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# Helen Hall (1892–1982): A Second Generation Settlement Leader

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*Helen Hall, settlement leader and second generation social worker, was a prominent social reformer for over fifty years. Her professional life spanned a period of early social work where her activities occurred alongside those of first generation social workers, and continued through the depression, the war years, into the 1950s and the settlement movement's increasing attention to juvenile delinquency, and finally into the turbulent 1960s when her activities overlapped the modern generation of social workers. Despite her widespread work in national affairs and neighborhood concerns, her leadership in the National Federation of Settlement, her extensive writings and studies, Hall has not received appropriate attention from those who study the past. This paper explores the significant contributions she made to the field of social welfare.*

"My first remembrance of politics goes back to the age of six when I surprised my parents by reciting triumphantly: 'Fried cats and pickled rats are good enough for Democrats.' "

Thus began a radio broadcast by Helen Hall (HH Papers, SWHA Box 34:File 20) on October 30, 1944 in support of President Roosevelt's reelection. This speech, like those before and those yet to come, was folksy, anecdotal, compassionate and spoken with her settlement neighbors in mind. In explaining how she was transformed from a Hoover supporter in 1928 to a Roosevelt supporter in 1932, she retold how she shared her settlement neighbors' stories of hunger and unemployment on Capitol Hill "only to be met with callous indifference from spokesmen for the Hoover Administration."

Helen Hall, who helped define and refine the social work profession during a period in which she was one of social work's most influential members, expressed themes, which remained with her during her long and distinguished career, related to

the importance of community, generalist practice, understanding the political environment, and advocacy for the poor and oppressed. Hall, like some other women of her time, has not received the attention and acknowledgement for her work that one might expect. This paper addresses this lack of attention, explores the significant role Hall played in social work, pinpoints a number of her major themes, and adds to the growing literature which, long overdue, evaluates the contributions of female social workers of the second generation.

### Second Generation Social Work Women

Hall, a second generation social worker, was prominent from the 1920s when she was head of University House Settlement in Philadelphia through the 1960s when she retired, after 34 years, as head of Henry Street Settlement in New York City. For the purpose of this article, a second generation career is defined as beginning in 1920 (overlapping with the first generation for most of the 1920s) and ending in 1955 (overlapping with the "modern" generation in the early 1950s), when the profession united in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). The role of female social workers during this period is only now being fully explored.

Contrary to most American professions, women played a vital role in social work from its earliest beginnings. During its first generation (up to around 1920), women and men together created social work and shared their involvement at all levels. The role of these early social work women has been well-documented (Chambers, 1986). The feminist movement provided a healthy environment for women looking for a career in social work before 1920. However, after 1920, women's political strength declined rapidly as the women's movement's energy evaporated. Without an active feminist movement during second generation social work, women struggled to maintain their leadership position in the profession and by the 1950s saw men in most of the leadership roles. While the second generation saw the beginning erosion of female leadership in social work, even during this period women dominated many areas of social work, particularly Hall's domain, settlement work, where they held most of the head positions at the houses. For example,

in 1930, women were the head workers at 76% of the houses; despite a decrease in the 1940s, women still held the majority (59%) of the head positions in 1946 (Trolander, 1987).

Despite many influential women of the second generation, including Hall, the environment was not conducive to their success. The long-standing attempt to essentially defeminize social work in order to attract men into the profession had an impact on female participation (Kravetz, 1976). Women unwittingly participated in their own demise without understanding (nor being in an environment which would support such an understanding) the way in which discrimination toward women would escalate as men increasingly entered in the profession. Social work, like other professions, was affected by a social environment that encouraged the profession's dominance by men. Yet women held leadership roles in all areas of social work and continued to dominate in some areas throughout the generation (Andrews, 1990).

### Helen Hall's Life and Work

Hall's professional life spanned a period of early social work where her activities occurred simultaneously with those of first generation social workers (i.e., Jane Addams, Lillian Wald), and continued through the depression, the war years, into the 1950s and the settlement movement's increasing attention to juvenile delinquency and drugs, into the turbulent 1960s when her activities overlapped the modern generation. Hall grew up in New England in a solid, middle-class family. Her original intention upon entering college was to pursue the arts and she spent a year taking art courses and doing sculpture. She decided to stop and "find out what was done for poor and people in trouble" (Hall, 1971). She spent one year (1915) at the New York School of Philanthropy (now the Columbia University School of Social Work) and found herself "caught beyond all recall in the enthrallment of social work" (Hall, 1971).

Until World War I, she organized a settlement house in Westchester County and worked with the Westchester County Children's Department. During the war, she went overseas with the Red Cross, working in hospitals at first and later organizing a club house for girls in Alsace. At the end of the war, she

went to the Philippines and China with the War Department to direct the Organization of Service Clubs for enlisted men. She was the Head Worker of University Settlement in Philadelphia from 1922–1933 at which time she became the Head Worker (succeeding Lillian Wald) of Henry Street Settlement.

While at Henry Street, Hall published widely in both scholarly journals and lay periodicals. The Helen Hall Settlement Papers (Brown, 1959), in the Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, covering the period up to 1958, cites sixty-five articles. She testified in Congress on numerous occasions from the 1920s through the 1960s on social legislation at all levels of government; supported consumerism, public housing, birth control, national health insurance and civil rights. Even after her retirement at age 75, she was remarkably active for several years during which time she completed her memoirs, *Unfinished Business in Neighborhood and Nation* when she was almost eighty years old.

Hall played a vital role in two major pieces of welfare legislation of the century. In the early 1930s, she sat on the Advisory Council of the President's Committee on Economic Security (which wrote a report leading to the Social Security Act), and, in the late-1950s, she was a founder of Mobilization For Youth, a forerunner of the War on Poverty. Her nation-wide study of unemployment conducted in 1928 for the National Federation of Settlements had a direct impact on public sentiment and future legislation regarding unemployment. The study, entailing hundreds of interviews throughout the country, dispelled three myths: that unemployment comes only in hard times; that only people who have been too thriftless to save suffer when they are unemployed; and that if a man really wants to find work, he can find it (Calkins, 1930). All the data were gathered before the stock market crash of 1929, and the timing could not have been better. Two books resulted from the study, and Hall contributed a piece to each one (Elderton, 1931; Hall, 1930, 1931). As President of the National Federation of Settlements from 1934–40 she traveled widely advocating for the poor and oppressed. She, along with her future husband Paul Kellogg, were more progressive than other Federation leaders and

were far ahead of them on the issue of the need for unemployment legislation.

According to Hall and others who knew her (Chambers, 1971; Keyserling, 1970), her life dramatically changed upon meeting her future husband in her midlife. Hall and Paul U. Kellogg, editor of *The Survey*, became friends in the late nineteen twenties when they met at a settlement conference. At that time Kellogg was married and the father of two adolescents. He often visited University House in Philadelphia where Hall was Head Worker and there was voluminous correspondence between the two from that time until 1933 when Hall moved to New York City to take the Henry Street position. With Kellogg also in New York, the need to correspond by writing no doubt diminished and there are few personal letters on file after 1933.

Kellogg seems to have been an important mentor for Hall. Letters from 1928 and onward show that he often wrote about her to others. For example, when Hall was planning a trip to Detroit to study that community's unemployment, Kellogg wrote William Norton of the Detroit Community Fund to introduce Hall saying, "You perhaps saw her article—one of the outstanding features of our special unemployment number last April. The settlement folk, under Miss Hall's leadership, have been the pioneer group of social workers in their awareness to the whole problem" (1-7-30, HH Papers, SWHA, box,44: file 14). In 1929, he asked her to consider a job with *The Survey*. Although she turned him down, she said, "You satisfy my sense of rightness for you combine a broad idealism with a fine personal adjustment to life and it doesn't seem to me that that often happens" (letter to Kellogg, 5-14-29, HH Papers, SWHA, Box 18). Later that same year Kellogg asked her to write a book on the unemployment study on which both had worked for the National Federation of Settlements and she again turned him down (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 39: File 1). Kellogg often edited written presentations Hall was preparing or offered feedback from completed presentations. In 1932, she gave a speech in Berlin on unemployment. The speech has several hand-written comments by Kellogg such as, "Europeans—Even settlement workers have it in the backs of their heads that the U.S.A. is rich. Upset that—and you have their interest" (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 34: File 1).

The letters became increasingly personal and by 1931 it was clear that they were in love (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 18). The file of their personal correspondence was sealed until 1987 and contains very personal and intimate correspondence. Kellogg obtained a divorce in 1934 and in February, 1935, Kellogg, age 55, and Hall, age 43, were married.

### Helen Hall's Themes

Hall defined herself as a social worker, despite the fact that she only took one year of social work courses and did not earn a degree. She focused on a generalist approach of linking the relationship of broad social problems to individual misery. She did not buy into the individual pathology perspective so popular in social casework during the 1920s and 1930s. For example, after attending a social work conference in 1935, Hall wrote a letter to Lillian Wald (6-19-35), former head of Henry Street, filling her in on all the sessions she attended including one which was critical of training which emphasized the casework approach. She said,

One tendency which amused and disheartened me at the same time, was that with the growing recognition of the importance of what has come to be called 'GROUP WORK', there is an inclination to use big words and social work terminology in the same way that the case workers for ten years obscured from the lay mind their sometimes quite simple processes! (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 14, File LW)

In the 1930s, Hall declared the settlement worker to be "the only general practitioner left in the field of social work" (1938, HH Papers, SWHA, box 34:file 9). When she first moved to Henry Street in 1933, she faced talk about settlements being unnecessary because slum neighborhoods were becoming a thing of the past. She strongly disagreed because, with the specialization occurring in social work, there would be more need than ever for generalists in the neighborhoods who could see the "...so-called 'closed' cases after they are closed—to see the child on his *way* to trouble, the family on its *way* to breaking up, the old people caught on the sixth-floor walk-ups, the defeated, the shy, the defiant" (Hall, 1971). In a speech on why a

city should have a settlement (Canadian Conference on Social Work, 1938, HH Papers, SWHA Box 34:File 9) she emphasized the peculiar nature of a settlement which made it suitable to help those in need: they see the whole family and those who fall through cracks; they are experiment stations where flexibility is their greatest asset; and they are a common meeting ground to which all elements of the community are welcome. She noted a significant change from earlier times, "We face an American-born, American-educated group of people. . . we. . . are living among a group of people brought up in the American tradition of opportunity for all but those who find themselves without opportunity or jobs."

The settlement worker, according to Hall, acted as a liaison between the wealthy and the poor. She was a firm believer in recruiting wealthy and influential patrons for the Henry Street Board of Directors. She often found the main task of the settlement worker to be one of interpretation because she believed that lack of awareness was "behind so much cruelty" (1931, HH Papers, SWHA, box 34:file 1). Over the years she wavered in this belief, but, she reported, was always reconvinced by her husband whose life work, after all, was involved with interpretation (Hall, 1971).

Hall was as comfortable talking with members of Congress as she was talking to residents in her Henry Street neighborhood. Robert Kennedy referred to her as a woman "whose name is a legend among those concerned with social justice" (6-8-67) and President Johnson applauded her for advancing the cause of human welfare (6-29-67). He invited her to the signing of the Medicare Act in 1965 (HH Papers, SWHA, 87:1). She remained influential into old age. For example, at the age of 84, in 1976, she continued to be active in the National Federation of Settlements, United Neighborhood Houses, Hamilton Madison House, Citizens Committee for Children, The American Parents Committee, Inc., Consumer Family Foundation, Inc., Attorney General's Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau, Mobilization For Youth, and was Director Emeritus, Henry Street Settlement, Clarke Chambers, historian, pointed out that ". . . she was deeply committed to the social-action role of welfare work; she believed in the necessity of social research; she was relentlessly

insistent upon social justice as ever the pioneering generation had been." (Chambers, 1963).

### Lack of Attention to Hall

Hall remains unknown to many social workers. Her role in social welfare history has not been told. Library searches indicate that, other than some book reviews of her memoirs in the early 1970s and some brief references to her in social welfare history books, she is little known to us. Some exceptions are noted: Chambers, in both his 1963 book, *Seedtime of Reform* as well as his 1971 book on Hall's husband, Paul Kellogg, gives generous reference to Hall and credits her with a significant role in second generation social work. Chambers knew Hall well for the last twenty years of her life. On April 19, 1968, he sent her a copy of a paper on poverty which he had presented at a national meeting. On the title page he had hand-written, "To Helen Hall—who *made* the history for others to write" (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 10:File 2). Also, Judith Trolander's 1987 book on *Professionalism and Social Change* gives Hall some attention and refers to her as one who "used the settlement house as a base for a long, devoted, and energetic career on behalf of liberal social legislation" (1987, p. 52). Finally, Hall was included in the 1986 *Biographical Dictionary of Social Welfare in America*, edited by Walter I. Trattner (Steinwall, in Trattner, 1986).

Certainly one reason for Hall not being better known is that Hall was not interested in taking center stage and often avoided any credit due her by insisting others played a more significant role or simply by refusing to let accolades be recited for her. Perhaps the major weakness in her 1971 memoirs is that she gave so little space to speaking about herself. She had a great deal to say about her neighbors at Henry Street Settlement and she credits various professionals and politicians for their involvement in settlement issues. She was so insistent that everyone be credited that ". . . once begun, the names multiply for fear of offending anyone missed" (Trolander, 1987, p.54). Chambers read a draft of the book and provided Hall with a critical analysis including the comment, "Again I know this is not intended to be a full scale autobiography, but I think you should have a bit more about yourself. . ." (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 37:File 1).

Either by choice or by nature, Hall did not project a strong national image despite her high involvement in projects that extended far beyond the borders of her neighborhood. Trolander compared her to Jane Addams and concluded that their different styles explain why Hall has not received similar praise and attention. Hall did not possess "Addams' genius as a publicist nor her ability to protect a strong public image of herself" (1987, p. 53). Hall had the difficult task of assuming leadership of a settlement which had been ably led by Lillian Wald, the founder of Henry Street Settlement, a pioneer of the settlement movement and one who portrayed a strong image. Many letters between Hall and Wald have survived and show that there was a great deal of warmth between the two women. Hall wrote Wald regularly after she took over Henry Street and kept her apprised of all activities.

Hall was committed to serving her neighbors as a friend and neighbor, rather than as a person who held power or prestige. Her approach to issues was to secure consensus rather than to promote confrontation. This was typical of settlement workers at that time and, even though the paternalistic aspects of working on behalf of neighbors would come to be called elitist by community organizers of the 1960s, Hall's demeanor was an expression of her sense of egalitarianism. Her model was anti-professional and in line with those who opposed the profession's emphasis on casework. As Wenocur and Reisch (1989, p. 73) note:

. . . The settlements' philosophy of training and service was not conducive to the establishment of a unique occupational domain. Whatever their class biases and their often awkward attempts to bridge class and cultural barriers, the settlements strove to create a more egalitarian relationship between providers and recipients of services. This approach was diametrically opposed to the prevailing conception of professionalism in the U.S. which stressed the expertise of the professional and a service ideal which underscored the unequal relationship between the parties to the service transaction.

The Social Work Second Generation and Hall's involvement with settlements occurred after the period when settlements

were dominant and her work ended during a period when settlements were under fire by the anti-establishment mood in the environment. The fact that Hall resigned (in 1967) during a period of great transition and turmoil in the settlement movement no doubt altered any assessment made of her work. Settlement Houses were at their peak before World War I and went into decline during Hall's years in settlement work. As casework took hold in the social work profession, the social reform efforts of settlements declined. In the 1930s, there were only 230 houses—down from 413 houses in 1910 (Wenocur and Reisch, 1989, p. 234). They were not given new energy until the 1950s and 1960s as neighborhood movements emerged. Ironically, while the advent of the "War on Poverty" and the funding of the Office of Economic Opportunity in the mid-1960s revived settlements, it also led to their eventual loss of favor. In 1965, it is estimated that settlements had over \$10 million worth of OEO grant money (Trolander, 1987, p. 185). Ideological differences, spurred on by some dominant personalities (i.e., Saul Alinsky, Richard Cloward), made it impossible for the settlement to continue to benefit from OEO.

The charges directed at settlements in the 1960s were centered around three basic issues: (a) confrontation, not the settlements' (and Hall's) desired mode of consensus, was alleged to be mandatory for social change; (b) settlements were accused of having become part of the established order; and (c) settlements were seen as not working with the ones who were the truly needy. The long-standing policy of settlements working on behalf of the poor by mediating between the well-to-do and the poor was seen as irrelevant and elitist by community organizers of the 1960s (Beck, 1976; Trolander, 1982). Hall's approach fell into this policy; she was considered "establishment" and she believed that you tap the wealthy patrons for money and support for programs in the neighborhoods. Her role in and approach to Mobilization For Youth exemplifies the ideological issues that were present when she bowed out of Henry Street.

### Mobilization For Youth

Mobilization For Youth (MFY) was the training ground for much of the criticism directed against settlements. Ironically,

MFY emerged out of the settlement movement and more specifically out of the work of Hall and the Henry Street Board of Directors. In 1957, the Board of Directors at Henry Street conceived of an interdisciplinary project to fight juvenile, delinquency by focusing on community organization, treatment, and research. Hall spent ten months writing a proposal for a demonstration project which would focus on the Lower Eastside in New York City. (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 90:File 5). She and the Henry Street Board recruited Lloyd Ohlin and Richard Cloward from Columbia University School of Social Work to develop a research design for the project. In late 1959, they received a two-year NIMH grant of \$450,000. They remained connected to Henry Street (were physically located there and funds were channeled through the settlement house) until late 1960. More planning occurred (now under the leadership of James McCarthy, Richard Cloward and George Brager) and MFY was finally launched by President Kennedy in May, 1962 when it received \$12.6 million (Hall, 1971).

In a short time, MFY became highly politicized and rejected its settlement beginnings and thus, Hall. Throughout this time, Hall remained optimistic and positive and later asserted in her typical style, "While I disagreed with some of their methods and their overhopefulness about being able to research everything, I considered the first three directors intelligent and creative men, who had great dedication" (Hall, 1971, p. 275). When Hall resigned, at age 75, from Henry Street Settlement, the director of MFY, Bertram Beck, also took on the directorship of Henry Street. In a brief period of ten years from its beginning conception at a Henry Street board meeting, MFY came full circle reconnecting with its Henry Street roots.

In an article on Mobilization For Youth (after Hall retired) in the *Village Voice*, (10-24-68) Susan Brownmiller referred to Hall as "the dowager empress of traditional social work." She said that "The powerful, elitist Miss Hall was both a sponsor of the original MFY and a dedicated enemy of MFY's community organizing program." Brownmiller noted that Beck was now in residence at Henry Street and said, "...In a heavy bit of symbolism, Beck has moved into Helen Hall's apartment in the Henry Street establishment (it goes with the job) and his family

now reportedly enjoys the services of Helen Hall's old cook." While Hall was disappointed and hurt by the article and its inaccuracies, she was predictably reluctant to defend herself by responding to the charges. It must have been particularly painful for Hall, who fought her entire career against the dominant trends in social work, to be called the "dowager empress" and an "elitist". She was caught up in a trend that was far larger than herself—a trend that was both ageist and sexist—the movement in the settlement houses from older female-dominated leadership to younger male-dominated leadership.

Even though she declined to defend herself in print, her supporters were furious and decided to take a stand. Samuel Schneiweiss, an attorney and Henry Street board member, drafted a letter to the editor of the *Village Voice*, but first let Hall read and edit it. He reported, "I made the mistake of telling Helen of my intention to respond to the article. It took the combined efforts of Fairfield Dana and myself to overcome her opposition. In addition, Helen censored my response, so that it ended up completely factual" (letter to Mrs. Herbert H. Lehman, HH Papers, SWHA, Box 93:File 10). Schneiweiss's letter to the editor was published in the *Village Voice* on November 7, 1968 defending Hall and summarizing all her activities and her significant contributions. It also pointed out that she was a founder of MFY (Brownmiller had indicated that Richard Cloward was the founder of MFY). Beck sent the letter to Hall with a handwritten comment, "From one elitist to another" (HH Papers, SWHA, Box 93:File 10).

### Conclusion

Helen Hall died in 1982 after several years of declining health. A memorial program was held in April, 1983, in New York City where those who remembered her (including, for example, the Honorable Robert F. Wanger) spoke of her work and of her character. A former assistant to Hall summarized their relationship: "From Helen, I learned that good is a stronger force than evil, that in the least promising soil, a few small seeds of compassion, planted and carefully tended, can spread into a whole garden of human dignity" (Henry Street Settlement, 1983).

Despite her widespread work in national affairs and neighborhood concerns, her leadership in the National Federation of Settlements, her extensive writings and studies, Hall has not received appropriate attention from those who study the past. Her contributions to the social work profession, particularly in the area of social reform, need to be more fully acknowledged. Hall was one of several strong women of the second generation who were able to benefit from the earlier pioneer social work women and to move successfully forward in an environment that increasingly was not conducive to leadership by women.

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