

## In Search of Neighborhood: South End House and its Legacy for Sociology and Social Work

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### Abstract

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Using both primary and secondary sources, this historiography presents the little known history of the South End settlement house in Boston in order to establish its legitimacy in the development of both sociology and social work. Using specific examples from the settlement records, we show some of the contributions and consequences of the work of the South End House in shaping both disciplines in ways still visible today. We also probe substantive contributions that can be of use today as we continue the journey of studying, analyzing, and understanding social problems in order to ameliorate or solve them. The history narrative is told largely through the work of the South End House founder, Robert Woods, his work as sociologist and social worker as well as his associates, influences, and motivations.

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**Keywords:** South End House, settlement houses, Robert A Woods, progressive era, history of sociology, history of social work

### 1. Introduction

Some study history because it is there while others study it because it holds lessons for the present and, perhaps more than anything else, because history shapes our identity, no less true for professions than for individuals and groups. To study history also carries with it the realization that there is rarely one history but multiple and diverse threads which woven together help us to know who we are, where we have been, and where we can go. It is in quest of lessons from the past that this work explores some little known strands of the histories of sociology and social work and their importance for the professions we know today.

In 1892, in Boston, a remarkable experiment in sociology and social practice was launched in the city's South End. A settlement house—patterned after London's Toynbee Hall—was begun under the name of Andover House. It was the sixth settlement in the United States and the first in the city of Boston. Its stated objectives: to be a center of learning for students; to be a good neighbor to the people, to churches and other organizations in the neighborhood; to serve as “a medium between different social elements of the city” and “to advance in general the cause of Social Christianity” (SEHR, Articles of Association, Circular No. 3, Reports: Folder 53). The founder and head resident was young Robert Woods (1865-1924), recently returned from an internship at Toynbee Hall. The settlement was first named for the seminary from which Woods was graduated and the Andover Association provided initial support and direction in the person of Dr. William Tucker, Woods' mentor and influential professor of the “new science” of sociology. For Tucker and Woods, the settlement was a form of Christian pragmatism and the best manifestation and use of the Christian personality (Carson 1990, p. 56). According to Tucker, an integral part of Christian pragmatism was “social investigation” and while the settlement's motive was religious, its method was to be education: “needed by no one class of people, but [as] a requirement for the direction of the social consciousness of every condition of society. . . .” (E. A. Woods, 1929, p.46). Andover House was renamed South End House (SEH) in 1895 to divest it of any perceived religious affiliation and today, as with other settlements, SEH has become a community services center, still in its old neighborhood but confined to one building and part of a consortium of United South End Settlements ([uses.org](https://uses.org)). The South End House history, however, is one worthy of telling, not only because it inspires and informs but also because it offers relevance for those who identify as sociologists or social workers and who honor the essence of both.

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With this work we seek to bring into the chronicles of two disciplines the legacy of South End House, an institution well known in the history of the settlement movement in the United States but neglected, even unknown, to the sociological and practice histories of which it was so integral a part. As Stackpole said,

“South End House was, perhaps more than any other settlement a sociological laboratory and ‘intellectualized’ its religious motives into sociological research” of the kind always useful for the neighborhood (1961, p.31).

At different times in his life and career, Woods identified and was identified by others as both a sociologist and a social worker. His archived papers contain two newspaper obituaries, the headlines of which are telling. One is captioned, “R.A. Woods, Social Worker, Dies Suddenly.” The other reads, “Robert A. Woods, Noted Sociologist Dies” (SEHR no date: F 82). As examination of Woods’ life and work indicates, he apparently followed the trajectory of many of his contemporaries who first identified as sociologists and subsequently as social workers as the discipline of sociology moved toward scientism and social work toward case work and group practice. Somewhat apart from his peers in both disciplines, Woods consistently stood for a community social work informed by sociology

Both primary and secondary data are used in this historiography. The founder and residents of SEH were prodigious researchers and writers and many of their works were published in books or professional journals prior to the first World War. Their published works are supplemented by two archival collections assembled by Woods’ wife after her husband’s death (SEHR and USESR) at the relatively young age of 59. Eleanor Bush Woods, member of the now famous Bush political family, also authored a biography of her husband (1929), and there are several comprehensive secondary works examining the history of the settlement movement in the United States that give substantial coverage of SEH as a part of the broader settlement movement (see for example Davis, 1984; Carson, 1990; Williams & MacLean, 2015). In addition, Shoemaker’s (1996) comprehensive analysis of the genderfication of social work in Boston gives some attention to Robert Woods’ role in this process.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1 The Settlement and its Neighbors

It was once described as a “University for the Overlooked” (Brooks, 1925, p.732), and Boston’s South End as an area “good citizens literally or figuratively hurried by. . . and strove to forget” (Woods, 1929, p.354). Robert Woods spent more than three decades as head resident of SEH and over the years the settlement became synonymous with his name and was very much the product of his training, preparation, and formative influences directly related to the social gospel<sup>3</sup> and to Toynbee Hall which had prepared him for his Boston work. He described the South End as a community of some “40,000 souls.” Woods (as yet unmarried) and three other young men took up residence at 6 Rollins Street in 1892. Unlike other settlements located in the very heart of slums, Andover House was located on a “quiet byway” but not far from one of Boston’s most “troubled centers” described later by his wife as,

“A vicious circle of tuberculosis and drunkenness centered in miserable houses built of wood, and undermined the health and integrity of the young. There was scarcely any recreational resource. The multiple assortment of drinking-places, the sordidness of the lower section of the district extending out to desolate unbuild flats along the harbor, gave to the task of ‘scientific charity’ a hopeless setting, with no hand held out to do more than the day’s work in relieving acute need” (Woods, 1929, p.146).

The settlement house, “a swell-front red brick” of “mid-nineteenth century respectability” was at a crossroad location because of nearby Dover and Washington Streets, “Mecca of drifting fragmentary humanity.” The area was a strategic hub of transportation for people from the commercial and industrial quarters of the city; a residential area for industrial workers; home of bars, cheap eating places, and entertainment of questionable reputation; home to large immigrant populations (mostly Irish or Jewish) and most of the city’s lodging-house and tenement residents. Woods and fellow residents worked in a milieu literally created by the expanding forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration—forces which shaped their lives and those of their neighbors.

The settlement occupied just one building until 1895 when a Club and Class Center was added. There were no female residents until 1900 when the first Women’s Residence was opened, then a second in 1906. For several years South End House also maintained buildings that housed work among the black population.

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<sup>3</sup> The social gospel was the nonsectarian Christian belief that God’s Kingdom would eventually be established here on earth and thus Christians should work to make the world worthy of that happening. For fuller explanation, see for example, Williams and MacLean (2012).

In 1908 these activities were spun off to become the independent Robert Gould Shaw House (Woods and Kennedy, 1911/ 1970, p.128). At the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South End House, Eleanor Woods reported that the settlement occupied ten city lots in six Boston locations and four summer vacation residents for children.

Such expansion and decentralization was part of her husband's pragmatic belief that "flexible manifold adaptation" was required of settlements (Woods, 1929, p.299). In time, there were as many as 30 persons in residence at South End House. Woods was careful and methodical in the selection of residents, aiming for diverse interests while resisting specific assignments. His early correspondence with Board Chair, William Tucker reported that residents were allowed "all the scope they could wish" and that each man was to "manage his own work from the beginning" (SEHR no date, letter from RA Woods to William Tucker, Series 1, F18). While encouraging residents to follow their own interests, whether in doing social investigation or initiating youth activities, Woods held them accountable as "trustees of the house" with reminders that they were engaged in "a social experiment of vast importance" and it was "essential not to jeopardize it by taking.. .extreme positions" thereby weakening "the emphasis on the main undertaking" (Woods, 1929, p.224). Research conducted by residents is evidence that they did follow their own interests, studying diverse problems in the neighborhood and beyond. The "main undertaking" for Woods, however, was always neighborhood study, diagnosis, and treatment—with treatment being not only remedial but including evaluation of results as experienced by the neighbors.

### 3. Woods the Sociologist

Woods was the first among settlement pioneers to formalize the concept of the settlement as a laboratory for sociological study of neighborhoods and communities for purposes of social reform and the alleviation of social problems. From the founding of SEH, significant studies were carried out by the residents. Fellowships subsidized by various colleges, universities, and seminaries were at the heart of sociological work as reflected in their threefold purpose: (1) to investigate the "concrete conditions with which social service has to deal," (2) to provide "genuine laboratory experience and training to men and women interested in the human sciences under the combined direction of college and settlement," and (3) to send out into the community men and women who "wish to have a solid working acquaintance with city conditions" (SEH Fellowships 1900-1923, SEHR, F57). It is noticeable that Woods included both males and females in this statement of purpose although statistics on holders of fellowships indicate that they benefitted more males than females because the schools providing the majority of fellowships were male institutions. In a report on fellowships from 1900 to 1923, 13 were from Harvard, 13 from Amherst, and three from other schools. The only female recipients named were from women's colleges: Radcliffe and Smith. Residents at SEH were described by Woods as "sharing in all the interests and activities of the settlement" but devoting themselves "particularly to a piece of first-hand investigation." It is clear from the records that each study had a practical or applied goal as reflected in the following examples.

"Data collected by the Dartmouth Fellow in 1902 concerning occupations entered by boys and girls as they left school contributed to the passage of a law by which the licensing of newsboys and bootblacks was transferred from the Board of Alderman into the more responsible hands of the School Board. "The Lodging House Problem in Boston," by Albert B. Wolfe, a Harvard fellow 1902-3, was the chief influence in preparing the way for. . . improving the lodging house situation. . . ." (SEHR, Fellowships)

In 1893, speaking before the International Congress of Charities, Corrections and Philanthropy, Woods defined the settlement as a group of experts "living intimately together constantly stirring each other to fresh interest by the result of new information and discovery" (p.43). He postulated that residents would become "experts" by their "study and experiment" in the community with its microcosm of social problems. Contextually it is apparent that Woods' use of the term experiment was synonymous with application of sociological research to ameliorate neighborhood problems and to work toward what he often referred to as "social reconstruction." Such experimentation, he believed, would produce positive results and offer pathways to more effective application. Settlement residents were tasked with making "a careful estimate of the objective social value of that particular effort" while learning from existing methods and experimenting "after a wiser and more effective way of gaining the result." In this same address, Woods introduced the unique methodology of the settlement and the concept of the settlement as a sociological laboratory.

Woods differentiated the settlement resident scientists from the charity "visitors" of the day and described a methodology for community study that we know currently as participant observation, "that of acquaintance and friendship" where the gathering of data was the result of reciprocity between worker and neighbors, "persons from separated sections of society" but who by their interactions will each "grow by admiring and seeking the better qualities that exist in the other" (Woods, 1893/1970, p.30). Woods saw the "great end of social science" as enabling persons "in different circumstances of life with different training and different feeling to put themselves in each other's place" or as we say today, assume the role of the other (1893/1970, pp.38-39).

For Woods, the first responsibility of a worker in the sociological laboratory was to know the community in its entirety: economics, demographics, physical structures, institutions, cultures, families, nationalities, language, religion, and even gossip—what people talked about, what they were interested in beyond day-to-day survival.

The 1893 address was Woods' definitive statement on the role of sociology in the work of settlement houses as well as a programmatic plan for that work. Although lacking in comparable recognition, the speech is similar to Robert Park's much later canonical essay on the city (1915), an essay that two revisions later was titled "The City as a Social Laboratory" (1925, 1929). Woods' earlier work on the neighborhood in social reconstruction was quoted in the first two essays but not the final version where Park collectively referenced settlement workers such as Woods and Jane Addams of Hull House as "pioneer students of urban sociology" (1929, pp. 5-6). Both Woods and Park laid out a plan for research but differed in methodology, scope, and purpose. Woods' essay makes unmistakable the purpose of settlement research: investigating social facts and using those facts to take action to alleviate problems in the community and, further, to evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken and follow up with additional investigation as needed. Woods was also clear that the neighborhood, or the smallest unit of analysis was to be the focus of study, not only because it was research manageable but because the neighborhood affects the whole contemporary social process (1914, p. 577). At times, Woods treated the neighborhood as a "manageable community unit" (1914, p. 579) while at other times he used community and neighborhood interchangeably as comparable units comprised of relationships. He was clear, however, in distinguishing neighborhood/community and city, "The neighborhood is concretely conceivable; the city is not, and will not be except as it is organically integrated through its neighborhoods" (1914, p. 579). Park, on the other hand, laid out a value-neutral plan of scientific study of the city with all its size and diversity because it "tends to spread out and lay bare to the public view. . . all the characters and traits which are ordinarily obscured and suppressed in smaller communities" (1915, p. 612). Unlike Woods, Park did not see a role for sociologists in social reform and, in fact, dismissed social reform as having become "a kind of popular 'indoor sport'" (1915, p. 598).

### 3.1 Local Sociological Study

As Head Resident, Woods laid out a sociological research agenda for himself and fellow residents. It consisted of two phases: a local and a national. The local studies were to focus on those areas of Boston near the settlement as explained in his fourth annual report.

"... a comprehensive social analysis of the lower half of the South End. . . .The study will include such topics as history, population, and economic condition of the district; the housing of the people; their relation as consumers, with the small shop, the installment store, the cheap restaurant, the saloon, the pawnshop; popular amusements; crime and criminals; local organizations, political, economic, recreative; charitable, educational, philanthropy, and religious activities. . . . A final essay will point out the total drift of things in the district, showing what its special needs are, and what practical steps can be taken to meet them" (USES 1896, Box 2).

The culmination of the first phase of the local work was publication of *The City Wilderness* (1898) that followed by three years *Hull House Maps and Papers* (1895), no doubt inspired by it, and both modeled after Charles Booth's work in London (1892). *Wilderness* is comprised of a Preface and twelve chapters along with maps and charts and other illustrative, largely demographic and descriptive facts. Data for some of the maps were collected by residents while other were compiled using secondary data from Tenement House and Census reports. The authors were all males as there were as yet no female residents and, with one exception, all were SEH residents at the time of writing. Woods is identified as the author of the Preface and of the two final chapters. He also wrote but did not claim authorship of chapters on politics and education which appeared with an explanation that the "writer withholds his name out of consideration for certain interests that involve outside persons" (1898/1970, p. v). In fact, the interests were those of the settlement as Woods was increasingly involved in civic affairs and did not want to be rendered ineffective because of his critique of local politics (politicians) and education. His authorship of these chapters was later confirmed by his wife (1929, p.169).

The chapter on politics described local caucuses as the control center of the city's political machine, documenting the relationship between boys' gangs and machine politics much as W. F. Whyte did decades later in what became a sociological classic, *Street Corner Society* (1943). Political bosses rewarded young men while exploiting them for their own purposes, for example, using their supply of "votes" gathered from deceased persons or non-voters. Woods used facts gathered for this chapter in leading efforts to reform Boston's election process. The chapter on education was no doubt controversial because Woods assigned to schools much of the responsibility for assimilation of first and second generation immigrant children, a task at which he saw them failing (1898/1970, p. 233). He also advocated for night schools and adult education and, on the broadest level, put the onus of justice, even the realization of the democratic ideal, directly on the schools (1898/1970, p. 243).

*City Wilderness* drew on the neighborhood as a social laboratory and was meant to form the basis of programmatic work at South End House and to provide compelling evidence for broader policy reforms at the city and state levels some of which are laid out in the final chapter. *City Wilderness* was followed by a similar work on Boston's North and West ends, *Americans in Process* (1902). These two works covered the areas of Boston containing the largest immigrant populations and provided data needed for the reconstructive work of the settlement. To complete the local research, Woods anticipated a third volume describing what we would today label as "ethnic succession" and "urban flight" in the lives of Boston's working classes.

"Having finished the investigation of the North End, the West End, and the lower part of the South End, the residents now look forward to some studies of the outlying working-class districts, Charlestown, East Boston, South Boston, and lower Roxbury. This belt of districts, while it includes real poverty, yet on the whole represents the more enterprising working people who have established their homes beyond the area of the greatest congestion. Several years will probably be taken for these new investigations. As the result of them will come the third volume in the series of which *The City Wilderness* and *Americans in Process* are volumes one and two" (USESR 1901, Box 2).

This third volume of the South End House series as initially planned by Woods was incomplete at the time of his death and was apparently abandoned by Albert Kennedy who, as Woods' associate, coauthor, and SEH successor, would have been expected to complete the project. The work portends Ernest Burgess' concentric zone theory (1925/1967, pp. 47-62) and was published much later, after a chance discovery of the incomplete manuscript, as *The Zone of Emergence* (1969). At the same time this systematic research program was underway locally other social investigations were conducted (some published) by individual residents and by Woods and Kennedy. Residents conducted studies on the lodging house population, the "tramp problem," public baths, women wage-earners, tenement housing, saloons, factory workers, Negroes in Boston, churches, recreational facilities for adolescents, family budgets, tuberculosis and other health problems. Resident Alvan Sanborn did an exhaustive participant observation study (one of the earliest of this kind) of "cheap" lodging and the life that went with it in Boston's South End, later published as *Moody's Lodging House and Other Tenement Sketches* (1895). Another early empirical work on lodging houses was conducted by resident Albert Wolfe and published as *The Lodging House Problem in Boston* (1906). Some of the South End House studies were disseminated as internal reports or as pamphlets for the city and for social service agencies (Woods and Kennedy, 1911/1970, pp.128-130). Some books written by residents were published by major presses of the day and other works in periodicals such as *Current Affairs*, *Charities and the Commons*, *The Independent*, and the *South End House Bulletin*. The subsequent use made of extensive research on lodging or boarding houses is a good example of the settlement's application of their data. South End lodging later became the special project of Eleanor Woods and resulted in several publications including a Boarding House Registry listing all houses in the area that met standards and their current vacancies. A South End House resident, sometimes Eleanor Woods, made regular visits to each house to insure that they met "moral standards" as well as those of sanitation, privacy, and space (Woods, 1929, p.184). Boarding houses participated in this registry because it gave them a stamp of approval and also brought them "preferred lodgers."

### 3.2 The National Scene

This final phase of Woods' sociological work reflects a more national and international perspective, no doubt because of his leadership in the settlement movement and the impact of the war. Two works were coauthored with Albert Kennedy and undertaken for the National Federation of Settlements with much of the cost underwritten by the Russell Sage Foundation. This exhaustive research produced an annotated catalog of all settlements in the United States, organized by states and cities within states, as of approximately 1910. The sheer volume of data collection required to produce *The Handbook of Settlements* (1911) no doubt explains the gap between Woods previous book in 1902 and this one. *The Handbook* "presents an outline of the material facts about every settlement in the United States, including non-residential neighborhood centers." Woods and Kennedy reported having visited "the large majority of the houses" and read all of their publications (1911/1970, p. v). The quantity and quality of information is uneven, depending on availability; however, some information is presented on 413 settlements. As might be expected, the most complete data came from the largest and oldest settlements: history; mission; founding; sponsorship; address (or addresses); name changes; neighborhoods served; head residents, and number of male and female residents and volunteers; activities; social investigations (with some reports and publications named) as well as social services, clubs, and organizations. Apparently Kennedy did much of the data collection and Woods the organization and final writing. *The Handbook* was an invaluable resource for social workers and settlement workers of the day and, because it was reprinted and reissued in 1970, remains a resource for researchers.

It was conceived not only as a reference tool but also as a symbol of strength and unity for the National Federation of Settlements of which Woods and Kennedy served as joint secretaries from 1911 to 1923 (Trolander, 1990, p.xii).

In quick succession, and shortly before his death, Woods produced two final books. *The Settlement Horizon* (1922) was co-authored with Kennedy and Woods' final book, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building* (1923), marked his 30 years at South End House. *The Settlement Horizon* is the companion volume to the *Handbook* and most of the content was no doubt a part of the data collected for the first volume, the latter, according to Eleanor Woods, intended as an amplification of it (1929, p. 356). She reported that publication was delayed because of the war and because of a trip she and Woods took around the world in 1919 and 1920. Whereas, *The Handbook* was a compendium of vital statistics on settlements in the United States, *Horizon* describes the origin, philosophical underpinnings, and substance of the settlement movement. The book is organized into five rather autonomous parts and the organization of each sometimes defies logic for today's reader. For example, hidden away in a chapter on families is an excellent methodological protocol for community study (1922/1990, pp. 305-315). The targeted audience for *Horizon* was apparently settlement workers and secondarily a concerned citizenry. The authors seemed most intent on introducing a new generation of settlement workers to a proud history and on resetting a national reform agenda. The book is in many ways the single best description of settlement work in the United States

### 3.3 Woods Impact and Legacy for Sociology

It is obvious that the SEH produced an impressive volume of work and the sociological content and methodology are equally impressive. One visitor's lengthy analysis of his visit to SEH proclaimed it "one of the first sociological laboratories of the world" (SEHR, Albert, no date, Series 5, B 78). On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SEH, Woods praised its residents as "among the earliest to approach community problems from a trained sociological point of view" (SEHR, Series 3, F52, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Fund). Woods also proclaimed SEH one of the "three leading settlements in the country," the other two being Hull House in Chicago and Henry Street in New York. Woods' commitment to sociological research was vested in all residents but particularly in those holding SEH Fellowships that he saw as spreading the settlement influence. Most residents served two or three years post college and then departed to spread the settlement story as they filled other roles and advanced the new science of sociology. For example, William I. Cole, one of the first SEH residents, left to become the first chair of the sociology department at Wheaton College (SEHR, 1913, *Boston Transcript Journal*, Series 3, F 67). In his dissemination of the settlement influence, Woods seemingly distinguished yet linked sociology and social work (1922/1990, p. 424).

"A number of residents have become instructors at colleges and universities, and staff are often asked to lecture. An ever growing body of one-time residents fill chairs in sociology or economics. Holders of settlement fellowships almost always report their experiences to classes in economics and sociology. . . . Students in sociology are sent to settlements for short periods of observation to obtain material for theses or to be put in touch with various phases of city life. In many instances courses are offered in social work and community organization which draw largely upon recorded settlement experience" (1922/1990, p. 392).

One example of Woods, the public sociologist, is evident in a long article appearing in 1916 in the *Boston Evening Transcript* describing a study conducted by a committee headed by Woods and tasked with addressing fears that the new minimum wage law would cause many low-paid young women to lose their jobs (Nov 11, 1916, SEHR). The study identified young women displaced as a result of the new requirement and the committee was able to interview or secure firsthand information on 55 of them and to collect data negating fears about the new law.

To understand Woods and his work, it is necessary to understand his view of the importance of neighborhood, local village, or community. He sometimes used these terms interchangeably but careful reading of his work suggests that he viewed the local community as comprised of various neighborhoods or villages (1914, p. 579). He wrote that the local neighborhood was "the very pith and core and kernel and marrow of organic democracy" (1923/1970, p. 135). Shapiro said of Woods, "his model was the American small town" (1978, p. 218). Eleanor Woods noted that her husband's "most significant impress" from his travels in 1920 was the "fresh realization that the great proportion of the world's people are villagers" (1929, p. 360). Woods was not, however, oblivious to larger, city, state, national, and international forces, particularly as these created social problems and affected social reforms. As a leader in the settlement house movement, he worked in a milieu shaped by the macro level forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration—forces that also shaped the daily lives of settlement neighbors.

To bring to the immigrants, these “Americans in process,” some semblance of a healthy neighborhood life, Woods looked to social science to which he assigned “the important study of the capacity of people for carrying forward the process of association and cooperation so necessary to the advance of democracy” (1929, p. 80). For social science to realize its potential in the local neighborhood, it must unite with sympathy, and settlement workers must collect not only objective, systematic data but neighborhood gossip as well.

#### 4. Woods the Social Worker

It is abundantly clear that social work to Woods was community practice with the ultimate goal of social reform or “reconstruction” moving from neighborhood to nation and beyond. Woods ended the first SEH book with a clear call to look beyond individuals to the community environment. “The individual does not have in himself the main cause of difficulty. . . .the trend of his physical and moral existence is practically determined for him by his outward conditions” (1898/1970, p 289). He called for all programs, institutions, and work to have “social purpose” over “individualist motive”(1898/1970, p. 297). His final work, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building* (1923) is a collection of speeches and writing moving methodically from neighborhood to the international scene in mapping the work of social reconstruction community by community.

In a lecture before the Harvard Ethical Society (1905) Woods presented what was perhaps his definitive statement for those considering service and training as social workers. Another lecture on the new profession of social work describes what he perceived as its foundation—that is, community practice which he suggested should be organized into three broad areas: health, work, and recreation (1923/1970, p. 154). Woods’ continuing emphasis on community or neighborhood should not be surprising given his role in the settlement movement, his training in sociology, and the fact that he experienced firsthand the local impact of the macro-level forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. His daily experience was in a neighborhood comprised of poorly paid immigrant workers living in a city ill equipped to handle them and in housing frequently unfit and unhealthy for human occupancy. Consistent with his defining neighborhood as a family of families, and from his vantage point in SEH, Woods was constantly impressed with the spontaneous and informal reciprocal assistance neighbors offered each other in times of need (1914, p. 577). Citizens were the power of the community and communities the power for building a better society. He denounced what he saw as social scientists’ lack of regard for the neighborhood as the “dynamic source out of which the foundation principles of all the more broadly organized social forces have been developed” (1914, p. 577). He attributed this disregard to the “psychological attitude of social students and social administrators” (1914, p. 578). Woods’ observations and summons to community participation did not stop with neighborhood boundaries. He also saw the “restorative energy of the city” going out to meet the neighborhood (1898/1970, p. 290).

Woods wrote and lectured on the new profession of social work, apparently in an attempt to influence its development at a time when there were different and competitive strains emerging. Shoemaker (1998) identified three early schools tasked with the training of social workers and the variant strains within and among them. The first became the New York School of Social Work. The second the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, and the third the Boston University School of Social Work.. According to Shoemaker, the New York school grew from the work of Philip Ayres of the New York Charity Organization Society’s summer training course in philanthropic work and a later program initiated by Edward Devine of the New York School of Philanthropy (1904). The Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy (1903), having several earlier names, was begun by Graham Taylor, head of the Chicago Commons settlement house. In 1904 also, Harvard University (then an all-male institution) and Simmons Female College, with the help and leadership of Robert Woods founded the Boston School for Training Social Workers.

Although the three schools were begun independently, but at about the same time, each quickly came to represent different orientations about what social work education, in preparation for the practice of social work, should be. In New York, director Samuel Lindsay, who had a strong preference for social work training rooted in sociology and economics, resigned in 1912 over a disagreement as to whether social work’s knowledge base should be academic and university based or agency-based skills acquisition. Ultimately Lindsay took his curriculum to the Department of Political Science at Columbia University where he continued to educate social workers as scholars (Shoemaker, 1998, p. 186).

The Chicago school, while successful in attracting and enrolling students and often staffed by unpaid faculty from Hull House, the Commons, and the University of Chicago, was perpetually in need of funds. Thus at a time when its future was in doubt, two women, Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge, who had taught at the school and supported it in good and bad times, simply took control and secured the school’s future as the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (MacLean and Williams, 2012).

Under the leadership of Abbott as the first dean, the school represented a kind of merger of casework practice and reform anchored in a sociological research. Both women were reformists with backgrounds in social science and were critical of “vocational social work.” Breckinridge wrote, for example, that individual and family casework would reveal “the extent to which our older social machinery fails and needs to be rearranged and adjusted to modern conditions of family and community life” (1924, pp. 3-4).

The Boston school was a product of the cooperative work of Henry Lefavour, president of Simmons College, Jeffery Brackett of the Harvard faculty, and significant input and influence from Robert Woods who had multiple ties with Harvard. He was a loyal graduate of Harvard-affiliated Andover Seminary; in 1910 he was awarded an honorary degree from Harvard; he served as director of student volunteer work at Harvard; several times taught summer classes there, and was a frequent guest lecturer on campus. A 1905 speech before the Harvard Ethical Society was perhaps Woods’ way of mediating mounting tensions among Boston’s social work educators. All three of the stakeholders were apparently in agreement that males and females should have different roles in the developing field of social work. In fact, some scholars put much of the responsibility for a persisting gender division in social work on the early Boston school (Shoemaker, 1998). Women social workers were often seen as simply extending their “natural” domestic roles and at pay lower than that of men in the profession, or even as volunteers. Lefavour, for example, in the planning stages of the joint program stated that “there are various inferior grades of work that women will be willing to occupy while men may not.” Brackett concurred, adding that women would be willing to work for lower salaries because of a “missionary spirit” often prompting college educated women to do volunteer work, for example, in serving as unpaid “charity visitors” (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 109). The Boston school envisioned and articulated a vastly different role for its male students, constructing for them “masculine” careers as statesmen, leaders in public service, and public administration. While Woods’ description of gender separate roles was similar to that of his colleagues, he did go a step further in emphasizing that the roles, although different, were both essential and equal, and he continued to adhere to a more macro-level model of social work practice for both males and females. It is perhaps worthy of note that Woods’ wife was a trained (Smith College) and practicing social worker before their marriage, and in writing her husband’s biography she addressed the social work schism directly in the same context as the name change of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1918 to the National Conference of Social Work. As she described the first annual meeting after the name change, her husband had to stand his ground against the “individualism of the case practitioner” and hold “before the minds of social workers the fact that the iniquities of our social economic system play their part in the failures of life and that the trouble is not wholly with individual incapacity” (1929, p. 313). In her report, there is evidence of how Woods’ sociological bent defined his social work and also indication that Woods was aware that the issues of gender division and micro versus macro were intertwined.

Shoemaker draws a rather direct link between the Boston settlement houses and Boston’s Harvard-Simmons’ social work training in the form of community practice. At one point Boston students were “learning through observation and practice in seven different settlements” or in other settings dedicated to social reform (1996, p. 107). Boston students were also trained in the social sciences and in research methodologies. “[E]very student at the Boston School was required to complete an investigative research project, some of which stand out as examples of the kind of innovative . . . research increasingly carried out by young social researchers and sociologists who saw surveys and statistics as basic tools for social improvement and reform” (Shoemaker 1996, p. 107).

As a vital part of training for community practice, Woods placed great emphasis on SEH fellowships and devoted considerable time to their funding and continuance. Fellows, with the mentoring of professors and Woods, were one of the major tools for the teaching and use of sociological methods in pursuit of facts that could be used to better community conditions. In announcing investigations made by fellows, Woods always reported results as the use made of data collected. However, in both sociology and social work, he was publicly more inclined to recognize males over females as he explained that the fellowships had proved “to prepare men for responsible community positions” and he went on to name some who post-fellowship were in public administration, serving as influential board members, in political positions, and as educators. Again, this practice may have been part of his effort to masculinize social work as he did not name equally successful women.

In 1916, after “12 years of apparently peaceful and productive cooperation” Harvard withdrew from the educational program with Simmons (Shoemaker, 1998, p. 186). As in New York, some of the same casework versus academic differences were present, but the Boston divorce more sharply reflected another dimension. According to Shoemaker, “the split appears to have been the result of fundamental consensus about gender-appropriate realms of social work.”



Since Harvard was at that time an all-male institution and Simmons a women's college, this cooperative program was perhaps the logical arena for such differences, leading to a split in educational preparation and paving the way for a gendered division in social work. Essentially, Harvard took the male program, training men in social policy, community organization, and public administration and left Simmons to train women in the techniques of case work. Woods seemingly attempted to mediate the differences in a speech that while putting male and female social work in line with the doctrine of separate spheres, also differentiated community practice and casework. Young men were to train in something of a statesmanship role to "enter upon a definite and absorbing career of public service at those points where the public need is greatest" (1905, p. 96). For women, on the other hand, social work opened up opportunities to extend the scope and deepen the value of home and neighborhood reconstruction. Woods made a laudable attempt to describe the different social work roles as "bringing men and women together in a common work in which their cooperation is based on an unmistakably sound and real type of equality between the sexes" (1905, p. 100). What he did most successfully, however, was to construct a masculine appropriate social work while less successfully constructing equal roles for men and women in social work.

While emphasizing different but equal roles, his description still sounded like women conscripted to traditional feminine roles, "making new and large adaptations of the specialized capacities which [they have] by nature and by training" (1905, p. 99). The equality Woods spoke of was not a real professional parity but rather an idealistic mutual and reciprocal understanding and respect between the sexes. Later, the Chicago school, under Abbott and Breckinridge, articulated a very similar role to that coming from Woods for males, but for all their social work students (of which there were more females). Abbott wrote, for example, that based on their research and collection of data, social workers "should be able to give sound advice" and should realize that the social legislation of the future would be in their hands (Abbott, 1931, pp 78-79, p. 88). While in the beginning women in the Chicago school separated themselves from charity visitors by turning our scientific studies, they were soon confronted with a need to separate themselves from disciplines such as sociology, political science, and economics (Muncy, 1990, p 303-304). Consequently, Chicago's initial scientific research approach gave way over time to more traditional social work practice.

The Harvard-Simmons split seemingly began the institutionalization of gender-differentiated paths in social work education and practice. Harvard went on to locate their training of male social workers in their Social Ethics Department (with emphasis in the social sciences) that later developed a sociology curriculum (MacLean and Williams 2005). Simmons, predictably continued to emphasize a technical, skills-based curriculum where female students were trained in the "art and science of adjusting personal relationships" in one of several specialized areas. This dual model of social work education won out with the Harvard program being more sociological, reflecting Woods' penchant for sociological research and its application in community practice. Woods philosophy of settlement work was very much a precursor of a model introduced much later by Murray Ross (1955) in his effort to rekindle community organization within a problem-solving framework of study, diagnosis, and treatment.

Just as Woods wrote definitively on sociological investigation (1893) and on the new profession of social work (1905), he also wrote definitively on practice at the community or neighborhood level. His only publication in the *American Journal of Sociology* (1914) is in reality a summation and synthesis of his belief that the neighborhood was the nucleus of all social life and that the settlement was the method of empowerment, improvement, and alleviation of problems through the utilization of the talents of diverse and dedicated residents doing study, diagnoses, and treatment drawn from interactions with their neighbors. Woods settlement methodology of neighborhood practice was what Shapiro termed "decentralized social reconstruction" modeled after the American small town (1978, p. 218). Or as Woods himself put it, "The neighborhood is the ultimate testing-place of all social remedies and reforms. It is the unit of measurement over against which in detail they must all be set" (1923, p. 196). It is understandable that Woods preferred the term "social reconstruction" in referring to the settlement method of social work. In his perception, the work of neighborhood reconstruction required knitting together the commonalities and strengths of diverse populations while simultaneously supporting their different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. Relocated rural migrants seeking economic opportunities in Boston were also at times part of the SEH neighborhood mix. According to Woods the social settlement could be "neutral territory where the descendants of the Puritans may meet the chosen leaders among the immigrants from Italy, Russia, and the Levant" (1905, p. 31).

Until the 1930s, settlements were the main providers of community services such as neighborhood planning, needs assessment, program evaluation, policy advocacy, organization, and community action for reform or amelioration of problems (Weil, 2013, p. 32).

“Settlements are the roots of local and larger-scale community practice approaches” (Weil, 2013, p., 168). In fact, Lee posits the beginning of strength-based social work in the early settlement houses (2019, p. 26). Such settlements were not, however, without their critics as representing an elitist reform or a homogenic path to democracy.

Although Woods is recognized as a leader in the settlement movement and, by some, as a pioneer community organizer/social worker, he does not escape criticism such as that offered by Fisher, in his assertion that the settlements’ “social welfare style of neighborhood organizing did not visibly improve ghetto conditions, increase the power of neighborhood residents, or alter significantly the elitist practices and biases of traditional organized charities” (1994, p. 10). On the other hand, Woods represented a new and different line of philanthropic work—“community organization’ that sought to mobilize the self-renewing forces in the neighborhood,” a strengths-based approach to ultimately bring outsiders into mainstream America. This process of inclusion was unfortunately interrupted by a therapeutic approach that Polsky characterizes as dismissing “citizen participation in any but the most routine form” (1991, p. 120).

### 5. Implications and Historical Significance

Woods’ contribution to sociology and social work was to place the neighborhood or community front and center in the work of both— as the unit of study and analysis and as the unit deserving of social reconstruction based on a strength-based community paradigm. These were separate tasks but of inseparable importance. Woods identified the neighborhood as a group of people with some degree of “crude gregarious association” and many underlying and diverse strengths (1923/1970, p. 147). He never explicitly differentiated his use of neighborhood and community, and often used the terms interchangeably although he seemingly used the latter to indicate a group of people who shared some common interests and attachments and who demonstrated a “public sense” of oneness formed over time and by shared experiences (1923/1970, p. 148). While Woods legacy may be compromised because of his apparent endorsement of the gender division in social work, on the other hand he deserves recognition for his contribution to the origin and development of community organization and practice or, more recently, strength-based social work. Woods’ kind of community organization emerged as a means by which social service providers could develop needed programs in a given community and mobilize the resources needed to support and sustain them (Reisch & Wenocur, 1986, p. 71).

Community organization later, of course, became more complex as increasingly political and economic forces had to be confronted in cultivating and empowering community leaders as agents of change. After the 1920s, social work moved away from community organization and practice as represented by settlement workers who viewed the community as the essential tool of social reform. Some semblance of community practice has emerged and reemerged over the decades in different forms, as for example in the community action programs of the 1960s War on Poverty or the Saul Alinsky grass roots organizations. The decades of the 1960s and 70s spawned idealism as well as consciousness of divisions defined by race/ethnicity, class, and gender—all fertile ground for community organization. However, in social work the trend toward community organization lost ground to the dynamics of a growing profession—the proliferation of undergraduate BSW programs, and the exodus of MSW degreed persons to private practice—and to the perceived threat posed by the growth and empowerment of community groups prone to battle “the establishment” (Moynihan, 1969; Fisher, 1994).

Robert Woods influence remains today because he played a “leading role in expanding the concept of person-in-situation to encompass a perspective of community-in-society” (Reisch & Wenocur, 1986, p. 70). Even today, there are differing strains of community organization vying for legitimacy, most notably what Reisch and Wenocur describe as community organization as a cause and vehicle to reform versus as a function of the administrative structure of social work (1986, p. 71). The profession of social work, which is today heavily influenced by psychology and psychotherapy, was in its origins a product of other, multiple influences: social surveys, community organization, participant observation (later ethnography), and philanthropy or the “charity visitor” tradition. Several of these influences can be traced back to Robert Woods and his South End House residents or, more broadly to what has become known as settlement sociology (Williams & MacLean 2015). In fact, Woods at times admonished social workers for their failure to work on community structure and for ignoring the neighborhood in favor of their psychological attitudes (1923/1970, p. 147, 192).

Although both sociology and social work have at varying times claimed the contributions of Robert Woods, in fact he belongs exclusively to neither. He may be best understood as what Polsky (1991) termed a “progressive philanthropist,” a community organizer, and a community sociologist who pioneered a strength-based approach to individual, group, and neighborhood. While in the latter part of his career, Woods was identified as a social worker, he continued to demonstrate the influence of sociology as he said in one of his last

speeches, “The first step toward a program is systematic study of local conditions and needs. . . (1923/1970, p. 139) and he argued for the maintenance of neighborhood laboratories as essential to the “science of community” (1923/1970, p. 152).

Although the neighborhood or community was always front and center in Woods’ work, he did not ignore larger organizations and social forces working outside the neighborhood—both positive and negative. He declared sociology an art as well as a science that “must find its primary essential data in the fully understood neighborhood—building organically from the neighborhood, up to the nation” (1914, p.589-590).

“The approach Woods advocated sought to tap a power every bit as profound as that imagined by the proponents of the casework technology. . . .During the first two decades of the twentieth century, this group began to differentiate yet another line of philanthropic effort, “community organization,” that sought to mobilize the self-renewing forces in the neighborhood” (Polsky, p. 120).

Some of the same tensions identified as problematic in the development of social work as a profession are still present today: gender inequality, disciplinary boundaries, competing micro versus macro approaches to the origin of problems and thus to the question of where to spend limited resources. The issue of gender inequality is still very real for the profession because currently over 80 percent of persons identified as social workers are female but the lesser number of men in the profession are far more likely than women to hold leadership or administrative positions. Furthermore, the profession recognizes that the female-domination (in numbers) results in social work being a low-salaried profession (Salsberg et al., 2017; Scarnato, 2019).

Robert Woods is today unknown or forgotten in both sociology and social work although he made substantial contributions to both. This work seeks to expand these histories by positioning Woods as a pioneer in both disciplines. He was a pioneering public sociologist who never wavered in his advocacy of the foundational gathering and use of sociological data even as he came to identify as a social worker or more aptly as a community worker. Finally, it is pertinent to raise the question of why it is worthwhile to look at Woods’ work and career today, almost a century after his passing. For sociology, it is timely to affirm the recently resurrected “public sociology” (Burawoy, 2005) and to affirm Woods’ commitment to sociological data as the necessary foundation of social action and change, even at the expense of studying other phenomena simply because they are there and pose interesting scientific questions. To Woods, sociological data must be put to use in community practice because “the better standard never becomes secure until neighbors conspire together to see that it is maintained (1922/1990, p. 242).

The fundamental differences that emerged in early social work education are a continuing, essential question: that of whether the cause of social problems is located in individuals or in the social structure. The question is alive and recognizable today in an individual case work orientation versus a more macro-level structural perspective. Reisch and Wenocur wrote of settlement workers that “their influence continues to be felt today, despite the retreat of most of the social work profession into individualized patterns of intervention and ideological rationales that reinforce this perspective” (1986, p. 71). The settlement influence is the simple recognition of the power of the political economy in shaping the individual and social groups. Woods declared that “social work is intended to have a peculiar closeness of relation to the historic forces of the present” (1923/1970, p. 100). In no way, however, did he see social work as static; rather he saw the potential for viable developments “in the present and in the future” (1923/1970, p. 92).

Settlement workers were perhaps the first to identify and use community organization as an aspect of social reform because as Woods emphasized, “Many forms of remedial work can be adequately carried on only in neighborhood units” (1922/1990, p. 396). The wisdom of Woods was that he recognized the need to study and know the environment in which people lived before undertaking remedial or ameliorative work such knowledge would recommend. He also recognized the need for and importance of neighborhood or community, concepts redefined or reimaged by today’s technology which puts us instantly in touch with a virtual community and redefines “neighbors” as fellow community stakeholders. A recent essay by Reinhardt (2016) takes us back to the classical concepts, well known in sociology, of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Toennies, 2002). To serve the needs of diverse “tribal” populations in today’s society, Reinhardt emphasizes the need for “livable communities, reimaged from the old village concept..” For example, he reminds of an aging population often isolated by lack of family or by distance from family, and coping with a loss of independence. He suggests one solution could be a return to a *gemeinschaft* idea, a communal community where people interact in direct face-to-face contacts. Reinhardt further suggests that one way to develop such communities would be with housing units occupied by a full range of ages and other diversities.

He acknowledges, much as Woods did almost a century ago, that neighbors would have to be willing to “develop bridges to people different from themselves as well as bonds with people similar to themselves” (2016, p. 4). Woods saw a certain resilience, strength, and dignity in neighborhoods where people in close proximity, regardless of differences, cared for each other. Further, he saw a role for both sociology and social work in studying, understanding, and nurturing these neighborhoods with their integrative strengths for individuals, families, cities, and for all of society. Indeed, Woods’ “social reconstruction” could be today’s reconstruction of *gemeinschaft* forged through the respective work and expertise of sociologists and social workers as he showed us the utility and importance of both science and practice.

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