

MOSTLY MEN, WOMEN & CHILDREN: Hull-House was a female endeavor established to address inhumane living conditions created by rapid industrialization. The women of Hull-House developed civic, social, and workplace prototypes that became the foundation for government today. They were of the first generation of women to be politically active at city, state, and federal levels.

Florence Kelley fled an abusive husband and moved into Hull-House with her three children in 1891. Soon after she began working for the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics and in 1893 was appointed Illinois' first Chief Factory Inspector by Governor John Altgeld. Her investigations on slums and the garment industry centered on women and children, mostly children, some as young as three worked in tenement sweatshops. Labor laws followed her investigative disclosures.

Illinois regulated sweatshops, limited women's working hours, and passed the first state law setting a legal age (14) for child employment. Witnessing countless cases against sweatshops fail in the courts impelled Kelley to complete her law degree (1894) and be admitted to the bar.

In 1899 she created the National Consumers League and moved with her children to New York as its first general secretary; a position she held her lifetime. Through the NCL she instituted the use of clothing labels to identify legally-produced goods; she promoted companies that met government standards; and she encouraged consumers to boycott sweatshop products. During her administration, workplace regulations that transformed manufacturing conditions in America were established. She was an author of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, the forerunner of the FDA, as well as laws that regulated work hours and established minimum wage.

In her efforts to eliminate child labor, she advocated for mandatory school attendance. She organized the New York Child Labor Committee and called for a commission at the federal level to legislate child labor laws. With her colleague Lillian Wald, Kelley formally proposed a federal commission to male legislators, whose laws appeared apathetic to the death rate of working children - 680 daily. Congress enacted her proposal and established the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1912. President Taft appointed Julia Lathrop the Bureau's first director, as well, the first woman to be a U.S. bureau chief.

But government appointments were not new to this Hull-House woman. Governor Altgeld had appointed Lathrop to head the Illinois Board of Charities in 1892 in recognition of her survey which documented the city squalor inflicting the poor. This appointment made her the first Hull-House woman, but not the last, to hold a government position.

As head of this Illinois board, Lathrop recommended separate care facilities for the mentally ill, the aged, the sick, and the disabled. In Chicago, with other Hull-House women, she founded the first juvenile court in the United States. It included a psychiatric clinic for the young wrongdoers, mostly poor-immigrant children. Lathrop relentlessly advocated against capitol punishment for juveniles and was a trustee of the Immigrants' Protection League.

As director of the Children's Bureau in Washington, D.C., Lathrop pioneered studies on illegitimacy, infant and mother mortality, child labor, juvenile delinquency,

and pensions for mothers. Of her first accomplishments was the creation and distribution of free pamphlets on the health needs of pregnant women and the care of babies. During her nine-year tenure, the 1916 Keating-Owen Child Labor Act was passed. It prohibited interstate commerce of goods manufactured by children and the Child Labor Division was created to enforce the Act.

Lathrop served as president of the National Conference for Social Work from 1918-19. After WW I, President Wilson commissioned her and Grace Abbott, another social worker and Hull-House woman, to an international conference on child welfare in Europe where Lathrop helped create a new childcare bureau in Czechoslovakia, itself newly created.

The Sheppard-Towner Act which provided states with grant money to develop programs of health care for mothers and children was legislated in 1921, due mostly to the actions of Lathrop and her colleagues, mostly women. The American Medical Association, mostly men, labeled the law socialistic and the women who supported it as sinister Communist conspirators.

Upon her appointment in 1925 to the Child Welfare Committee formed by the League of Nations, Lathrop again traveled to Europe representing the United States at the League of Nations Childcare Commission. She served on the CWC through 1931, the year before her death at age 74.

Sources: <http://www.webster.edu/~woolflm/lathrop.html>

<http://www.webster.edu/~woolflm/kelley.html#worksc>

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