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Richard Bayard Miller

The History of Jane Addams Day

**A Presentation by
Jan Lisa Huttner
for
College of Complexes**

November 21, 2009

On December 10, 2009, we will celebrate the third annual “Jane Addams Day” in Illinois. In a life spanning 75 years of extraordinary accomplishment, Jane Addams did an incredible number of things. She wrote an unbelievable number of books, essays and articles; she was active in many organizations; and she even founded several important groups as well.

Of personal significance to me is the fact that Jane Addams was a founding member of two organizations to which I now belong. The first is AAUW (the American Association of University Women), which was originally known as the Association of Collegiate Alumni. Note that its current name refers to women who have graduated from universities, not women who teach or otherwise work at them. In the context of 1889, when the Chicago Branch was first established, this distinction was critical because the number of women who had graduated from universities at that point was very, very small. The other organization is IWPA (the Illinois Woman’s Press Association), which was founded in 1885 by a Chicago-based group which included Jane Addams.

Addams was also a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as the founder and leader of the International Women’s League for Peace and Freedom (IWLFP). Before her death on May 21, 1935, Addams fought to end child labor and improve city services, and she was also active in the suffrage movement.

When the legislation creating the first Jane Addams Day in Illinois was passed, I had the privilege of being the Director of International Relations for AAUW-Illinois. That was also the year I was personally celebrating my 25th anniversary as a member of AAUW’s Chicago Branch.

AAUW-Illinois played a critical role in the Jane Addams Day legislation. Then, once the legislation was passed, Chicago Branch helped get the word out all around the state

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(with others adding their own voices to my efforts). And IWPA also played a big role in getting the message out too. Every year, IWPA sponsors a space, now a full tent, at the Printers Row Book Fair, and for the past three years, I've used my combined memberships in AAUW-Illinois and IWPA to help coordinate a Jane Addams Day table under the IWPA canopy.



2007



2008



2009

Jane Addams: The Woman and Her Achievements

Jane Addams was born on Sept. 6, 1860, in Cedarville, IL. She is best known as the founder of Hull-House, which still exists on what is now the University of Illinois campus, but was once located in one of the worst slums in our city.

Some of the greatest names now associated with the history of the profession of Social Work were also involved in the creation of Hull-House: the Abbott Sisters (Edith and Grace), Sophonisba Breckinridge, Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, etc, etc. Other important associates of Jane Addams included influential women in America who were colleagues of Frances Perkins, the woman who became the first female cabinet member in USA history. (Perkins served as Secretary of Labor during Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" administration).

These women all participated in the settlement movement, many of them at Hull-House or at other facilities around the country that emulated Hull-House. Addams offered women the opportunity to become agents for social, political, educational and economic change in their own lives and the lives of others as well.

As a teenager, Addams wanted to go to Smith College, one of the few schools that offered women the chance to earn a bachelor's degree. Her father, a prominent businessman in the Rockford area, was liberated for his time and favored his daughters obtaining higher education, but not quite enough. He wanted her to stay at home and attend Rockford Seminary for Women (now known as Rockford College), where, in fact, she did receive an excellent education. But Rockford Seminary was not a degree-ranking institution at that time, so she didn't receive a bachelor's degree until later in her life, when ironically she was given a number of honorary degrees.

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On Dec. 10, 1931, Jane Addams became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace, which primarily honored her work as the founder and leader of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. When the prize was awarded, Halvdan Koht, a prominent Norwegian historian, declared Jane Addams to be "the leading woman in the nation, one might almost say its leading citizen."

Dec. 10 is also "International Human Rights Day." The date was chosen to honor the United Nations General Assembly's adoption and proclamation, on 10 December 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the first global enunciation of human rights. I like to think that Eleanor Roosevelt, who was our delegate to the United Nations at that time, having gotten everyone to agree to the wording so close to the day that the Nobel Prizes are given out, cagily created this "coincidence" so that International Human Rights Day would always fall on "Nobel Prize Day." (Nobel Prizes are distributed on Dec. 10 because that's the day Alfred Nobel died in 1896.)

And, yes, Dec. 10 is also my own birthday. I'm absolutely certain **this** is a complete coincidence, but, even so, I thank my Mom for her incredible gift anyway!

The Politics of Winning a Nobel Prize

So how did Jane Addams come to win the Nobel Prize for Peace? I'm here to tell you it did not just "happen." One of the things that really fascinates me is how people often treat success as a given. Once something happens, we become so complacent about it that we forget the effort that it took to make it happen. I'm willing to bet ten years from now, people are not going to remember how unlikely it was that Barack Obama could actually become President of the United States. Honoring Jane Addams seems like an obvious thing to do in 2009, but I'm here to tell you that Nobel Prizes just don't happen.

Addams received her Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, long after the end of World War One, and in the middle of the Great Depression. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom sponsored her for this great award. One of the key supporters of their campaign was Julius Rosenwald, the Chief Executive Officer of Chicago-based Sears, Roebuck & Co. From the very beginning, Rosenwald and his wife Augusta ("Gussie") were great advocates of Addams' work, and constant contributors to Hull-House and related projects.

Rosenwald's grandson, historian and Hyde Park resident Peter Ascoli, wrote a book called *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*. Ascoli grew up aware that his grandfather had given away \$63 million of his own wealth to philanthropic causes, but his book doesn't say a whole lot about the specific relationship that Julius and Gussie Rosenwald had with Addams. However, Ascoli wisely directed me to just the right place for more details.

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In the extensive Julius Rosenwald collection housed at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library, I immediately found two amazing letters. The first is a letter from a woman named Bessie Kind on Women's International League for Peace and Freedom letterhead. I've tried to find out more about Kind, who's listed as a board member on the letterhead, but even the WILPF archivist (who's now located at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania), had no information specifically about her. The letter, which clearly indicates that she actually knew the Rosenwalds personally, reads:

I am writing to you as my most influential friend and as a friend of Jane Addams to ask if you would personally ask Mr. Coolidge, Mr. Kellogg, Max Mason, and George E. Vincent to recommend her.

The proposals must come from government officials, university professors, and especially distinguished citizens.

I feel quite sure that your recommendation would carry great weight.

With many thanks for anything you can do to help. And warmest greetings to you and Mrs. Rosenwald, I am

Affectionately yours,
Bessie Kind

Mr. Coolidge is, of course, Calvin Coolidge, who was President at the time (the 30th President of the USA from 1923 to 1929). I'm guessing that Mr. Kellogg is journalist Paul Kellogg. In 1918, Kellogg became chairman of the Foreign Policy Association in New York, and in 1920 he was also one of the founding members of the ACLU. Max Mason was an American mathematician, president of the University of Chicago from 1925 to 1929, and president of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1929 to 1936. George E. Vincent was an American sociologist. At one time a President of the University of Minnesota, in 1914 he was elected president of the Religious Association of America. Incidentally, Vincent was also born in Rockford, so I'm guessing his name is on this list because, in addition to his other accomplishments, he had a personal relationship with the Addams family.

I was only able to find two letters that seem to echo Kind's letter. One is a short, brief note from John D. Rockefeller Jr. that basically says, "Oh, so sorry, busy right now." But the other one is from James Angell on Yale University Office of the President letterhead:

To Edwin R. Embree, Esq. (President Julius Rosenwald Fund)

Dear Mr. Embree:

I have your note of June 14th which came just at the beginning of the Commencement period and has of necessity been sidetracked until the present moment.

I find your request extremely difficult to deal with. I have known Miss Adams for nearly 40 years and have in many ways great admiration for her character and accomplishments. I am frank to say, however, that I could not understand, and find it

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even difficult to wholly forgive her attitude during the early part of our entry into the war. She was, from my point of view, so altogether irrationally pro-German, veiling her actual procedure under the guise of her Tolstoian pacifism that, in common with many of her other life-long friends, I found myself deeply hurt and alienated. I doubt whether I could write the type of letter which would really be helpful in connection with the Nobel Prize, assuming that any weight attached to a letter at all, and I think that, under these circumstances, perhaps I had better not make the effort. I am sure you will understand that I am guided simply by my desire to introduce no discordant note in any attempt to secure this recognition for Miss Addams.

Yours very truly,
James Angell
June 22, 1928

Note that Angell's letter was written barely a year before the stock market crash on "Black Tuesday" (Oct. 29, 1929). All through "the Roaring '20s," when we were flying high in America, many people were very angry at Addams for her pacifist stand during WWI. She had become quite unpopular. But then in the '30s, after the stock market crashed and as the Great Depression deepened, somehow Addams was rediscovered as a voice of clarity. These are the real components of history, and I find the historical irony of all of this very timely right now.

Honoring Jane Addams in Illinois

When then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich signed House Bill 5243, he brought to fruition over two years of dedicated work by Dongola Unit School teacher Cindy Vines and a team of five eighth-graders. It all started when Vines said to her new eighth-grade social studies class that she would like to "do a project that would make a difference."

The five students—John Cauble, Katie Forcht, Brittany Lannom, Jennifer Medlin and Chayse Swink—decided that their goal was to advocate for a state holiday honoring Jane Addams, after discovering there are no state or national holidays honoring women anywhere in the USA. Did you know that? Zero! Right now, there is not one single state or national holiday honoring a woman anywhere in the United States!

When I interviewed her, Cindy Vines actually told me: "Every year Casmir Pulaski Day would roll around and I would have to tell the students what Casmir Pulaski Day was and why we were celebrating it." Although Vines said she happy to celebrate Casmir Pulaski Day, she said it reminded her each year that we are not honoring any women. Without going into the whole hermeneutic of "holiday" versus "commemorative day," I should tell you that there are a few commemorative days. The national commemorative day for Susan B. Anthony is Feb. 15. Has anyone in this room ever celebrated Susan B. Anthony Day on Feb. 15th? No? Me neither...

There are also some state days. There's a commemorative day for the Abbott Sisters, Grace and Edith Abbott, in Nebraska. There's a state day in Montana for Jeannette

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Rankin who was the first woman to serve in the House of Representatives. There's a Margaret Chase Smith Day in Maine. Those are the only ones I could find.

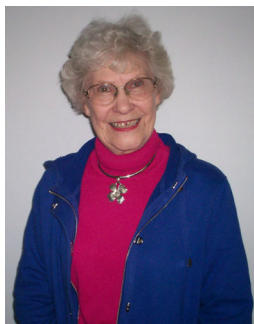
None of them are "holidays" per se, and as far as I can tell from looking in Google, nobody knows much about any of them. In Illinois, Jane Addams Day is now a "commemorative day," which means it's not a paid holiday, no state offices are closed or anything like that, and nobody gets paid overtime if they work on Jane Addams Day. So there are a few rare days named for other women, but they are barely remembered and rarely celebrated. And that's why I'm so adamant that here in Illinois we will celebrate Jane Addams Day every year on Dec 10.

AAUW-Illinois Members Embrace the Vines Class Project

As soon as they heard about the Dongola students' project, members of AAUW's nearby Carbondale Branch immediately provided encouragement and support. They knew that Jane Addams had been a founding member of AAUW's Chicago Branch in 1889 because Chicago Branch members had distributed a historical monograph in 1976. A copy of the monograph became part of Vines' background kit, offering a lot of personal information about Jane Addams that was very hard to find at that time.

Months of making phone calls and writing letters to legislators had resulted in little progress. Lelia Marvin, who was the President of Carbondale Branch at that time, suggested calling Illinois Rep. Mike Bost (R-115, Murphysboro). On Jan. 9, 2006, Bost met with Marvin, Vines and Jennifer Medlin (one of the students), in his Carbondale office. Impressed by their enthusiasm and the compelling case they made, Bost agreed to support their project.

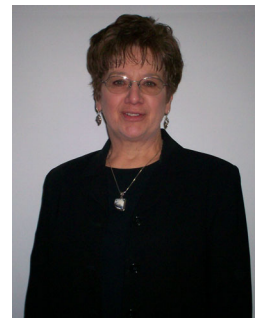
When the spring '06 legislative session began one week later, Bost called on Barbara Flynn Currie of Hyde Park, who is now House Majority Leader, leading her to introduce HB 5243 on Jan. 27. On April 12, after having passed in both the House and the Senate under the watchful of AAUW-Illinois lobbyist Paula Johnson Purdue, HB 5243 was signed and sent to the governor's desk for his signature. When he signed the bill, it became effective on December 31st, and that's why the first Jane Addams Day was officially celebrated in 2007.



Lelia Marvin



Photos taken 3/8/07



Cindy Vines

First Year Preparations

I first got wind of all of this in July 2006, when Kim Benziger, Immediate Past-President of AAUW-Illinois, gave her year-end report at our Summer Board Retreat. As she was going through a list of things she had done and places she had been, she said, "And Carbondale Branch members are very excited because they helped pass legislation to create a Jane Addams Day in Illinois."

I had been very active in planning the Chicago Branch Centennial Celebration (held at the Chicago History Museum on Oct. 14, 1989), so I knew that Jane Addams had been a member of Chicago Branch, therefore I immediately made the connection. I was totally convinced, in my gut, that if we did not make a big deal out of celebrating the very first Jane Addams Day, then there would never be another one.

And so I did everything personally possible to encourage people all around the state to celebrate the first Jane Addams Day on Dec. 10, 2007. I started with a press release that was issued on Dec. 10, 2006. In my mind, I was "planting a flag," claiming the territory a full year in advance. We sent our press release into cyberspace, letting everyone everywhere know that they were on a one-year countdown before the celebration of the first annual Jane Addams Day.

The first official event was a kick-off program sponsored by Chicago Branch AAUW that was held at DePaul University's downtown campus on Feb. 10, 2007. That just happened to be the day that a certain Illinois senator went to Springfield to announce his presidential campaign. So nobody cared much about the kickoff for the first Jane Addams Day celebration, but I cared. And I'm sure that lot of the people who otherwise would have worked with us through-out the year got engaged in the Obama campaign. By the end of that year, a lot of Illinois energy was going into Project Obama, which is hard to fault... even for me!

Our kick-off meeting at DePaul included the screening of a documentary called *Dinner at Jane's* by an artist named Suzanne Lacy. It was filmed at Hull-House in 1993 in conjunction with the Centennial Celebration of the Columbian Exposition.



The *Dinner at Jane's* Dinner Guests

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I heard a rumor there was a film called *Dinner at Jane's* and with great effort, I finally tracked it down. Finding a film about Jane Addams was incredibly hard, even though she's a great hero to so many people. Just think about the implications of how difficult it was to find this film. It has Gloria Steinem, Susan Faludi and Addie Wyatt—very well-known national and international feminist activists—and yet no one ever thought it was important enough to do a commercial release of this film!

I took *Dinner at Jane's* anywhere that anyone invited me; after the February screening in Chicago, I took *Dinner at Jane's* to Aurora, Carbondale, Decatur, Ottawa, Park Ridge, Quincy, and St. Charles. Even today, very few copies of this film exist and they're all on VHS. Video Data Bank (www.vdb.org), associated with the Art Institute of Chicago, is creating DVD copies that are supposed to be available soon. One of my personal goals is to make sure that copies of *Dinner at Jane's* are available to everyone by the time of Jane Addams' 150th birthday celebration on Sept. 6, 2010.

Our efforts in 2007 culminated in two December programs. The first one was on Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Chicago History Museum. The second was a luncheon at Hull-House on Monday, Dec. 10. Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn and Barbara Flynn Currie were our very special guests on that day. Quinn was very active behind-the-scenes, pushing forward the legislation. The Hull-House dining room, the same room filmed in *Dinner at Jane's*, was totally full. You can find out more about both programs, with many pictures of the happy celebrants, in the Jane Addams Day section of my blog "The Hot Pink Pen" (www.TheHotPinkPen.com).

So the first year was a big success. Well beyond Chicago, libraries held exhibits, bookstores did special displays, and programs were held all around the state.



With Kim Benziger (left) in Hull-House Dining Room

What Comes Next?

As I've already mentioned, next year is a big deal: the 150th anniversary of the birth of Jane Addams. Jane Addams' birthday on Sept. 6, 2010, will fall on Labor Day. Most

people won't be working that day because they are supposed to use that time to remember and support the American Labor Movement. How perfect!

Lucille Knight is the author of a wonderful book called *Citizen*, which is one of the key resources currently available on Jane Addams' early years. With the 150th birthday looming, Knight is about to publish a less scholarly but more complete biography of Jane Addams. What's the publication date? Sept. 6, 2010! I'm hoping publication of Knight's book will be a springboard, propelling us to bigger and better celebrations of the fourth annual Jane Addams Day come December. Maybe we can even get Book-TV to cover Knight's launch?!?

I also would like to see a kick-off ceremony to rebuild the Jane Addams Sculpture Garden timed for her 150th birthday. In 1993, a sculpture garden was created in Jane Addams' honor on the Chicago Lakefront. According to Mary Jane Jacobs of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, all the Louise Bourgeois pieces created for this garden are now in the basement of the Art Institute. So one of my goals for 2010 is an event where we break ground for the reestablishment of the Jane Addams Sculpture Garden. We need to get commitment from the city and the state, and get these sculptural pieces by Bourgeois, an internationally known sculptor, on display where they belong!

What Makes Jane Addams Day So Important to Me?

As a point of principle, I believe it's extremely important to have holidays named for women. In the words of the very important book that's been just published by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Women Hold Up Half The Sky*, so to eliminate us from history is close to criminal.

The significance of Jane Addams Day is twofold. First of all, remember what I told you: right now there are no, zero, no holidays in the entire USA named for women. After three years of research, I can only name three states besides Illinois that even have commemorative days named for women.

Women hold up half the sky. We played a vital role in American history from the very beginning. We are half the world. So why is it such a revelation that there is a commemorative day for a woman in Illinois now? How can it be that none of you, members of a progressive organization as you are, knew anything about Jane Addams Day before tonight? People go through the effort of achieving a commemorative day for a woman, and nobody knows about it and nobody celebrates it, not even people like you who thrive on honoring progressive heroes? Wow!

Women's voices must be integrated into the public imagination—young girls must be raised to believe they can be "somebody" in this world, and maybe even honored for their accomplishments someday. It's imperative that people understand why Illinois now has a day named for a woman. We should all be proud of this accomplishment and celebrate this special day.

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Secondly, I want you all to remember that Jane Addams Day didn't just happen. We now have a Jane Addams Day in Illinois because people cared enough to dedicate their lives to it, spending the time and the energy required to make something happen. In their honor, we must all spread the word about Jane Addams Day. We should remember that activism is real and still essential, and not just a matter of history or something that someone else accomplished sometime in the past.

For me, Jane Addams Day is not a just day to talk about what one woman managed to accomplish in the past. Jane Addams Day is a day to look at Jane Addams' life as a model for what we can accomplish together in the future!

© Jan Lisa Huttner (12/10/09)

Text for Nov 21st presentation prepared & delivered by Jan Lisa Huttner.
Condensed & edited for posting with assistance from Dawn Raftery.



To see Jan “as Jane Addams” interviewed on CAN-TV, visit:

<http://www.thehotpinkpen.com/?p=294>