

# NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT ARCHIVES

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The Centennial History Committee's initial search in the spring of 1990 for records and documents at the Northwestern University Settlement house was disappointing. The Settlement house library shelves and cabinets held no archival records, and the attic, vault room and basement were not accessible. A second-floor closet eventually yielded some damaged papers and records in several sooty boxes, which included a 25-year-old sketch of the Settlement's records by Louise C. Wade, a Ph.D. in history who was writing a series of reports on Chicago social welfare archives for *The Social Service Review* in March 1966. She wrote that what little she found was tantalizing, but what she believed to be missing was heart-breaking.

Dr. Wade regretted the apparent loss of early Settlement documents as well as a substantial amount of papers of Harriet E. Vittum, who presumably had removed them so that she might write her memoirs. The History Committee learned that a relative of Miss Vittum, Bruce Vittum of Dublin, Ohio, turned over some of her papers to the University of Illinois-Chicago in 1971 and 1972. However, the material contained no hoped-for Vittum memoirs, no manuscripts, and her diaries turned out to be only daily social calendars.

Clearly, this was not a promising start to writing a centennial history.

Undeterred, the History Committee pressed its search into the newly opened attic, vault and basement. As they examined and evaluated an increasingly overwhelming amount of papers and photographs, members discovered exciting records covering more than 90 years of Settlement history.

The History Committee informed Northwestern University archivist Patrick M. Quinn about the extent



*Mrs. Ellerth Overboe is a member of the Board of Directors and Central Committee, a member of the Northwestern Settlement Associates board, a former member of the Evanston Woman's Board and a former president of the North Shore Junior Board. She received her M.A. in history from Northwestern University.*

of the material. Quinn had expressed a concerned interest on a number of occasions in the whereabouts of Settlement records. Quinn and Northwestern University Settlement Executive Director Ron Manderschied discussed the disposition of some Settlement records in 1987. Northwestern University agreed to evaluate the History Committee findings; in October 1990, the Settlement's Executive Committee directed the transfer of records from the Settlement house to the university archives.

Northwestern University removed more than 3,000 pounds of records from the Settlement and culled approximately 100 cubic feet of historically valuable Settlement archives. This major collection is stored in acid-free containers in Northwestern University's archives, available at long last to scholars. The Settlement's gift of its records – past, present and future – to Northwestern University serves the best interests of both institutions.

This informal history has become part of the historical record of Northwestern University Settlement. In writing *The Worn Doorstep*, Mark Wukas compiled the most comprehensive history of the Settlement to date by utilizing a portion of the Settlement documents selected by the History Committee. Wukas began the assignment in April and completed it in August; this fine history is more than we could have imagined in the spring of 1990.

*The Worn Doorstep* rightfully focuses most of its attention on the early persons associated with the Settlement who were motivated by their respective sense of social justice. Not the least among these is Miss Vittum, an esteemed political and social reformer who, by accident

of neglect, was obscured in the very recesses of the place she served as head resident for 40 years. The History Committee – indeed, all those associated with Northwestern University Settlement – hopes this book will provide a symbolic doorstep for scholars, whose work now will be made all the richer by the wealth of archives now at Northwestern University.

Many library archives have been most helpful in this project. They included the Evanston Historical Society; the Fulton County Historical and Genealogical Society in Canton, Illinois, Miss Vittum's home town; the Seymour Library Archives of Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois; Northwestern University Library archives in Evanston; the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison; the University of Chicago and the University Library of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Sincere thanks go to the members of the History Committee. A core group worked with the archives and/or taped oral history interviews, while others offered their encouragement and advice. A special thank you to Mrs. Saul Thomashow, Mrs. Robert E. Lee, Mrs. Dudley Robinson and Mrs. Harry Drake.

Little realizing the amount of work this history would require when we began nearly two years ago, it is recommended that members of the Settlement Association begin preparing for the 125th anniversary of Northwestern University Settlement by starting to read and research now. Our wonderful story now goes into its second century.

Doris Overboe  
History Chairman