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An Awakened Spirit: Review of *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Volume 7, Preparing to Lead*. Edited by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Barbara Bair, and Maree de Angury.

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# An Awakened Spirit

Kate Culkin

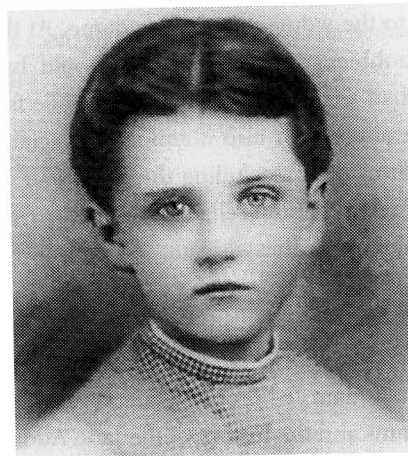
*The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Volume 1, Preparing to Lead.* Edited by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Barbara Bair, and Maree de Angury. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

The popular image of Jane Addams is “The Angel of Hull House,” a matronly woman selflessly devoting herself to helping the nation’s immigrants. *The Selected Papers of Jane Addams: Volume 1, Preparing to Lead, 1860–1881*, edited by Mary Lynn McCree Bryan, Barbara Bair, and Maree de Angury, illuminates a more complex, and more interesting, woman behind the angelic image. The book, the first of several planned volumes, covers the early years of Addams’s life, from her childhood through her graduation from the Rockford Female Seminary. Letters, diary entries, speeches, school essays, poetry, and debates illustrate Addams’s intellectual and emotional development, pointing to the woman she will become. At the same time, we also learn of her humor, hobbies, and spirit. (Who would have guessed that the saintly Jane Addams had a talent for taxidermy?) While focusing on Addams, moreover, the extensive annotation also illuminates crucial aspects of the second half of the nineteenth century, including the aftermath of the Civil War, westward migration, and debates about religion and women’s role in society. Emerging from this volume, the reader has a strong sense of the young Jane Addams and the world in which she lived.

The book is divided into two parts, along with a general introduction, an explanation of editorial methods, and long biographical profiles of the important players in Addams’s life. The general introduction gives us both the history of Jane Addams and the history of the Jane Addams Papers. The editors outline her accomplishments in the years after the scope of this volume, noting Addams’s work for labor and education reform, woman suffrage, and world peace. She founded the settlement house Hull House in Chicago with Ellen Gates Starr in 1889, lectured and wrote extensively on reform issues, published eleven books, and founded the Woman’s Peace Party and the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace in 1915 and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919. Addams received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, and



Jane Addams, age 4  
Jane Addams Papers Project



Jane Addams, age 6  
Jane Addams Papers Project

various periodicals regularly named her one of the country's most admired women. Her life was not without controversy, however, and her outspoken stance for peace during World War I earned her the sobriquet "the most dangerous woman in America." By her death on 21 May 1935, she had regained public favor, though that public never embraced her as fully as it had before the war. Despite her fame during her lifetime, Addams was little remembered by the 1960s. The Jane Addams Papers, which began in 1976, were part of the feminist project of rediscovering women from the past and shedding light on their historical significance. The project has been a three-part process. The eighty-two-reel microfilm edition was released in 1985 and 1986; Indiana University Press published *The Jane Addams Papers: A Comprehensive Guide* in 1996. The printed volumes are the final step in securing Addams's legacy.

Part I, titled *Early Influences: Childhood and Family in Cedarville, 1860–77*, addresses Addams's first seventeen years. The introduction to and annotation of this section intertwines Addams's family history and the history of the society surrounding her. Called Jennie as a child, Addams was born on 6 September 1860 in Cedarville, Illinois, the eighth child of Sarah Weber and John Huy Addams. Her parents, like many of her neighbors, had emigrated from the East. John Huy Addams, to whom his daughter was extraordinarily close and who was her role model, owned a mill and was active in civic affairs; he was elected to the senate of the Illinois General Assembly in 1854 and served for sixteen years. In 1863, Sarah Addams died, soon after giving birth to her ninth child, a stillborn daughter. The oldest Addams girl, Mary, took over raising her younger siblings until 1868, when John Huy Addams remarried. His second wife, Anna Hostetter Haldeman Addams, brought two sons into the Addams house, as well as an interest in high culture and phrenology and a "sense of order, propriety, and responsibility—all of which was so very different from Mary's habits and attitudes" (32). George Haldeman, the younger of Anna's children, became a close companion for the young Jennie, but there were tensions as two families struggled to knit themselves together. Addams began to attend the Cedarville public school when she was six, where she was a strong student; although John Huy Addams had relatively conservative views regarding women's roles and did not believe in woman suffrage, he wanted all of his daughters to receive a good education. He also fostered the idea that the family's wealth and social prominence brought with it social responsibility.

The documents in this section are primarily diary entries and letters by Jane Addams to family members and a few friends, though letters to her and the diary entries of others are also included. The earliest correspondence, written when

she was eight and nine years old, is presented all in caps, to indicate her block printing, and includes the dots she put between each word, which were meant to help children learn to write. The editors speculate that Addams may have been dyslexic, as she often reversed and had trouble forming letters. They have corrected the reversed letters, but left her frequently misspelled words as is and indicate when they have added periods by putting the punctuation in brackets. We can thus trace Addams's slow but sure progress as she masters written language. The documents in Part 1 illustrate Addams's loving relationship with her family and friends and the close-knit community of Cedarville and the surrounding area. The annotation brings that community to life, detailing the people, places, and events that made up Addams's childhood.

A letter written by the poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier to the thirteen-year-old Addams is one of the most revealing documents in this section. Addams had written to Whittier regarding his poem "Barbara Frietschie," which celebrated that fact that Frietschie had raised the Union flag to protest Stonewall Jackson's arrival in Frederick, Maryland. Addams's letter has not been found, but from Greenleaf's reply it appears that the young girl asked if the title character was an actual person. Whittier answered that his heroine was real, adding "I thank thee for thy generous appreciation of my writings" (103). The fact that Addams read and was moved by this poem illustrates how she and her contemporaries, born too late to remember the events of the Civil War, grew up steeped in the mythology of that cataclysmic event. We also learn that, even at an early age, images of female strength and heroism attracted Addams and that she was motivated to engage with the world beyond her small community, taking it upon herself to write the well-known author and activist.

Another notable document in this section is the remarkably prescient phrenological reading that Addams received while visiting the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. Addams's skull revealed that she was "Womanly and matronly. True, steady and uniform, self sacrificing until she finds she is imposed upon then would become very indignant" (145). Addams and her step-brother George formed the Capenic Phrenological Society of the Northeast on returning home from the exposition, suggesting her organizational skills were already well-developed. Phrenologists argued that people could improve themselves through self-discipline and the exercise of certain organs, and the editors speculate that her exposure to phrenology and its emphasis on self-improvement and personal motivation may have influenced Addams's later philosophies as she founded Hull House. Addams copied the reading into her own hand. Readers of *Documentary Editing* will appreciate the humor with which the editors

note that not only did the phrenologist assert that Addams was not a “good copyist,” but that Addams made two large errors in her copy (143).

Part II, “*An Educated Woman*”: *Rockford Female Seminary, 1877–81*, addresses Addams’s years away at school. The documents in this section are more varied, including correspondence, speeches, school essays, debates, poems, and articles published in the seminary magazine. The introduction places these documents within the context of nineteenth-century discussions about women’s education and, more generally, women’s role in society. Addams had hoped to attend either Smith or Vassar, women’s colleges that, unlike the Rockford Female Seminary, granted degrees and had rigorous curriculums that emulated those of men’s schools. Her family, however, had a long association with Rockford, which her older sisters had attended and where her father served on the board. While Addams continued to discuss transferring to a college in the East, she helped transform Rockford into the type of institution she wished to attend. During her time at the school, faculty, alumni, and current students, with Addams at the forefront, pressed to improve the curriculum and reputation of the school. Within a year of Addams’s 1881 graduation, Rockford too began to grant degrees. She would later reminisce, “The opportunity for our Alma Mater to take her place in the new movement of full college education for women filled us with enthusiasm, and it became a driving ambition with the undergraduates to share in this new and glorious undertaking” (159).

Her years at the seminary laid the groundwork for Addams’s later accomplishments, giving her the intellectual and organizational tools she would need. The documents from this period show her grappling with religion, participating in debates, redesigning the school’s magazine, helping to organize a science club, serving as president of a literary society, and writing passionately about the ideas she encountered during her schooling. The headnotes for Part II helpfully point out material that seems particularly relevant to her later life and work. For instance, Addams published an article entitled “Follow Thou Thy Star” in the July 1879 edition of the *Rockford Seminary Magazine*, concluding, “Unless each man follow independently his own star no one man can be a hero” (285). In the piece, the editors note, “Addams wrestled with the themes of idealism, life’s purpose, ambition, self-hood, and fate, all of which would engage her mind for years and eventually lead her to found Hull-House” (284). Addams’s reaction to her class’s choice of “the breadgivers” as its official motto also foreshadowed her later work. She had campaigned for this motto and, upon its selection, excitedly explained to her friend Clara B. Lutts, “our purpose is to give bread to the world in every sense we can, for it surely needs it” (318).

During her time at Rockford, Addams developed many close friendships. The most significant was with Ellen Gates Starr, with whom she would later found Hull House. The two women met during the 1877-78 school year; their friendship remained strong even though Starr left the seminary in June 1878 to teach school. In part because they were separated, there is an expansive body of correspondence between the friends. The emotional support and intellectual stimulation seen in their letters help illuminate the “female world” that historians of nineteenth-century women often discuss. This volume thus is an important contribution to the growing body of literature, such as Sarah Deutsch’s *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870–1940* (New York, 2000) and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz’s *The Power and Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (New York, 1994), which explore the importance of female companionship in the lives of women who successfully pursued careers outside the home.

The final two documents in the volume are, appropriately, Jane Addams’s graduation essay and her valedictory, both delivered at the seminary’s commencement exercises on 22 June 1881. The pieces demonstrate her sense of female potential and willingness to take a stand on issues important to her. In the graduation essay, entitled “Cassandra,” Addams argued that women should use their natural intuition to improve the world; she added they could make the best use of that intuition by learning to think rationally through the study of science (427–32). In her valedictory, Addams praised her school and teachers profusely, but did not shy away from controversy (432–37). She suggested that the school was too protective of its students, then tackled the issue of turning the seminary into a degree-granting institution. Addams stated that in the preceding year the students had felt “in the very air an awaking of college spirit, seen in the higher standard of admission and scholarships, in the enlarged course of study and in the ambition of the students”; addressing the seminary’s board, she continued, “do not now, we beg of you, stint this newly awakened college life” (433). Addams and her fellow students did not receive diplomas that June day. During the next academic year, however, the board approved the issuing of degrees to certain students who completed advanced courses of study. During the 1882 commencement ceremony, the seminary awarded diplomas to Addams, who had taken a rigorous curriculum during her years at Rockford, and a few students from the class following hers.

The strength of this volume is at times also its weakness. The editors have provided exhaustive contextual material through the introductions, footnotes, and headnotes. Even minor characters often receive a long paragraph of biographical information, and the histories of small towns across Illinois, visited by

Addams or one of her correspondents, are well-documented. The major figures in Addams's life, including her parents and Ellen Gates Starr, have extensive biographical profiles; that of John Huy Addams alone runs 14 pages (466–79). Illustrations appear throughout the volume, with generous, informative captions. The abundance of annotation demonstrates the meticulous research and enormous effort that have gone into this project; it can also, however, be overwhelming and somewhat rambling. A footnote on taxidermy, for instance, runs 10 paragraphs (322–24). It gives not only the history Addams's interest in the subject and the role taxidermy played in nineteenth-century culture, but also provides detailed examples of the relationships among taxidermy, the development of museums, and the cult of masculinity personified by Theodore Roosevelt. This verbosity makes it easy to lose sight of Addams and strays from the editors' stated intention of using annotation "to help readers understand its [the document's] significance to the narrative story of the life, times, and achievements of Jane Addams" (xlvi–ii).

With this exception, the volume is a fine edition. The transcriptions are literal, with a few clearly explained exceptions; misspelled words that the editors fear will confuse readers have footnotes indicating the correct spelling. Most of the material here appeared in the microfilm edition, though this volume includes documents that surfaced after its publication and others that fell outside the scope of that edition but help tell the story the editors wish to convey. The thorough, well-organized index helps navigate the copious annotation. Documents were chosen based on their "centrality to Addams's life story" and for what they reveal about Addams's work and philosophies (xxviii); the majority of the material is written by Addams, but material by others is included when especially relevant. Read as they are arranged, in chronological order, the letters serve as an excellent biography of the young Jane Addams; though her other biographers have touched on this topic, nowhere is it so thoroughly explored. Scholars of not only Addams, but of nineteenth-century women, education, and the Midwest will find *Preparing to Lead* invaluable.



