

- Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1880
- She was the fourth child of William Henry and Josephine Augusta
  - Her father maintained a “middle-class standard of living” as a merchant on the cotton exchange
- Only Elizabeth and one brother survived infancy
- She attended packer collegiate institute (which was one of the best private schools in Brooklyn and still is)
- She attended smith college for college
  - During her college years, Elizabeth Irwin and her best friend Elizabeth Westwood earned money writing for the newspapers in the vicinity of North Hampton
- When she graduated in 1903, Irwin had already decided on a career of coaxial work
- During the summer of 1903, she enrolled for a course at the new york school of philanthropy
  - Along with Jeanette Rankin and Frances Perkins
- Through that course, she found her first job at the Hester street park (“in the heart of the Jewish ghetto”)
- Continued her social work at the college settlement on Rivington street
  - She dropped out at the end of the year to start a career “that promised more novelty and entertainment”
- In 1905 “the two Elizabeths” joined resources and decided to share the same quarters and “splinter the gay freelance” together
  - The two women collaborate with their combined knowledge of writing and marketing articles and producing ideas and projects
  - Their lifestyle consisted of travel, entertaining friends, and writing
  - They were published in the *New York Evening Sun* under the heading “two college girls peddle Yankee notions on vacation”, on April 1906 and again on May 7, 1907
  - They were journalist, **“a new type of woman emerging from the victorian stereotype”**
  - “Elizabeth wrote stories about women artists or photographers, about the problems of obtaining domestic servants, about the handicrafts practiced by recent immigrants, about how to furnish an apartment cheaply, about why women don’t marry.”
- Her articles were featured in various magazines
  - Good housekeeping, new idea, the craftsmen, as well as the Sunday supplements of several new york newspapers
- In 1909 the two Elizabeths gave up the struggle and went back to work at the college settlement on Rivington Street though they both continued to be published sporadically for the next few years
- In 1912 she introduced a group of her friends to join her in renting a small apartment at number 1 Patchin Place
  - Here she suggested another innovation: the dinner club
    - A place where interesting or distinguished persons were invited for good food and conversation (like Jeannette Rankin who was later the first woman elected to

the United States Congress, or Frances Perkins who was later Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor and the first woman to hold a Cabinet Post)

- “Whatever the employment or vocation of the women in this group, they were all engaged actively in the suffrage movement” (which at the time was directed towards the adoption of an Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution of each state)
- In the second decade of this century, the reform movement the triangle shirtwaist factory fire occurred clearly pointing out the problems with social workers and reformers in general
- After that devastating event, the 540hour bill passed the new york legislature and the factory investigating commission
  - Frances Perkins served under Alfred E. Smith on the Factory Investigating Commission and brought of its inquires to the dinner club
- The women at number 1 Patchin Place discussed and planned for ways to effect the reforms they sought
  - They acquainted themselves with radical men and women such as John and Mary Beard, James Harvey Robinson, and John Dewey as reformers
    - Some participants even changed their names so they could get involved with our consequence (Irving Granitch changed his name to Mike Gold)
- In 1910 she left the settlement house for a job as a field worker with the Public Education Association ( a private organization concerned with improving the cities school system
- After a year she was promoted to the staff as a psychologist
  - She was prepared by her experience as a social worker, her fieldwork, and reading in the educational theory and behavioral science
  - She made studies of “feeble-minded children”, truancy and other problems of public education
    - several of which were published by educational journals and attracted the attention of newspapers
- As she became more knowledgeable she was chosen to direct the fieldwork of New York University summer school students in pedagogy
- In 1914 she was put in charge of a psychological clinic established in the public school at fifth street and Avenue D
  - This experience was very helpful in her later years when she established her own school (LREI), along progressive lines
  - “Only when children of all ages had been studied and their abilities measured, could one set standards of achievement in a progressive or any other school” -the basis of this study was the intelligence scale of the French psychologist Alfred Binet
- Her proximity to underprivileged children in the settlement house and public schools of the east side elevated her interest and affection for children
- When she passed her thirtieth year without any prospect of marriage, she embarked on a series of adoptions (only one of which was legally binding)

- The first was a boy of Italian extraction named Luigi Balestro who came to her in her teens
  - He attended Ethical Culture High school and graduated from the Gunnery School in Washington Connecticut
- After the death of Elizabeth Westwood, the Patchin Place establishment broke up
  - Kathrine Anthony and Elizabeth moved into 36 Grove st
  - She adopted her second Child at the age of ten. She names her Elizabeth Westwood Jr. because she was grieving the death of her best friend. Everyone called the girl June.
  - She adopted her third Child in 1916 with her partner Kathrine Anthony. She was named Kathrine Irwin
- From 1911 to 1916 Irwin administered intelligence test and conducted interviews with students at P.S 15
  - These “experiments” were written about and published in issues of the Public Education Bulletin
- Starting in 1916 she worked with Louis Marks
  - She was working on educational experiments at Public School 64 on the Lower Eastside
  - Irwin implemented and tested new pedagogical ideas
- She taught her classes in the annex of the school (that happened to be painted red...thus the name *Little Red School House*)
- In 1921 she took the name along with her to PS 41 where she was appointed to organize a school within a school for yonder children
- Irwin became a “luminary” in the constellation of female educators who contributed to the history of education in new york during this era and in the intellectual and cultural ferment that was Greenwich Village in the 1920s
- In 1924 (three years after the completion of the experiment), Irwin received her masters of philosophy at Columbia
  - She submitted a report of her experiment at P.S 64 titled *Some Features of an Educational Experiment*
    - Irwin and marks replicated the report in their book, *Fitting the School to the Child*
- By 1931 it was the middle of the great depression and financial problems and a philosophical split between the Board of Education Association resulted in a decision to close the school
  - Public support for Little Red was lead by John Dewey, Eleanor Roosevelt, Lucy Sprague Mitchell (of the Bureau of Educational Experiment), and William H. Kilpatrick (of teachers college) but was not enough to save the school
  - Ultimately it was saved by the parents and the school was reborn as a private institution the following year
    - The organizational meeting was held in a Greenwich village ice cream parlor
- She worked in progressive education until the day she died
- By the time Irwin died in 1942 LREI had already expanded to include a high school named after her