

## CHAPTER 5.

# FUNDING GEOGRAPHY: THE LEGACY OF FEMALE- RUN SETTLEMENT CULTURE FOR CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY INITIATIVES

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*Rohan's case study deploys archival methods to historicize the work of contemporary feminist teachers, researchers, and administrators who develop community engagement and place-based initiatives. It provides data about historic feminists working and writing in the U.S. progressive era in Chicago and Detroit, with special attention to the history of a Detroit-area settlement house, the Tau Beta Community House, which flourished between 1917 and 1954. Historical figures such as Lucy Carner and Borgchild Halvorsen suggested that community service work among feminist academics has a history that is linked to the work of progressive era feminists, particularly those inspired by Jane Addams, and like-minded colleagues running settlements. Thus, this chapter also highlights the dynamics leading to the demise of this feminist-run settlement culture during the politically conservative decades following the Depression. Overall, Rohan historicizes community-based feminist projects as a way to trace contemporary place-based pedagogical movements sponsored by Detroit educators and artists.*

This archival study features some historical rhetorical work undertaken by Tau Beta, one of Detroit's upper-middle-class women's clubs, from approximately 1916 to 1958 when Tau Beta members, along with the professional woman they hired, developed and arranged the building of a settlement house in the city of

Hamtramck, Michigan. Hamtramck was first a village, and also an enclave of Polish immigrants that held out from annexation with the city of Detroit when this city multiplied its girth exponentially in the 1920s, in tandem with the expanding U.S. auto industry. Growing separate from the surrounding city of Detroit, the material needs of the village's citizens were nevertheless acknowledged along with those of Detroit's through the city's major philanthropic organizations such as the Detroit Community Union, a major funding source for the Tau Beta Community House (Wood, 1955). Tau Beta settlement work in Hamtramck began in 1916 in a rented flat before it moved into a neighborhood house that included a library, a nursery, a health clinic, a domestic science room, a boy's club room, showers, and residence for its six workers (Social pioneering, 1926). Eventually the settlement expanded to fill a larger house that was finished in 1928. Some history of Tau Beta showcases historical feminists who built place-based pedagogies through various means of persuasion when relying on nineteenth-century discourse about domestic space, which included espoused cooperation across gender and class lines. The eventual demise of this particular community settlement house project also offers a historical illustration of how the interplay of rhetoric and constructed gender roles can shape community building, and also how a place, in this case Detroit between the world wars, can encourage the invention of specific claims and methods among activists working for change. Featuring the perhaps inevitably temporal circumstances in which individuals wield their power through their rhetoric and related material practices, the study also shows a primary example of the "the social networks in which women connect and interact with each others and use language with intention," which Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster (2012) name "social circulation" (p. 101).

As Tau Beta leaders gained momentum as feminists in Detroit the influence of U.S. woman's clubs was actually beginning to wane. By the end of the 1920s it was no longer fashionable to make the case for women's work as particularly distinct or women's needs as particularly pressing (Gere, 1997; Ladd-Taylor, 1994), which had been the method of Tau Beta members and their allies during these years in Detroit. But in Detroit, and its micro-community of Hamtramck, the work of women, and the work of Tau Beta particularly, might have been seen differently considering the need for services for and social control of newly arrived African-Americans and immigrants working for the auto industry. As Tau Beta club-women began their work, Detroit was being overrun by newcomers responding to Henry Ford's program to pay workers five dollars a day. Confirming the adage that if the country gets a cold, Detroit gets pneumonia, when a short recession hit the US from 1914 to 1915 more than 50 percent of Detroiters were out of work and "an estimated sixty thousand were European immigrants, most of whom could not speak or read English" (Mason, 2008, p. 127). Hamtramck had become one of

the most densely populated communities in the country at the time. Just 2.1 miles square miles, the city filled with unskilled immigrants, again, mostly Polish, who were drawn to the Dodge Main plant built in the village (Hyde, 2005; Kowalski, 2006). The perceived need to Americanize new immigrants, as well as these immigrants' real material needs, drew Tau Beta women into Hamtramck where they were particularly encouraged to go (Plumb, 1938; Kowalski, 2010).

A centerpiece of Tau Beta's development work was the aforementioned community building finished in 1928, which also included a big gymnasium, an auditorium, a roof garden, an expanded pottery room, a game room and a "model flat" (Plumb, 1938). The funding for new space was the result of a mass campaign that included cooperative fundraising with other community leaders for a woman's hospital, a YWCA building, and a home for pregnant women. The \$4,000,000 campaign was coined as "building for the womanhood of Detroit" (Social pioneering, 1926). The Tau Beta settlement movement's strengths and weaknesses, including its developmental roots in nativist anxiety, would eventually bring about its demise. After World War II, the rhetoric of the female-run settlement movement was no longer efficacious in Detroit, and elsewhere, because immigration patterns changed, and the field of social reform was professionalized, which marginalized elite female philanthropists and activists. Also in Detroit and elsewhere, when philanthropic organizations such as the United Way grew larger, more bureaucratic, and less interdisciplinary, settlement homes were regarded as costly white elephants. The Tau Beta Community house closed in 1958 just a few years after a male leader took over the work. The large Tudor home that once housed Tau Beta settlement activity was sold to a church and was repurposed as a school (Kowalski, 2006). Three other settlement houses were destroyed altogether for urban renewal projects including the longstanding Neighborhood House whose "neighbors" were forced to relocate (Acomb, 1959; Trolander, 1987).

## **ABOUT THE TAU BETA COMMUNITY HOUSE: HOMEMAKING AS PLACEMAKING AS PEDAGOGY**

Tau Beta began in 1901 as a social club among elite Detroit young women still in high school (Kowalski, 2006). Soon enough the young women were drawn into charity work as the group's methods of community building were developed and its social consciousness was raised. Tau Beta's earliest charity work mimicked the work of another local visiting nurses program. It included preparing and delivering food to Detroit's poor and sick, mostly tuberculosis patients, and when using stoves in the basement of an elite Detroit school. Tau Beta members delivered the food on streetcars, on foot, in their "electrics" and eventually in gasoline

cars. To fulfill the stereotype of a Tau Beta member as a rich society woman, one member was occasionally able to use her family's limousine. This work morphed into two other related projects: a diet kitchen, a kind of "meals on wheels," and a tuberculosis clinic, each later taken over by other agencies (Plumb, 1930, pp. 110-111). The women collaborated with established Detroit charities such as Associated Charities as well as the Detroit Community Union, established in 1917 (Mason, 2008). That philanthropic work developed by women was taken over by larger municipalities or organizations would be a trend with Tau Beta's future work and a significant overall result of women's volunteer work in the progressive era. For example, in 1912, U.S. women leaders founded the Children's Bureau, a national agency that provided prenatal and infant care among the underprivileged. The agency had an element of social control typical of elite-founded and run progressive-era civic and philanthropic endeavors at the time (Muncy, 1991). Emma Howes' study of elite women of the Y.M.C.A. working with poor women in Appalachian America described in this collection (Chapter 4, this collection) also draws attention to the social control embedded in benevolent progressive-era projects, which included settlement work.

Tau Beta's Hamtramck settlement work was established late as of 1916 when considering that, as one example, Chicago's well-known Hull House got its start decades earlier in 1889; settlement work began in Detroit as earlier as 1858 when the Neighborhood House settlement was established. But Tau Beta's first philanthropic activities situates the organization's goals in context with similar progressive-era female run endeavors roughly during a time period when settlement houses in the US had proliferated from six to four hundred by 1910 (Jackson, 2001). Tau Beta's settlement work grew along with the previously mentioned Detroit Community Fund, a precursor to United Way Services, as well as with similar settlement initiatives in Detroit, and across the nation. The settlement work that would birth The Tau Beta Community House in its heyday, sprawling into two houses, included sports programming, a music program, an arts program, a health clinic, a laundry, and a "nursery" for working women who needed daycare for their children and a program we might call "latchkey" care today (Tau Beta Community House, 1930). During its formative years Eleanor Clay Ford (wife of Edsel Ford, daughter-in-law of Henry Ford), and her associates, including Eleanor's sister, Josephine Clay Kantzler, were at the helm of the organization and longtime director Borgchild Halvorsen was in charge of running the community house, known as "The House of Hope."

The Tau Beta Community House, like other settlement houses flourishing at the time, extended women's work into the public sphere by grounding this work materially in a particular locality through what I call placemaking via homemaking. When placemaking via homemaking, Tau Beta leaders relied on the

same Victorian beliefs that influenced the growth of Hull-House, a settlement that has been heavily studied, and was one model for Tau Beta leaders. As two feminist geographers describe the ideology shaping the growth of Hull-House: the “home was . . . the seat of moral, aesthetic, and cultural stability” and “home decoration was a matter of great consequence” because it expressed “the status, taste and moral character of its inhabitants” (Domosh and Seager, 2001, pp. 7-8). Placemaking through homemaking was a pedagogy in the sense that “creating a good home was seen as integral to creating good moral citizens” and “hence empowered [immigrant women] as important shapers of U.S. democracy” (p. 21). That is, Tau Beta settlers were teachers when modeling and prescribing particular behaviors. Placemaking as homemaking also relied on what historian Molly Ladd-Taylor (1994) calls “maternalism.” She explains that “maternalists’ genuine concern for the welfare of women and children of other racial and ethnic groups—combined with their culturally specific ideas about proper family life and children’s needs—made assimilating immigrants into ‘American’ culture a vital part of their child welfare work” (p. 5). As one example, one of Tau Beta’s first programs in 1917 taught neighborhood women to knit for “their men in the service” (Plumb, 1938, p. 136). Tau Beta leaders working as maternalists capitalized on agreed upon or stereotyped roles for middle-class women when drumming up support for new and expanded physical space and program creation. As Tau Beta historian Mildred Plumb (1938) described the women’s initiative, “The village government had little vision of the public’s needs . . . . We aimed to undertake what the authorities did not, or could not, provide and demonstrate its value” (p. 133). The women were actually successful in modeling the value of what they considered to be essential services to government agencies when in 1924 the settlement’s library became the Hamtramck Library (Plumb, 1938; Kowalski, 2006). The fate of this library parallels another trend characterizing progressive-era clubwomen’s work. U.S. clubwomen founded many of the country’s first public libraries, to the extent that by 1933 75% of public libraries “owed their origins to women’s clubs” (Gere, 1997, p. 122). Tau Beta’s founding of Hamtramck’s library demonstrates how some progressive-era feminist philanthropy projects were taken up by government agencies and further exemplifies placemaking as homemaking. During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, libraries were associated with middle-class homes while library work became associated with women who joined this profession en masse (Jenkins, 1996).

The settlement’s “model flat,” one result of the 1926 building campaign, further evidences that the Tau Beta Community House promoted domestic space, placemaking as homemaking, as an argument to its clients, and to Hamtramck leaders. Designed as a key teaching tool to be used for bridal showers and also

as temporary living quarters for newlyweds post-honeymoon, the model flat was promoted with perhaps some wishful thinking. Ostensibly, when brides and/or the newly married looked at or spent time in the flat, they would be persuaded to set up housekeeping independent from their “in laws,” an “all too common practice among this class of people” (Tau Beta Community House, 1930; Tau Beta 23<sup>rd</sup> annual report, 1928). The new two-storied house was also meticulously decorated, and included Detroit’s signature design, Pewabic pottery tile, as well as various decorative gifts including a drinking fountain, a sunlight lamp, and a bronze statue of a “Wild Flower.” As at Hull House, the Tau Beta Community house also had rooms set aside for in residence professionals (Plumb, 1938). The model flat and the attention to décor in the new building echoed one means of persuasion via the design for the original Tau Beta settlement space established in 1916; its décor was “finer than the neighbors” when “owing to the standard of taste” (Plumb, 1938, p. 135.).

A leader of the Detroit clubwomen movement who visited the new community house in 1930 relied on maternalism to assess the value of Tau Beta’s programming, affirming circulating associations between a beautiful home and moral behavior. The visitor asserted that “by steady growth in influence, community houses like Tau Beta send forth their little beam into a naughty world” (Tau Beta Community House, 1930, p. 21). Placemaking as homemaking was a form of persuasion, a pedagogy, and also inevitably coercive. A historian of Hamtramck, referring to the Tau Beta settlement, put it most astutely in 1955 when he wrote that “the financial support of settlements . . . indicates that the movement did not arise indigenously from a realization of need on the part of the people served” (Wood, 1955, p. 189). The nativist goal of teaching non-assimilated Americans how to live via Victorian-style décor is obviously an outdated pedagogical method. Yet, typical of other settlement projects, including Chicago’s Hull House, Tau Beta’s settlement also created career opportunities for women. Its “first residents” were “nurses, visiting housekeepers and social workers” who “lived as friendly neighbors” at the flat (Plumb, 1938, p. 139). Perhaps also coercive, but yet progressive from a contemporary perspective, Tau Beta women also taught an American version of feminism in the Hamtramck Polish community, encouraging Polish women to defy their husbands, get out of the house and make time for themselves (Plumb, 1938). The Tau Beta Community House furthermore provided scholarships to Hamtramck community women, one who founded a sorority at Wayne State University that was reportedly open to members of all racial and ethnic groups (Wood, 1955). Encouraging citizenship had real consequence as well when the Polish-American contingent of Hamtramck seized political power of the previously German-American run village and voted to become a city independent from Detroit in 1921 (Kowalski, 2010).

The Tau Beta Community House was at one time regarded one of the best in the nation, and the women leading Tau Beta were among Detroit's most elite citizens. So the Tau Beta Community House could be categorized as a boutique operation, Hamtramck a rich woman's playground. But the relationship between placemaking and cooperation among settlers and those whom they served, was embraced by settlers across the country. In 1945 the well-regarded Chicago area settlement house movement leader Lucy P. Carner emphasized the importance of placemaking among settlers when declaring that, "[t]he settlement is rooted in geographical community [sic]. Its purpose is to understand that community, to help develop its potentialities, to provide or aid it in securing needed services." As scholar of Hull House Shannon Jackson (2001) has observed, settlers were "committed to locality" (p. 6). Noting the limits of cooperation between settlers and their clients, Jackson points out furthermore that "settlement reform still meant changing the persons that one encountered" (p. 13). Relying on maternalism, settlers drew "from a discourse of domesticity, a nineteenth century formation that positioned women as sympathetic interpreters of the microperformances of every day life" (p. 6). Roxanne Mountford (2005) relatedly points out the relationship between "rhetorical performance" and "the rituals performed in that space" (p. 37). The expansion of space, creating and maintaining a beautiful home, was the set for to settlers' "performance" to local clients and local stakeholders; a domestic aesthetic embedded in a space also designed like a home tempered an activist agenda. Pretty was power.

Maternalism also softened what could have otherwise seemed too polarizing or too unfeminine. Tau Beta leaders were aware of their privilege and power to create change, and feasibly waves, in the world of Detroit philanthropy, and in the world of competing men of industry such as Henry Ford and the Dodge brothers, Horace and John. Hamtramck's Dodge auto plant was a competitor to the nearby Ford plant. The Dodges had broken business ties with Henry Ford, but these brothers at the same time donated space to Tau Beta for its library, installed shelves for this library and also supplied janitor services for the building (Plumb, 1938). Lore even suggests that the many Polish residents who had flocked to Hamtramck "were promised an 'open' town, free from the Puritanical restrictions of the Ford Motor Company" (Wood, 1955, p. 46). Meanwhile, Eleanor's husband Edsel was a major contributor to the Detroit Community Fund (Contributor's list, 1917) in the same period when the Dodge family donated more than \$10,000 to Tau Beta. Kantzler had been a bridesmaid in John Dodge's daughter's wedding (Hyde, 2005), but her husband Ernest, best friend and ally of Edsel, was also a nemesis of Henry (Collier and Horowitz, 1987). Conflict in this small world run by men was just not practical in the so-called domestic sphere of community building via settling. As Tau Beta president Marion Thurber described the value of cooperation



in 1909: “Our desire is to work with the other organizations rather than in opposition to them, and we trust that we may some day be of help to them that they have already been to us” (as cited in Plumb, 1938, p. 15). Forty years later in 1949, the longtime director of the Tau Beta Community House, Borgchild Halvorsen, told the *Detroit Free Press* that during her thirty-year career she was most proud of “the fact that Tau Beta staff members, the people served by the center, and the community itself have worked and developed together in ‘distinguished cooperation’” (as cited in McIntire, 1949).



*Figure 5.1. The new Tau Beta Community House, funded in part by Detroit's "Building For Womanhood," philanthropic campaign. Photo courtesy of Hamtramck Historical Society.*

Tau Beta's appeals for a new building as part of the previously mentioned Detroit "Women's Building Campaign," in a 1926 public relations booklet entitled "Social Pioneering," features the inter-relationship between maternalism, nativism, placemaking as homemaking, and pedagogy. The rhetoric used for this campaign furthermore shows how these Detroit women were poised to "perform" so-called women's work, and the rituals enabled by this work, through the expansion of space, as well as by cooperating with community leaders. The stated purpose of the existing house at this time was purportedly to "help in



the adjustment of the foreign-born citizen and his [sic] family to American life” (Social pioneering, 1926). Helping immigrants adjust effectively required more space. Quarters for the health clinic that was run in cooperation with the Visiting Nurse Association were cramped. The mortality of infants was at stake as well. Since the Visiting Nurses Association had begun its work in Hamtramck in 1914, infant mortality had decreased by roughly half, an arguable result of the “better babies, better citizens” mantra circulating at the settlement. Space was needed for young women’s fine and domestic art instruction and recreation facilities for the boy’s youth programming. The opportunities for recreation and amusement in this new space for boys in particular would purportedly cut down on juvenile delinquency. Two hundred and forty-five boys had passed through Hamtramck’s Juvenile Court in 1926. The staff had also increased considerably since the settlement’s inception. The reported material support in 1926 reflects the method of “cooperation” built into the Tau Beta settlement model: five full-time workers were paid by the City of Hamtramck, seven full-time and 11 part-time workers were paid by the Detroit Community Union, and seven full-time and two part-time workers were paid by the Visiting Nurse Association.



*Figure 5.2. Children playing on the Tau Beta Community House playground.  
Photo courtesy of Hamtramck Historical Society.*

Relying on maternalism—babies might die, as well as some arguable nativist anxiety—weak recreation offerings was breeding juvenile delinquency—the argument for more space to support and expand Tau Beta’s goals and initiatives through interdisciplinary settlement work is arguably well laid out. Tau Beta’s “Social Pioneering” pamphlet, that also represented interests of other Detroit feminist activists, urged philanthropists “to replace . . . inadequate and work out buildings for the womanhood of Detroit” (Social pioneering, 1926). The Tau Beta Community House, it argues, “has grown steadily in usefulness from year to year, and its work has been done so well that the present equipment will no longer accommodate all who seek its advantages.” Appeals relying maternalism were still persuasive to Detroit philanthropists in 1926: the building of the new Tau Beta house was financed along with the funding for the new YWCA, and the two women’s medical centers (Florence Crittenton, 1930). A 1928 review of the new settlement building in the Detroit Community Fund News shows that the agreed upon value of placemaking as homemaking, and homemaking as a companion to pedagogy, was status quo: “The auditorium, which would be a credit to any community, fulfilled a strong felt need. Here, at last, is a place where the young people as well as their elders may hold their parties, attend lectures, concerts and educational movies” (as cited in Tau Beta 23<sup>rd</sup> annual report, 1928). Perhaps also convinced of the relationship between beautiful home living and better behavior, Hamtramck’s probation officer in the juvenile division was awed by the “cordiality” of the new building’s entrance and “all the activities planned to help the individual to enjoy and understand himself through some form of Art” (as cited in Tau Beta 23<sup>rd</sup> annual report, 1928).

Also in 1928, Kantzler, then chairman of the building committee, reflected on the relationship between Tau Beta community building and the building itself, emphasizing the relationship between the expansion of physical space and the women’s proliferating ethos as activists. Assessing the value of the women’s investment in space to be \$330, 000 (over four and a half million 2017 dollars), and grateful for the funding from the Community Union, Kantzler asserted that “[i]t is a real obligation which we have assumed” (as cited in Tau Beta 23<sup>rd</sup> annual report, 1928). Growth of the settlement’s activities the following year in 1929 was attributed to the expanded space that included multi-uses for the new auditorium. As planned, the new space also allowed for expanded art programs, and more jobs, including the hiring of a pottery teacher, another woman on staff. In her summation of the year’s successful endeavors, then Tau Beta president Margaret Watkins emphasized the relationship between new space, and improved services. Watkins also reflected upon the espoused value of cooperation across gender and classes among those engaged in settlement work when declaring, “I think we have become what we always wanted to be, a real community center”

(as cited in Tau Beta 24<sup>th</sup> annual report, 1929). Ironically, the collaboration between Detroit's funding organizations and Tau Beta through the expansion of space that Kantzler remarked upon in 1928, as well as the relationship between space expansion and community building, emphasized by Watkins a year later, would become irrelevant or forgotten just three decades later. Soon enough, and perhaps too soon, settlement houses were regarded as white elephants, costly and irrelevant to community development.

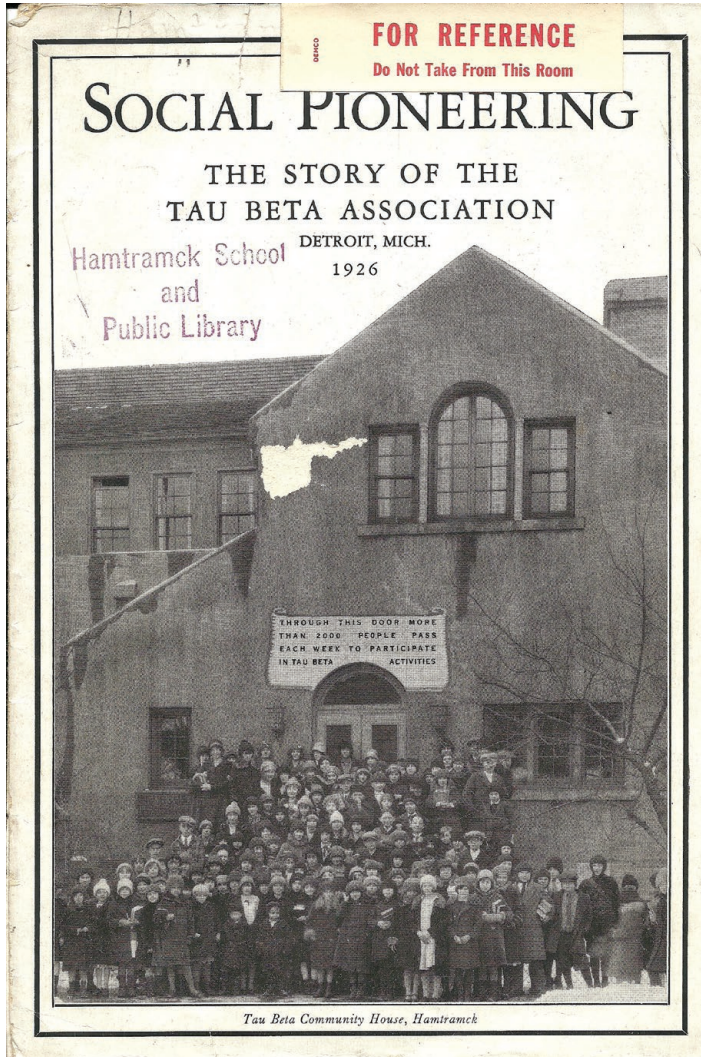
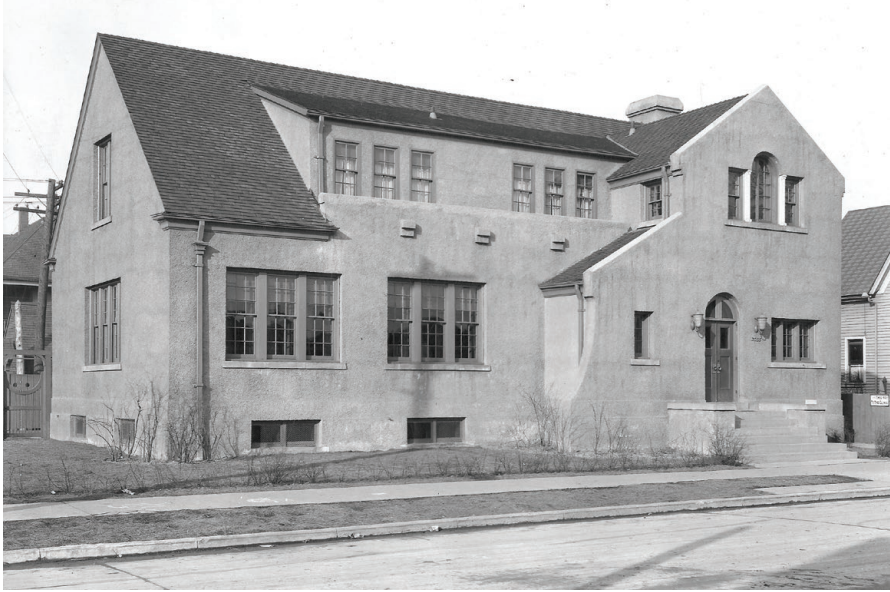


Figure 5.3. The cover for the public relations brochure, *Social Pioneering* (1926).  
 Photo courtesy of Hamtramck Historical Society.





*Figure 5.4. The second but not newest Tau Beta building, built 1919-20, mostly from private donations, at a cost of \$54,880.02 (Plumb, 1938), which is 792,000 2018 dollars. Photo courtesy of Hamtramck Historical Society.*

While the expanded space of the new Tau Beta Community House provided opportunity for robust programming, the momentum in this space in 1929, the funding of new facilities was also a climax of sorts, the beginning of the end. As the Depression hit, the resources of the settlement were tested. Staff salaries were cut, the nurse was let go, and art programs were slashed, as the house also reached its all time highest attendance (Plumb, 1926). Volunteer work, which included jobs big and small on the part of Tau Beta members, helped to keep the house afloat (Plumb, 1936). Other changes fragmented core leadership at the settlement. In 1935 Olga Wahlburg, a hired settlement activities director, and an immigrant herself, who was reportedly very skilled at negotiating with Hamtramck leaders, left the settlement and by 1937 the members of Tau Beta were more scattered across the Detroit metro area and even the globe (Plumb, 1936). As of 1947 the mission of the settlement was transformed, and excluded reference to Americanizing activities. The settlement's mission at this point was to "supplement the social, education and recreational activities and to initiate new activities to meet new needs" (Tau Beta Community House purpose, 1947). Perhaps acknowledging an increase in African Americans in Hamtramck to 11.7 percent of the population by 1950 (Wood, 1955), the Tau Beta Community House mission statement also claimed that "the facilities of the House are open

to children and adults regardless of race or creed” (Tau Beta Community House purpose, 1947). The board running the Tau Beta community house was also transformed to include more community members. Probably the most significant change came about when longtime settlement director Borgchild Halvorsen retired and the settlement was taken over by a male leader, Emeric Kurtagh. A few years later the Tau Beta Settlement House would close.

## **GEOGRAPHY IS NOT FUNDED: THE END OF THE TAU BETA SETTLEMENT WORK ON LOCATION**

The decision to close the Tau Beta Community House, along with other settlement houses across the country, was the result of some powerful cultural mandates, an extension of a mass assessment sponsored by United Community Services, the organization into which the Detroit Community Fund had folded. The assessment that likely led to the closing of Tau Beta’s settlement house, authored by consultant Lewis Barrett, and referred to at the time as the Barrett report, signified that the rationale for women’s placemaking via homemaking was no longer persuasive or relevant because of changing cultural assumptions about the role and administration of community centers. Barrett had already performed similar assessments in New Orleans and Boston (McDowell, 1953). Feminist geographer Doreen Massey (1994) argues that “space, and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them . . . are gendered through and through” (p. 186). The particulars allowing Tau Beta clubwomen to fund a robust community center in a house affirms Massey’s argument that space is gendered and culturally constructed. Progressive-era cultural constructions, extending nineteenth-century ideology fusing domesticity and femininity, enabled Tau Beta’s work to physically expand when proliferating an ideology, which I also identified as a pedagogy. The efficacy of this ideology had run its course as new brokers like Barrett gained power.

Collectively spelling out the death knell of the settlement culture as birthed by Jane Addams and her ilk dedicated to “locality,” and the related practices of placemaking as homemaking, Barrett’s incisive tone could shake the boots of any reader whose pet projects have been assessed with the alleged spirit of progress. Barrett’s overall task was measuring duplications—that is, ascertaining if private agencies were performing the work that was already being taken care of by public agencies. Barrett first concluded overall that the settlement houses were duplicating services already provided by public schools and tax-supported recreation centers. Mobility via automobiles and public transportation also expanded people’s options for education and recreation. Barrett ultimately recommended “a revised pattern of operation for group work and recreational services

in Detroit,” directed by United Community Services, a pattern that would soon enough frame the funding structure for settlements in the next decades. Along with his many specific recommendations for several Detroit settlement houses, Barrett argued that the Tau Beta Community House, as well as the nearby Highland Park settlement, should create stronger programming for adults “even at the expense of smaller programming for children and youth,” and add more men and community members to their boards. Barrett’s recommendation that the Neighborhood (settlement) House be closed, because it was now located in an area slated for industry per urban renewal initiatives, was either prescient or successfully prescriptive. As mentioned earlier, this building became a victim of urban renewal and was torn down in 1959 (Acomb 1959).

Kantzer’s untimely death when she drowned in a swimming pool in 1954 paralleled the end of the Tau Beta era of settlement work on its grounds when some of the service once sponsored at the house merged with those housed at the eventually torn down Neighborhood House, and also the closed Highland Park settlement. Previously in-house settlement services would become the Neighborhood Service Organization launching its signature program, “Meals on Wheels” (Acomb, 1959). This “reorganization” embraced by 1954 Tau Beta settlement leadership was designed to “shift the emphasis from a building-centered to a problem-centered approach” (Tau Beta Association, 1954). Kurtagh considered the Neighborhood Service Organization a “mutation of the settlement” in “offering a variety of accessible and coordinated social services” (Trolander, 1987, p. 204). In fact, Kurtagh was quoted in the *Detroit Free Press* (Stromberg, c.a. 1959) as claiming, “When we operated in building-centered agencies, we spent 60 percent of our budget for personnel. Now we are able to spend 95 percent on personnel. This means more and better trained workers.” For Kurtagh, houseless mobile social service work was more agile. In 1957 the Tau Beta Community House went up for sale. The Hamtramck Recreation Commission was posed to buy it, but in the end could not afford it (Kowalski, 2006). All services at the house were suspended by January of 1958. Of the closing of the house, the president of Tau Beta, Mrs. George Bushnell, described the event as such, “The community that we entered in 1916 was in sharp contrast to what it is today. Many of our former services are no longer needed, thanks to general community prosperity and maturity” (qtd in Stewart, 1955).

Bushnell’s remarks parallel similar rhetoric about female-run settlement work at the end of its heyday and also echo many of the recommendations in the Barrett report, which highlights the interplay between rhetoric, culture and activism as well as the phenomenon of hegemony in shaping major change. As sociologist Leslie Trolander (1987) describes this paradigm shift from local control to agencies using mostly social work personnel: “Gone was the settlement’s special



identification with a neighborhood” (p. 233). Place-based pedagogy wasn’t out of business necessarily, but the value of place itself as a generative tool for social service had been marginalized or was not prioritized in the broader culture of late twentieth-century U.S. settlement work. As one social worker described the dynamic, “Nobody is funding geography” (as cited in Trolander, 1987, p. 230). The new paradigms shaping social service negated the relevance of “locality,” and hence the importance of location for activist work. Furthermore, as Kurtaugh’s comments suggest, the mobile settlement model relied on social workers rather than volunteers, specialists or trained-on-the-job professionals like Tau Beta’s Wahlberg and Halvorsen had been. In its flushest years, Tau Beta had its own ceramics teacher and a slew of medical professionals on site. Charlotte Kimerly of Detroit’s Sophie Wright Settlement complained in 1952 that the settlement’s art program suffered because of the new job classifications, purportedly dictated by United Community Services (later the United Way) that required credentialed social workers. “I, for one, can’t figure out how a Master’s in Social work qualifies one to teach arts and crafts,” Kimerly asserted.

## **GENDERING SPACE: THE LEGACY OF PROGRESSIVE ERA CULTURE, RHETORIC AND ACTIVISM**

When the large homes that had hosted progressive-era female run settlement work were sold, closed or torn down for the sake of agile social services, and also urban renewal programs, elite women activists lost their power that had been conditional. The stellar and otherwise state-of-the-art Tau Beta Community House was also a house of cards. Early twentieth-century-club women succeeded when armed with a certain set of assumptions related to maternalism. Meanwhile, these ‘feminine’ values became absorbed into dominant (a.k.a. ‘male dominated’) American culture when government agencies took over some social services when for example, setting up welfare programs for children and also supporting public libraries. The relationship between the home and the actual physical spaces of settlements affirmed ‘women’s roles’ in society as homemakers, which fit the constructed view of a woman’s role in society. By the late 1940s, culturally assigned roles for women were particularly in flux as women were encouraged to embody private spaces as homemakers (Enoch, 2012).

To some extent, the mission of Tau Beta’s settlement house had already been completed or, was no longer necessary, as Bushnell, the Tau Beta president quoted earlier, suggested. First, libraries were no longer gendered as a particularly female space, at least in Hamtramck. Later, the needs of the poor in Detroit were interpreted and responded to by the Neighborhood Service Association. Moreover, interpreting America to assimilated Americans, or the many Afri-

can-Americans who now lived in Detroit neighborhoods once filled with immigrants, put the particular brand of settlement culture espoused by bourgeoisie female settlers in perhaps too radical, too uncomfortable, or too ambitious of a position. As one head worker of the Detroit Sophie Wright Settlement House, Dora Nelson (1952), asserted during the era, “For Sophie Wright Settlement, as for all Settlements working with negroes [sic] there is a particular need to be convincing, courageous, and energetic as the problems of this whole group are more difficult to solve.” Nelson argued for the relevance of settlements for activism and problem solving but also hinted at their limitations. The spirit of cooperation embraced by Tau Beta clubwomen early in the century may have required a much different mindset and a more flexible skillset to serve a new generation of neighbors.

Cultural mutations, which erased or made irrelevant maternalism, and the agreed upon associations between homemaking and women’s work, in conjunction with the professionalization of social services, were perhaps inevitable. On the other hand, this historical case study suggests that the gendering of space can have real material consequences. This history lesson is therefore potential food for thought among contemporary feminist activists mindful of how culture affects and shapes their work. As Mountford (2005) suggests, “The study of physicality and space, especially in studies of rhetorical performance (formal or informal), is a promising area of research that offers important opportunities for feminists” (p. 152). Historical perspectives can on the other hand illustrate the difficulty of measuring contemporary cultural trends. That is, for historical actors—as well as for us—it has been, and it is nearly impossible to critically interpret and react incisively to the forces that buoy us or bring us down on the spot and in real time. Whether there were mixed feelings on the part of the founders or female leaders of the Tau Beta Community House when it closed is unknown or unavailable. One copy of the Barrett report stamped “Tau Beta,” peppered with the annotations of its anonymous reader writing “bunk,” does suggest that the ideas and suggestions Barrett espoused were not necessarily agreed upon or mainstream even in their day, or at least by one reader. Even with all of their privileges, Tau Beta leaders weren’t impervious to cultural trends that marginalized women’s work. Hull House hadn’t even made the cut. A highway through a neighborhood served by this settlement house, as well as the building and establishment of the new University of Illinois at Chicago, displaced most if not all of the settlement’s nearby residents. The culture of cooperation between settlements, neighborhoods, and the middle-class bourgeoisie, was either forgotten or irrelevant to the writer of an article in the Hull House newsletter who remarked about the planned college campus and asserted that Hull House

“would have no place on the campus of a modern university in a metropolitan center” (“Hull House to Continue,” c. a. 1963).

This historical case of the growth and demise of the Tau Beta Community House grounded in trends shaping American progressive-era feminist work first highlights the relationship between rhetoric, culture and the gendering of space, and secondly suggests the relevant legacy of the progressive era for those planning thoughtful place-based and civic oriented projects. Studying the “social circulation” of language use and its historical context in this case “can help us see how traditions are carried on, changed, reinvented, and reused when they are passed down from one generation to the next” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 101). As Emily Ronay Johnston similarly argues (Chapter 3, this collection), knowledge-making includes “negotiating what we know, have known and have yet to know,” which should include of the legacy of historical actors. New initiatives in contemporary Detroit designed to meet the educational and material needs of its citizens, such as a new makers space housed in a church (Swan, 2014), furthermore suggests a renewed interest in the progressive-era brand of “locality,” when citizens are served on site in neighborhoods and philanthropy fosters neighborhood relations. Detroit activist and writer Yusef Shakur is funding a community house in his boyhood Detroit neighborhood located in one of the poorest zip codes in the US. Committed to “locality,” Shakur says he is “bringing the neighbor back to the hood” (Mondry, 2014; DeVito, 2015). Recently deceased philosopher and longtime Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs (2012), who admired and quoted from the work of progressive giant John Dewey, advocated for place-based learning in a city where neighborhood schools have been shuttered en masse. She imagined a neighborhood school with services akin to historical settlements, shaped by curricula that engages young people, and also an intergenerational citizenship via “a resource center with a community theater, artists’ studios and information about the different skills available in the neighborhood” (p. 132). These developments shaping change in Detroit’s urban neighborhoods suggest that various aspects of women’s historical rhetoric and material practices grounded in place, that too relied on rhetorical work and pedagogical initiatives, should be acknowledged by contemporary activists and feminists. As Enoch (2008) likewise suggests, acknowledging the legacy of historical actors who created, occupied, and shaped space can prohibit presentism about our work’s novelty or originality and also encourage awareness that our contemporary work, too, is culturally constructed. Overall, these histories are sources for inspiration and reflection when measuring an inevitably flawed and complicated collective experience among feminists engaged in and affected by place-based pedagogies.

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