CRAFTING AMERICANS:
IMMIGRANTS AND TEXTILE CRAFTS AT THE HULL HOUSE
LABOR MUSEUM, 1900-1935

by
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ABSTRACT

Social reformers Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr opened Hull House in 1889 to serve working-class residents of Chicago’s ethnically diverse West Side through a variety of programs. Among these, Addams established the Labor Museum in 1900 as a public space in which neighborhood immigrants could demonstrate the preindustrial craft practices they had brought from their countries of origin. Addams hoped the museum would give the Americanized children of immigrants greater respect for their parents, as well as connect workers in the city’s factories and sweatshops with the long history of handcraft behind their labor. Because much of the local population worked in the garment industry, the museum’s textile demonstrations were central to its mission.

This thesis explores the extent to which the Labor Museum followed or diverged from its stated purposes by examining the representation and reality of its textile craft practices. Past scholarship has focused largely on the museum’s founding mission as articulated in writings by Addams and other reformers. However, reformers’ accounts tell an incomplete story of how the museum operated during its 35-year lifespan and leave little room for immigrant perspectives. Previously underutilized forms of evidence such as photographs, textiles, financial records, and oral histories flesh out the Labor Museum’s history by suggesting the complexity of the cultural work it performed. They offer fresh insight into the museum’s treatment of national identity and immigrant cultures, and they show that the sale of handcrafted products represented a significant economic opportunity for local immigrants.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In her 1910 memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, social reformer Jane Addams recalled the memorable visit of a group of Russian immigrant garment workers to Hull House, the philanthropic community center she had co-founded in Chicago.¹ Having been misinformed that Hull House was hosting a Christmas party, the Russian women were disappointed to find no such celebration in evidence. Their discouragement persisted until residents of Hull House showed them the Labor Museum, which held exhibits and equipment for demonstrating preindustrial crafts such as spinning and weaving. In this space, by Addams’ account, “the thirty sodden, tired women were transformed”:

They knew how to use the spindles and were delighted to find the Russian spinning frame… They turned up their dresses to show their homespun petticoats; they tried the looms; they explained the difficulty of the old patterns; in short, from having been stupidly entertained, they themselves did the entertaining. Because of a direct appeal to former experiences, the immigrant visitors were able for the moment to instruct their American hostesses in an old and honored craft, as was indeed becoming to their age and experience.²

¹ Although most period references to Hull House included a hyphen in the name, many contemporary scholars do not use one. In keeping with present-day usage, I have elected to omit the hyphen in this work except when referring to publication titles, such as the *Hull-House Bulletin*, or corporate entities, such as the Hull-House Shop.

No doubt fatigued from the long hours of tedious sewing work they endured daily, the women found themselves revitalized by the sight of familiar objects, and by the opportunity to share the knowledge and experience they were unable to use in their daily working lives.

This anecdote, carefully selected by Addams for her memoir, neatly encapsulates the Labor Museum’s founding mission and methods. By enabling local immigrants to practice and share the craft traditions they had brought with them from their homelands, Addams aimed to ease their adjustment to American life and industrial work. She also hoped to encourage greater respect for these first-generation immigrants, whose struggles to master a new language and culture were frequently met with condescension, even contempt. Writing *Twenty Years at Hull-House* a decade after the museum’s establishment, Addams used anecdotes like the one above to illustrate its value.

Yet whether foreign-born members of the community viewed the museum’s goals and accomplishments in the same light is another story. This thesis seeks to tell that story by exploring the extent to which the Labor Museum functioned as Addams intended over the course of nearly four decades. Did the museum truly foster appreciation for immigrant culture and promote the production of traditional ethnic crafts? And did immigrant visitors and craft demonstrators approach the museum as an educational opportunity, a social service, or something else altogether? The translation of an ambitious idea into reality involved negotiating the needs, priorities, and perspectives of all participants against a backdrop of pervasive social and cultural conflict. Under these circumstances, it is hardly unthinkable that the museum’s initial
mission might have evolved into a more dynamic, multifaceted, and sometimes inconsistent project.

**Background: Hull House and the Immigrant Community**

Like many programs at Hull House, the Labor Museum served as the site of a continuing conversation about the place of immigrants and their culture in the United States, participating in a larger national debate. At one extreme were nativists, who feared the effects of foreign influence on American culture and advocated restricting immigration from countries whose inhabitants were considered undesirable. Those who did not object outright to the influx of immigrants had varying perspectives on how the foreign-born should be treated. Should new arrivals from foreign countries be pressed to abandon all vestiges of their culture in order to assimilate fully to the American way of life? Or could American life be enriched by the addition of new folkways, languages, and customs, producing a heterogeneous harmony?

While debates between assimilation and cultural pluralism unfolded, many immigrants battled more immediate hardship in their adopted nation. Numerous immigrant groups that arrived from the late nineteenth century onward settled in cities, living in densely populated neighborhoods and struggling to make ends meet through low-paying and unskilled industrial work. One such neighborhood was the Nineteenth Ward on Chicago’s West Side, where newcomers from myriad countries lived in crowded tenements and worked in factories and sweatshops.

It was this population that Jane Addams hoped to serve when she and Ellen Gates Starr founded the Hull House settlement in 1889 (Figures 1-2). Fresh from a tour of Europe, former college classmates Addams and Starr set out to start a settlement house in a poor neighborhood of Chicago in which they would live with
other reformers, reach out to the community, and together find solutions to the social problems that surrounded them.\textsuperscript{3} In doing so, they were following the model of the first settlement house, Toynbee Hall in East London, where in 1884 a group of wealthy young men had decided to live among slums in order to break down class barriers and combat poverty.\textsuperscript{4} The settlement movement spread quickly from England to the United States, and Hull House was one of its earliest and most influential outgrowths. In keeping with the settlement movement’s philosophy, Addams and the other residents of Hull House aimed to move beyond traditional conceptions of philanthropy, in which the vectors of influence traveled in only one direction. They hoped to both change and be changed, to develop reciprocal relationships with the neighborhood around them.\textsuperscript{5}

The typical resident of Hull House was American-born, well-educated, and upper- or middle-class. Many residents were women, and several remained at the settlement for decades. All worked to provide education, social services, and recreation for disadvantaged immigrants while also advocating for them in the political arena. Hull House served as a safe and welcoming public space for community members, organizing and hosting recreational clubs, lectures, and cultural events. The settlement offered classes in an array of subjects both practical and

\textsuperscript{3} James Hurt, “Introduction,” in Addams, \textit{Twenty Years at Hull-House}, ix-xix.

\textsuperscript{4} For an excellent history of the settlement movement’s ideology and development, see Mina Carson, \textit{Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

\textsuperscript{5} Addams describes the settlement’s foundational goal of reciprocity and exchange in \textit{Twenty Years at Hull-House}, 55.
creative, including languages, fine arts, and manual training. Residents of Hull House were also instrumental in campaigning for legislation to improve local living and working conditions.

The Labor Museum at Hull House: Mission and Methods

In 1900, Jane Addams added to this range of programming by opening the Labor Museum, a project to which she expressed great personal attachment. The museum’s purpose was to preserve and display a global range of preindustrial craft traditions in spinning and weaving, pottery, metallurgy, bookbinding, printing, woodworking, and even cooking grains. Aside from the bookbinding operation, which Ellen Gates Starr ran, the majority of craft techniques shown were those of local immigrants with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Programming consisted primarily of live craft demonstrations given by these immigrants (Figure 3). The demonstrations took place during the Labor Museum’s open hours each Saturday evening, which presumably made attendance by working-class visitors more feasible. The museum also hosted lectures and displayed informational exhibits that included charts, photographs, and examples of handicraft from around the world, with many artifacts

6 Though the precise hours are unspecified elsewhere, several issues of the Hull-House Bulletin list the museum demonstrations as occurring between 7:30 and 9:30 on Saturday evenings. See for example Hull-House Bulletin Vol. 6, No. 1 (Mid-Winter 1903-4), 12. Unless otherwise noted, editions of the Hull-House Bulletin and Hull-House Year Book can be found in Series X: Publications, Box 1, Folders 425-446, in the Hull House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
donated by the Field Columbian Museum. Programs of labor songs, including the folk songs of early textile workers, sometimes accompanied the museum’s activities.7

The textile “department” was the first to be developed at the Labor Museum and took center stage through most of its existence.8 Because the garment industry’s sweatshops and factories employed a large portion of the community, textile demonstrations were key to the museum’s aim of reshaping laborers’ relationship with their work. Addams recruited neighborhood immigrants to demonstrate traditional spinning and weaving techniques, arranging them in a supposed “historic order” from primitive to modern. Southern Italian, Syrian, and Russian women each illustrated so-called early spinning methods, while others used the more “advanced” technology of the spinning wheel. A similar setup for weaving traced an evolutionary narrative with immigrants working on Navajo, Turkish, colonial, and modern fly shuttle looms, although in practice the traditional techniques they demonstrated were not always those of their own cultures.9 Demonstrators often dressed in traditional ethnic costume or sometimes in more generic historical costume. Lectures and exhibits on the cultivation and preparation of raw materials such as wool and cotton showed garment workers where the fabrics they worked with had come from.

Addams claimed that the idea for the museum had resulted from a walk through the neighborhood in which she had seen “an old Italian woman, her distaff


9 Ibid., 5.
against her homesick face, patiently spinning a thread by the simple stick spindle so reminiscent of all southern Europe,” on the steps of a tenement house. In this display of old-world handicraft, Addams saw a means of building “a bridge between European and American experiences in such wise as to give them both more meaning and a sense of relation.” By presenting demonstrations of traditional craft in an educational context, the museum that Addams envisioned would create appreciation for the folkways, skills, and knowledge of older immigrants, many of whom worked as unskilled laborers in spite of the abilities they brought with them from their native countries. These first-generation immigrants often spoke little English and struggled to adjust to the alien culture that surrounded them, a fact that caused tension with their Americanized children. Addams believed that if the children saw their parents performing skilled work before an admiring audience, the younger generation might better understand and respect the older, developing that “reverence for the past which Goethe declares to be the basis of all sound progress.”

In addition to fostering filial respect, Addams intended the museum to trace a global narrative of labor, stretching from a long era of preindustrial craftsmanship to the relatively recent development of modern industrial production. She thought this perspective would allow community members employed in shops and factories to better understand the social and historical context for their work. Perhaps if they


11 Ibid., 139.

12 Ibid.

knew more about the materials they worked with and the larger historical tradition to which they belonged, these workers would be able to take more pride and interest in their labor, notwithstanding the often appalling conditions under which it took place. Moreover, the museum’s message would transcend ethnic or national boundaries for immigrant audiences; the displays of preindustrial practices from around the world would illustrate not only the continuity between past and present, but also the commonality of human experience across nations. As Addams declared optimistically, “history from the industrial standpoint at once becomes cosmopolitan, and the differences of race and nationality inevitably fall away.”

Addams’ descriptions of immigrant craft practices as “simple” and “primitive” in her writings, along with the hierarchical ordering of different practices into “historic order” from primitive to modern in the museum, betray a condescending undertone. In her historical narrative of labor, Addams associated immigrant practices with the past, painting them as rustic ancestors to the industrial production of U.S. cities. Such problematic language and evolutionary narratives typify Victorian conceptions of civilization. Yet the Labor Museum’s interpretive framework also drew upon a demographic reality: many immigrants had come from unindustrialized rural areas of southern and eastern Europe. For those who had, the harsh conditions of urban life in tenements and factories might have been an unfamiliar and overwhelming experience. Crowding, noise, and alien machinery would have made adjustment to a new country far more difficult. Whether or not a labor museum was the best way of easing the

14 Ibid., 7.

15 Hull-House Year Book (1906-7), 10.
transition, Addams at least based its approach on her experiences and interactions with local residents, addressing their perceived needs, rather than on purely abstract Progressive ideology.

The Labor Museum’s explicitly stated goals suggest that local immigrants, particularly young people, were its primary intended audience. Yet the museum’s activities played out before a wider group of visitors that included middle-class tourists, fellow reformers, and members of educational groups. As a world-famous institution, Hull House attracted considerable numbers of visitors, reporting as many as 9,000 each week during winter months by the early twentieth century (a possible exaggeration given the logistical problems this number would present for the settlement). In the Labor Museum, audiences from near and far enjoyed the opportunity not only to take in the spectacle of live demonstration, but also at times to participate in the craft process; Addams’ 1902 report mentioned that the Navajo and Turkish looms were both used by visitors.

The evident range of visitors and experiences suggests that the museum may have embodied more varied and complex meanings in its operations than those

16 For example, a 1915 report to the Chicago Association of Commerce noted that the museum had been “used for the purposes of study by a number of schools and colleges as well as institutions for instructing teachers.” See Auditors’ Reports, 1909-1925, Folder 97, Hull House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.

17 Hull-House Year Book (1910), 6. This figure was used repeatedly in the yearbooks from 1910 onward for a number of years, until being reduced to 6,000 per week in the yearbook for 1928-1929. There is no indication of what year the figure was originally recorded or how accurately it described visitation in subsequent years.

explicitly set forth by Addams herself. In particular, the presence of middle-class and non-immigrant spectators at the craft demonstrations raises questions about what such audiences took away from the display. In Twenty Years at Hull-House, Addams hints at a potential lesson to be learned by native-born visitors: the recognition “that immigrant colonies might yield to our American life something very valuable, if their resources were intelligently studied and developed.”19 This statement points to Addams’ participation in a mode of thought that historian Kristin L. Hoganson has termed the “immigrant gifts” movement: the idea that Americans should welcome immigrants as offering valuable contributions to American culture, largely in the form of traditional folk practices such as song, dance, and handicraft.20 Through exhibits, festivals, pageants, and other public events, social reformers and other promoters of immigrant gifts hoped to create an appreciation for the foreign-born that would counter the widespread hostility toward them.

At first glance, such inclusive attitudes seem strikingly forward-thinking; the rejection of a strictly policed homogenized culture in favor of a pluralist approach calls to mind modern-day celebrations of multiculturalism. However, Hoganson and others have argued that even the best-intentioned reformers controlled and shaped these public representations of ethnic culture, inserting their own ideas and choosing which elements were acceptable “gifts” from an American perspective. Moreover,

19 Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House, 143.

“immigrant gifts” was as much a strategy for Americanizing immigrants as it was an effort to promote intercultural exchange.

Craft revivalist Allen H. Eaton’s 1932 book, *Immigrant Gifts to American Life*, reflects this dual purpose. Eaton devoted much of the book to describing several “homelands” exhibitions, which displayed ethnic crafts and household articles that immigrants had brought with them to the U.S., and instructing readers in developing their own exhibitions. Although he painted a progressive picture of the U.S. as a nation of immigrants and extolled the virtues of the foreign-born, he also presented the “immigrant gifts” concept as part of a new and more persuasive approach to Americanization. In Eaton’s words, if the immigrant “feels that the values precious to him are prized by his fellows, he is encouraged. If he knows that he has something besides the work of his hands to offer he will feel himself more truly a part of the new country and be stimulated to become more firmly identified with it.”21 By celebrating immigrant folkways, native-born Americans could put the newcomers at ease, giving them incentive to be loyal to their adopted nation and cooperate in efforts at Americanization.

**Approach of Thesis**

In light of these larger tensions between appreciation and exploitation, pluralism and Americanization, this thesis examines how the Labor Museum engaged with ideas about immigrant gifts, cultural diversity, and American identity. For the

past several decades, a proliferation of scholarship in a variety of disciplines has examined seemingly every possible aspect of Hull House and its reformers’ philosophies and achievements. Yet few scholars have devoted enough attention to the Labor Museum to tease out its complexities. Of those who have analyzed it in depth, exceeding the token paragraph or two that so often appears in histories of Hull House or the Arts and Crafts movement, none has undertaken an analysis of the museum’s material culture by studying the small but significant body of objects that survive. Together with photographs, oral histories, and financial records from Hull House, these objects are underutilized sources ripe for interpretation. They possess the potential to help scholarship move beyond current understandings of the Labor Museum, which have leaned heavily on Addams’ writings and other published accounts.22

The museum’s goals, as set forth by Addams and others, are well-known and much-discussed. But how did the museum actually operate and develop over time, from its establishment in 1900 to its decline in the late 1930s? It seems unlikely that

22 When discussing such published accounts throughout this thesis, the primary group referred to includes: First Report of the Labor Museum at Hull-House (1902), presumed written by Addams; museum curator Jessie Luther’s article “The Labor Museum at Hull House” in The Commons Vol. 7 No. 70 (May 1902): 1-13; journalist Marion Foster Washburne’s article “A Labor Museum” in The Craftsman Vol. 6, No. 6 (Sept. 1904): 570-580; Mertice Maccrea Buck’s article “Hull-House Labor Museum, where women are taught spinning and weaving, and also the history of these industries,” in The Craftsman Vol. 13, No. 2 (November 1907): 229-230; and Addams’ memoir Twenty Years at Hull-House (1910). The content of these writings is remarkably similar. However, these are not the only published accounts on the Labor Museum; many others along the same lines appeared in newspapers across the country during the first decade of the museum’s existence, reflecting its widespread fame and influence.
the museum remained the same over these decades, during which national immigration patterns shifted, widespread nostalgia for simpler times intensified, and craft movements gathered steam. Moreover, Hull House was never a static place. The neighborhood’s ethnic makeup was always in flux, and new programs were continually being developed. Addams’ reformers took a pragmatic approach to their social work that rejected stiff ideologies in favor of flexible strategies continually reshaped by experience.23

Moving beyond the Labor Museum’s founding philosophy also means looking past reformers’ perspectives in order to examine how other participants accepted, rejected, or adapted the original mission according to their own motivations. For local immigrants, did the museum represent a venue for proudly sharing their cultural traditions, an educational experience, an economic opportunity, or some mixture of the three? For non-immigrant visitors, was the museum just another ethnological display, similar to those at world’s fairs? Was it a means of acquiring fashionably cosmopolitan knowledge, or of indulging nostalgia for the preindustrial age? Or did visitors come away with different understanding of the immigrant experience? Though these questions are to some extent unanswerable due to the scarcity of firm evidence, this thesis suggests new interpretations of the possibilities. First, however, it is necessary to establish where the current scholarship stands.

Historiography

Within the large body of scholarship on Hull House, the Labor Museum has received far less extended analysis than it deserves. The few exceptions to this have

23 James Hurt, “Introduction,” Twenty Years at Hull House, xvi.
examined the Labor Museum’s founding philosophy and goals, with attention to its treatment of immigrant culture(s) and national identity. Most scholars approach the topic through the same general body of primary evidence: published accounts by reformers and journalists from the museum’s early years. Shannon Jackson devotes a section of her 2000 monograph, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*, to a close analysis of the Labor Museum’s social dynamics. In her larger argument, she uses performance theory as an interpretive framework for the everyday interactions of middle-class settlement workers and immigrant populations at Hull House. According to Jackson, reformers’ belief in the “constructed nature of human realities” and in their ability to shape or (re-form) people or communities foreshadowed contemporary performance theory, which “incorporates critical theories of social interaction, of the relationship between space and subjectivity, of human behavior as signifying practice, and of the material and embodied basis of identity formation.”

Their reform work was partially predicated on the idea of modeling desirable modes of behavior for the populations they wished to help; yet reformers were equally affected and shaped by their surroundings.

The demonstrations or performances that took place in the Labor Museum, Jackson argues, “realized” certain constructs of national and cultural identity espoused by Addams and other reformers. She describes the museum’s practice of using individual craftspeople to represent entire national cultures as “unproblematized divisions of ethnicity,” which failed to reflect individual difference or the community’s actual cultural groupings. A display of “Italian spinning,” for example,

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overlooked the reality that Italian immigrants identified with their provinces of origin—they thought of themselves not as Italians, but as Sicilians or Neapolitans. The museum also adopted the schemes of hierarchical classification that were typical of its time by attempting to impose a narrative of evolution from “primitive” to modern on the craft practices of various cultures. Control over the museum’s presentation of ethnicity and culture thus rested with the reformers, who decided which aspects of immigrant culture were compatible with their own: “Unlike foreign languages, non-Christian religions, or unhygienic domestic practices that were being addressed much differently in other reform spaces, arts and crafts were safe national gifts that spiced the American way of life without dangerously threatening the idealized dream of a clean, ordered, yet diverse America.”

Due to the space’s multiple uses as museum, craft shop, and classroom, moreover, the “performer-laborer” had to navigate shifts in performative modes, functioning at various times as “producer, spectacle, teacher, storyteller” before different audiences. These modal shifts rendered the museum’s various performances unstable. Jackson offers what is essentially an extended oppositional reading of journalist Marion Foster Washburne’s 1904 account, “A Labor Museum,” in order to tease out the dynamics of performative interaction among reformers, demonstrators, and spectators at the museum. In doing so, she suggests the possibility of “theorizing a realm of performative agency for these humans-turned-exhibit.”


26 Ibid., 262.

27 Ibid., 267.
However, Jackson’s attempts to retrieve the immigrants’ agency by reading between the lines of such accounts remain necessarily speculative, stretching the limits of her evidence. Her highly theoretical approach identifies problems with the representation of ethnicity at the museum, but does little to recover the immigrant perspective in a convincing way. Importantly, though, Jackson’s work does provide a model for moving beyond the Labor Museum’s founding philosophy and toward an assessment of its everyday dynamics. As she argues, “to understand such a space is not simply to interpret its espoused ideology but also to understand the legitimating operations of its performative media.”

Like Jackson, historian Kristin Hoganson uses the Labor Museum to support the larger argument of her 2007 book, Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920. According to Hoganson, wealthy and middle-class American women positioned themselves as privileged global citizens within their nation’s emerging economic empire by consuming exotic goods and partaking of foreign cultures. Hoganson situates the emergence of the “immigrant gifts” movement within this context, suggesting that its advocates were less interested in promoting an inclusive ethic of cultural pluralism than in satisfying their urge to appropriate and consume elements of foreign culture. Hoganson characterizes as “imperialist nostalgia” the desire of these mostly white, privileged, native-born Americans to preserve those endangered elements of ethnic culture they deemed

28 Ibid., 270.
29 Hoganson, Consumers’ Imperium, 8-12.
worthy of saving, even as they encouraged immigrants to adopt American ways.\textsuperscript{30} Echoing Jackson, she points out that the Labor Museum and other celebrations of immigrant gifts engaged in selective acts of appropriation: they welcomed apolitical arts-and-crafts traditions, but rarely political or religious convictions, as acceptable “gifts” to American culture.

Though compelling, Hoganson’s interpretation of the immigrant gifts movement as an outgrowth of cultural imperialism lacks nuance. By attempting to align the Labor Museum’s undertakings not only with other efforts toward Americanization and reform, but also with fashions for ethnic cuisine, costume, and interior decoration, she skims over the complexities of the museum’s educational mission and practice, reducing it to a touristic spectacle. Though a portion of the Labor Museum’s visitors may have been seeking a form of urban tourism, many more were immigrants, educators, and like-minded reformers with a genuine interest in learning. Furthermore, her dismissal of the museum’s displays of preindustrial craft as mere imperialist nostalgia fails to consider their potential connection to larger social currents, including the growth of antimodernist craft movements and an increasing nationwide preoccupation with the crafts of early (Anglo-Saxon) Americans. Hoganson is not the first to overlook this parallel; scholarship has largely ignored the idea that the simultaneous popularity of ethnic arts and colonial revival crafts reflected common roots. Like Jackson, and perhaps even more severely, Hoganson problematizes the Labor Museum’s treatment of ethnic culture, but her interpretive framework proves too restrictive to fully capture the museum’s messy reality.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 249. Hoganson borrows the term “imperialist nostalgia” from anthropologist Renato Rosaldo.
Sarah E. Chinn provides a more balanced and less ideologically driven treatment of the Labor Museum in her 2005 essay, “‘To Reveal the Humble Immigrant Parents to Their Own Children’: Immigrant Women, Their American Daughters, and the Hull-House Labor Museum,” which examines the museum’s attempt to bridge the immigrant intergenerational gap. Chinn contrasts Addams’ traditional view of parent-child relationships with the emerging identity category of adolescence. While teenage children of immigrants were forming identities based around pleasure, entertainment, and working-class culture, reformers like Addams waxed nostalgic for less sensual and more family-oriented forms of recreation.

In her analysis, Chinn recognizes the potential for an “objectifying ethnographic gaze” involved in putting ethnic craftspeople on display as demonstrators. However, she ultimately distinguishes the Labor Museum from more problematic modes of ethnographic display in its emphasis on the continuity and similarity of cultures, as well as its blurring of the line between spectator and performer. The museum encouraged visitors to participate and make connections between the displays and their own experiences, rather than to essentialize ethnic difference. Chinn argues against accusations that “Addams conceived of the Labor Museum… as a tourist attraction or a site of the objectification of ‘primitive’

immigrant crafts.” Instead, Chinn emphasizes Addams’ use of the preindustrial past “for strategies for social interaction and coexistence,” her espousal of craft as an alternative to commercialized leisure and alienated labor. Chinn presents an admirably nuanced interpretation of the philosophy behind the Labor Museum’s activities, providing a solid foundation for future scholarship. Yet her focus on intergenerational dynamics leaves room for sustained examination of other aspects of the museum.

**Organization and Scope of Thesis**

In exploring new perspectives on the Labor Museum, this thesis complicates existing scholarship in three ways: by repositioning the museum’s mission within the broader context of anti-industrial cultural movements; by introducing material objects as sources that shed new light on the museum’s operations; and by examining more closely the sale and consumption of crafts produced in the museum. All three objectives use new evidence to question prevailing ideas and methodologies. The ensuing chapters of the thesis will follow this threefold organization.

Chapter 2 situates the Labor Museum’s activities within the context of related craft movements. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr drew inspiration for their programming at Hull House from the moral philosophy of John Ruskin and his followers. The Labor Museum’s mission reflected the Arts and Crafts movement’s concerns over industrialization, as well as its principle of taking pleasure in labor. More surprisingly, the museum also took certain cues from the colonial revival in its representation of immigrants. Photographs of demonstrations in the Labor Museum suggest that Hull House reformers may have appropriated imagery from the colonial revival.

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revival, a movement seemingly antithetical to their beliefs, in order to present a more inclusive vision of national identity. Although the colonial revival is better known for its nativist and assimilationist proponents, these photographs reveal that the movement’s rhetoric could be used to very different ends.

Chapter 3 examines a small collection of weavings produced at the Labor Museum, now in the collections of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, along with related textiles from Hull House. Although Addams framed the Labor Museum in her writings as a site for the demonstration of ethnic craft traditions, the simple weave structures and generic patterns of surviving textiles suggest that authenticity was not the museum’s main concern. Instead, its woven products speak of adaptation, experimentation, and cultural hybridity. The textiles serve as material evidence of how the museum actually engaged with ethnic cultures, illustrating the potential of objects to fill in the gaps where written evidence falls short.

The fourth and final chapter analyzes the sale of handcrafted goods from the Labor Museum, with attention to the distinct perspectives of reformers, craftspeople, and consumers. Examining the Labor Museum’s financial operations provides a counterpoint to the scholarship on its founding mission, creating a more complete picture of how local populations experienced and used the museum. Although Addams and other reformers at Hull-House had lofty intentions for the Labor Museum, immigrants may have been more appreciative of the concrete economic opportunities it offered. Meanwhile, visitors and shoppers who bought ethnic handicrafts were perhaps drawn to them as much for aesthetic reasons as from a desire to support the museum’s principles of cultural pluralism and moral uplift. Financial records and oral histories help to trace the history of the Labor Museum as a commercial enterprise.
The scope of this thesis is limited to the museum’s textile crafts for several reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, the textile department was the largest, earliest developed, and most publicized area of the museum. As such, far more evidence of textile demonstrations survives in the form of written descriptions, photographs, oral histories, and weavings, than of the other crafts. Second, though pottery was perhaps the museum’s next most prominent craft, the history of pottery at Hull House (both within and outside the Labor Museum) has been traced in the excellent edited volume *Pots of Promise: Mexicans and Pottery at Hull-House, 1920-40.* The settlement’s textile production deserves a similarly intensive treatment. Finally, in the craft movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, spinning and weaving carried a singularly symbolic weight as emblems of a simpler past, notably playing a central role in the iconography of the colonial revival.

Although Hull House engaged in the production of handcrafted goods beyond the Labor Museum through classes and other programs, this thesis concentrates primarily on the museum where it is possible to make the distinction. Whereas most students were expected to pay for classes and the materials provided (at least in theory), Labor Museum participants could actually earn money by selling the crafts

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33 Cheryl R. Ganz and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Pots of Promise: Mexicans and Pottery at Hull-House, 1920-40* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Although this volume (and particularly the essay “Shaping Clay, Shaping Lives” by Cheryl Ganz) provides valuable insight on the intersection of ethnic identity and craft practices at Hull House, it focuses mainly on production of pottery for sale at the Hull-House Kilns, which were distinct from the Labor Museum.

34 One flyer advertised weaving classes at the settlement for $2 a lesson, with “materials extra.” However, oral histories suggest that arts and crafts classes may have been free to local residents or those who could not afford to pay. See flyer,
they produced. This commercial aspect, combined with the specific social mission of the museum, set it apart from other programs at Hull House. However, it is frequently difficult to distinguish the efforts and products of the Labor Museum from those of other classes and programs. In practice, there appears to have been understandable overlap in the use of materials, spaces, equipment, and personnel. For example, Honora (or Hanora) Brosnahan showed “Irish spinning” in the Labor Museum but also staffed the textile shop where weaving products such as blankets, towels, and rugs were sold. The financial records for Hull House do not appear to distinguish between the Labor Museum and the textile shop in reporting on income from the sale of products. Classes in dressmaking, millinery, cooking, and embroidery took place in the museum’s exhibition room during the week and evidently were enriched by the surrounding didactic displays. Furthermore, the idea of establishing a trade school

1985.0058.0008, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum; oral histories will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

35 A gravestone at Mount Carmel Cemetery in Hillside, Ill. (a town just west of Chicago) marks the final resting place of one “Hanora McGuire Brosnahan.” The death date of 1913 comes about a year after the woman known to Hull House as “Mrs. Brosnahan” or “Honora Brosnahan” stopped appearing in the Labor Museum’s financial records. It therefore seems likely that these were the same person, and “Hanora” might have been the more accurate spelling of her name. See record for grave of Hanora McGuire Brosnahan at the “Find A Grave” Website, <www.findagrave.com>.

36 Hull-House Year Book (1906-1907), 12.

37 Hull-House Year Book (1906-7), 11. See also documents in the “Labor Museum” folder, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection. A statement in this folder from 1908 on the cost of maintaining the Labor Museum includes “its allied classes in dressmaking, millinery, cooking and other subjects.”
for immigrant girls at Hull House developed directly out of the Labor Museum.38 Yet the settlement’s publications took the trouble of clarifying that the Hull-House Shops, including the textile shop, were “quite distinct from the museum or the classes, although occupying the same space.”39 Every attempt will therefore be made to maintain this distinction, noting where any uncertainty remains.

By examining new forms of evidence alongside published accounts, the following chapters offer a closer look at how the Labor Museum’s intended purposes translated into daily operations. They complicate scholarly treatments of the museum’s approach to national identity, cultural pluralism, and immigrant gifts. They also invite imaginative inquiry into how immigrants may have experienced the Labor Museum, attempting to restore muted voices to the museum’s narrative without presuming to speak for them. Most of all, these chapters demonstrate that the museum had no single, stable meaning, but rather encompassed a multiplicity of perspectives, functions, and audiences. At Hull House, pluralism was not merely a philosophy but a lived reality, characterized by a continuous process of intellectual and cultural exchange. The messy nature of this process resists efforts to untangle its myriad influences and impose a tidy interpretation, but it also reflects the lively and dynamic atmosphere that prevailed at Hull House during its decades of greatest activity.

38 Document from Jane Addams, May 18, 1908. “Labor Museum” folder, Box 1, Series 13a, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

Chapter 2

“DIFFERENCES OF RACE AND NATIONALITY INEVITABLY FALL AWAY”: REPRESENTING IMMIGRANT CULTURES IN THE LABOR MUSEUM

What can non-textual forms of evidence reveal about the Labor Museum that published accounts do not? As this chapter will argue, photographs suggest that the museum engaged issues of national identity as much as it did questions of labor and industrialization, borrowing symbolically charged imagery from the colonial revival to do so. These photographs speak volumes about how the museum presented immigrants and their place in American culture. They also complicate received notions of the museum’s relationship to Arts and Crafts principles by drawing out the nationalistic aspect of craft revivalism, appropriating the old-fashioned costumes, spinning wheels, and hearths of the colonial revival as visual rhetoric to brand immigrants not just as skilled craftspeople, but as Americans.

Written descriptions of the museum by Addams and others clearly display the ideological influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, emphasizing the value of preindustrial crafts and the importance of helping laborers take pride in their work. The museum’s mission also reflected the idea of “immigrant gifts,” the belief that immigrants brought valuable contributions to American culture that should be welcomed and shared. This belief, embraced by Hull House and similar institutions, can be seen as a forerunner of modern cultural pluralism in its acceptance of diverse practices within a larger culture. Such open-mindedness had its limits; pluralistic policies cohabited at Hull House with programs of acculturation that taught
immigrants the “superior” American (and middle-class) ways of cooking, keeping house, and other practices. Nevertheless, in endeavors like the Labor Museum, Hull House and others advanced the idea that American culture would be strengthened rather than vitiated by the influx of diverse cultural practices. The museum was intended to inculcate an appreciation for immigrant cultures among its audiences, which included both immigrants’ children and white, native-born visitors. The performative nature of its demonstrations created an ideal opportunity to engage visitors directly in the process of intercultural exchange.

Among photographs showing immigrant textile demonstrations in the Labor Museum, several suggest that organizers employed a complex strategic approach in representing immigrants to their audiences. Rather than asserting the value of cultural difference, this group of photographs instead highlights similarities across cultures. The immigrant craftspeople resemble not only each other, but also the images of industrious colonial women that enjoyed such widespread popularity during the early twentieth century as part of the colonial revival. That any aspect of Hull House might have drawn from this movement is unexpected; the settlement’s embrace of cultural pluralism stands in contrast to the colonial revival’s strong undercurrents of nativism and assimilationist tendencies. While Addams and other Hull House reformers did not

embrace the whitewashed picture of American identity set forth by the colonial revival, they may have borrowed its iconography in order to paint a less threatening picture of immigrant culture to audiences. They promoted acceptance of ethnic folkways, not as something new and different, but as something old and familiar. In presenting immigrants to the public, they inflected an appreciation of preindustrial craft inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement with the specifically nationalistic overtones of the colonial revival.

Much scholarship on the Labor Museum has explored its debt to Arts and Crafts ideology, and writers on the Arts and Crafts movement frequently cite the craft programs at Hull House in passing. However, the museum’s appropriation of colonial revival imagery to “domesticate” its representation of immigrants adds a new dimension to our understanding of its mission. This chapter, then, examines the Labor Museum’s interaction with the notions of national identity that played such a key role in craft movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to the attention scholarship has already given to the influence of Arts and Crafts at Hull House, it will receive an abbreviated treatment here. A brief overview of the museum’s relationship with Arts and Crafts principles will provide context for an examination of how the museum adapted colonial revival discourse to challenge prevailing notions of national identity.

**Arts and Crafts Origins: The Labor Museum in Context**

The Labor Museum’s mission was rooted in the Ruskinian ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, which aimed to reform the conditions of labor in industrial society. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr had both read and admired the works of John Ruskin, the mid-nineteenth-century art critic who provided a moral grounding for
British Arts and Crafts with his ideas about the necessity of beauty in everyday objects and joy in labor.\textsuperscript{41} Early expressions of interest in Arts and Crafts at Hull House, including art lectures and exhibits, culminated in 1897 with the founding of the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society during a meeting at the settlement.\textsuperscript{42} The Society’s membership included Addams and Starr as well as many local artists, architects, and artisans. Among its stated aims were advocating beauty in everyday objects, promoting manual education and handicraft, and finding solutions to industrial ills.\textsuperscript{43} The Society was responsible for establishing the Hull House shops, which produced crafts for sale on weekdays in the Labor Museum, and its members taught many of the settlement’s arts and crafts classes.

Most American proponents of the Arts and Crafts philosophy took a much more moderate stance on industrialism than did their British counterparts, embracing the machine’s potential to help the worker (and consumer) if used correctly.\textsuperscript{44} However, Starr’s deep concern over labor issues informed her socialist ideals and increasing advocacy of radical political reform. Acting on her conviction that art should be accessible to everyone, Starr established the Butler Art Gallery at Hull House in 1890 and organized an innovative lending library of art that neighborhood


\textsuperscript{42} Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 37.


\textsuperscript{44} Boris, \textit{Art and Labor}, 29.
residents could check out, free of charge.\textsuperscript{45} Starr’s belief in producing objects of beauty through skilled craftsmanship inspired her to study bookbinding at the Doves Bindery in England, and to open a bookbinding workshop at Hull House on her return.\textsuperscript{46} The bindery later became absorbed as part of the Labor Museum.

Addams’ writings on the Labor Museum echoed Starr and other Arts and Crafts proponents in their veneration of preindustrial craft traditions. However, she balanced Starr’s idealistic approach to art with a more pragmatic one. Acknowledging industrialism as an inescapable social force, she believed that this relatively new age of civilization required “adaptability and speedy readjustment to changing conditions.”\textsuperscript{47} Instead of rejecting the Industrial Age outright, Addams sought to remedy its worst characteristics and conditions, not only through labor reform, but also by easing the transition to machine work for laborers who came from preindustrial cultures. She conceived of the Labor Museum as a means of doing just that: by supposedly tracing the history of textile and other manufactures back to preindustrial times, the museum would give laborers a better understanding of and appreciation for their work in factories and sweatshops, mitigating some of the tedium and frustration of such work.\textsuperscript{48} In this sense, she adapted the Arts and Crafts tenet of taking pleasure in labor to fit the industrial realities she found in her surroundings.

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\textsuperscript{45} Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 36.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{47} [Addams], \textit{First Report of the Labor Museum at Hull-House}, 11.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1-3.
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Some scholars have criticized Addams’ pragmatic use of art at Hull House as a palliative measure, even an “opiate for the masses” or form of social control, aiming to make workers complacent rather than to encourage agitation for systematic change.\textsuperscript{49} In his study of antimodernist movements at the turn of the twentieth century, historian T.J. Jackson Lears characterizes Addams’ efforts, particularly the Labor Museum, as part of a larger trend among craft revivalists and reformers toward embracing “therapeutic” solutions to social issues. Arts and Crafts leaders like Addams and Starr wished to revitalize both their own privileged class and the working class through the joys and virtues of manual labor. Although many reformers approached their work with the best of intentions, their focus shifted over time “from social justice to personal fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{50} Starr, too, eventually abandoned the notion of art as a tool for social change. However, it is worth noting that in later years, she increasingly pursued reform through direct political action.\textsuperscript{51} Addams may also be seen as having separated the overt political advocacy in which she undeniably engaged from her cultural work in the Labor Museum.

At the same time, the celebration of ethnic cultures on American soil was hardly apolitical given the pervasive hostility toward immigration in the early twentieth century. Addams’ stated goals for the Labor Museum were decidedly practical, helping immigrants and their children adjust to industrial work and life in a

\textsuperscript{49} Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 38.


\textsuperscript{51} Stankiewicz, “Art at Hull House,” 38.
new country. Yet the museum’s significant volume of native-born visitors meant that demonstrators were representing immigrant gifts to audiences outside their community. In this light, the museum’s performances become charged with greater political meaning. They communicated to both immigrant and native-born visitors that immigrant folkways held a valuable place in the national culture.

This message had particular significance in the context of the widespread search to define and encourage a national culture. During the nineteenth century, Americans had shown an increasing self-consciousness about the extent to which they borrowed their culture from European sources. World’s fairs encouraged this preoccupation by engaging different nations in direct competition for industrial and stylistic superiority. From the 1876 centennial in Philadelphia onward, these expositions were marked by U.S. manufacturers’ attempts to demonstrate that their wares surpassed those of foreign countries.52

Certain strains of the Arts and Crafts movement reflected the continuing concern for a distinctly American style, while others embraced influences from abroad. The variety of individual artists and designers within the multifaceted movement defies generalizations about its attitudes toward national identity. However, its growth in Europe was closely tied to the rise of nationalistic sentiment, as many countries sought to foster national cultures of their own by studying and reviving domestic craft traditions. In Britain, the birthplace of Arts and Crafts, proponents drew

on a variety of international influences, including Asian design, but also promoted Gothic and rural architecture as embodying a domestic design vernacular. American Arts and Crafts, meanwhile, took cues from both at home and abroad by synthesizing British and Continental design with more homegrown elements such as Mission, Native American, and colonial styles. The Labor Museum’s cosmopolitan celebration of diverse ethnic traditions was thus not at odds with larger currents of the Arts and Crafts movement in the U.S.

The Colonial Revival and National Identity in the Labor Museum

The colonial revival provided a counterpoint to such internationalist approaches to craft. While sharing with the Arts and Crafts movement a love of simplicity and a nostalgia for a preindustrial past, its exclusive focus on Anglo-American traditions set it apart. In this, the colonial revival paralleled the more nationalistic manifestations of Arts and Crafts that took hold in European countries from Sweden to Russia. Its followers searched for an alternative to modernity in forms that seemed to embody the romantic simplicity of early American culture, from Georgian architecture and turned wooden furniture to braided rugs and needlework samplers. The frequent historical inaccuracy of their claims notwithstanding,


54 Clark and Kaplan, “Arts and Craft,” 93-98.
revivalists believed a return to colonial forms would help instill in new generations of Americans the values of the nation’s founders.55

Glorifying the imagined industriousness and self-sufficiency of Anglo-Saxon colonial settlers, the colonial revival was closely tied to nativist concerns over the influx of immigrants considered ethnically alien, from areas such as Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe, and over the increasingly heterogeneous national makeup that resulted. Far from praising the contributions of immigrants to American culture, colonial revivalists decried foreign influences as compromising the nation’s purity. If they included immigrants at all in their cultural vision, it was by expressing the hope that colonial architecture and decorative arts might exert an Americanizing influence on them.56 Given the gulf between these attitudes and the Labor Museum’s ideological foundations, the presence of colonial imagery in photographs of the museum requires some explanation. It is to this seeming inconsistency that the chapter now turns.

A large group of photographs survives documenting the Labor Museum’s interiors and activities, particularly its textile demonstrations.57 Though many are undated, the photos appear to range in date from shortly after the museum’s inception in 1900 to the 1930s. These images appeared in numerous publications at Hull House and beyond, reaching a broad audience, and they also provide evidence of how the live

55 For a comprehensive overview of the colonial revival, see Alan Axelrod, ed., The Colonial Revival in America (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).


57 All photographs discussed here may be found in the Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
demonstrations may have been staged. In this way, they reflect how reformers wished to present the museum and its demonstrators to the public. Different photos emphasize different facets of the museum; taken as a group, they underscore the impossibility of ascribing a single, static mission to a dynamic museum that brought together participants from many backgrounds with varying priorities and perspectives. However, a sub-group of about six photos depicting women at work before an old-fashioned fireplace hints at a particularly intriguing perspective on the value of immigrant crafts.

A view of the museum’s full interior reveals a distinctly non-domestic setting, with high ceilings, visible beams, an open floor space, and an array of equipment for spinning and weaving (Figure 4). Similarly, images from a 1902 report on the Labor Museum show demonstrators working industriously, alone or in groups, before busy backdrops of equipment and display objects (Figures 3, 5).58 Framing children and adults, Italians and Irish, within the same view, the group photos emphasize the museum’s community orientation and mission of building parent-child relationships and fostering intercultural exchange. Other photos provide solitary views of unnamed craftspeople, labeled in such a way as to stand in for an entire ethnic tradition: “Irish Spinning,” “Russian Spinning.” They serve as representative mileposts in the transnational, evolutionary narrative of preindustrial labor whose trajectory Addams wished to trace. Whether focused on community or classification, though, the photographs clearly present the Labor Museum as a distinctly public space.

In contrast, another set of photographs depicting immigrant demonstrators suppresses the public context in favor of a more domestic atmosphere. Six images show spinning craftswomen seated in front of a fireplace (Figures 6-11). Located in one room of the Labor Museum and used in its cooking classes, the “old fashioned fireplace” was “supplied with hobs and crane from which the present stove has evolved.”

In a view of the kitchen space published in 1910, the fireplace can be seen surrounded by exhibits of preindustrial craft from around the world, with two Windsor chairs facing the hearth (Figure 12). In the images of spinning women, the mantel is adorned with what appear to be metal trays, kettles, and other objects, some perhaps made in the museum’s metalworking division, and in the fireplace sit irons, pots, and a kettle on a crane. A closer view of the fireplace from 1924 shows these features in more detail, with the addition of a spinning wheel posed evocatively to one side of the hearth (Figure 13).

The combination of fireplace and spinning wheel conjures up romantic notions of the preindustrial home, and indeed, all non-domestic aspects of the Museum’s interior have been carefully excluded from these images. Gone is the clutter of looms and equipment, didactic object displays, and groups of craftspeople demonstrating their skills alongside one another. Instead, each solitary woman intently practices her craft before the fireplace and its gleaming metal accessories. In at least two of the photos, the spindles of the old-fashioned Windsor chairs on which the women sit can be seen (Figures 6 and 9). A single vase or pitcher with a sleek geometric shape, sitting on the mantel in some of the pictures (most visibly in Figure 10), serves as the

only hint of modern style in the tableaux. While the women in three of the photos are dressed in contemporary clothing, the other three stand out for being in costume; the demonstrators of Russian and Dutch spinning have on some form of ethnic dress, while a third figure, the Irish spinner, wears a more generic traditional costume. Without the museum trappings, the demonstrations depicted here evoke not so much ethnographic or educational displays as intimate glimpses of home life, showing immigrants industriously engaged in handiwork.

More than simply evoking domestic tradition, these scenes bear a striking resemblance to popular colonial revival images, in which open hearths and spinning wheels were often central elements. They appeared frequently in colonial kitchen tableaux, which first gained attention as early as the 1860s when they served as a popular entertainment at sanitary fairs to raise funds during the Civil War. On a wider scale, a recreated colonial kitchen at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia stoked the public imagination with its spinning wheel, turned wooden furniture, costumed interpreters, and prominent hearth (Figure 14). Though the organizers were displaying the colonial kitchen as a point of contrast to the amenities of an adjacent modern kitchen, a spreading disenchantment with the effects of modernization and industrialization led some to take away the opposite message. In the colonial tableau, the past seemed a simpler time, in which self-sufficient settlers wore homespun and completed handiwork by the rosy glow of the fire. The absence of such unpleasant aspects of modern life as wage labor, factory production, and ethnic or class conflict only heightened the picture’s appeal.

From their origins at fairs, romantic depictions of the colonial hearth became widespread in visual culture from the late nineteenth century onward. Artists and photographers staged reenacted scenes of early American life by the fireside, often depicting their subjects in historical costume.\textsuperscript{61} Most famously, the minister-turned entrepreneur Wallace Nutting capitalized on this wave of nostalgia in the early twentieth century by selling what he called “colonials”: hand-tinted photographs of domestic scenes mostly featuring women in colonial dress, frequently engaged in handicraft activities such as rug-making or embroidery (Figures 15-16).\textsuperscript{62} As a leading authority on American antiques, Nutting also created a fad for turned Windsor furniture, which appeared in many of his romantic colonial tableaux as it does in the Labor Museum photographs. His images were inexpensive and widely distributed, decorating the walls of middle-class homes across the country.\textsuperscript{63} Nutting himself boasted of his pictures in a 1912 catalog that “a person of taste can set forth her walls with perfectly good art for a sum so small it would not buy a good ring.”\textsuperscript{64} Many people were therefore familiar with these images and the vision of the American past they represented.

The symbolic value of colonial scenes was as great as their commercial value. Historian Abigail Carroll argues that colonial revival kitchens, with their prominent

\textsuperscript{61} Thomas Andrew Denenberg, \textit{Wallace Nutting and the Invention of Old America} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 34.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 58-77.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 17-21.

hearth and often spinning wheels too, “constituted theatrical spaces that, through the facilitation of particular, often overlapping plots, served as stages for the performance of national identity.” Among these “plots” was the Americanization plot, which frequently attempted to engage and educate immigrants through the modeling of America’s supposed ancestral spaces. This was particularly true of period rooms, colonial-kitchen-themed restaurants, and other places in which immigrants played active roles as visitor-participants in the period scene.

Taking a view of colonial revival tableaux as performative spaces, what might the Labor Museum’s staging of its demonstrators before an open hearth with Windsor chairs, paneled walls, and spinning wheels indicate about its public message? The presentation of immigrant women in such an evocative setting hardly seems incidental. The quaint backdrop against which the spinners plied their craft transmitted messages not only about national identity, but also about gender and class, to viewers. Thomas Denenberg characterizes Wallace Nutting’s “colonials” as a reactionary response to changing gender roles; like many of his contemporaries, Nutting sought to praise the “productive and genteel” colonial woman as a domestic helpmate in contrast to the defiantly independent New Woman. The Labor Museum photographs appropriate the value-laden imagery of Nutting and others, but they use its gendered meanings in order to “domesticate” the immigrants they portray, to render them less culturally alien and link them with traditional values. By drawing a visual parallel


between modern-day immigrants and the idealized colonial woman, they ascribe to the former all the positive qualities of industriousness, gentility, and skill associated with the latter.

These images reflect Hull House reformers’ attempts to advocate for immigrants as valuable members of society, capable of enriching national culture with contributions of their own. However, the photos also play on the colonial revival’s assimilationist attitudes, reassuring the viewer that twentieth-century immigrants are comparable to the unthreatening Anglo-Saxon women of colonial times. They emphasize cultural similarity rather than embracing difference. By modeling foreign-born craftswomen after colonial dames, these images perhaps suggest to the viewer that immigrants’ ways are not so foreign after all, and even that their culture has the potential to reconnect the nation with the virtues of the past.

**Immigrant Portrayals in Visual Culture**

The Labor Museum photographs must be interpreted within the context not only of colonial revival images, but also of popular portrayals of immigrants and the working poor. Nativist political cartoons often showed immigrants as a teeming horde invading American shores, bearers of disease and social chaos who threatened to destabilize their adopted country. At the same time, by the 1890s a new genre of photography had emerged that documented social conditions among the poor using emotionally charged visual rhetoric. The pioneering figure of reform photography was muckraking journalist Jacob Riis, whose images of squalid living and working conditions among the poor of New York City circulated widely at the turn of the twentieth century. In his photographs, Riis expertly combined voyeuristic fascination
with sentimentality in order to galvanize viewers into action on social issues. His highly effective style, which showed photography’s persuasive potential, had an enormous impact on how reformers publicized their efforts. Riis’ influence can be seen in photographic illustrations for a 1921 study of immigrant living conditions, *New Homes For Old*, by longtime Hull House resident Sophonisba Breckinridge. One image shows the cramped and messy interior of a railway car in which, the caption informs, a family of eight lives with three dogs (Figure 17). Children in soiled clothing stand amid the clutter and look directly at the camera, implicating and imploring the viewer.

Such dramatic images were calculated to unsettle viewers and evoke their sympathy, raising awareness of and interest in social causes. Yet by depicting immigrants as unwashed, destitute, and unhappy, they did little to dispel nativists’ claims about the immigrant threat of uncleanliness and political discontent. Riis’ photography presented his subjects as “a race apart,” an attitude reflected in the title of his influential 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. Although not all images of immigrants and the poor went to such sensationalist extremes, those that did likely had the widest impact. As a stock

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70 Hales, *Silver Cities*, 279.
character in American visual culture, the immigrant was culturally alien from middle-
class viewers.

The Labor Museum’s fireside photographs counter this otherizing view with an
idealizing one, reconciling the foreignness of immigrant culture with the American
hankering for a simpler past. Immigrants were not the problem of the Industrial Age,
but potentially a solution to its ills. If appreciated as more than a source of cheap wage
labor in factories and sweatshops, they could enrich the national culture with their own
preindustrial traditions, producing objects of beauty while modeling traditional values
of domesticity and industriousness. The photos embody Addams’ wish for the Labor
Museum to “demonstrate that immigrant colonies might yield to our American life
something very valuable.”71

This favorable mode of representation relates to what Carrie Tirado Bramen
has termed the “urban picturesque,” a form of description that surfaced in New York
periodicals at the turn of the century. Bramen argues that romantic descriptions of
immigrant customs reflected a “general attempt to nationalize the transnational as
distinctively American” and served as a “vehicle for transforming immigrants from
social threats to cultural resources, as signs not only of an urban identity but also of a
national one.”72 Proponents of the urban picturesque portrayed New York’s
cosmopolitanism and heterogeneity as defining characteristics of American identity,
leaving a lasting impact on the larger cultural discourse. Periodical writers attempted
to engage middle-class readers with a taste for cross-cultural encounters, indulging

71 Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House, 143.

72 Carrie Tirado Bramen, “The Urban Picturesque and the Spectacle of
their curiosity about the ethnic and socioeconomic “other.” In contrast with assimilation or the “melting pot” idea, the urban picturesque celebrated and aestheticized cultural difference, embracing a pluralistic approach to national identity. Like the urban picturesque, the Labor Museum fireside photographs show immigrant customs as cultural resources. However, rather than highlighting cultural difference as a positive attribute, they mute any “exotic” connotations and emphasize compatibility with more traditional ideas of American cultural heritage. In this way, they send a clearer message to viewers than other images of the Labor Museum.

The typical readership consuming Bramen’s urban picturesque was middle-class and white. In comparison, photos of the Labor Museum reached mixed audiences. Immigrant as well as native-born viewers could have seen these images in several places, from Hull House publications to newspaper articles and books. The fireside photo captioned “Italian spinning” (Figure 9) appeared in almost every edition of the *Hull-House Year Book* from 1913 to 1934, as did a photo of “Irish spinning” staged against the somewhat less domestic backdrop of a floor loom.\(^73\) The 1907 book *Textiles and Clothing*, by Kate Heintz Watson, illustrated the history of spinning and weaving with the photographs of “Russian Spinning” and “Dutch Spinning” (Figures 6-7). Intriguingly, it also includes the photo elsewhere labeled as “Irish

\(^73\) *Hull-House Year Book* (1913, 1916, 1921, 1925, 1929, 1931, 1934). By 1934, the Italian woman’s dress would surely have struck viewers as old-fashioned, although not of the same vintage as the fireplace. While it is tempting to read deeper meaning into the unchanging representation of immigrant traditions, outdated photographs and old descriptions appeared throughout the *Year Book*’s pages, remaining unchanged from edition to edition. These included the text describing the Labor Museum, which borrowed heavily from the 1902 *First Report of the Labor Museum* and must have sounded increasingly quaint in later decades.
Spinning” (Figure 8), re-captioning it as “Colonial Flax Wheel.” These images are interspersed in the text with portrayals of both “primitive” and colonial techniques from Hull House and elsewhere. In Watson’s historical narrative, this juxtaposition hints at the potential permeability of the boundary between exotic primitives from non-Anglo cultures, seen as less advanced, and noble colonial settlers, imagined ancestors from simpler (though not uncivilized) times. The re-labeling of “Irish Spinning” also shows that the images’ meaning changed based on the context in which they were interpreted and the perspective of the interpreter. Presented by Watson in supposed order from primitive to modern, the photographs affirm the Labor Museum’s troublesome evolutionary narrative, the more so because the captions do not identify the spinners and weavers as modern-day immigrants demonstrating historical traditions. In contrast, within the context of the Hull-House Year Book they become proof of immigrants’ industriousness and skill.

The idea of presenting ethnic craftspeople as living emissaries from the preindustrial past is, of course, problematic. In describing the handwork performed by immigrants, Jane Addams and her contemporaries made condescending or reductive characterizations, even as they echoed colonial revival evocations of a simpler, nobler past. In Twenty Years at Hull-House, Addams declared that “the Labor Museum has revealed the charm of woman’s primitive activities” and praised older first-generation immigrants as “more natural and cast in a simpler mold.” Whereas popular depictions of colonial dames acknowledged the very “pastness” of the past by

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74 Kate Heintz Watson, Textiles and Clothing (Chicago: Home School of Economics, 1907), 4-26.

75 Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House, 142, 136.
attempting to revive it, the distinction between past and present in the Labor Museum demonstrations was far less clear. First-generation immigrants, who by and large came from unindustrialized rural areas, were seen as closer to their ancestors than the modernized and urbanized American was to the colonial settler. Reformers’ tendency to portray immigrants as embodying past traditions rather than practicing present ones made a distinction that was as alienating as it was ostensibly flattering.

Nevertheless, by celebrating ethnic craft skills, the Labor Museum offered a potent retort to nativists who saw immigrants as a threat to American culture. Craft demonstrations served to humanize and “domesticate” immigrants to a native-born public, showing them as skilled and productive workers. Their cultural traditions appeared as a welcome counterpoint to the industrial society that seemed to be obliterating all signs of the past.

The museum’s fireside photographs suggest that the colonial revival’s romantic view of early American settlers and reformers’ view of ethnic cultures had much in common. Most histories of the colonial revival address immigration, if at all, chiefly as a source of consternation and reactionary sentiment for the movement’s proponents. However, as diffuse and multifaceted as the movement was by the early twentieth century, it is hardly surprising to find such a seeming contradiction as the use of colonial revival imagery to validate immigrant crafts. Addams herself expressed nostalgia for an imagined domestic past, feeling what she called “a yearning to recover for the household arts something of their early sanctity and meaning.”

Advocates of immigrant gifts and apostles of the colonial revival conceptualized their missions in similar ways: they found contemporary American culture lacking and wished to re-

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76 Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House, 141.
infuse it with preindustrial values and aesthetics. Their disagreement was over where such values and aesthetics were to be found.

Beyond adding another layer to our understanding of colonial revival ideology, the fireside photographs illuminate an aspect of the Labor Museum that written accounts neglect to address. They suggest organizers’ awareness of the museum’s mixed audience, and of the opportunity this presented to participate in larger conversations about the place of immigrants in American culture. Through these images, the museum disseminated a form of Americanization aimed not at immigrants themselves, but at the public perception of immigrants. To the extent that they depict the actual staging of craft demonstrations, they also provide valuable evidence of how the museum operated—not wholly contradicting its mission, but revealing other facets of it. Finally, the fireside photographs qualify modern scholarly accusations that reduce the museum’s demonstrations to an objectifying ethnographic display. It is true that the images downplay individual identity, and captions such as “Irish spinning” draw attention to the nationality of their subjects. Nevertheless, the visual content of the images stresses the universality of human experience (which, admittedly, has an American face) over cultural difference. Not only could immigrants be Americans; they embodied what appeared to some as the most essential ancestral traits an American could possess. As the next chapter will show, however, their craft practices were anything but static. Fireside spinners and industrious weavers in the Labor Museum were learning new forms as much as continuing old ones.
Chapter 3

MATERIAL EVIDENCE OF WEAVING PRACTICES IN THE LABOR MUSEUM

Surviving material evidence calls into question the picture of the Labor Museum set forth by written accounts. Like photographs, textiles made in the museum and related programs at Hull House illuminate aspects of its representation of ethnicity that are largely absent from textual sources. Settlement workers and journalists, as well as the modern-day scholars who have used their writings as sources, have described the Labor Museum as a venue for the demonstration of authentic craft traditions brought from foreign countries. In its original conception, the museum’s demonstrators were to be immigrants from the neighborhood who happened to also be skilled craftspeople. These immigrants could teach audiences about the practices of their preindustrial cultures while creating handicrafts that reflected their heritage.

However, the extant group of textiles produced in the museum does not support this interpretation. Instead, material evidence suggests that the Labor Museum’s functions went beyond the practice of specific ethnic traditions. Judging from its relatively generic textile output, the museum may have focused more on teaching simple techniques and producing goods for sale. Although the overall lack of provenance information attached to these objects makes interpreting them a speculative endeavor, this chapter aims to challenge prevailing ideas of how the museum operated by examining the textiles created within its walls.
Textiles from the Labor Museum

From the Labor Museum’s nearly four decades of textile production, a small but suggestive group of material evidence survives. The collections of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum contain seven textiles cataloged as having been made in the Labor Museum. In addition, several other textiles are attributed more generally to Hull House. Four looms also reside in the Hull-House Museum collections, of which two four-shaft looms can be traced back to the Labor Museum with some certainty. The majority of the objects are undated, and few have substantial documentation. Six of the seven Labor Museum textiles are decorative pieces consisting of flat, simple rectangular forms. Three have been cataloged as table runners, two as table throws (though indistinguishable from the runners), and one as a bureau scarf. The seventh article is a purse or bag, the only object of the group that would have served as a personal accessory rather than as a furnishing textile. These weavings have in common their relatively simple designs, which consist of colored stripes or geometric patterns woven into the fabric.

Such basic designs make any attribution of the objects to a specific ethnic or regional weaving tradition extremely challenging. Plain-woven textiles with stripes or floating weft patterns appear globally across many cultures.77 The generic nature of these designs, then, does not positively disprove that they were made by craftspeople demonstrating culturally specific techniques. However, it does suggest that their

77 The difficulty of distinguishing among basic weaving patterns from different parts of the world was agreed upon by textiles curator Linda Eaton (consulted March 11, 2013), handweaving revival scholar Sara Jatcko (consulted via email March 12, 2013), and textile history expert Beverly Gordon (consulted via email March 17, 2013). Gordon noted that “these patterns--stripes, short pattern floats--are fairly universal to European weaving traditions.”
makers were not taking pains to produce objects that reflected distinctive forms of ethnic heritage. To a degree, the difficulty of distinguishing among the products of different ethnic weaving practices even underscores Addams’ initial vision of what the Labor Museum could teach: that “history from the industrial standpoint at once becomes cosmopolitan, and the differences of race and nationality inevitably fall away.”

The striking commonalities among weavings of diverse non-industrial cultures highlight an aspect of human creativity that defies cultural classification.

The supplementary weft patterning on three of the museum’s textiles is a case in point, representing a technique that appears in many weaving traditions. In these pieces, part of the pattern is created by an extra weft floating over the tabby weave of the structural warp and weft. The extra weft runs from selvage to selvage (in contrast with brocade, in which supplementary wefts or warps cover only the pattern area), floating on the fabric’s front face to form the pattern and floating on the back face where it does not appear in the front. A table throw woven in the Labor Museum around 1920 features this technique. Its gold-colored weft floats on a plain-woven white background, probably of linen, to form a geometric pattern of stepped diamonds. A checked border, contained between narrow tabby-weave stripes, runs across each end (Figure 18).

Although visually striking, the loose and wavy appearance of the weft floats is unintentional, likely a result of the length of the floats and the round


79 Table throw, 0000.0076.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM). The throw is currently on display at the Hull-House Museum as an example of textiles woven in the Labor Museum.
shape of the spools on which the gold threads were stored before weaving.\textsuperscript{80} The unusually long floats, particularly visible on the back side, underscore the throw’s decorative nature—the floats would present a structural hazard on a functional textile due to their tendency to snag.\textsuperscript{81}

The same supplementary weft technique appears in the pattern of a second table throw, which features a large geometric design of diamonds and bars within a crisscross pattern, framed by a border of triangular points and narrow tabby-weave stripes at either end (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{82} The design is created by an extra weft of blue thread floating on a white tabby-weave background. The large pattern of blocky, stepped shapes formed by the wavy weft floats resembles that of the other table throw, indicating that the two might share a maker or design source. On a third textile, cataloged as a table runner, supplementary weft patterning surfaces in a different way. The white, plain-woven runner is very simply embellished on either end with borders consisting of several narrow stripes, created with structural wefts of blue thread. Between the rows of stripes, floating wefts of white thread add subtle texture to the pattern (Figure 20).\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Suggested by Linda Eaton in personal communication with author, March 11, 2013.

\textsuperscript{81} Lotus Stack notes this weakness in what she calls “float brocading” (although the weaves with selvage-to-selvage supplementary wefts that she describes are technically not brocades) in \textit{The Nonessential Thread: Brocade, Silks to Synthetics} (Minneapolis: The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1989), 28.

\textsuperscript{82} Table throw, 0000.0112.0001, JAHHM.

\textsuperscript{83} Table runner, 1336, JAHHM. One wonders if the textile in question might be the same as or similar to the table runner described in an undated document as “Table runner, white with decoration in blue bands” and priced at $4.00. See folder “Social
Though used to different effect, the distinctive supplementary weft patterning on these three textiles, all woven in the Labor Museum, hints at a common influence. They might have been created by the same maker, by multiple weaving students with the same teacher, or by multiple weavers using the same drafting patterns or coming from the same weaving tradition. However, this shared characteristic does not definitively tie the textiles to a particular national, regional, or ethnic tradition. Similar techniques appear in the weavings of many cultures. The exploration of potential influences that follows is therefore highly speculative. Nevertheless, it serves to suggest the exchange of cultural techniques that might have taken place in the museum.

**Potential Sources for the Supplementary Weft Technique**

If written accounts of the Labor Museum as a venue for demonstrating traditional ethnic crafts are accurate, it follows that the supplementary weft technique must have come from the weaving practices of local immigrants. Italian, Mexican, and Scandinavian folk weaving all make similar use of this technique and match with elements of the neighborhood’s ethnic makeup, providing potential sources for the designs found on Labor Museum weavings. However, the absence of clear visual prototypes prevents any certain attributions from being made. In addition, the aesthetic simplicity of the textiles points to another possible influence: the American handweaving revival of the early twentieth century. With their generic patterns and activities—art,” Series 13a, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
lack of clear ethnic sources, textiles from the Labor Museum call into question previous accounts of the museum’s practices.

Supplementary weft patterns appear with some frequency in Italian weaving traditions, among others. For centuries, weavers in the Umbrian region of Italy have made so-called “Perugian towels,” featuring geometric patterns formed by supplementary weft floats (Figure 21). These simple white linens, typically embellished with colored (often blue) supplementary wefts, were woven in rural homes by agricultural workers as a form of cottage industry; trade routes allowed the finer products to travel to other parts of Europe, including France and Germany. 84 Although many traditional Perugian towels display figural patterns with winged creatures or mottoes, their brightly colored weft-float patterning on a white ground bears a resemblance to the textiles from the Labor Museum. Umbrian weavings represent one possible design source, given that a large population of immigrants from rural areas of Italy lived in the neighborhood surrounding Hull House and several Italian women worked in the museum and the textile shops. 85

The ethnic composition of the neighborhood and museum staff suggests the potential influence of other weaving traditions as well. As Mexican immigrants began to arrive in growing numbers during the 1920s, many took advantage of the


85 The involvement of a “Mrs. Molinaro” or Molinari with the Labor Museum is noted in several sources, including daughter France Molinaro’s obituary, which states that her mother Caroline worked in the museum during its early years. The 1906-7 *Hull-House Year Book* also records two women, “Mrs. Olivete” and “Mrs. Matilde Vite,” possibly of Italian descent, working in the textile shop at Hull House. See Kenan Heise, “Hull House Worker for 47 Years,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 18, 1986.
opportunity to make and sell crafts at Hull House. Oral histories from local residents remark on the apparent talent Mexican immigrants had for weaving, pottery, and other crafts. James Greco, an Italian-American who took weaving classes at the museum as a young boy, later recalled of his Mexican-American acquaintances:

“Well they were very artistic. They came into the pottery rooms and ceramics. They were real good at it, because that's what they did in . . . They were very good weavers, too. They could really weave and make big blankets and large items that were very difficult… They had a loom, and they could even make looms, which was very, very difficult to make. But they came from rural areas in Mexico.”

Esther Wendel, a daughter of Swedish immigrants who taught weaving at Hull House during the 1940s, echoed this praise in her recollection: “They are wonderful craftsmen, the Mexicans. They take to weaving just like a duck to water, really. They are really very, very fine with their hands.”

Even such complimentary and well-intentioned statements as these must be interpreted with caution in light of their tendency to essentialize and make generalizations about other cultures. Nevertheless, they suggest that Mexicans were known within the community for their active involvement in weaving at Hull House, and that some brought pre-existing skills and knowledge of the craft with them from Mexico.

The Mexican presence provides another possible clue to design sources for the supplementary weft patterns on the Labor Museum textiles. This type of patterning

86 James Greco, oral history interview, 1984. Box 3, Folder 35, Hull-House Oral History Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections. All citations of oral histories in this thesis come from transcriptions found in the database at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, which had custody of the recordings until 2001.

commonly appears in textiles from Mexico and Central America, particularly on the *huipil*, a traditional garment woven on a backstrap loom and worn by indigenous women. Common decoration on the *huipil* includes geometric patterns created with embroidery, applied decoration, and weft-float designs. The patterns on the Labor Museum’s gold- and blue-decorated table throws would have been relatively easy to weave on a backstrap loom using pattern sticks or rods to create the appropriate sheds for each pass of the weft. Though a backstrap loom is not explicitly listed within the Labor Museum’s large assortment of weaving equipment in early records, the museum did possess a “poncho loom” donated by the Field Columbian Museum, and a photograph from the 1933 *Hull-House Year Book* shows two children using a backstrap loom in a weaving class (Figure 22). Moreover, James Greco’s account indicates that some Mexican immigrants brought or made their own equipment.

Yet, just as many different cultures have produced similar weaving designs, the same basic textile can be made using a variety of equipment and techniques. The table throws with weft-float patterns could be the products not of a backstrap loom, but of a four-shaft floor loom, again using pattern sticks to create the design. This setup has traditionally been used in Sweden for a type of weft-float technique, *opphämta*, which presents another potential design source for the Labor Museum textiles. In *opphämta*

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89 Personal communication with Linda Eaton, March 11, 2013.

90 *Hull-House Bulletin* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1902): 10; *Hull-House Year Book* (1933), 13. Incidentally, the museum’s “old fashioned fireplace” is visible in the background of the photo.
(sometimes spelled *upphämta*), the pattern wefts span from selvage to selvage, floating on a ground of linen or cotton and forming simple shapes such as checks, diamonds, stripes, stars, and crosses. Many traditional Swedish weavings in the *opphämta* style resemble the Labor Museum textiles, with their long weft floats forming large, simple geometric patterns (Figure 23). Many also have border designs similar to that on the blue-decorated table throw, with its repeating stepped triangular points. Moreover, the checkered border on the gold-decorated table throw recalls Swedish *halvkrabba*, another type of supplementary weft technique in which small squares arranged in a checkerboard pattern form a design over a tabby-weave ground. *Halvkrabba* is typically used in conjunction with other techniques, as are the checks on the table throw. Although the patterns on the Labor Museum textiles do not match any one Swedish prototype exactly, Scandinavian weaving presents the most visually compelling case as a design influence.

The resemblance to *opphämta* and *halvkrabba* is even more significant given the longtime presence at Hull House of Danish-American immigrant Susanne


92 Although Figure 23 shows the basic weave structure of *opphämta*, a more illustrative example of the long, wavy weft floats often produced by the technique appears in Nylén, *Swedish Handcraft*, 192; see also Anneli Palmsköld, *Textila tolkningar: om hängkläden, drättar, lister och takdukar* (Stockholm: Nordiska Museets Förlag, 2007), 10, 46, 63, 67, 70-71, 76-80, 84-88, 94, 99, 145. Still more can be found on the website of the Hallands Konstmuseum (Art Museum of Halland); two in particular, with the accession numbers HM 10468 and HM 4849, exhibit bold, simple geometric patterns in blue weft floats on a white background. *Opphämta* was particularly common in the Halland region of western Sweden.

93 Nylén, *Swedish Handcraft*, 166.
Sorensen, who taught weaving classes and worked in the textile shop. There is reason to believe that Sorensen’s weaving might have drawn inspiration from Swedish patterns and techniques. Within the revival of traditional national crafts that swept Europe during the late nineteenth century, the Danish handweaving revival took many of its cues from Sweden. Denmark’s native weaving traditions had largely died out decades earlier with the rise of industrial textile production. The lack of surviving heritage prompted Danish revivalists to import techniques from Sweden, whose national culture of home weaving had continued uninterrupted from past centuries.94

Sorensen, then, may well have served as an emissary of Swedo-Danish weaving styles at Hull House. In a flyer for her weaving lessons, she is advertised as a native of Askov, Denmark and as an importer of Danish looms.95 Askov was notable for being a center of the “new Danish weaving tradition”; at the Askov Folk High School, revival leaders Jenny La Cour and Johanne Siegumfeldt began teaching weaving classes after being inspired by a study trip to Sweden in 1888.96 Their summer weaving classes were extremely popular, especially among women. They also published a book, Vævebog for Hjemmene (Weaving Book for the Home), in 1897, which exhibited the influence of Swedish weaving on its authors. It is possible that

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95 Flyer. 1985.0058.0008, JAHHM.

Susanne Sorensen, who was weaving at Hull House by 1906, read the book or even took weaving classes in Askov before immigrating to the U.S.\textsuperscript{97}

Further evidence connects the blue- and gold-decorated table throws to Sorensen’s Scandinavian influence. For some time during her tenure at the settlement, Sorensen wove on a Danish loom imported for her by a Niels M. Steenhill of Chicago during the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{98} Painted black and decorated with colored stenciling and chip-carving, the four-shaft loom survives in the collections of the Hull-House Museum (Figure 24). Still attached to the loom is an unfinished textile featuring a simple, geometric supplementary weft pattern with short floats in red and green on a tabby-weave, buff-colored ground (Figure 25). A fragment of another textile woven on the Danish loom at Hull House also has a simple supplementary weft pattern of checks and bars in blue thread on a tabby-weave ground (Figure 26).\textsuperscript{99} Although these fragments might have been woven at any time during the loom’s long residence at Hull House, they attest to the possibility that the extant Labor Museum textiles were produced on this very loom or one similar to it with the aid of pattern sticks.

Beyond Susanne Sorensen, Scandinavian traditions could have influenced weaving at Hull House indirectly through the significant role they played in the American handweaving revival. Many of the earliest books on handweaving came

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\textsuperscript{97} Sorensen’s 1950 obituary states that she came to Chicago in 1916, yet she is listed as an employee of the Hull House textile shop in the 1906-7 \textit{Hull-House Year Book}. See “Former Tutor at Hull House Dies in Iowa,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, Nov. 12, 1950, 46.

\textsuperscript{98} Donor information from database record for loom, 1985.0058.0001, JAHHM.

\textsuperscript{99} Textile fragment, 1985.0058.0017, JAHHM.
\end{flushleft}
from Scandinavian countries and especially from Sweden. American proponents of handweaving often took their cues from Sweden, where the revival of handicraft was already in full swing and weaving schools were further developed than in the United States. Many weavers studied in Sweden or engaged the services of Swedish-born weavers to teach technique. Such was the case with the Fireside Industry at Berea College in Kentucky, which allowed local Appalachian women and college students to earn income or pay tuition by weaving; Swedish-born Anna Ernberg, hired by the college in 1911, oversaw the Industry’s production for many years.

The career and works of Edward F. Worst provide a notable case study in the transmission of Scandinavian techniques to American weavers. A key figure in the manual education movement who taught crafts in Chicago for much of his career, Worst made multiple study trips to Swedish schools between 1908 and 1912 in order to learn more advanced weaving techniques. He also imported spinning wheels and looms from Sweden and Norway, and in 1915 he organized a group of Swedish weavers.


101 For a history of the handweaving revival in Appalachia, including weaving at Berea College under Ernberg’s tenure, see Philis Alvic, Weavers of the Southern Highlands (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2003). It should be noted that although Ernberg learned to weave in Sweden, her task at Berea was to teach and preserve weaving traditions native to Appalachia (Alvic, 42).

immigrant women in Lockport, Illinois, to produce household textiles for sale.\textsuperscript{103} Worst eventually designed his own “Lockport Loom,” based on Swedish and Norwegian models, and sold the product to craft centers and schools nationwide throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.\textsuperscript{104} In his highly successful manual, \textit{Foot-Power Loom Weaving}, first published in 1918, Worst dedicated two full chapters to Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish weaving alongside a chapter on colonial American techniques, combining two of the handweaving revival’s major influences. Despite having no documented connection, Worst and the weaving teachers at Hull House probably enjoyed some degree of mutual familiarity due to their concurrent participation in local manual education efforts. At the very least, Worst gave lectures and instruction for courses at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy alongside Jane Addams and other Hull House residents.\textsuperscript{105} Worst could even have brought Scandinavian weaving to Hull House himself, either in person or through the use of his published manual by teachers and students.

\textsuperscript{103} Mahoney, \textit{Edward F. Worst}, 25.

\textsuperscript{104} Mahoney, \textit{Edward F. Worst}, 27.

\textsuperscript{105} For example, in 1908 Worst served as an instructor for a summer course in handicraft occupations, intended for staff at mental institutions; the course organized by Julia Lathrop and supervised by Helen Burling, and featured lectures by Jane Addams and Alice Hamilton, all of Hull House. See \textit{Twenty-First Fractional Biennial Report of the Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities of the State of Illinois} (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Journal Co., 1911), 207. For a description of a 1910 course in which Worst taught alongside Addams and Lathrop, see also Edward Thomas Devine and Paul Underwood Kellogg, \textit{The Survey} Vol. 24, April-Sept. 1910 (New York: The Charity Organization Society, 1910).
Susanne Sorensen and other Labor Museum demonstrators may have infused weaving at Hull House with foreign techniques, but native-born workers also took part in weaving instruction, teaching both demonstrators and audiences how to work the equipment. Non-immigrant settlement residents Jessie Luther and Mary Hill directed the Labor Museum in its early years as “curators” or supervisors; Jane Addams herself took over as museum director in 1906. In teaching at the Labor Museum, Hull House residents and immigrants alike might have turned to the manuals on handweaving that proliferated during the early twentieth century, perhaps including Worst’s book. Such manuals, with their basic patterns for beginners, might provide one explanation for the simple and generic decoration on many of the textiles woven at Hull House.

Because many products of the Labor Museum were sold for the joint benefit of the makers and the settlement, it is possible that those who wove in the museum did so with an eye on profit. Sales might have provided incentive for craftspeople to produce more simplified styles, toning down the intricate patterning and applied decoration found on many traditional ethnic weavings. The Labor Museum textiles, devoid of


107 Examples of aesthetic simplicity in handweaving revival products can be found in the illustrations of manuals such as Worst’s Foot-Power Loom Weaving (Milwaukee, Wisc.: Bruce Publishing Company, 1918); Mattie Phipps Todd, Hand-Loom Weaving, rev. ed. (1902; repr., Chicago: Rand McNally, 1914); and Luther Hooper, Hand-Loom Weaving, Plain & Ornamental, rev. ed. (1910; repr., London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, Ltd., 1920).
applied embellishment, create visual interest through colors, textures, and patterns that are inherent in their weave structure. They echo the plain, pared-down aesthetic of the other handmade goods that were popular at this time, such as rag rugs and Shaker crafts. Goods inspired by ethnic or “folk” designs also enjoyed commercial success in the early twentieth century. Many of these products reflected designers’ or manufacturers’ ideas of ethnic style rather than imitating exact prototypes. The gold- and blue-decorated table throws from the Labor Museum, with their bold colors and geometric patterns, may have been original designs inspired as much by department-store renderings of the ethnic as by genuine craft traditions. They may also represent their makers’ awareness of their market. Like many ethnic craftspeople who sold their output to consumers in this period, they may have discovered that adapting designs to fit the tastes and preconceptions of a middle-class market brought a better profit than strictly adhering to their own traditions. The marketing and sale of crafts from the Labor Museum, along with the commercial appeal of handcrafted and ethnic goods, will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Aesthetic Ambiguity in the Labor Museum Textiles

The gold- and blue-decorated table throws and the blue-striped table runner may be evidence of Scandinavian, Mexican, or Italian influences on weaving in the Labor Museum. Yet due to the amount of overlap in basic decorative motifs from different parts of the world, their ultimate design source(s) will likely never be known. This aesthetic ambiguity also appears in other textiles from the museum. The purse, with its blue-and-yellow striped pattern, decorative fringe, and corded carrying handle,
is too generic to be identified with any particular culture (Figure 27).\textsuperscript{108} Similarly, the simple, abstract geometric design in red and black thread bordering the two fringed ends of a table runner evokes multiple traditions, including Greek and Mexican weaving (Figure 28).\textsuperscript{109} Another table runner features a bright, striped geometric pattern in light blue, dark blue, and orange on a plain-woven, off-white background, with a short fringe at each end (Figure 29).\textsuperscript{110} The pattern is created by supplementary colored wefts that are carried up the selvages; these wefts float over only a few warps at a time and thus do not create the long floats seen on the gold- and blue-decorated table throws. The vibrant colors and striped pattern resemble both Mexican and Scandinavian folkways.\textsuperscript{111} This simple design could have been created with pattern sticks on a backstrap loom or a four-shaft, four-treadle floor loom. Notably, it resembles the “honeysuckle” and “rosepath” patterns found in handweaving manuals such as Worst’s \textit{Foot-Power Loom Weaving}.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{108} Purse, 0000.0077.0001, JAHHM. Sadly, the purse was unavailable for in-person examination for the duration of my research, so all physical description comes from the object record and photograph in the museum’s database.

\textsuperscript{109} Table runner, 0000.0078.0001, JAHHM. The table runner, cataloged as “possibly made in the Labor Museum,” was also unavailable for viewing. Based on the museum database photograph, Linda Eaton remarked that the pattern somewhat resembled Mexican or European folk textiles, while Beverly Gordon thought it looked “vaguely Greek,” but both agreed that no certain attribution could be made. The pattern was probably created using supplementary wefts, but could also have been embroidered onto the woven textile.

\textsuperscript{110} Table runner, 1973.0028.0015, JAHHM.

\textsuperscript{111} Linda Eaton, personal communication with author, Sept. 24, 2012.

\textsuperscript{112} For examples of rosepath, see Fig. 72 and Fig. 73 in Worst, \textit{Foot-Power Loom Weaving}, 55. See also illustrations of textiles designed by Worst or made under his direction in Mahoney, \textit{Edward F. Worst}, 26 (table runner), 32 (various handwoven
The final textile attributed to the Labor Museum, a bureau scarf, hints at larger issues of provenance surrounding the interpretation of this group of objects. Its design is the simplest of all, with plain-woven stripes created by alternating structural wefts of dark blue, orange, and red thread over unbleached warps (Figure 30). However, its most noteworthy feature is the inexpert nature of the weaving. The uneven selvages expand and contract down the length of the warp, suggesting a weaver who was still learning to regulate the tightness of the weave. The weft threads occasionally float over two warps instead of one, indicating mistakes made by the weaver. Finally, though the spacing of the stripes from one fringed end to the other appears symmetrical at first glance, on closer examination there is significant variation in width and spacing.

Together, these characteristics call to mind the product of a novice weaver, or at least one who was not prioritizing display or sale value. Aside from being handwoven, everything about the bureau scarf runs counter to descriptions of the Labor Museum as a gathering of skilled craftspeople demonstrating ethnic folkways. Perhaps the best explanation is that the textile was created not at a museum demonstration, but in one of Hull House’s popular weaving classes. Yet this does not necessarily undermine the object’s Labor Museum provenance; rather, it illustrates once more the hazy boundaries between museum demonstrations, craft classes, and the shops that produced textiles for sale. If a student wove the bureau scarf in a class that

textiles), and 45 (doily). An example of the similar honeysuckle pattern can be found in Mary Meigs Atwater, *The Shuttle-Craft Book of American Hand-weaving* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 159.

113 Bureau scarf, 1973.0028.0014, JAHHM.
took place in the museum space, it was “made in the Labor Museum” in at least one sense.

Though the other six Labor Museum textiles are the work of far more skilled and confident hands, they too may have been created in a context other than that of immigrant demonstrations. A teacher like Susanne Sorensen could have made them while teaching a class in the museum, or a worker in the textile shop could have woven them with thoughts of selling. In other words, their attractive but simple patterns might be results of profit- or education-oriented weaving rather than expressions of ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, textiles with similarly generic patterns appear in the background in photographs of Labor Museum demonstrators, as in one image of a woman seated at a spinning wheel against a backdrop of multiple plain, striped and fringed textiles (Figure 31). In another photo, a woman identified as Syrian demonstrates spinning in front of a large, boldly striped textile, possibly a rug (Figure 5). These photos affirm the presence of such textiles as part of the Labor Museum’s overall display, regardless of whether they were woven in the demonstrations, classes, or shops. To museum visitors and those who viewed the photographs, they represented the global history of weaving.

Irregularities in the patterning of the gold- and blue-decorated table throws raise further questions about the circumstances of their production. Though both have repeating patterns that span from selvage to selvage, each exhibits a few small variations in width between repeats. On the gold-and-white throw, the diamond pattern on one end is slightly narrower than the other repeats, as though it had been compressed in order to fit the design onto the textile. The blue-and-white throw has fewer repeats, but the design grows noticeably more compressed from one selvage to
the other. In addition, the triangles that form the border pattern are much longer on one side than the other. These irregularities suggest an approach of adaptation and experimentation rather than adherence to familiar tools and techniques or static traditions. Perhaps the maker was adjusting traditional patterns to new equipment, or inventing new designs based on traditional ones.

There are several potential explanations, then, for the vaguely ethnic designs of the table throws and other Labor Museum textiles. They may be the products of immigrant weavers demonstrating simple (or simplified) examples of traditional techniques from their own cultures, as published accounts of the museum’s mission suggest. They could equally well be original designs adapted from or inspired by a variety of sources, including ethnic textiles in museums (including the Labor Museum’s own display collection) and patterns in handweaving manuals. Settlement workers may have created designs they thought would add an appropriately ethnic flavor to the weavings, or perhaps the practices of immigrant craftspeople changed as they encountered new equipment, techniques, and textiles from other cultures.

The question remains of whether these seven textiles are representative of the Labor Museum’s production. Their lack of dating and provenance make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the museum’s output, which likely changed over time and according to the context and maker. They could have been woven by immigrant demonstrators, settlement workers, or weaving students, with each possibility altering the nature of their significance. Only one piece, the bureau scarf, has a recorded history of ownership (by a Mrs. Maxwell Arthur, about whom no other information is provided). However, at the very least, they represent a portion of the museum’s

114 Information from database record for bureau scarf, 1973.0028.0014, JAHHM.
output and suggest that its mission may not have been—or remained—its reality. Though clearly indebted to ethnic designs, their patterns appear to be simplifications or adaptations rather than exact imitations. In this way, the objects provide key evidence of how theory translated into practice at the Labor Museum. The interpretive mission of classifying, comparing, preserving, and celebrating the craft traditions of different nations gave way to a mix of creative expression and experimentation fueled by both individual needs and cultural exchange.

**The Larger Group: Textiles from Hull House**

A related body of textiles at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, cataloged as having been woven at Hull House or on the settlement’s looms, puts the Labor Museum textiles in context. Although they are not specifically attributed to the Labor Museum, textiles made at Hull House were most likely woven on the same body of equipment as the Labor Museum textiles. They therefore provide valuable information about weaving activities at the settlement. Most serve to confirm that weaving at Hull House drew from a variety of sources other than ethnic folkways, including the handweaving revival and related craft movements. Several will be highlighted here.

The two rag rugs, one striped in a blue/white/cream palette, the other in lavender/pink/white, call to mind the handweaving revival and the colonial revival in their form and color (Figure 32-33).\(^\text{115}\) Although the form was certainly not unique to American craft traditions, many handweaving manuals from the early twentieth

\(^{115}\) Rug, 1985.0058.0005 and Rug, 1985.0058.0004, JAHHM.
century contained instructions for making rag rugs from household materials.\textsuperscript{116} At the same time, hooked, braided, and other types of rag rugs frequently appeared in colonial-style interiors. As Wallace Nutting’s 1915 staged “colonial” photograph \textit{Weaving a Rag Rug} shows, the practice was popularly viewed as an early American home industry, whether accurately or not (Figure 34). A Sears, Roebuck and Company catalog from circa 1910 advertised its own rag rugs, “firmly woven from thoroughly cleaned rags,” as being “exactly like the old fashioned rag carpet.”\textsuperscript{117} It is significant, then, that Hull House craftspeople made such rugs, either to sell or to decorate their own homes. If the weaving of rag rugs did not tie directly to the colonial revival aesthetic, it at least suggests an awareness of the widespread interest in such goods. The pale pastel colors of the two rag rugs would also have fit in with the faded palette (incorrectly thought to replicate historical colorways) of a colonial-style home better than the bold colors and contrasts of some of the Labor Museum textiles.

Like the rugs, a navy and white double-woven cloth from Hull House resembles patterns found in handweaving manuals (Figure 35).\textsuperscript{118} Double weaving was a complex technique not likely to have been taken on by beginners. It also

\textsuperscript{116} For example, see “Rag Rugs” in Worst, \textit{Foot-Power Loom Weaving}, 43-44, and “Rug-Weaving” in Atwater, \textit{The Shuttle-Craft Book of American Hand-weaving}, 122-127. Atwater praises the charm of early American rag rugs but questions the practicality of weaving modern rag rugs given the cheap quality of cloth and the amount of time required to make them. Mattie Phipps Todd also mentions the use of rags throughout her book \textit{Hand-Loom Weaving} (originally published in 1902).


\textsuperscript{118} Cloth, 1971.0021.0008, JAHHM. Cataloged as “probably woven at Hull House.”
required a loom with at least eight shafts, unlike the simpler weft-patterned textiles, which could be woven on a four-shaft loom. Examples of similar double-weave patterns appear in Worst’s *Foot-Power Loom Weaving*, and a match to the pattern on the Hull House cloth appears in Figure 414 of the manual, which shows a detail from a Danish draft for double weaving.\(^{119}\) Whereas one simple, repeating pattern covers the entirety of the Hull House cloth, this pattern and others like it appear in Worst’s book and similar manuals as a component of larger and more complex designs.\(^{120}\) The Hull House cloth may therefore represent another instance of a simplified pattern.

Also bearing a likeness to products of the handweaving revival are several flat, decorative textiles from Hull House with simple striped patterns, which show that the stylistically similar Labor Museum weavings were part of a larger group. This group includes a purple-and-white striped table throw woven on Susanne Sorensen’s Danish loom,\(^{121}\) a woven cloth of unspecified use (probably a table throw),\(^{122}\) and a table runner with five matching place mats (Figures 36-38).\(^{123}\) In addition, a cream-colored scarf with textured stripes has an unusually detailed provenance, which notes that Jane

\(^{119}\) Worst also describes several examples of double weaving with blue and white thread. See Worst, *Foot-Power Loom Weaving*, 162-165.

\(^{120}\) See for example the designs “Johann Ludwig Speck” (29), “American Beauty No. 3” (142-3), and “Silk Worm Draft” (149), in Marguerite Porter Davison, ed., *A Handweaver’s Source Book: A Selection of 224 Patterns from the Laura M. Allen Collection* (Swarthmore, Pa.: Marguerite P. Davison, 1953).

\(^{121}\) Table throw, 1985.0058.0016, JAHHM.

\(^{122}\) Woven cloth, 1994.0007.0009, JAHHM.

\(^{123}\) Table runner and placemats, 1994.0007.0004a-f, JAHHM.
Addams gave it to one Marion Curtis at her 1920 wedding (Figure 39). Though the phrasing leaves the lingering question of whether Addams might have woven the decorative scarf herself, the date of 1920 confirms that such plain textiles were a product of Hull House weaving at this time, about halfway through the Labor Museum’s lifespan.

Two more items, a handkerchief and a table scarf, illustrate two very different techniques employed by their maker, Marika Galanopoulos (Figures 40-41). An immigrant from the Tripoli area of Greece, Galanopoulos learned to weave at Hull House, probably during the 1930s. She subsequently borrowed one of the settlement’s looms in order to weave in her home, selling half her output at Hull House in exchange for the equipment. Whereas her handkerchief features a simple white tabby weave embellished by two narrow, patterned stripes in red and blue thread, the table scarf has a modern-looking color scheme of gold, blue, red, and green combined with an openwork technique that resembles the modern weavings of later decades (for example, Danish weaver Paula Trock’s 1958 Hulgardinet or “hole curtain”).

Galanopoulos’s table scarf is significant as an immigrant-made craft that embraced

124 Scarf, 1989.0072.0001, JAHHM. Provenance from database record.

125 Intriguingly, Addams does appear in the Labor Museum cashbooks as a contributor of income; whether she sold woven goods or merely made cash donations to help sustain the museum is unclear.

126 Handkerchief, 1993.0033.0002 and Table scarf, 1993.0033.0003, JAHHM.

127 Electronic communication from Ann Stemler, granddaughter of Marika Galanopoulos, documented in database record for Table scarf, 1993.0033.0003, JAHHM.

128 Dickson, Dansk Design, 156.
contemporary styles rather than ethnic traditions, like much of the pottery produced by Mexican-Americans at the Hull-House Kilns during the 1930s.

Another unlikely pairing of objects made by a Greek immigrant are Demetra Dicketopoulos’s evening gown and embroidered pillow shams (Figures 42-43).129 Dicketopoulos learned to sew at Hull House.130 Along with lace borders, decoration on the white pillow shams includes a central embroidered design of Greek letters spelling out “ελενη,” or “Helen,” wreathed in floral patterns. The shams therefore bear some trace of their maker’s ethnic identity in addition to conveying a traditional aesthetic. In contrast, the evening gown is a tour de force of 1920s style, featuring a sleeveless top largely composed of sheer lace, a drop waist, and beadwork in abstracted foliate designs. With these creations, Dicketopoulos proved that she could ply her needle in a range of modes. She might even have used her versatile skills to earn money, although by tradition Greek women in Chicago rarely worked outside the home until the Great Depression made such arrangements necessary.131 Hull House presented many economic opportunities to women in needlework, both by offering sewing classes and by providing a sales venue for skilled seamstresses. As local reformer Ruth Austin later noted of the Labor Museum, “There you saw the older


130 “Dicketopoulos” is almost certainly not the original spelling of the name and may be an Anglicized transcription of a Greek name, perhaps Dioikitopoulos or Diakopoulos.

Italian women and many of the neighborhood women did beautiful embroidery on consignment. And weaving—all that kind of thing.”

Other textiles from Hull House exhibit the same aesthetic ambiguity as the Labor Museum group. These include two textiles cataloged as “probably woven at Hull House.” The first is a large blue twill-weave tablecloth embellished with white cross-stitched figures of flowers, birds, and urns, a fairly generic form of decoration common to needlework traditions in many cultures (Figure 44). The second is a large cloth, possibly a blanket or rug, woven with a geometric pattern of interlocking yellow, red, and black lines inside a black border (Figure 45). The cloth’s design of interlocking lines closely resembles those of Navajo blankets and rugs. Notably, borders on Navajo textiles reflected the stylistic influence of traders, who persuaded native weavers to alter their traditionally borderless designs for enhanced market appeal. Since the Labor Museum’s furnishings included a Navajo loom, on which immigrant Hilda Satt learned Navajo-style weaving and later demonstrated on Saturday evenings, it is possible that the Navajo-style cloth was made on museum equipment, almost certainly by an immigrant or settlement worker rather than a native weaver.

The tablecloth and blanket both defy ethnic categorization, one due to the ubiquity of figural cross-stitch designs in European folk textiles, the other due to the

132 Ruth Austin, oral history interview, circa 1970. Box 2, Folder 10, Hull-House Oral History Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.

133 Tablecloth, 1971.0021.0009; Cloth, 1981.0092.0001, JAHHM.


use or imitation of a Navajo design by a non-Navajo maker. However, both hint at the variety of textile projects that took place under the auspices of Hull House.

The larger context of weaving at Hull House reinforces what the seven extant Labor Museum textiles suggest: that the settlement’s pragmatic attitude and pluralistic approach to culture resulted in a mixture of techniques and aesthetics. Whatever their sources, the textile designs underscore the inadequacy of “cultural authenticity” as a criterion for interpreting such crafts. Few diasporic cultures remain static or impervious to outside influence for long. Whether created by a Danish-American weaving teacher, a Mexican-American weaving student, or a native-born settlement worker, each object represents the intersection of diverse practices in an atmosphere of cultural exchange rather than the pure product of an isolated tradition. Taken together, the textiles’ stylistic hybridity and resistance to classification mirror the experiences of immigrants, whose tightrope-walk between preserving familiar traditions and adapting to life in the U.S. often resulted in distinctive new forms of cultural identity. In this way, their weavings were as much “American” as they were anything else. As the discrepancy between written accounts of the Labor Museum and its surviving textile output suggests, tidy theories of labor and culture translated into far messier and more dynamic realities.
Chapter 4
NEW PERSPECTIVES: THE MUSEUM THROUGH IMMIGRANTS’ EYES

Visual sources have already shown that the Labor Museum’s representational strategies were more complex than described in written accounts. Material sources have also suggested that adaptation and experimentation were more characteristic of weaving at Hull House than strict adherence to tradition. This final chapter explores a third disjuncture between theory and practice: how the museum’s meaning(s) to immigrants may have differed from the agendas set forth by well-intentioned reformers. Although Jane Addams founded the Labor Museum with well-defined ideas of the social and cultural work it would perform in the surrounding community, little evidence exists to suggest how immigrant craft demonstrators and their local audiences actually experienced the museum. In contrast to the residents of Hull House, who recorded the details of their work in writings from correspondence to published accounts, the working-class denizens of the Nineteenth Ward rarely left behind written documentation of their perspectives. Did the children of immigrants visiting the museum develop a newfound respect for their parents’ skills? Did industrial workers feel less alienated from their labor after learning about the long historical tradition to which they belonged? And did immigrant demonstrators feel more at home in their adopted country after sharing their craftsmanship with an appreciative audience?

Although these questions have no clear answers, a constellation of sources provides a fuller picture of the Labor Museum’s operations, qualifying the idealistic assertions of reformers. The only published memoir of an immigrant’s experiences at
Hull House, Hilda Satt Polacheck’s *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, provides a rare and valuable written account of her encounters with the museum, which will be examined in the next section. Following that, financial records and oral histories will help to bring into focus a largely overlooked aspect of the museum: the opportunity for profit it offered to participants in marketing their crafts as commodities.

**An Immigrant’s Account of the Labor Museum**

In *I Came a Stranger*, Hilda Polacheck (née Satt, 1882-1967) recounted her family’s journey from Poland to Chicago’s West Side in 1892 and her subsequent experiences, including her involvement with Hull House. Polacheck devoted an extended passage to her initial encounter with the Labor Museum, which she described as a turning point that “marked the beginning of a new life” for her. She had first visited the recently opened museum as a teenager in 1900, while seeking diversion at Hull House after a monotonous day spent sewing cuffs at the shirtwaist factory where she worked. Jane Addams greeted her in the reception room and decided to take her to the Labor Museum, where curator Mary Hill gave her a tour. “When we had finished looking at the cases,” Polacheck recounted, “Miss Hill asked me whether I would like to learn to weave something that was typically American. Yes, I was ready to learn

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137 Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 63.
almost anything. So she brought out a small frame, several balls of heavy cotton cord, and several balls of various colors of wool, and very soon I was weaving a small Navaho-style blanket.”

Polacheck’s experience reveals a departure from the museum’s operating model as described by Addams: instead of immigrants demonstrating their own craft traditions for younger generations, here an Anglo-American settlement worker demonstrated a Native American weaving technique to an immigrant audience. The anecdote suggests that the museum did not always operate strictly within the bounds of its stated mission. Rather, settlement workers responded to needs as they arose and sometimes stepped into the position of teacher-demonstrator at the museum, making immigrants their pupils. Significantly, though, Polacheck’s narrative seems almost deliberately to resist any reading of Mary Hill’s actions as implementing an assimilationist agenda: although the American settlement worker was teaching her a “typically American” craft, this craft was in the style of a Native American (not Anglo-American) tradition.

Later portions of Polacheck’s account indicate that the Labor Museum may have followed its founding blueprint somewhat more closely when it was open to the public on Saturday evenings, with talented older immigrants displaying their craftsmanship for mixed audiences. It was on one such evening that Polacheck first witnessed the skill of Irish immigrant Honora Brosnahan at the spinning wheel, recalling, “I was fascinated by her deft hands which gently coaxed the linen thread from the bunch of flax on her spindle.”

138 Ibid., 64.
139 Ibid., 66.
work, Polacheck fell within Addams’ target audience for the museum, and her account seems to confirm the museum’s success in fostering respect for the craftsmanship of an older generation. However, the fact that Satt later demonstrated Russian spinning and Navajo weaving at the museum, techniques she had clearly learned there, shows further divergence from Addams’ model.\textsuperscript{140}

Except for the story of her first visit, Polacheck’s narrative validated Addams’ idealistic goals for the museum to a remarkable degree. She recounted in one anecdote, “I remember going to the home of a friend whose father was a tailor. This girl had been attending some classes at the Labor Museum and had learned all about the making of cloth. When her father came home from work, she proudly told him what she had learned and that she was glad her father worked with cloth.”\textsuperscript{141}

Polacheck admitted that “[t]he Labor Museum did not solve all the problems of immigrant parents and their children,” but quickly added, “[b]ut I am sure the Labor Museum reduced the strained feelings on the part of immigrants and their children.”\textsuperscript{142}

Polacheck’s adulation of Addams, expressed elsewhere in the memoir, might explain her eagerness to confirm the success of Addams’ vision. However, it also highlights a potential bias in Polacheck’s depictions of the Labor Museum. In a memoir written several decades after her time at Hull House, Polacheck might have consciously or unconsciously edited her memories to align with the perspective of the reformer she

\textsuperscript{140} Petkewicz, “Contextualizing Craft,” http://tigger.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/urbanexp/main.cgi?file=img/show_image_in_gallery.ppt&gallery=19&image=244.

\textsuperscript{141} Polacheck, \textit{I Came a Stranger}, 66.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
idolized, such that they perfectly corroborate Addams’ description of the Labor Museum in her widely-read *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.143

In spite of its limitations, *I Came a Stranger* remains the fullest existing account of the Labor Museum from an immigrant’s perspective. It shows that at least some members of the community surrounding Hull House appreciated the opportunities for learning and interacting with new people that the museum offered. Many may have viewed it the way Polacheck described Hull House overall, as “an oasis in a desert of disease and monotony.”144 Yet Polacheck’s recollections represent only one perspective among many, and other forms of evidence indicate that the Labor Museum offered more than just a social or educational experience. Specifically, the museum may have presented a significant economic opportunity to local immigrants, many of whom were able to sell the crafts they produced there. It is to the sale of the Labor Museum’s craft products that this chapter now turns.

**Selling Craft: Economic Opportunity at the Labor Museum**

Whether or not Jane Addams’ hopes for the Labor Museum as educational experiment and social laboratory came to full fruition, its financial operations may have played a more important role in the Hull House community than previous scholarship has suggested. The sale of crafts from the museum’s demonstrations and other activities generated significant income, both for Hull House and for those who

143 Dena Polacheck Epstein notes in the memoir’s afterword that her mother relied primarily on memory in composing her story, taking some liberties with dates and facts. See Epstein, “Afterword,” in Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 186.

144 Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger*, 73.
produced the crafts. Oral histories and financial records shed light on this aspect of the museum, which published sources from the period typically underplayed in favor of focusing on its social mission.

One possible reason for the previous lack of attention to the Labor Museum’s craft sales may be the hazy boundaries between the museum itself and the related programming that took place within the museum space, particularly the classes and “shops” encouraged and supported by the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society. Several editions of the *Hull-House Year Book* describe the Society as “closely identified with the Labor Museum and the classes in pottery, metal work, enamel and wood carving,” though separate. Meanwhile, the Hull-House Shops are characterized as “an outgrowth of the arts and crafts classes, although not directly connected with them” and as “self-supporting and… quite distinct from the museum, although occupying the same space.”\(^{145}\) The shops engaged in the production and sale of textiles, metalwork, woodwork, and pottery, and the *Year Book* assured its readers that “demand for the products from all the shops has been most encouraging.”

Yet the sharing of space, equipment, and personnel complicated formal distinctions among the museum, shops, and classes. The textile shop’s staff included Honora (or Hanora) Brosnahan, a regular demonstrator at the Labor Museum, as well as Susanne Sorensen, who also taught weaving classes. These and other arts and crafts classes took place in the museum space during weekdays, at which time the shop staff also plied their respective trades. Only on Saturday evenings did the Labor Museum officially function as a museum, throwing its doors open to the public with live

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\(^{145}\) *Hull-House Year Book*, (1906-1907), 12.
demonstrations. However, the flexible and informal approach with which Hull House conducted its day-to-day operations meant that the museum space did not adhere to strict divisions of purpose. Addams’ anecdote about the Russian women who showed up at Hull House in search of entertainment (recounted in the introduction to this thesis), as well as Polacheck’s account of her first experience with the Labor Museum, suggest that the museum space functioned pragmatically according to the variable needs of visitors, standing ready for use at any time.

Hull House’s financial records affirm the lack of clear boundaries among the settlement’s various craft operations, showing overlap in staff and income. Cashbooks for the period between 1910 and 1938 recorded income from each of the major programs at Hull House, including the Coffee House, Gymnasium, Cafeteria, Boys’ Club, and Music School.\textsuperscript{146} Though its earnings rarely equaled those of larger endeavors, such as the Coffee House, the Labor Museum merited a column in the cashbooks for most of the time these records were kept.\textsuperscript{147} Its presence indicates that the sale of crafts was a notable source of income for Hull House. In the earliest cashbook, for the period of 1910-14, some entries specify the individual goods sold by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{146} Cashbooks. Folders 100-107, Hull-House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Changes in recordkeeping practice over the years meant that both the format of the cashbooks’ printed columns and the way information was recorded varied from year to year and sometimes from month to month, perhaps depending on who was in charge of the books. For example, the cashbook for 1914-1917 only has columns for the Coffee House and Cafeteria, noting all other sources of income (such as the Labor Museum) within individual entries; by 1916, the record-keeper had taken to adding columns in pen for the Labor Museum and other operations. In spite of these inconsistencies, the cashbooks nevertheless provide valuable evidence of Hull House’s shifting priorities over time.
\end{itemize}
the Labor Museum, along with their prices and the people who sold them. The names listed for these “Labor Museum” sales include several staff members from the Hull-House Shops: Mrs. Brosnahan, Miss Sorensen, and Mrs. Olivetti of the textile shop, as well as Mr. Hazenplug, who created designs for the metal shop. Moreover, the volume of goods sold each month seems unlikely to have been produced within the museum’s official open hours one evening per week. In September 1910 alone, Mrs. Brosnahan sold, among other things, at least four rugs and two pieces of linen. The information supplied by these entries suggests that the Labor Museum column included sales from the Hull-House Shops, which are not noted elsewhere in the cashbook.

The intertwined finances of the museum and shops help to explain why their boundaries were persistently confused. Income from shop sales may well have been what kept the Labor Museum afloat, given the cost of materials and equipment. A 1908 report listed the cost of maintaining the museum and “its allied classes in dressmaking, millinery, cooking and other subjects” as $2500 a year and proposed an endowment fund of $100,000 to provide $5000 in annual income for supporting and expanding the museum’s activities.\textsuperscript{148} No evidence exists, however, to suggest that the endowment was ever created. Although a 1915 report declared the Labor Museum to be “self-sustaining,”\textsuperscript{149} and a different report by Jane Addams claimed the museum

\textsuperscript{148} Untitled report signed “President of Hull-House,” May 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1908. In folder “Jane Addams Labor Museum,” Series 13a, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

\textsuperscript{149} 1915 report to the Chicago Association of Commerce. In Auditors’ Reports, 1909-1925, Folder 97, Hull House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
had been self-supporting in 1914, a series of auditors’ reports on Hull House for the period of 1909-1925 indicates that the Labor Museum’s expenses exceeded its income in most years. Only in 1914 and 1919 did the museum’s operations clear a profit. The shops, meanwhile, appear to have been fairly successful. An issue of the *Hull-House Bulletin* from 1903-4 announced that “summer sales were so uniformly good as to enable the textile department to become self-sustaining.” Between 1906 and 1916, several successive editions of the *Hull House Year Book* characterized the Hull-House Shops as self-supporting. By 1929, the *Year Book*’s description of the textile shop, which now appeared under the same heading as the craft classes instituted by the Arts and Crafts Society, specified that product sales supported the Labor Museum.

Income from craft sales held significance not only for the museum, but also for the craftspeople who produced the goods. Oral histories indicate that profits from sales were evenly split between the maker and Hull House. Either the maker received half the sale and Hull House the other half, or makers were required to give one item to the settlement for each item they took home. As Italian-American James Greco recalled of weaving around 1930, “If you made a scarf and Hull-House sold it for $7, you

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150 Minutes from Jan. 26, 1915. In Board of Trustees Minutes, April 1895-Jan. 1919, Folder 1, Hull House Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.

151 Auditors’ Reports, 1909-1925, Folder 97, Hull House Collection.


154 Esther Wendel and James Greco, oral history interviews.
received $3.50.”\textsuperscript{155} The price cited by Greco here, though perhaps chosen at random, fits within the range of prices recorded several years earlier in cashbook entries between 1910 and 1914: rugs brought in about $3.50-$6, linen and cotton scarves $1.25-$5, pillow tops (or shams) $1.50-$5, laundry bags $1.25-$1.45, and napkins $0.45-$0.80.\textsuperscript{156} Each figure in the cashbook likely represented half of the actual selling price, with the maker pocketing the other half according to settlement policy.

These prices no doubt varied based on the product’s size, quality, and decoration. Taken together, however, they indicate that the income a museum weaver might have earned from craft sales was significant, especially when compared with the typical wages of an industrial worker living in the Nineteenth Ward. Hilda Satt Polacheck recalled that in a knitting factory at the turn of the century, “even the fastest worker could not make over five dollars a week.”\textsuperscript{157} Similarly, a report from circa 1915 on the girls’ trade school at Hull House records instances of a local woman who brought in $2 a week “pulling bastings,” a teenager who earned $2.50 a week at an ice cream cone factory, and another girl who cleaned coats in a tailor shop for $3.50 a week. Unskilled labor of this type rarely paid more than $4 weekly. Even those girls and women lucky enough to have graduated from the trade school at Hull House could expect their starting wages at a dressmaking shop to be no more than $4-$6 a week.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{155} James Greco, oral history.

\textsuperscript{156} Cashbook, 1910-1914. Folder 100, Hull-House Collection.

\textsuperscript{157} Polacheck, \textit{I Came a Stranger}, 57.

\textsuperscript{158} All figures found in documents from “Trade School for Girls and Sewing Shop” folder, Series 13a, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
In light of the poor wages paid for frequently unpleasant work, the potential impact that earning $4 for a rug or $3.50 for a scarf may have had to a person or family struggling to make ends meet becomes clearer. The craft programs at Hull House, then, may have taken on a different significance for members of the community than Jane Addams had foreseen in founding the Labor Museum. Immigrants who wove textiles or made pottery in the museum were not merely showcasing hidden talents, celebrating cultural traditions, or teaching audiences about the history of labor—they were also taking advantage of an economic opportunity. Beyond any symbolic value their craftsmanship held for them, it also held real monetary value.

James Greco’s experiences, recounted in an oral history interview, support the idea that financial considerations were as important as cultural expression for some immigrants who produced crafts at Hull House. Born in Chicago to Italian immigrants in 1921, Greco first came to Hull House as a young boy in 1927. His recollections of childhood reflect an acute awareness of his financial circumstances, little wonder given that his family of nine lived in a two-bedroom tenement apartment. Having first heard about Hull House “because you could get so many things there free,” the family thereafter took advantage of the settlement’s many social services and recreational clubs. Greco soon began taking weaving classes, for which Hull House furnished the materials and provided a sales outlet. He persisted in learning to weave in spite of teasing from girls, explaining, “I took advantage of every opportunity, especially doing things you could make a few dollars.”

159 Though Greco was not a demonstrator

159 James Greco, oral history.
for the Labor Museum, his experience highlights the economic opportunity provided by the craft programs that took place within the museum. Those who did participate in demonstrations may have stood to make significantly more than “a few dollars.” The 1910-1914 cashbook shows that Honora Brosnahan and later Susanne Sorensen routinely contributed upwards of $40 each month to the museum’s earnings; they were presumably taking home an equal amount.\textsuperscript{160}

Bringing the Labor Museum’s financial features into focus serves as a helpful reminder that complex cultural politics were not the only forces at play in the museum. Any theoretically based attempt to reconstruct the immigrant experience by examining representations of ethnicity in reformers’ and journalists’ accounts falls short if it does not also consider the economic realities that immigrants and their families faced. Moreover, interpretations that use Addams and other Anglo-American writers as their chief sources create a problematic understanding of immigrants filtered through the perspectives of a socially privileged group. Material evidence, financial records, and oral histories open new avenues of analysis toward restoring immigrant voices to a history of the Labor Museum.

An examination of craft sales at Hull House shows a side of the immigrant experience that reformers’ accounts largely skirted. However, it also raises further questions about the intercultural dynamics that underlay these sales: who was buying crafts produced by immigrants, why, and in what settings? Were consumers of Hull House crafts motivated by a genuine interest in ethnic craft traditions, a charitable impulse, or an aesthetic taste for the handmade and foreign? What kind of interactions

\textsuperscript{160} Cashbook, 1910-1914. Folder 100, Hull House Collection.
might the craftspeople have had with their buyers? Direct documentation of the individual buyers and their motivations is scarce, but examining the context in which crafts from Hull House were sold provides a general idea of the clientele.

Hull House itself was the primary venue for the sale of crafts produced in the Labor Museum and its shops, indicating that many customers came from the larger pool of visitors to the settlement. James Greco recalled that the settlement “would sell [crafts] on a particular day, mainly on Saturday afternoon when many visitors would come to see Hull-House.”\textsuperscript{161} Although immigrants from the surrounding community made up a large portion of overall visitation, it seems improbable that these working-class individuals and families would be purchasing $8 rugs, the equivalent of perhaps two weeks’ factory wages, made by their neighbors. Rather, the groups of wealthy philanthropists, like-minded reformers, school groups, women’s clubs, and upper- and middle-class urban tourists who flocked to Hull House from all over the city and beyond seem the most likely markets for the settlement’s handicrafts.

Annual Christmas bazaars at Hull House were a particularly important source of income for the arts and crafts programs. Esther Wendel, who taught weaving classes at Hull House during the late 1940s, recalled of this later period that “we had the sale, you know, at Christmastime, which was very, very successful. All the who's who and the what's what from Chicago came there to that sale. We never really had enough material; we never had anything left over.”\textsuperscript{162} Though Wendel was describing a time years after the Labor Museum closed in the mid-1930s, financial records show

\textsuperscript{161} James Greco, oral history.

\textsuperscript{162} Esther Wendel, oral history.
that sales often peaked during the holiday season in earlier decades as well. Graphs of
the Labor Museum’s monthly income as recorded in the cashbooks show that by 1929
a pattern had developed in which income spiked in December and often dropped to its
lowest in January and February; this pattern became increasingly pronounced over
time (Figure 46). The post-holiday ebbs are consistent with Wendel’s statement that
Hull House had no goods left over after its Christmas sales. The “who’s who”
mentioned by Wendel also indicates that the Christmas bazaars became a prominent
event on the local social calendar, drawing patrons from among the city’s elite. This
provides further evidence that handmade goods from Hull House had an upper-class
clientele.

The Hull-House Shop

Perhaps the most telling development in the history of Hull House’s craft sales
was the opening of the Hull-House Shop on Michigan Avenue, one of Chicago’s
prime upscale shopping thoroughfares, in 1931. Located in glamorous Diana Court
within the Michigan Square Building, the shop sold products from Hull House’s arts
and crafts programs, including pottery and weaving. Though the textiles sold there
might have been made in either the Labor Museum or the Hull-House shops (the

163 Although constraints of time and space prevented the creation of a master graph
spanning the period 1910-1933, the pattern of December spikes was noticeable in the
cashbooks by about 1920.

164 Brochure, “Hull-House announces the opening of the Hull-House Shop…” Box 3,
Folder 47, Jane Addams Memorial Collection, Small Manuscripts: Hull-House Artists
and Craftsmen: Hull-House Shop, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special
Collections.
longtime locus of craft production at the settlement, not to be confused with the Michigan Avenue store), much of the pottery came out of the Hull-House Kilns. Opened in 1927 as an extension of pottery classes at the settlement’s art school, the Kilns were expressly intended for the production of marketable ceramic wares. The growing Mexican population that took root in the neighborhood during the 1920s was heavily involved in this operation, producing many pieces with Mexican-inspired decoration.

The *Hull-House Year Book* for 1930-1931 announced the shop in Diana Court as “a practical, permanent outlet for the creative talent found so abundantly in the neighborhood about Hull-House,” operating “on a non-profit basis to give financial aid to those who have talent and the impulse to create.” This emphasis on individual artistry and economic opportunity diverged significantly from the Labor Museum’s focus on the social and educational value of craft production. An advertisement for the shop’s opening drew attention to its artistic bent by announcing “A SERIES OF LECTURES ON ART / AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS / AN EXHIBIT FROM THE HULL-HOUSE ART SCHOOL,” accompanied by a block print depicting various stages of the pottery-making process (Figure 47). If the Labor Museum was conceived as a kind of history museum, the Hull-House Shop more closely resembled an art gallery in its approach.

The choice of location for the shop underscored its dual focus on artistry and profit. Tucked inside the modest façade of the Michigan Square Building at 540 N.

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165 For more on the Hull-House Kilns, see Ganz, “Shaping Clay, Shaping Lives,” in *Pots of Promise*.

166 *Hull-House Year Book* (1930-1), 16-17.
Michigan Avenue, designed by Holabird and Root in 1927 and completed in 1930, Diana Court was a luxury shopping center whose lavish Art Deco interior contained two stories of shops and galleries (Figure 48). Historian David Garrard Lowe describes the court’s “spectacular spatial effects” with admiration:

…white-metal-railed stairways zigzagged out of sight; floors bore brilliant terrazzo patterns; and marble piers, their corners sharply grooved, soared to a coved ceiling where hidden lights reflecting off gold leaf seemed part of the sky itself. At its center, the hub of this vibrant space, was a circular marble fountain topped by a lovely bronze statue of Diana by the Swedish sculptor Carl Milles.

In addition to the bronze statue, the court also contained a series of seven-foot-high acid-etched glass panels depicting Diana and other figures, created by artist Edgar Miller. The space combined glamorous and commerce-friendly Art Deco style with high art to superlative effect. A 1933 guide to Chicago praised Diana Court as “unique and more beautiful than any center to be found in New York or London or Paris.” Aside from the Hull-House Shop, the court contained “shops of varied character showing the finest products of Europe and America.” Nightly festivals took place in the building in the month of June, during which “the shops are kept open and


169 Sheila Malkind, “Always an Artist,” Chicago Reader, April 22, 1993. Two of the panels now reside at the Art Institute of Chicago.

170 Alfred Hoyt Granger, Chicago Welcomes You (Chicago: A. Kroch, 1933), 53-55.
entertainments of music and dancing are given in the court”—a perfect synthesis of art and business.\(^{171}\)

In 1932, the shop moved to a different but equally upscale location on Michigan Avenue, the Italian Court, where it remained until closing in 1937.\(^{172}\) Constructed in 1919-20, the Italian Court building was intended to evoke a “small European shopping quarter” containing three stories of shops, apartments, artists’ studios, and offices along with an interior courtyard featuring a fountain and statue of Narcissus (Figure 49).\(^{173}\) The Hull-House Shop shared the building with such distinguished cohabitants as an antique store, a tearoom, an oriental shop, and an importer of English glassware. The Italian Court was further known as a gathering spot for Chicago’s bohemian artists and served as the venue for poetry readings by Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost, and others.\(^{174}\) This combination of upmarket business and artistic activity must have suited the Hull-House Shop, which continued to host exhibitions of art made at the settlement. A 1932 advertisement showing the shop’s second location indicates that weaving lessons also took place there (Figure 50).\(^{175}\)

\(\)\(^{171}\) Ibid.


\(^{173}\) Stamper, Chicago’s North Michigan Avenue, 47-48.


\(^{175}\) Brochure, “Hull-House announces...” Weaving demonstrations had also been part of the flurry of artistic activities at the Diana Court shop. See Eleanor Jewett, “Hull House Spur to Art Seen at Show,” Chicago Tribune, May 4, [1931?]. In Folder “Social activities—art,” Series 13a, Jane Addams Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
Considered within this context, the sale of handmade crafts from Hull House takes on new dimensions. At either location of the Hull-House Shop, a casual Michigan Avenue shopper could buy a handwoven table throw or pick up a brightly glazed ceramic pitcher made by a Mexican immigrant at Hull House without ever visiting the settlement. Whereas visitors to the Labor Museum or the Christmas bazaar actually saw the site of production and might even have met the craftspeople whose products they were buying, patrons of the Diana Court store had none of this context. They might have been thinking less about the benevolent institution their purchase was supporting and more about the pleasing aesthetics of the goods on display. For trend-conscious consumers, crafts from Hull House were not, or not only, socially meaningful artifacts of immigrant culture—they were fashionable pieces of home décor.

“Simple Designs and Primitive Forms”: Ethnic Craft as Commodity

As the Hull-House Shop opened in 1931, two aesthetic trends had been developing among upper- and middle-class consumers for several decades: a taste for the handmade and a fascination with “folk” or ethnic designs. Both reflected a widespread dissatisfaction with the homogeneity and impersonality of mass-produced industrial goods. The same nostalgia for preindustrial practices that drove the Arts and Crafts movement and the colonial revival heightened consumer demand for products that displayed the hand of their maker. While some consumers filled their homes with goods that evoked America’s own colonial past or notions of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship, others sought an antidote to industrialism in the products and styles of other cultures. Design reformers, museum curators, and collectors all contributed to
the growing popular interest in these styles, which savvy manufacturers and retailers exploited in marketing their products.

The influence of anti-industrial craft movements, whose philosophies have been discussed at length in Chapter 2, extended to the commercial sphere with a growing popular taste for the handmade. The popular “colonial” and “craftsman” styles, which embraced the aesthetic of preindustrial craftsmanship even when made by machine, filled the pages of trade catalogs. As the success of Wallace Nutting’s “colonials” illustrates, the colonial revival proved particularly marketable, playing on patriotic sentiment and nativist concern with preserving the purity of American culture. Initial interest in colonial artifacts had been stimulated by world’s fairs, such as the 1876 Centennial Exposition, and museum exhibits. By the 1920s, the explosion of scholarship on and enthusiasm for colonial craft had opened a middle-class market for antique and colonial-style goods. In contrast with earlier decades, the focus was increasingly on the aesthetic qualities of such goods rather than their historical pedigrees.176 Entrepreneurs like Nutting offered reproductions of colonial furniture, while products such as hooked and braided rugs became strongly associated with the colonial style in spite of their dubious historical authenticity.177 Women’s magazines such as Ladies’ Home Journal and Modern Priscilla also promoted the colonial style


and handicraft in general, encouraging readers to take up traditional household arts such as needlework and rug hooking.\textsuperscript{178}

Beyond symbolizing historical tradition, craftsmanship appeared synonymous with quality. In contrast to the notorious shoddiness or flimsiness of many cheap, mass-produced goods, a product painstakingly created by hand seemed to guarantee fine workmanship.\textsuperscript{179} Luxury goods imported from Europe, such as jewelry and glass, frequently owed their cachet to their makers’ reputations for skilled craftsmanship. Producers even marketed their machine-produced goods as aspiring to the high quality of handwork: a 1924 catalog for Montgomery Ward advertised its “Imitation Hand Crochet Trimming” as “a good imitation of hand crochet work, requiring the closest inspection to detect that it is a manufactured lace.”\textsuperscript{180} Any imperfections in craftwork caused by human error were not only outweighed by the product’s overall integrity, but embraced as lending it warmth, authenticity, and singularity. Gustav Stickley’s magazine, \textit{The Craftsman}, boasted in 1906 of the pleasing color variations in Stickley’s line of fabrics that resulted from the materials and the dyeing process,

\textsuperscript{178} Gordon, “Spinning Wheels,” 179.

\textsuperscript{179} Notably, Arts and Crafts champion William Morris couched his political complaints about modern society in terms of quality, pronouncing an “age of shoddy” and declaring socialism the only solution. His evocative turn of phrase points to the political critiques that were sometimes, although not always, embedded in the handcrafted aesthetic. See letter from William Morris to William Allingham, April 18, [1883-4], in H. Allingham and E. Baumer Williams, eds., \textit{Letters to William Allingham} (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 232.

\textsuperscript{180} Montgomery Ward, \textit{Mid-winter Sale for the Family, the Home and the Farm} (Chicago: The Company, 1924), 33. Collection of Printed Books and Periodicals, Winterthur Library.
comparing the effect to that of “the uneven weave from a hand loom” (despite being machine-made): “It suggests personality instead of a machine. It is companionable as never a bleak, even surface can be.”\textsuperscript{181} Weaver Mary Meigs Atwater echoed this sentiment in 1928, declaring that the “superiority of a hand-woven fabric” over machine-made goods resided “in the slight irregularities of hand-work that give character to the fabric, and in the freedom of design.”\textsuperscript{182}

The anti-industrial attitudes that fed the taste for handicraft also contributed to the popularity of ethnic craft in the early twentieth century. A growing awareness of and interest in ethnic cultures added to its appeal. Kristin Hoganson attributes the widespread consumption of foreign goods from the mid-nineteenth century onward to an imperialistic cultural outlook.\textsuperscript{183} Influenced in part by ethnographic displays and exhibitions, white consumers imagined relationships of dominance or condescending benevolence toward ethnic producers. The rise of ethnological collections at museums, live displays at world’s fairs, urban tourism, and foreign travel (real and virtual) all increased middle-class exposure to ethnic folkways, fostering fascination with other


\textsuperscript{182} Atwater, \textit{Shuttle-Craft Book}, 110.

\textsuperscript{183} See the discussion of Hoganson’s argument in the introductory chapter of this thesis; see also Hoganson, \textit{Consumer’s Imperium}. 
cultures. The novelty of ethnic culture to most white Americans made it eminently marketable.

The commercial appeal of ethnic craft lay not only in its cultural “otherness,” but also in an emerging appreciation for its aesthetic. In the art world, anti-industrial attitudes propelled a movement to uncover past vernacular traditions and preserve surviving ones, resulting in the rise of the “folk art” genre in the early twentieth century. At the same time, the work of anthropologists raised interest in the arts and crafts of “primitive” (non-industrial) cultures. As historian William Leach has shown, large urban museums launched folk and “primitive” art into the commercial sphere through their efforts “to place their expertise and collections in the hands of mass market manufacturers and retailers.”

Morris D’Camp Crawford, a specialist in “primitive” textiles at the American Museum of Natural History, gave lectures on Peruvian artifacts to designers and factory managers during the 1910s. He also encouraged industrialists to visit and take inspiration from the museum’s


collections. Similarly, Stewart Culin at the Brooklyn Museum urged designers to use “peasant and primitive” designs and colors from the collections to inject mass-produced goods with renewed vitality, for the ultimate benefit of both businesses and consumers.

Museums thus shaped the tastes of upper- and middle-class consumers both directly through exhibitions and indirectly through collaboration with manufacturers, carrying the ethnic aesthetic over from the world of anthropology into that of fashion and design. By the 1930s, the prevailing commercial style of Art Deco had absorbed the influence of ethnic and “primitive” arts. Designers took inspiration from the bright colors and abstract geometric motifs of European folk traditions and non-western art forms both past and present, incorporating these elements into a chic, urban aesthetic seen as distinctly modern.

Given the widespread popularity of both handicraft and ethnic styles, the goods sold at the Hull-House Shops on Michigan Avenue during the 1930s likely appealed to consumers for a range of reasons beyond the simple desire to support a charitable organization. The shopper hoping to decorate her home with an “authentic” ethnic artifact might have been drawn to pottery made by Mexican immigrants and using Mexican motifs. Yet because Hull-House Kilns also designed products with

187 Ibid., 165.
188 Ibid., 169.
marketability in mind, a shopper looking for housewares in the latest modern style would have been equally pleased by the pottery’s bright colors and pared-down geometric shapes, sold in functional forms such as pitchers and candlesticks.\textsuperscript{190} Likewise, if the textiles sold at the shop resembled those examined in Chapter 3, their simple geometric patterns would have vaguely evoked ethnic arts while also fitting seamlessly into a modern interior. An advertisement for the Hull-House Shop accentuated the ethnic appeal of the goods, boasting that “an effort has been made to keep to the simple designs and primitive forms of the peasant workers.”\textsuperscript{191} The singularity of each handcrafted object only heightened its appeal, ensuring that no one else could buy an exact copy. Diana Court and the Italian Court were apt settings for the sale of fashionable products; a Michigan Avenue location would only have enhanced the impression that the Shop’s wares were stylish, exclusive, and intended for consumers with taste.

Perhaps feeling the bite of the Depression, the Hull-House Shop merged with another business, the Indian Trading Post, to cut overhead at some point during its tenure in the Italian Court.\textsuperscript{192} The Trading Post specialized in Native American crafts and promoted itself as “a genuine clearing house for the native handcrafts of the new world” where “rugs, blankets, fabrics, pottery, beadwork, baskets, jewelry, curious

\textsuperscript{[\textit{190} For examples of these pottery products, see illustrations in Ganz, “Shaping Clay, Shaping Lives,” 55-88.]

\textsuperscript{[\textit{191} Brochure, “Hull-House announces…”]

\textsuperscript{[\textit{192} Ganz, “Shaping Clay, Shaping Lives,” 80.]}
objects of art and utility from all the Americas” were “assembled for your delight.”
Like the Hull-House Shop, the Indian Trading Post hosted art exhibitions, such as one in 1932 of painted tiles by Mexican artist Enrique Dusolier Laureola. Fred Leighton, the shop’s proprietor, also traveled and delivered Chautauqua lectures on Native American handicrafts. His lectures were accompanied by “an elaborate exhibit of rare and beautiful Indian blankets, pottery, jewelry, etc.” as well as performances by “an Indian friend, B. Begay, only full-blooded Navajo Indian in the middle west, who sings native songs in tribal costume.” Blending education with entertainment, Leighton’s combination of didactic delivery, artifact display, and live costumed demonstration resembled the Labor Museum’s programming.

A brochure for Leighton’s Chautauqua lectures and his store is revealing of the attitudes that brought businesses like the Hull-House Shop and the Indian Trading Post to upscale shopping centers. The titles of his lectures blend scholarly, anthropological topics (“The Navajo Indians, Their Land and Customs”) with ones that seem to situate native handicrafts within the art world (“The Place of American Indian Art in Modern Culture”) and within the commercial sphere (“American Indian Handcrafts and Their Place in the Modern Home”). Taking a similar interpretive approach, the consumer

193 “Lectures by Mr. Fred Leighton of the Indian Trading Post, 58 E. Delaware Place, Chicago, on Culture and Handcrafts of the American Indians, With Distinguished Exhibits of Genuine Indian Handwork” (Chautauqua brochure, n.d.) Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections.


195 “Lectures by Mr. Fred Leighton of the Indian Trading Post.”

196 Ibid.
of native handicraft at Leighton’s store might have felt pride all at once in his or her knowledge of American Indian culture, ability to participate in the art market, and impeccable taste in home décor. The goods for sale at the Trading Post, like those at the Hull-House Shop, were a bargain-value combination of artifact, art object, and commodity.

Knowing the context in which crafts from Hull House were sold, as well as the class of consumers they enticed, adds to our understanding of craft production at the settlement. More specifically, it helps us to imagine what working in the Labor Museum, the shops, or the Hull-House Kilns may have meant to immigrant craftspeople. As much as demonstrating the “immigrant gifts” of authentic cultural traditions, these immigrants were finding another way of fitting into American culture by capitalizing on the public fascination with ethnic folkways. Hull House craft programs offered them the opportunity to profit from their marginal social position, to turn curious spectators and urban tourists into potential customers.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Had the Labor Museum operated strictly within the limits of the social mission Addams originally conceived for it, the museum would perhaps have drawn far less enthusiasm from the constituents it was intended to serve. The high-minded mission of “fixing” problematic relationships between parents and children, workers and industry, might have been a hard sell to many community members, and the idea of arranging craft techniques in an evolutionary sequence seems unlikely to have gained the affections of those immigrants who were classified as primitive. Yet the Labor Museum remained a fixture at Hull House for over three decades. Clearly, the endeavor fulfilled its diverse community’s needs in some way.

Whereas published accounts rarely stray from the “party line” of Addams’ initial vision for the museum, other forms of evidence shed light on the variety of meanings this space may have held for immigrants and others. Photographs suggest that the museum broke away from its evolutionary narrative at times, instead presenting its immigrant demonstrators as akin to those guiding lights of preindustrial American culture, colonial women. The subjects of these photographs may have appreciated a form of representation that did not render them as exotic primitives, while native-born viewers were encouraged to consider immigrant practices in a new light. Textiles from the Labor Museum conjure an atmosphere of adaptation, experimentation, and continuous cultural exchange. They show the museum not as a repository for static traditions, but as a dynamic space from which new forms
emerged. Finally, financial records and oral histories reveal the extent of the museum’s economic operations, suggesting that the sale of ethnic (or ethnic-looking) crafts may have provided a meaningful opportunity for immigrants to combat their disadvantaged socioeconomic position.

The Labor Museum deserves sustained study, not as a footnote among programs at Hull House or Arts and Crafts endeavors, but as a multifaceted and long-running project that surpassed the original focus of its creator. This thesis has aimed to open new paths of inquiry into the many cultural currents that converged in the Labor Museum, showing that perhaps the most enshrined or accepted interpretations of historical events are the ones that benefit most from reexamination. Moving beyond textual sources into visual, oral, and material ones creates new possibilities for recovering perspectives that were never written down in the first place. Although it is not the intent of this thesis to speak for immigrants by reconstructing their experiences at the Labor Museum, it does at least suggest that reformers’ accounts need not have the final word.
Figure 1. Photograph of Jane Addams, ca. 1896. Image courtesy of the Photograph Collection, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
Figure 2. “Entrance to Hull-House,” from Hull-House Year Book (1913). Photo of image by author. Image use courtesy of University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 4. Labor Museum, “End of Textile Room.” This image appeared in the *Hull-House Year Book* for 1906-7. JAMC_0000_0176_0242, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 6. Labor Museum, “Russian Spinning”: Hilda Satt demonstrates spinning, ca. 1900. This image appeared in Kate Heintz Watson’s *Textiles and Clothing* (1907). JAMC_0000_0177_092, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 7. Labor Museum, “Dutch Spinning.” This image appeared in Kate Heintz Watson’s *Textiles and Clothing* (1907). JAMC_0000_0177_0245, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 8. Labor Museum, “Irish spinning.” Spinner identified as Honora Brosnahan. This image appeared as “Colonial Flax Wheel” in Kate Heintz Watson’s *Textiles and Clothing* (1907). JAMC_0000_0177_0243, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 9. Labor Museum, “Italian spinning,” ca. 1900. Spinner identified as Mrs. Olivetta (or Olivetti). JAMC_0000_0176_3012, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 11. “Hull-House Labor Museum—Demonstration,” 1920s.
JAMC_0000_0175_0240, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 12. “End of Kitchen—Showing Primitive Implements,” from *Hull-House Year Book* (1910). Photo of image by author. Image use courtesy of University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 13. “Hull House Labor Museum—Fireplace, 1924.”
JAMC_0000_0175_1321, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
AN IMMIGRANT RAILWAY WORKER LIVES IN THIS CAR WITH HIS WIFE, SIX CHILDREN, AND THREE DOGS

Figure 17. Illustration from *New Homes For Old*, by Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1921), facing p. 4.
Figure 18. Table throw with gold supplementary weft pattern, 1920s. 0000.0076.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 19. Table throw with blue supplementary weft pattern. 0000.0112.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 20. Striped table runner with detail of supplementary weft decoration. 1336, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Top image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Detail photo by author.
Figure 21. Linen piece with supplementary weft pattern in blue thread, composed of long floats. Italian, 16th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 38.185.39. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Figure 22. “A Class of Weavers”: Children weaving at Hull House, with backstrap loom in use at right and fireplace in background. From *Hull-House Year Book* (1933). Photo of image by author. Image use courtesy of University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 23. Swedish textile featuring opphämta pattern with short weft floats; detail at right. Images by user Damast on sv.wikipedia.org, available online at Wikimedia Commons.197

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Figure 24. Danish loom imported by Susanne Sorensen for weaving at Hull House. 1985.0058.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 25. Unfinished textile found on loom 1985.0058.0001 (with detail). Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Photos by author. Image use courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 27. Purse made in the Labor Museum. 0000.0077.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Table runner with red and black decoration woven in the Labor Museum. 0000.0078.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 29.  Table runner with blue and orange decoration woven in the Labor Museum (with detail). 1973.0028.0015, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Images courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 31. Untitled photograph of woman spinning in the Labor Museum, ca. 1913. JAMC_0000_0177_0248, Jane Addams Hull-House Photograph Collection, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.
Figure 32. Rag rug woven at Hull House (with detail). 1985.0058.0004, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Top image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Detail photo by author.
Figure 33. Rag rug woven at Hull House. 1985.0058.0005, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 35. Double-woven cloth from Hull House. 1971.0021.0008, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Top image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Detail photo by author.
Figure 36. Purple and white table throw woven at Hull House. 1985.0058.0016, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 37. Blue and white cloth woven at Hull House. 1994.0007.0009, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 38. Table runner from Hull House. 1994.0007.0004a, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Images courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 39. Scarf woven at Hull House and given to Marion Curtis as wedding gift in 1920. 1989.0072.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 40. Handkerchief woven by Marika Galanopoulos (with detail). 1993.0033.0002, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Images courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 41. Table scarf woven by Marika Galanopoulos (with detail). 1993.0033.0003, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Images courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 42. Embroidered pillow sham made by Demetra Dicketopoulos. 1993.0032.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 43. Evening gown made by Demetra Dicketopoulos. 1993.0032.0003, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 44. Blue tablecloth from Hull House, decorated with white cross-stitch patterns. 1971.0021.0009, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 45. Navajo-style cloth from Hull House. 1981.0092.0001, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Image courtesy of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
Figure 46. Graphs of cash income from the Labor Museum, 1910-1913 and 1929-1933. Created by author.
Figure 47. Brochure advertising Hull-House Shop in Diana Court. Jane Addams Memorial Collection: Hull-House Artists and Craftsmen, Box 3, Folder 47, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections. Photo by Gretchen Neidhardt.
Figure 48. Michigan Square Building, Diana Court, Chicago, IL, 1928-1930. Holabird & Root, architects. Historic Architecture and Landscape Image Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.
Figure 49. Brochure advertising Hull-House Shop in Italian Court. Jane Addams Memorial Collection: Hull-House Artists and Craftsmen, Box 3, Folder 47, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections. Photo by Gretchen Neidhardt.
Figure 50. Italian Court, Chicago, IL, 1919. Robert Seeley DeGolyer, designer. Historic Architecture and Landscape Image Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, The Art Institute of Chicago.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Museum and Library Collections:

Collections of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (JAHHM), Chicago, Ill.

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Re: Permission to Publish Request
3 messages
Valerie Harris <val66@uic.edu>
To: swishkat@gmail.com
Cc: LIB-PERMISSIONS@listserv.uic.edu

Mon, Apr 22, 2013 at 1:55 PM

Dear Ms. Swisher,

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Dutch spinning, JAMC_0000_0177_0245
Irish spinning, JAMC_0000_0177_0249
Italian spinning, JAMC_0000_0176_3012
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Hull House Labor Museum files are INCORRECT NEG NUMBER PROVIDED, NEG 1312 SHOWS A PAGE FROM "PROGRAM OF FOLK SONGS"
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I wish you good luck and congratulations on the completion of your program of study!

Valerie Harris, Interim Head
Special Collections and University Archives Dept.
University of Illinois at Chicago
Richard J. Daley Library, Room 3-330
801 S. Morgan St
Chicago, IL 60607

312-996-2742
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Re: Permission to Publish Request

Kate Swisher <swishkat@gmail.com>                           Wed, Apr 24, 2013 at 1:50 PM
To: Valarie Harris <val66@uic.edu>

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- "A Class of Weavers", Children weaving at Hull House, From Hull-House Year Book (1933).
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Please let me know if I should fill out a form for this request—I was not expecting to encounter difficulties with these images, so I'm a little short on time. Thanks again for your help with everything!

Best,
Kate

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Best of luck!
Val

Valerie Harris, Interim Head
Special Collections and University Archives Dept.
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best
Lisa

Lisa Junkin
Interim Director
(312) 355-5301

Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
University of Illinois at Chicago
800 S. Halsted Street, MC 051
Chicago, IL 60607
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April 26, 2013

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Regards,

Lisa Junkin
Interim Director
Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

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Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Stephanie

[Inscribed last name]

Stephanie Coleman
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Chicago, IL 60603-6404
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Ryerson & Burnham Archives <rbarch@artic.edu>  Mon, Apr 15, 2013 at 10:50 AM
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To: Kate Swisher <swishkat@gmail.com>  

Wed, Apr 24, 2013 at 1:39 PM

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If you have further questions, don’t hesitate to contact me again.

Best, Wendy

Wendy E. Chmielowski, Ph.D.
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Julie Zettel

Julie Zettel / Senior Manager of Rights & Permissions
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