



MichiganWomenForward



## Alice King Hamilton

(1869 - 1970)

*Inducted:* **1997**

*Locale:* **Ann Arbor**

*Era:* **Historical**

*Area(s) of Achievement:* **Medicine/Health Care, Public Health**

Alice Hamilton, M.D. was a leader and pioneer in the field of industrial health and welfare. Although born in New York City and raised in Indiana, Hamilton summered on Mackinac Island where she developed her curiosity about and zest to meet new people. Determined to have a career which would leave her independent and of use to society, she chose the field of medicine. After receiving a medical degree in 1893 from the University of Michigan, she accepted a position teaching Pathology at Northwestern University's Women's Medical College and moved into Hull House. Settlement homes such as Hull House allowed educated people to live among and help those who were disadvantaged. (During this time Hull House became known as a model of social reform.) This is where Hamilton met industrial workers and discovered the health hazards of the work place. The neighborhood was described as a type of "human laboratory" and she lived in the house for more than twenty years.

Hamilton embarked on a career in industrial health, publishing one of the first articles in the field, and becoming an international expert on industrial disease and lead poisoning. Her work had tremendous impact on the health and welfare of America's industrial workers and led to better working conditions, worker's compensation laws, workplace-hazard and safety laws. Today she is called the Mother of Industrial Health.

After more than two decades working in Hull House Hamilton accepted an appointment as assistant professor in the new industrial hygiene program in Harvard University's Medical School and School of Public Health. This made her Harvard's first female faculty member. She also published the first American textbook on industrial toxins and was a pioneer in revealing the dangers to workers of lead and other substances used in the rubber and munitions industries. Although not one for politics, Hamilton's work with the disadvantaged ultimately lead her to pacifism, and to support of labor reform and birth control. She served two terms on the Health Committee for the League of Nations, an organization which she initially opposed.

A member of the National Women's Hall of Fame, Alice Hamilton is an inspiration and role model for women today. Her outstanding legacy lies in her vigilant and unending work to improve the health and protect the rights of American industrial workers. She saw a need to protect groups of people within society and spent her life working toward that goal. Today, many of the laws and safety standards that protect us are a result of her efforts. Her life of service to those less fortunate is an example of how one person can make an impact on society.

Photo Courtesy Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan