek 1989; Johnson 1989; Bryan and Davis 1990) is highly approving and uncritical of the movement and its pioneers. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, all of the authors use Jane Addams and Hull House as a reference point from which to begin their analysis. Certainly, this narrow definition of the American settlement house is problematic. Why has so little research been conducted on other settlement houses, in other cities (or even in Chicago, for the local comparison)? We all recognize and applaud the great social reform achievements led by Hull House residents and friends. We all know that Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (as was Emily Green Balch of Denison House, in 1946). Yet I have only found six scholarly works, total, that are in any way critical of Addams and Hull House’s methods of community reform (Boyer 1978; Carson 1990; Crocker 1991; Lissak 1989; Karger 1990; Lasch-Quinn 1993, discussed later in this chapter). This is particularly surprising considering how little it appears (from my brief analysis) that Hull House did for the African American community migrating into Chicago from the south in the early twentieth century. Moreover, only Trolander (1987) considers the charges
of social control that were launched at settlements from the left in the early twentieth century, and then later, in the 1970s. Why was there no serious appraisal of that settlement (or any other, for that matter) between the 1920s and the 1970s?

By the mid-1970s, social-welfare historians began challenging the dominant view that the settlement house movement had been a democratic and progressive force for social change. These scholars were influenced by the “new social history,” begun in the United States with the work of Stephan Thernstrom and others who published revolutionary studies in the fields of immigrant, black, and working-class history (see, for example, Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (1964); Tamara Hareven, ed., *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth Century Social History* (1971); Josef J. Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Romanians, and Slovaks in an American City, 1890-1950* (1975); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1978).

The new social history called for a reinterpretation of social work history from the point of view of the clients, not the providers, of social services. This new social history also led some historians to question the previous generation’s sympathetic portrayal of settlement houses and settlement workers (Davis 1967; Chambers and Hinding 1967; Lubove 1962). Settlement house movement reinterpretations by Paul Boyer (1978), Mina Carson (1990), Ruth Hutchinson Crocker (1991), Rivka Lissak (1989), Harold Karger (1987), and Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn (1993) reflect a renewed interest in social welfare history and multiculturalism that is partly derived from the dismantling of the welfare state. While few of these studies were able to tell the story of the settlements from the clients’ point of view, they represent a more critical approach. These works pose difficult questions for historians: Were the settlement workers upper-class missionaries, intent on manipulating or controlling their slum neighbors? Or were they shining
examples of the Progressive Era, trying to humanize the increasingly fragmented industrial city
(Davis 1967; Chambers and Hinding 1968; Chambers 1963; Trolander 1975, 1987; Husock
1992; Koerin 2003; Polachek 1989; Johnson 1989; and Bryan and Davis 1990)?

Paul Boyer’s (1978) thorough, trenchant assessment of the forces of urban moral reform
between 1820 – 1920 places him in the social control group. His was the first post-Davis study
critical of social welfare, charities, and the settlement movement as a whole. Boyer was clearly
influenced by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward’s *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of
Public Welfare* (1971) in that, like them, he believes that progressive reformers were motivated
more from fear and distrust of the city and its new immigrants than altruism. He admits,
however, that the settlement workers contributed to a positive environmentalism in their
campaigns to clean up the city, create public parks and playgrounds, and improve housing
standards.

Mina Carson (1990) certainly agrees with the social control thesis, though she attempts to
offer an impartial history of settlement ideology and its changes over time. She situates the
American settlement movement in terms of its English origins, especially Victorian organicism
and the social gospel movement. Like Davis (1967), she contends that “Christian character” and
Victorian notions of masculinity and womanly service (merged into one androgynous ideal) were
central to the settlement impulse. Carson’s study follows the settlement movement through
1930; thus, she shows how the settlements’ emphasis on Victorian concepts of character – built
among the poor through contact with house residents – faltered in the 1920s, when professional
social work was gaining interest, and institutionalization took over. She concludes that the
settlement movement was “at once sui generis and promiscuously tangled up with almost every
strand of American reform culture” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Carson 1990, 198).

Ruth Crocker’s (1992) work opens with the contention that Jane Addams and Hull House have overshadowed the history of the settlement house movement in the United States. Certainly, this is not a new or original notion: other historians have suggested that the larger settlements in New York, Chicago, and Boston have received far too much attention and fame at the expense of the second-tier settlements, those which played an important part in their communities but were not headed by nationally recognized reformers (Lissak 1989; Karger 1987). Crocker instead chooses to focus on seven settlements in Gary and Indianapolis, Indiana – settlements that achieved local importance but little if any national attention. After analyzing the seven settlements’ attitudes toward religion, immigrants, foreign cultures, African Americans, and labor, she concludes that these seven settlements represented the real settlement movement and that settlements like Hull House were the exception. The evidence she provides from the Indiana settlements – if taken to represent the entire movement – suggest that the movement was extremely conservative in its view of society, cooperated with the business establishment to perpetuate the existing social order, and quashed cultural pluralism at every turn. The problem with this hypothesis is this: she gives no definition of what she classifies as a settlement house. During the Progressive Era, a wide variety of institutions emerged to deal with the social and economic problems of industrialization and immigration. These institutions could be identified with the settlement movement through membership in the National Federation of Settlements (NFS), which met annually to share ideas on improving settlement services. While not all settlements joined the NFS, those that did tended to be more politically progressive (for example, University Settlement (New York City), Hull House (Chicago), Chicago Commons,
Henry Street Settlement (New York City), Greenwich House (New York City), South End House (Boston), Denison House (Boston), and Kingsley Association (Pittsburgh). Of Crocker’s seven settlements, only one was an NFS member. In addition, all seven settlements had religious establishments as sponsors, supported the traditional role of women, the Americanization of immigrants, and the development of a non-unionized work force. Two of the settlements were founded with investments from U.S. Steel, a conservative anti-union business. Thus, the agenda of these settlement houses was vastly different from the renowned settlements in New York, Chicago, and Boston, where funding was public, the clientele was cosmopolitan, and secularity was indispensable to serving the diverse community. Moreover, the Indiana settlements did not share what Davis (1967, 26) refers to as the most significant feature of the settlement movement in the United States, “the progressive impulse.” Therefore, while Crocker successfully proves the existence of another settlement movement, one that is not well-publicized, she incorrectly extends the conclusions based on the Indiana settlement to the settlement movement in general.

Rivka Lissak (1989), another member of the social control school, takes a different, provocative approach to interpreting the settlement movement, and in particular, Hull House and the legacy of Jane Addams: she attempts to write from the client’s point of view rather than that of the settlement workers. In exploring the relationship between the settlement workers and their immigrant neighbors, she marshals a good deal of evidence to indict the settlers as assimilators rather than cultural pluralists. Lissak first examines the social theories of Hull House workers (and their close allies at the University of Chicago, whom she labels “Liberal Progressives”) in order to locate their ideas on nationality, assimilation, and culture. She concludes that the settlement workers rejected the “melting pot” model of assimilation in favor of a competitive model, and that they assumed Anglo-Saxon culture would suppress more primitive foreign
cultures. Next, she performs a microanalysis of the Hull House neighborhood by using immigrant oral histories to look at the impact of the settlement on the assimilation process. According to Lissak, these oral histories reveal that Hull House “never made any meaningful efforts to preserve and foster immigrant cultures” (Lissak 1989, 131). Lissak labels immigrants who enrolled in Hull House’s Americanization programs as “marginal,” but dismisses evidence that shows some immigrants sought assimilation and wanted to blend into American society as quickly as possible. However, despite her harsh assessment of Jane Addams and Hull House residents, Lissak is to be applauded in that she refuses to privilege the viewpoints of settlement house workers above those of the community, who undoubtedly were among the best assessors of the impact of the settlement on the neighborhood.

Howard Karger’s (1987) study of ten Minneapolis settlement houses between 1915-1950 is perhaps the least stimulating of the recent settlement analyses, partly because the movement was in somewhat of a decline during that period. Moreover, his data are incomplete – he relies almost entirely on the reports and speeches of a few settlement house workers and neglects to consider external interpretations by other social historians – which leads to a bland, one-sided assessment of Minneapolis social welfare history (and which may have been his objective). Karger’s data suggest that all ten settlements had similar goals, programs, and politics: none of the settlements opposed the United States’ entry into WWI (an extremely contentious issue for settlement workers that ultimately created a schism in the national movement), and all of them supported the national campaign to Americanize immigrants. One, the Phyllis Wheatley House, was established to serve African Americans who had migrated north to find work in the rapidly industrializing Midwest. According to Karger, the other nine settlements were apathetic with regards to racial problems and unresponsive toward the new arrivals. Although this is interesting
in itself, he avoids any further discussion of conflict between different ethnic or racial groups within the city. He also fails to examine the response of Minneapolis settlement workers to the New Deal social welfare programs. Karger’s most egregious mistake, however, is that he fails to draw comparisons, either among the Minneapolis settlements, or with settlements in other cities of the same size. In short, this research left more questions than it answered.

Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn (1993) provides the first full-scale attempt to document the allegation that the settlement movement was racist. She argues that settlement houses attempted to address the needs of white immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but failed to show the same concern for African Americans as they began to replace ethnic whites in settlement neighborhoods, especially after World War I. Indeed, she claims that most settlements “either excluded blacks, conducted segregated activities, closed down completely, or followed their former white neighbors out of black neighborhoods” (Lasch-Quinn 1993, 3). Like Crocker (1992), Lasch-Quinn rejects the definition of a settlement as a member of the NFS and considers a variety of agencies organized for and by African Americans across the northeast, Midwest, and South. Her criteria are broad: she includes any organization that “conducted extensive work in black neighborhoods in the settlement house tradition” (Lasch-Quinn 1993, 115). Thus, she reviews the community-based activities of Methodist home missions, YWCAs, and “school settlements.” She correctly asserts that social welfare historians should broaden the definition of Progressivism to include the reform efforts of African American women, an idea that is long overdue. Yet Lasch-Quinn’s work has a major fault: she casually dismisses other revisionist scholarship on the settlement movement by claiming that “scholars have accepted uncritically the self-image developed by the settlement movement” (Lasch-Quinn 1993, 5-6). This statement negates contributions by Paul Boyer (1978), Judith Trolander (1987), Howard
Karger (1987), Rivka Lissak (1989), Mina Carson (1990), and Ruth Crocker (1991) all of whom mentioned the failings of the older view of the settlements espoused by Allen Davis (1967), Clarke Chambers and Andrea Hinding (1968), and Roy Lubove (1962). Furthermore, Davis admits in his introduction to the 1984 edition of his 1967 work *Spearheads for Reform* that his study is incomplete, and that historians need to explore the coercive and racist aspects of the settlement movement. Certainly, Lasch-Quinn’s claim that settlement house historiography has focused primarily on white-women’s activism and white immigrants has merit (see, for example, Rousmaniere 1970, Sklar 1985, and Beauman 1996 – none of which mention African Americans as settlement workers or residents in the community). However, this study is unconvincing in too many places and incomplete in others; Lasch-Quinn should have included some discussion of the tensions between service providers, donors, and clients. Still, the author is the first to examine in depth the fact that in the first forty years of the movement, settlement workers did little to address white society’s systematic discrimination against the African Americans in their communities.

In the next chapter, I explore the reasoning behind the earliest American settlement workers’ commitment to becoming part of the local community. In this respect, the settlers changed the scope of social reform, since they were the first social workers to acknowledge the fact that the needs of the poor could not be understood without direct and continued knowledge of the environment.
CHAPTER III

BRING IN THE NOBLESSE OBLIGE

I received an ineradicable impression of the wretchedness of East London ... They [the assembled crowd] were huddled into ill-fitting, cast-off clothing, the ragged finery which one sees only in East London. Their pale faces were dominated by that most unlovely of human expressions, the cunning and shrewdness of the bargain-hunter who starves if he cannot make a successful trade, and yet the final impression was not of ragged, tawdry clothing nor of pinched and sallow faces, but of myriads of hands, empty, pathetic, nerveless and workworn... clutching forward for food which was already unfit to eat.

(Jane Addams, witnessing a Saturday night (rotten) vegetable auction in the East End of London, 1887, in Addams 1917, 67-68)

East London is such a ghetto, where the rich and powerful do not dwell, and the traveler cometh not, and where two million workers swarm, procreate, and die... The application of the Golden Rule determines that East London is an unfit place to live. Where you would not have your own babe live, and develop, and gather to itself knowledge of life and the things of life, is not a fit place for the babes of other men to live. (Jack London 1903, 128-29)

In chapter two I reviewed relevant literature on nineteenth-century social welfare efforts, including the American settlement house movement. Criticism of this movement and its founders (nearly all of which uses Hull House and its workers as a point of reference) tends to be extreme in one of two ways: either it is overly sentimental or maudlin, or it is excessively accusatory of social control by the movement’s founders. This project takes a different approach at interpreting the movement, first by focusing on two lesser-known settlement houses, South End House and Denison House, and second by assessing the smaller-scale achievements of the settlement workers – how they impacted, and, in some sense, created – their neighborhoods within the increasingly ethnic South End and South Cove communities.

To appreciate the differences between South End House, Denison House, Hull House, and other settlements, we first need to understand the socio-economic history of the American settlement movement. In this chapter, I begin with a detailed account of the first English
settlement house, Toynbee Hall. I then describe how American students traveling through England in the 1880s appropriated Canon Barnett’s “practicable socialism” working ideal, Toynbee, and began a social reform movement in the United States that lasted until the early 1920s. From there, I explore how early American settlement workers grappled with the burgeoning concepts of national identity and community as newcomers (from the American countryside and abroad) arrived in the urban slums of the 1890s. Finally, I consider the ways that American settlers concentrated on reforming their local environment rather than following the British settlement model of concentrating on reforming the individual.

The Descent into Whitechapel: Origins of British Settlement Housing

In the summer of 1902, the American novelist Jack London moved to the slum – a destitute district called Whitechapel – in London’s East End. His English friends discouraged the move: “You don’t want to live down there … it is said there are places where a man’s life isn’t worth tu’pence” (London 1903, 17). London needed no further encouragement; as a socialist, he wished to see for himself how modern capitalism had affected living conditions for the English working classes. After buying a disguise (“rags and tatters” and “a pair of brogans which had plainly seen service where coal was shoveled”), London rented a bed in a room with two other men and began his “descent” into the “under-world” (London 1903, 11, 17, 21-23). Over the next few months, he spent his days in workhouses, food lines, and pubs, and his nights – when he was slumming it on the street – looking for a park bench on which he might lay down unbothered by the constables. By summer’s end, London concluded that the population of Whitechapel (who he generally described as indigent, illiterate, alcoholic, hedonistic, and “doomed to rack and ruin” by the age of 25) lived “like swine” in a district that “blots out the
light and laughter, and moulds those it does not kill into sodden and forlorn creatures, uncouth, degraded, and wretched” (London 1903, 36, 162).

London was not the first outsider to move to Whitechapel for the slum experience. Eighteen years earlier, on Christmas Eve 1884, two students from Oxford University took permanent residence in an abandoned building in Whitechapel. While some revisionist settlement historians (Lissak 1989, in particular) argue that the students came to the neighborhood merely for the thrill of living amidst a dangerous community, there is no doubt that they fully expected to “become residents of the neighborhood, and to learn as well as to teach” (Davis 1967, 3). In fact, these two students were the first settlement workers, and the abandoned building in Whitechapel became Toynbee Hall, the first settlement house in the world. Toynbee Hall was named for Arnold Toynbee, an impassioned Oxford University student who had also temporarily moved to the East End in 1875 to work as a visitor for the Charity Organization Society. It was at Oxford that Toynbee, like many of his fellow students, encountered the liberal ideas of Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and particularly the philosopher Thomas Hill Green, who viewed public service as a moral imperative. Toynbee translated these ideas into actions: he moved into the slum and attended workingmen’s clubs, hoping to better understand the working classes. He urged his peers to do the same, to pursue social good over their own gratification, and to give their lives to those less fortunate. Burdened by the “class-consciousness of sin,” Toynbee lectured extensively at Oxford and at workingmen’s clubs on political economy and the social conditions of the poor. After graduating from Oxford in 1878, Toynbee traveled throughout England, visiting working-class towns and giving lectures on Enclosure, the factory system, the Poor Law, socialism, and communal citizenship (Woods
1970). He portrayed the Industrial Revolution as a catastrophic event which had destroyed the mutual bonds of a closely-knit preindustrial society. Toynbee promised workers that the upper-middle class would “give up the life with books and those we love” if the poor promised to “lead a better life” (quoted in Carson 1990, 6; Meacham 1987, 17). Yet, he was also convinced that state intervention was needed to achieve social reform, especially in the areas of housing and education. “Where people are unable to provide a thing for themselves, and that thing is of primary social importance, … the State should interfere and provide it for them,” he argued (quoted in Meacham 1987, 17). Denied state-subsidized housing and education, the poor would never accept their civic responsibility to pursue “a purer and higher life” (quoted in Meacham 1987, 17). Despite his socialist leanings, Toynbee was a staunch believer in capitalism and what we would today refer to as “trickle-down economics.” In March 1883, he agreed to two political lectures at St. Andrew’s Hall, London, wherein he would provide a rebuttal to Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty*. In the first lecture, he argued that his own class was responsible for the growing discontent among the working people, and that “the evil” would not cease until the wealthy “were willing to live for and if necessary to die for” the poor (quotes cited in Anonymous, 1887). It was clear that the lectures excited him greatly; at the end of the second, he fell back in his chair and fainted. He was quickly transported to a friend’s house, where he died at the age of thirty-two (Woods and Kennedy 1922; Meacham 1987; Rose 2001).

Toynbee’s social ideals (and his early death) inspired one of his closest friends, Reverend Samuel Barnett, to name the first settlement house after him. And in fact, it was Barnett, not Toynbee, who was primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the Toynbee Hall “social experiment” (Anonymous, 1887). Barnett and his wife, Henrietta, moved to the East End

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9 Toynbee’s lectures were collected together and published posthumously under the title “Lectures on the Industrial Revolution” (Rose 2001).
of London to fill the vicarage position at St. Jude’s in 1873. By this time, it was widely known that Whitechapel, the center of the largest concentration of working-class Jews and Irish in East London, was a dangerous district with intractable poverty and Dickensian undertones. Moving there would require serious commitment to the community. The Bishop of London urged Reverend and Mrs. Barnett to consider the implications of such a move: “Do not hurry in your decision, it is the worst parish in my diocese, inhabited mainly by a criminal population, and one which has, I fear, been much corrupted by doles” (quoted in Barnett 1909, 10). And in fact, Briggs and Macartney (1984) report that the first act of welcome Reverend Barnett was met with when the couple first moved to Whitechapel was to be mugged – knocked down and have his watch stolen. Yet Reverend Barnett was “spurred rather than daunted” by the community’s reputation, and he accepted the vicarage position. The Barnetts faced a difficult adjustment, chronicled by Henrietta:

The people were dirty and bedraggled, the children neglected, the streets littered and ill-kept, the beer-shops full, the schools shut up. I can recall the realization of the immensity of our task, the fear of failure to reach or help those crowds of people, with vice and woe and lawlessness written across their faces. (Henrietta Barnett, quoted in Meacham 1987, 28)

The Barnetts had not finished unpacking from the move when the first parishioners arrived at their doorstep, begging for food and money. They came “at all hours, on all days, and with every possible pretext.” Worse, Henrietta reported that the community was so confident “that help would be forthcoming that they would allow themselves to get into circumstances of suffering or distress easily foreseen and then send round to demand assistance” (Henrietta Barnett’s emphasis, from Barnett 1909, 11). St. Jude’s refused to distribute doles indiscriminately, frustrating the wretchedly poor community, who had, presumably, received handouts from the
church before the Barnetts arrived. Instead, when a parishioner came to the church beseeching funds, Reverend Barnett sent him to a charity association:

When someone comes begging, I myself see him, talk to him, and send him to the Charity Organization Society, who investigate the case, not so much with a view of finding out the applicant’s deserts as to show us, from his past life, the best means of helping him in the present. A committee, composed of Mr. Hicks, Mrs. Barnett, Mr. Rowland, Mr. Polyblank, and myself, meet on Friday evenings, before which the man is summoned to appear. Perhaps it proves to be the best plan to give him efficient assistance in the shape of a gift, or a loan; perhaps the most helpful way of helping him will be by a stern refusal. In neither case does our watchful care cease. When there has been no interference we have seen success attend our efforts – the family has commenced to save; the children sent to school; the girls to service; but when visitors, no less kind, but less wise, have come in with their doles of sixpences, or their promise of help, we have seen the chains of idleness, carelessness, and despair fall again around the family … Money pauperizes the people. (Barnett, quoted in Stroup 1986, 71)

At times, the community sought revenge against the new parson who denied them financial rewards for attending service. Henrietta reported that “once the Vicarage windows were broken; once we were stoned by an angry crowd, who also hurled curses at us as we walked down a criminal-haunted street and howled out, as a climax of their wrongs, ‘And it’s us as pays ‘em!’” (Barnett 1909, 12)

Within the first year, however, social tensions had begun to dissipate within the parish. Church attendance had risen to 30 in the mornings and 50 – 100 in the evenings, a choir had been organized, and classes were available for both children and adult students in German, Latin, arithmetic, composition, and art. Moreover, there were adult classes and a night school for girls, a literary society (similar to a library), mothers’ meetings and a maternity club, annual art exhibitions, and a penny bank to encourage thrift (Stroup 1986; Meacham 1987). The classes, clubs, and library were intended to serve as decent, moral alternatives to the depravity of the neighborhood’s saloons and brothels. “Throw down the walls,” cried Reverend Barnett, who
hoped to free the local population from its degrading and crippling environment (quoted in Pimlott 1935, 16).

Both Barnettts believed that the university community ought to be doing more for London’s poor. In May 1875, they visited Oxford for “Eights Week,” the annual intercollegiate rowing competition. While there, Reverend Barnett began holding philosophical discussions with students on “the mighty problems of poverty and the people” (Barnett 1909, 13). Soon, he was a regular visitor to the school, engaging students with his “shambling, low-key manner” about class politics and the benefits of social service (Carson 1990, 7). His efforts to expose Oxford undergraduates to the slum earned him the reputation at the university as the “unpaid professor of social philosophy” (Barnett 1909, 14). Reverend Barnett was keenly aware of how ignorant Oxford students were regarding the wretchedness of the slum, and within weeks of their first visit to Oxford, the Barnetts extended an invitation to any Oxford student who wished to see Whitechapel firsthand. Arnold Toynbee was one of many Oxford students who passed through St. Jude’s in the 1870s; indeed, the demand for lodging at the vicarage soon grew so great that other rooms had to be found in the neighborhood (Woods and Kennedy 1922).

In 1877, with the assistance of his friends and associates at Oxford, Reverend Barnett opened a branch of the London University Extension Society in Whitechapel. Although university lectures were not generally held in working-class neighborhoods – many educators believed that the poor were not entitled to higher education – Barnett argued that the working classes needed “the knowledge, the character, the happiness which are the gifts of God to this Age” (Davis 1967, 7). Moreover, he was becoming increasingly politically outspoken. By the early 1880s the Barnetts were publicly advocating state responsibility for poor relief, social
security, improved housing, and public libraries and art galleries. Reverend Barnett called his social welfare idea “practicable socialism” (Meacham 1987, 71-73).

In 1883, Barnett read two papers to a group of students, “Our Great Towns and Social Reform,” and “Settlements of University Men in Great Towns,” in which he considered what a group of motivated university men might accomplish by living in depressed, industrial neighborhoods such as the East End. He argued that traditional forms of charity were patronizing and that missionaries frequently assumed a superior stance to the poor – and that a new approach to the social problems of poverty was needed. Furthermore, Barnett was skeptical whether missions could “carry to the homes of the poor a share of the best gifts now enjoyed in the University.” He proposed a “settlement,” which would be headed by a “chief” who was “qualified to teach” and was “endowed with the enthusiasm of humanity.” This man (a female chief was not considered), joined by other recently graduated (male) students, would help to cultivate a relationship between the university and the community. Men of learning would become neighbors of the working poor. “This,” said Reverend Barnett, “will alleviate the sorrow and misery born of class division and indifference. It will bring classes into relation; it will lead them to know and learn of each other, and those to whom it is given will give” (Barnett, quoted in Stroup 1986, 78). Moreover, a university settlement, inhabited by nondenominational settlers, could provide “a community where the best is most common, where there is no more ignorance and sin – a community in which the poor have all that gives value to wealth, in which beauty, knowledge, and righteousness are nationalized” (Barnett, quoted in Meacham 1987, 33-34).

Certainly, the time was ripe for social reform. The same year Barnett proposed establishing a settlement, 1883, a “remarkably effective” penny pamphlet was published, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, which detailed the miserable poverty of London’s East End
(Briggs and Macartney 1984, 2). *The Bitter Cry* described “heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness” in “the very center of our great cities,” and was immediately given publicity in the media as well as in churches and universities. A few weeks after the publication of the pamphlet, Reverend Montagu Butler urged his congregation to act on behalf of London’s poorest citizens:

> God grant, that it may not startle only, but that it may be read and pondered by thoughtful brains, as well as by feeling hearts … God grant also that here, in this great home of eager thought and enlightened action and generous friendship, the bitter cry of outcast London may never seem intrusive or uninteresting, but that year by year her choicest sons may be arrested by it. (quoted in Briggs and Macartney 1984, 2)

Similarly, the call to service was heard on university campuses; the social reformer Walter Besant described the mood amongst college students in the 1880s:

> Men at the universities, especially those who directly or indirectly felt the influence of T.H. Green, were asking for some other way than that of institutions by which to reach their neighbors … They felt that they were bound to be themselves true to the call which had summoned them to the business and enjoyment of life, and they distrusted machinery … Philanthropy appeared to many to be a sort of mechanical figure beautifully framed by men to do their duty to their brother men. (quoted in Meacham 1987, 32)

Barnett encouraged university men to join the settlement as a means of assuaging the guilt that their privileged backgrounds had imposed upon them. Like other Victorian reformers (Matthew Arnold, Charles Kingsley, and Edward Caird, not to mention Arnold Toynbee), Barnett insisted that the rich had social responsibilities toward the poor. The “intrusive presence of special interest and class” could only be overcome if individuals of all backgrounds could commingle and fraternize (Meacham 1987, 19). Increased association would benefit society in ways that sporadic philanthropy would not:

> The thousands of East London labourers will never be taught by missions; they must be reached one by one; and any one educated man or woman may be the one to show to eyes wearied with gloom something of God’s infinite beauty … One by one is the phrase which best expresses our method, and the “raising of the buried life” is that which best expresses our end. (Barnett, quoted in Meacham 1987, 37-38)
Carson (1990; 2001) argues that Barnett’s ideas about public welfare were part of the rhetoric of social change expressed in politically progressive circles in England as well as the United States in the 1880s. Indeed, Barnett’s plans for settlement house work were progressive, for he advocated going beyond mere contact with the poor (the approach used by church groups anxious to convert the poor and the COS) to sharing experiences with his neighbors and establishing a sense of community.\(^1^0\) Barnett wanted involvement – involvement based on knowledge, not guilt. “The needs of East London are often urged, but they are little understood,” he argued. Thus, Toynbee Hall’s settlement workers were to start by being “friendly to their neighbors … Parties will be frequent, and whatever be the form of entertainment provided, be it books or pictures, lectures or reading, dancing or music, the guests will find that their pleasure lies in intercourse” (Barnett, quoted in Briggs and Macartney 1984, 5). Regular social events which involved Toynbee residents as well as their neighbors would serve to create a bond between the two otherwise separate communities.

Some regarded Barnett’s untiring interest in the East End as short-sighted. Alfred Milner, one of Arnold Toynbee’s closest friends, complained bitterly about the location of Toynbee Hall, when he claimed that Barnett was “simply a professional grabber for the East End. Why the Dickens should the thing be specially for the East End? Any other of the towns that received Toynbee well, that he was fond of, have more claim” (Milner, quoted in Briggs and Macartney 1984, 16). Yet there were good reasons for focusing attention on the East End in the 1880s, just as there had been good reasons for focusing attention on the industrial cities of the

\(^{10}\) Though he had been one of the founders of the charity organization movement in London, Barnett broke with the Charity Organization Society in 1895 because he believed the COS had become administratively top-heavy and fragmentized. In addition, Barnett felt that the leadership “idolized” certain solutions to poverty without taking into account their practicality. While the COS advocated “independence of state relief,” Barnett felt that state participation in social welfare matters was necessary, and that it was not possible for the problem of poverty to be solved on the basis of voluntary initiative alone.
provinces forty years earlier, at the start of England’s industrial revolution. Between 1870 and 1900, the population of Greater London was growing faster by far than the national population as a whole, and the East End was the largest area in London where the negative effects of urbanization were most visible. More and more middle and upper class Londoners were moving to the newly developing suburbs – partially assisted by the Cheap Trains Act of 1883 – and the housing they left behind was overcrowded and deteriorating. Meanwhile, rent fees, contingent on low supply and ever-higher demand, were skyrocketing. In *The People of the Abyss* (1903), Jack London noted the fierce competition for overcrowded, ramshackle housing in the East End:

> It is notorious that here in the Ghetto the houses of the poor are greater profit earners than the mansions of the rich. Not only does the poor worker have to live like a beast, but he pays proportionately more for it than does the rich man for his spacious comfort. A class of housesweaters has been made possible by the competition of the poor for houses… (Houses) are sub-sublet down to the very rooms… Beds are let on the three-relay system – that is, three tenants to a bed, each occupying it eight hours, so that it never grows cold. (London 1903, 131-32)

People like London who were beginning to take notice of the desperate situation in the East End were well aware of the efforts of Reverend Barnett at Toynbee Hall. Charles Booth, who wrote the “groundbreaking work for both English and American social investigation,” *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889 – 1903), was among those individuals who claimed that Barnett inspired his interest in social welfare (Carson 1990, 33; Davis 1967). Booth was a successful businessman from Liverpool whose “lifelong fascination with working-class life” led him to the East End and Toynbee Hall in the mid-1880s (Carson 1990, 33). Booth’s interest was partly fueled by his growing skepticism of the Social Democratic Federation’s (SDF) claim that a quarter of London’s population lived in extreme poverty. In 1886, he gathered a group of assistants who undertook a painstaking street-by-street, house-by-house inquiry into the living
standards of East End households and the industries that supported them. By classifying the population by income and occupation, Booth developed today’s concept of the “poverty line.”

Booth published the results of his investigation in a series of volumes that included detailed maps of the East End districts and color-coded them according to eight “classes.” Yet beyond statistics, the books offered graphic descriptions of the living conditions of the poor: the social problems and physical diseases that plagued them, their improvised household finances, and the unsanitary conditions of their houses and streets. Ultimately, Booth concluded that the SDF’s estimates of poverty were low – that fully 35 percent of the East End was living “at all times more or less in want,” and Whitechapel’s figure was higher – at least 40 percent (Carson 1990, 33). Charles Booth’s survey work in the East End would help to spur the scientific philanthropy movement of the late nineteenth century; indeed, Booth’s investigations inspired settlement workers at Hull House, New York’s University Settlement, Denison House, and South End House to conduct their own social surveys of their communities (Davis 1967).

Booth used Toynbee Hall residents as assistants in the first stages of data collection, and the settlement itself as home base for rechecking facts in the district. Booth, untrained in social science methodology, studied the people of Whitechapel (including the residents of Toynbee) as an anthropologist might, by asking questions – How did people live in the slum? and What did they really want? – and avoiding moral judgments of whatever he observed (Meacham 1987). Booth’s descriptions of the East End were strikingly dissimilar to that of the founder of the Salvation Army, “General” William Booth (no relation), who compared the district’s poor to “African pygmies,” or the Darwinian biologist T.H. Huxley, who compared them to Polynesian savages.11

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Toynbee Hall inspired a settlement movement throughout England. Oxford House, located in Bethnal Green, London, was founded a year after Toynbee, in 1885, and sponsored by Oxford University. Oxford House, however, was a mission as well as a settlement, established by Church of England clergy with the belief that the parish church should be the focal point of the community. Its 1892 Annual Report asserted that “the principles of the Oxford House are, and will continue to be, first and foremost the belief in Christianity as the starting point of all civilizing effort, and second, the recognition of the power and efficiency of community work under religious sanctions” (quoted in Meacham 1987, 79). Oxford House was outspokenly denominational, a feature that contrasted greatly with Toynbee Hall’s secularism (Meacham 1987; Carson 1990).

By 1891, other English settlements had joined the ranks of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House in the effort to bring university students – both men and women – into contact with the poor. Yet programs varied widely. Toynbee Hall emphasized educational development through the university extension program, and residents engaged in social reform through the survey method made popular by Charles Booth. Indeed, when Toynbee Hall was first founded, one of its stated purposes had been “to inquire into the condition of the poor and to consider and advance plans calculated to promote their welfare” (Meacham 1987, 83). Oxford House offered its “teetotum” working men’s clubs – football, cricket, rowing, running, chess, gymnastics, and whist – as well as dramatics and a string band – as alternatives to East End saloons (Ingram 1895, 39). The Wesleyan Methodists’ Bermondsey Settlement (1891) near the South London docks focused its energy on forwarding the settlement movement in the United States. The Congregationalists’ Mansfield House (1890) in Canning Town founded a lodging house for the homeless, and was the first settlement to offer free legal advice to the indigent. Browning Hall
(1890) supported social programs like old-age pension (Carson 1990; Woods and Kennedy 1922).

The English women’s settlements, though separate institutions from the men’s, did largely the same work. The Women’s University Settlement in Southwark was founded in 1887 and was jointly sponsored by the women’s colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. In addition to its own clubs, classes, lectures, and art exhibits, Women’s University Settlement (a nonsectarian organization) participated in the COS, the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, and the London Pupil Teachers’ Association. Cheltenham College Settlement (1889) and Saint Margaret’s House (1892) added church-related work to their activities. Settlement historians such as Rousmaniere (1970) and Carson (1990; 2001) argue that women’s settlements came to outnumber men’s, both in Britain and the United States, because the settlement movement became a vehicle for women seeking a quasi-professional role in public life and an alternative to either marriage or life as a spinster.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Toynbee Hall remained the training ground for bright, young, reform-minded American men and women who, once they returned home, would found and operate their own settlement houses in places like New York, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Indianapolis (see Figure 3.1). The American settlement house movement, however, would diverge from the movement in England in three significant ways. First, most American settlements were nonsectarian, whereas most English settlements were “little more than modified missions,” heavily sponsored and influenced
Figure 3.1. U.S. Settlement Houses, 1886-1905.
and religion differences. This, more than any other factor, led the Americans to modify Barnett’s model for Toynbee Hall. Indeed, Woods and Kennedy (1922, 65) argued that immigration was “a peculiarly American cause of disintegration in neighborly relations” that needed to be understood to be resolved. Third, while Barnett believed that social reform must begin with the individual, American settlement workers viewed the physical and social environment as the starting point for community reconstruction. As Veness (1984, 134) states,

> Where the charity organizations relied on a program of instilling character type that would enable the individual poor to rise above their material resources and environmental circumstance, the (American) settlements considered the impact of a constraining environment on human abilities.

Woods and Kennedy (1922, 64-65) claim that American settlement house founders purposely selected “the district(s) most notorious for extremes of misery and even of crime,” places within which settlement residents could have the “widest reach possible.” These districts were always located in the industrial slum, where “wholesome neighborly relations” were unattainable and “family morale” was, according to the settlers, at a low point. Woods and Kennedy, both headworkers at South End House, believed that industrialism created a sense of impermanence in the urban landscape, since factory workers were “interchangeable” and a “class of nomadic factory hands” moved wherever the job opportunities were best. New arrivals to the city “found and lost jobs with bewildering ease … Lean years, when products and labor glutted the market, limited workers’ choices, deprived them of work, and forced them into unaccustomed activities, adding yet another element of change to the flux of the modern city” (Barth 1980, 18). Intensified industrialization and economic specialization fostered class

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12 While English settlements were funded by churches and religious organizations, American settlements were privately funded, by individuals and charity organizations. Beyond this, little is known – none of the settlement literature has an extensive discussion of American settlement funding. Even the headworker reports give little mention of money in general – other than rent and mortgage costs of the houses themselves.

13 Albert J. Kennedy (1879-1968), a graduate of Harvard University and Rochester Theological School, resided at South End House from 1906-1928. He served as headworker at South End House after Robert Woods died in 1925, but moved to New York City in 1928 to assume the headworker position at University Settlement (Davis 1967).
segregation within the city, and urban slums continued to deteriorate throughout the nineteenth century.

The American settlement movement represented an attempt to resolve some of the slum’s deficiencies by providing free gymnasiums, libraries, employment bureaus, kitchens, laundries, baths, and health clinics, among other services. The movement spread quickly: within ten years after the first American settlement house opened in 1886, the doors opened at fifty-seven other settlement houses, almost entirely in the northeast. Settlements were established in different cities without the founders having any knowledge of or connection to (with exception to those undertaken by the College Settlements Association) other founders. After Neighborhood Guild opened in 1886, there was a three-year gap during which no new American settlements were established. In the fall of 1889, however, two settlements were opened within weeks of each other: Hull House (Chicago) in September and College Settlement (New York City) in October. The next five settlements, East Side House (New York City), Northwestern University Settlement (Chicago), Andover House – South End House (Boston), College Settlement (Philadelphia) and College Settlement – Denison House (Boston) opened within the eighteen-month period between June 1891 and December 1892. In the following section, I describe the processes by which the leaders of the American movement – Stanton Coit, Jane Addams, Vida Scudder, and Robert Woods – developed distinct models for working social experiments in the slum. Each of these founders created spaces that illustrated their personal vision of community in the midst of a rapidly industrializing economy.

**The Movement Crosses the Atlantic: Neighborhood Guild, New York City**

Stanton Coit, a “moody and idealistic” graduate of Amherst College, who learned about Toynbee Hall in the summer of 1885 while taking graduate classes in philosophy at the
University of Berlin, established the first American settlement house (Davis 1967, 8). Eager to see – and perhaps engage in – settlement social work for himself, Coit applied to Reverend Barnett for the “privilege of residence,” and moved into Toynbee in January 1886 after completing his doctorate in Berlin (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 41). He remained a resident of Toynbee Hall until March 1886, when he returned to New York City and set about finding space for a similar undertaking on the Lower East Side, in a tenement “with an especially evil reputation in a neighborhood notorious for crime” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 42). When he opened the new settlement in fall 1886, he called it “Neighborhood Guild,” and described it as an “extension of the family idea of co-operation.” (Coit 1891, 7) His presence puzzled his neighbors, who speculated Coit was “a cast-off son of wealthy parents who had sought the East Side in the last descending stages of want … Only a dime novel plot seemed adequate to explain so unusual a situation” as Coit’s presence within the neighborhood (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 42).

Coit envisioned his guild operating within a larger system of guilds, each containing about 100 families, and serving to promote “all the reforms, domestic, provident or recreative which the social ideal demands” (quoted in Davis 1967, 9). His theory was that “a few men and women of leisure” could mobilize local residents to engage in social regeneration (Coit 1891, 25). Though it was loosely modeled after Toynbee Hall, Coit’s guild emphasized developing local leadership and “abdicating to indigenous leaders as they came forward,” while Barnett’s settlement fostered a sort of paternalistic relationship with the Whitechapel community, recruiting Oxford’s most learned professors to lecture to the people. Indeed, Coit was convinced that the strong leadership required to progress toward social goals was more likely to be found within the community than from without: “A personality of the type needed is perhaps more
common among working people than among the leisured classes. With the latter the conventionalities of society, rather than the opinions and tact of individuals, prescribe conduct” (quoted in Carson 1990, 37).

Coit believed the first step in social reform should be “the conscious organization of the intellectual and moral life” of the community for the “total improvement” of the larger society (Coit 1891, 4). As such, he was highly critical of Toynbee Hall’s vague objectives and “haphazard” methods:

The men at Toynbee Hall believe in having no method or system, but simply in watching their opportunity to do anything good that turns up, and in learning the condition and mental habits of the people. Now to begin without preconceived plans is the only scientific attitude toward social problems; but that on principle one should continue, after years of practical work and observation, to have no formulated methods and principles, is itself a dogma. (Coit 1891, 86-87)

He further questioned whether Toynbee Hall’s young men’s clubs could promote social progress if they offered their members “no purpose except to smoke, box, and play cards” (Carson 1990, 36). Yet despite his severe criticism of the East End settlement, Coit believed an institution like Toynbee Hall might facilitate neighborhood organization, which he viewed as essential to urban civic renaissance (Davis 1967). The notion of neighborhood organization – organization on a community level, within the city – was a new one, but one that social reformers, concerned about the negative impacts of industrialization and immigration on the city, took seriously. Coit credited the “pioneers” of localism in social work, Thomas Chalmers14 and Octavia Hill15 with developing practical alternatives to philanthropic efforts such as the Charity Organization

14 Thomas Chalmers, leader of the Free Church of Scotland and theology/moral philosophy professor at the University of Edinburgh, used his position as minister and professor to bring attention to the needs of the poor, first in Glasgow, and later in Edinburgh. Chalmers insisted on personally visiting every family in his community, and discovered what was most needed were schools. He established small public schools wherein anyone could attend classes in reading, writing, arithmetic, or bookkeeping for a few shillings (Cheyne 1985; Rose 2001).

15 Octavia Hill is best known as a housing reformer. In the early 1860s, Hill purchased several dilapidated tenement buildings in the East End and converted them into flats for the poor. She hired “genteel” ladies and gentlemen to assist her in collecting rent from tenants as well as to act as friends and examples to the poor. She invested incoming rent money into building improvements requested by tenants (Carson 1990).
Society, which he viewed as “tainted with laissez-faire doctrines and extreme individualistic theories” (quoted in Ward 1989, 98).

Coit’s Neighborhood Guild was designed to integrate education, recreation, and relief while also developing the consciousness of the community’s needs and interdependence. Like Barnett, Coit believed that social regeneration was possible, but would occur on an individual level. He imagined a sort of contagion diffusion taking place within the city:

The way to save and prevent is often by educating the intellect, and cultivating the taste of the person in danger or already fallen; and, the superior development of one member of a family or of a circle of friends may prove the social salvation of all the rest. (Coit 1891, 11-12)

It is likely that Coit did not anticipate “educating the intellect” of the youngest members of the community first, but as Davis (1967) asserted, the neighborhood most needed kindergarten classes and after-school childcare. A few months after opening its doors, Neighborhood Guild began holding kindergarten classes from morning until 3:00 pm, when classrooms emptied out and the study, library, and rooftop playground were filled with children of all ages (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 43). The kindergarten, a new approach to primary education, served the dual purpose of educating and socializing young children while allowing mothers who worked all day an alternative to leaving their children at home alone. Kindergartens, first brought to the United States by German liberals after the Revolution of 1848, encouraged the development of the entire personality of the child through art, music, and creative play. Settlement workers used the same method – “the Froebel method” – in adult education classes (Davis 1967).

Within the first year of operation, Coit organized five other clubs for young people (“each representing enterprise new and strange beyond present-day possibilities of conception”) at Neighborhood Guild, including the Lady Belvedere Club (for young women between the ages of 16 – 22), the Order, Improvement, and Friendship Club (for young men around the age of 18),
and a club for girls between the ages of 10 and 14 (Coit 1891). The formation of social clubs kept juvenile delinquency in check; Coit believed that as members of a club, rebellious teenagers of both genders would be “coerced” into good behavior “by the most telling force members know, the publicly expressed judgment of a group of their peers.” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 75) Moreover, club membership ensured exposure to individuals of different nationalities, religions, and educational backgrounds. A Legal Aid Society and a loan office were open all day, and trade unions often met at the Guild at night. In addition, the settlement’s public baths were quite popular, being the first in the city (Trolander 1987; Davis 1967).

Coit left Neighborhood Guild within two years of its establishment, leaving the settlement movement as well. He moved to England to become a lecturer for the South Place Ethical Society, and the University Settlement absorbed the Guild in 1891. Coit’s assistant, Charles B. Stover, took control of the settlement house for the next twenty years (Woods and Kennedy, 1922).

Like other American students traveling through London during the 1880s, Coit was heavily influenced by his experience with the Barnettts at Toynbee Hall (Coit 1891). To American students traveling through London in the 1880s, Toynbee Hall represented the new “religion of humanity” and the belief that social science could resolve the problems of urban industrial society. Jane Addams, the founder of the second settlement house in the United States, said of Toynbee: “It is so free from ‘professional doing good,’ so unaffectedly sincere and so productive of good results in its classes and libraries so that it seems perfectly ideal” (quoted in Carson 1990, 48). Addams visited Toynbee Hall in 1888, but had decided to do something to promote community awareness and social justice long before traveling to England. Addams, the founder of Hull House in Chicago, had a privileged background, yet her Quaker father
emphasized the importance of humility; when around her less-privileged Sunday School classmates, Jane was instructed to wear her older clothes so as not to appear ostentatious. In *Twenty Years at Hull House* (Addams 1910), Addams relates a sentimental story from her childhood about the instant when she decided that “when I grew up, I should, of course, have a large house, but it would not be built among the other large houses, but right in the midst of horrid little houses like these” (Addams 1910, 3-5). After graduating from Rockford College in 1881, Jane Addams assumed she would pursue a career in medicine. A semester into medical school, however, she was diagnosed with a spinal disease for which her doctor suggested an extended tour through Europe. This tour, taken in several segments between 1883-88, brought Addams and a college friend, Ellen Gates Starr, through Toynbee Hall, where she first realized that she could serve the poor in other ways than “practicing medicine upon them” (Addams 1910, 66). Addams had long struggled to find her place in society; in *Twenty Years at Hull House*, she wrote at length about her “nervous depression” and her feelings of futility and misdirected energy in the years following college (Addams 1910, 66). Addams was innately practical; her Quaker upbringing had instilled in her a strong sense of thrift, and she hated the possibility of wasting anything, let alone a college education. Yet determining what she might be qualified to do with her liberal arts education proved frustrating until she returned to Chicago in January 1889 and began her search for a building in which she could establish a settlement house. Some scoffed at the idea – the Scottish-born philosopher and member of the St. Louis Hegelians, Thomas Davidson (1840-1900), dismissed Addams’ idea as “one of those unnatural attempts to understand life through cooperative living” (quoted in Addams 1910, 90).16

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16 Davidson must have reconsidered his initial denunciation of settlement houses, since he lectured at Educational Alliance settlement on Manhattan’s Lower East Side during the winter months of 1888 – 1890 (referenced on website www.thoemmes.com/American/hegelian_intro.htm, run by the Thoemme Continuum).
Despite some criticism (and much skepticism), Addams and Ellen Gates Starr continued with their plan to open a settlement, and Hull House, situated between an undertaker’s business and a saloon in a crowded working class neighborhood of Italians, Greeks, Irish, Russian Jews, and Germans, opened in September 1889. The house itself had been built in 1856 for Charles J. Hull, an early Chicago real estate developer and philanthropist. While “Hull’s House” was designed to be an elegant rural homestead, it also functioned as a hospital, a factory, an apartment house, an office building, and a furniture store between 1856 and 1889. For Addams, the location was the key – she was convinced that settling in the middle of immigrant colonies (“which so easily isolate themselves in American cities”) would benefit the city regardless of the outcome (Addams 1917, 90).

Hull House represented much more than a workplace to Addams, and to her generation. For her, the settlement represented an end to “nearly overwhelming personal distress” and a beginning of a life of service on behalf of others (Elshtain 2002, xxiv). Addams was quite frank about the fact that the settlement house movement served restless, idealistic college-educated young men and women as much as the neighborhood families. More than any other settlement reformer, she provided a generation of college-educated women with a sense of social obligation. “There is a heritage of noble obligation which young people accept and long to perpetuate,” she said. “The desire for action, the wish to right wrongs and alleviate suffering haunts them daily.” (Addams, quoted in Crocker 1992, 20). While men could pursue this call to service in many ways in a range of fields, women were limited. In the 1880s, female college graduates (the first generation of college-educated women) had two choices: they could either go into teaching or marry. Many women, like Jane Addams, were not interested in either as a permanent vocation; what they sought was some way they could be useful to society. Settlement work offered not
only an occupation, but also a substitute for traditional family life, one that was similar to the college dormitory they had just left. The semi-protected, respectable environment of the settlement house provided a solution to many single women’s personal and occupational dilemmas. Settlement work also afforded women an opportunity to affect public policy before they were given suffrage (Davis 1967).

Woods and Kennedy, headworkers of South End House in Boston, stated that Addams and Starr “more consciously than any other prime movers of the settlement in America, set out definitely to share with their neighbors both their choicest possessions and the ripest results of their intellectual training” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 47). Certainly, Hull House residents, led by Addams, Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, and Alice Hamilton, used their political savvy and influence to confront serious social problems in their neighborhood and beyond. They initiated Chicago’s first investigations of truancy, sanitation, typhoid fever, cocaine use, tuberculosis, infant mortality, midwifery, and children’s literacy. In addition, Hull House opened the city’s first public baths, first public playground, first public gymnasium, first public swimming pool, and first free art exhibits. Clearly, Addams considered local reform one of Hull House’s primary responsibilities to the community; as early as 1891, she argued in a personal letter to a Miss Coman at Denison House that “the most important aspect of settlement work is the neighborhood aspect and the arousing of the responsibility of good citizenship. I should consider education and didactic work secondary” (Cheever 1892, 6). Of course, education was not forgotten; within the first year, kindergarten classes were held daily, and within the first few years instruction was offered in art history, chemistry, algebra, geometry, physics, parliamentary law, English (with separate classes in Emerson, Shakespeare, Dante, and the *Odyssey*), Italian, German, French, Latin, dancing, and gymnastics (Moore 1897, 629).
Vida D. Scudder, the founder of the College Settlement Association, and later, Denison House in the South End of Boston, grew up in the city’s fashionable Back Bay district. She hailed from a wealthy, intellectual family; her maternal uncle edited *Atlantic Monthly*, and she attended Boston’s well-regarded Girl’s Latin School, where she studied the classics. Scudder first learned of Toynbee Hall while doing postgraduate work at Oxford in 1885. The luxury of Oxford juxtaposed with the overwhelming poverty of Whitechapel was disquieting and somewhat embarrassing to Scudder, who wrote, “Ruskin and the rich delights of the place, forced me to realize for the first time the plethora of privilege in which my lot had been cast” (quoted in Carson 1990, 40). Ruskin’s political activism impressed Scudder; he actively supported a social welfare system and advocated better housing for the poor. Two years after her initial exposure to Toynbee Hall, Scudder met with a group of Smith College graduates for a college reunion, and together, they decided to found a settlement. This, she felt, would serve “to rouse the coming generations to know and feel that justice could only be won at cost of a tremendous crusade of social upheaval” (quoted in Davis 1967, 11). College-educated women from Wellesley, Vassar, Smith, Bryn Mawr, and Radcliffe joined the cause, and together they formed the College Settlements Association (CSA). In 1889, Scudder helped to open the first CSA house, College Settlement, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (on Rivington Street) not far from Neighborhood Guild. Locals were not sure how to receive the women; Davis (1967, 11) reports that in the early days of College Settlement, a policeman stopped in at the house to inform them that if they would contribute to his income, he would not bother them further. A New York newspaper story reported “Seven Lilies have been dropped in the mud, and the mud does not seem particularly pleased” (in Davis 1967, 11).

17 Clara French, Mary H. Mather, Helen C. Rand, Jane E. Robbins, and Jean Fine. Robbins, a physician, and Fine were early volunteers at Neighborhood Guild prior to the establishment of College Settlement.
Originally, the founders of College Settlement planned to devote all resources to the needs of girls and women who lived in their community. During the first year, residents reclaimed the girls’ clubs which they had organized at Neighborhood Guild, installed two baths for women and children, and opened a library. Somewhat grudgingly, they also organized three boys’ clubs. A second CSA house was opened in Philadelphia in early 1892, and a third in Boston (also called Denison House) in December of 1892 (Woods and Kennedy 1922).

The six Denison House settlers moved into a neighborhood that, like others in Boston, was changing rapidly with the influx of new immigrants from Italy, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Armenia. Yet, there still remained a large Irish population in the South Cove, and upon their arrival in the neighborhood, Denison House residents called on the local Catholic priest to explain their plans for the community. Father Billings, a convert from Methodism, was highly suspicious of the settlers’ motivations, and objected to their proposed clubs and lending library, both of which he considered irreligious. One Denison resident, Helen Cheever, begged the priest to give them a year to make good: “Wait and see … let us try our own plans, and watch results” (Cheever 1892, 4; Cheever 1893).

Three months later (March 1893), Father Billings arrived at Denison House fuming; accusing the settlers of promoting clubs for young people, he said he had been forced to speak against the settlers in church: “I have had to speak against you publicly and warn the children not to come near your house. I don’t believe much in the influence of gentleness and suavity on these people … You ought not to have children in your house, and I have forbidden any to come.” Cheever protested, saying the settlement residents lacked his authority to enter their neighbors’ houses, so that making friends with the children (through clubs and entertainment) was vital – it would bring in the parents of the children as well: “Our ultimate object is to help
the home, only we must reach the same result by different means … Perhaps we can arrange to see them in their own houses?” Father Billings immediately rejected that idea: “Impossible, you talk like an innocent child. I have told you what would help me, to teach cooking and assist thrift in the homes.” Whereupon Cheever retorted,

Your people speak highly of your zeal and devotion … I should think you would welcome every good influence … We played jack straws here with one boy, and suggested that he make some for himself. After that, he spent hours at home whittling, having found a reason for staying in – we should like to bring that about in many homes. (Cheever 1893, 7)

Not surprisingly, Father Billings remained unconvinced: “Well, Miss Cheever, you make the fatal mistake of teaching the children disrespect for their parents every time you try to influence them directly … I prefer bad home influence to outside influence” (Cheever 1893, 7).

Whether Father Billings retracted his disapproval of Denison House or not is unclear – there is no further mention of the priest in the annual reports. Carson (1990, 63) suggests Father Billings’ defensive behavior was common amongst neighborhood priests who “were themselves threatened by the gentle, suave methods of the largely Protestant, middle-class philanthropies and public agencies threatening the church’s ascendancy over its communicants.” Regardless of Father Billings’ complaints, the Denison settlement workers continued to interact with the community, and beginning the first year, held classes in cooking, art, singing, literature, and “Shakespeare reading,” opened a library, and a Penny Provident Bank. Vida Scudder and Helena Dudley organized a Social Science Club in 1893, and for a time, 40-50 working-class individuals, businesspeople, professionals, and students met weekly to hear lectures and discussions on such topics as “The Ethics of Trade Unions” or “German Socialism” (Dudley 1893; Dudley 1894; Davis 1967, 41). Like the College Settlement in New York City, however, it was clear that the Denson residents’ attention (and program) was focused on the girls and
women of the neighborhood. In 1896, there were three clubs and two classes for boys and young men on the weekly schedule, while there were twice that many available to girls and young women at the settlement.18

Robert Woods, founder and headworker of Andover House (renamed South End House in 1895) in the South End of Boston, was handpicked by his professor at Andover Seminary to visit and observe Toynbee Hall upon his graduation from the seminary in 1890: “Professor (William J.) Tucker has a plan for me to go to England to look up social questions and give some lectures to the seminary on my return” (Woods, from letter to his mother, in Woods 1929, 32). Indeed, Tucker’s plan was for Woods to assess the impact of Toynbee on the neighborhood and determine whether a similar project was possible in Boston. Awarded a six-month residence at Toynbee Hall, and “armed with some little brown notebooks,” Woods set about his assigned task to study the “practical social work” of the settlement (Woods 1929, 33-36).

Woods found the Whitechapel district gloomy, but somewhat familiar:

The faces of the poor have the familiar Anglo-Saxon lineaments. One of the unsuspected reasons for the home feeling which all intelligent Americans experience in London is that there they are able to see themselves in tatters. It is this fact especially which causes the average American to return even from a carriage ride in the East End with some new care for the men and women who have to pass their lives in a great city’s closely crowded quarters. (letter from Woods to Tucker, in Woods 1929, 35)

However, he also found the fraternal atmosphere of Toynbee Hall comfortable, for it reminded him of his college experiences at Andover. He attended Fabian Society lectures, met with members of the Salvation Army, spoke with professors at Cambridge and Oxford and determined that English social movements – including the settlement movement – “have beyond question

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18 For boys, there was a Jewish Club, a Franklin Club, and a Young Massachusetts Club. For young men, there was an English literature class and a Young Men’s class. For girls, there were French and gymnastics classes, and a sewing club, a Kitchen Garden Club, and a Fortnightly Club. For young women, there were classes in geography, grammar, writing, and cooking, and a Young Mother’s Club. Classes open to anyone included Dante, English literature, English language, American history, Trade Unions, and art. Clubs included the Debate Club, the Social Science Club, and the Stamp Savings Club (Dudley 1896).
drawn out and strengthened the higher intellectual and moral forces of English society.” After six months of study and observation, Woods decided that American society could benefit from English theories of social democracy:

The American aristocracy is more powerful and more dangerous than the English. Our class system is not less cruel for having its boundaries less clearly marked. And it can no longer be taken for granted that workingmen are better off in the United States than in England … We are beginning to see that the problem of lower New York is in some respects even more serious than the problem of East London. (letter from Woods to Tucker, in Woods 1929, 43)

In the spring of 1891, six months after he had returned from England, Woods wrote a letter to one of the Toynbee Hall residents, mentioning the plans for a settlement in Boston: “We are going to start an Andover House in Boston in the fall. It will be mainly social in its work, but we hope after awhile to have a platform where we can talk our heresies a little” (in Woods 1929, 41). Tucker named 26-year old Woods the head resident, since Woods possessed “some knowledge of the organized activities of London settlements,” and on January 1, 1892, Woods and three other men took residence in the South End, “a neighborhood of social destitution and want” (Woods 1891, 1).

The primary goal of the first Andover House settlers was to “create some real sense of brotherhood,” and “work from within the community for its social development.” While Woods argued that the “whole aim and motive” was religious, the “method” was to be “educational rather than evangelistic.” Education began with the children: by the end of the first year, over 100 boys, ranging in age from 10-18, joined clubs at the settlement, where they played games, read books, and sang songs. Though the boys’ clubs featured most prominently in the settlers’ early educational work, twenty-five girls also met at Andover House once weekly for group

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19 The “whole aim and motive” for establishing a settlement may have been religious for Woods, but most other American settlement workers deemed religion to be more a set of guiding principles or a set of mores that influenced their decision to enter social service.
sewing and conversation (Woods 1891, 5). Within five years kindergartens were established, a circulating library opened, and a variety of classes and clubs met weekly at the settlement (Woods 1896).

In the next sections, I discuss the two seminal ways in which the American settlement movement diverged from the British model: the settlers’ approach to immigrants in their neighborhood and their approach to localized community reform.

**Settlements and Immigration**

Unlike British settlement workers in London, settlement workers arriving in American slums in the late nineteenth century confronted a new urban reality: their neighborhoods consisted mainly of immigrants, and every year, this majority proportion increased. For this reason, American settlement workers had to consider issues like nationalism, national identity, American culture, and the place immigrants and their cultural activities should occupy in American society ten to twenty years before the Americanization movement gained large-scale popular and political attention. And in fact, immigration was a national political issue in the 1880s – in 1882, Congress passed two separate immigration laws – first, the Chinese Exclusion Act, which provided a moratorium on Chinese laborers for ten years, and second, a general immigration act which denied entrance to the United States to those individuals likely to become a public charge, including convicts and the mentally ill (Salins 1997; Anderson 1987).

Of course, during this period, memories from the war for the Union were still fresh, and while geographical sectionalism was no longer imminent, class and especially national/ethnic segregation seemed possible. Further, immigrants, especially those arriving after 1880, were viewed with suspicion and fear. Ward (1971) explains some of the demographic reasons for the heightened nativist sentiments: prior to 1880, approximately 85 percent of all immigrants came
from the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany, and British America. After 1880, the source areas of American immigrants changed considerably. The number of new arrivals from Italy and the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires increased steadily until by 1896 they accounted for over half of the total immigration (see Table 3.1).


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¹ Continental European boundaries prior to 1919 settlement.

Americans developed methods of differentiating between the immigrants who arrived before 1880 (and were predominantly English or German speaking) and those who arrived after 1880 (and were primarily Russian, Austro-Hungarian, or Italian). Some nativists believed that the “new immigrants,” so obviously different from the earlier arrivals in language and (often) religious persuasion, represented a potential menace to American homogeneity and national solidarity (Lissak 1989). Presbyterian and Congregationalist clergy who derived their faith and culture from the Puritans of colonial New England played a key role in fomenting anti-immigration sentiment. Beginning in the 1830s and continuing through the late nineteenth century, these ministers warned their congregations that unchecked immigration threatened the American way of life. This perceived “way of life” was framed within the vision of a Protestant

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20 According to Ward (1971), Canada was referred to as “British America” until 1867, and includes Newfoundland.
American republic as a democratic model for the world.\textsuperscript{21} The Roman Catholic “system of ignorance, priestcraft, and superstition” threatened this vision (in Billington 1938, 10). Many worried that Catholics could “take over” the country, leaving the pope in charge of the nation and destroying American political and religious liberty at the same time. Samuel F.B. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, sincerely believed there was a Catholic plot to destroy the United States; in 1835, he urged his fellow American citizens not to be any longer deceived by the pensioned Jesuits, who have surrounded your press, are now using it all over the country to stifle the cries of danger, and lull your fears by attributing your alarm to a false cause … To your posts! … Fly to protect the vulnerable places of your Constitution and Laws. Place your guards; you will need them, and quickly too. And first, shut your gates. (Morse 1835, in Dinnerstein and Reimers 1982, 28)

In the 1840s, the first major nativist political party emerged – the American party. The party platform for 1845 read ominously:

It is an incontrovertible truth that the civil institutions of the United States of America … now stand in imminent peril from the rapid and enormous increase of the body of residents of foreign birth, imbued with foreign feelings, and of an ignorant and immoral character … [Because of] the suicidal policy of these United States … a large proportion of the foreign body of citizens and voters now constitutes a representation of the worst and most degraded of the European population – victims of social oppression or personal vices, utterly divested, by ignorance or crime, of the moral and intellectual requisites for political self-government. The mass of foreign voters … will leave the Native citizens a minority in their own land! (in Salins 1997, 19)

The organization, both anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic, functioned somewhat like a secretive fraternal order; when asked about the organization, members were instructed to say “I know nothing.” The party, later called the Know-Nothings, was tremendously popular, and through the early 1850s, carried some state and local elections. George Tindall and David Shi (1997) allege that the Know-Nothings could not gather political strength on a national scale, and failed to effect anti-immigration legislation. Further, the movement lost momentum by the end of the 1850s when another issue reached the political forefront: slavery.

\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, Thomas Jefferson called America “the world’s best hope” for true democracy (in Salins 1997, 20).
Before the Civil War, then, the most important source of conflict between native-born Americans and immigrants was religion. Or rather, the key battles were fought over American objections to Roman Catholics. After the war, many groups were stereotyped in negative terms. The Italians were one of the most despised groups: old-stock Americans viewed them as ignorant criminals (“wops”) and in the south, many were forced to attend all-black schools (Kinzer 1964; Salins 1997). Popular media agreed with the disparagement: in 1875, the *New York Times* reported that it was “perhaps hopeless to think of civilizing [Italians], or keeping them in order, except by the arm of the law” (in Dinnerstein and Reimers 1982, 36).

Other groups experienced similar prejudice. Anti-Chinese sentiment rose in the 1870s (after the transcontinental railroad was completed), with the belief that there were vast cultural and moral differences between Caucasians and Asians. The Chinese were accused of running prostitution rings, opium dens, and corrupt gaming rooms. Beginning in California, nativist groups pressured politicians to ban the Chinese from entering the United States. In 1877, one such nativist spoke before Congress of the need to restrict immigration:

> The burden of our accusation against them is that they come in conflict with our labor interests; they can never assimilate with us; that they are a perpetual unchanging, and unchangeable alien element that can never become homogenous; that their civilization is demoralizing and degrading to our people. (in Dinnerstein and Reimers 1982, 50)

The geographer Kay Anderson (1987) notes that state officials in Canada, too, ascribed racist categories to the Chinese arriving in Vancouver in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Canadian officials, like the Americans, worried that the Chinese could present a source of immoral contagion – even if were segregated into ethnic ghettos:

> They come from southern China … with customs, habits and modes of life fixed and unalterable, resulting from an ancient and effete civilization. They form, on their arrival, a community within a community, separate and apart, a foreign substance within but not

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22 For more information on Chinese prejudice and how the state (Canada) played a role in the social construction of place (Chinatown), see Anderson (1987) and Kobayashi (1990).
of our body politic, with no love for our laws of institutions; a people that cannot assimilate and become an integral part of our race and nation. With their habits of overcrowding, and an utter disregard for all sanitary laws, they are a continual menace to health. From a moral and social point of view, living as they do without home life, schools or churches, and so nearly approaching a servile class, their effect on the rest of the community is bad. (Canadian Royal Commissioners Clute, Munn, and Foley, 1902, cited in Anderson 1987, 580)

The fear of a Chinese invasion into Canada was so great that in 1903 Ottawa officials imposed a $500 head tax on Chinese immigrants (Anderson 1987).

Indeed, the American (and Canadian) xenophobia of the 1870s – 1900s was directed toward one goal: immigration restriction. Organizations such as the American Protective Association, formed in Iowa in 1887, and the Immigration Restriction League, formed in Boston in 1894, called for drastic immigration limitations at the federal level. In 1896, Congress passed a bill which required all immigrants over the age of 16 to be literate in some language. Although not aimed at any particular group, the message behind the bill was clear: northern and western Europeans, who were more likely to be literate, were welcome; southern and eastern Europeans and Chinese, who were less likely to be literate, were not. The bill was soon vetoed by president Grover Cleveland, who insisted that the United States ought to remain a refuge for oppressed individuals everywhere. Moreover, Cleveland argued that the assumption that the “new” immigrants were less desirable than the “old” was ridiculous: “It is said that the quality of recent immigration is undesirable. The time is quite within recent memory when the same thing was said of immigrants, who, with their descendants, are now numbered among our best citizens.” (quoted in Dinnerstein and Reimers 1982, 57) Ultimately, although the 1882 immigration laws restricted the Chinese and certain other classes of immigrants, the flow of immigration traffic was unaffected by the nativist groups of the late nineteenth century.
Not surprisingly, the settlement workers’ perspectives toward immigrants fell across a wide spectrum. Some settlement workers, such as Edith and Grace Abbott, Jane Addams, and Florence Kelley at Hull House, Lillian Wald at Henry Street Settlement in New York City, and Vida Scudder at Denison House openly embraced cultural pluralism and encouraged new immigrants to celebrate their national heritage through festivals and other events. Other settlement workers shared the fears and racist stereotypes of their fellow Americans toward new immigrants. In a chapter titled “The Invading Host” in *Americans in Process*, a South End House study of 1902, Jews were characterized as miserly workaholics, Italians as dirty liars, Syrians as deceitful and “next to the Chinese, who can never be in any real sense Americans, they are the most foreign of all foreigners” (Busheé 1902, 43). Carson (1990, 102), however, asserts that for the most part, settlement workers were “less overly condescending in their discourse” about immigrants than most other native-born Americans.

While settlement leaders and residents never reached a consensus on the place “new immigrants” and their cultures should play in American society, they were on the forefront of designing an educational program for citizenship, which differed from settlement to settlement. Most settlements offered classes in English, civics, and American history. But they also refined their programs over time to reflect their changing attitudes toward immigrants and Americanization.

Warner (1962, x) contends Boston’s early settlement workers tried to define an “American standard of living” for the new arrivals, which included a minimum of food, clothing, and shelter that would “allow a person the level of decency and dignity then commonly accepted

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23 In 1902, Addams founded the Hull House Labor Museum, which had as its centerpiece a working exhibit of seven modes of spinning and weaving. The museum provided meaningful employment to local men and women and permitted them to “reconnect with the second generation of immigrants, who were beginning to scorn the (traditional) ways of their parents” (Carson 2001, 39).
by the majority of society.” Robert Woods, headworker at South End House, insisted that this standard of living needed to be extended to second- and third-generation immigrants, those individuals who had not yet been exposed to “persons who express through their manners and attitudes, and in the conditions under which they live, the national standard,” e.g., settlement workers. This standard was also reflected in the ways the settlers tried to affect their environment through neighborhood improvement. In the following section, I briefly review the methods by which the earliest settlement workers approached community reform, and how these methods differed from the English settlement model, represented by Toynbee Hall.

**Settlements and the Nineteenth-Century Neighborhood**

Geography played a key role in the settlement movement, since American settlement workers viewed the physical and social environment as the starting point for community reconstruction. They saw individuals as integrally connected with a larger entity, the neighborhood, and they believed that all residents should help care for their communities. This focus on localism and local responsibility was progressive in the late nineteenth century, and reinforced slum exposes like Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* and *The Children of the Poor* which suggested the need for neighborhood amenities like playgrounds, public parks, and libraries as well as the reform of sanitation and housing laws (Riis 1890, 1892).

Central to the movement’s tenets was the concept of residence within a community. This concept was actually taken directly from Samuel Barnett’s model of an English settlement. Barnett insisted that settlers could bridge the class divide by setting up house in a working class neighborhood. Albert Kennedy, headworker of South End House after Robert Woods died, wrote that residence in a neighborhood “puts us into a position to assess every aspect of living from pre-natal care to dotage, to get into the family as an operating unit and into society also as
an operating unit” (Kennedy 1958, quoted in Carson 2001). While none of the settlement workers specified how large or small this “neighborhood” should be, it was implied that a neighborhood would be a place where everyone knew everyone else and where all regular daily and weekly activities – school, shopping, and settlement clubs and classes – could be found. As residents of the neighborhood, American settlers worked to bring badly needed services and amenities to the slum – maternal and infant health care, better sanitation, child care, employment searches, playgrounds, and libraries – and although these services and amenities reflected their own middle-class values and priorities, they still provided local health care and recreational opportunities that otherwise would not have existed.

American settlement workers – especially Stanton Coit, Robert Woods, Albert Kennedy, Mary Simkhovitch, and Jane Robbins – thought the urban neighborhood should imitate the best aspects of small-town living, in that it should offer residents a sense of rootedness and a sense of place in an otherwise chaotic, disconnected, impersonal society. This, too, was adapted from the British model, only the British settlement was inspired by the rural parish rather than the small town. When he accepted the job in Whitechapel, Barnett’s task was to revive a defunct East End parish, St. Jude’s. Yet the similarities in terms of community reform ended there. Barnett believed the settlement could best serve the community through scientific research and educational programs. Indeed, part of Barnett’s initial vision placed the settlement as the core of an east London “working man’s university” (Meacham 1987). Barnett hoped that Toynbee’s classes (the Political Economy class, in particular) might train “workingmen … to take part in civic movements on behalf of the community” (Henderson 1899, 34). Unlike American settlement founders, then, Barnett did not actively encourage settlement residents to get involved in community social reform. Instead, he considered the settlers’ primary responsibilities to be
residing amongst the poor and disseminating valuable knowledge. This was the crux of his “practicable socialism” agenda. By providing education and examples of improved social status, Barnett hoped that Toynbee Hall might inspire locals to pursue social reform themselves. In this way, Barnett and his staff focused their attention on reforming individuals in the community rather than the neighborhood itself (Barnett 1898).

In the next chapter, I examine the specific goals of Robert Woods in founding South End House. I then consider the ways in which the settlement workers developed a broad array of programs and services to address the community’s social ills and dearth of recreational spaces. Finally, I discuss the differences between the settlement ideal as perceived by Robert Woods in Boston and Samuel Barnett in London.
CHAPTER IV

SOUTH END HOUSE: A MODEL OF POSSIBILISM AND PERMEATION

The South End House stands at the heart of the great central working-class district of Boston ... Every year brings more factories, long rows of tenement houses, and denser crowds of people. The region more and more clearly has the marks of those vast isolated “cities of the poor” which grow along with the growth of all great centers of population – showing the same monotonous round of working-class experience, varied here and there by aspects of glaring picturesqueness set over a background of tragedy and despair. (Woods 1896, 6)

Two men – an ambitious grad student and a liberal theologian who later became the 9th President of Dartmouth College – established the South End House in 1891. It was the fourth settlement in the United States, and the result of a long social awakening of its longest headworker and founder, Robert Archey Woods. Woods hailed from Pittsburgh, the son of a Scottish-Irish father and second-generation Irish mother, both devout Presbyterians. In 1881, at the urging of one of his high school teachers, Woods left Pittsburgh for Amherst College, in Amherst, Massachusetts. He was 16. After college, Woods enrolled in graduate studies at Andover Seminary and took courses in constitutional history, political economy and socialism, and Biblical theology. He immediately fell under the spell of a state socialist clergymen-professor, William Jewett Tucker. Tucker, along with Francis A. Walker of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Francis Greenwood Peabody of Harvard, and George Hodges of the Cambridge Episcopal Theological School helped found the American Economic Association in 1885. In the 1880s, his social economics classes – which included units on the distribution of wealth, income tax, eight-hour work days, and Arnold Toynbee’s Industrial Revolution – were

24 South End House was originally named Andover House; the name was changed in 1895 in part to distance it from any religious affiliation with Andover Theological Seminary.
25 Records of, about, and by Robert Archey Woods are abundant, partly because he was a voracious writer, and partly because his wife, Eleanor H. Bush Woods (the great-great-aunt of George W. Bush) permitted public access to his affects after he died in 1925. All South End House reports, published surveys, newspaper articles, photos, maps, and correspondence are in the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota.
quite popular among the Andover students who otherwise took courses in “dry-as-dust church history, homiletics, Hebrew grammar, and textual exigesis” (Mann 1954, 104).

Dr. Tucker felt strongly about advising his students to enter the ministry, though not to serve through traditional means. Instead, Tucker recognized (as Canon Barnett did in London) that Christian teachings needed to be adjusted to answer new questions on morality, and new social issues made complicated by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. A previous generation, he argued,

Saw the religious peril of materialism, but not the religious opportunity for the humanizing of material forces … The fundamental idea [of the Church] was still that of charity, and the whole trend of events was showing the insufficiency of the idea for social reform and advance. The greatest social grievance came from those who, if in need of charity, did not want it – the vast army of unskilled labor. Their grievance, as it became understood, changed the whole problem from that of charity to that of economic justice. (Tucker 1917, quoted in Woods 1929, 25)

Tucker told this generation of students, the students of the 1880s, that traditional forms of charity were ineffectual, and that policy reform was needed to achieve “economic justice” on behalf of the poor. In Tucker’s lectures, he argued that there was a need to eliminate poverty, child labor, tenement housing, and class stratification – and described the social inequalities of Boston’s slums in detail (Woods 1929, 26). By spring 1890, Andover had designated his social economics course a regular elective, and he began talking about establishing a settlement in Boston. He felt that the promise of the settlement idea lay in its simplicity:

It departed as far as possible from the institutional ideas and methods, and laid the emphasis altogether upon the use of personality. Its aim was the identification of a group of University men with the life of people in a poor neighborhood where they would take up their residence. First they were to know their neighbors and their conditions and then to initiate and encourage methods for mutual service in behalf of the neighborhood. (Tucker 1917, quoted in Woods 1929, 30)

In May 1891, Tucker sent Woods to England to study Toynbee Hall, where Woods observed and recorded the new “social science.” Woods’ (1892) English Social Movements was
the first systematic review of settlement houses in the United States. In it, he told Americans that England had already recognized the severity of the poverty and class stratification that accompanied industrialization, and was taking strides to rectify the situation at the local level. London businessmen were building model tenements in the slums, and London social scientists were taking exhaustive socio-economic surveys of the worst neighborhoods. Although working conditions had been better in the United States in the past, now English workers had access to trade unions, cooperative stores, eight-hour days, and university extension courses (Mann 1954).

Moreover, Woods reported that the future looked bright for England: “England is well prepared for the working out of the national society of the future. The strength and vitality that has been the means of conquering so much of the world is gradually proving itself able to throw off internal evil” (from Woods 1892b, in Woods 1929, 43). As he praised the progressiveness of English “social democracy,” Woods condemned American laissez-faire economics – and the superior attitude of American academics toward Old World society:

I may, however, express my increasing conviction of the substantial emptiness of the kind of criticism made upon the constitution of English society which is intended to be an indirect felicitation of ourselves over our own social conditions. The American aristocracy is more powerful and more dangerous than the English. Our class system is not less cruel for having its boundaries less clearly marked. … It will be of great importance that we watch closely the remarkable progress England is making in these ways. (from Woods 1892, in Woods 1929, 43-44)

**Starting a Settlement: “The Recovery of the Parish”**

Upon Woods’ return from England, he and Tucker formed the Andover House Association, with Woods designated Head Resident and Tucker President of the future “Andover

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26 *English Social Movements* was widely read amongst the social reform community; in a letter to Woods, Jane Addams wrote that “all” of the residents at Hull House had read the book “with much interest.” She then asked Woods if he might visit Chicago and deliver a lecture on trade unions or the settlement movement (Addams, in letter to Woods, quoted in Woods 1929, 57).

27 Woods sometimes referred to neighborhood revitalization as “parish recovery” (Davis 1967, 75).
In the first Association circular, Woods described the goals of their proposed settlement:

The Andover House is designed to stand for the single idea of resident study and work in the neighborhood where it may be located – a neighborhood of social destitution and want. … Personal identification with the lives of those who need help is the character of the (settlement) movement: to establish personal connection at every possible point, to encourage, teach, organize for mutual support, bring classes together, create some real sense of brotherhood, and in every way work from within the community for its social development. (Woods 1891, 1)

These objectives were nearly identical to those of Toynbee Hall, where Woods lived for six months in 1891, and directly spoke to the social problems that Woods perceived had accompanied industrialization and immigration in the South End. Like Toynbee, Andover House’s early aim was to instruct, encourage, and provide examples of socialization across disparate class lines: “people should be trained, intellectually and morally, in that greatest influence of modern life, the power of association … and thus truly to rehabilitate personal, family, and neighborhood life. The organized neighborhood work is wholly subordinated to this motive” (Woods 1896, in Woods 1929, 112). Woods argued that a settlement house could serve as a “corrective tendency” for a society gone awry, a society increasingly fragmented by industrialization and urbanization. Settlements could function both as spaces for socialization and as forces for neighborhood improvement. Thus, settlements could make a difference, at the local level, and foster community relations, perhaps even throughout the city (Woods 1929, 66).

Woods, like Barnett and Tucker, believed that society, tied together by the living Christ, was organic. In nineteenth-century cities (much like most American cities today), the rich and poor lived in separate districts, separated spatially as well as by nationality, educational background, and income level. By the 1890s, residential segregation by class – and in some cases, national origin – had changed the urban fabric. Organic city theorists like Robert Woods
held that both classes suffered as a result – the rich from living isolated from their fellow men, and the poor from lack of cultural amenities and opportunities.

The theory of the organic city rests on a number of assumptions about the nature of biological organisms: first, an organism is an autonomous individual. It has a definite boundary and takes up certain space. It does not change by adding new parts, but rather through reorganization (as it reaches limits or thresholds). Second, while it has differentiated parts, form and function are always linked; therefore, the entire organism is homeostatic, self-repairing and self-regulating. According to Patricia Mooney-Melvin (1987), if we extend these assumptions to cities, an organic city is a separate spatial and social unit made up of highly interactive people and places (in fact, the organic city model is also referred to as the interdependent model). A “healthy” city is mixed, diverse, with many parts. The neighborhood – a small residential area, one which can be easily walked – is the fundamental social unit, and together, many neighborhoods form the city whole.28

Mooney-Melvin (1987) asserts that organic city theory, which gained prominence in the early twentieth century (though its roots clearly extend back to the 1880s), helped people to accept the major social changes that accompanied industrialization at the neighborhood level. Organic city theorists stressed the importance of neighborhoods (partly because they were manageable spaces) and small-scale civic participation. Robert Woods and William Tucker believed that the future of American society – which would be industrial, urban, and completely chaotic and fragmented – depended upon grass-roots neighborhood organization and neighbors

28 Although Mooney-Melvin does not include an exact areal definition of a “neighborhood,” she suggests that it would be small enough to be easily organized and managed, but large enough to include all the social and economic problems of the city (and the nation). She also states that organic city theory is a response to the unprecedented urban and industrial growth occurring in the late-nineteenth century United States, and the spatial expansion of the American city due to changes in transportation technology. We can infer from this that a neighborhood would be “walkable.” Peter Hall (1988) maintains that a “neighborhood” should be large enough to serve as a socially self-contained unit for regular activities (daily and weekly shopping, primary school).
working together. For these settlement founders, bringing together different classes in urban neighborhoods was, in fact, the “major problem of industrial civilization, as nation building was for feudal culture” (Mann 1954, 119). South End House services and programs – social clubs, classes, public bath, playground, and modified milk station – directly impacted the rapidly changing, working-class neighborhood of the South End. The social surveys that South End House residents performed “provided penetrating insights into the coping abilities of the poor and the structural causes of poverty” (Ward 1990, 492). Woods was one of the strongest proponents of the survey as means to understand (and interpret, to municipal authorities) the local community – and a means to facilitate social and political mobilization. Woods considered the social survey to be a new scientific method of approaching the problems of the slum, and he applied it to the South End.

Robert Woods and his South End House workers were committed to localism, to creating new stable communities in areas that had little. Woods, like Stanton Coit, viewed the neighborhood as an engine for social change: “the neighborhood is the very pith and core and kernel and marrow of organic democracy” (Woods 1923, 133). He argued that practicing social scientists could help to improve and unify otherwise unstable, splintered, derelict neighborhoods. Woods perceived settlements to be “social laboratories,” and in a sense, he saw settlement workers as social engineers. If the settlement workers (the engineers) and their neighbors (the subjects?) could work together, they could create a “sense of community” from which could come a desire to improve the community, from within. Thus, the social organism, the city, could be homeostatic, self-repairing and self-regulating, just as biological organisms (Woods 1929).

On January 1, 1892, the settlement, Andover House, opened at 6 Rollins Street in the South End (around the corner from 20-22 Union Park, where the settlement moved in 1901) (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Four to seven men made up the “resident force” (an all-women’s residence – initially, for kindergarten teachers – was located at 43-45 East Canton), most of whom stayed three years. From 1898 on, residence was restricted to those who could guarantee at least a one-year stay. The residents came from Amherst College, Andover Seminary, Yale University, Rutgers University, Williams College, Lehigh University, Harvard University, and Drew Seminary – and all were male. All residents were expected to spend at least part of their day in the house teaching classes, instructing morals, and encouraging neighbors to find employment. Andover House, like Greenwich House (New York City) and all three College Settlements, provided fellowships to cover room and board (plus a small stipend) for most of its residents. These fellowships helped realize the founders’ ideal of the settlements as living, working places, and in addition, served as recruitment tools (Woods 1891, 1892).

Robert Woods, like other settlement house founders (Jane Addams, Vida Scudder, Ellen Starr, Jean Fine, and Florence Kelley, among others), believed that the educated classes had a responsibility to work toward social reform (aimed at the uneducated classes). Mann (1954, 102) calls this newly emerging nineteenth century social consciousness “the gentleman’s burden,” and argues that in Boston, educators such as William Jewett Tucker (Andover), Francis A. Walker (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Francis Greenwood Peabody (Harvard), and George Hodges (Cambridge Episcopal Theological School) purposely appealed to their students of high social standing to get involved in social reform. The “burden” of the privileged was “to safeguard society against subversion from extreme and antithetical elements.” The upper classes
Figure 4.1. South End Neighborhood in 1908, with South End House (Source: South End House files, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota).
Figure 4.2. Headquarters of South End House, 1916 (Source: South End House files, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota).
would benefit from their altruism, however; the “gentleman’s comfort” was that in a
“materialistic and selfish age an educated young man could make life personally meaningful
only by helping others” (Mann, 1954, 113-114).

In his plans for Andover House, Woods, an educated upper-class individual himself,
envisioned college-educated settlement workers bringing “life-giving” culture to the slum, but
doing so with a scientific purpose, not made inept by sentimentality. Settlement workers, or
scientists “in this new kind of laboratory,” would bestow “the healing virtue of social resources”
while at the same time gain a “sound knowledge of organic social life” (Woods, in Woods 1929,
77, 80). Woods believed Andover House would provide the means for the cure of the South
End’s social ills, which were growing alongside the immigrant resident population.

Woods, like his fellow social reformers of the 1880s and 1890s, considered slums to be
microcosms of the evils of the modern city: they were crowded, chaotic, and filthy – “the home
of feasts and orgies” (Warner 1962, 12). Though parts of the South End were less slum-like than
the squalid North End (the first place of settlement for the poorest immigrants to Boston), much
of the district exhibited typical slum characteristics: overcrowded and unhygienic tenements,
dirty streets, cheap theaters, saloons, pool rooms, and “easy” women. Mann (1954, 5) describes
it as a dreary “wasteland,” where Catholic and Jewish immigrants settled after the well-to-do
native Protestants retreated to the suburbs and the Back Bay.

Indeed, during this period (1870-1900), Boston’s class differences were beginning to
form along geographical lines, and the city was expanding into the suburbs. The old walking
city of the 1870s had become the region of “cheap secondhand housing,” while the ever-
expanding street railway system permitted Boston’s wealthiest citizens to move beyond the city
limit, to a land of new suburban construction (Warner 1962, 46). In the latter part of the
nineteenth century, then, the South End functioned as the second rung on the economic ladder –
one step up from the North End, but still working class – exactly the population Robert Woods
would want to rescue. Woods was increasingly explicit about who he wanted to help and who he
did not. There was no question that he was only interested in “the working class proper, in
which lies both the great danger and the great hope of the American city” (Woods 1900, 16).

According to the Massachusetts census of 1895, 40,406 people lived in the South End
when Woods opened the settlement (Bushée 1898, 33). Most of this population lived in three to
four story brick tenement buildings, while about a third lived in lodging houses, the old, well-
used housing of wealthy Bostonians who had moved on. These rooming houses were primarily
still managed by the original owners, though some were “grotesque” in appearance and in ill-
repair, having been passed from one population to the next without undergoing renovation
(Bushée 1898, 34). The tenement buildings were in far worse shape: a resident doctor took
inventory of the district in 1898 and found that housing originally built for one family (3-stories,
with 2 large rooms and 2 very small rooms on each level, plus a cellar and a kitchen in the
basement; each level had a sink in the hallway; one water closet per building) was now sheltering
four to eight families. Very few tenements included bathing facilities, making it “very difficult
for parents, however well inclined, to train their children to habits of cleanliness and neatness, or
for adults to preserve that self-respect which depends upon the bath and fresh clothing”
(Underhill 1898, 68). As a result, tenement families lived in “a vicious circle of tuberculosis and
drunkenness” which “undermined the health and integrity of the young” (Woods 1929, 146).

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29 This process of neighborhood change whereby housing passes from one social group to another (usually lower-
income) is called filtering. For more on this process in American cities, see Gray and Boddy (1979) and Johnston
(1971).
The variety of buildings was “equaled if not surpassed” by the variety of people in the district (Bushée 1898, 36). By 1895, “every European country” was represented by students at the Quincy School, directly across the street from South End House. Yet the majority of the population was Irish, British, Jewish, and Black, with Italians, Greeks, Armenians, and Germans beginning to settle in significant numbers. Adjacent to this population was Chinatown and a Syrian community, making “a population as complicated as it is inharmonious,” according to a young South End House resident, Frederick Bushée (Bushée 1898, 37). Bushée, the settlement’s demographer, compiled masses of statistical data on Boston’s changing population between the 1840s and 1900 – and tracked neighborhood development. In 1898, he argued that the South End district was less “foreign” and more assimilated into American society than its counterpart, the North End, where “the immigrant has remained foreign because isolation is possible there … He does not become American for the simple reason that the North End is not American.” Further, he asserted that the “problem” of the North End was the “problem of immigration,” while the problem of the South End was “the internal social problem” of “rising on the social scale.” Indeed, in the South End, “the chief ambition” of the newly arrived immigrant “is merely to keep from falling off the social scale; and the exertion put forth is often all too small to accomplish it” (Bushée 1898, 38-39).

**Assimilation and Patriotism**

The slowness of the assimilation process in the North End worried Robert Woods, who began writing about the need for a “determined and far-reaching policy of assimilation” in the late 1890s, when the foreign population of the South End was rising rapidly (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 34). Woods claimed the South End House had a “patriotic purpose” in assisting

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30 Frederick A. Bushée was probably a professor of the new field of sociology, although what department he might have been affiliated with, and when, is uncertain. In reviews of his 1903 work, *Ethnic Factors in the Population of Boston*, the authors called him “Dr.,” and refer to him as a “sociologist,” but do not list any school affiliation.
new immigrants; the settlement, after all, was “established as representing a friendly overture on the part of people who have the long-term heritage and tradition of American citizenship to the newcomers, divided in race and religion, whom the nation has invited to its shores.” (Woods 1899, 12; Woods and Kennedy 1922, 60). In the South End annual report for 1900, Woods wrote that the settlement was an

outpost in the interest of social peace – of a sound Americanism … The raising of the economic standard of the immigrant to the American level – the elevation of his range and wants as a consumer and of his abilities as a producer – is a most vital form of patriotic service, and to this the House is more and more strongly giving itself. (Woods 1900, 18)

The South End House reports suggest that Woods and his settlement staff wanted immigrants to assimilate into American society as quickly and quietly as possible. Woods, in particular, seems increasingly obsessed with guarding Boston against “geographical sectionalism” – a distinct possibility for the nation twenty years prior. With immigration numbers rising to unheard of levels, Woods worried that the different ethnic groups arriving in Boston would segregate themselves into ethnic enclaves, which would then segregate by class, creating a chaotic and dangerous landscape. In 1902, he wrote that

Distinctions of intelligence, wealth, race and religion are so emphasized in a great city by the growth of separate residence quarters, and those distinctions may become so dangerous to the welfare of a democratic community, that the settlement must be recognized as one of the very important institutions of these days. (Woods 1902, 5)

Six years later, Woods claimed that South End House had solved the “overwhelming problem” of the immigrants in Boston: “Place about him the immediate, highly charged atmosphere of all that is sound in American life, keeping in the background all that would make assimilation impossible through the kindling of racial and sectarian passions” (Woods 1908, 14). Woods was convinced that assimilation could not occur unless immigrants came into contact with both American families and organizations, as well as families of their own nationality who
had “made substantial progress toward Americanization” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 328). He believed that settlement workers had a responsibility to impart American values and ideals – not only to foreign-born Americans, but to second and third generation immigrants. For South End House residents, the “American standard of living” included the following:

- **Language**: The use of English\(^{31}\) in its living quality as a means of human interchange.
- **Food**: Daily rations of meat, milk for children, wheat flour, and sugar in sufficient quantity so that the strength of adults is maintained and children make certain average advances in weight and development.
- **Room**: A living room sufficiently large to permit the family to meet together, and a bedroom for every two persons, with additional space where necessary to insure decent privacy.
- **Cleanliness**: A bath at least once a week, and sufficient underclothing to permit of weekly change. Indeed this is an indispensable factor in the American standard; one worked out by Americans under conditions much more difficult to encompass than are met by most immigrants.
- **Clothing**: Of a pattern and quality so that the wearer may feel inconspicuous and comfortable upon the street or in any public conveyance or place of gathering.
- **Association**: The meeting of the entire family at meals once a day.
- **Child Nurture**: Devoted care for health, cleanliness, and dietary; constant oversight of play and association; watchfulness for the appearance of ability or talent; readiness to sacrifice convenience or substance in order to provide education and opportunity for advancement.
- **Moral Idioms**: Willingness to meet with others for creation of a better environment, interest in local affairs, and general attitude of hope and opportunity toward communal activities. (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 419-20)

According to Woods, any behavior not fitting within the range of acceptable American standards was considered a “temporary stage” in an “upward process” of assimilation (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 420). To encourage patriotism and assimilation amongst their neighbors, South End House residents decorated one of the meeting rooms in the settlement in a festive flag motif (see Figure 4.3).

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\(^{31}\) I have not found any evidence that South End House tried to provide multi-lingual services to their neighbors. I do not think there was any effort made by the settlers to communicate with their neighbors in Italian, Polish, Russian, or German. Therefore, I assume that all visitors to the settlement spoke English to the best of their ability – or did not visit. I also assume that South End House did not recruit settlement residents or volunteers on the basis of their fluency in a second language. Interestingly, South End House did not offer classes in English to adults until 1914.
Figure 4.3. Assembly Room in South End House (Source: Woods 1929, 244).
While Woods rarely used the explicitly racist language that his fellow South End House resident, Frederick Bushée, used on a regular basis, settlement historians Carson (1990), Lasch-Quinn (1993), and Lissak (1989) argue that Woods shared the chauvinism and fears of many Americans toward the “new immigrants” from eastern and southern Europe. Woods strongly believed that “certain types of newcomers” created “breeding grounds for much that is incompatible with or hostile to the best values of American life,” and he saw the “future intellectual and moral stamina” of the nation in danger from these elements (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 330-31). However, Woods was not a militant Americanizer – and he himself admitted that settlement workers who engaged in aggressive Americanism programs tended to scare off potential clients. To some extent, his views on civil rights and (separate but) equal opportunity were progressive for that time. He did, however, warn his fellow settlement workers of the risk of “conversion,” and stressed that settlers take guard against assimilating to the standards of the local immigrant groups (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 331).

Fortunately for Woods, the South End House demographer, Bushée, found that South End immigrant families (who made up over 62 percent of the total families in 1898) were less likely to form ethnic enclaves than those in the North End and more likely to associate (or at least, pass on the street) with families of different origin. In the South End, ethnic isolation was “no longer possible,” and in some cases, families of different nationalities or race (generally, Russian/Polish Jews – not German Jews – and Blacks) occupied the same tenement house, though the families rarely socialized with the other (Bushée 1898, 38).

32 Woods, like other settlement workers (including the most progressive) made generalizations about various ethnic groups. For instance, Woods claimed that Irish boys and men fell “instinctively” into gangs, that Jews had more familial loyalty than group loyalty, that Italian men easily became jealous, and that Bohemians possessed a “native sense of beauty” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 332-335).
Bushée’s characterizations of the various ethnic groups in the South End were clearly based on popular stereotypes. For instance, Bushée considered the Irish especially vulnerable to external physical and “moral” influences: “(They) are easy-going, jovial folk, who require a strong external support to make them succeed … They remain idle if no man hires them.” The Jewish population of the district, on the other hand, was resilient, hard-working, and moral:

The Jew has a surprising power of endurance. If employed under a hard master, he still works on under conditions which would drive the Irishman to drink and the American to suicide, until finally he sees an opportunity to improve his condition. Surely the modern Jew must have been the “economic man” upon which the “dismal science” was founded. (Bushée 1898, 43)

The Jews’ clean living, so appreciated by Robert Woods and his staff, could not make up for their self-absorbed frugality: “morality without generosity is not likely to be appreciated, particularly in the South End” (Bushée 1898, 42-43).

Black men and women, most of whom arrived in Boston after the Civil War, appeared “loud and coarse, revealing much more of the animal qualities than of the spiritual” to the settlement workers, though most were “good-natured and obliging people,” and some even had “the instincts of gentlemen” (Bushée 1898, 44). Many in the older population had lived as slaves in the South before migrating to Boston. Securing employment was difficult for black men of all ages at this time, so frequently the women worked as household servants – “Dinahs” – and did the “washin’s and ironin’s” for the Boston Brahmin (Bushée 1898, 45). South End reports for 1902 and 1905 reveal that employment was a serious issue for the black male population in Boston; in 1905, 80 percent of the black men who had jobs worked in “menial occupations” – as porters, coachmen, and waiters. Woods argued that this cohort needed better, “decent” jobs in order to assimilate into Boston society (Woods 1905, 25).33

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33 Woods regularly compared the plight of blacks to recent European immigrants, and urged blacks to follow the example of immigrants toward assimilation and self-help.
In the 1880s, Italians, Greeks, and Syrians arrived in the South End. Bushée had little to say about the Italians of the district, except that they had “no church and no religion.” The Greeks, a “very friendly and courteous people,” and the Armenians – mostly young men – learned English more readily than the Italians, “partly because their occupations demand it more, and partly because they are not so illiterate as the Italians.” Greeks worked primarily as petty merchants, while Armenians worked in factories and Armenian restaurants (Bushée 1898, 48).

The Armenians of the South End – “nearly all peddlers, if they are anything” – were courteous and hospitable to settlement residents when the residents paid “friendly visits” to their neighbors, but Bushée found them “deceitful.” Like the Chinese, the Armenians seemed especially foreign to the South End House residents. The Chinese, too, had a dark side, represented by the many opium dens in the district (Bushée 1898, 47).

The British American families who settled in the South End tended to come from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward’s Island. The Nova Scotians “seem to be the most desirable … They are of fair intelligence and very industrious,” unlike those from Prince Edward’s Island, who were “quite likely to be illiterate and are generally of a somewhat inferior type” (Bushée 1898, 49-50). More British American women than men came to Boston during the 1880s and 1890s, but the men were more apparent in the South End for the simple fact that they lived in the neighborhood, while the women lived as domestic servants for wealthy Bostonians in other neighborhoods (Bushée 1898).

In 1898, when *City Wilderness* was written, Robert Woods and the South End House residents knew the demographics of their neighborhood would continue to change; so much had changed in the district within the past century. The expansion and infill of the South End began in 1805, but was not actually completed until the 1860s. In 1853, the Metropolitan Railroad
extended a streetcar line out to the South End, and for the next fifteen years, the district was the fastest growing area in the city. In the 1870s, however, the infilling of the Back Bay region led to the exodus of the middle and upper middle class out of the South End and into the newly developing Back Bay. By the 1880s, the district had been all but “forgotten” by Boston’s middle classes, and the neighborhood had “come to be made up of people who have no local attachments and are separated from one another by distinctions of race and religion” (Cole 1898, 3). According to Woods, this lack of connection to the neighborhood created fertile ground for “social sectionalism,” and it was his responsibility as an American to make sure this would not happen in the South End (Woods 1906, 4).

There is no evidence that South End House residents excluded any group of people to the settlement on the basis of race or national origin. However, I doubt they encouraged their black neighbors to visit, either. In some respect, I think Woods felt completely perplexed by what he called the “Negro question,” and had no idea how to approach developing a solution. He does mention the obvious problems of the black population a few times between 1892 and 1904 – the high unemployment rates, the low wages, and the attendant poverty. In 1904, South End House residents helped establish a black auxiliary settlement (Woods called it a “colored benevolent organization”) nearby – the Robert Gould Shaw House. While Woods acknowledged the severe economic and social discrimination experienced by blacks in Boston, he was staunchly opposed to a mixed-race settlement. Instead, he argued that “neighborhood intermixtures of people” should happen naturally, gradually (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 338). Oddly, he did not extend that sentiment – or at least, not vocally – to the different ethnic groups in his neighborhood.

34 He did, however, favor the exclusion of immigrants at one time. Eleanor Woods reports in 1929 that Woods “had been for many years one of a small group of men called ‘the Immigration Restriction League’” (Woods 1929, 350).
Yet, South End House reports included few references to clubs or classes specifically designed for or by certain ethnic groups in the annual settlement reports, either – a major difference between South End House and other American settlements (Hull House, Denison House, and University Settlement, for example). Woods first mentions a “Jewish club” and an Irish theater production in 1915 (Woods 1915, 17). This was clearly a lapse in judgment on the part of Woods, since throughout his tenure as headworker, the South End became increasingly ethnic – and increasingly comprised of poor, unskilled laborers, struggling to exist in the modern industrial city. Eleanor Woods called the district “a Mecca of drifting fragmentary humanity,” and an area for “men seeking jobs and cheap amusement” (Woods 1929, 48). Certainly, the poverty (if not the national origin) of the population played a role in how South End House residents approached the social reform of their community. The first task for these residents was to get to know their neighborhood as a social and economic unit – that way, they could best determine how to make desirable reforms. Robert Woods argued that residents, the new “social scientists,” could foster neighborly relationships among the working classes while still maintaining their objectivity.

To collect social and economic data on the South End district, Woods advocated using the inductive method of “friendly visiting,” a method made popular by earlier philanthropic and religious groups in the 1880s (most prominently, the Charity Organization Society). Essentially, Woods planned for each resident to take an interest in a particular group of families. During visits, the resident would note the details of each family’s environment, including living conditions, income and expenses, work habits, educational attainment, sobriety, health, religious observation, daily activities, and the influence of each family member on the others (and the neighborhood) – all without resorting to the “mechanical and inquisitive methods of the census-
taker” (Woods 1893, quoted in Carson 1990, 65). While settlement workers like Woods were wary of COS principles and methodology, they were convinced that settlement “friendly visiting” would be different from that of less skilled (e.g. less educated), less sensitive charity workers. In December 1895, Woods noted that the South End House residents had “easy access to the homes of the people, which comes out of real acquaintance and continuous residence in a given locality” (Woods 1895, 2). By 1907, the settlers visited an average of seventy families a week (Woods 1908, 51). Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, founder of Greenwich House in New York City, discovered the same thing in her district: settlement workers had “distinct leverage” over other friendly visitors, since the settlement worker was a local resident and was expected to already be on a good social footing with the community (versus charity workers who came into the neighborhood, did their visiting, and left) (Davis 1967).

The settlers’ friendly visiting/social analysis efforts quickly revealed one of the neighborhood’s needs. At the time, mandatory education ended at age fourteen, and afterwards most boys, looking for any way to make money, would take temporary jobs as newsboys, bootblacks, and office boys. Those who could not immediately find employment would wander the streets. Eleanor Woods (then still Eleanor Bush) described how settlement residents would occasionally see one of the local boys “on some street corner apparently deep in thought, with head hanging in dogged fashion. ‘What about school?’ the settlement resident would ask. ‘Don’t have to go to school – had a birthday – looking for work,’ would come the reluctant answer.” (Woods 1929, 184)

Thus, in early 1892, Robert Woods developed boys’ social clubs, getting “the boys in off the streets” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 73). From the beginning, the groups were kept small in number – a nod to Stanton Coit’s theory that it was better to know a few children well than to
know many superficially (Coit 1891). By the end of the first year, more than 100 boys ages 10-18 engaged in organized settlement activities at South End House on a regular basis. Wood firmly believed that the clubs fostered feelings of social responsibility:

> Out of the discipline acquired from constant meeting comes power to check one’s impulses, ability to retain ideas in solution and to state them with tolerance and respect for an opponent, willingness to acquiesce in the judgment of fellow-members, a new feeling for order in human relations, capacity to unite easily and to work swiftly and surely. Organization is thereafter seen as a system of broadened and deepened responsibility. (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 76)

The boys generally met in the evenings and joined in activities like table games, story-telling, debating, and singing (Woods 1929) (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

South End House residents publicly praised the schools in the neighborhood, but pushed the mayor’s office for more funding, as they viewed the schools’ job as critical to the future of American society. In 1898, a resident wrote in *The City Wilderness* that the local public school served as an

> important agency for righteousness among children living in the midst of some, if not all, of its evils – the industrial struggle, intemperance, ugly surroundings, vice, ignorance. The public schools, therefore, have a difficult missionary task to perform. They are called upon, not only to give a certain amount of book-learning, but to bring light and life and social healing. Among the forces at work for the upbuilding of the local community, the public school, at least in scope, stands first. It is the one institution that touches every family. (Anonymous 1898, 231-32)

That year, Woods began a campaign for extending educational options to older children, children over the age of fourteen. Whenever given the chance to speak on the subject, he told the audience that from 80 to 85 percent of the city’s children were not attending school beyond the grammar school level (Grade 6). In 1901, Woods wrote an article for the *Boston Globe*, stating that he did

> not believe that any man or group of men in Boston could do an act that would be as much like far-seeing statesmanship than would be a large expenditure of money in ways wisely designed to put every boy and girl in the city, so far as possible, in full possession
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club/Class Name</th>
<th>Membership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 am – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 pm – South Bay Club</td>
<td>Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Boys’ Club #1</td>
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<td>7:30 pm – Boys’ Club #2</td>
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<td>Girls</td>
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<td><strong>Tuesday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 am – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 pm – Children’s Club</td>
<td>Young children</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Room for Men</td>
<td>Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 pm – South End Choral Society</td>
<td>Young men and women (teens)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 am – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 pm – Children’s Club</td>
<td>Young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Drawing Class</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Shakespeare Class</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Young Men’s Club</td>
<td>Young men (teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 pm – Andover Dramatic Club</td>
<td>Young men and women (teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 am – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 pm – Children’s Club</td>
<td>Young children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Carpentry Class</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 pm – Women’s Club (fortnightly)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friday</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 am – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 pm – Girls’ Club</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm - Boys’ Club #1</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 pm – Boys’ Club #2</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 pm – Singing Class</td>
<td>Young men and women (teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 pm – Girls’ Club</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 pm – Library, Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Room for Men</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 pm – Class in English Literature</td>
<td>Young men and women (teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 pm – Reading Room for Men</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 pm – Concerts of South End Musical Union</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Club/Class Name</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 12 – Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Sewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 12 – Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Basketry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Cooking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Dancing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Stamp Savings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 pm – Brigade</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm - Millinery</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Sloyd</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Checkers Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Arrah Wanna Club</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Kineo Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 pm – Dancing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 12 – Kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm - Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Handiwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Dressmaking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Alcott Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 – Athletic Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 – 12 – Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 pm – Kindergarten Mothers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Clay Modeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Sewing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pm – Sloyd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Printing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm - Singing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Singing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Sloyd</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Mohawk Indust. Club</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 pm – Dancing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
(Table 4.2 continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station</th>
<th>Any</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>9 – 12 – Kindergarten</td>
<td>Small children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Housekeepers</td>
<td>4 pm – Little Housekeepers</td>
<td>Girls, 8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>4 pm – Cooking</td>
<td>Girls, 10-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clay Modeling</td>
<td>4 pm – Clay Modeling</td>
<td>Boys, 9-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>4 pm – Drawing</td>
<td>Boys, 10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloyd</td>
<td>7:30 pm - Sloyd</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Cooking</td>
<td>7:30 pm – Camp Cooking</td>
<td>Young men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrography</td>
<td>7:30 pm – Pyrography</td>
<td>Young men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Reading</td>
<td>7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Saturday        | 8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station | Any  |
| Kindergarten Band| 9:30 – 11 – Kindergarten Band   | Small children |
| Children’s Band | 10 – 11:30 – Children’s Band    | Older children |
| Little Girls’ Club | 10 – 11:30 – Little Girls’ Club| Small children |
| Little Boys’ Club | 10 – 11:30 – Little Boys’ Club | Small children |
| Piano lessons   | 11 am – Piano lessons            | Any   |
| Lace-making (Beg.) | 1:30 pm – Lace-making (Beg.) | Girls, 10-15 |
| Dolls’ Dressmaking | 2 pm – Dolls’ Dressmaking | Girls, 9-10 |
| Fancy Dancing   | 2 pm – Fancy Dancing             | Girls, 10-13 |
| Lace-making (Adv.) | 2:30 pm – Lace-making (Adv.) | Girls, 10-15 |
| Men’s Reading   | 7:30 pm – Men’s Reading Room     | Men   |

| Sunday          | 8 – 9 am – Modified Milk Station | Any  |
| Concerts of South End | 4:30 pm – Concerts of South End | Any |
| Musical Union   | Any                              | Any   |

of the trained ability which nature designed him to have. (Woods, in E. Woods 1929, 189)

Woods especially advocated industrial arts programs in schools – classes in sloyd, carpentry, printing, garment cutting, cobbling, chair caning, plumbing, and brick-laying – as he thought they might help young people obtain training in a particular trade. Until these classes were widely taught in public schools, settlements like South End House, Hull House, and Hudson Guild in New York City took up the cause (Woods and Kennedy 1922). Industrial art classes at South End House in 1907 included lace-making (girls ages 10-15), sloyd (boys ages 10-12),

35 The term “sloyd” is derived from the Swedish term “slöjd,” which generally describes craft work with wood, metal, and textiles. Boys traditionally worked with wood and metal, and girls with textiles. At South End House, sloyd training referred to wood-cutting and wood-working.
printing (young men), and pyrography (the art of burning an image onto wood; young men) (Woods 1907, 47-49).

The South End House settlers (all male) established similar clubs for girls, but not nearly as many, and Woods mentions girls’ clubs in his annual reports almost as an afterthought, after he has tallied the accomplishments of the boys’ clubs. Of course, nearby Denison House offered a good number of activities for local girls, and girls in the South End could easily walk to the South Cove settlement. Likewise, Denison House, founded and run by women, offered far more activities for girls than boys, and often sent local boys to South End House. In 1891, a girls’ club with twenty-five members met at South End House on Wednesday afternoons to sew and socialize. Other girls’ groups were essentially classes in homemaking, art, music, and literature, held in “an environment as nearly as possible like a home … a laboratory kitchen” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 90).

By 1901, the settlement developed a program of “association and recreation” for young women between the ages of seventeen and twenty. This population was particularly vulnerable to “hardship and temptation,” according to Woods and Kennedy: “The girl … is more subject to neighborhood moral traditions than the boy … Lack of sufficient recreation, the necessity to rely upon men for costly and desired pleasures, easily becomes a cause of moral breakdown” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 91). South End House settlers attempted to keep young women interested in settlement activities like cooking and housekeeping classes by holding them responsible for preparing refreshments for settlement parties, picnics, and the summer vacation school (Woods and Kennedy 1922).
Within the neighborhood, word spread quickly about South End House – first through the children, then the mothers, and finally (and reluctantly), the fathers (Woods 1893, 5). Woods acknowledged the fact that children were instrumental in broadening this sphere:

It will be remembered that the work of the settlement began first of all among the children. Small groups of boys and girls were formed – each group as a rule being a kind of “street gang” which had already loosely banded itself together – and one young man or young woman was asked to become the regular leader of each group. Thus into every little corner of the neighborhood have been running quiet streams of influence from the House as a source. (Woods 1896, 4)

Although the settlement clubs offered instruction and entertainment, Woods admitted in 1896 that the primary purpose of the clubs was to “secure a personal and moral relationship” between the club leaders, the club members, and their families (Woods 1929, 112). He believed settlements had a responsibility to “incite individual initiative and mutual aid among the people,” and he saw South End House clubs and classes as vessels through which he could bring the working-class community together – and out of the gambling houses and saloons:

Through this club work, followed up by much visiting in the homes of the people, the neighborhood as a while has been permeated with a better spirit, and there is a marked return feeling of confidence and cooperation on the part of the people toward the House. The settlement is in these ways able to meet the tenement-house problem in its many aspects at close range … to “begin with the children” amid the home conditions which will so largely determine their destiny; to supply counter-attractions to the saloon. (Woods 1899, 12)

While the South End children came to the settlement first, by 1896 the South End’s adult population was beginning to visit South End House on a regular basis (Woods 1929). A men’s reading room opened that year, supplied with several Boston dailies, weeklies, magazines, and games (checkers and dominos – no cards allowed). Men (males over 18) could keep their hats on while there, converse, and smoke. The room sat about forty “comfortably,” but often as many as sixty men occupied it. In 1896, the reading room was open three nights a week and Sundays. The male community immediately responded to open access to a men’s only space, especially
one that was not located within a dark, dank saloon. When the reading room was closed, neighborhood men stood “about the street corners and in doorways, resorting frequently to the saloons near by.” By the following year, due to demand, the room hours had expanded to five evenings a week, plus Sundays (Woods 1898, 11).

There was a “roughe element” that enjoyed using the Reading Room, however – generally, inebriated men. Yet by 1901, Woods remarked that this element had “all but disappeared,” and he organized the “more promising men” of the reading room group into a social club, to meet once a week – the South Bay Club. This group of seventy-five was self-managing, hosted lectures, and elected officers twice a year. Space was limited, so there was a waitlist for men who hoped to join (Woods 1901, 7).

The South End House Women’s Club began biweekly meetings at the settlement in 1897. Although the 1898 headworker’s report does not explicitly say that the club was limited to mothers, it is implied – the women are said to “talk about their children and kindergarten classes,” and mothers with babies were encouraged to attend (and bring sewing). However, the Women’s Club also took field trips to the art museum, and Woods makes a reference to a Women’s Club picnic where the women “watched sheep” (perhaps in the Boston Common?) (Woods 1898, 13). In 1901, Woods reports that the mothers’ meetings introduced “variety and stimulus into the lives of women, and help them to become better wives and mothers.” (Woods 1901, 21).

Many settlement workers were horrified at the way their immigrant neighbors kept house. Homemaking classes, held in model tenement apartments, instructed the neighborhood women in cooking, cleaning, and childcare. By 1907, Woods noted that these classes (held in the Women’s Residence at 43 E. Canton Street) had had an obvious beneficial effect: “In the homes of the
neighborhood there is a noticeably better standard as to sanitation, cooking and the welfare of children. There is somewhat more intelligent expenditure on food, on clothing and furniture.” He also remarked that South End House’s kindergarten classes helped reinforce – for the parents – a new, American “impulse to cleanliness and order” (Woods 1901, 21; Woods 1907, 12).

Also, like other settlements, South End House organized neighborhood public health programs and exhibits. In 1908, a South End House resident (and dentist) held an oral care exhibit. In the spring of 1910, South End House began a pre-natal nursing program wherein a trained nurse made home visits to local homes, instructing pregnant women in the “hygiene of pregnancy and the preparation of the layette.” A South End House resident and nurse, Mary Strong, visited every pregnant woman and her family in the neighborhood. The classes disseminated much more than mere medical information, however – Woods said that the classes helped to develop “an aspiring type of family life,” by strengthening “the father’s instinct to protect mother and child” and both parents’ desire to “create a compelling and beautiful round of home habits” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 252-253).

In 1914, South End House extended the well-baby/well-family program to include those children (between the ages of eighteen months and five years) and families who had “graduated” from the program earlier. The club, called the “Babies’ Good Government Club,” met on a monthly basis for recreation and instruction by a doctor and a nurse (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 254).

**Municipal Responsibility and Reform**

From the beginning, and almost without exception, settlement residents believed that they should play an integral part in municipal reform beyond merely providing health and hygiene classes. Many settlement workers were influenced by Charles Booth’s (1891-1903) *Life and
Labour of the People of London, and they set out to conduct their own research, gather their own statistics, and persuade city officials to make changes. Generally, the settlers had three related aims in entering city politics: to secure public officials sympathetic to their reform proposals, to rid the system of corrupt politicians, and to encourage a broader, more informed constituency among their neighbors. Residents at Neighborhood House, Chicago Commons, University Settlement (New York City), East Side House, and most famously, Hull House lobbied their ward leaders for school repairs, better street sanitation, street repairs, street lighting, running water in tenements, and public playgrounds. In 1887, Neighborhood Guild formed a street cleaning association which assumed responsibility for its block. In 1892, Hull House residents helped to secure an appropriation for Chicago’s first public bath, erected on settlement property. Indeed, many settlements were instrumental in bringing public baths to the city, including College Settlement (New York City), Chicago Commons, Franklin Street Settlement (Detroit), Hiram House (Cleveland), and Codman Guild (Columbus). Such facilities were especially important to families living in tenements, without access to running water (or a kitchen sink) (Woods and Kennedy 1922).

Davis (1967, 174) remarks that Robert Woods was an “unlikely municipal reformer.” Woods dressed very conservatively, and was quite proper in social manners. Despite his wanting “desperately” to become friendly with his neighbors, he often “gave the impression of ministerial aloofness” and neighbors were initially wary of him. His upright, uptight behavior sometimes made people uncomfortable. In 1899, Alice Hamilton, a Hull House resident, witnessed Jane Addams and Woods collaborating at a settlement conference and concluded that “Mr. Woods … has the highest ideals and very clear rational convictions, but he has no warmth, no human impulsiveness and personal interest in his attitude toward people” (Hamilton, quoted in Carson
Yet Woods got the job done. In 1897, an “ice water fountain” was installed in the South End at the behest of the settlers, supplied by a local church. Woods wrote in that year’s annual report that “it ran very effective competition with the saloons during the hot days of last summer” (Woods 1898, 4).

While Woods opposed taking a stand in ward politics, he was an effective lobbyist for the South End, especially during Mayor Josiah Quincy’s tenure from 1895-99. In late 1896, Quincy sent Woods a letter asking him to serve as chairman of a three-member municipal bath commission for the South End:

You are hereby requested to serve (without pay) as a member of a committee appointed by me to make a preliminary report, for use in recommending an appropriation to the City Council, upon the subject of establishing a municipal bath, to be kept open all the year round. I desire to have such a report cover the following questions, namely:

1) Whether such a bath should be absolutely free, or whether there should be a small charge?
2) Whether it should be designed for the use of both men and women?
3) Where it should be located?
4) What capacity should it be?
5) How should it be planned?
6) What will be its probable cost? (from Woods 1929, 122)

The committee reported to the Mayor that a bath was needed in the South End immediately, but that it should be free – and made using marble for the interior walls – “durable and serviceable, no sham about it,” Eleanor Woods boasted (Woods 1929, 122). The district – now numbering 50,000, crowded into a square mile of tenements – was truly in dire need of a public bath-house, and in late 1897, the first municipal bath house was opened in the South End. Use of the Dover Street Bath House was free to everyone, but soap and a towel would be furnished to the bather for the fee of two cents. In the four years that Quincy remained the Mayor of Boston, he and Woods worked together on a number of South End projects, including what later became the first municipal gym in the country (Davis 1967; Woods 1898, 1929).
As early as 1892, South End House settlement workers published their surveys of local educational institutions, unemployment factors, and recreational spaces, as well as surveys of local family morals and political activity. In 1894, South End House residents presented the results of their unemployment study before a state legislative board (Woods and Kennedy 1922). In 1898, a group of current and former South End House residents published a 12-chapter volume on the people of the South End, titled *The City Wilderness* (Woods, 1898). The book included chapters on South End history, demographics, public health issues, wage levels, education, “criminal tendencies,” entertainment, churches, and an anonymously written chapter on the “roots of political power.” The “investigation” was intended to be a graphic rendering of the district’s poor living conditions (ala Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour*) as well as to provide possible solutions to what the settlement workers perceived to be the community’s social problems. While the book was well-received by some for its “trustworthy information” about life in a degenerate section of Boston (Carter 1899, 426-27), others criticized the work for being a “mere aggregation of details,” in which “local description occupies too large a space” (Howerth 1899, 421).

In his 1900 annual report, Woods wrote that the *City Wilderness* writers were most concerned with how they could best “present to the more responsible citizens of Boston an ordered conception of the way of life in the city’s great central working-class quarter” (Woods 1900, 2). At the same time, the *City Wilderness* authors applauded (themselves and) the “social recovery” of the South End since the settlement’s opening:

> There is no such overcrowding as there is in lower New York; poverty has no such painful and revolting aspects as are to be seen in East London; drunkenness is of a less sodden and brutalizing character than in the corresponding quarters of many American cities; immorality is at least not obtrusive and defiant; and, amid a cosmopolitan population, representing nearly every grade of working-class experience, the labor problem is at about its average degree of difficulty. (Woods 1898, 8)
The book was a success, and widely viewed as progressive regarding neighborhood organization. In 1902, residents of South End House published a similar survey of Boston’s North and West Ends: *Americans in Process* (Woods and Kennedy 1922). In 1905, South End House residents began a program of “friendly visiting” in the black community; within a year, thesettlers routinely visited one hundred black families a month. That same year, a settlement resident and Harvard student undertook a systematic study of the district’s black population which culminated in the establishment of an all-black settlement in 1908 (Woods 1906, 22; Lasch-Quinn 1993).

While Woods was an active social reformer, he was also particular about who he thought should benefit from municipal programs. In 1898, Woods began arguing that settlements focus on the “great middle class of labor, the working-class proper” rather than the “submerged grades” of the dependent poor or the “aristocracy of labor” (those who had moved up and out). He held that these individuals – “independent, capable, yet unambitious” – were essentially “collectivists” and that the settlement’s true mission was to foster “every helpful form of association,” from sewing clubs to labor unions (Woods 1899, 8). This new focus on the working class represented a shift in Woods’ thinking; in the late 1880s, he spoke of class-free societies and the potential of every individual. Of course, this shift came about partly after living in the South End for eight years, and witnessing the devastating effects of the 1893 depression on the community. That year, over 30,000 men found themselves unemployed in Boston, “industrious citizens” who were “victims of abnormal economic conditions” (Woods 1929, 85).

Yet within this group of unemployed citizens were “dangerous types” who were unfit for work: criminals, lunatics, paupers, prostitutes, and drunkards. Woods referred to these “indolent and vicious” individuals as the “unworthy poor” (Woods 1929, 90). While he recognized some of these individuals were not responsible for their “unfitness,” they were unfit nonetheless – and
therefore, needed to be dealt with by city officials. Woods strongly believed that these types should be isolated from the rest of the city; one of his worst fears was that moral degeneracy would spread. Further, he thought that segregation of the unfit classes would permit social welfare agencies, like settlement houses, to concentrate on the “working-class proper, in which lies both the great danger and the great hope of the American city” (Woods 1900, 32). In *The City Wilderness*, Woods wrote that “So much of the social wreckage must be dredged out. Any other course with this class itself is hopeless … With the worst fathers and mothers removed, and those with like tendencies threatened by a similar fate, the work of child saving would be greatly simplified” (Woods 1898, 292-293). Similarly, South End House residents (led by Woods) continually lobbied the city council between 1907-1910 to build a hospital and detention colony for confirmed alcoholics. Woods argued that alcoholics, like all social degenerates, needed to be isolated; otherwise, they would “prey upon the community” and function as a “burden and menace to their family and neighborhood” (Woods 1910, 12). In 1913, the annual South End House report emphasized the “necessity of the elimination and segregation of the unfit – the tramp, the drunkard, the pauper and the imbecile” (Woods 1913, 6).

To some extent, Woods based his social segregation plan on late nineteenth century contemporary science – on social Darwinism and eugenics. Like other progressive reformers, Woods was convinced that the new social science and social-scientific methods could cure societal ills: “social science includes within its data the constructive and reconstructive energy of the conscious mind. It is the science of social nutrition and hygiene, of social pathology and therapeutics.” (Woods 1923, 31) Before 1900, social Darwinism was thought to explain away some of the social and economic inequalities amongst the population that were increasingly evident on the landscape. Woods, influenced by social Darwinist theory, firmly believed that
men (and women, though he referred to men most in his writing) who took part in self-indulgent, hedonistic activities like drinking, gambling, and prostitution would eventually die out – unless they took advantage of “betterment” opportunities offered by the settlement:

The men (of the South End) are confronted by and in some degree involved in some change toward moral betterment. There is no escape from these changes; those who do not yield to them must, sooner or later, go to the wall … Thus, death itself is the final factor in this process of social regeneration. The morally fit survive, and the morally unfit drop away. (Woods 1901, 14)

South End House provided alternative amusements to those found in the saloon and gambling houses, but the settlers could only help those individuals who wanted to help themselves. Those with “weak and inactive natures,” if they survived at all, were likely to “relapse into some sort of degeneration” (Woods 1898, 288). Woods was convinced, however, that it would be better for the South End – and for Boston – to simply speed up the “natural process” of social regeneration and remove the debased population from the district altogether. In 1913, Woods argued that the “new science of eugenics” justified the “elimination and segregation of the unfit,” since eugenic theory proved that the underlying cause of the human social problems of pauperism, feeblemindedness, alcoholism, and criminal behavior could be traced to defective genes (Woods 1913, 6). Woods later extended these scientific theories to the larger problem of immigration; in 1917, he wrote that since some immigrants were unfit, restrictive immigration laws should be enacted (Woods 1917).

Conclusion

For Robert Woods, the settlement movement had three main objectives, which remained consistent from the early days of planning the settlement to 1923, when he wrote The Neighborhood in Nation-Building: providing a morally-upright space for locals to gather, educating the community on American values and ideals, and interpreting “how the other half
lived” for Boston’s privileged classes. To understand and interpret the working classes of the South End, Woods advocated using new inductive methods of social science rather than what he considered outdated deductive methods from the 1870s. Behind this inductive methodology lay a class consciousness imported from the English settlement movement. Yet while Barnett and the Toynbee Hall residents focused on creating an extension of the university for the working classes in the Whitechapel slum, Woods and the South End House residents focused on employment and child labor issues, tenement housing reform, and class stratification. While Barnett and his staff focused on the individual, Woods and the South End settlers focused on the neighborhood – and worked on influencing societal relations through their clubs and classes. Woods believed that the “power of association” would “rehabilitate personal, family, and neighborhood life.”(Woods 1896, in E. Woods 1929, 112)

Indeed, one of the biggest differences between the English movement and Woods’ American project was the extent to which Woods wanted to affect the city of Boston. There is absolutely no doubt that Woods wanted South End House to provide services that directly benefited the neighborhood. However, he also wanted to affect change on a larger scale – he proposed geographical solutions to the city’s social problems of severe poverty and criminal behavior: to keep the paupers and degenerates isolated, far away from the rest of the city and the impressionable new immigrant groups. Woods recommended that these new immigrants, on the other hand, assimilate – both geographically and socially – as quickly and thoroughly as possible, because he wanted to guard against the possibility of ethnic sectionalism. In many respects, then, Woods aspired to be both a spatial engineer and social engineer for the South End.
In the next chapter, I compare and contrast the reform methods of the South End House settlement workers with those of Denison House, a female-run settlement house less than a mile away.
CHAPTER V

DENISON HOUSE: THE PEOPLE’S UNIVERSITY

Into this world ... life with bewildering and contradictory theories, yet bent, as no other age has ever been, in the analysis of social evil and the right of social wrong – into this world we are born – we, the first generation of college women. In a sense, we represent a new factor in the social order ... Surely, I may at least say, that we make ourselves significant if we will. (Vida Scudder 1890, in Mann 1954, 201)

I am confronted again by the contrast between the great needs of a tenement district and the puny efforts that we can make to meet them. How impotent clubs, classes and social entertainments are to meet these needs none realizes more keenly than the settlement residents. (Dudley 1900, 26)

Denison House, established in Boston December 27, 1892, was one of three settlements under the auspices of the College Settlements Association (CSA). The CSA was a women’s social reform organization – really, a sorority – whose function was “to induce competent students to assist in Settlement work, to unite alumnae in social service and to promote investigation” (Henderson 1899, 53). Students from Smith, Wellesley, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr (and later, Radcliffe, Barnard, Swarthmore, and others) raised funds, organized, and operated the settlements in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. All three settlements emphasized “helpful, personal contact” between the workers and the neighborhood residents, but stressed the mutual benefits both groups could enjoy by observing the daily activities of the other class (CSA 1890, 1). The CSA’s purpose was to “unite all college women, and all who count themselves our friends, in the trend of a great modern movement; would touch them with a common sympathy and inspire them with a common ideal.” The founders of the CSA emphasized the benefits of the settlement and the settlement movement specifically for college-educated women (CSA 1891, 4).

What set College Settlement (New York), College Settlement (Philadelphia), and Denison House (College Settlement, Boston) apart from other American and English settlement
houses was the settlements’ organization. The CSA vested settlement house control with a group of women (representing the aforementioned colleges), but not necessarily residents of New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. As Carson (1990) notes, this allowed the CSA to expand their “movement” into other cities, instead of being limited to one settlement in one city, staffed from one pool of female social activists. Henderson (1899, 53) describes the workings of the association:

Any college raising a subscription of $100, or one which represents at least twenty members, is entitled to membership and to send two representatives called Electors to the meeting of the Electoral Board. This Board meets semi-annually to do the general business of the Association, to appropriate funds, and is responsible to the Association for the general policy of the Settlements. It appoints three members of a local Executive Committee for each Settlement, and these then elect, subject to approval, the remaining members of the committee. This committee appoints the Head-Worker and is responsible to the Electoral Board for the management of the Settlement.

Thus, the CSA developed a democratically-run settlement organization – a very different model from other American settlements, like South End House. This design was the direct result of a “chance” meeting of four Smith College alumnae in 1887. These women, in talking over “the new economics, the new awakening of practical philanthropy in England,” determined that there was a need for a similar social reform undertaking in America, since “a great number of very poor people lacked opportunities for larger life than that of unremitting toil, brightened by no social enjoyment, sweetened by no neighborhood sympathy” (CSA 1890, 1). In the spring of 1890, the women formed the College Settlement Association, led by Vida Scudder. In the next section, I discuss the motivations of Scudder and her fellow classmates in deciding to set up house in the slums of New York, Philadelphia, and Scudder’s hometown, Boston.

**Vida Scudder: The Gentle Radical**

College Settlement, Boston (Denison House) was the third settlement house designed by Vida Dutton Scudder and three other Smith College graduates: Clara French, Mary H. Mather,
and Helen C. Rand. Scudder, a well-educated Bostonian from a privileged background, was a devout Episcopalian who “wanted Christianity to socialize the world” (Mann 1954, 217). Unlike an earlier generation of female social reformers in Boston (Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, to name a few), however, Scudder was disinterested in the equal rights movement. Of course, with her background, she had never been refused entry to anything – inherited wealth and a lineage traced back to John Winthrop granted Scudder access to all of Boston’s finest. According to Scudder, it was not enough for women to be free or equal; rather, they must be useful. She idealized the female as “social engineer” in her fictional writing, too. In *Mitsu-Yu Nissi, or A Japanese Wedding*, the heroine, a Japanese woman educated in the United States returns to Japan to find herself out of step with her native culture. She faces a decision: she can stay in Japan and uplift her native people, or she can leave her homeland and return to a westernized, valueless society. She of course chooses the former path (Scudder 1887c).

Mann (1954) alleges that Scudder’s semi-autobiographical novel *A Listener in Babel* (1903), set in the slums of Boston, reveals her increasingly desperate search for modern faith in a city of sin. The heroine of the novel, Hilda Lathrop, gives up a promising art career and the man she loves to join a settlement. Scudder suggests that Hilda has a need for social penitence because she feels partly responsible for the “cleavage of classes, cleavage of races, cleavage of faiths! an inextricable confusion” (Scudder 1903, 74). Hilda ultimately chooses to volunteer her time toward discovering how industrialism could be made aesthetically attractive to factory workers.

In 1887, Scudder lambasted the suffrage movement for its limited objectives – and its craft sales: “Here is a world of suffering needing to be healed, of ignorance longing to be
enlightened; and here are women, the heaven-appointed powers to illuminate and to heal, devoting their energies to the embroidery of doilies, while they mourn the narrowness of their lives” (Scudder 1887b). She arrived at these radical theories after spending six months at Oxford University for graduate school in the fall of 1884. Prior to this, she was essentially a “literary, introverted, and well-to-do Puritan girl” whose social reform impulses were satisfied by occasional charitable events in Boston (Mann 1954, 219). Studying at Oxford, however, was life-altering – and unusual – most women were not permitted to attend the university outside of the Women’s Colleges until after 1900. Scudder attended lectures and tutorials by special arrangement. She arrived just in time to hear John Ruskin’s last lectures as Slade Professor, which awakened her to the idea of the social responsibility of the educated classes toward the ignorant poor.37

Art historians Kenneth Clark (1964) and Sarah Quill (2000) argue that Ruskin’s repeated tours through Italy and prolonged stays in Venice influenced both his views on Byzantine architecture and political economy. It was while he was in Venice in the 1850s that Ruskin began developing his opinions on the place of labor in the new social and economic system of capitalism. His readers might have initially assumed his ramblings on the theory of rent, which were mixed in with his ramblings on Gothic doors, windows, and arches, were “harmless by-products of his idealistic theory of art,” but they became much more – outlines of a new social

37 The English art collector Felix Slade died in 1868, leaving £35,000 to found chairs of fine art at Oxford, Cambridge, and University College, London. John Ruskin was elected the first Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford in 1869. He retained that position until 1885, with some years off due to “mental breakdowns” (Windsor 2000, 17).
philosophy that influenced individuals ranging from Mohatma Gandhi\footnote{Gandhi said that Ruskin’s critiques of Victorian capitalism in \textit{Unto this Last} (1862) awakened some of his deepest convictions and transformed his life (Rosenberg 1963; Quill 2000).} to George Bernard Shaw to Marcel Proust\footnote{Like Gandhi, Marcel Proust claimed to be a disciple of Ruskin’s: “He will teach me, for is not he, too, in some degree the Truth?” (quoted in Quill 2000, 198)} to Leo Tolstoy (Clark 1964, 263-64; Rosenberg 1963; Quill 2000).

Indeed, Ruskin’s political economy lectures and papers were among the first to question laissez-faire economics and the morality of the fact that a few property owners were making more money than they required by exploiting the poor. Ruskin firmly believed that the only way the poor could earn enough capital to significantly improve their standard of living was by taking it from the rich: “The only way to abolish the east-end is to abolish the west-end” (Ruskin, quoted in Clark 1964, 267). Further, he believed that the state ought to take control of the means of production and distribution and organize them, for the benefit of society in general. Ruskin’s unique political ideology spurred young men and women all over England to establish “Ruskin Societies” wherein they discussed the economic injustices brought on by capitalism (Clark 1964). Ruskin’s love of Italian political literature (he read Plato daily), culture, and art combined with his protest against the ugliness of industrialism strongly influenced the social convictions and political ideology of the American graduate student and future settlement leader Vida Scudder.

Scudder, who had not had any direct contact with Samuel Barnett or his crew at Toynbee Hall, heard much discussion of the settlement, both in class at Oxford and through her volunteer work with the Salvation Army (Rousmaniere 1970, 58). Scudder most appreciated the settlement’s “realism.” Unlike organized charity, Toynbee Hall’s residents did not waste time with London’s unemployed masses, the most helpless of the poor. Instead, the settlement focused its attention on “the most-valuable and self-respecting of the working class,” whom,
more than anything, needed cultural amenities and exposure. The idea of women volunteers, “united and sympathetic in tastes, ideals, desires,” serving society and imparting cultural knowledge appealed to Scudder. She imagined a group of women living together in a tenement, teaching their neighbors “a few of the practical things which the better classes of the poor in our great cities so desperately need to know,” like housekeeping. In addition, she believed settlement residents could instill in their neighbors “the spiritual and hidden wealth of a sensitive nature attuned to beauty, a mind rejoicing in its own fair powers, a soul rejoicing in the unseen.” Both the settlement workers and the larger society would benefit from the “hearty, mutual comprehension and friendship between classes” especially if it could help “avert our social dangers” (Scudder 1888, 588, 620).

Scudder returned to the United States in 1885 with two conflicting impulses: the first, toward “social radicalism,” ignited by her year at Oxford and her exposure to Toynbee, and the second, toward the “spiritual traditions of the past,” ignited by her regular attendance at the Anglican Church in London (Scudder 1937, 91-92). Not knowing which direction to take, she floundered for two years, during which time she completed her Master’s degree in English at Smith and began lecturing at Wellesley College. In 1887, she met with French, Mather, and Rand, and two other Smith Alumnae – Dr. Jane E. Robbins and Jean Fine, who had worked at Stanton Coit’s Neighborhood Guild in New York. The group opened three settlements in the next five years.40 Initially, the CSA had a difficult time recruiting volunteers, which Ellen Starr, the cofounder of Hull House, attributed to their limiting their applicant pool to college women:

[Theirs] is to be confined to college women and is to be an organization which ours distinctly is not, and then I think [they are] less Christian than Jane is. Jane feels that it is not the Christian spirit to go among these people as if you were bringing them a great boon: that one gets as much as she gives. (Starr 1889, in Carson 1990, 56)

40 Although Scudder lived at Denison House from time to time, she was not a permanent resident. Instead, she lived in Wellesley, MA, where she taught, cared for her mother, and worked as the settlement’s chief advisor for years.
While the CSA might have limited their early recruitment body, the settlement fever quickly spread through the women’s colleges. Denison House, the third College Settlement, began at 93 Tyler Street, but within ten years the settlement had expanded into 89, 91, 95, and 97 Tyler, between Harvard and Oak Streets, at the edge of the South Cove district of Boston (Figure 5.1). The CSA women named the settlement itself for Edward Denison, the social activist who went to live amongst the poor in Stepney, East London in 1867. His actions (and his idealism) catapulted his status among British and American social reformers, first, to “pioneer,” and later, to martyr (Denison died young, at the age of 30 in 1870). Denison’s decision to “settle” in one of London’s worst slums and participate in “hand to hand work” inspired many future settlement workers in Britain and the United States to join the movement and work for urban social reform (Dudley 1893, 4).

Starting a Settlement

Denison House opened with a paid head resident (more advisor than supervisor), her assistant, one or two fellowship residents, and a half dozen or so paying residents who generally remained for several weeks at a time. In 1895, board varied from $5.50 to $6.50 per week, depending on the room. Each resident had her own room on an upper floor of the building (there were nine bedrooms, total). Residents were expected to “give” a minimum of four hours daily to settlement work as well as spend at least half an hour on light housework (besides the care of one’s own room). Settlement work entailed running social clubs, teaching classes, or library duty. Heavy housework and cooking was done by a hired maid and cook. Residents were also expected to be “at the disposal” of the Headworker for one-half day a week, for “settlement

41 As far as I know, this CSA settlement, the third endeavor of the group, was the only one that had a name other than “College Settlement.”
42 The CSA settlement staff in New York also included a full-time physician.
Figure 5.1: South Cove Neighborhood, with Denison House.
correspondence, special investigations, or any need that may arise” (Williamson 1895; Scudder 1895, 2). The Headworker and the nonresident CSA secretary selected residents from the large number of applicants. The CSA required full-time residents to remain at the settlement for one season (3 months), but encouraged individuals to stay longer, if possible, to “establish lasting friendships and gain a thorough insight of neighborhood conditions.” The headworker of Denison House in 1895 advised residents to “take frequent short changes, as, for instance, spending Sunday away,” so that residents would be less inclined to feel overwhelmed and leave the neighborhood – and the settlement (Scudder 1895, 2; Mann 1954).

The Denison House residents were greeted with “curiosity and both friendly and hostile interest” in the first two years of operation. Yet hostility soon gave way to friendship, as Robert Woods noted in 1898: “The informal friendly gatherings for neighborhood people are especially satisfactory. The freedom with which neighbors come to the house is the result of much inside acquaintance with local family life” (Woods 1898, 269). In 1910, a Denison House resident reported that

The question how the settlement was to reach its neighbors was never a serious one, for from the beginning the neighbors reached the settlement … The settlement was first known in the neighborhood by its bath-sign … Baths (first offered in 1894) were sold at 5 cents each … The business flourished and we made many friendships with the bathers, as they waited in the kitchen … Some approached their first experiment of the kind with fear and trembling. (Thayer 1910, 38).

As at South End House, some of the first visitors to the settlement were neighborhood children (Thayer suggests boys arrived first, then girls), and gradually these children were organized into small clubs. Not all children were “allowed” in the settlement, however, and those who were

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43 In 1890-91, there were over 80 applicants for 6 positions at the CSA settlement in New York (Annual Report of the CSA, 1892).
44 Thayer gives no explanation for why some children were permitted entry and some were not. I could not find any explanation for the exclusion of some children in the settlement reports, either.
not caused a “great deal of disturbance” on the steps of the building, ringing the bell and rushing inside when the door opened:

For every boy who came in to attend a club there were always two or more boys who were necessarily excluded. They attempted ingress through windows and coal holes, and when unable to enter in person, they delivered at the window frequent and varying tokens of their affectionate interest. As a last resort they settled down to the joyful task of ringing the doorbell. (Thayer 1910, 38)

The second year, a new batch of settlers arrived and the transition – for both the settlers and their neighbors – was awkward. The change of household was “a disaster to growth and efficiency,” and many of the settlement workers were young and ill-equipped for life in the slum: “It was altogether a difficult and discouraging time for the small body of inexperienced women, brought together for the first time into the presence of the great problem of poverty” (Dudley 1899, 6).

In the early days, the neighborhood surrounding Denison House consisted mainly of American and Irish families, though Russian and Polish Jews, Italians, Germans, Hungarians, and Armenians were beginning to arrive in significant numbers. The settlement was one block away from the “Chinese bit of Harrison Avenue,” an area that has remained predominantly Chinese since (Dudley 1893; Woods and Kennedy 1911; Chira and Yeh 2002). By 1910, residents reported that the South Cove was the “most cosmopolitan district of Boston,” including Syrians, Armenians, Italians, Greeks, Chinese, French, and Eastern European Jews (Dudley 1910, 20).

In 1898, Robert Woods described the working-class neighborhood of the South Cove as being located “not far from the great wholesale establishments.” Yet he also noted the fact that the neighborhood was quiet, “not swept through by great thoroughfares, and sufficiently small in its natural boundaries to allow of thorough acquaintance with its round of life.” The neighborhood, on the border of the South Cove and the South End, had little in the way of
entertainment opportunities, other than saloons, illegal kitchen bar-rooms, dance halls, and variety shows.45 The lack of “respectable ways of meeting” made for an “evil” environment, one where “drunkedness” was common. In 1893, most families lived in overcrowded housing – several families squished together in “tenements poorly enough contrived out of the small houses built for but one family.” These tenements were dilapidated and depressing, with very little ventilation and little light.46 Many tenement residents spent as much time outside as possible, to escape their wretched living situation. One of the primary functions of Denison House, then, was to provide safe spaces for socialization – beyond the walls of the tenements, and off the streets (Dudley 1893, 4).

Sixteen years later, the “miseries of overcrowding, and unsanitary homes, and insufficient food” were still apparent. The neighborhood’s population had swollen to 8,000, and the city provided just three schools (1 primary, two grammar) for 1,500 children. Yet there were forty-six saloons and ten inexpensive theaters and moving picture shows nearby, offering “decent entertainments, but often including also songs and pictures of a harmful type” (Dudley 1910, 20).

The primary goals of the settlement in the first year were to “bring brightness and help to a limited neighborhood,” “emphasize the idea of the settlement as a home,” to provide adequate opportunities for “informal and occasional meetings in our house,” to establish college extension classes, and to organize local labor groups (CSA 1890, 2; Dudley 1893, 4-5). Of course, the settlement’s objectives changed with the fluctuations in the local economy. During the financial

45 Apparently, however, children living in the South Cove in 1893 were “more favored than those of New York” in that there were “more ample school accommodations, and more accessible playgrounds” (Dudley 1893, 4).
46 In the headworker’s report for 1893, Dudley described the settlers’ earliest attempts at neighborhood housing reform: “We have reported unsanitary houses that came under our observation to the Board of Health, and have in certain cases insisted on repairs” (Dudley 1893, 4). In 1901, a Denison House resident worked full-time on investigating the housing conditions of the neighborhood, “trying to effect such improvement as can be brought about by the cooperation of the Board of Health” (Dudley 1901, 26).
panic of 1893, the Headworker of Denison House – Helena Stuart Dudley – realized that her community needed more than social clubs:

There is much destitution, especially this autumn, since employment has failed so many bread-winners … The tenement houses are many of them in wretched state…some landlords have a custom of shutting off the water supply from their houses during the coldest weeks of the winter, while there is danger that the pipes will freeze. Many are too ignorant and shiftless to stand up for their own rights. (Dudley 1893, 4)

Helena Stuart Dudley was not a Bostonian by birth. She grew up in Colorado, though details on her life before she came to Boston are sketchy. Dudley worked at odd jobs until she was 26 (1884), at which point she entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She supported herself by working as a live-in servant for Dr. Robert Richards and his famous wife Ellen H. Richards. A Boston settlement historian (Burns 1998) suggests that Ellen Richards persuaded Dudley to leave MIT in 1885, where she was unlikely to reach any real level of professional success, and transfer to Bryn Mawr College – a new women’s college opening in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania in 1885. At Bryn Mawr, Dudley had chance to meet Vida Scudder while Scudder was on a recruitment campaign for the CSA. Thereafter, the two remained close friends and social activists until Dudley’s death in 1932 (Burns 1998; Balch 1939).

Dudley graduated with the first class of college women at Bryn Mawr (1889, at the age of 31), and worked for a year at the College Settlement House in Philadelphia before taking the reigns at Denison. She arrived in Boston during the 1893 depression, and quickly went to work – she appealed to the mayor of Boston to open work relief stations as stopgap employment for the desperately poor residents of the South Cove. Within weeks, Dudley arranged for 300

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47 Ellen H. Richards was trained as a chemist, earning a B.A. from Vassar College in 1870 and a B.S. in 1873 from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She was the first woman admitted to MIT, and she remained there for two more years of graduate studies, but she was not awarded a Ph.D. In 1875 she married Robert Hallowell Richards, a professor in mining and metallurgy at MIT. In 1890, under Ellen Richards' guidance, the New England Kitchen was opened in Boston to offer to working-class families nutritious food, scientifically prepared at low cost, and at the same time to demonstrate the methods employed. Richards later lobbied for the introduction of courses in domestic science into the public schools of Boston (Burns 1998).
neighborhood women to join “sewing stations,” where they could earn a bit of money to help support their families (Burns 1998). She realized that settlements needed to limit expenditures during the financial crisis, and she suspended Denison-sponsored recreational activities and classes to save money. In 1894, she wrote: “For a settlement to devote itself to educational and social work exclusively at such a time would be as anomalous as for the Parisian of 1870 to devote himself to receptions and lectures during the siege, with the sick and dead lying in the street” (Dudley 1894, 46).

The depression plunged American settlement workers into what Jane Addams later called a “decade of economic discussion” (Addams, quoted in Carson 1990, 76). Carson (1990) suggests that the depression – and the settlers’ self-image as pioneers in the new field of applied social sciences – forced them to analyze the broader causes of the economic crisis. As a result, that year, Denison House residents began a Social Science Club (in cooperation with South End House), directed by Vida Scudder. The club studied topics like the history of socialism and the “social problem,” and read authors such as Carlyle, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Matthew Arnold, and William Morris.48 In addition, the settlement began focusing on labor organization, a politically risky activity, especially for a public organization that relied heavily on private donations (Dudley 1894). In November 1893, a neighborhood woman rushed into Denison House, upset because a representative of the Knights of Labor had been to her garment shop trying to “force” the workers to organize a union. That evening, Denison House sponsored a meeting to allow the union representatives (including John O’Sullivan of the United Garment Workers) a chance to explain their objectives to the seamstresses. The women workers finally agreed to form a union and organize other women’s garment shops, provided that “the ladies of the house would help

48 Although the club was initially quite popular, attracting 40-50 businessmen, professionals, and students on a weekly basis, attendance gradually dropped, and the club collapsed after its third year (Davis 1967).
them” (Carson 1990, 79). Denison House residents viewed this local opportunity as social reform with broader consequences:

The organization of women workers is beset by difficulties which at present seem almost insuperable. But the mere knowledge which we are gaining, and which we in turn may hope to share with many, will assuredly help to that awakening of the social conscience which must precede all social betterment (Dudley 1894, 5).

The settlement – and Dudley and Scudder in particular – continued to support labor causes through the 1890s and 1900s, and the two women joined the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the Union Label League. By 1903, Dudley’s labor rhetoric sounded increasingly socialistic:

It is true that the condition of the wage-earner is improving in America and is much more bearable than that of the Russian peasant, but we cannot deny that there is still much to improve in the housing and education of the poor in our large cities and we certainly cannot rest content in a country where the sweat shop, the coal mine, the cotton factory, and many other industries are carried on at such cost of vital force. (Dudley 1903, 36)

Dudley made her socialism public in 1912, when she resigned from her post at Denison House out of fear that her political activism might jeopardize the financial solvency of the settlement (Carson 1990; Davis 1967).

By 1895, the crisis was over and the settlement’s organized neighborhood work again included clubs, classes, and lectures. The headworker’s report for that year told of plans for college extension classes in writing, spelling, literature, “travel” (geography), art, American history, and “trade unions” (Dudley 1895, 13). Scudder believed that one way to rid society of economic (and especially social) inequality was through public education. “If you cannot turn out scholars, you can make happier women,” she wrote in the headworker’s report for 1897 (Scudder 1897, 20). Residents had made plans for college extension classes back in 1893, classes like art, literature, history, and science, but the depression had slowed progress.
The college extension program was relatively small, but inclusive – Scudder’s advertisement for the program read “Everyone is welcome to the classes who cares to improve herself, or enjoy the pleasure of interesting studies” (Scudder 1895, 1). In 1896, the program included a class in poetry for “working-men,” a class in poetry for boys, two classes in letter writing, a “travel” class (where the eight students “went to rural France, London, and Italy” via photographs, paintings, and drawings), and classes in American history, English and math (all open enrollment, though the last two attended by a “group of interesting Russian girls”) (Dudley 1896, 15).

For the most part, the college extension classes were a success – and Denison House, after Hull House, was the first settlement to design such a program. Scudder felt personally encouraged by the students’ “intent desire for improvement.” Yet, the Denison staff also realized the limitations of their evening school students, many of whom were “working-girls older than the usual night school age” (Dudley 1896, 15). While the attendance of the evening school grew year by year, and Scudder herself noted that the working-girls had an “instinctive sense for poetry,” she also had these comments:

1) The working people want what we can give them.
2) You cannot make scholars out of people whose chief nerve force is given to manual work all day long. You must take them as they are, ignorant and immature.
3) The lack of training is compensated for to a certain degree by unspoiled intuitions, and a poetic sensitiveness in artistic and literary lines rare in more highly trained students.
4) A little culture, with all the joy and enlargement it brings, can be gained – let us boldly say, it is worth gaining – without any basis of education.
5) The subjects most profitable for working-women to study are not as a rule utilitarian subjects, but those which enrich the imagination. (Scudder 1896, 15-16)

Certainly, it was easier for well-educated settlement workers like Scudder to understand and try to reach those neighbors with intellectual interests and ambitions, rather than the majority of their neighbors who had little schooling, little interest in schooling, and were simply trying to
get by in the slum. While there is no evidence that Denison House residents refused entrance of anyone to classes or clubs, the annual reports make clear that they preferred teaching and socializing with their more-educated neighbors. Still, the college extension classes grew steadily through the mid-1890s, and by 1899, registration had reached 150 (out of which “over 100” attended regularly) (Dudley 1899, 20). In 1903, Denison House introduced a college extension course in social work, taught by one of the residents, Emily Balch, who was also an economics instructor at Wellesley College. Suggested readings for the course included Robert Woods’ socio-economic surveys of the North, South, and West End neighborhoods of Boston, Jane Addams’ *Democracy and Social Ethics*, and Amos G. Warner’s *American Charities*.

Registration levels for the college extension courses fell in the early 1900s, however; the headworker’s report for 1904 attributed this drop-off to the opening of an Educational Center in South Boston. Between 1904 and 1914, I found only one other mention of the college extension classes: “The list of College Extension Classes has been much the same as usual, but the attendance has been larger and more regular.” Presumably, the program continued until WWI, at least (Dudley 1910, 21).

Other evening classes (cooking, laundry, hygiene and nursing, music, industrial arts, English, French, arithmetic, and Shakespeare, among others) were available to the general public that were not necessarily college-level (see Tables 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3). In addition, evening classes for local public school teachers in subjects like Dante and Shakespeare were also held at Horace Mann’s Josiah Quincy School49 across the street (90 Tyler Street) (Woods and Kennedy 1911). In the 1890s, women teachers “of all grades, from the kindergarten to the college” formed a teachers’ club (which Robert Woods described as “a happy thought” in 1898) that met weekly at Denison House. The club gave female teachers a chance to “come together for friendly

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49 Quincy School is best known as the first school in the United States to use separate classrooms for each grade.
Table 5.1 – Program of Clubs and Classes, Denison House, 1893 (Dudley 1894, 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Club/Class Name</th>
<th>Membership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>None (residents “at home” all day)</td>
<td>(Any can visit house)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>All day - Library, Penny Provident Bank</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening - Federal Labor Union</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening - Garment Makers Union</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening - Cooking Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Afternoon – “Little” Girls’ Club #1</td>
<td>Girls (unspecifized ages)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Afternoon – “Little” Girls’ Club #2</td>
<td>Girls (unspecifized ages)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Art Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Shakespeare Reading Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Morning – Social Science Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4 – 5 pm – “Little” Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecifized ages)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Residents “at home”</td>
<td>(Any can visit house)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Afternoon – Literature Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Singing Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecifized ages)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evening – Literature Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>2 – 5 pm – Five Children’s Clubs</td>
<td>Children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 pm – Lectures at Andover House</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 – Program of Clubs and Classes, Denison House, 1896 (Dudley 1897, 14-15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Club/Class Name</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>4:00 pm – Club of Boys</td>
<td>Jewish Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm – Dante Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(? time) – Residents “at home”</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(? time) – Settlement Conference (1x/mth)</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm – Travel Class</td>
<td>Women over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm – Gymnastics</td>
<td>Girls over 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Federal Labor Union (1x/mth)</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>3:00 pm – Home Savings</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm – Stamp Saving</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm – Girls’ French</td>
<td>Girls 14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm – Girls’ Sewing</td>
<td>Girls 14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm – English Literature</td>
<td>Young Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm – English Grammar</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Science Conference (2x/mth)</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4:00 pm – Busy Bees</td>
<td>Girls (unspecifized ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm – Young American Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecifized ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:40 pm – Women’s Cooking Class (in homes)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:40 pm – Writing Class</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 5.2 continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>11:00 am</td>
<td>Social Science Club for Students</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm</td>
<td>Young Massachusetts Club</td>
<td>Boys of 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Class of Young Men</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Residents’ Neighborhood Reception</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3:00 pm</td>
<td>Mothers’ Club</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm</td>
<td>Kitchen Garden Club</td>
<td>Girls of 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>The Fortnightly Club</td>
<td>Girls over 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>English Literature Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Kitchen Garden Club</td>
<td>Girls 8-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:00 pm</td>
<td>Drawing Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:00 pm</td>
<td>Franklin Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Class in English Language</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 – Program of Clubs and Classes, Denison House, 1903 (Dudley 1904, 39).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Sloyd Class</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Little Girls’ Cooking Class</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm</td>
<td>Teachers’ Club (2nd, 4th weeks)</td>
<td>School Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:45 pm</td>
<td>English Literature</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Reading Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Sloyd Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>History Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Embroidery Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Young Women’s Class</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Italian Art Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Current Events Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:00 pm</td>
<td>Singing Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>2:30 pm</td>
<td>Women’s Club</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Little Girls’ Club</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Clay Modeling</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Younger Boys’ Cooking Class</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Younger Girls’ Laundry Class</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6:45 pm</td>
<td>English Composition Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Paul Revere History Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:15 pm</td>
<td>Boys’ Social Evening</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>E.F.A. Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 5.3 continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Sunshine Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Young Girls’ Cooking Class</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>and Laundry Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>6:45 pm</td>
<td>Penmanship Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:15 pm</td>
<td>Star Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Star Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Physical Culture and</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Elocution Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Trojan Club</td>
<td>Boys (late teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Thursday Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Sloyd Class</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Thursday Club Cooking Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Hudson Tigers</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Cobbling Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Embroidery Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>7:30 pm</td>
<td>Dressmaking Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>8:00 pm</td>
<td>Shakespeare Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>8:00 pm</td>
<td>English Composition</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>8:00 pm</td>
<td>Residents’ Neighborhood Party</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Game Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3:45 pm</td>
<td>Older Boys’ Cooking Class</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>6:45 pm</td>
<td>French Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Paul Revere History Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:00 pm</td>
<td>Knights of Arthur</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:15 pm</td>
<td>Syrian Girls</td>
<td>Girls (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Psychology Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Emergency and Hygiene Class</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td>Students’ Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:00 am</td>
<td>Boys’ Club</td>
<td>Boys (unspecified ages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10:30 am</td>
<td>Saturday Morning Club</td>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

intercourse as members of a common craft," as Woods rhapsodized in 1898 (Woods 1898, 269).

Initially, Denison House offered fewer weekly engagements for children than other CSA settlements. This was partly due to lack of space and to the fact that boys’ clubs were available at nearby South End House. The problem of “male space” plagued the settlement for years; the 1901 headworker’s report stated that

There is a great need of a properly equipped house devoted to boys’ and young men’s clubs – a place where the older organizations might have their club rooms under
attractive and wholesome conditions and where the younger fellows would prefer to play
games or read at night to standing on street corners or frolicking in the dim light of the
street lamps until the “cop” causes their temporary dispersion. (Dudley 1901, 28)

Too, Denison House focused more attention on the adult population rather than the children: the
headworker’s report for 1893 stated that the settlement would never be a “center for exclusive or
even distinctive work among children and young people” (Dudley 1893, 5).

Still, many clubs and classes were open to the children of the neighborhood, plus a
playground and gymnasium. Helena Dudley attributed these settlement-run amenities to
“preventing the increase of criminals” (Dudley 1901, 30). A contemporary observer of the
settlement reported that children “who would be greatly injured, if not ruined, by roaming the
streets, are delighted to busy themselves with carpentry, sewing, cooking, elementary science,
drawing, reading and short excursions to the sea shore or wooded hills” (Henderson 1899, 59).
In 1896, the nine children’s clubs or classes included kitchen gardening (cooking, cleaning,
general housework), debating, and singing. By the next year, there were sixteen clubs or classes
for children, including sloyd, mat-making, gymnastics, drawing, cooking, and debating. Thirteen
years later, the clubs and classes continued to thrive – there were twenty-seven weekly clubs for
boys and girls in 1909 (Dudley 1896, 1897, 1909).

By 1900, the demographics of the neighborhood surrounding the settlement had changed:
the American and Irish families who had moved up the social ladder had also moved to the
suburbs, “where pleasanter conditions can be had for the same money” (Dudley 1904, 44). In
their place arrived new immigrants – Syrians, Greeks, Armenians and Italians. The settlement
residents struggled to meet changing needs of their new neighbors. While a significant number
of these new arrivals were poor and fell “naturally into the ranks of unskilled labor,” others – the
middle class – troubled Denison residents more:
There are many others well born and educated, though poor, who seek here broader opportunities … They are often made to feel themselves unwelcome intruders by their neighbors in the tenement house quarter, for, besides the natural prejudice against foreigners, there is the justifiable objection to any people who, by accepting less than current wages, menace the American standard of living. (Dudley 1904, 45)

Thus, while the settlers considered it their “first business … to know our neighbors,” and their “second to make them happier,” clearly they had particular groups they targeted, groups they felt they could nurture and help develop (Dudley 1894, 3). Scudder, like Robert Woods at South End House, also advocated “friendly visiting,” wherein Denison House residents could collect valuable socio-economic data about their neighborhood as well as “stand by those in trouble or in temptation” (Scudder 1895, 1). Through friendly visiting, classes, and social gatherings, Denison workers hoped to level the societal playing field, which was uneven and unhealthy for everyone: “Our inequality materializes our upper class, vulgarizes our middle class, brutalizes our lower class … We owe our uncivilizedness to our inequality” (Scudder 1898, 257). Friendly visiting often entailed residents or settlement volunteers giving advice to mothers on proper hygiene and nutrition; one resident recorded her visit with a local woman in February 1893: “I had a long talk with Mrs. X about food. She buys little milk, and feeds her children on white bread, meat, potatoes, and tea. I suggested that in Johnnie’s case, she have milk instead of tea – oatmeal and milk in the morning, and whole-wheat bread for lunch” (Cheever 1893, 14).

“Domestic science” classes were a vital part of the curriculum at Denison House. In 1895, residents organized weekly Mothers’ Meetings at the local public Kindergarten on Hudson Street. More than twenty women attended, on average, to hear “practical talks” on topics such as “Relation of the Kindergarten to the Home,” “Home Emergencies,” “Home Sanitation,” “The Beautiful in our Homes,” and “Proper Clothing for Children” (Dudley 1895, 10). After the settlement had expanded into the neighboring building, more space could be used for kitchen
experiments and lessons. In 1898, volunteer cooking teachers from the School of Domestic Science came to the settlement twice a week to instruct neighbors on nutrition and food preparation techniques (Dudley 1898, 20). By 1901, cooking classes for women and girls were held at Denison House every afternoon and evening. Laundry had also been added to the schedule (Dudley 1901, 26).

In June of 1903, Denison House began a Modified Milk station, wherein mothers could buy milk for their babies and children. Within a month, 112 bottles of milk were sold daily, some mothers traveling from as far away as South Boston and Dorchester. Denison’s resident nurse kept all of the milk recipients (the babies, anyway) under strict supervision, to ensure “that the effect of the milk might be intelligently studied.” Each baby was weighed weekly, and at the end of a two-month trial period, most of the babies had “thriven” and “gained well in weight.” The more “delicate” babies were sent to the Floating Hospital (presumably, a mobile health-care facility) “for the fresh air and skilled care that they could not have at home” (Dudley 1904, 40). All of the classes, the public laundry facilities, the milk station, and the health clinic were services provided to a community that otherwise had none. These were services that Denison House offered for free (or for pennies) to their neighbors, services that otherwise would have been out of reach of their neighbors – and they represent tangible evidence of neighborhood improvement.

In 1905, the settlement filled four buildings (89, 91, 93, and 95 Tyler), and residents had made arrangements with the owner of a fifth (100 Tyler) to use the space for Denison House clubs and classes. The extra space provided the opportunity to hold larger and more frequent cooking and laundry classes. Five afternoon cooking classes for “younger girls” (probably pre-teens) were held during the week (the most popular being Monday), which had an average
enrollment of twenty-two. In the evenings, four cooking classes were held for “older girls” and young women and one was held for boys (“camp cooking”). This same year, Denison introduced a housekeeping class for Syrian girls, whom Denison House residents thought needed to know “how better to feed and care for their children.” According to the annual headworker’s report, many Syrian children suffered from rickets and other deformities “caused entirely, we are told, by improper food and bad ventilation.” Moreover, the report noted that the Syrian mothers who visited the settlement were “quite pathetic in their desire to do their best for their little ones.” As a result, the settlement workers made plans to establish a model tenement in 1906 where students could learn hands-on how to keep house – cook, serve meals, sweep and dust, make beds, and wash windows (Dudley 1906, 2).

Another way Scudder and Dudley believed they could promote social equality within the neighborhood was by ensuring immigrants easy access to English classes. Dudley (1903, 39) recounted an episode in which she met with a local Italian woman in 1903:

> It seems a pity that you speak no English, we said to a charming woman. How long have you been in this country? “Twelve years,” was the answer. “And I have a great desire to speak the English. But what would you? All the time I have inhabited Boston and of course in Boston one has no opportunity to hear the English spoken.”

While English was taught at the evening school as early as 1899, Denison House residents planned specific evening English classes for the Italian community in 1903, when Italians comprised one of the largest immigrant groups in the neighborhood. They also planned Italian classes for the “Bambini,” so that they might retain some connection to their old country (Dudley 1904, 39).

Scudder, influenced by Ruskin and his love of Italian culture and architecture, wanted to help “educated young Italians” learn about American culture. In 1904, Scudder joined forces with a local Italian man, Francesco Malgeri to organize an Italian club at Denison House, one
that was geared toward Italian intellectuals and the professional class. Malgeri, a recent immigrant himself, believed that new Italian immigrants needed to be educated on the “lofty ideals of the great American Fatherland” and that Denison House could be the venue for such education. He warned Americans against ethnic stereotyping: “it had been the habit to look only at the mass in its entirety, chiefly composed of poor laborers, and no attention was paid to the various excellent civic qualities of individuals here and there” (Malgeri 1905, in Dudley 1905, 2). Malgeri believed that Denison House could provide a space for Italians to socialize, amongst other Italian immigrants and with other Americans (he makes no mention of other ethnicities or nationalities). Denison House created the first public space for recent (and not so recent) Italian immigrants to meet – outside of the university environment (Harvard, Boston University, Boston College), that is, which was probably not a common destination for these immigrants, regardless of educational attainment.

The Circolo Italo-Americano club began with classes in English and Italian, and later added lectures in Italian history, sewing classes, and a circulating Italian library. The club became an important force for promoting better communication and understanding between Italians and Americans in the area, and conducted its meetings, lectures, and debates in a combination of Italian and English. Americans could take lessons in Italian and Italian history, while Italians could hear speakers on American issues and American values. Evenings featured Italian music and political talks. A 1906 political debate on the “Social Ideal of the Future” erupted in a riot between the Italian socialists and the Italian anarchists, an event Denison House workers found discouraging (Dudley 1905; Dudley 1906, 43; Davis 1967; Carson 1990). Yet the headworker’s report for 1907 suggests that the riot actually heightened the settlement workers’ resolve to help the Italian community:
There are many evils which need to be reformed in the Italian community; but in a state of hurt and excited feeling, such as prevailed last winter, no such reforms can wisely be begun. The state of things was a forcible comment on the strange situation of these great immigrant bodies in the midst of us, forming part of our civic life, yet maintaining an existence essentially provincial, with none of the protection against these petty passions so easily prevalent in small social groups which would be afforded by contact with larger interest. (Dudley 1907, 7)

The next year, Denison House sponsored an arts and crafts fair featuring local Italian handiwork (“the event of the year”). On viewing the artwork, Vida Scudder was moved to tears – not just over the beauty of the art, but of the unfortunate lack of employment opportunities for educated Italian immigrants:

No one could watch the craftsmen at work and see that inherited deftness of hand, shaping the delicate intricacies of filigree silver of coaxing the clay to come to life, without pausing to regret that it is his shovel and not the craftsman’s tool that the Italian immigrant usually finds with ‘its handle to his hand.’ (Scudder, in Dudley 1909, 48)

Indeed, it is clear that Scudder viewed improving the welfare of the local Italian population as a pet project. Carson (1990, 104) suggests that Scudder’s European travels (including stopovers in Vienna, as Ruskin did), her passion for literature, and her Anglo-Catholicism (especially her discovery of St. Catherine of Siena) formed the basis for her “fascination with Italian immigrants.” By associating with educated Italians immigrants – who she felt she could relate to – Scudder could experience “America in the making” (quoted in Carson 1990, 104). She tried to convince other social activists of the same, and in 1909 wrote an article for the politically progressive journal *Survey* suggesting that others join her campaign:

“They are well worth knowing. The poets and thinkers of the Latins, from Mazzini and Carducci to Georges Sorel, are on the tips of their tongues; their minds are atingle with the European issues, political and religious, concerning what we read in the magazines” (Scudder 1909, 48-49).
Most of the settlement classes and clubs were “international” in membership after 1900, aside from a large club of Syrian boys, a club of Syrian girls, and the Italian clubs (Dudley 1904, 36). Denison House residents must have deliberately formed these groups in isolation of other nationalities, perhaps because they found the Syrian and Italian population reluctant to mix. Certainly, the Syrian population was growing in the South Cove from the 1890s on, and clearly Denison residents had concerns about the acculturation of this population. In 1908, an “educated” Syrian man came to the settlement asking for assistance in organizing more educational and social opportunities for the Syrian community. Denison residents were thrilled:

A committee of Syrians and Americans, with an intelligent special worker resident, could attack this problem and save some lives from ruin if the financial support were assured. The Greek situation is similar. We should be glad to have Denison House used as a meeting place where some of our best citizens could come into direct relation with the representatives of this ancient famous race. (Dudley 1908, 11)

The following year, Denison House residents hosted a reception for 300 of their Syrian neighbors, and in return, the Syrian community hosted a large reception for Denison House. Both events were well attended. Sixty of the “better educated men and women” of the Syrian community began meeting at Denison House on a monthly basis, discussing the “ideals and civic opportunities of the new country” they now inhabited. The gatherings gave the Syrian immigrants an opportunity to meet American men and women who were “interested in the problems which attend the assimilation of these new citizens” (Dudley 1909, 52).

During the summer, Denison House, like South End House, offered a “Vacation School” for children between the ages of 3 – 14, with kindergarten classes, classes in carpentry, sewing, science, and music, and a “nature room,” stocked with flowers and specimens of local plant and animal life. In the summer of 1894, groups of children were taken “to the country or seaside” twice a week. By 1896, the six-week summer school session, held in the Tyler Street Primary
School, registered 222 students on opening day. Enrollment remained over 200 for the next fifteen years. Class offerings included kindergarten, sewing, carpentry, and woodwork for children. In addition, the settlement ran a playground during the summer, equipped with one small sandbox, one swing and a seesaw. The playground was in such demand that in 1910, “the children had to be limited not only in number, but also in length of time each was allowed to stay.” Settlement workers arranged afternoon outings (to museums and the Harvard Botanical Gardens) and teas for single-women and mothers (Dudley 1896, 12; Dudley 1898; Dudley 1911, 52).

**Beyond Education: Neighborhood Reform**

During the winter of 1897, Denison House residents met weekly to discuss methods of relief offered by the city, state, and local private charities, all of which, according to the headworker’s report, were “designed to take care of the dependent, defective, and delinquent classes.” Yet none of the agencies were addressing what the residents perceived to be the “principal problem” of the district – unemployment and under-employment:

> There is still in America great reluctance to acknowledge that this problem is a really serious one, or that society should organize to meet it. But there is no graver menace to character than irregular and uncertain employment; and a state that acknowledges its responsibility to the criminal not only by taking him out of society, but also trying to reform him, cannot logically continue to deny its responsibility toward the large number of men and women out of work in our country … While we do not believe that the world owes every man a living, we do believe that the world owes every man a chance of earning his living. Discounting, however, the shiftless and the unskilled, the problem of the skilled work-man is yet of sufficient magnitude to give us all unquiet nights (Dudley 1897, 18).

This problem was not limited to adults, either. As boys and girls “finished” school at 14, they immediately sought paid work to help their families, but the work generally promised little beyond a small paycheck. This cohort had “few quiet and respectable ways of meeting,” and “often complained of loneliness.” Denison House workers, like South End House workers,
worried that without stable employment or access to safe entertainment, these young adults might be drawn to more dangerous activities, like gambling, stealing, and prostitution (Dudley 1893, 5; Dudley 1897).

Both Dudley and Scudder acknowledged the settlement’s responsibility to their neighbors and their neighborhood (after all, as residents, they were part of the neighborhood), and worked to improve living conditions as well as erase social divisions in the district created by class and nationality. The accomplishments of the staff were plenty. In 1894, residents helped to establish a branch of the public library (partly stocked by settlement books), with a reading and smoking room for men in back. Both served as “rivals” of nearby saloons, which the settlement workers saw as a positive development for the community. Indeed, Dudley wrote in 1896 that she hoped municipal officials would establish more reading rooms: “the city could hardly take stronger measures against intemperance than by the establishment of reading rooms” (Dudley 1896, 14).

Most of the time, a Denison House resident was on hand in the library to help children select appropriate books – primarily, adventure and fairy stories. The library was a success: between January 15 and May 1, 1895, it loaned 4,504 books out and issued 475 library cards (half to adults) (Dudley 1896).

When Denison House opened in 1892, there were no public baths or public gymnasiums in the South Cove. In 1900, a nearby abandoned chapel was donated to Denison House, to be used as a gym. After raising money for renovation and equipment, Denison House residents and volunteers opened the new gym. Within a year, however, Dudley convinced the city to take responsibility for the space, which became the first public gymnasium in Boston. The city paid Denison House $500 annually for the use of the gym space (Dudley 1901).50 Similarly, Dudley

50 Interestingly, there is little discussion of finances in the Denison House headworker’s reports (although much more than in South End House reports, where money is never mentioned) other than the listing of rent and mortgage

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opened public bathing facilities in 1894 through Denison House, which helped prod the city to build public baths (Balch 1939).

By 1900, Denison House operated a daytime health clinic and dispensary, staffed by a resident nurse and volunteer doctors and nurses. Patients mainly came to the clinic suffering from “bruises and small ailments,” problems not serious to require hospital care, but that needed some medical attention. In addition, the clinic staff saw (and sometimes treated) “quite a number of cases of adenoids, weak eyes, eczema and rickets.” During seven and a half months of 1902-1903 (184 working days), the clinic staff treated 1,760 patients - or an average of nine and a half daily. To help alleviate some of the community’s demands on the clinic, a home nursing class was included in the Denison House evening school curriculum in 1903 (Dudley 1903, 37). In 1907, Dudley established evening clinics at Denison House so that day laborers could access health care at night (Dudley 1907, 11). All of the medical services that the settlement provided were needed – and well used. In 1909-10, the Denison House resident nurse visited 4,092 homes and the volunteer doctors and nurses in the settlement dispensary treated 543 patients. The evening clinic was open every Wednesday night (Dudley 1910, 22).

Denison House residents also performed technical socio-economic surveys of their neighborhood. In 1897, settlement workers began a thorough house-by-house investigation of the district’s lighting, sanitation, tenement house ventilation, and crowding – very similar to Charles Booth’s methods while researching *Life and Labour of the People of London*. Results were sent to the city’s Board of Health (Dudley 1897). Dudley, however, felt strongly about settlement workers being more than mere data collectors; she believed residents should invent costs and the costs of the summer “Vacation School.” Yet no settlement historians questioned the lack of monetary discussion. Perhaps settlement workers thought it impolite to speak of money issues? We know that there were funding problems, which limited the settlements to offer certain programs and not others. We also know that there were fundraising campaigns for the purchase of new buildings. Yet we know next to nothing about who was donating the money and how much was being donated other than the funding was all from private sources.
creative solutions to some of the neighborhood’s social problems. Her 1899 headworker report conveys her strong feelings on the subject:

The settlement serves as a social watch-tower, from which can be seen a rather more extended view of society than elsewhere. But a watch-tower is only of service as the watchers not only watch but act on their observations. Sociological investigation is only of value as it is used by moral passion. The settlements, then, as they give opportunity to close contact with poverty, must stir not only to the help of the individual but also to more searching methods of bettering conditions. They must play their part in building up in our community a sense of public responsibility toward the diseases and needs of the body politic. (Dudley 1899, 6)

Although Denison House residents did not pursue social scientific surveys in quite the same vein as did South End House residents (and Denison House never published reports on the scope of The City Wilderness), the settlement still represents one of the first neighborhood-based social reform efforts in Boston, as well as in the country. Residents knew the needs of their community were not being met by other city, state, and private charities: “We wondered at first why every need is not met; but we soon discovered that all these agencies are designed to take care of the dependent, defective, and delinquent classes, and that, except in the case of children, there is little provision for preventive work” (Dudley 1898, 18). Thus, Denison House workers attempted to fill the gaps, to help those who were not “dependent, defective,” or “delinquent” – with educational classes and social clubs for adults, as well as classes and clubs for children, a public playground, public bath, public library, laundry facility, health clinic, and summer camp. These services and amenities reached “an approximate population of 8,000” in 1909, and “a thousand families” in 1913 (Dudley 1909, 20; Gordon 1913, 60). Yet the headworker’s report

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51 Denison House residents worried that some of their efforts, like the playground and gymnasium, were trivial: “so much of the energy of a settlement house goes into giving wholesome amusement that in our strenuous moods we are likely to feel our efforts too frivolous” (Dudley 1902, 30). The 1902 headworker’s report, however, attributes the drop in the “number of juveniles taken in charge by the authorities” to the playground and the other children’s facilities at the settlement.
for 1909 indicates that residents knew there were larger socio-economic problems in the neighborhood which were not so easily solved by settlement programs:

The settlement cannot touch directly the economic problem of insufficient ware, although the attendant miseries of overcrowding, and unsanitary homes, and insufficient food, are evident enough to us. Neither do we attempt the relief of those who have fallen into destitution, since the charitable societies and hospitals are organized for this purpose, but we must give much of our time to becoming a connecting link between the people of the neighborhood and these agencies. (Dudley 1909, 20)

By reviewing over twenty years of the settlement’s annual reports, it is clear that Denison residents perceived their role in the community in two ways: first, as facilitators of social services, both those provided at the settlement itself, and those provided elsewhere. Second, residents hoped to serve the community as social scientists, to “understand and interpret the complex life of a small district” crowded with poor immigrants (Gordon 1913, 57). While Geraldine Gordon (the headworker at Denison House after Helena Dudley left in 1912) did not specify who the residents were “interpreting” for, she implies this interpretation was beneficial to all concerned – the neighbors, the settlement residents, and the city at large. Moreover, she suggests that the social interaction that occurred as a result of settlement activities marked some of the first instances in cross-class, cross-ethnic association in Boston.

Conclusion

Vida Scudder and Helena Stuart Dudley, the founder and headworker of Denison House (Dudley from 1893-1912) were also members of the first generation of college women. This was no coincidence; this first generation of college-educated “conscience-stricken” women felt they had a social responsibility to use their newly attained knowledge for the greater good (Mann 1954, 217). Both women believed they could serve society best through neighborhood reform, embodied by the settlement house. In Scudder’s 1903 work *A Listener in Babel*, a college professor reassures a young girl who wants to become a settlement worker that the impulse to
serve is understandable: “Any woman feels restless unless she is taking care of somebody. You have no one near you to take care of so you want to take care of the poor” (Scudder 1903, 57). Settlement work provided an outlet for these enthusiastic, idealistic women who romanticized work in the slum. Too, this work permitted an alternative for women who did not want to marry or become a schoolteacher – the only two socially-accepted options available to women in the 1880s. A Chicago newspaper reporter remarked in 1908 that “Twenty years ago … a young woman who was restless and yearned to sacrifice herself, would have become a missionary or married a drinking man in order to save him. Today she studies medicine or goes into settlement work” (quoted in Davis 1967, 37). Settlement work, then, gave women the chance to confront – hands on, at the local level – the social problems associated with industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.

Settlement work was frustrating. Both Scudder and Dudley provide painful accounts of their tireless efforts to improve the South Cove community. Mann (1954) goes so far as to suggest Scudder is masochistic, and her 1900 report titled “Settlements Past and Future” reveals her discouragement with the seemingly insignificant results of the settlement movement:

So long as we live, conditions, broadly speaking, will probably remain unimproved. Hideous over-crowding will continue; wages will ever be insufficient in most trades to sustain more than a barren and dreary bodily existence; the majority of the rich will still wrap themselves in apathy, or view with complacent pride the minute palliatives which they apply to the social surface. (Scudder 1900, 6)

Yet Scudder continued her role in helping to run Denison House into the early 1940s. Of course, Scudder’s impetus to serve society through settlement work can also be traced to her religious conviction. While Denison House’s program of clubs and classes was completely devoid of religious substance, Scudder, like Robert Woods at South End House, took her religion very seriously, and believed that a good Christian (of whatever denomination) had a social obligation
to the less fortunate classes. Her best friend, and probably companion, Dudley, never mentioned religion in any of her settlement reports.

In the next chapter, I compare and contrast the two study sites, Denison House and South End House, and offer some final words on how these two social reform outposts affected social problems brought on by industrialization and immigration at the local scale.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The university settlements, facing the worst results of the industrial revolution, of a new migration, and of the unmanageable growth of cities, may at first fill a strange variety of functions; but their deep and abiding use lies in direct effort toward scattering the social confusion and re-establishing social order. (Woods 1923, 54)

After the public school the social settlement has been the most direct and effective agency at work for the coherence and the integrity of the Nation. (Tucker 1917, 649)

When I first began this project, I wanted to evaluate how Boston’s first settlement workers influenced their neighbors and neighborhoods. I quickly realized that this kind of (unbiased) analysis would not be possible, since I do not have access to data from the neighbors themselves. Indeed, my primary sources of information were from the settlers – their annual reports, their house programs, their journal articles or works of fiction, and, in some cases, their personal correspondence. Therefore, this study is less an assessment of the settlers’ work and more an assessment of how the settlers thought they could be helpful to the poor in their neighborhoods (and ultimately, modern urban America), and how those ideas changed over time.

Yet this research does acknowledge that South End House and Denison House represent two of the nation’s earliest experiments in urban social reform at the local scale – experiments that directly benefited the residents of the community in the form of badly needed services and amenities. These experiments were undertaken with the understanding that something needed to be done to confront the increasing social fragmentation fostered by the ongoing processes of industrialization, immigration, and urbanization. To that end, settlement workers at both houses worked to change the local environment as well as to expose the unpleasant (and often wretched) living conditions of industrial slums to Boston’s middle and upper classes. By bringing the public gaze to the vast social and economic inequities resulting from overwhelming levels of
immigration and rapid urbanization, South End House and Denison House settlers humanized the problems of the poor and thus influenced early twentieth century middle-class attitudes toward the city and its residents.

Boston’s first two settlements can tell us something about the changing social geography of the city. These two settlements present ideal sites for analyzing specific local reform efforts geared toward ameliorating the wide range of social problems brought on by industrialization and massive immigration. As Carville Earle (2003) suggests, these problems were only aggravated by two other related late-nineteenth and early twentieth century spatial processes – suburbanization and decentralization – geographic processes that were not explored in this dissertation.52 In this chapter, I review each of my initial research questions and attempt to provide some answers based on data from the settlement workers themselves. First, what were the socio-economic conditions within nineteenth century Boston residential neighborhoods that prompted such a social reform response, and how were they affected by the settlements? In the case of the South End and the South Cove, both districts (and their resident populations) were being squeezed by encroaching industrialization and persistent immigration. Housing conditions were horrid, street sanitation infrequent, play spaces nonexistent, and health care expensive. There were no “quiet and respectable” places for young people to meet and talk (Dudley 1893, 4). Settlement founders Robert Woods and Vida Scudder, both aware of the increasing social segregation in Boston, decided to “work upon the local community structure from within … seeking to knit together its human relationships” (Woods 1917, 1). Woods, especially, spoke of the changes in the social structure of the city: “The great city – the typical product of civilization

52 Earle (2003) argues that one of the main reasons for the spatial expansion and increasing social segregation of manufacturing cities between 1880-1930 was the arrival of immigrants and Blacks in American inner cities. Changing demographics, coupled with major transportation improvements, caused both residents and industry to move away from the city center to the city fringes.
– shows by multiple effects the danger of having people cut off from the better life of society, and breeding with phenomenal rapidity all the evils with which (urban) society is cursed” (Woods, in Woods 1929, 66). Both Woods and Scudder were convinced that settlements could elevate working-class neighborhoods by bringing to them education, art, and culture – the refinements of an upper-middle class background. Moreover, both assumed that if the settlement workers and their working-class neighbors cooperated, they would create a sense of community from which would come the desire to improve the community. Indeed, Woods thought that he might be able to train and export “a steady stream of social reconstructionists to other needy communities” (Mann 1954, 120).

Both Woods and Scudder, too, believed that publicizing the terrible living and working conditions of the poor was a service in itself. Like Jacob Riis, Boston’s first generation of settlement workers exposed the plight of the undereducated, underemployed to the mainstream, middle and upper classes of the city. Their activism on behalf of their neighbors resulted in a wide array of municipal provisions, including public baths, public libraries, public gymnasiums, and regularly scheduled street sanitation – services and amenities that were previously denied to an “untouchable” population. While the impact of these measures is difficult to measure, particularly at the local level a century later, we can see the lasting effect of settlement reform in labor legislation, housing legislation, the federal public housing program, and the lasting effect of settlement work in general in the expansion of sociology and social work programs in universities across the country (Davis 1967; Carson 1990). In a sense, settlement workers were the first shapers of urban public policy in the United States, since it was their efforts in social reform that led to the extension of public works projects and municipal services and amenities into the nation’s poorest inner-city districts.
My second research question concerned the motivations of the founders of the settlement houses in deciding to live in the slum. Settlement ideology suggested that middle- and upper-middle class leadership was needed to initiate neighborhood reform in the city. Yet another motivating factor may have been middle-class guilt; settlement historians John Rousmaniere (1970, 46) and Stanton Lynd (1961, 54) argue that Hull House workers, in particular, joined the reform movement “to ease the guilt occasioned by the period’s discovery of poverty.” Guilt certainly motivated Scudder, and may have motivated Woods as well. Both settlement founders were well-educated, upper-middle class Bostonians (one native, one a transplant), and both considered it their social responsibility to utilize the new tools of social science to stimulate local reform. In addition, both Woods and Scudder were motivated toward personal service/social reform work as a result of their belief in the social gospel. Both believed they could practice “social Christianity” by engaging in settlement work, and encouraged others to join the Christian brotherhood of service.53 Woods, in particular, encouraged American clergy to use their position to promote neighborhood rehabilitation. In Neighborhood in Nation-Building, Woods scolded religious leaders for their negligence:

Practically every Christian church in the entire country to-day is allowing itself to remain in the attitude of a divisive, disintegrating influence, instead of a center for the promotion of catholic human fellowship and cooperation in its neighborhood, in the local community, for whose democratic progress it stands in the most solemn of all conceivable responsibilities. (Woods 1923, 136-137)

Yet the two disagreed on how modern industrial society – increasingly irreligious, immoral, and impersonal – could best be healed through settlement work. Scudder hoped

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53 South End House maintained institutional links with nearby churches throughout Woods’ tenure as headworker. In the settlement’s first year, Woods tried to institute daily prayers for the residents, but two residents immediately rebelled against the headworker (Carson 1990). In 1892, Woods inaugurated a community-wide Sunday evening musical service designed to appeal to the “simpler and deeper religious instincts of people … absolutely without the taint of proselytism” (Woods 1893, 9). However, Woods also realized that overt denominational connections could limit the settlement’s capacity for reform; as a result, the settlement was renamed South End House from Andover House in 1895.
settlements would empower local communities through education and labor organizing; Woods believed that the main purpose of settlements was to serve as sociological laboratories (and training facilities) where educated men and women could study the “art and science of community organization” (Woods 1920, 16). Woods hoped that businessmen, lawyers, doctors, teachers, housewives, and artists would join the settlement cause and apply their specific skills toward studying the needs of the South End (Davis 1967).

Certainly, South End House served as a testing ground for Woods’ theories on community work and neighborhood rehabilitation. Woods was a strong proponent of social surveys – empirical social science – because he thought they might provide insight into the degree to which the South End environment played a factor in poverty. To that end, South End House “friendly visitors” collected vast quantities of data on household environment, income, occupation, religion, educational attainment, health, and sobriety within the South End district (Davis 1967; Carson 1990; Ward 1989). Woods assumed that once the surveys revealed the neighborhood’s “environmental defects,” the settlement workers, with their neighbors, could begin to address those defects, and reduce the crippling social costs of industrialization on the local level.

Robert Woods was convinced the settlers’ friendly visiting would lead to familiar relations between settlement residents and their neighbors. In fact, Woods argued that securing data “so complex, detailed, and intimate meant involving one’s self with people sufficiently to be taken within the reserves of family, neighborhood life and thought.” For Woods, friendly visiting represented a shift away from “scientific disinterestedness” and objectivity toward “humanized participation” and sympathy (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 59).
Vida Scudder, an avowed socialist, felt quite the opposite. Scudder did not advocate data collection or using the settlement house as an experiment in social science. She believed that the settlement “should feel that it vindicates its existence, though it give not a statistic to the world, if only, in these difficult and sorrowful days, it renders possible life among the people for those whose heart belongs to the people” (Scudder 1892, 345). As a result, Denison House residents did not produce or publish a social survey of the South Cove. Both Helena Dudley and her closest friend and advisor, Scudder, focused on reaching the individual rather than the entire community: “The settlement worker is occupied generally not in securing the larger reforms of conditions which must come gradually through public action, but in caring for the individual” (Dudley 1903, 13).

The goals of the settlement workers did change during periods of financial crisis. In 1893 and again in 1903, Woods and Dudley scrambled to help their neighbors; in 1893, Dudley and her staff solicited funds from an ad hoc Citizens Relief Committee to open a workroom “for the better class of sewing women” (Carson 1990, 76). Eleanor Woods wrote that “to be living in the South End of Boston at such a time was to follow the pulse of industrial depression” (Woods 1929, 89). Robert Woods, noticing that “the residuum of labor” was arriving in the South End from an ever-widening area of the city, began pushing for public works employment: “these people are not responsible for their unfitness” (their unemployment); “it is a condition that confronts us” (Woods in Woods 1929, 90). For the most part, however, Woods’ and Scudder’s social reform objectives remained consistent over time. This remained the case despite the changing demographics of both the South End and the South Cove during this period. During the duration of Woods’ tenure as headworker, the primary focus of the South End settlers was “neighborhood work,” which meant bringing “about a better and more beautiful life” in the
South End, developing “new ways of meeting some of the serious problems of society, such as may be applied in other places,” and discovering “individual initiative and mutual aid” among the working classes (Woods 1896, 1-4). The means by which South End House settlers participated in neighborhood work ranged from holding classes, organizing clubs, and building playgrounds and libraries to conducting social surveys of the neighborhood residents. Scudder and Dudley, on the other hand, emphasized community reform through education – which is why Denison House residents offered kindergarten classes as early as 1896, college extension classes in 1895, and why they organized regular lectures on current socio-economic issues facing late nineteenth century Americans. Yet both Woods and Scudder agreed that one of the most important services the settlements could provide at the local level was simply safe and clean space, space off the streets and out of the damp, dark, crowded, noisome tenement buildings.

My third research question relates to geographical boundaries: how did the settlers determine the geographical boundaries of their communities – or did they? My research suggests that neither group of settlement workers knew initially how large an area they might affect, or even who lived within their neighborhood. Within a few years of establishment, however, boundaries became clearer. The *City Wilderness*, written in 1898, shows the South End House sphere of influence to be west of Albany Street, east of Tremont Street, south of Eliot and Kneeland Streets, and north of West and East Brookline Streets – an area of about half a square mile, in which, in 1899, 40,000 people reportedly lived (Woods 1898, Woods 1899, 4). By 1908, however, these boundaries had shrunk to a little more than half the size, with the northern boundary being Berkeley Street. I could not find precise boundaries for Denison House in the settlement records until the 1940s, at which time they were identified as being east of Washington Street, west of Albany Street, south of Essex Street, and north of Curve Street – an
area of perhaps a third of a square mile. I assume that with time, as the neighborhoods gained and lost population, settlement boundaries changed accordingly.

My next research question asked how the settlement workers at each house decided who to help—and whether there were any groups purposely excluded. Of course, the targeted recipients of settlement work varied according to neighborhood demographics and resident interest. The annual reports of Denison House indicate that residents focused first on the local children; within two years of opening, the settlement offered two clubs for girls, two for boys, and five for children of either gender. By 1897, the children’s clubs numbered sixteen, and by 1909 there were twenty-seven clubs for children (Dudley 1895, 10; 1897, 19; 1910, 21).

Moreover, beginning in 1896, Denison House offered public kindergarten classes. Secondly, Denison House workers—initially all women—concentrated on the needs of women and mothers within the neighborhood, and provided classes in domestic science and hygiene as well as college-extension courses for those feeling intellectually ambitious. In developing these two types of curriculum, the leaders of Denison House to some extent presented and supported class divisions (at the adult level) within the settlement itself. Further, annual reports between 1895 and 1907 suggest that certain ethnic groups—Italians, for instance—were encouraged to participate in cultural and political events at the settlement, while other ethnic groups—Syrians, for example—were directed toward cooking and housekeeping activities and classes. After 1908, however, Helena Dudley discusses educational opportunities for Syrians and Greeks. A Syrian “social and educational club,” the Gemaat Surea Americanea, began meeting at Denison House in 1910, and within a year membership had swelled to nearly 100 (three-fifths of which were men). Like Hull House, Denison House residents encouraged cultural preservation in the form of ethnic festivals, folk art, and craftwork. In 1911, the settlement held a Syrian artwork
exhibit in 1911 where rugs, Bedouin blankets, and wooden furniture filled six rooms. Beginning in 1912, Denison House sponsored folk handicraft production by other local immigrant artists – Italians, Syrians, Greeks, and Armenians. The artists were paid for their craftwork in part from a settlement art fund – and the remainder from local consumers’ wallets.

While Scudder and Dudley viewed Boston immigrants (and their cultural backgrounds) with a combination of condescension and admiration, South End House demographer Frederick Bushée viewed immigrants with pure contempt (see chapter 4). Woods, too, wrote incessantly about elevating the economic and moral standards of Boston’s recent immigrants to American standard levels – and about the potential for ethnic factionalism. Second- and third-generation immigrants (especially “laggard types”) often required extra attention, particularly if they had lived in isolated ethnic neighborhoods like the North End of Boston (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 326). Woods promoted Americanization programs at South End House beginning in the 1890s, and he argued that the settlement served as “an outpost of a sound Americanism” which he hoped would spread “its infecting spirit from person to person among all classes” (Woods 1900, 6; 1908, 12). He believed that the “best answer” to the “overwhelming problem of the immigrant in our cities” was for settlement workers to encourage “wholesome,” modern, American standards of living and notions of democracy while discouraging older, European, peasant standards of living and ancient ethnic and racial hatreds (Woods 1908, 12). In the 1920 annual report for the settlement, Woods laments that the “native stock” cannot simply “invite” immigrant families into their homes and “play with them,” thus “passing on the essentials of American standards of life.” He then warns his fellow settlement workers that immigrants “tend to colonize, and when they colonize they necessarily establish institutions and associations like those of the fatherland” (Woods 1920, 15). Without Americanization programs, Woods believed
that immigrants would not have “an adequate knowledge of the manners, customs, ways of thought, [or] American ideals” (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 329). Thus, Woods assumed assimilation would help to foster a sense of social coherence, even in the most cosmopolitan districts.

Robert Woods and his South End House residents took a paternalistic, protective stance toward his district’s laborers, much more so than Denison House residents. Woods believed the working classes to be susceptible to society’s worst degraded and delinquent elements – perhaps because of their lack of education and lower culture – and therefore advocated that these elements be eliminated from the South End. Beginning in the late 1890s, he spoke of “dredging out the residuum” that “demoralized” the neighborhood, including vagrants, drunkards, prostitutes, and criminals (Woods 1929, 198). Segregating these degenerate classes would serve the dual purpose of providing the afflicted with proper medical and psychological treatment while ridding the community of noxious influences. Woods took a particularly harsh stance against alcoholics, who he perceived to be morally corrupt and likely to “undo” any sense of moral character in the home (Woods 1929, 250). He recommended gathering all “troublemakers” together and transporting them elsewhere – anywhere, just out of the South End.

My fifth research question concerned Paul Boyer’s (1978) and Rivka Lissak’s (1989) assertions that some settlement workers engaged in “social control” – did the settlers at South End House and Denison House try to “control” certain populations in the slum? This question cannot be answered in a paragraph, because this issue is largely a matter of opinion. I would argue that in some respects, both groups of settlement workers tried to manipulate their neighbors, through the specific programs offered at the houses. Robert Woods wanted to do
more than control the “residuum” in the South End – the criminals, lunatics, paupers, prostitutes, and drunkards – he wanted to exile them from the neighborhood. He favored the “control” of the local Black population, especially those “of an exceptionally low grade,” but he passed that responsibility on to the Robert Gould Shaw house, an all-Black settlement (Woods 1902, 13). He hoped to “control” the immigrants of the South End by encouraging association (and discouraging ethnic sectionalism) among the different groups.

Vida Scudder and Helena Dudley worked toward “controlling” the population of the South Cove – especially the girls and women of the neighborhood – by showing them how to cook, serve nutritious meals, keep house, and care for children. Denison House residents considered it their responsibility to “present the best American standards” to the immigrants of the neighborhood (Dudley 1905, 44).

My sixth research question asked how the South End House and Denison House residents perceived their role in the community, and whether this role changed over time. Twenty-five years after South End House opened, William Tucker argued that one of the most significant contributions of the American settlement house movement was the creation of new “social units” within the city – societal units that corresponded to other urban sectors with geographical boundaries (e.g. political – wards; religious – parishes) (Tucker 1917, 642). According to Tucker, these units – neighborhoods – had great potential, but needed organization and improvement. Robert Woods believed that one would lead to the other: that organizing the increasingly heterogeneous, unhealthy, congested South End community would lead to the (moral) improvement of the people who lived there. In some respect, Woods perceived his role in the neighborhood to be that of a social engineer, a neighborhood reconstructionist. Like other late nineteenth century reformers, he assumed that new social scientific methods could solve a
range of social problems associated with immigration and industrialism. Woods also believed that settlement methodology could restore some sense of social order and efficiency to a rapidly “disintegrating” society that had “lost coherence, to maintain face-to-face friendship in a society increasingly impersonal and anonymous” (Chambers 1963, 115). He argued that the first step toward reestablishing social order in the South End required renovating and overhauling the physical and social environment, since this, ultimately, determined an individual’s moral existence. In *The City Wilderness*, Woods asserts that the “real trouble” in the South End was that “people here are from birth at the mercy of great social forces which move almost like the march of destiny.” (Woods 1898, 290)

Woods, an environmental determinist, was clearly at the forefront of what was later called the “neighborhood movement” or “community movement” in the 1920s – represented most notably by Wilbur C. Phillips’s “Social Unit Organization” initiative. This movement was an attempt to organize neighborhoods into distinct resident and expert components that would engage in an ongoing dialogue about the needs of the neighborhood, and implement programs to meet these needs. Phillips had a broad agenda of social reform at the local level, and he wanted to give local residents some sense of control over their environment (Mooney-Melvin 1987).\(^{54}\) While Woods’ ideas on neighborhood organization did not include such extensive political self-determination, he did propose that settlement house residents “gain some sort of practical

\(^{54}\) Wilbur Phillips’ began his pilot neighborhood reform initiative (which focused on distributing medical information and preventive health care) in Cincinnati in December of 1917. The Mohawk-Brighton Social Unit Organization was highly structured, consisting of block workers and block councils (block-level resident organizations), citizen councils (comprised of block council delegates), occupational councils (professionals serving the neighborhoods, such as physicians, nurses, and settlement house workers), and a general council, bringing all of these together at the neighborhood level. Cincinnati officials initially supported the project; later, local politicians admitted that they viewed the involvement of the citizenry in social service planning and delivery as unrealistic and possibly dangerous. Mooney-Melvin argues that despite the demise of the "social unit" experiment in Cincinnati, it continues to serve as a model of democratic organization at the neighborhood level, and involved neighborhood residents to a far greater extent than had occurred in the past (Mooney-Melvin 1987, 156-157).
influence in local politics and municipal administration” (Woods 1923, 53). Woods’ annual reports suggest that South End House residents served as political advocates for the poor; the settlement also supported labor organizations that lobbied for “the improvement of social conditions,” though not to the extent that Denison House residents supported labor causes (Woods and Kennedy 1922, 61; Carson 1990).

Woods’ environmentalism was influenced by Charles Booth and Jane Addams. Before South End House residents’ *The City Wilderness* (1898) and *Americans in Progress* (1902) came the first installments of Booth’s twelve-volume *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1891-1903) and Hull House residents’ *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895). Addams, in particular, argued for exhaustive surveys of settlement neighborhoods because she believed the causes of poverty could be found in environmental defects. The historian Paul Boyer argues that Addams “inverted a classic charity organization formulation: the moral defects of the poor were not the cause of their poverty … but a consequence of the ‘struggle for existence, which is so much harsher among people near the edge of pauperism’” (Boyer 1978, 158). The neighborhood, too, provided a springboard from which the settlement workers could “assess every aspect of living from pre-natal care to dotage, to get into the family as an operating unit and into society also as an operating unit.” (Kennedy 1958, quoted in Gilchrist and Jeffs 2001, 25)

Carson (1990, 117-18) notes that the settlers faced a difficult moral issue in performing neighborhood reform. If they actively encouraged social mobility and educational attainment, they would also help to widen the social gap between children and their parents – especially immigrants – and possibly “abet the fragmentation of community endemic to the American city.” Woods, in particular, worried that the settlement’s reform efforts might actually advance geographic sectionalism between the classes. South End House reports show that beginning in
1900, Woods is increasingly obsessed with and frightened by the prospect of class (and generational) sectionalism.

To address the potential for geographic sectionalism, Woods and his staff tried to encourage their neighbors to connect to their neighborhood and take some responsibility for its improvement (similar to current theories on home ownership – the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development argues that if a family owns a home, they are more likely to remain and maintain its upkeep; see Trattner 1999; Husock 2003). Moreover, Woods strongly believed in the curative powers of “neighborhood fellowship” and “association;” he was convinced that morality and residential stability would proceed in the South End “one-by-one:”

> Neighborhood fellowship, without in the least lowering the value of any special loyalty of culture, tradition, or faith, can penetrate and surround them all as radium can carry its ray through apparently solid objects. This constitutes the marvelous power of the neighborhood idea and its surpassing adaptability to our political and moral needs. (Woods 1923, 136)

To that end, South End House supported social events wherein locals could gather, discuss neighborhood problems, and strategize possible solutions.

For most American settlement workers (Addams, Scudder, Graham Taylor, Mary Simkhovitch), this focus on neighborhood relations was inspired by old romantic notions of small town America and the idea that village communities (wherein everyone knew everyone else) made for social stability. Woods, on the other hand, viewed the neighborhood more like an English rural parish: an ideally cohesive and socially balanced community with a pastor or priest at the head. In 1923, he argued that settlers could help revive unhealthy neighborhoods in the same way that ministers could bring healthy personal influences to defunct parishes: “The settlements have undertaken to restore for some of its uses the old-time parish system. In one form or another, that system is an indispensable means for sustaining the general tone of a
community. This is particularly true in the thickly inhabited quarters of great cities.” (Woods 1923, 54)

My final research question relates to how South End House and Denison House differed from the prototypical American settlement house, Hull House. Mina Carson (1990) suggests that Denison House was most similar to Hull House, in that both settlements advocated reciprocity and stressed the educational benefits of settlement work for college women. Indeed, the primary difference between the two houses lay in the settlements’ organization: CSA-run settlements, like Denison House, vested control in a membership representing women’s colleges. Hull House, on the other hand, “depended on the personal force of one women for its survival and success,” Jane Addams (Carson 1990, 56). South End House, too, relied on one person, Robert Woods, for over thirty years, until Woods retired. Woods initially recruited settlers from the Andover Seminary, but later extended invitations to others in Boston’s educational, religious, and philanthropic circles. Residents at South End House, however, approached neighborhood reform more like Hull House residents than Denison House residents – indicating what Robert Woods thought was most important for his community was similar to what Jane Addams thought was most important for her community in Chicago – actual physical improvements to the infrastructure and regularly organized activities.

Both Woods and Scudder knew Boston was changing and would continue to do so. Like most American cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, Boston’s spaces became increasingly differentiated and more socially divided. Between 1870 and 1900, Boston’s central business district expanded considerably, pushing the warehouse district outward toward the South Cove and South End (Ward 1971). The “evils” of industrialization now seeped into Boston’s residential neighborhoods, creating slums in both districts. As a result, Boston’s social
reformers embarked on various schemes to investigate and eliminate socio-economic inequality and neighborhood dereliction caused by industrialization and immigration. The settlement movement represented one reaction to “Manchester economics” and the fragmenting effects of the new industrialized social order. Living in a newly industrial society, it made sense for Boston’s early settlement pioneers to look to English social reformers like Samuel Barnett for specific ways to affect social change in an increasingly unpredictable and fragmented urban environment. The concepts of localism and direct personal contact in social work provided the means by which American reformers could impose their ideas of social discipline and social order. Robert Woods and Vida Scudder developed a broad array of services to address local social problems, including early childhood education, day nurseries, lending libraries, and recreational clubs. The diversity of programs within the two settlements reflects each founder’s understanding of the needs of the South End and South Cove communities amidst rapidly changing social and economic conditions.

The settlement movement declined in the 1920s, partly because the movement’s leaders split over the political role of the United States in WWI. In 1915, the leaders spoke with one voice for an active American neutrality; by 1916, the American entrance into the war divided the leaders into factions, with Robert Woods and Mary Simkhovitch on one side, pushing for militaristic progressivism and Jane Addams, Vida Scudder, Helena Dudley, Geraldine Gordon, Lillian Wald, and Emily Greene Balch on the other, pushing for a pacifistic progressivism that rejected wartime totalitarianism. Yet settlement pacifists paid an unexpected postwar price for their wartime activism – in 1919, several of Denison House’s chief supporters refused to help raise funds for the settlement because of the settlers’ “very radical and anti-capitalistic position”
during WWI. In 1920, Denison’s headworker, Geraldine Gordon was asked by the CSA Board of Directors to “go away for a rest.” She left the following month (Carson 1990, 163).55

By the 1920s, too, settlement neighborhoods were changing. The prosperity of the early 1920s (and the growth of urban transportation networks) gave many American families the opportunity to move to better sections of the city. These families were replaced primarily by poor, southern, Black families. The transition of the American inner city from a white, ethnic demographic to a Black demographic made for more complicated social problems, problems that (settlement workers believed) could not be addressed by traditional settlement methods such as recreational clubs or classes. Moreover, by this time, most settlement workers had professional training in social work, and therefore had particular ideas on how they could best serve society as professionals – without the sentimentality of the earlier settlers. These new social workers had little interest in living in the slum (many of them had been raised in such neighborhoods, and were not eager to return) amidst the working classes – they saw themselves and their work differently. As a result, Trolander (1987) and Davis (1967) argue that the new settlement workers tended to think of their neighbors as their “clients,” which led to the decline of the settlement ethic of working with the local community and the rise of the social work ethic of working for the local community.

Although settlement workers continued to work for community development through the Great Depression, by the 1930s and 1940s, both municipal and federal agencies shouldered the burden of providing facilities and services to inner city neighborhoods. By the 1960s, the

55 While Jane Addams was never asked to give up her post at Hull House, she received hate mail from before the war to the early 1920s. Several organizations (including the Kiwanis Club, the American Protective League, and the Daughters of the American Revolution) launched public attacks on Addams for her stance on the war, her defense of immigrants who were rounded up in the Justice Department raids of 1919 and 1920, and her supposed political association with noted anarchists Eugene Debs and Emma Goldman. Carson (1990) suggests that part of the reason for the decline of the settlement movement in the 1920s was the vicious public attack on Addams, the spokesperson and heroine of the movement, as well as the movement’s inability to agree on immigrants and settlement assimilation programs.
settlement movement was essentially defunct, and the War on Poverty’s community action programs addressed urban social problems. Yet a few settlement houses are still in operation, albeit under different names (e.g. United South End Settlements and Federal Dorchester Neighborhood Houses in Boston, Cleveland’s Harvard Community Services Center, and East Side House, University Settlement, and Jacob Riis Settlement, all in New York City). The settlers’ commitment to localism and neighborhood organization remains – but research and reform now tends to be done by outsiders, and few social workers today communicate with the public at the local level. This is unfortunate, considering that today’s American inner cities house some of the poorest of the poor, the marginalized minorities in the “outcast ghettos,” who have limited access to job opportunities (increasingly located in the suburbs and edge cities), well-funded education, or cultural amenities – just as inner city residents lacked a century ago.
LITERATURE CITED


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VITA

Meg Streiff was born in St. Louis, Missouri, but spent her formative years in Buffalo, New York, during the peak years of the deindustrialization of the Rust Belt auto industry. Her interest in urban social geography can be traced directly to her parents, who, much like settlement workers, value neighborhood diversity and social justice. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the City College of New York in 1992, where she majored in political science. In 1994, she earned a Master of Arts degree in geography at San Diego State University, where her thesis research focused on the various social and economic impacts of large-scale public works projects (specifically, interstate highways) on inner-city neighborhoods in San Diego, California. Ms. Streiff will be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University in August 2005.