

University of Chicago Library

Guide to the James L. Minnick, University of Chicago Settlement Album circa 1900-1901



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Table of Contents

Descriptive Summary	3
Information on Use	3
Access	3
Restrictions on Use	3
Digital Images	3
Citation	4
Acquisition Information	4
Historical Note	4
Scope Note	6
Related Resources	6
Subject Headings	7
INVENTORY	7

Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.MINNICKJ
Title	Minnick, James L., University of Chicago Settlement Album
Date	circa 1900-1901
Size	0.25 linear feet (1 box)
Repository	Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract The James L. Minnick Album contains about 20 photographs that capture the physical environment of the Packingtown (Back of Yards) neighborhood in Chicago at the turn of the 19th century and a few of the activities organized at the University of Chicago Settlement House. Established in 1894, the Settlement House reflected the wider social settlement movement in Britain and the United States. Settlements called upon wealthier members of society to give of themselves personally by going to live among the working poor. Settlement residents got to know their neighbors, made surveys of their conditions and undertook a variety of programs to improve their lives. Settlement work was shaped by both the application of the ethos of Christian brotherhood to addressing the ills of society but also the aspirations of nascent social science.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Restrictions on Use

The album's binding is fragile and should be handled with care.

Digital Images

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The University of Chicago Library appreciates hearing from anyone who may have information about any of the images in this collection.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Minnick, James L., University of Chicago Settlement Album, [Box #, Folder #], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Acquisition Information

The James L. Minnick, University of Chicago Settlement Album was a gift of the Tinley Park Historical Society.

Historical Note

Although the album bears the name of James L. Minnick, who was a regular charity organizer of his time, the photographs that he took document aspects of an important Progressive Era initiative: social settlement. The settlement concept originated in Britain in the 1880s but was quickly adopted in the United States. Settlement involved well-born or well-educated individuals who took up residence in a disadvantaged neighborhood in order to improve the lives of the working poor. Settlement was one of several mid-to-late nineteenth-century movements that sought to address the problem of poverty in industrializing societies. Efforts that preceded and influenced the settlement concept were the cultivation of “character” to bind individuals together for the mutual good and overcome the spiritual emptiness of industrial society. Christian socialists also sought to combat selfish individualism but they believed that regarding all of society as a nation, or brotherhood, united under Christ was the way to alleviate misery and achieve organic unity. Charity organizations soon emerged to provide relief in impoverished neighborhoods and encourage cooperation among the upper and lower classes.

The social settlement concept began as a criticism of organized charity. The relief programs that charities offered were imposed from “without” and not adapted to the needs of the poor in a given neighborhood. In addition, charity organizations did not go far enough in expecting the

well-to-do individuals who participated in charity to undertake an activity that would connect them to the organic whole. Social settlement, by contrast, asked the well-to-do to aspire to greater social connection through “personal service,” by residing in poor neighborhoods and seeking to become “friendly neighbors.” Being friendly neighbors had a practical aim as well. Through the practice of “friendly visiting,” settlement workers developed personal relationships with the families they served at the same time that they surveyed their living conditions so as to identify what reforms would best address their needs. By combining intimate familiarity and dispassionate observation, settlement residents felt they were undertaking “scientific charity.” In this respect, settlement work maintained a close alliance with the nascent social science that aspired to understand the workings of the social organism and achieve organic unity by studying social facts. Certain settlements were affiliated with universities and were seen as “laboratories” to gather facts and apply the general principles that were being researched in a social science department.

The partnership between social settlement and social science did not preclude relationships with Christianity or religious institutions. Many settlement workers were motivated by a desire to live out their Christian duty to serve their fellow brothers and sisters in society. However, this sense of acting upon a Christian ethics could be variously understood, either in close alignment with a Christian denomination or in a non-sectarian fashion, in which the core of Christ’s teaching was seen to be a universal principle that all human communities shared--not just one church--and that could be realized in the world--again, beyond the circle of a given church. In the case of close alignment with a Christian denomination, settlement houses were typically understood to be laboratories of “social Christianity,” or sites where the ethics of Christian brotherhood were practically applied. This was the case of the Chicago Commons, a settlement that was founded in Chicago in 1894 by Graham Taylor. Taylor was pastor of Tabernacle Church and a professor of practical theology at Chicago Theological Seminary. In this respect, the parallel American development of “social Christianity” (later “Social Gospel”) had prepared fertile ground for reception of the settlement concept when it migrated from Britain.

Founded in 1894, the University of Chicago Settlement was an example of a more non-sectarian arrangement, given that its faculty sponsors intended it to serve as a “window” for the new Department of Sociology even as it “ministered to the needs of a Chicago neighborhood.” The faculty committee approached Jane Addams, who had established Chicago’s first settlement, Hull House, in 1889, about someone who could lead the University’s new initiative, and Addams recommended Mary McDowell. The two women knew each other because McDowell had lived at Hull House in the early 1890s. McDowell accepted the University’s offer to serve as head resident, and in November 1894 she moved into a tenement building in Packingtown (Back of the Yards), on Cross Avenue near the intersection of 47th Street and South Ashland Avenue. Two years later, the University Settlement consisted of multiple flats spread across two buildings. When Minnick resided at the settlement and took his photographs, it was at this location on Cross Avenue. The game room and party that are depicted in Minnick’s photographs were among the typical activities and services that settlement houses organized for their communities. Other common examples were day nurseries, crafts clubs, plays spaces,

medical dispensaries, in-home visits by a nurse, sanitation campaigns, and coordination with local union leaders.

In the 1950s, the University Settlement was renamed Mary McDowell Settlement House and became an entity that no longer had direct affiliation with the University of Chicago. McDowell House was later merged with Chicago Commons in 1966.

Scope Note

James L. Minnick was serving as Superintendent of the Stock Yards District for the Chicago Bureau of Associated Charities when he took the photographs contained in this album, sometime in 1900 or 1901. Minnick was at the time a resident of the University of Chicago Settlement House in the Packingtown (Back of the Yards) neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. About one-half of the photographs in the album pertain either to activities organized at the Settlement House or to Packingtown and its environs. The other half of the photographs are miscellaneous and may not have been taken by Minnick himself. Those range from a postcard of Keir Hardie, the founder of the British Labor Party, to a picture of Mrs. Minnick's dog to several pictures of homes in an unknown fashionable neighborhood. Hardie addressed the postcard to Mary McDowell, head resident at the Settlement. Whoever ultimately came to be in possession of the album is not known but he or she likely received it from Mrs. Minnick, whose address is recorded at the end of the album. Either Mrs. Minnick or the person who later received it may have been responsible for the addition of the photographs that are unrelated to Packingtown or the Settlement House.

Concerning the photographs that are from Minnick's residency at the Settlement, several portray homes, streets and railyards in Packingtown. Another set of shots capture a nearby garbage dump, where people were salvaging, and Bubbly Creek on the northern edge of Packingtown. Although unconnected with the Settlement House, a Gypsy (Roma) camp had been established at 47th Street and Ogden Avenue. Minnick took a handful of shots of Gypsy women and their families. Lastly, a final series of photographs pertain to activities organized at the Settlement House for the people of Packingtown. There are boys in the game room and children gathered around a table for a party. Mary McDowell appears standing behind the children in the party photograph.

Related Resources

Addams, Jane. Collection

Camp Farr Collection

Chicago Commons. Collection

National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers. Records

University of Chicago Service League. Records

University of Chicago Settlement. Records

Wallin, Madeline. Papers

Subject Headings

- Addams, Jane, 1860-1935
- McDowell, Mary, 1854-1936
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- University of Chicago. Settlement
- Back of the Yards (Chicago, Ill.)
- Friendly visiting
- Social gospel
- Social settlements
- Sociology--History

INVENTORY

Box 1

Photograph Album, circa 1900-1901

View digitized album. <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/src/md/minnickj-0001-001>