

## **Sarah Libby Carson 18xx-1928**

Sometimes called the “Jane Addams of Canada” Sara Libby Carson not only played a definitive role in the early development and direction of University Settlement, she was also a pioneer in the fields of settlement and social work in Canada.

The world in which University Settlement was founded was one in which Social Service work was considered, at least initially, to be a distinctly masculine pursuit. In fact, in 1910 when Robert Falconer founded University Settlement, women were entirely excluded from the Agency, both as staff and clients. As more and more women filled university lecture halls gaining professional training in social work, however, the gender shift in expertise in the field had begun.

In the fall of 1915, as the agency faced financial and organizational challenges, in response to the need for greater Social Settlement agency expertise and management savvy at the helm of University Settlement, Falconer brought in Sara Libby Carson to organize and supervise the operations of University Settlement for a one year period.

Carson was working at the Presbyterian board of social services and evangelism at the time she was brought on board at University Settlement. Over the past decade, however, she had founded and helped to found some of the first Settlement Houses in North America, including Christadora House in New York, Evangelia Settlement in Toronto (Canada’s first Settlement House) and three Presbyterian settlements across Canada. She had also worked on a reorganization of the St. Christopher House in 1912. Following her extensive work with Christian organizations, she had developed a view that settlement work provided greater opportunity to help people than denomination services did. Furthermore, as a teacher of settlement work, Carson was also able to train, introduce and build a strong pool of burgeoning social work talent within University Settlement’s staff.

When she arrived at University Settlement, Carson brought with her a number of social service graduates and students, primarily women, to help with the reorganization and staffing. By the spring of 1916, Carson had installed the first woman Head Resident at the agency, Ethel Dodds, a member of the first graduating class of the University of Toronto’s social work program.

Carson’s major move in the development of University Settlement was to diversify and expand the groups and services that the Agency offered. She accomplished this by fostering the creation of a wide variety of self governing clubs and associations that ran within the settlement house and under its auspices. This, in effect, generated greater community involvement and investment, a wider range of clients served, and all without exhausting the limited resources a war-time settlement house had at its disposal.

Although Carson left University Settlement in 1917, the structure and organization that she helped to create were crucial to the early years of the Agency. In addition, the emphasis she placed on education and training for her staff, led to a lasting tradition of excellence and competency among those working within the agency. She continued to be an active voice for social change and reform in Canada and the U.S. until her death in 1928.