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# Transatlantic Border-crossing to and from Hull-House: Jane Addams, Henrietta Barnett, Hilda Polacheck, and Me

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## Abstract

In an era when immigration and diaspora claim as much attention from political rhetoric as from scholars, we stand to gain from re-visiting the writing of women associated with Hull-House, a pioneering Progressive-Era settlement established in Chicago's urban center during another period of high anxieties around immigration. And, in the context of this SSAWW conference, Hull-House's current cultural value can be re-illuminated by considering how its physical and social location—at a crossroads bringing people from many ethnic backgrounds together—helped produce generative women's writing about border-crossing and its links to social justice agendas. This paper will revisit the actual transatlantic border-crossing experiences of three women closely associated with Hull-House's early history: Jane Addams, its most visible leader; Henrietta Barnett, co-founder of London's Toynbee Hall, whose example inspired and continued to influence Addams and her writings; and Hilda Satt Polacheck, a Jewish immigrant from Central Europe whose memoir represents the only book-length narrative about Hull-House from the perspective of one of those Addams and her co-"residents" at the settlement called their "neighbors." I will first consider how the repeated transatlantic crossings of Addams and Barnett—both in person and through ongoing correspondence of over 40 years—shaped the vision and actions choices of both in gendered settlement leadership. I will then highlight aspects of Polacheck's memoir of border-crossing—not just across the Atlantic but also from tenement and sweatshop into settlement life—as providing a crucial supplement to Addams' and Barnett's "mestiza" narratives. Finally, I will reflect briefly on my own experience of re-envisioning Hull-House and Addams through transatlantic projects with colleagues in the Symbiosis organization and in at the University of Edinburgh.

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