

DIVERSE EXPRESSIONS OF PHILANTHROPY

Changes in Jewish Philanthropy

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In the late 1830s, when the first 20 German Jews came to Cleveland, they brought with them a Torah scroll and a tradition of “tzedakah”, charity. For Jews, the community is an entity in its own right, embodying the noblest values of God and Torah, values that create a connection with those who have gone before and those who will come after. This connection calls for involvement in communal affairs and for selfless giving to the survival and success of the world community in its broadest sense.

The Jews of Cleveland established themselves economically, purchased cemeteries, chartered synagogues, began schools, and organized a multitude of institutions, including relief societies. The city welcomed their talents and the settlers flourished. Immigration swelled their numbers; they became more socially and culturally diverse; and charitable giving grew in importance. In 1903, the forerunner of today’s Jewish Community Federation was established to coordinate the philanthropic efforts of some 25,000 people.

After World War I, the balance of power between the old guard and the newly arrived Eastern Europeans was more equally shared. The remainder of this century has seen the Jewish community of Greater Cleveland, its agencies and its philanthropic organizations, evolve and mature into a cohesive, dynamic whole, forged primarily by world events, the Holocaust and the State of Israel. Cleveland Jewry has been fortunate in that its leaders have had extraordinary insight. Today, with 65,000 Jews, this area is recognized as one of the most creative, productive, and generous Jewish communities in America.