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Title: Mary Lily Walker of Dundee: Social Worker and Reformer

Authors: Baillie, Myra

Advisor: Rempel, R. A.

Department: History

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Abstract: 

<p>Mary Lily Walker (1863-1913) was Dundee's leading activist in matters of social welfare and social reform during the late Victorian and Edwardian period. As the Honourary Superintendent of the Dundee Social Union (DSU), she initiated a number of social welfare services in Dundee for working class women and children. The Grey Lodge Settlement Association, a bustling community centre in present-day Dundee, owes its origins to Lily Walker. Walker was a remarkable Scottish woman, yet until

now she has not been the subject of historical study.

This thesis progresses in a broad chronological fashion. Chapter one examines the failure of late nineteenth century philanthropy, and documents Walker's early years until 1889. Chapter two looks in detail at the London settlement house movement of the 1890s. Chapters three and four study Walker's role in the new philanthropy, 1900-1913, examining her contribution to the development of Dundee's social welfare provision. It concludes by critically assessing Walker's achievements.

In summary, the purpose of this thesis is threefold. First, it studies the career of Mary Lily Walker, an important woman in her own right. Second, it reveals the problems faced by women in Scotland when they entered the public sphere as social reform activists. Third, it documents her disillusionment with traditional practices of philanthropy and her recognition of the need for the resources and intervention of the state. Walker's experience was in line with many in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, and serves as a microcosm of the shift from the philanthropic principles of the nineteenth century to the recognition of the state as an agency for the improvement of the collective good.

This thesis is largely based on archival sources in Dundee. Walker left no diaries or memoirs, and evidence on the DSU is fragmented, especially after 1902. Walker's role, contribution and social philosophy, therefore, has been derived largely from newspaper reports and the minute books of local government bodies. Fortunately, some of her personal letters are preserved in the D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson Papers in the University of St Andrews Library. These letters convey a sense of Walker as a person, and not just as a public figure.

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