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Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918

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Allies

A CARTOGRAPHER marking a Greenwich Village map to show where the neighborhood's largest ethnic groups lived in 1900 would have begun by shading in four large areas: an Italian section in the south Village, an African American enclave south and west of Washington Square, a west Village Irish district, and the blocks on Washington Square North and lower Fifth Avenue where the Protestant gentry lived. This exercise would have left one section in the center of the Village largely untouched: the east, south, and west sides of Washington Square and the streets between it and Sheridan Square, and the blocks north of Sheridan Square between Waverly Place and Sixth Avenue. This L-shaped borderland between the Village's most readily identified ethnic enclaves was mainly a middle-class residential district whose inhabitants included many of the reformers, social activists, and writers who are the focus of this chapter.

Although they came to their adopted causes by a variety of paths, these reform-minded Villagers shared certain traits and beliefs. They were cosmopolitans, well above average in their educational attainments, and intensely interested in national and international affairs. Their conviction that an old world was passing and a new one emerging was inspired by events that are largely forgotten today: the growth of Socialist Party strength in the United States, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the panic and depression of 1907.

Few of the reform-minded Villagers stayed permanently in the neighborhood. Unlike Robert de Forest, Serena Rhineland, Father Demo, Billy Walker, and Charles Culkin, all of whom lived in the Village for decades, many of the middle-class reformers came and went. They might rent rooms in the Village through the winter, summer elsewhere, and then, perhaps after a period spent somewhere else, return to the Village for a time.

An extreme example of such transitory Villagers would be Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, the young journalists mentioned in chapter 1. Both rented rooms on Washington Square in 1898, Boyce spending the better part of the year at the Judson Hotel and Hapgood living at the Benedick (a bachelor hotel at 80 Washington Square East) for a few months in the fall. After they married, Hapgood and Boyce (she retained her maiden name) moved to an apartment in Chelsea, the neighborhood just north of the Village. They never again lived in the Village, although their ongoing connections with the neighborhood—their summers at Provincetown with Village friends and their frequent visits to the Village in connection with literary and political activities—were so numerous that they were treated by their contemporaries as honorary Villagers long after they had ceased to live there.¹

Practical considerations such as easy access to good transportation, relatively low rents, and pleasant surroundings drew many middle-class individuals to the Village's Washington Square–Sheridan Square district; ties with friends and local institutions kept them coming back. Madeleine Doty and Ida Rauh met and became involved in Village life when they enrolled as students in New York University's law school. There they met another classmate, Jessie Ashley, forming bonds of friendship based in large part on a shared ambition to break into the legal profession at a time when it was exceedingly unwelcoming to women. Even at N.Y.U., which in the early 1900s had one of the few law schools in the country that accepted women students, men still outnumbered women by a ratio of more than thirteen to one in Doty, Rauh, and Ashley's class of 1902.²

At the time they graduated Doty and Rauh were in most respects still very conventional personally and politically. Rauh was the daughter of protective Jewish parents, and Doty adhered to the Victorian behavioral code—women should not smoke, drink alcoholic beverages in public, or engage in sex outside of marriage—with which she had been inculcated by her Presbyterian upbringing and Smith College education. Both women were smart and ambitious, but in 1902 neither had any expectation that before the end of the decade they would become activists on behalf of the city's poor.³

An evolution from an apolitical outlook to progressive activism was not

unusual among the Washington Square–Sheridan Square middle-class Villagers, as the case of Mary Heaton also illustrates. When she married Albert White Vorse in October 1898, she felt that she had failed in her efforts to become an artist but that she had made a highly desirable marriage. Bert seemed perfect: a Harvard graduate (friends with Hutch Hapgood, who was also a Harvard man), an aspiring author, and an editor with connections that gave the two of them entrée to the best of traditional literary culture (the Richard Watson Gilders’ north Village salon) and to the circle of bohemians led by James Gibbons Huneker, a well-known literary critic. When she and Bert moved to their first home, a five-room apartment at 210 West Fourth Street (across from Sheridan Square), Mary had no inkling that her writing career would soon be much more successful than her husband’s or that she would be actively supporting radical working-class protests.⁴

In all their undertakings, whether local, national or international, the reform-minded Villagers sought to build networks among allies of two types: friends from their own class of educated social critics, and comrades from working-class backgrounds. Few were more important than those they found inside Greenwich Village.

THE A CLUBBERS

In February 1906, a group of eighteen or twenty young writers and social workers bought a mansion at 3 Fifth Avenue, just north of Washington Square, with the intention of entering into a cooperative housing arrangement. The news caused a small stir in the newspapers. The proposed housing collective was so at odds with the individual or familial ways that New Yorkers usually lived that reporters were dispatched to investigate this novel group. When a reporter asked its president, Howard Brubaker, what the collective’s name was, Brubaker casually replied, “Oh, just call it a club.” Thereafter it became known as “A Club” both in the newspaper accounts and in the popular lore of the group itself. Although the A Club cooperative housing experiment lasted only a few years, it nevertheless brought together and helped solidify a network of individuals whose contribution to Village history far outweighed their relatively small numbers.⁵

Newspaper reporters who interviewed A Club’s founders received somewhat contradictory descriptions of the group’s purpose and membership. The earliest version came from Helen Todd, a wealthy Chicago settlement worker who had bankrolled the purchase of the mansion. She described A Clubbers as “people who like the bohemian life and are interested in the East Side of New York,” and who took the Fifth Avenue house “because it

is only a short distance from the ‘ghetto.’” The part about wanting to be close to East Side slums was true enough, but the New Yorkers in the group objected to Todd’s use of the word “bohemian” in connection with themselves. Charlotte Teller, an editorial assistant at *Everybody’s* magazine and a writer of both fiction and nonfiction, emphasized that “Life [at A Club] will not be bohemian, as has been stated, for most of us are old enough not to be childish in that way. . . . We shall lead a perfectly conventional, normal family life.” Another woman member also disagreed with newspaper stories that had implied “that we are organized for dilettante, artistic, easy living, which is entirely false.” She, for one, hoped to organize women who were employed in the factories of the Washington Square district. “We are here for work,” she stated emphatically.⁶

Charlotte Teller and Howard Brubaker gave interviewers additional reasons behind the founding of A Club. “Driven to desperation by New York hotel, boarding house and apartment life,” Teller said, “we think this [cooperative arrangement] will be an improvement and it seems to me a perfectly natural thing to do.” Brubaker thought that “getting literary people together” would provide a stimulating intellectual environment for all concerned, but added that the club had been founded without any specific public or political purpose in mind. Teller agreed with the latter point, although she acknowledged that because “all the members hold views more or less radical,” A Club might become “a radical centre” and its members might join forces to promote some “political, social or industrial movement.” But the club’s main purpose, she said, was to provide each member with a convenient place to live and do his or her work.⁷

Residents of A Club came to 3 Fifth Avenue by a variety of routes, the two most common being through contacts made in literary circles (Mary Heaton Vorse heard about the club in that way) and through friendships formed among settlement house workers (which was how Helen Todd of Chicago came to join the group). Veterans of University Settlement on New York’s Lower East Side provided most of the early recruits, including Howard Brubaker, Ernest Poole, Leroy Scott and his wife, Miriam Finn, Hamilton Holt, Walter Weyl, and Arthur Bullard. Although most of these individuals had ceased to be active at University Settlement before moving to A Club, many of them had continued to work together in activities related to the 1905 Russian Revolution.

Settlement workers who had lived on the Lower East Side could scarcely have avoided being affected by the intense anti-czarist feeling that prevailed among recent immigrants from Russia and Poland, the latter at that time controlled by Russia. Again and again the college-educated American social workers heard their Jewish East European neighbors decry tyrannical czar-

ist rule and the atrocities committed against Jews. In the same period that immigration from eastern Europe had been swelling the population of New York's East Side slums, Russia had been undergoing an economic crisis, and strikes and food shortages were widespread. When Czar Nicholas II's unpopular expansionist program in the Far East led to disastrous defeats in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the disaffection of workers, peasants, and soldiers began to approach revolutionary intensity.

In January 1905, thousands of workers marched on the czar's winter palace in St. Petersburg; troops fired live ammunition into the crowd, thus ending any hopes that the czar would hear the workers' protests. Bloody Sunday, as this incident came to be called, left more than a thousand demonstrators dead and triggered a period of rioting throughout Russia. Czarist control continued to weaken as the year progressed. In November, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Social Democrats, a Marxist party, returned to Russia, and in December armed uprisings broke out in Moscow and other major cities.

The future A Clubbers in the University Settlement group did not stand idly by as these events unfolded. Immediately upon receiving news of Bloody Sunday, they went into action. Ernest Poole, already known for his pro-labor articles about working conditions in New York and Chicago, asked *Outlook* magazine to send him to Russia as its correspondent. Three weeks later he arrived in St. Petersburg, posing as a representative of an American shoe company but actually bearing money and letters for Russian revolutionaries. After meeting secretly with anti-czarist informants in St. Petersburg, he traveled to Moscow and to the Caucasus, where he continued to find evidence of czarist repression and revolutionary unrest. When Poole returned to western Europe, he was joined in London by English Walling. They traveled to Paris and then to Geneva, where two more University Settlement veterans, Arthur Bullard and Howard Brubaker, showed up. Walling and Bullard set to work to establish a news bureau that would give anti-czarist writers financial support and help them publish their writings in the West.⁸

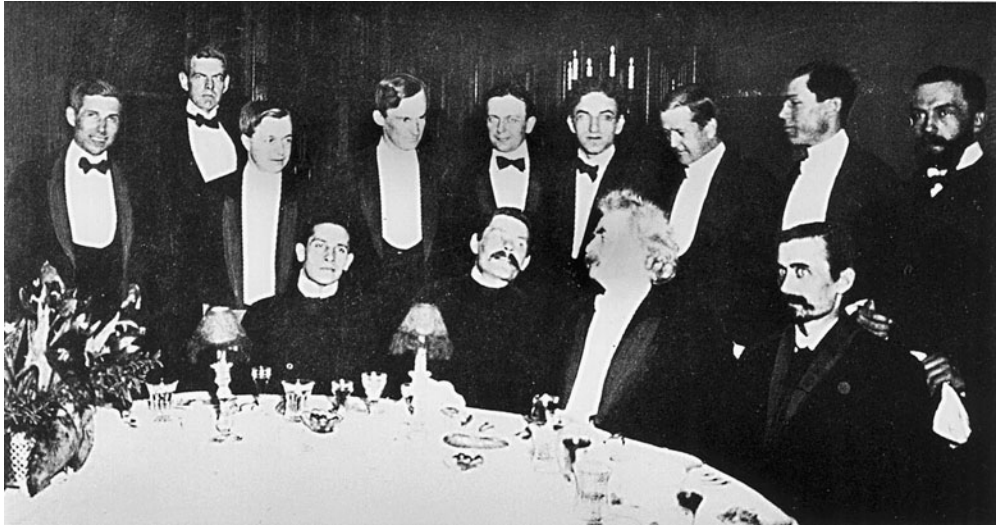
The young Americans were intensely excited about their campaign. "In 1905," Brubaker recalled, "we were sure that the revolution was just around the corner." Walling and Bullard soon left for Russia, but before their departure and again after they reached St. Petersburg, Walling cabled Anna Strunsky, a Russian-born Californian who had been romantically involved with the novelist Jack London, and urged her to come to St. Petersburg and "lend a hand" in the work of dealing a "possible *death* blow to the old society." Without telling their parents where they were going, Anna and her sister Rose headed for Russia, joining Walling and Bullard in St. Peters-

burg. Less than a month later, Anna Strunsky and English Walling had fallen in love and decided to marry. When news of the Walling-Strunsky engagement reached New York, it was greeted with a banner headline on the *New York World's* front page: "Socialism Finds Bride for a Rich Yankee in Russia." In June they were married in Paris, and that fall the newlyweds returned to the United States and stayed at A Club for about six weeks.⁹

By the time English and Anna reached A Club, the most highly publicized moment in the club's history, Maxim Gorky's visit to the United States, had passed. Gorky, the renowned Russian author, had arrived in New York City to an enthusiastic reception on April 10, 1906. His trip, approved by Lenin to raise money and create goodwill for the revolution, owed much to the efforts of English Walling, Arthur Bullard, and their Friends of Russian Freedom organization. The plan was to have a committee chaired by Mark Twain, who lived from 1904 to 1908 at 21 Fifth Avenue and frequently visited his A Club neighbors, sponsor a welcoming banquet in Gorky's honor. Besides Twain, the committee's members included such leading literary figures as Richard Watson Gilder and William Dean Howells. An informal preliminary reception was held for Gorky at A Club shortly after his arrival. The Russian author's visit was off to a good start (fig. 22).

Then the public mood underwent an abrupt change. On April 14 the *New York World* revealed that Gorky's traveling companion, a well-known actress and Bolshevik named Madame Andreyeva, was not his wife and that Gorky was still married to another woman. The fact that Gorky and Andreyeva had a common-law marriage of long standing did not prevent moralists from raising a great uproar about their relationship. Embarrassed, Twain and most members of the honorary committee resigned, and the welcoming banquet was canceled. In quick succession three hotels evicted the Russian visitors. Late one rainy night, left with nowhere else to go, Gorky and Andreyeva went to A Club and asked to be taken in. Details of this memorable episode vary from account to account, but all agree that the two Russian radicals were welcomed at A Club, sheltered there from press inquiries for several days, and then spirited off to other locations owned by sympathetic hosts. Gorky remained in the United States until October, but as an effort to generate goodwill for the revolution, his visit had been, in the words of one historian, "a complete fiasco."¹⁰

Support for the 1905 revolution was not the only public cause in which the young progressives who lived at A Club were active. Energized by the feeling that the pace of change was accelerating, they played major roles in founding or sustaining organizations—the Women's Trade Union League of New York (NYWTUL) and the Intercollegiate Socialist Society—



22. Although A Clubbers had to cancel their full-scale banquet for Maxim Gorky, they were able to hold a welcoming dinner for him on April 11, 1906. Gorky is second and Mark Twain third from the left in the front row. Culver Pictures.

whose goals were indicative of the direction in which the A Clubbers' social and political thought was evolving during the period.

The NYWTUL was established in 1904 as one of the first local branches of the National Women's Trade Union League, an organization founded in 1903 as a result of lobbying by English Walling and others at the American Federation of Labor's annual meeting. Walling's idea, borrowed from British precedent, was that women factory workers should be encouraged to form or affiliate with unions. As an elite group, the NYWTUL drew most of its active members from among middle- and upper-class women who used their wealth, professional training, and access to the press to further the league's goals. Walling served briefly as the league's secretary and then withdrew from direct involvement in its affairs. However, most of the women who lived at A Club between 1906 and 1910 participated in at least one NYWTUL project, and A Club became a center of women's pro-labor activism in the Greenwich Village area (fig. 23).¹¹

A Clubbers also figured prominently in the early history of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS). Founded in September 1905 at a meeting in New York City, the ISS made spreading information about socialism among college students its principal goal. Although its leaders insisted that their purpose was to educate rather than convert, they encountered considerable

resistance from college administrators, who did not welcome ISS speakers or chapters on their campuses. Initial support, therefore, came mainly from eminent American writers and intellectuals. Upton Sinclair, Clarence Darrow, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were among the group that signed the call for founding the organization, as was Anna Strunsky Walling's husband English, and her old flame Jack London. London was elected ISS president and was succeeded two years later by Graham Stokes, a Socialist Party member with intimate ties to the A Club circle. Among Greenwich Villagers who served as ISS officers during its first five years were Graham's sister Helen, his brother-in-law Robert Hunter, Paul Kennaday, Ida Rauh, and three A Clubbers: Ernest Poole, Leroy Scott, and Robert W. Bruère.¹²

The A Clubbers' comrade English Walling, an inveterate organizer, also helped found the NAACP. In the aftermath of an August 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois, Walling, assisted by Mary White Ovington (who was

23. The headquarters of the Women's Trade Union League of New York in 1909–1910. Museum of the City of New York, The Byron Collection.



doing research on New York City blacks with grant support from Greenwich House), brought together a nucleus of reformers with the goal of establishing a biracial organization to promote black civil rights. Although in no sense a Village enterprise, the NAACP in its early years had some significant ties with the neighborhood. One of the founders' first meetings (in March 1909) was held at the Liberal Club, a debating society with Village roots: of sixteen attendees, half were from the A Club-ISS orbit. In 1914 the NAACP moved its national offices to 70 Fifth Avenue in the north Village.¹³

In supporting the NAACP, the 1905 revolution, the NYWTUL, and the ISS, the young reformers challenged contemporary orthodoxies. By helping to establish the NAACP, they attacked the prevailing racial mores of the time. Similarly, A Clubbers who became members of the NYWTUL repudiated the belief (held by most male unionists and many male Socialists) that a woman's place was in the home, even though the reality was that by the early 1900s many women were wage earners doing industrial labor. A Clubbers who joined the ISS and the Socialist Party in the first decade of the twentieth century did so out of frustration with what they viewed as the largely do-nothing response of the Democratic and Republican parties to the emergence of modern urban-industrial society. The laissez-faire conservatism of the two major parties, the young Villagers charged, favored the wealthy few at the expense of the working masses. In the interests of creating a truly democratic society, the Socialists endorsed a platform that, by 1912, included proposals for the "collective ownership and democratic management" of the nation's railroads, grain elevators, and telephone and telegraph industries; federal public works projects to employ the jobless; labor laws to establish shorter work days, a minimum wage, stricter factory safety regulations, and to prohibit child labor; and a variety of other reforms, including women's suffrage, the direct election of the president, and a graduated income tax.¹⁴

If asked to describe their social and political viewpoint, many A Club residents would have agreed with Charlotte Teller's statement that they were "more or less radical." Teller was typical of her A Club colleagues in using the word in this vague way. In an age of innocence before the Bolshevik Revolution gave the word a more specific meaning, many A Club residents used the terms *radical*, *liberal*, and *progressive* interchangeably to refer to one or another form of advanced thinking. Given the Socialist leanings of most A Clubbers and their advocacy of programs to the left of mainstream opinion, the term *radical* fits them well enough for the 1904-1907 period. Later, however, in a passage written in the mid-1930s, when finer distinctions had come into use, Mary Heaton Vorse observed: "Some of the

A Club members fondly thought of themselves as revolutionists, but we were liberal reformers . . . natural-born New Dealers.” In retrospect, Vorse got it about right. By later standards A Club residents were neither radicals nor revolutionaries. Rather, in most of its elements, their version of socialism anticipated the Progressive Era regulatory laws passed in the 1910s and the welfare capitalism programs instituted during the New Deal years.¹⁵

The opportunity to make common cause politically with other A Clubbers was only one reason the residents of 3 Fifth Avenue were so enthusiastic about life at A Club. There were also practical benefits of a cooperative housing arrangement and the house’s convenient location in the city. Above all else, however, A Clubbers enjoyed being part of a small residential community that contributed in important ways to their personal lives, serving as an informal marriage bureau, a writers’ collective, and a mutual support group.

Many A Club members arrived at 3 Fifth Avenue as part of an already established couple. This group included two couples—Bert and Mary Heaton Vorse and Leroy and Miriam Finn Scott—who stayed for long periods, and English and Anna Strunsky Walling, who were briefly in residence there. The Scotts and Wallings struck many outside the A Club circle as unusual couples because they consisted of a wealthy Protestant man married to an East European Jewish woman. The Walling-Strunsky alliance had been a headline grabber; other A Club marriages were not high-profile events, but they came along with impressive regularity. 1907 was a banner year. In quick succession Ernest Poole married his sweetheart, a Chicago heiress named Margaret Winterbotham. Then Poole’s sister married Walter Weyl, a University Settlement veteran. Finally, Martha Bensley, one of the club’s founders, married Robert Bruère, a Socialist who was working as an agent for the New York Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor.¹⁶

As a writers’ collective, A Club was a place where a lot of work got done. 1907 was a big year for books as well as marriages. Charlotte Teller, Ernest Poole, and Leroy Scott all published novels that year. It seemed as though everyone either had just finished a project or had several works in progress. Mary Heaton Vorse completed her first novel, *The Breaking in of the Yachtman’s Wife* (1908), and wrote several dozen short stories during three stays at 3 Fifth Avenue. A veritable flood of articles and stories poured forth from the pens and typewriters of other A Club residents between 1906 and 1910. Martha Bensley Bruère produced articles on modern housekeeping techniques and became a recognized expert in that field; her husband, Robert, wrote about education and industrial democracy; Miriam Finn Scott completed several pieces about contemporary labor conditions. Arthur Bullard

and Howard Brubaker were productive too, writing mostly about foreign affairs, and Madeleine Doty did weekly book reviews for the *New York Times*.¹⁷

In their memoirs, Ernest Poole and Mary Heaton Vorse provided particularly vivid descriptions of life at A Club. Poole emphasized the high level of energy that was generated when friends who shared many professional and political goals also shared one roof. “With most of us writing books, stories, or plays and all of us dreaming of reforms and revolutions of divers kinds,” Poole wrote, “life in that house was a quick succession of intensities, large and small.” One by-product of living together was that one writer’s work sometimes stimulated another’s. Mary Heaton Vorse, inspired by Arthur Bullard’s success in publishing articles based on his travels in Europe, went to North Africa in 1909 to collect material for a similar series of her own. Like Poole, Vorse remembered A Club as both a political and a social community. She particularly valued the A Clubbers’ political iconoclasm. “It was the first time,” she wrote, “I had been in a large group of like-minded people who questioned the system under which they lived.” She also fondly remembered “the mutual kindness and the gaiety of our household. It was,” she felt, “a completely successful and civilized experiment in communal living.”¹⁸

As Vorse’s words suggest, she found in A Club a very supportive environment. Here was a place in which everyone, men and women alike, was working. The male residents—particularly Leroy Scott and Ernest Poole—were better known to the general public than most of the women residents. But the women A Clubbers certainly held their own and helped to create a residential community in which gender roles did not divide along the conventional lines of men doing the “real” work and women taking care of the kids, meals, and the laundry. When Mary Heaton Vorse hung out an “I am working! Do not enter!” sign, it carried a message that she knew her housemates would honor. The sign also affirmed the importance of her professional endeavors, testifying to the disappearance of her previous diffidence about her writing achievements as she laid claim to her inner creative power. She was delighted when her newfound confidence led her A Club friends to speak admiringly of her as a “dangerous woman.”¹⁹

Vorse and her fellow A Clubbers were Greenwich Villagers of a particularly peripatetic type. For example, just before beginning his three-year stint at the Church of the Ascension, Alexander Irvine lodged briefly at A Club, moving out as soon as he found a place uptown to which he brought his wife and three children. Other A Club residents also came and went, some spending a month at 3 Fifth Avenue, others a summer, and still others living there a year or more. Upon leaving A Club quite a few former resi-

dents remained in the neighborhood. Madeleine Doty summered at A Club in 1906 before moving to an apartment on Charles Street in the west Village. Similarly, after he married and left A Club in early 1907, Ernest Poole rented rooms for himself and his bride at 88 Grove Street, formerly the location of Greenwich House settlement's men's annex. When the Pooles later left their Grove Street place for another Village apartment, Mary Heaton Vorse rented the rooms they had vacated.

These comings and goings were not, in and of themselves, particularly significant, but they represented one way that A Clubbers and their allies spread throughout the Village and continued to build a network of radicals and reformers dedicated to furthering the social changes that had begun to surface so forcefully between 1904 and 1907.

THE GREENWICH HOUSE CIRCLE

The network of reform-minded Villagers had three discernible elements: individuals, institutions, and cross-class relationships. Individuals came to join the network through a variety of personal and professional avenues. Certain institutions functioned as anchors or gathering points for collective action. In the Village these included the two local social settlements, Greenwich House and Richmond Hill House, the district office of the Charity Organization Society (C.O.S.), and, for a while, A Club. These institutions then became the organizational bases from which their founders and members, most of whom were well educated, middle- and upper-class Protestants, were able to develop relationships across ethnic and class lines with the non-elite, non-Protestant residents of the neighborhood. This chain of associations is the subject of the remaining sections of this chapter.

In January 1906 Madeleine Doty was sharing a Lower East Side apartment with Ida Rauh, her friend from law school days. Visits to University Settlement, which was nearby, provided Doty and Rauh with plenty of intellectual stimulation. Through conversations with residents there, Doty "first heard about Karl Marx and socialism." Rauh was an enthusiastic participant in the activities of the Women's Trade Union League of New York until early 1906, when she fell ill. At that point her parents intervened and, according to Doty, took her "much against her will" to Europe for rest and recuperation. Unable to afford the rent on their flat by herself, Doty moved to A Club, where many former University Settlement workers now lived.²⁰

Doty arrived at A Club just after the April 1906 uproar over Gorky and Andreyeva. Having shed some of her previous prudishness about manners

and morals (“I had long since learned to smoke cigarettes,” she wrote, “and looked with amusement at my former attitude”), Doty unhesitatingly joined her A Club friends in defending their famous Russian visitors against the moralistic outcry in the American press. Moreover, through daily contact with young members of what she called a “literary artistic crowd,” all of whom advocated revolution in Russia and criticized the American capitalist system, Doty gradually adopted more radical positions on political and economic affairs, placing herself on a trajectory that would eventually lead her to join the Socialist Party.²¹

At A Club it was possible to rent rooms on a monthly basis, but most Greenwich Village leases ran for a year that began in the fall. As a result, every Villager in search of better accommodations—and there were always many of them—was on the move in September or October. Doty joined this annual migration in September 1906, leaving A Club for a west Village apartment. She leased a five-room flat on the third floor at 12 Charles Street, midway between Greenwich Avenue and Waverly Place. Since her earnings from legal work barely covered her share of the expenses for a law partnership she had formed with her N.Y.U. classmate Jessie Ashley, Doty supplemented her income with part-time jobs. Her work as a tutor at her former prep school paid poorly, so she dropped tutoring and found two new jobs: teaching at Greenwich House settlement (which enabled her to take some meals there) and reviewing books for the *New York Times*. Rent on her apartment was substantial, \$36 a month, and to help defray that expense she planned to sublet two of the flat’s three bedrooms. One she held for her friend Ida Rauh. The other she rented to Crystal Eastman, a young woman she met through the Greenwich House connection.²²

Eastman was twenty-five at the time she moved in with Doty. The daughter of one of the first women to be ordained as a Congregational minister, Eastman had graduated from Vassar College in 1903 and earned a master’s degree in sociology at Columbia University a year later. For the next two years she lived with her parents in Elmira, New York, teaching high school to help pay for her younger brother Max’s last year at Williams College and for his subsequent treatments for various ailments. Although she dutifully helped her family, Eastman was eager to get back to New York City. As early as February 1905, she visited Greenwich House with Paul Kellogg, a social worker who was a resident at the time. Eastman intended to pursue a law degree at N.Y.U. while teaching classes and taking her meals at Greenwich House. As she wrote her mother, “I like it [the Greenwich House circle] because they are all cranks and reformers, and sooner or later every really interesting and up and doing radical who comes to this country gets down to Greenwich House for a meal.” When Madeleine Doty, a graduate

of N.Y.U. Law School and also a part-time worker at Greenwich House, invited her to share an apartment, Eastman agreed at once; the arrangement seemed ideal.²³

Nearly every aspect of Eastman's new situation went well. She managed to earn satisfactory marks in her law school classes without devoting an inordinate amount of time to them. She enjoyed her work at Greenwich House and was delighted with the attention she received from several male members of the settlement's circle. These included Paul Kellogg and Paul Kennaday, both former Greenwich House residents who often dropped by to see friends there. Mary Simkhovitch's husband, Vladimir, also made it plain that he found Eastman completely enchanting. She liked him and wrote her mother that his friendship was one of "the richest things that I have found in New York so far." However, being the object of Vladimir's overt interest was a bit awkward. Fortunately, a partial solution presented itself around New Year's 1907 when her brother Max arrived in the city. He and Vladimir hit it off, so Crystal felt free to invite Max to accompany her and Vladimir to cultural events, the threesome serving to defuse a potentially troublesome situation. "It solves a good many things to have Max here," she confided to her mother.²⁴

On learning that Max had come to the city without any job prospects, Crystal's admirers rallied to help. Kellogg and Kennaday worked for the Charity Organization Society, and they combined forces to get Max hired as a lecturer for the C.O.S. Committee on the Prevention of Tuberculosis. Soon thereafter Vladimir Simkhovitch persuaded the philosopher John Dewey, whom he knew as a colleague at Columbia and who was a frequent visitor to Greenwich House, to recommend Max as a replacement for a Columbia philosophy teacher who had died early in the spring term. Appointment in hand, Max moved uptown to be closer to the Columbia campus.

Max's very brief stay in the Village coincided with a variety of changes—some small, others large—in the lives of the women at 12 Charles Street. Ida Rauh returned from Europe in January and occupied the third bedroom at Doty's apartment. She and Crystal's brother were introduced, but neither was especially impressed with the other on first meeting. Crystal, meanwhile, had decided that she was, as she had written Max, "not very fond of Madeleine Doty." Though the reasons for this feeling went unspecified, they probably arose out of small but crucial temperamental differences: Crystal was an early riser and loved to socialize, while Madeleine slept late and had little time in her daily schedule for leisurely chats. By February 1907 the two women were no longer trying to cooperate on meals and other activities.²⁵

At this point Doty had so much on her mind that she scarcely noticed her roommate's withdrawal. Her work schedule was extremely demanding. The previous September she had answered a *New York Times* help-wanted ad for a man to interview authors and review their recent books. Although the editors reluctantly agreed to hire her, they insisted that the column's byline show a male name. Doty chose the nom de plume Otis Notman, which stood for "O 'tis not man." She still devoted most daytime hours during the work week to her legal practice, but she now took brief breaks three or four times a week to interview authors. On Sundays and the nights that she didn't have meetings at Greenwich House, she prepared her two- to three-thousand-word articles for the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*. Even though her multiple jobs made for what she called "a hectic life," she was thrilled by the opportunity that Otis Notman had to meet well-known authors such as Maxim Gorky, Theodore Dreiser, Charles Edward Russell, and David Graham Phillips.²⁶

Doty's interview with Phillips set in motion a chain of events that turned her world upside down. Their first conversation took place in early January at his Gramercy Park apartment. Initially they chatted about his political writings, especially *The Treason of the Senate*, an exposé of the influence of large corporations on U.S. Senators that he had published less than a year earlier. However, Phillips soon steered the interview toward his real interest, which was writing novels, specifically novels about love and about the lives of "people who have not become conscious of themselves." They talked a while longer; then, as Doty rose to leave, he startled her by asking, "Aren't [you] going to invite me to come and see you?" Almost speechless with surprise, Doty nonetheless agreed to go out with him for what proved to be the first of many times.²⁷

Doty and Phillips were a study in contrasts. He was a worldly forty-year-old who felt that "love is everything. . . . The most creative and vital thing in the world." She was an emotionally immature twenty-eight-year-old who, though she was beginning to find herself professionally, had never had a serious romantic relationship and who, by her own admission, knew almost nothing about "love and sex."²⁸

Despite their intense attraction to each other, what Doty called "a great struggle" arose between them. Phillips wanted a companion and lover but not a wife; Doty was not sure she could live that kind of life. When Phillips invited her to accompany him to Paris in June, she declined, but by the time he left for France her eager response to his passionate embraces made her wonder if she had made the right decision. "He left me," she recalled, "a seething mass of emotion. My reason said, married or unmarried, our love was justified. We were hurting no one!"²⁹

Coincidentally, about the time that personal upheavals left Doty with little energy to think about her work at Greenwich House, a promising opportunity for meaningful social service came Crystal Eastman's way. Indirectly, Eastman's good fortune was traceable to advice that Robert de Forest, the president of the Charity Organization Society, had given a private client in 1906. This client, Mrs. Russell Sage, had asked for help in establishing a charitable trust in her deceased husband's name. De Forest urged her to give any such trust a broad mandate so that it could respond flexibly to changing societal conditions. She agreed and had him draw up incorporation papers for the Russell Sage Foundation accordingly. In 1907 the trust made its initial grants, and one of the first went to support a comprehensive investigation of industrial conditions in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. To direct the project, C.O.S. administrators asked Crystal Eastman's friend Paul Kellogg, then coeditor of the C.O.S. journal, *Charities and the Commons*, to take a leave of absence and oversee what became known as the Pittsburgh Survey. Kellogg, in turn, recruited Eastman to conduct the part of the investigation that dealt with industrial accidents and employers' liability laws. Her duties were to begin in September.³⁰

Toward the end of June, her immediate job future secure, Eastman took the bar examination and prepared to spend the summer with her parents in Elmira. As the time to leave 12 Charles Street drew near, she became aware that although she had been a resident of the Village for less than a year, she had begun to think of the area near Greenwich House as home. At a later date she explained her feelings in some detail to Max. "This neighborhood," she wrote, "is *home* to me—partly from habit, partly because my friends are here; (and it does not matter much whether I see them or not, so long as they are within reach); partly because Greenwich House is a center of life and interest with which I feel myself identified."³¹

Eastman's Greenwich House circle was composed of settlement house residents, social workers, and a few intellectuals and academics. At any given time the current residents of Greenwich House comprised the heart of this community of friends and allies. As they collaborated with Mary Simkhovitch to fulfill her goal of improving the immediate neighborhood, their daily contact with working-class Villagers enabled them to fine-tune their programs to the changing neighborhood scene.

From their vantage point on Jones Street, Greenwich House residents were well aware that the west Village's ethnic makeup was not only changing but changing very swiftly. Blacks were moving out of the Jones Street district, as were many Irish Jones Streeters. The block's new residents were mostly Italians, many of them recent arrivals from their native land.

These shifts in Jones Street's ethnic makeup took less than a decade to

unfold. Barely a year after Greenwich House opened its doors in 1902, Mary Simkhovitch had observed that although Jones Street was on the “edge of the incoming Italian colony,” few Italians lived on Jones Street itself; census records show that at the beginning of the century, about 11 percent of the street’s residents were Italian. (This was roughly the same percentage as that of German and African American Jones Streeters, while Irish Americans comprised more than 40 percent of the street’s residents.) By 1906, however, Simkhovitch was reporting that “each month brings an increasing number of Italians” to the area, and in 1910 Italians comprised Jones Street’s largest ethnic group, one that had taken over nearly half of the tenements on the block. Committed to working with neighbors of all ethnic backgrounds, Simkhovitch made a point in her 1909 annual report of emphasizing the positive impact the growing Italian community was having on the area. The Italian presence, she asserted, was “revivifying [the Village] with new color and stir. . . . The Marionettes come and go. Dried mushrooms, caccicavalla [sic], tortone, pan forte, fresh artichokes and peppers in the shops and on the pushcarts all proclaim us an Italian neighborhood.”³²

Simkhovitch and her Greenwich House colleagues also noted that even as the arrival of Italians was changing the Village, the newcomers were themselves being changed by their encounter with the host culture’s economic realities. Traditionally, Italian women neither worked outside the home nor socialized outside their church and family circles. These conservative mores had considerable staying power among Italian Villagers and significant consequences for Greenwich House programs. In 1909 Simkhovitch observed that it was “extremely difficult to establish social clubs among Italian girls. Many of the parents object most strenuously to dancing.” Typically too, unmarried daughters of Italian families were strictly chaperoned. Nevertheless, adherence to old country conservatism was gradually being undermined by economic realities; in order to achieve a decent standard of living in their adopted homeland, many Italian families were forced to abandon the practice of not letting their unmarried daughters work outside the home. The result, Simkhovitch wrote in 1909, was “the dramatic, if silent, *entry into industry of the Italian girl*.”³³

There were times when such gradual social transformations in the neighborhood yielded center stage while Villagers dealt with the sudden onset of a social crisis of massive proportions. The panic and depression of 1907–1908 was one such crisis. Beginning on March 13, 1907, an extended period of panic selling in the stock market exposed the weaknesses underlying the general prosperity of the previous ten years. Business bankruptcies, production cutbacks, and rising unemployment followed. By the fall of 1907, all

but the most complacent observers had to admit that the economy was in the worst shape it had been in since the depression of the early 1890s. The bad times continued unabated throughout the winter of 1907–1908.

Greenwich Village social workers grimly compiled statistics on the depression's severe impact. The Charity Organization Society's Greenwich district office reported that requests for economic assistance increased dramatically in 1907–1908, running double the norm from recent years and higher than at any time since 1893–1894. What distressed C.O.S. agents even more than the sheer numbers of needy Villagers was that the new applicants were drawn from an unusual source. The groups that typically dominated C.O.S. relief roles were newly arrived immigrants, widowed women with young children, and families that had lost their main breadwinner to disease, old age, or injury. By contrast, aid applicants in 1907 and 1908 were, according to Sophie P. Foote, the C.O.S. district agent, "families containing able-bodied, fairly capable men and women willing to work," but for whom "[work] can not be found." Mary Simkhovitch agreed that conditions were especially bad. Writing many years later, she recalled: "That was the hardest time our neighborhood saw till the close of 1929. The hope of the neighborhood was stunned by the sudden drop in prosperity."³⁴

Social workers had few palliatives they could offer to relieve the distress of jobless Villagers. Greenwich House ran a workroom at the settlement where a few working-class women made craft items and clothing, and the proceeds from products that were sold went to assist the workroom participants. Similarly, the C.O.S. expanded its woodlot, a business that provided the agency's able-bodied clients with small stipends in return for their work chopping firewood. Even though these private philanthropic efforts were pitifully inadequate at a time when the needs of the unemployed and their families were so great, few middle-class reformers were ready to demand that the federal government step in (as it did twenty-five years later during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when it became the employer of last resort for jobless Americans). It took a longer and more severe downturn—one that hit even the middle class—to bring that major shift in reform thought.

Nevertheless, the 1907–1908 depression did have an impact on the thinking of reform-minded Villagers, who, in common with most middle-class progressives of the day, looked first to what could be done through private philanthropy and local or state laws that regulated housing conditions and workplace health and safety. With the depression lending urgency to their concern about their working-class neighbors, members of the Greenwich House circle launched new initiatives to deal with two problems associated

with urban-industrial life: urban “congestion” (i.e., overcrowding in tenement districts) as a source of disease, fires, and crime, and the dangerous and unhealthy conditions under which many industrial workers had to labor.

The problems attendant to urban overcrowding were creatively addressed through the work of the so-called Committee of Congestion, which sponsored a two-week-long conference and “Exhibit on Congestion of Population” that was held at the Museum of Natural History in March 1908. Although the Committee on Congestion was a blue-ribbon panel that drew its membership from the wider community of social workers and progressive reformers in the city, members of the Greenwich House circle played key roles in the project. Mary Simkhovitch was the committee’s chair and three other Greenwich residents—Benjamin Marsh, George Ford, and Carola Woerishoffer—took primary responsibility for planning and preparing the exhibit’s displays. The goal of the conference and exhibit, Simkhovitch explained, was to show the public “that overcrowding was responsible for many of the city’s ills,” including high infant mortality rates, rising numbers of tuberculosis cases, and, more generally, the appallingly low quality of the physical environment in tenement districts.³⁵

Simkhovitch acknowledged that the negative impact of overcrowding was most severe on the Lower East Side, but an awareness of similar conditions in Greenwich Village was never far from her mind. “Jones Street,” she noted, “was the most densely populated of the lower West Side streets,” consisting as it did of a single block with “fourteen hundred people, 975 to an acre.” Moreover, as recently as 1903, both the “infant death rate and tuberculosis death rate [in the Greenwich House neighborhood] were the highest in the city.” The appropriate response to these problems, according to Simkhovitch and other speakers at the Committee on Congestion’s conference, was to recognize the pernicious effects of urban overcrowding, and to go beyond tenement house laws (which dealt with individual buildings only) and create a city planning process to deal with broader issues of urban development.³⁶

Carola Woerishoffer’s role in the Committee on Congestion and other Greenwich House activities exemplified the dedication and idealism with which the settlement’s residents pursued their work. A Bryn Mawr graduate, class of 1907, Woerishoffer became a Greenwich House resident in 1908 and lived there for the next two years. She was the third in a line of dynamic, wealthy women in her family. Her grandmother, Anna Uhl, lost her first husband in 1852. Finding herself a widow with six children to support, she took control of the family’s business, the important German-language daily, *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, and edited the paper on her own until the late 1850s. In 1859 she remarried; her second husband was Oswald

Ottendorfer, a veteran of the German revolution of 1848, whom she had named her coeditor in 1858. Anna Uhl Ottendorfer's daughter (also Anna) married Charles Woerishoffer, a native of Germany who amassed a fortune as a Wall Street investor before his untimely death only a year after Carola was born. Both Carola's grandmother and mother were canny financial managers who subscribed to a social ethic that combined liberal politics (the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung* had been pro-Union and pro-emancipation during the Civil War) with generous charitable deeds. One of Anna Woerishoffer's philanthropic endeavors was support for Greenwich House, a cause she adopted several years before her daughter became a resident of the settlement.³⁷

At Greenwich House Carola Woerishoffer occupied a small upstairs room, and although she was very wealthy, she voluntarily adopted a life of poverty. It was not that she despised all wealth; she simply did not derive any pleasure from lavish surroundings, rich food, or personal luxuries. She was intelligent, athletic, and in the habit of holding others to the same high standards she demanded of herself, but she strenuously avoided publicity about her accomplishments. In an era when the leading newspapers and magazines avidly pursued stories about the foibles, excesses, and activities of rich and famous Americans, this was no small achievement, particularly since Woerishoffer was a representative of a phenomenon the public found endlessly fascinating, the "Revolt of the Young Rich" who chose social service careers over idle luxury.³⁸

Woerishoffer's preference for anonymity and her voluntary poverty served her well during the summer of 1909 when she undertook a study of conditions in the city's commercial steam laundries, a business that, like many other urban industries, relied heavily on the labor of women. For her survey Woerishoffer adopted the undercover investigatory style of the era's muckraking journalists. For four months she answered help-wanted advertisements from laundry companies, regularly changing jobs to be sure that she acquired a broad knowledge of diverse shops. No employer challenged the heiress's application, and only one coworker suspected she was something other than what she claimed to be, and that Woerishoffer did not belong in a steam laundry shop. More often, however, Woerishoffer was accepted as just another worker, and she freely participated in the ordinary chatter that her coworkers exchanged about their jobs and social life. (Conversations on the latter topic often ran along these lines: "Say, you got a feller?" "Sure. Ain't you got one?" "Sure.")³⁹

Woerishoffer followed a demanding daily schedule during her career as a laundry worker. She rose at six or earlier to play tennis on a court near Greenwich House, hurriedly ate a spartan breakfast, and rushed off to her

job. Her workday began at seven-thirty and continued for twelve to fourteen hours, with quitting time often not arriving until nine or ten o'clock in the evening. For sixty or seventy hours of labor each week laundry workers received as little as \$3 or as much as \$25, the great majority earning \$4.50 to \$8 (less than fifteen cents an hour). Standing for ten or twelve hours straight at machinery that had to be operated at a fast pace in order to keep one's job, women suffered from fatigue that greatly increased the danger of injury. Woerishoffer found that not even the most experienced workers escaped burns at the sleeve-ironing machines, and that unguarded or poorly shielded mechanisms of pressing machines took a constant toll of crushed fingers and arms. The better-paid work, such as hand starching, was done in extremely hot, humid rooms. Once after a long stint in a starching room, Woerishoffer stepped outside on a sweltering summer day and remarked how refreshingly cool the 96° outdoor temperature felt by contrast with the room she had just left.

Upon completing her research on New York's laundries, Woerishoffer became a special investigator for the New York Department of Labor. During a trip to inspect an immigrant labor camp in upstate New York in September 1911, she lost control of her car on a wet road; the car turned over, pinning her underneath. She died of her injuries the next day. She was twenty-six.

Woerishoffer's colleagues in reform circles had no doubt that they had lost a talented and resourceful ally. Her Bryn Mawr College classmates published a book-length memoir, *Carola Woerishoffer: Her Life and Work*, in 1912, and her mentor at Greenwich House, Mary Simkhovitch, wrote a stirring eulogy of Woerishoffer in the settlement's *Annual Report* for 1911. The tragedy of her death at such an early age doubtless intensified the feelings of loss expressed in these memorials, but the qualities attributed to Woerishoffer—"generous," "entirely fearless," "oblivious to conventional criticism," "a knight errant of industrial democracy"—had a larger import. For in lauding these qualities in their young friend, members of the Greenwich House circle were also affirming the ideals which they believed should motivate their ongoing work in the west Village.⁴⁰

CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES, 1907-1911

The women of the Greenwich House-A Club circle had male counterparts in the world of social reform, but the proportionate influence of women activists in Village life was greater in the first decades of the twentieth century than it had been at any previous time. Moreover, their contribution to the Village scene was more than just a matter of numbers, of more women

involving themselves in public affairs. Progressive Era women Villagers were both working for social change in the public world and redefining themselves in terms of individual standards of behavior instead of obedience to the socially imposed codes of conduct with which they had been brought up. Indeed, it was their pursuit of one or both of these goals—social or personal transformation—that had brought many of them to the Village in the first place.

For the better part of three years in 1907–1909, Madeleine Doty was engaged in a struggle to clarify what she needed to do in both her personal and professional life. Having graduated from N.Y.U. Law School in 1902 and worked both in a private law practice and as a book reviewer for the *New York Times*, Doty seemed to have achieved much for a young woman. Nevertheless she was, by her own description, immature, and she was caught in the crosscurrents between her desires and her ideals that were generated by her relationship with the writer David Graham Phillips.

Phillips wanted her to agree that “a secret [sexual] relation without marriage was right,” but Doty, passionately idealistic, could not bring herself to agree. “My conscience,” she wrote, “said that if it was real love our relationship should be open,” with “no lies, no sense of shame.” Unable to resolve this conflict, she fled to Europe with her friend Ida Rauh, who, it happened, was involved in a similar situation with a man who wanted a lover and not a wife. The two women returned to New York in February 1909, but Doty, now suffering from chronic indigestion brought on by emotional conflict, left the city almost immediately and sought refuge in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she lived in “a little rest house” owned by her alma mater, Smith College.⁴¹

In Northampton Doty took to her bed and, seeking to understand what was the matter with her, read four volumes of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* by Havelock Ellis, an English physician-psychologist who was a pioneer in the study of human sexuality, and *The Sexual Question* by Auguste Forel, a now largely forgotten writer who at the turn of the century was widely admired as an authority on relations between the sexes. “All the information I had dodged,” Doty wrote, “was there,” but “the knowledge gained didn’t help.” She “might read that colitis came from emotional disturbance, but that did not cure it.” The cure came when, on the advice of a friend, she went to see Dr. Richard Cabot, a Boston psychologist. He helped bring an end to the deep conflict between her convictions and her desires by urging her to do volunteer work for a Boston hospital with which he was associated. She soon found that “forgetting [her]self and working for others brought peace.”⁴²

As her health returned, Doty became convinced that social service rather than the law or marriage was her true vocation. Late in 1909 she went back

to New York and began to explore ways of becoming a legal advocate for juvenile delinquents, and plunged into doing pro bono work on behalf of working-class women who needed legal assistance. When she chanced one day to meet Phillips on the street, the encounter was entirely cordial. “He seemed very glad to see me,” Doty wrote. “I found I could meet him now on a wholly new basis. I had learned it was possible to live without him. I was free and able to stand on my own feet.” Their renewed friendship flourished, albeit without any romantic attachment, in the year and a half before Phillips was murdered by a deranged man in March 1911.⁴³

While Doty was in the process of discovering her vocation, Crystal Eastman’s career in progressive causes continued to flourish. In the fall of 1908, after a year spent completing her survey of industrial accidents in Pittsburgh, she returned to New York City to prepare a written report on her findings. She rented rooms on West Eleventh Street in the Village, sharing the flat with her brother Max and preparing several essays on employers’ liability for publication. In April 1909 she was named a member of the New York State Employers’ Liability Commission, the sole woman on the fourteen-member panel. The *New York Herald* featured an article on Eastman titled “Portia Appointed by the Governor” that praised her intelligence and dedication. By the fall of 1910 Eastman was hard at work drafting a state workers’ compensation law that, once passed, became a model for similar laws in other states. In the meantime she and Max had moved to another Village apartment, located at 118 Waverly Place. Vivacious and attractive, Eastman never lacked for male suitors, although it was not until late 1910 that she met a man who, in her brother’s words, “aroused Crystal for the first time physically.” This was Wallace Benedict, a Milwaukee businessman, whom she married in May 1911. They moved to Wisconsin, and Eastman, ever the irrepressible activist, became the leading organizer of a campaign (unsuccessful, as it turned out) for women’s suffrage in the state.⁴⁴

College-educated Village women played significant roles in the life of Crystal’s brother Max. Late in 1909 he had a brief flirtation with Inez Millholland, a Vassar graduate and soon to be N.Y.U. law student who was living with her wealthy parents at 9 East Ninth Street, in the patrician part of the Village. Despite being viewed by their friends as the perfect twosome—both handsome and well educated, and both interested in important political causes (women’s suffrage and working people’s rights)—they never quite clicked as a couple. However, less than a year after his failed romance with Millholland, Max was strolling through Washington Square and happened to bump into Ida Rauh, who invited him to tea at her nearby apartment. Ida, once the timid little rich girl, was now a confident young woman who not only knew more about both Marxism and love than Max did, but gladly undertook to tutor him on both subjects. They married in May 1911.⁴⁵

Between 1907 and 1909 the writer Mary Heaton Vorse had little time for reform activities. She was the family's main breadwinner, supporting her husband, Bert, two children, a nursemaid, and a secretary-stenographer. Although she was earning a good income from her articles and stories, keeping the money coming in required entrepreneurship. In 1909 she persuaded *Harper's Monthly* to hire her for a series on Morocco, and toward the end of October she left for North Africa by way of Europe. Late the following spring, in June 1910, she was en route back to New York when she received word that Bert and her mother had died only one day apart. After a summer of grieving at Provincetown, she returned to New York City in the fall, moving herself, her aged father, and her children into the apartment at 88 Grove Street, long a popular rental location among members of the Greenwich House circle. She hired a young woman named Rosina to cook for the household, "the first," as she wrote later, "of a line of those magnificent, efficient, noisy, good-tempered Italian girls who brightened [my] life for the next seven years, sending a cousin or sister to take a place left by marriage."⁴⁶

Even as Vorse devoted herself to personal concerns, like many of her friends in the A Club–Greenwich House circle she became caught up in events related to the shirtwaist strike of 1909–1910, a massive labor conflict that further exposed the underside of urban industrialization. Harsh working conditions—six-day workweeks of up to sixty or seventy hours, low wages, and oppressive rules—deeply angered many garment workers, most of whom were young Jewish and Italian immigrant women (fig. 24). Resentment over these conditions had simmered during the depression of 1907–1908, and when better economic times returned, worker militancy increased. In late 1908 and during the summer of 1909 walkouts occurred at several major firms, among them the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, which occupied the top three floors of the Asch Building, a ten-story structure located on Washington Place one block east of Washington Square. (Completed in January 1901, the Asch building was precisely the type of tall commercial building whose construction close to the square so troubled the north Village patricians.)

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company epitomized many negative features of the urban-industrial world that prompted middle-class sympathizers and striking garment workers to form an alliance in defense of the workers' interests. The company's owners were notorious for their tough labor policies: low wages, long hours, and annoying rules, which included a prohibition on speaking to one's neighbor at the workbench and a penalty of being sent home and losing a half day's pay for taking more time for a toilet break than the floor supervisor felt was necessary.⁴⁷

As the worker demonstrations against the company continued into the



24. A shop floor in a New York garment factory. UNITE Archives, Kheel Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

fall, Triangle's owners struck back aggressively. Pickets were verbally and physically harassed by hired thugs and the police, and dozens of strikers were arrested. To add insult to the injury of incarceration and fines, the arrested women were taken to Jefferson Market Courthouse at Sixth Avenue and West Tenth and tried in Night Court, a tactic meant to intimidate strikers through association with the prostitutes whose cases usually filled that court's dockets. "No nice girls go there," one arrested shirtwaist maker asserted.⁴⁸

The tactic did not succeed. On the contrary: not only were the striking women's spirits not broken, but other shirtwaist makers rallied to the cause. On November 22, 1909, a mass meeting of shirtwaist makers at Cooper Union led to a strike pledge that was accepted by more than twenty thousand workers. Faced with a revolt of this magnitude, many employers quickly accepted their operatives' three general demands: a fifty-two-hour workweek, five paid vacation days annually, and union recognition. (Wage hikes, if any, were to be set on a shop-by-shop basis.) By early December, approximately one-third of the companies had settled with their employees.

The strike action continued into February 1910, although with gradually declining strength as more companies agreed to terms and the strikers who continued to hold out over the union shop issue lost public support. Some employers—notably the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company—refused to make any concessions to the union's demands.⁴⁹

Especially in the early phase of the walkout, shirtwaist makers benefited from having the support of a broad coalition that included settlement folk, social activists, women's suffrage advocates, and a few male unionists. The most sustained backing for the strikers from outside their own ranks came from the Women's Trade Union League of New York (NYWTUL). This cross-class organization, its membership composed of a few working-class women and a much larger number of their college-educated allies, undertook a wide range of activities in support of the strike.⁵⁰

Members of the Greenwich House circle participated in or led many of the NYWTUL's major initiatives. When five to ten thousand strikers marched on City Hall on December 2, 1909, to demand that Mayor George McClellan order police to stop the arrests and mistreatment of picketing operatives, Ida Rauh was one of the NYWTUL leaders selected for a delegation of six women who met with the mayor (fig. 25). Rauh also offered

25. A delegation of three shirtwaist workers and three middle-class allies leading a march on the mayor to demand an end to police brutality against striking garment workers. From *New York World*, December 4, 1909.

**GIRL STRIKERS IN PROTEST PARADE;
ARE PROMISED JUSTICE BY MAYOR.**



free legal assistance to pickets who were arrested, as did Madeleine Doty and Crystal Eastman. Carola Woerishoffer organized a NYWTUL news bureau that disseminated information about the strikers' grievances and goals.⁵¹

These activities often had places or events in the Village as their primary context. For example, Crystal Eastman and Inez Milholland attended Night Court sessions at Jefferson Market Courthouse to issue reports on the generally harsh penalties handed down in cases involving strikers. When one judge sought to punish detainees by refusing to release them unless they could provide large amounts of bail secured by real property, Carola Woerishoffer stunned the court by producing a deed to property valued at \$75,000, after which the women were freed. Past and present women A Clubbers—including Mary Heaton Vorse, Martha Bruère, Miriam Finn Scott, and Bertha Weyl—joined the strikers' picket lines outside the Triangle Shirtwaist Company's factory. The latter tactic proved highly effective in reducing the number of arrests of picketing Triangle operatives, since incidents involving middle- or upper-class women typically resulted in bad publicity for the police.⁵²

By taking their protest into the streets, shirtwaist makers and their college-educated allies opened themselves to hostile interpretations of their conduct. As indicated by the response of many male authority figures (factory owners, policemen, and judges), their defiance of Victorian rules of respectable womanly conduct led to charges that they were behaving indecently. Yet reform-minded women were not deterred. It was a time of growing militancy not only for women garment workers on strike, but also for middle- and upper-class suffrage advocates (a term applicable to all the Greenwich House circle women who were aiding the striking shirtwaist workers). Inspired by the direct-action tactics of their British counterparts, New York suffragists from 1907 onward abandoned their former dependence on such genteel methods as petition-writing and formal addresses given in auditoriums and increasingly took to the streets, giving street-corner speeches and launching pro-suffrage marches on the city's major thoroughfares.⁵³

The new style of protest caught on with astonishing swiftness. The city's first suffrage parade in February 1908 drew only a few dozen marchers, but in May 1910 (not long after the shirtwaist strike had been settled), more than a thousand women—many of whom, the *New York Times* reported, "had never taken part in anything of the kind before"—joined that year's parade. Three years later, in May 1913, an estimated ten thousand women's suffrage advocates assembled in Washington Square and then marched eight abreast up Fifth Avenue in support of their cause.⁵⁴

Along with direct-action protests, a distinguishing trait of the shirtwaist strike had been the cross-class alliance forged between Village NYWTUL members and working-class women. That sisterhood across class lines had become the order of the day during the strike was acknowledged even by the none-too-friendly *New York Times*, which observed that “a sort of ‘you-a-girl-and-me-a-girl’ spirit” prevailed between women on the picket lines. “For once,” the *Times* reporter continued, “the factory girl and the college girl are making a fight together.” It was a high-water mark of cooperation among women that was rarely matched until what came to be called second-wave feminism emerged in the late 1960s.⁵⁵

Second-wave feminist scholars have made important contributions to the reconstruction of the full picture of the campaigns their early twentieth-century predecessors waged. Close scrutiny revealed that the earlier efforts at cross-class and cross-ethnic cooperation had been beset by significant problems. Middle-class NYWTUL allies sometimes found it difficult to bridge differences in language and culture between themselves and Jewish and Italian immigrant women workers. The political agenda of many middle-class allies led them to give a high priority to the goal of women’s suffrage, and this was seen by working-class women as a betrayal of their basic economic concerns. Despite the best intentions of the participants, Progressive Era cross-class coalitions were fragile and temporary, strained by reservations and misunderstandings between the two allied camps.⁵⁶

No description of the accomplishments of the middle-class women progressives who became members of the Women’s Trade Union League of New York can be considered complete if it fails to note the class and ethnic tensions that limited the NYWTUL’s effectiveness. Nevertheless, it is equally true that the combined efforts of the NYWTUL’s leaders and rank and file accomplished something truly remarkable. Coming together under the NYWTUL banner, women from various classes and ethnic backgrounds joined hands, however awkwardly and briefly, to fight effectively for a common cause in the factories, streets, and courtrooms of New York City.

There was a sequel to the great shirtwaist strike of 1909–1910. This was the tragic fire at Triangle Shirtwaist Company in 1911, an event that more than any other during the pre–World War I period produced cooperation among representatives of nearly every major group in Greenwich Village.

Just as the World War II generation of Americans never forgot precisely when and how they first learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, residents of the Village who were in the neighborhood the afternoon of March 25, 1911, always retained vivid memories of the fire at Triangle Shirtwaist Company. Mary Heaton Vorse got her first inkling that some-

thing was amiss while trying to phone an A Club friend, Bertha Carter, whom she expected to find at the apartment of a mutual acquaintance, Frances Perkins. But the telephone connection was haywire. All Vorse could hear was women's voices screaming, "They're burning! They're jumping out of the windows!" Alarmed, Vorse telephoned the local police station and learned that a huge fire was raging at a factory building near Washington Square. Not knowing what to expect but fearing the worst, she left her Grove Street flat and hurried toward the square, three blocks away.⁵⁷

By the time Vorse reached Washington Square, Frances Perkins was already there. Perkins, a former resident of Greenwich House and now secretary of the Consumers' League (which had sponsored Woerishoffer's steam laundry investigation), had been at her Waverly Place apartment when she heard the sound of fire engines passing nearby and went outside to see what was going on. Drawn by crowd noise to Washington Square, she could see that the top three floors (the eighth, ninth, and tenth) of the Asch Building were ablaze. Having arrived just as the first of many workers began leaping from the upper stories, Perkins was stunned. "I shall never forget," she said later, "the frozen horror which came over us as we stood with our hands on our throats watching that horrible sight." The crowd, constantly augmented as workers from neighboring factories reached the square during the usual rush at Saturday afternoon quitting time, now numbered in the thousands.⁵⁸

Another A Clubber, Martha Bruère, was walking down Fifth Avenue toward Washington Square. Ahead she could see what she described as "a great swirling, billowing cloud of smoke that swept like a giant streamer out of Washington Square and down upon the beautiful homes in lower Fifth Avenue." Two young working-class women she knew rushed up to her. "Tears were running from their eyes," Bruère recalled, "and they were white and shaking as they caught me by the arm. 'Oh,' shrieked one of them, 'they are jumping. Jumping from ten stories up! They are going through the air like bundles of clothes and the firemen can't stop them and the policemen can't stop them and nobody can't help them at all.'"⁵⁹

This was the grim truth. Unable to escape the building's upper floors because fire escapes were lacking, elevators stalled, and stairwell exits either locked or jammed, desperate Triangle employees were leaping out of windows. Firemen tried to catch them in nets, but the plummeting bodies broke through the fabric and smashed on the sidewalk (fig. 26). The fire and smoke, the thump of bodies landing, and the screams of the crowd created pandemonium. Even the stolid fire truck horses, accustomed to flames, smoke, and general disorder, became alarmed and, wild-eyed, moved nervously in their harnesses.

Ernest Poole, another A Club veteran, was at work in his apartment on West Eleventh, a quarter of a mile away. He heard a horse ambulance com-

ing at a gallop to the entrance of St. Vincent's Hospital just down the block. Then another ambulance approached, its gong sounding; then another. Finally, all sorts of vehicles, cabs, carriages, and automobiles, converged on the hospital entrance. Puzzled, Poole went outside and found that a crowd of onlookers had gathered. It took a few moments for him to grasp what was happening. He saw a taxi pull up and disgorge a man carrying "a huge bundle." Only when Poole saw "a head and a shock of hair" protruding from the bundle did he realize that it was a person; not until later did he learn that the taxi had been carrying a Triangle fire victim.⁶⁰

The death toll eventually reached 146, most of them young Jewish or Italian women. Grief and anger were expressed in all parts of the city but felt with particular intensity on the Lower East Side and in the Village, the districts from which most of the dead and injured came.

The tragedy prompted an outpouring of sympathy and support from individuals and organizations representing every class and ethnic group. Much of the assistance offered to Triangle victims and their families came from traditional philanthropic sources. In the Village, for instance, Robert de Forest, the president of the Charity Organization Society and head of the New York chapter of the American Red Cross, lived two blocks from the site of the disaster. Immediately after the fire, de Forest called on Mayor William Gaynor and urged him to issue a public appeal for contributions to aid fire victims. Subsequently, de Forest assigned many C.O.S. employees to help with the relief effort. The Red Cross drive, led mainly by wealthy New Yorkers like de Forest, directly aided more than a hundred working-class families.

Members of the Women's Trade Union League of New York also swiftly rallied to the cause. NYWTUL members helped to locate affected families and evaluate their needs. Settlement workers from Greenwich House provided information on Italian families that had lost loved ones. Carola Woerishoffer, though she no longer lived at Greenwich House, had retained close ties with the settlement and the NYWTUL, and she took time from her busy schedule as a factory inspector for the state Department of Labor to visit many of the families of victims who had lived in the Village.

Most of the dead were Jewish women from the Lower East Side, but at least eighteen were Italian Villagers and members of Father Antonio Demo's Our Lady of Pompei Church. The roll call of the deceased was grim testimony to the youth of many fire victims: Rosie Grasso and Gaitana Midolo, both age sixteen; Isabella Tortorella, age seventeen; two sisters, Bettina and Francesca Maiale, aged eighteen and twenty-one; Amelia Prato, age twenty-one; Mrs. May Levantine, age twenty-eight, the sole support of a young daughter; and so the list went on and on.⁶¹

During the months after the fire, priests at Our Lady of Pompei said

masses almost daily for deceased individuals at the request of their families. The major commemorative occasion, however, was a solemn high requiem Mass held at the church on Sunday, April 26, 1911. The *New York Times* reported that the church itself was “completely filled and several hundred persons remained at the doors.” The wails of bereaved relatives and friends were frequently audible throughout the service, and at one point during the sermon the sobbing became so loud that the priest had to pause until the noise subsided. In a gesture that acknowledged that the tragedy was not simply a private matter for grieving within the Italian community but an event that touched a wider public, Father Demo agreed to let NYWTUL members distribute leaflets to mourners at the church. According to the *Times*, these fliers, printed in three languages (English, Italian, and Yiddish), urged all present to support “a plan to compel the enforcement of proper protective laws” for workers in the city’s factories (fig. 27).⁶²

Cooperation among Villagers across class and ethnic lines continued for some time in the wake of the Triangle fire. In June 1911 the state legislature voted to establish a New York Factory Investigating Commission, and

26. Police and the bodies of Triangle workers who died when they tried to escape the fire by jumping from the building’s upper floors. Tamiment Institute Library, New York University.



MOURNING THOUSANDS MARCH IN SILENCE THROUGH RAIN-DRENCHED STREETS.

The procession starting up Fifth avenue, both sides of the street crowded with spectators.



WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

Hundreds of thousands of persons stood in the rain or otherwise saw 40,000 men and women workers march through the main

27. The mass funeral procession for the victims of the Triangle fire passes through Washington Arch. From *New York Tribune*, April 6, 1911.

Frances Perkins, a member of the Greenwich House circle, was named the commission's secretary. Responsible for most of the commission's day-to-day operations, Perkins presented its proposals for reform laws to the legislature.

Perkins's efforts received a big boost from having the backing of key Democratic legislators who represented districts in Lower Manhattan. In the past Tammany had played a clever double game, courting working-class

voters with promises of jobs and at the same time seeking support from business interests by pledging to oppose laws that regulated the hours and conditions of industrial work. Now, however, Tammany's leadership, fearful of losing the allegiance of Jewish and Italian workers, advocated regulatory reform. In 1912, the Lower East Side's reigning Democratic boss, state senator Big Tim Sullivan, used his considerable influence to secure passage of a bill to limit the workweek of most New York women factory workers to fifty-four hours. Shortly thereafter Sullivan fell ill, and two younger Democrats from Lower East Side districts, Assemblyman Al Smith and Senator Robert Wagner, both of whom were members of the Factory Investigating Commission, took up the campaign for socially progressive laws where Sullivan had left off. Jimmy Walker, another loyal Democrat who since 1909 had represented the west Village in the state assembly, followed Smith's lead and voted for the pro-labor legislation promoted by Tammany's reform wing.⁶³

Backed by a broad coalition of middle-class reformers and Tammany Democrats, more than fifty new regulatory measures passed into law from 1912 to 1915. Like the Tenement House Act of 1901, which had not ended the city's housing woes, the so-called Triangle Fire Laws of 1912–1915 did not eliminate every workplace health and safety problem of the time. But the enactment of the new regulations did reflect an important development in American reform, the increased readiness of New York's social progressives to lobby local and state governments for laws that would aid the city's workers.

Although public outrage over the Triangle fire tragedy provided the immediate impetus for this flurry of legislative activity, the groundwork had been laid earlier by reform-minded Villagers and their working-class allies. The numerous surveys of industrial conditions by members of the Greenwich House circle—Carola Woerishoffer on steam laundries, Crystal Eastman on industrial accidents, and Louise Bolard More on wage-earners' budgets—helped shape the climate of opinion in which the Triangle Fire Laws were passed. By documenting the underside of urban industrial life, these studies revealed to all who were open-minded enough to see it that the ready availability of inexpensive consumer goods, taken by many to be a hallmark of the era's vaunted material progress, had been achieved at great cost to the workers who produced those goods.⁶⁴