Hamilton, Alice Workers' Advocate (1869-1970) Encyclopedia Article

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During the Progressive Era, Alice Hamilton became part of the revolution of thought about the causative factors of disease, explicitly linking environmental factors to serious illnesses or epidemics. To satisfy her passion for social activism, Hamilton joined Jane Addams in Chicago at Hull House, the first of many settlement houses in America.

From left to right: Mrs. F. Louis Slade, Marion Edward Park, and Alice Hamilton.
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Hamilton focused her activities on worker health, an issue neither employers nor the federal government expressed much concern about at the time. One of Hamilton's main contributions to eliminating worker hazards was a study of the health effects of lead. Through an exhaustive investigation, Hamilton demonstrated the harmful effects of the toxin on humans. She also conducted research connecting typhoid to flies and improper sewage disposal, and linked the use of white phosphorous to the disease "phossy jaw."

In 1925, while serving as the first female staff member at Harvard University, Hamilton published her classic *Industrial Poisons in the United States.* Her work continued to emphasize several themes over the course of her life, including the effects of many toxic substances, the improvement of safety standards for workers, and the future effects of toxins on human health. Many regarded Hamilton as one of America's best-known experts on occupational hazards.

Bibliography

Hamilton, Alice. (1943). *Exploring the Dangerous Trades: The Autobiography of Alice Hamilton, M.D.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Internet Resource

"Biography of Alice Hamilton." Available from http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/biographies.