

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED SERVICES FOR THE POOR:
RE-EXAMINING MORGAN MEMORIAL AND THE SETTLEMENT HOUSE
MOVEMENT

by

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B.A., American History
Brown University, 1984

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of organizations at the turn-of-the century that attempted to create comprehensive services to better the lives of the urban poor and to improve their neighborhoods. The period of the 1890's to the 1920's marked the first time in American history that hundreds of concerned thinkers and activists set to work in the nation's slums to address the problems of urban poverty brought on by rapid industrial expansion.

My primary case study is of Morgan Memorial, an organization located in Boston's South End, whose contribution to the development of neighborhood services in this era has largely been overlooked. Morgan Memorial was created by Edgar Helms, who in a matter of a few years took a small inner-city church dedicated to work with the poor and transformed it into a large, multi-service community-based organization. At its height at the turn-of-the century, Morgan Memorial operated lodging houses, a factory, child care, social services, recreational and cultural programs, and an interdenominational church for thousands of the South End's children and adults. The centerpiece of Helms' creation was his industrial venture, Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores, which provided job training and employment to unemployed, elderly, and disabled people.

In analyzing Morgan Memorial, I compare it to the settlement house movement, the dominant effort of that time to address the problems of the nation's slums. Settlement house workers took up residence in America's slums in order to learn the needs of the poor first-hand, to create services and activities to better the lives of their neighbors, and to improve the physical and social conditions of those neighborhoods. I also place Morgan Memorial in the context of the South End, where it was located, in what was then Boston's port of entry for immigrant newcomers and one of the city's most impoverished districts.

This historical research is an outgrowth of my concern with current approaches to addressing the needs of poor and homeless people and their neighborhood conditions. My premise is that the philosophy and approach of these historical organizations offer relevant lessons for groups doing similar work today. Out of concern that current services have become too fragmented and specialized, I look at earlier efforts to respond in a comprehensive fashion to an individual's needs for employment, housing, social services, cultural activities, and the like. Out of concern that contemporary organizations fail to place an individual's needs within the context of his or her neighborhood, I examine the way these earlier organizations attempted to reconstruct their neighborhoods. They sought to develop their neighborhood's physical infrastructure and to strengthen the community's social fabric. In this thesis I particularly focus on the efforts of Edgar Helms and the

settlement house workers to further social reconstruction of their neighborhoods by establishing neighborhood centers offering social services and social activities for all neighbors. They also developed activities that strengthened the bonds of affiliation and respect between families and neighbors, and they created opportunities for neighbors to be participants in the process of neighborhood improvement not simply passive recipients of services. After presenting the story of Morgan Memorial and the settlement house movement and providing my analysis of why they were effective, I conclude this thesis by examining some of the lessons for contemporary practice derived from the work of these earlier organizations.

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Writing this historical thesis took me on a journey into the past. A number of people helped make that journey a more enriching and pleasant one. Still others made sure that while I made the journey I at least kept a foothold in the present and in the much larger world beyond this thesis. I am indebted to all of them.

I am grateful to Henry E. Helms, former director of Morgan Memorial and son of the organization's founder, and to his staff for carefully assembling the complete and well-organized archives of Morgan Memorial. The staff at the library of Boston University's School of Theology, where these archives are housed, were also most gracious in making these materials available to me as I came back time and time again to check and re-check information. This is a wonderful source of information on a fairly overlooked but quite remarkable Boston organization. I hope others in the future will have the opportunity to make use of this resource as I have done.

My main guide and source of much-needed assistance on this historical journey was my thesis advisor, John Davis. I can't begin to thank John for all of his help. John encouraged me and patiently offered direction and advice, especially as I went off on several "side trips" in the process of selecting the main journey. He helped me focus my thinking and my writing. He read and copy edited one draft after another. He helped me set time lines and goals, and he listened and listened as I tried to make sense of my ideas and research. In short, he helped make this a much more focused and enriching journey than I believe it would have been otherwise.

I am also indebted to my reader, Langley Keyes. Lang inspired me early on to take advantage of my time at DUSP to make a historical journey. When most people would have said "turn-of-the century??" Lang encouraged me to think about the relevance of the settlement houses and groups like Morgan Memorial to contemporary urban planning. His fascination with the past and his sense of its relevance has reminded me to continue to make the connections between what was done then and what we do now long after this thesis is completed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This thesis is an examination of social and religious organizations at the turn-of-the century that created neighborhood-based services for the poor. I selected this era for my historical study because never before had so many thinkers and activists in this country dedicated themselves to bettering the lives of the poor and to transforming the nation's slums. My primary case study is a religious organization whose contribution to the creation of neighborhood services in this era has largely been overlooked. That organization was Morgan Memorial.

The driving force behind the creation of Morgan Memorial was Edgar Helms, a man dedicated to transforming the lives of the poor, who had the organizational skill, drive, and single-minded sense of purpose needed for the task. Edgar Helms offered a response to urban poverty that was quite unique. He also drew heavily from the philosophy and practice of the settlement house movement, the dominant effort at the turn-of-the century to improve the nation's slums. The concerned middle- and upper-class men and women who were a part of that movement took up residence in houses in America's slums. Their objectives were to learn the conditions of their neighbors first-hand, to offer services and activities to improve people's lives, and to reform the social and physical conditions of their neighborhoods. Helms had quite similar objectives for Morgan Memorial. To appreciate his achievement, I compare Morgan Memorial to the settlement house movement. I believe this comparison serves to highlight Morgan Memorial's distinct features while also underscoring the many ways this organization was similar to the settlement house movement, the dominant social movement in poor neighborhoods of that time. I also look at Morgan Memorial in the context of Boston's South End where it was located. The South End's conditions and the efforts by organizations there to create neighborhood services are

an example of the state of poor urban neighborhoods in other industrial cities at the turn-of-the century.

My examination of Morgan Memorial and the settlement house movement is the outcome of a search that began with questions and concerns about contemporary practice and ended with a historical study. I began my historical research with the belief that understanding the philosophy and practice of organizations a century ago could offer insights for groups doing similar work today. I do not pretend that history offers clear answers to our questions of today. Strategies that were successful one hundred years ago at meeting people's myriad needs and improving their neighborhoods can not simply be identified and re-applied today. Although people's needs for decent housing, vocational training, jobs, child care, and opportunities to get to know their neighbors and to participate in neighborhood life have changed little since then, the obstacles contemporary organizations face in addressing those needs have changed quite a bit. While the experiences of organizations of the past may not offer specific answers, they teach us that there are alternative approaches to addressing the problems of homelessness and poverty. By reflecting on the thinking and methods of these earlier organizations hopefully we can find ways to improve contemporary practice.

With a belief that we might learn from history, I set out to see what insights might be drawn from the philosophy and practice of earlier neighborhood organizations. I was inspired to begin this historical exploration by Kathleen Hirsch's book, *Songs from the Alley*.¹ Hirsch intersperses her tale of the lives of two contemporary homeless women in Boston with an examination of historical efforts to serve Boston's very poor. She argues that turn-of-the-century organizations, like the settlement houses and Morgan Memorial, had a comprehensive, integrated, and neighborhood-based approach to meeting the needs

¹ Kathleen Hirsch, *Songs from the Alley* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989).

of the poor. I share Hirsch's view that these historical organizations may have done a better job at addressing people's multiple needs and overall neighborhood conditions than we do today. It was also her description of Morgan Memorial that first sparked my interest in finding out more about this organization.

As I delved into the archives of Morgan Memorial I discovered a rather unusual organization. Morgan Memorial bears the name of the eccentric Methodist preacher, Henry Morgan, who in the late 1800's first created Morgan Chapel in Boston's South End. It was Edgar Helms, also a Methodist minister, who took charge of Morgan Chapel in 1895 and transformed it from a modest inner-city religious mission into a large, multi-faceted, community-based organization. Helms responded to the variety of needs of the South End's poor by creating an integrated network of jobs, vocational training, housing, child care, social services, recreational and cultural programs, and a church. The centerpiece of his organization was a business venture, Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores. This industrial enterprise created long-term and temporary jobs for thousands of the South End's poor.

In some ways Morgan Memorial resembled a settlement house--it offered a similar combination of social, educational, and recreational activities for children and adults. In other ways it resembled what was then called an "institutional church," a church with an expansive social mission to assist its poor neighbors. In other ways it resembled a rescue mission because it offered lodging and other services to the South End's transient and homeless men. Morgan Memorial was a combination of all of these. It also was a unique industrial enterprise.

I began this historical exploration with the hope of broadening the contemporary debate about solutions to poverty. I was most concerned with issues that related to my

own professional work. In my work I assist shelters and other organizations that serve homeless people to move beyond the provision of emergency services to the creation of more permanent solutions to homelessness. As these organizations attempt to develop housing, jobs, and other social services they are influenced by a larger debate about the appropriate way to end homelessness and combat poverty. This debate also influences how public funds are allocated, policies are made, and programs are structured.

Some argue that homelessness is primarily an economic problem; that there is insufficient housing for people of limited means. The solution, they state, is to create more housing affordable to very low-income people and to provide jobs and other financial benefits to increase the incomes of the poor. Others argue that many homeless people have distinct social problems and disabilities that must be addressed if homelessness is ever to be solved. These problems include mental illness, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Proponents of this view believe the provision of social services must be at the center of any solution. Although many housing and service professionals believe that homelessness is the result of a combination of both economic and social issues and requires a combined solution, debate about the solutions has typically been quite narrow.

The narrow confines of this debate over homelessness are not unique. The larger discussion about the causes and solutions to poverty, of which this debate is merely a subset, takes a similar form. I focus on the debate on homelessness because I am most familiar with it. My sense that there were missing dimensions to this debate first prompted me to begin my historical research to find out how organizations years ago coped with similar concerns related to poverty.

The following are some of the issues I believe are overlooked in contemporary practice. It is far from an exhaustive list. I am also far from the only person to highlight

the missing elements of the current debate. Many thoughtful practitioners are attempting to address these very issues in their work to overcome homelessness and poverty. Even with their efforts, it has been my experience that these issues continue to be inadequately addressed.

I find the current debate to be narrow because there are many elements that seem to be integral to solving homelessness--or poverty for that matter--that are either overlooked or hardly discussed. There are two broad issues, in particular, that I believe fail to be accorded adequate attention. One is the need for a comprehensive response to people's complete and complex needs, the other is the need to strengthen neighborhoods.

There is a great deal of discussion about the importance of a coordinated, comprehensive approach, but the barriers to moving beyond fragmented strategies can seem insurmountable. Too often each of the pressing needs of homeless people is dealt with in isolation--one organization provides housing, another job training, and still others ancillary social services. Public and private funding sources often dictate the services small organizations are to provide. Funding typically is targeted to address specific and separate needs. Organizations develop expertise in different areas and it becomes difficult for them to integrate their efforts.

One consequence of this fragmented approach is that in the rush to respond to an individual's most overwhelming needs, such as for housing or stable income, we often relegate other needs to secondary status, even though meeting these "secondary" needs may be critical to the achievement of successful housing and productive lives. I would define these needs as those less likely to be addressed by social services, such as for peer support, companionship, recreation, cultural activities, and spiritual pursuits. Many thoughtful housing and service providers realize that helping individuals improve their quality-of-life

can make the difference between simply getting a roof over their head and enabling them to overcome their isolation, develop relationships with neighbors and family, and participate in the larger world.

A second consequence of this fragmented approach is that far less thought and attention is given to job creation and economic development than to housing. This is especially true among organizations dealing with homeless people, since their first and foremost concern is usually to get people housed. Yet once people are housed their employment needs often go unaddressed. There are many questions related to the employment of the very poor that need to be accorded greater attention. How can we ensure a decent income for people who may never have the skills to secure more than low-wage employment? How can we create opportunities for disabled and unskilled people to participate in the economic activity of society through a job, even if they may remain partially dependent on public support? Numerous thoughtful practitioners are asking these questions and looking for solutions, but their suggestions have yet to be incorporated adequately into funding and policy decisions.

There is also a tendency for contemporary organizations that work with homeless people to target their services only to the homeless or only to a subset of this population, rather than to a particular geographic neighborhood. Organizations may find that they barely have the resources to address individual needs, let alone tackle the problems of the larger neighborhood. Yet meeting the needs of individuals often depends on improving housing, economic, and other conditions of the neighborhood and strengthening the community's social fabric.

Typically, for homeless people the loss of housing also has meant the loss of neighborhood. People forced to go elsewhere in search of shelter often become cut off

from the neighborhoods in which they had once lived. The organizations that serve homeless people often are not neighborhood-based, in part because the people they serve are no longer tied to a particular neighborhood. This can become a problem when shelters seek to change their focus and help people stabilize and reintegrate into particular communities. Community development corporations, community-based multi-service agencies, and comparable organizations that work with low and moderate income people tend to understand the importance of being neighborhood-based--building neighborhood support, addressing overall neighborhood issues, and working closely with other neighborhood groups. Very often, though, these groups are wary of integrating homeless people back into the neighborhood because of fears--whether real or imagined--that these individuals bring multiple problems which pose a risk to neighborhood stability. In the meantime, shelter organizations and the housing ventures they spawn often are not focused on building neighborhood linkages to meet the needs of the very poor and homeless people they serve. In short, the organizations that work with homeless and formerly homeless people--be they large shelters, recovery homes, or lodging houses--often are as isolated from the mainstream of neighborhood activity and from other neighborhood groups as the people they serve.

A critical part of creating stronger neighborhoods is providing opportunities for individuals to build relationships with their family, fellow tenants, and other neighbors. Strengthening the social bonds in neighborhoods also depends on affording people the opportunity to become participants in neighborhood activities, be they social, political, recreational, or otherwise. In recent years there is increasing interest in finding ways for poor and disenfranchised people to become participants in managing their housing, determining their social services, or helping to shape their work environment. These efforts are just beginning and need to be more fully integrated into the work to end homelessness and combat poverty.

Having identified these deficiencies in contemporary practice, I began my historical research to see how organizations dealt with these same concerns almost a century ago. I decided to look at Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses because their staff functioned as generalists and proposed comprehensive solutions to the problems of poverty. In addressing their neighbors' diverse individual needs they also attempted to reconstruct the physical conditions and social fabric of their neighborhoods. These turn-of-the century neighborhood workers avoided a number of the pitfalls that face practitioners today.

Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement house workers tried to respond to the needs of their neighbors in a comprehensive way. They thought in terms of a person's total needs--economic, social, cultural, educational, spiritual, and recreational--and responded by creating diverse and integrated services and activities. The staff and volunteers of these historical organizations recognized that people's myriad needs were inter-connected; therefore they created services that linked housing to jobs to child care to recreational activities and so on. They set out to be generalists and to do whatever needed to be done to meet people's needs; they did not segment or isolate their efforts into specific categories. They were community organizers, social service providers, teachers, vocational trainers, camp counselors, sponsors of cultural events, and much more. In Morgan Memorial's case they also were employers.

Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement house workers also understood part of their mission to be the reconstruction of their neighborhoods. They worked to improve their neighborhoods' physical conditions, its housing, open space, and sanitation services, either by fighting for reforms or by creating better alternatives. They also worked to build a greater sense of community by strengthening the bonds between people. They brought

individuals together for group activities and they created services and activities to match the needs of different people in the neighborhood.

My discussion of Morgan Memorial and the settlement house movement that follows in the next several chapters focuses on these two particular themes--their efforts to create comprehensive and integrated services and their strategy to reconstruct their neighborhoods. These are, by no means, the only interesting aspects of their work. Edgar Helms and many of the settlement workers were remarkable people who accomplished a great deal in their time. There is much to be learned from their achievements. I have chosen to focus on only a few.

CHAPTER 2

The South End at the Turn-of-the Century and the Response by Social and Religious Organizations

Introduction

The turn-of-the century, especially the years 1890 to 1920, was a period of enormous political and social change in American history. Disturbed by the consequences of rapid industrial expansion, social and religious thinkers and activists began to take action. They initiated reform activity to combat the problem of the nation's growing slums, the oppressive conditions faced by industrial workers, and the increasing division between rich and poor. They rejected the nation's glorification of rugged individualism and competition and sought to promote counter values of community concern and cooperation. This ferment of reform activity and re-thinking of the dominant cultural values set this period apart from the more conservative eras which preceded and followed and gave the period its name, the Progressive Era.

Morgan Memorial emerged at this time in response to the needs of the South End's poor and to the conditions under which they lived. Morgan Memorial was far from an isolated response. During this period, hundreds of organizations were established in the South End and in other poor neighborhoods in America's cities. These social and religious organizations--settlement houses, institutional churches, and rescue missions--aimed to address problems brought on by the sudden and enormous growth of cities, the massive influx of immigrants, the rise of industrialism, and a resultant increase in urban poverty.

The leaders of these social and religious organizations in poor neighborhoods shared a common set of goals: to combat urban ills and to better the lives of the poor. They shared similar social and religious values; they also interacted and learned from one

another's approach. Edgar Helms, founder of Morgan Memorial, was influenced by these parallel movements going on in the cities' slums, shared much of their philosophy, and adopted many of their methods in his work with the poor. To understand Morgan Memorial it must be placed in the context of similar neighborhood movements of that time.

Morgan Memorial also must be viewed in the context of conditions in Boston's South End at the turn-of-the century. The South End's poverty and its housing and social conditions were among the worst in Boston. When Edgar Helms set to work at Morgan Memorial it was in response to what he saw around him. Many other concerned individuals had a similar response and created the South End's numerous settlement houses, institutional churches, and rescue missions.

In this chapter, I begin by describing Boston's South End at the turn-of-the century as a way to set the context for Morgan Memorial's work and that of other organizations in the district. I then turn to the settlement house movement, its origins, philosophy, and objectives. I also look at the settlement house activity taking place in the South End at the same time that Edgar Helms was building Morgan Memorial. In addition, I discuss the social gospel movement, which had an important influence on the religious thinking of all of these turn-of-the century neighborhood movements. I also reference the work of the South End's religious organizations, the institutional churches and rescue missions.

I present a picture of the South End, both its conditions and the efforts by social and religious groups to respond to those conditions, to help explain the environment in which Edgar Helms set to work. In comparing Morgan Memorial to the settlement houses, I primarily look at the settlement house movement nationwide rather than at the specific settlements of the South End. While the South End's settlements made important contributions to this movement, it is the overall movement that set the stage for future social

services and reform activity in poor neighborhoods of America. I am interested in the philosophical roots of this movement, its approach, and its evolution over time. Morgan Memorial had much in common with the thinking and approach of this social movement; the comparison helps place Morgan Memorial in the context of similar efforts of its time.

The South End: 1800-1930

When Edgar Helms, founder of Morgan Memorial, came to the South End in 1895, the district was one of Boston's most overcrowded and impoverished. But the area had not always been that way. Until 1800 the South End had been no more than a narrow isthmus of land known as "the Neck" bordered on both sides by beach, marshes, and water.

The Neck's transformation first began in the early 1800's as excavated land and gravel were used to widen the isthmus. By mid-century, the South End had been completely filled in and the street railway extended through it. With its new land and rail service, the South End became a choice site for residential development for the city's affluent. Soon, attractive brick row houses lined the district's streets. For the next fifteen years, the South End served as one of Boston's popular quarters for the rich.

In the 1870's the South End underwent a second transformation. In a matter of a few years, this wealthy district became one of Boston's poorest. A combination of events triggered a mass exodus of the rich from the area and a massive in-migration of poor rural Americans and foreign immigrants. As Boston's economy grew, factories and commercial establishments began to encroach upon this residential district. After the fire of 1872 destroyed much of Boston's downtown manufacturing, many factories relocated to the South End. Added to these changes was a run of residential foreclosures in the South End following the depression of 1873. Banks then sold these repossessed homes to working-class families.

The decline of the South End as an affluent residential district coincided with the availability of new locales where the rich could establish their homes. The Back Bay, previously no more than a swamp, had been filled in and transformed into an attractive and wealthy residential district. In addition, the expansion of Boston's railway system into the suburbs made it possible for the wealthy to take up residence outside the city. With the departure of the rich, poorer families and drifters poured into the district. By the 1870's, the South End had become the port of entry for thousands of newcomers to the city.²

Boston, like most of the United States' northern cities in the late nineteenth century, was growing rapidly as a result of massive industrial expansion. As the country's agricultural sector declined and its industries increased, millions of Americans abandoned the nation's rural towns in search of jobs in the cities. Augmenting this urban migration were 18 million foreign immigrants who came to the United States between 1880 and 1910.³ Most of these immigrants had left declining agrarian regions of Europe with the hope of finding work in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Boston drew its share of this immigrant wave. In 1800 Boston had no more than 24,937 residents; within a hundred years its population had grown to 560,892. By 1895, less than one half of the people living in Boston had been born in the city. Twenty-two percent were from other parts of Massachusetts or from other states, especially in New England; another 35% were foreign-born. Many among this population of newcomers settled in the South End.⁴

² The borders of the South End did not match those of today. Then, the South End included the area known today as Chinatown, and the district ended in the middle of the present-day South End near Blackstone and Franklin Squares. The streets near Massachusetts Avenue, which now form the southern section of the South End, were considered outside of the district.

³ Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *A Concise History of the American Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 383.

⁴ Albert Benedict Wolfe, *The Lodging House Problem in Boston* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906), Appendix B, and Morison et al., p. 211.

Among the newcomers to the South End, were a large number of single men and women, predominantly rural New Englanders, Canadians, and Irish. Some of these newcomers found employment as clerks, sales people, waiters, and cooks, while others took up work in the building trades and with the railroad. To meet their housing needs, the district's once elegant homes were subdivided into tiny rooms. The average house provided lodging to a total of 12 to 20 individuals. These lodging houses usually had one bathroom, no common living room, and no kitchen facilities for the tenants. The lodgers had to take their meals in the South End's numerous cafes and basement dining rooms.

The lodgers tended to be a transient population. Available statistics from the period indicate that lodgers moved often, typically staying in one house no more than a year.⁵ These single men and women, many of them new to Boston and without social and family networks, lived a fairly isolated existence. They also had little opportunity to interact with their fellow tenants, since every room in the typical lodging house was rented as a bedroom and none were maintained as common meeting space for the house's occupants. Furthermore, lodgers tended to keep to themselves out of fear and suspicion of their fellow tenants. Whether rumor or fact, lodging houses had the reputation of housing people involved in criminal or illicit activities: stealing, gambling, and prostitution.⁶

The development and sale of lodging houses was a speculative business. Real estate brokers bought up the former homes of the affluent; sold them to lodging house keepers, typically women who survived on the rental income; and quickly foreclosed and resold the houses whenever the landladies fell behind in their loan payments. Under

⁵ Wolfe, p. 84.

⁶ See Wolfe, *The Lodging House Problem in Boston*, for a complete description of the population, lodging house conditions, and an analysis of the real estate speculation in lodging houses.

pressure to meet their mortgages, the lodging house owners charged the highest rents possible. They were indifferent to the tenants they selected and to the activities going on in their houses, so long as rent was paid. The owners also lacked the necessary resources for property upkeep. As a result, the properties deteriorated rapidly from intensive use by so many lodgers. Because the lodging house environment fostered isolation, indifference, and suspicion on the part of both owner and lodger, it discouraged the development of social relationships among neighbors and the creation of neighborhood affiliation and unity.

Once a lodging house became seriously deteriorated and could command only the cheapest rents, it was usually converted to tenement housing for families even poorer than the lodgers. Houses originally designed to accommodate a single family eventually became home to four to eight families, with one toilet for up to 15 to 30 people and no bathing facilities.⁷ These conditions were common. In her autobiographical account of her immigrant childhood, *The Promised Land*, Mary Antin gives a first-hand account of her childhood in the South End. Antin and her family moved to Wheeler Street behind Morgan Memorial in 1895. Her family's living situation exemplified conditions in the South End's tenements:

On Wheeler Street there were no real homes. There were miserable flats of three or four rooms, or fewer, in which families . . . cooked, washed, and ate (and) slept from two to four in a bed, in windowless bedrooms. . . . Beds and cribs took up most of the floor space, disorder packed the interspaces.⁸

⁷ Frederick Bushée, "Population" and Charles D. Underhill, "Public Health" in *The City Wilderness*, ed. Robert Woods (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1989), pp. 33-5 and 64-5.

⁸ Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 272.

Not only did several families crowd into houses designed as single-family homes, cheaply constructed tenements were placed on what had once been the front and back yards, further adding to the crowding and lack of light, air, and open space.

There were several major differences between the lodgers and the tenement dwellers. The former were single adults; the latter were families. Both groups earned meager wages, although the lodgers were more likely to be skilled workers able to command slightly higher earnings. The lodgers also were a more ethnically homogeneous population than the tenement families. When the South End first became a working-class district, the Irish were the dominant immigrant group. By the early 1900's, immigrants to the United States increasingly came from Southern and Eastern Europe, and this change in national immigration trends was reflected in the changing ethnic composition of Boston's South End. Increasingly, the foreign newcomers to the district were Italians, Russians, Syrians, and Greeks.

The immigrant families who settled in the area found work on the South End's docks and in the district's lumber yards, piano and furniture factories, rail yards, laundries, and in the numerous shops, restaurants, and hotels. Boston's economy was more diverse and less dominated by manufacturing than that of other industrial cities. Although Boston was not primarily an industrial city, the industrial expansion of the late 1800's affected working conditions and wage rates in all sectors of the economy. The mechanization of production and the agglomeration of industry, retail, and other economic activities reduced the need for skilled labor and drove down wage rates. With the influx of thousands of unskilled job seekers into the city, the South End's poor residents faced fierce competition for low-paying, unskilled jobs which offered neither job security nor financial protection in the event of accident, sickness, or old age.

Massachusetts was one of few states in the 1890's to institute legislation to provide minimum improvements in working conditions. State law restricted the hours of work for minors and women to 58 a week, prohibited child labor under the age of 14, and required minimum safety standards for factories. The state also prohibited the use of a "sweating system," common in New York City, where entire families worked in their cramped tenements making garments for the clothing industry.⁹ Nevertheless, because these relatively progressive laws were difficult to enforce, it remained quite common for men, women, and minors to work six or seven days a week, more than 10 hours a day, under unsanitary and unsafe conditions.

Although it was a densely settled district, the South End lacked a strong neighborhood identity. Unlike other residential districts in Boston, the South End was a heavily commercial zone. It was also known for its heavy concentration of the city's "dives:" saloons, dance halls, pool rooms, gambling halls, and brothels. Parents in the district not only had to struggle to support their children, but to keep them away from gathering places rife with alcoholism, gambling, and prostitution. Furthermore, the South End lacked the basic amenities and services which strengthen a neighborhood and improve the quality-of-life of its residents.

Those institutions which might have offered assistance to the South End's residents and served as alternative gathering centers to the "dives" were desperately lacking. With the flight of the affluent from the district, most of the Protestant churches had abandoned the neighborhood. In addition, city services, such as libraries, community centers, or even a public bath house (the tenements lacked bathing facilities) were nonexistent. With every foot of open space given over to tenement housing, no space remained for parks or playgrounds for children; before the establishment of social organizations in the district,

⁹ Robert Woods, "Work and Wages" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 87.

few recreational activities were available. It would be many years before residents had sufficient resources to develop their own cultural clubs and social centers.

Throughout the period 1890-1930 the South End remained a poor, immigrant neighborhood. In 1923, Professor Charles Carroll, of Boston University's School of Religious Education and Social Service, conducted a survey for Morgan Memorial of the neighborhood's population and needs. Professor Carroll's students and paid canvassers surveyed the 107 city blocks near Morgan Memorial, comprising most of the South End. The survey found that conditions in 1923 were quite similar to those that Edgar Helms had found when he first came to the South End in 1895. Three-fifths of the population lived in tenements and one-sixth in lodging houses. About half of the residents subsisted on unskilled, low-paid work. A substantial portion of the population were recent immigrants, though the ethnic composition of the neighborhood had changed over the decades. Of the total residents, 44.7% were foreign-born: 24% were Russian; 16.5% were Italian; 14.5% were Syrian; 7.6% were Greek. Smaller percentages of the residents came from another 30 countries. Of the American-born population, about a third were the children of immigrants; the remainder were whites, primarily from rural New England, and blacks from the rural South.¹⁰

The increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of the South End contributed to the district's lack of unity. The immigrant groups were separated from one another by language and culture and isolated from the mainstream of Boston life. Their isolation was even more pronounced than that of earlier Irish and rural American settlers, who at least had shared a common language and a more similar ethnic culture with the city's better-off residents. Further promoting this separation was the tendency of each immigrant group to

¹⁰ Charles E. Carroll et al., *Morgan Memorial Social and Religious Survey* (Boston: School of Religious Education and Social Service, Boston University, 1923), pp. 37 and 59.

cluster with family and friends in separate enclaves within the district. While this might have enabled recent arrivals to take advantage of social and family networks within their ethnic group, it reduced the likelihood of their joining together in the creation of neighborhood-wide organizations that provided social services and amenities to all of the district's neighbors. It also made it more difficult for them to unify to combat the proliferation of saloons, brothels, and other dives in their neighborhood.

In the late 1920's the South End began to change again. Since the turn-of-the century the Irish already had been moving out of the South End to Dorchester and other nearby suburbs. By the 1920's, other immigrant groups, having gained enough of a foothold in their adopted country to secure better living conditions, also began to leave the South End. National restrictions on immigration, imposed in the 1920's, also meant the immigrants who moved out of the neighborhood were no longer being replaced by newcomers. By 1940, the percentage of foreign-born residents in the central districts of the South End was no more than 27.7%.¹¹

As families who economically advanced left the South End, those left behind were primarily the most recent immigrants, Syrians, Greeks, and Armenians, as well as African-Americans from the South. In addition, the South End's population was becoming increasingly older and single. By 1940, rooming house residents comprised 55% of the population. Many of these men and women were elderly; a large percentage were also physically disabled or mentally ill. Issues of social isolation, poor sanitary conditions, and a high incidence of health problems, like tuberculosis, plagued the rooming house

¹¹ My information regarding the South End in the 1930's-1940's comes from two sources provided to me by Henry Cohen, DUSP alumnus, 1944, and a resident of South End House, 1942-44: Henry Cohen, "Notes on South End, 1943-44" (personal records of information he gathered in preparation for the South End House fiftieth anniversary report), especially pp. 1-11, and Richard S. Winslow, "The South End and South End House Today and Tomorrow" (Boston: The South End House Association, n.d., excerpts from fiftieth anniversary report), especially pp. 5-12.

population. The South End's residents continued to live in impoverished conditions and had many of the same social and economic needs of their predecessors.

While poverty in the South End persisted well after the 1930's, conditions were particularly dire in the period spanning the 1880's to the 1930's. The conditions described above were similar to those in other industrial cities at the turn-of-the century. It was these conditions in the South End and in other slums that inspired social and religious leaders to work in poor neighborhoods, developing services that were desperately lacking and fighting for reforms that were badly needed.

Social and Religious Movements Working with the Poor

Changes at the turn-of-the century--such as industrial expansion, the growth of cities, and the massive increase in urban poverty--produced the conditions found in the slums of America, like the South End. This period of change also generated widespread social, religious, and political activism, much of it in reaction to the conditions confronted by the urban poor. The South End was fertile ground for these incipient movements.

A phalanx of social activists, clergy, community volunteers, and others set to work among the South End's poor. Some of these neighborhood workers became active in citywide efforts for reform and helped to advance legislative changes bringing stricter housing codes, improved sanitary conditions, and educational and recreational services to the district. Some also supported the efforts by labor unions to win wage increases and improved working conditions.

The efforts of these concerned activists to secure social and political reform helped improve neighborhood conditions, but reform was not the only activity in which they were

engaged. In fact, most neighborhood workers were primarily concerned with addressing the variety of social, educational, recreational, and other needs of the neighborhood's individuals and families. These neighborhood workers looked at the needs of the district's residents in a holistic way; therefore they developed comprehensive services and activities. They also conceived of the problems that beset impoverished residents in terms of the whole neighborhood; therefore they tried to build a stronger neighborhood. Central to building stronger neighborhoods was strengthening relationships between neighbors and between family members. To do this, they developed centers that allowed all community members to come together for activities that built stronger family and social relationships. Finally, creation of a stronger neighborhood required increased participation by residents in neighborhood activity. Therefore neighborhood workers structured activities to involve neighbors as participants rather than as passive recipients of services.

In focusing on the entire neighborhood, these concerned activists looked at the inter-related forces their impoverished neighbors had to contend with--poor housing and sanitation; exploitative working conditions; and a lack of educational, cultural, social, and recreational services--and set out to address all of them. Their ultimate goal, therefore, was not simply to respond to individual needs, but to institute activities and secure reforms which built a stronger overall neighborhood.

Morgan Memorial was only one of the many organizations active in the South End at the turn-of-the century with both a neighborhood-based philosophy and a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of slum residents. When Edgar Helms developed Morgan Memorial, he drew from the philosophies and strategies of other social and religious movements in poor neighborhoods at that time. He was not alone in attempting to address the needs of the South End's poor, nor was he the first to attempt this work. Many other

organizations, especially the settlement houses, engaged in similar activity and shared Morgan Memorial's mission to transform this and other impoverished neighborhoods.

The Settlement House Movement

In 1884 Samuel Barnett, vicar of St. Jude's Church in London's poorest parish, invited a small group of men from Oxford University to take up residence nearby. After years of offering university extension classes and lectures at St. Jude's, Barnett sought to take his idea of service to the poor a step further. He invited this dedicated group of Oxford students to settle in the neighborhood in order to help the poor, not through assistance from afar, but by building friendly, neighborly relations between helpers and the helped. Barnett wanted the privileged to take action to reduce the wretched housing, industrial, and social conditions faced by the poor, but he also believed the elimination of such conditions demanded an elimination of the enormous barrier between rich and poor. "What will save East London?" asked Barnett, referring to the city's poorest district. His answer was the destruction of West London, the city's most privileged section. Barnett was not calling for the physical destruction of London's affluent district, but for an elimination of the divide between these two worlds and a recognition that the lot of the poor would not improve if the rich did not also change. "Not until the habits of the rich are changed, and they are again content to breathe the same air and walk the same streets as the poor, will East London be 'saved.' Meantime, a settlement of University men will do a little to remove the inequalities of life, as the settlers share their best with the poor and learn through feeling how they live."¹²

¹² Samuel Barnett, "Settlements of University Men in Great Towns" (A paper read at St. John's College, Oxford, November 1883). Quoted in Robert Woods and Albert Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon* (1922; rpt. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990.), p. 27.

The inception of this residence, known as Toynbee Hall, where the residents literally "settled" in the poor neighborhood, marked the beginning of the settlement house movement in England and the United States. After several months in residence at Toynbee Hall, Stanton Coit returned to the United States intent on adapting Barnett's approach among immigrants in New York's Lower East Side. In 1886, Coit established the first American settlement, the Neighborhood Guild. Independent of Stanton Coit, other college-educated men, and especially women, began to establish residences in poor neighborhoods of the nation's cities. The most famous American settlement, Hull House, was opened in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in Chicago's West Side slums soon after the two women had returned from a trip to Europe which had included a stay at Toynbee Hall. Three years later, Professor William Tucker of Andover Theological Seminary selected Boston's South End as the site for a settlement. Tucker recruited one of his former seminarians, Robert Woods, to lead this effort. Woods, who had recently returned from six months at Toynbee Hall, went on to serve as head resident of South End House for the next 34 years until his death in 1925.

What began as isolated settlements in city slums throughout the U.S. in the late 1880's grew into a national social movement which flourished for the next forty years. In 1891, the Neighborhood Guild, Hull House, and South End House were among the first six settlements in the country. Within the next six years this number grew to seventy-four; by 1910 there were more than four hundred settlements in the poorest neighborhoods of America's cities.¹³

The settlement houses typically were run by a core group of women and men known as settlement residents. These residents lived in the settlement house anywhere from one to several years. Very often, only the head resident received financial

¹³ Allen Davis, *Spearheads for Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 12.

compensation, the others receiving no more than room and board. The work of these full-time settlement residents was usually supplemented by the part-time assistance of university students and professionals who at times also lived in the house. The settlement houses further depended on a cadre of middle- and upper-class volunteers who lived outside the neighborhood but spent time at the settlement running clubs, teaching classes, and engaging in a variety of other neighborhood activities.

Although the settlement houses acted independently of each other with each devising its own set of services for its poor neighbors, the settlement workers shared a common commitment to neighborhood reconstruction. They settled in their cities' slums with the hope of learning the conditions of the poor first-hand and serving the area's residents as fellow neighbors rather than as outsiders. The mission of the settlements was not charitable relief. This they left to the older and more established charity organizations to provide. Instead, they offered educational and recreational services that would improve the long-term quality of life of the neighborhood's children and adults. The settlement workers wanted to transform their neighbors into better citizens who would be better equipped to build stronger neighborhoods. The more they became involved in their neighborhoods, the more they branched out and took on the roles of investigators, community organizers, and lobbyists, attempting to secure improved housing, sanitation services, medical care, schools, and other social reforms needed in their neighborhoods.

The settlement house idea spread quickly in the United States in response to the economic and social conditions of the age. The industrial expansion of the late nineteenth century, which produced enormous wealth for the privileged, also gave rise to an extreme and rampant form of urban poverty previously unknown in this country. The settlement house workers were horrified by such destitution. They were also disturbed by the growing division between rich and poor, the increasing class conflict manifested by labor

uprisings, and the repressive response of the owners of capital. The settlement house movement rejected Social Darwinism, a widely accepted social view of the day, which justified class divisions as the inevitable consequence of the survival of the fittest. In place of the prevailing ethos which glorified individualism and fierce competition, the settlement house philosophy promoted collective participation and cooperation. The settlement house leaders rejected the notion that individual initiative promoted economic progress and furthered democracy. They believed an over-emphasis on individualism threatened society's well-being by producing the selfishness of the privileged and the exploitation of the most vulnerable. Instead, they argued, citizens needed to learn to act collectively and cooperatively to promote the greater good. The settlement houses defined as their mission the strengthening of the key "collective" units which cultivated good citizenship, namely the family and the neighborhood.

Hundreds of settlement houses were established in America's industrial cities not only because the movement offered an alternative response to the prevailing social and cultural beliefs of the age, but because there was a population of women and men able and eager to take up settlement work. The settlement house movement was in large measure a women's movement. Most settlement workers were women and women figured prominently in the movement's national leadership. The economic expansion of the late 1800's had provided the opportunity for far more affluent young people to attend college than ever before. For college-educated women, who had little opportunity to pursue professions, the settlement house offered a unique work opportunity. These women typically had the economic means to take up residence in a settlement for a period of a few years. They brought skills and a willingness to dedicate themselves to addressing larger societal problems. Added to their numbers were male settlement residents many of whom were also financially able to give a few years of volunteer service. Over time, settlement houses also included residents who combined work in an outside profession with volunteer

activities at the settlement in their free time. In addition, the settlements eventually included residents of more modest means who came from the surrounding neighborhood or who at least shared the same religious and cultural background of the neighboring poor people whom the settlement served.¹⁴

The settlement house mission was primarily a social one. Just as Barnett had hoped to eliminate the divide between East and West London, the American settlement workers wanted to create a common ground where rich and poor could come together for the benefit of both. The goal was not the elimination of economic differences, but a reduction in the social divide between the classes. Robert Woods of South End House believed this to be the most important aspect of the work of the movement: "It is the ultimate distinction of the settlement that it provides a base for acquaintance, fellowship, and joint effort between those who represent the two sides of the great economic rift in our civilization."¹⁵

By bringing together rich and poor the settlement workers hoped to create in the cities' slums a "healthy village life" where all neighbors regardless of their station in life lived in close proximity and cared for one another.¹⁶ Their ideal was not a future classless industrial order but a romanticized pre-industrial past where men and women lived harmoniously regardless of their wealth. The settlement house leaders were influenced in their reaction to the industrial era by earlier thinkers such as the British writer, art critic, and social reformer, John Ruskin. In his lectures and books Ruskin rejected the growing urbanism and industrialism of the mid-1800's which had produced a division of labor that tied the industrial worker to the machine. The industrial worker's life was dominated by

¹⁴ Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1981), pp. 308-9, and Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, p. 364.

¹⁵ Robert Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building* (1923; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 283.

¹⁶ Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, p. 25.

long hours of grueling, mechanized toil. It was an existence completely devoid of culture and beauty and isolated from the privileged who controlled the culture.¹⁷ Like Ruskin and his follower, William Morris, the settlement workers sought to share their educational and cultural privileges with the poor and to bring culture and beauty into the slums through lectures, art classes, and training in handicrafts.

Although the settlement workers tended to idealize pre-industrial village life, they accepted that they could not turn back the clock on industrialization as Ruskin and Morris had hoped to do. They were influenced as well by utopians such as Robert Owen who, almost a century before the creation of the settlement houses, had attempted to integrate his ideal of village life into the modern industrial world. At his model factory village of New Lanark, England, Owen raised wages and shortened hours for workers, while offering extensive educational services and recreational activities. Model factory villages like Owen's and the British industrial and consumer cooperatives proved to settlement house workers that improved economic and social conditions were possible under industrial capitalism.¹⁸

The settlement workers idealized the village not only as a place free of the worst aspects of industrialism, but as a society where neighbors were actively engaged in furthering their collective well-being and in promoting democracy. The settlement workers believed the survival of democracy demanded collective participation in strengthening neighborhood units rather than increased individualism. To promote democracy required imparting to the growing numbers of poor, especially the millions of recent immigrants, an appreciation of America's democratic tradition and the tools of citizenship. Jane Addams

¹⁷ Davis, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, pp. 4-5.

believed that all of the settlement's work figured in this effort to promote the kind of active citizenship among the poor needed to further democracy: "The educational activities of a Settlement, as well as its philanthropic, civic, and social undertakings are but different manifestations of the attempt to socialize democracy."¹⁹

The settlement house mission, while primarily social, was also religious. To the settlement house leaders, their social objectives and religious ideals were merged. The settlement workers were not alone in their reaction to the era's excessive individualism and industrial exploitation of the poor and working class. Increasingly, prominent urban ministers also were speaking out against these economic and social ills. The sermons and activities of these clergy, to be discussed in further detail later on, became known as the social gospel movement. Followers of the social gospel drew attention to Christ's work with the poor; they also redefined salvation as a social matter. Christians were as responsible for their neighbor's redemption (and that of all of society) as with their own salvation.

The settlement workers were strongly influenced in their work and approach by the social gospel movement, which first took shape in the late nineteenth century and entered mainstream Protestantism by the early 1900's. Jane Addams believed the settlement house movement to be a "renaissance of early Christian humanitarianism" which attempted "to express in social service and in terms of action the spirit of Christ."²⁰ Although they ran the settlements as nonsectarian centers, most settlement workers believed their cause had a religious purpose. The charter for South End House, directed by Robert Woods, stated that its settlement's "whole aim and motive is religious, but the method is educational rather

¹⁹ Addams, p. 310.

²⁰ Addams, p. 97.

than evangelistic."²¹ Like South End House, most settlement houses had a secular mission but one grounded in the religious faith and purpose of its members.

The settlement house philosophy reflected an optimistic faith in progress. This faith in progress characterized most of the social, political, and religious movements at the turn-of-the century and gave this period its name, the Progressive Era. The Progressive Party, founded in 1912 on a political platform which encapsulated the dominant reform philosophy of the era, included settlement house leaders among its most active participants. The settlement house workers, the social gospel clergy, and the Progressive reformers for the most part shared a common social, religious, and political philosophy. They often joined forces to promote reform. Central to their shared world view was the belief that the application of rational social reform and increased cooperation among the classes could overcome the worst effects of industrialism and urbanism. Such societal improvement would ensure the nation's continued economic prosperity. All of these reform movements shared a faith in America's potential for economic and social progress and the ability of the American democratic system's to adapt to changing conditions.

The Settlement Houses of the South End

Most settlement houses at the turn-of-the century were established in the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Of those cities, Boston figured prominently in the settlement house movement, and the South End had the majority of Boston's settlements.

The South End, with its poverty, overcrowding, and high population of recent immigrants was a logical district for settlement activity. As described earlier, the district

²¹ Robert Woods and Albert Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements* (1911; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1970), p. 125.

lacked that which settlement houses were committed to creating--a sense of neighborhood and a network of neighborhood services. By the turn-of-the century several settlement houses were active in the South End combating the neighborhood's social ills, fighting for improved municipal services, and providing a variety of social, educational, and recreational activities. By 1910 the South End had more than 12 settlement houses. The three largest, which offered the most extensive services, were South End House, Denison House, and Lincoln House. Together, by the end of the nineteenth century, they served about 1,200 residents of the district.²² The South End's settlements ran nurseries and kindergartens; offered recreational clubs and summer camps for children; provided classes for adults and children in vocational training, handicrafts, English, music, dance, and more; and sponsored art shows, concerts, movies, and lectures.²³

The efforts of the South End's settlements extended well beyond the provision of educational, recreational, and cultural activities. South End House, in particular, played a lead role in investigating the housing, labor, sanitary, and general social conditions of the neighborhood. Based on its investigation of the poor conditions in lodging houses, South End House organized a room registry which served as a system to inspect and maintain housing standards in participating lodging houses. South End House and Lincoln House also fought for reform of municipal elections and of the provision of city services. These two settlements, along with others, organized their neighbors and lobbied the city to build a public bath house, construct playgrounds, improve the schools, provide medical care to children, pave the streets, remove garbage, and provide other services to the South End. Some of the South End's settlements were also involved in the labor movement. Denison House worked with female employees to secure better work conditions; South End House arbitrated labor/management disputes; and the Wells Memorial Institute, which was taken

²² Robert Woods, "Social Recovery" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 272.

²³ Woods and Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements*, pp. 105-135.

over by South End House in 1922, served as a meeting center for the city's trade unions and provided a cooperative bank and cooperative medical society for labor union members.

The settlement house workers provided a wide range of activities and services because they appreciated the interplay between poor housing conditions, lack of educational resources, unemployment, and other social problems. Their approach tended to be holistic: they conceived of problems in terms of the whole person and the entire neighborhood. They attempted to address social, educational, recreational, and cultural needs while also attacking problems related to the housing, health care, sanitation, employment, and the general condition of their neighborhood. And they attacked these problems by becoming generalists, not specialists. At times the settlement workers acted as "friendly visitors" to the families and individuals they served; at other times they were social service providers, sponsors of cultural events, community organizers, investigators, and lobbyists. As Jane Addams noted, the strength of the settlement approach was its flexibility, "its power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand."²⁴ The South End's settlement houses exemplified this effort to address the total needs of the neighborhood and to do whatever was needed to secure neighborhood improvement while meeting individual needs.

Central to the building of stronger neighborhoods was the development of stronger social and family networks. Before the advent of the settlement house, the charitable relief organizations had come to appreciate the importance of evaluating an individual's needs within the context of his or her entire family. The settlement houses extended this approach even further. They engaged groups of family members and neighbors in educational and recreational activities. And they offered a physical center, the settlement house, where neighbors could become acquainted--through classes, clubs, plays, musical bands, dances,

²⁴ Addams, p. 98.

etc.--and strengthen their neighborly ties. The settlement house workers looked at the individual's needs within the context of both his or her family and his or her neighborhood.²⁵

The settlement house served as a community center offering activities to all age groups and open to all neighbors, regardless of religion or ethnicity (although not always regardless of race). The settlement workers wanted to reduce the isolation of residents who lacked social and family ties in the South End and to overcome the ethnic and linguistic differences that kept neighbors apart. They started social clubs, educational classes, and recreational activities which encouraged interaction and the development of relationships among neighbors. They also tried to overcome differences by promoting the adoption of American cultural standards and ideals.

The settlement houses, both of the South End and elsewhere in the nation, are remembered today for encouraging the assimilation of foreign immigrants into the dominant American culture. Much of their work promoted assimilation. They ran classes in Americanization, both to help foreigners attain citizenship and to train them in American culture and way-of-life. But the settlement workers also recognized the dangers of assimilation. They were disturbed to find immigrant children eagerly adopting the ways of their new society and rejecting those of their parents'. To counteract this trend, the settlements offered classes and social events celebrating the languages and ethnic traditions of their neighbors. By doing so, the settlement workers hoped to teach the children of immigrants respect for their family heritage and to strengthen family ties.²⁶

²⁵ Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, p. 396.

²⁶ See Addams, "Immigrants and their Children," pp. 169-185 and Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, p. 328.

Building stronger neighborhoods also demanded participation by neighbors in the life of the neighborhood. Although the settlement workers understood their role to be the uplift and socialization of their neighbors, they did not expect their neighbors to play a passive role in this process. They conceived of their neighbors as participants. Neighbors ran social and cultural clubs and participated in district wide club councils. South End House sought to awaken local initiative by organizing a neighborhood committee for district betterment. The outcome of this effort was the creation of the South End Improvement Association, made up of 700 area neighbors.²⁷

South End House, the most prominent of the district's settlements, was led by Robert Woods who, in addition to his work in the South End, became a leader in the national settlement house movement. Woods distinguished the settlement's work from other activities for social improvement taking place in the South End. He classified the work of these organizations in three ways: *remedial*, *recuperative*, or *reconstructive*.²⁸ The charitable organizations which provided financial relief and other assistance to families during an emergency were doing *remedial* work. The organizations dedicated to improving the quality-of-life of residents played a *recuperative* function. Given that settlement houses were committed to improving the quality-of-life through the creation of clubs, classes, and the like, much of their work served this recuperative function. Woods also included in this category organizations devoted entirely to cultural and educational activities, such as neighborhood music schools, art centers, and lecture halls.

While settlement houses played a recuperative role in the lives of the people they served, the ultimate purpose of their work was *reconstructive*. By reconstructive, Woods meant a commitment to social reconstruction, or the building of a stronger neighborhood.

²⁷ Woods and Kennedy, eds, *Handbook of Settlements*, p. 127.

²⁸ Woods, "Social Recovery" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 248.

Among settlement leaders nationwide, Woods was the best-known proponent of neighborhood reconstruction, but his overall position was echoed in the writing and speeches of other prominent thinkers of the settlement house movement. In his book, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, Woods expanded on his notion of social reconstruction. Woods defined the neighborhood as "a political and moral unit" as critical to the development of strong citizenship as the family. In fact, to Woods the neighborhood was a sort of "family of families."²⁹

Neighborhood reconstruction, according to Woods, involved several types of activities.³⁰ It included working for the neighborhood's physical improvement, especially by fighting for reforms in housing conditions, sanitation services, and other needs of the district. It also involved working for the neighborhood's social improvement by strengthening the ties between families and neighbors and engaging neighbors as participants in the political, social, and cultural life of their district.

Woods believed neighborhood reconstruction could only take place if enlightened and educated leaders--the settlement house residents--shared their privileges with their impoverished neighbors so that the poor might become better citizens. While this conception of the turn-of-the-century settlement house worker as a privileged outsider intent on uplifting the poor has been criticized by many who have studied this movement, Woods appreciated that the settlement worker played a critical role in helping foreign newcomers to adjust to America's urban conditions. Moreover, settlement workers took up residence among these newcomers with the intention of becoming fellow neighbors. It was as a neighbor that the settlement worker was to learn the needs of the area's residents and work

²⁹ Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, p. 151.

³⁰ See Woods, "Social Recovery" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 274 and Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, Chapter XIII, "The Neighborhood in Social Reconstruction."

with them to address those needs. Furthermore, the more enlightened settlement leaders believed neighborhood reconstruction could only be realized if the neighborhood's residents, most of them foreign immigrants, contributed the best of their culture's customs, music, art, and the like to the neighborhood's development. At the same time, the settlement house worker was to expose the immigrant to the better aspects of America's political ideals and culture. The settlement worker not only sought to socialize her neighbors to American ways but to serve as a counterbalance to the other less exemplary Americans with whom the slum dwellers primarily interacted--the saloon keeper, the slum landlord, and the exploitative boss.

Woods believed the vital neighborhood was but the smallest unit in a democracy, therefore building a strong neighborhood would provide "the cement of twentieth century democracy."³¹ Democracy's work was carried out at the neighborhood level through cooperation among neighbors and their collective participation in everything from social clubs and cultural activities to the fight for the paving of a local street or the opening of a school.

A vital neighborhood comprised of informed, educated residents not only promoted democracy, it furthered economic cooperation. Like most settlement leaders, Woods criticized economic competition for its exploitation of industrial workers and believed economic progress could best be achieved through cooperation. An example of such cooperation were the English consumer and producer cooperatives. Many settlement workers hoped for the replication of these British models in America. Aside from isolated experiments to start cooperatives, such as a cooperative coal association at Chicago's Hull House, settlement houses never ventured into the creation of such models of economic cooperation. Woods realized, though, that England's producer and consumer cooperatives

³¹ Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, p. 158.

grew out of strong neighborly relationships and neighborhood affiliation among cooperative members. Woods hoped that by promoting neighborhood affiliation, settlements might further the effort by members of America's growing labor movement to work together. Thus, collective and cooperative activity, cultivated at a neighborhood level, offered the promise of economic and social progress for the nation.

All of these activities to improve the neighborhood's physical infrastructure, socialize the district's residents to the best of America's culture and political ideals, forge stronger ties among neighbors, and foster participation in local activity were a part of the work of neighborhood reconstruction. By reconstructing neighborhoods, Woods believed settlement workers would help create a better society.

Although Woods and other settlement leaders drew a careful distinction between the remedial efforts of charitable organizations and the reconstructive role of the settlement houses, the settlements worked in partnership with the charities. The South End settlements referred people suffering a financial emergency to the Associated Charities and those in need of long-term assistance to the Overseers of the Poor. In other cities where the charities were not so well organized as they were in Boston, settlement houses at times provided charitable relief. But even though their efforts occasionally overlapped with those of the charities--settlement workers occasionally provided financial assistance and frequently made "friendly visits" to the poor to assess their needs--the settlement workers defined themselves as neighbors, not charity givers. They sought to build a long-term relationship with their neighbors and to assist them with the work of neighborhood-building even after short-term emergencies were resolved. Where charity workers emphasized the individual causes of poverty, settlement workers stressed the social and

economic conditions that made people poor.³² Where charity workers remained outsiders, the settlement workers became fellow neighbors to the people they served.

With so many settlement houses in the South End, the boundaries between them often became blurred. As early as 1899 the South End settlements created the South End Social Union to eliminate inter-settlement competition and overlap. They also joined forces to become involved in neighborhood-wide reform activities. In 1908 the South End Social Union joined with similar groups from the North and West Ends to form the Boston Social Union. The creation of the Boston Social Union enabled the individual settlement houses to combine their efforts for citywide reforms. Through its committees, members of the Union fought for juvenile protection, investigated social conditions in Boston's slums, promoted the creation of public playgrounds and better school facilities, and lobbied for social legislation. The Union also set guidelines to define the neighborhood boundaries of each settlement. According to the Union's charter, each settlement house would agree to the territory from which it would draw its membership, and neighborhood children and adults could be members of no more than one house.³³

In addition to distinguishing the geographic boundaries of each settlement, the Boston Social Union distinguished between settlement houses and the neighborhood's churches and religious missions. Settlement houses that joined the Union were required to be non-sectarian. Its charter stated: "No member of the union shall give any religious instruction or endeavor to change the religious beliefs of any person."³⁴ Robert Woods recognized that several churches, through their social and educational activities, provided

³² Davis, pp. 18-9.

³³ Woods and Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements*, p. 105.

³⁴ Woods and Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements*, p. 105.

much-needed assistance to the South End's residents. But while their clergy often conceived of their churches as religious settlements, Woods did not classify them as such. He believed these churches lacked the neighborhood base of the settlement houses. Furthermore, their interest in neighborhood reconstruction was always subordinate to their religious activities. While they claimed to be non-denominational, they only accepted differences among Protestant sects. They clearly promoted Protestantism over Catholicism and Christianity over Judaism, even though the majority of the South End's immigrants were either Catholics or Jews. Woods noted that the public often confused religious organizations with settlement houses, resulting in misunderstandings about the motives of settlement neighborhood work. The religious mission, Woods concluded, "serves no specific local purpose and throws settlement work into disrepute."³⁵

The public easily confused settlement houses with religious organizations because there was a great deal of overlap to their activities. Even the residents of nonsectarian settlement houses classified some church-affiliated groups as religious settlement houses. By the early 1920's, the settlement house movement was comprised of a total of 400 settlements nationwide, almost half of which had church sponsorship. Many functioned much like church missions.³⁶

The Social Gospel Movement

Woods criticized the churches for masking evangelism behind settlement activity, but he also recognized those church assets that were particularly valuable to the work of neighborhood reconstruction. The churches in poor neighborhoods had property and

³⁵ Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*, p. 371.

³⁶ Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 3.

buildings which could be used for additional neighborhood activities. Through their religious activities churches already were engaged in promoting reconstruction of their neighborhoods. They brought people together, thereby strengthening social networks and increasing neighborhood participation.³⁷ Increasingly, clergy at the turn-of-the-century defined the church's mission in even broader terms as combating poverty and the divisions between the classes.

The social gospel movement, which had an important influence on the religious thinking of the settlement house workers, also inspired action on the part of many clergy. Charles Stelzle, a well-known Presbyterian minister of the social gospel active on the national scene, articulated the conditions faced by the poor and working class in the industrial cities. In their plight he saw the challenge before the nation's churches:

The filthy slum, the dark tenement, the unsanitary factory, the long hours of toil, the lack of a living wage, the back-breaking labor . . . these weigh down the hearts and lives of multitudes in our cities. . . . No hell in the future can be worse to them than the hell in which they now live. . . . What meaning have the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man? . . . It is in meeting the needs of these that the Church will be severely tested in coming days. ³⁸

By the turn-of-the century more and more ministers responded to this challenge through service in the nation's slums. Like the settlement house leaders, ministers of the social gospel reacted to the horrors of their industrial age. Often they romanticized the pre-industrial past as an era of greater class harmony. Yet they did not reject industrialism. Like the settlement leaders, they believed social reforms could mitigate the excesses of industrialization and could harness the power of industry to serve the good of society. It was this optimism in the future and in the potential of America to achieve a more just and

³⁷ Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building*, p. 163.

³⁸ Charles Stelzle, lecture of 1908 quoted in Ronald C. White, Jr. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), pp. 53-4.

prosperous social order which characterized the social gospel movement. This optimism, equally shared by settlement house workers, infused their religious activities.

The social gospel was less an organized movement than a shared religious perspective which spurred many clergy to action among the poor and working class. The most radical among these clergy came to espouse a Christian socialism that went beyond pleas for greater cooperation between labor and capital and called for the creation of a Christian socialist state. Most proponents of the social gospel espoused a more moderate position however, and remained within the mainstream of the Protestant churches. The social gospel spawned the development of two types of religious organizations dedicated to work with the urban poor. One was the religious settlement house, also referred to as the "institutional church," the other, the rescue mission. Both were active in the South End.

The Religious Organizations of the South End

The term "institutional church" was first coined by Professor William Tucker, the force behind the creation of South End House, to describe the work of Boston's Berkeley Temple. The term was soon employed to describe the churches and missions which were expanding their functions to cover "the entire life of man," the social, cultural, educational, economic, and spiritual.³⁹

The Congregationalist Berkeley Temple was the first church in Boston to expand its mission into the social sphere. Beginning in 1888, the Berkeley Temple offered classes for young men and women in academic and vocational subjects. The church particularly sought to serve the lodging house population. It organized a "temperance guild" run by

³⁹ Aaron Abell, *The Urban Impact on American Protestantism 1865-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 137.

reformed alcoholics to help other men end their drinking habits and fought successfully to prevent the opening of several saloons in the neighborhood.⁴⁰

In 1894 the Universalist's Every-Day Church followed the path laid down by the Congregationalists and opened a reading and recreation room just outside the South End. The church also started a daily lunch program, a kindergarten and day nursery, and vocational and recreational classes.

The third major institutional church serving the South End was the Episcopal St. Stephen's Church. Unlike the other two churches, which were located just outside the district, St. Stephen's was located in the South End and more immersed in the neighborhood's problems. It also placed greater emphasis than the other two institutional churches on evangelical work. The St. Stephen's Rescue Mission proselytized men through its mission services, while also offering lodging and meals in its lodging house.⁴¹ By the early 1900's the neighborhood in which St. Stephen's was located had become predominantly Jewish and Italian. In order to meet the needs of those neighbors, who were not interested in St. Stephen's missionary work, the church branched out into other activities that did not have an evangelical motive. St. Stephen's House, the church's religious settlement, ran a kindergarten, vocational and recreational classes, a dispensary, and fresh air camp outings.⁴²

Many other churches also launched new projects and activities to serve the South End's residents. The Benevolent Fraternity of Churches opened Parker Memorial just outside the district as a center for lectures, clubs, classes, and the like. The Mission Priests

⁴⁰ Abell, p. 154 and William I. Cole, "The Church and the People" in *The City Wilderness*, pp. 208-9.

⁴¹ Cole, "The Church and the People" in *The City Wilderness*, pp. 212-3.

⁴² Woods and Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements*, pp. 134-5.

of St. John the Evangelist in 1908 constructed the St. Augustine's and St. Mary's Mission in the black community bordering the upper South End. This church eventually ran clubs and classes for up to 200 of its neighbors.⁴³

In addition to the institutional churches, there were the rescue missions. They combined poor relief with evangelism. The Salvation Army, which had local units across the country, operated a mission in the South End. So did the Volunteers of America, an offshoot of the Salvation Army. Unlike the settlement houses and institutional churches, which worked primarily with the district's families, the rescue missions dealt primarily with the poorest and most transient individuals in the South End many of whom were alcoholics subsisting on temporary day labor. The Salvation Army ran a Workingman's Hotel. Like most rescue missions, it both proselytized and provided food and emergency shelter.

The institutional churches and religious missions dedicated their efforts to the provision of neighborhood services. They stayed out of the settlement fights for political and social reform. Their focus remained on the immediate needs of their parishioners and neighbors.

A Shift in Neighborhood-Based Services after the Turn-of-the Century

The settlement house movement reached its height at the turn-of-the century. Settlement houses established an array of neighborhood services and activities; carried out neighborhood investigations of slum housing, poor sanitation, and other social ills; and fought for political and social reforms. The turn-of-the century marked the period of

⁴³ Woods and Kennedy, eds., *Handbook of Settlements*, p. 114 and John Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1914), p. 194.

greatest neighborhood activity among settlement houses in the South End as well as in other city slums. After World War I, Progressive Era reformers, including the settlement workers, were halted in their reform efforts by the conservative shift taking place in national and local politics. In addition, the urban slums began to change and so did the settlement houses.⁴⁴

The passage of immigration restrictions in the 1920's stemmed the tide of immigrant newcomers to places like the South End. Replacing the flow of immigrants was the great migration of rural southern blacks to the northern cities. These newcomers did not need the classes in citizenship and other cultural activities to help immigrants assimilate that the settlements had offered to earlier residents. Settlement houses, in turn, were not always willing to open their doors and adapt their activities to suit this latest group of newcomers. While some welcomed the participation of African-American neighbors; some settlement houses chose to relocate rather than integrate. Still other settlements stayed in these communities but remained segregated.⁴⁵

The settlement houses also changed in response to increased financial burdens. After the World War I, interest in and financial support for settlement activity failed to return to pre-war levels, in part because of diminished interest in the problems of urban poverty in an era of national post-war prosperity. It was also more difficult to attract money for work with poor blacks than it had been for work with immigrant whites.

With funds more difficult to come by, the settlement houses increasingly found it expedient to join other city charities and fundraise through the "Community Chest." As the

⁴⁴ This analysis of the changes in urban slums and in settlement activity described in the following section is drawn from Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, "The Interwar Period", pp. 21-4 and Davis, "Epilogue: World War I and After," pp. 218-245.

⁴⁵ Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, p. 22.

sources of their funding became centralized and institutionalized through the Community Chest, the settlement houses began to lose some of their autonomy. In her book, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression*, Judith Trolander describes how settlement houses became far more dependent for funds on the Community Chest and on wealthy board members than they had ever been in the Progressive Era. These funders were removed from neighborhood conditions and pressured settlement residents to steer clear of labor union battles and other political controversies. They encouraged settlement residents to pursue the work of individual betterment of their neighbors and to curtail their efforts for political and social reform.⁴⁶

The settlement houses also experienced increased difficulty attracting new residents and volunteers. Educated young people no longer took up settlement service as much as they had in the past. This declining interest in settlement residence, combined with the growing professionalization of social work, caused a shift in the settlement approach. Increasingly, settlement workers did not define their objectives as settling in the neighborhood and building friendly relations with area residents by serving as generalist neighborhood workers. Many new settlement workers had specialized training in social work, nursing, or recreation. They defined their efforts as professional work. Many settlements also began to eliminate the residential component of their centers. Gone as well was the zeal of earlier settlement leaders who conceived of their efforts as a secular mission to poor neighborhoods. Allen Davis sums up the characteristics of the new settlement workers and their changed philosophy:

They thus came trained as case workers or recreation experts, and they gradually began to speak of the people they were helping not so much as their neighbors as their clients . . . Critical of traditional practices that seemed sentimental and haphazard, the new breed of social workers even challenged the idea that residence was indispensable. . . . Many were the

⁴⁶ See Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), "Boards, Chests, and Funds," pp. 50-63.

sons and daughters of immigrants, and some had, themselves, been brought up in the slums. They were interested neither in living in a working-class neighborhood nor in remaining at the settlement in the evening to attend meetings of labor unions or reform organizations. They often wanted a home in the suburbs and other trappings of status that earlier residents had taken for granted.⁴⁷

Settlement houses began to specialize in part because their workers were professionally trained. They also narrowed their range of activity as new social agencies, with particular areas of expertise, established themselves in urban neighborhoods. In addition, the government took over many of the activities the settlements had once initiated.

In a sense, success caused the settlement house workers to specialize. Once they had won the government's commitment to open a neighborhood library, offer a kindergarten, construct a playground, provide vaccinations to children, and expand the vocational and academic offerings of the schools, the settlement workers no longer felt compelled to provide a comprehensive array of services themselves. Moreover, the social legislation of the New Deal, which some of the more prominent settlement leaders had a hand in crafting, reduced the dependence of the poor on private charities and settlement house services. The same advances that improved economic and social conditions for the urban poor and working class helped undercut the need for comprehensive, neighborhood-based settlement activity and weakened the missionary zeal of the settlement house workers to advance neighborhood reconstruction.

Conclusion

Settlement houses, institutional churches, and rescue missions continued to work in slum districts like the South End well after the turn-of-the century. It was during the

⁴⁷ Davis, pp. 231-2.

Progressive Era, though, that hundreds of upper- and middle-class community volunteers, clergy, and other social reformers dedicated themselves to living and working in the slums. Out of this activism was born the settlement house movement composed of hundreds of neighborhood houses in slums across the country. Paralleling the work of the nonsectarian settlements was that of the institutional churches and rescue missions, also established by the hundreds during this era.

Boston's South End was a center for a great deal of this neighborhood work and reform activism. Edward Everett Hale, the founder of one South End settlement, Hale House, and a prominent activist on behalf of Boston's poor, once referred to the turn-of-the century South End as "the most 'charitied' region in Christendom."⁴⁸

Among the dozens of social and religious organizations at work in the South End was Morgan Memorial. Edgar Helms, the principal architect of this organization, drew upon the philosophy of the social gospel to guide him in his religious, urban mission. He also adopted many of the methods and activities first started by the non-sectarian settlement houses. His creation, Morgan Memorial, he described as an institutional church. But it was far more than that. It was a combination institutional church, settlement house, and industrial venture. It offered religious, social, cultural, and recreational activities as did the institutional churches and settlement houses. It also provided vocational training and jobs for thousands of men and women. For this reason Helms also referred to his creation as an industrial church. However it was classified, Morgan Memorial was unique. It offered an array of services and activities that was different from that of other South End agencies. It also had a distinct approach to addressing the needs of its neighborhood, rooted in the work begun by Henry Morgan, and dramatically expanded as a result of the skill and vision of Edgar Helms.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Woods, "Social Recovery" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 245.

CHAPTER 3

Morgan Memorial

Introduction

The story of Morgan Memorial begins with Henry Morgan. It was he who established the original Morgan Chapel and defined many of the core ideals and objectives which formed Morgan Memorial's philosophical foundation: a mission of service to the poor, the provision of multiple activities to feed the body and the soul--particularly vocational training and employment, and a belief in this work's over-arching religious purpose. It was Edgar Helms who ultimately took Henry Morgan's original ideals and shaped them into Morgan Memorial's philosophy and unique approach. Helms also took Morgan's small church and expanded its operation, eventually creating a jobs, housing, and service empire that served thousands of poor individuals and families of the South End.

The following is the story of Morgan Memorial's development. It is the story of an organization that owes its philosophical beginning to Henry Morgan, but which was built by an exceptional visionary and institution-builder, Edgar Helms. It is also the story of Helms' comprehensive approach to the needs and problems of his South End neighbors and his dedication to the neighborhood's social reconstruction. The outcome of this approach was the creation of a network of jobs, housing, and services that improved neighbors' lives and resulted in a stronger neighborhood. Helms' unusual industrial venture, which was the organization's most distinct feature, also became a model for hundreds of similar ventures established across the nation and around the world.

Henry Morgan and the Creation of Morgan Chapel

In 1859 Henry Morgan came to Boston. Unable to secure a position in a church, the itinerant Methodist preacher rented out the city's largest auditorium, the Boston Music Hall, and charged ten cents admission in the hope of covering his costs. Morgan did not have to worry long about paying the Music Hall rental fee. The *Boston Atlas* reported on the Connecticut preacher's debut, describing Morgan as a "genuine specimen of a live, jumping, nervous Yankee."⁴⁹ The crowds soon flocked to Music Hall to hear Morgan rail against the city's corruption and moral degradation and promote the gospel of temperance.

Despite his popularity, Morgan soon needed to take his preaching elsewhere. The other entertainment users found Morgan too controversial and the owner refused him further use of the hall. At the invitation of a saloon keeper, Morgan took up preaching in a large Boston saloon. The saloon keeper figured the popular preacher would bring in the crowds and boost business. Morgan brought in the crowds, but under the spell of his sermons the patrons would not drink and he again found himself without a pulpit from which to preach.⁵⁰

Henry Morgan became well-known for his crusade against alcoholism and other forms of moral corruption, but the cause to which he was most dedicated was service to the poor. Morgan had known dire poverty as a child, and he never forgot the experience. Throughout his life he referred to himself as "Henry Morgan, Poor Man's Preacher."

⁴⁹ Ivan D. Steen, "Building a Foundation for Goodwill Industries: The Activities of Rev. Henry Morgan," unpublished paper, Department of History, State University of New York at Albany, n.d., p. 3.

⁵⁰ Edgar Helms, *Pioneering in Modern City Missions* (Boston: Morgan Memorial Printing Department, 1927), p. 39.

In his first sermon in Music Hall, Morgan opened by stating: "My object in Music Hall is to present the gospel to the working classes and to open a mission for the poor in some part of the city."⁵¹ Within a year of coming to Boston, he had realized his objective. In 1860, an interdenominational committee formed the Boston Union Mission Society for the primary purpose of serving the poor. The Society offered the position of pastor to Henry Morgan and a year later it established a new denomination, the First Independent Methodist Church, and granted him ordination. This was the only official ordination Morgan would ever receive, having been refused ordination by the New England Methodist Conference for his failure to comply fully with established church rules.

In 1860 city authorities granted the Union Mission Society use of the Franklin School building on Washington Street. Finally, Morgan had a place to build his mission for the poor. He proceeded to launch a variety of activities--an employment office where the poor could learn of jobs without paying a fee, a sewing school for girls, and a volunteer-run effort to repair old clothing for the benefit of the poor. These activities were small in comparison with his biggest scheme, the establishment of a trade school. The Franklin School grew into a large and successful night trade school for impoverished boys who worked by day. In its first five years, the school educated hundreds of Boston's poor children. Unfortunately for Morgan, the school became so successful that in 1868 the city decided to take it over and make it part of its newly formed public school system.

Between his work for the Union Mission Society and his popular lectures, Henry Morgan had become one of Boston's best-known clergy. His reputation resulted in his appointment as chaplain of the State House, where he had the opportunity to become acquainted with Governor Claflin. When the Governor learned that Morgan had been dislodged from the Franklin School building, he offered to provide Morgan the funding to

⁵¹ E.C.E. Dorion, *The Redemption of the South End* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1915), p. 27.

purchase the Church of the Disciples in the South End. The congregation, following the trend of many of the South End's established churches, had recently transferred to the Back Bay, putting up for sale its former South End church.

Morgan purchased the church at auction in 1868, and eventually repaid the Governor with the proceeds from his popular lectures and books. He renamed the church Morgan Chapel and dedicated its mission to work among its poor neighbors. Although he was never able to re-create the variety of programs he had once provided at the Franklin trade school, he offered classes, employment assistance, and other relief to the poor.

In the last years of his life, Morgan became increasingly focused on what he believed to be the city's deteriorating moral environment. He hired investigators to help him explore the seamy side of Boston. Armed with this information, he wrote a book which achieved immediate popularity, *Boston Inside Out*, an exposé of the corruption and moral vice he claimed pervaded Boston's Roman Catholic Church and the city's government. A few years after the establishment of Morgan Chapel and the publication of his last book, Henry Morgan contracted tuberculosis. After suffering a long illness, he died in 1884.

During his lifetime Morgan not only spoke out against the city's moral corruption, he passionately defended those groups who suffered under unjust economic, political, and social conditions. In addition to his dedicated service to the poor, Morgan gave strong support to working people, aligning himself with labor in well-known local strikes. Morgan was also a radical proponent for his day of women's rights. He created a "Women in the Pulpit" series at Morgan Chapel, at which well-known women spoke. He also urged women to fight for equal pay for equal work, and felt that the injustice of prevailing conditions necessitated a universal strike for women's rights. Morgan even spoke out for a

fairly forgotten group--mentally ill persons--whom he believed lived under oppressive conditions in state asylums.

Morgan gained fame and popularity in his day for his sermons and books, but his most enduring legacy was the creation of a mission for the poor at Morgan Chapel. Henry Morgan's work and his dedication to ministering to both the body and soul of the poor laid the foundation for an extensive social service and jobs organization which several years later would be built in his name.

The eccentricity Henry Morgan manifested during his life extended to the conditions he set in his will for the disposition of Morgan Chapel. Having never been accepted by the Methodist Church, Morgan bequeathed his church to the Unitarian City Missionary Society with the condition that the Unitarians hire a Methodist minister. Over the next 11 years Morgan Chapel went through a succession of five ministers, none of whom possessed Henry Morgan's organizational skill, leadership, or vision. In the meantime, the congregation dispersed. Bereft of leadership and members, the church abandoned many of its activities assisting the neighborhood's poor. Finally in 1895, a new minister agreed to take on the task of running Morgan Chapel. Unlike his immediate predecessors, this minister came with a vision and the determination to build on the foundation Henry Morgan had laid.

Edgar Helms and the Influences Upon his Work

Edgar Helms, a devout Methodist from rural Iowa, seemed an odd match for this inner-city Boston ministry. Yet, Helms' combination of charisma, good-natured charm, and single-minded dedication to serve the poor were the very traits needed to rebuild Morgan Chapel and to meet the needs of its parish of very poor families and individuals.

Edgar Helms was born in 1863 in upstate New York. As a young child his family moved to the frontier of Iowa to become farmers. Helms cared little for the backbreaking toil of farm life and was determined to seek a different profession. After brief attempts at law and journalism, he decided to pursue his dream to become a minister and to serve as a missionary abroad. In 1889, following many years of preparation for the ministry, Helms headed east to attend Boston University's School of Theology in order to ready himself for missionary work. Three years later he graduated with the highest grades ever conferred by that school.

Edgar Helms, along with his fiancée, Eugenia, believed they were finally on the verge of realizing the dream for which they had waited and worked over the ten years of their engagement: to serve together as missionaries in India. An unexpected obstacle forced them to re-think their dream, however. They were informed that the church had changed its policy and would only accept as missionaries single men who would commit to five years of service. Unwilling to postpone their marriage any longer and committed to carrying out their missionary service together, Helms and his fiancée decided if they were not able to do missionary work abroad, perhaps they could do it at home.

Helms recognized there was plenty of domestic missionary work to be done. Although poverty in this country was less dire than in India, the poor in America's cities lived and worked in desperate conditions. Helms was familiar with the work being done with London's poor at Toynbee Hall and at the early settlement houses established in the late 1880's in U.S. cities. When Helms applied to the Boston Missionary and Church Extension Society for domestic missionary work, he informed the board that "the settlement was the best way to Americanize and Christianize the foreigners in Boston."⁵²

⁵² Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 33.

In 1892, with a meager stipend from the Boston Missionary Society, Helms, his wife, and a group of friends moved to the North End to establish a religious settlement house. They set to work learning the needs of their Italian, Portuguese, and Jewish immigrant neighbors. Because of their evangelical focus, many neighbors were suspicious of their intentions, although others accepted the assistance. The settlement residents discovered that the Italian immigrants were being cheated out of hard-earned wages by the padroni, Italian bankers and money lenders. Helms and his associates organized a bank for these immigrants enabling them to send money to relatives in Italy without depending on the services of these padroni. They also started a Portuguese newspaper and offered classes in English and in domestic and industrial trades. Since the mission of their work was religious, the residents also conducted church services, recruiting an Italian minister to assist them.

Helms' philosophy and his activities were shaped by a variety of influences. Perhaps the strongest was the social gospel. Like many other ministers of his day, Helms interpreted the teachings of Jesus as a call to serve industrial America's poor and to bring the Gospel to life in the inner city. Like other proponents of the social gospel, Helms shared a commitment to action and optimism that society's salvation could be achieved through love of neighbor and service to God: "The world could become a paradise in a few generations if government, science and industry would make 'service' their chief objective and no longer exploit others, but build up a better race of human beings."⁵³

As a student at Boston University, Helms had been greatly influenced by Borden Bowne, a prominent Methodist theologian with whom he studied. Bowne aligned himself with the most moderate proponents of the social gospel. He recognized the need for

⁵³ Helms, *Pioneering*, pp. 72-3

legislation to improve industrial working conditions but rejected labor union organizing as the harmful agitation of radicals. Bowne believed many of society's ills were rooted in individual failings, not economic exploitation. The appropriate solution was individual redemption, not collective action.⁵⁴

Bowne's position was in keeping with Methodist theology. Methodism championed the individual virtues of frugality and hard work and claimed most social ills to be the product of individual sin. This conservative theology kept most Methodist clergy from calling for greater economic and political justice for the poor--as did other ministers of the social gospel--even though the Methodist Church had traditionally drawn its greatest following from the poor and lower classes.

As a Methodist, Helms shared his church's emphasis on thrift and hard work. In later years, he always spoke of his effort to create jobs as offering the poor a chance to work rather than giving them charity. He also shared his church's zealous dedication to the cause of temperance. Helms defined his work with homeless men at Morgan Memorial more in terms of their rescue from the sin of alcohol than from the plight of poverty. However, his Methodist tradition also provided him with a role model in his work against poverty.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who preceded Helms by more than one hundred years, had dedicated his life to serving the poor of Eighteenth Century London. Wesley had divided London into districts, enabling his charitable visitors to become familiar with their section in order to give wisely to the poor. Wesley made loans to the poor, established orphanages, and built a home for elderly women. Most important, from

⁵⁴ Robert Rollin Huddleston, "The Relatedness of Goodwill Industries and the Christian Church," Diss. Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Co. 1959, p. 165 and Henry May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949, pp. 195-6.

Helms' perspective, Wesley recognized the urgent employment needs of the poor and located jobs for them during times of depression. Helms believed Wesley had set the example for ministers like himself of the kind of rescue work needed in the cities.⁵⁵

Another important influence on Helms was the settlement house movement. Helms had used the early settlement houses as a guide for much of his work in the North End. In 1899, after Helms had already begun work at Morgan Chapel, he received a fellowship from Boston University to study in Europe, giving him the opportunity to visit Toynbee Hall and see firsthand the work of the earliest and most influential settlement house. Although Helms defined his work as a religious mission, in contrast to the secular mission of most settlement houses, he copied many of their social, educational, and recreational activities and approaches.

During this trip to Europe, Helms also visited a number of well-known cooperative colonies including the Rochdale Cooperative and those founded by Robert Owen and Fourier. Helms was quite impressed by what he saw and came away with the conviction that cooperatives could be an effective instrument of social change.⁵⁶ Helms believed these cooperative ventures exemplified the best of democracy and Christian brotherhood and were the ideal alternative to the competitive and exploitative industries of his age. In 1905 when he started Morgan Memorial's industrial arm, he defined it as a cooperative industry. It was his dream to inaugurate a producers' and consumers' cooperative. He believed the creation of models of industrial cooperation offered the means to America's economic, social, and moral well-being. On future trips to Europe in the 1920's and '30's, Helms again visited cooperatives, and sent other Morgan Memorial staff to tour them as well.

⁵⁵ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 127 and Huddleston, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Huddleston, p. 172.

Throughout his life he maintained this dream of launching a cooperative enterprise modeled on the ones he had seen in Europe.⁵⁷

The Development of Morgan Memorial

In 1895, after three years in the North End, Edgar Helms assumed leadership of Morgan Chapel. It had been eleven years since Morgan's death and the church had lost most of its congregation. It had also lost sight of Morgan's original mission. Helms described how the minister who preceded him had instituted a kind of rescue work which neither rescued souls nor attracted many followers: "After feeding three or four hundred tramps with coffee and sandwiches the men were locked in the chapel and compelled to attend a preaching service. The result of this method was to drive almost everyone but tramps from the meetings."⁵⁸ Helms accepted the invitation to serve at Morgan Chapel on condition that he could discontinue the morning breakfasts for tramps and "put the larger emphasis on work for children and the community."⁵⁹ Helms promised the Unitarian City Missionary Society he would not abandon the tramps. He would devise more effective ways to meet their needs, but first he wanted to serve the neighboring families.

Meeting the needs of his neighbors was to be no easy task. The area surrounding Morgan Chapel could hardly be called a community. Looking back years later, Helms recalled the conditions in 1895 when he first came to Morgan Chapel: "I went into the most vicious neighborhood I have ever known. I have visited most of the slum sections in

⁵⁷ Edgar J. Helms, "The Enlarging Goodwill Industries' Program," Unpublished paper, 28 January 1939, Morgan Memorial archives, Boston University School of Theology Library, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 40.

⁵⁹ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 40.

nearly all our American cities and most of those in Europe, but I have never seen anything quite so bad as the conditions around Morgan Chapel thirty years ago."⁶⁰

Upon arriving at Morgan Chapel, Helms set out to make himself known throughout the neighborhood and to become acquainted with the residents and their needs. Wedged in between the saloons, gambling halls, and brothels, Helms found families crowded into tenement housing. The streets closest to Morgan Chapel included a colony of blacks recently arrived from the South. Residing in the tenements spreading out from there were immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe, and single men and women, both American and foreign born, in the lodging and boarding houses.⁶¹

Helms had promised to serve the needs of the families around Morgan Chapel and he proceeded to do so. He gathered together what furniture he could find in the church, assembled some makeshift cribs between the pews, and opened a nursery. The nursery soon was up and running, and with the assistance of an experienced nanny, grew quickly into both a nursery and day kindergarten. At the same time, Eugenia Helms began to offer classes to older children to prepare them to run a home and to secure employment.

Having established a few activities to serve the neighborhood's children, Helms returned to his promise not to abandon the "tramps." He uncovered the boarded up baptistery, which Morgan had used for full-immersion baptisms, and he adapted it to provide showers for the men. Concerned that the lure of the local saloons was drawing many of the men into alcoholism, he established Saturday evening concerts as a form of alternative entertainment. He also created an alcohol-free alternative to the local bars,

⁶⁰ Helms, *Pioneering*, pp. 40-1. In 1898, the residents of South End House, surveyed conditions in this district. They found the particular streets around Morgan Chapel to be the worst in the South End, if not in the entire city. Frederick A. Bushée, "Population" in *The City Wilderness*, p. 45.

⁶¹ Bushée, "Population" in *The City Wilderness*, pp. 45-9.

known in those days as temperance saloons. Within a few years Morgan Chapel's temperance saloon offered a reading room, piano lounge, and a daily meal. Every night it filled up with about one hundred men.⁶²

In Edgar Helms' day, the religious missions tended to serve the homeless men and the settlement houses, the immigrant families. Helms' approach was somewhat unique because he extended his efforts to include all of the South End's poorest residents. He also expanded his mission beyond assistance to working families, who were struggling but not impoverished, and placed particular emphasis on helping the very poor. That same optimism rooted in the social gospel which gave him faith in the possibility of society's salvation, fortified his belief in each individual's value and potential redemption: "No one is too poor or too bad to go to Morgan Memorial. The best is none too good for the poorest, and the poorest shall have our very best."⁶³

Helms' dedication to all of humanity led him to open the doors of Morgan Memorial to both blacks and whites at a time when the doors to most religious missions and settlement houses remained closed to blacks. Helms also claimed that Morgan Memorial, although Protestant, made its activities available to all its neighbors regardless of their faith. As Helms himself stated, at Morgan Memorial "there shall be no discrimination on account of cash, creed, color, caste, or character."⁶⁴

Having cleaned up the church and opened its doors to its neighbors, Helms next set to work cleaning up the neighborhood. Helms believed building the neighborhood involved more than offering activities within Morgan Chapel; it meant working to change

⁶² Dorion, p. 99.

⁶³ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 50.

⁶⁴ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 50.

conditions in the surrounding streets. He and his assistants used an innovative form of community organizing to confront and rid the neighborhood of its absentee-owned houses of gambling and prostitution: they went into the real estate business. They had a young man open a real estate office nearby without publicizing his connection to Morgan Chapel. He was able to identify the area's absentee owners, most of whom left their buildings to the care of real estate agents and were unaware of how they were used. Helms then went to the owners, informed them of the activities going on in their buildings, and offered to provide them with more suitable tenants from among the families who used the services of Morgan Chapel. Some landlords complied. When others did not, Helms came up with other ways to rid the neighborhood of these problems. In one instance, Morgan Chapel leased a nearby property as a lodging house from where it tracked the illegal activity in adjacent buildings. When Helms went public with this information, he faced bitter opposition from those involved in the illicit activities. Threats were made on his life and on the church, but public opinion had been aroused against these illicit businesses.⁶⁵ Over the next several years, under a reform city government and with the cooperation of other social and religious agencies in the South End, Morgan Memorial was able to clear the neighborhood of the worst of these establishments.⁶⁶

From the start, Helms was committed to trying to meet the vocational and employment needs of Morgan Chapel's impoverished and unskilled neighbors. He started by opening a night school for adults, much as Henry Morgan had done thirty years before for teenagers. The school offered classes in carpentry, cobbling, printing, tailoring, dressmaking, and other trades. With the onset of a severe economic depression in the mid 1890's, the school was swamped with people in search of skills and work. Helms responded by opening an employment bureau. When he could not locate enough jobs, he

⁶⁵ Earl Christmas, *House of Goodwill* (Boston: Morgan Memorial Press, 1924), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁶ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 41.

realized he would have to create some himself. This idea was the beginning of what would prove to be an enormous employment venture.

By 1900, within five years of coming to Morgan Chapel, Helms had taken this neglected church building and transformed it into a center in which activities for infants, older children, and adults went on from morning till night. At this rate of expansion Helms' efforts would soon outgrow the church building. Before that could happen, the church needed to be replaced. It had become so deteriorated and unsafe it was about to be condemned by the city. In order to construct a new building the church's trustees borrowed \$50,000. After construction was completed, in 1901, the church struggled each month to meet the mortgage. Helms received little support in his fundraising from the Unitarian trustees since they did not want their denominational funds used for Morgan Chapel. In 1911, the church was brought to the point of foreclosure. Fortunately for Helms, there were no bidders on the building and the bank gave him time to launch a capital campaign. The Unitarian City Missionary Society withdrew its oversight of the church. Helms established a new interdenominational board for Morgan Chapel and renamed the church, "Morgan Memorial." His capital campaign proved so successful he was able to pay off the entire mortgage. After that experience Helms never again incurred debt to finance any of Morgan Memorial's construction projects. He added new buildings only when he had sufficient funds to pay for them outright.

Although Helms had changed the organization's name to Morgan Memorial he continued to define it as a church and the surrounding neighborhood as its parish. Throughout his years of service to Morgan Memorial, Helms remained unequivocal in his promotion of the organization's religious mission: "Religion has always been at the center of all Morgan Memorial activities."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 65.

The Morgan Memorial building constructed in 1901 became known as the Children's Settlement. It served as both the organization's chapel and the center of activities for children. The Children's Settlement offered a nursery and kindergarten, a bible school, clubs, recreational activities, and vocational classes. By 1912, 1,000 children from neighboring homes participated in some Morgan Memorial activity.⁶⁸ Although the Children's Settlement was at the physical center of the new Morgan Memorial building, it was Helms' employment venture which was fast gaining prominence.

The employment venture began in 1895 with a simple idea. In part, this idea was an extension of something Henry Morgan had done years before: collect old clothes and have volunteers repair them for use by the poor. Only, in place of the well-off volunteers recruited by Morgan, Helms employed poor people. Helms and his assistants collected used clothes, shoes, and furniture from the Back Bay's wealthy, and then hired unemployed people to repair the items. Helms had noticed that many of the mothers who brought their children to the nursery needed jobs. He began by hiring them. Very soon the men came as well and they too were put to work. Once the items were repaired, Morgan Chapel sold them at prices affordable to its poor neighbors and invested the proceeds in the church's neighborhood activities.⁶⁹

After the depression of the mid-1890's passed, those with skills moved onto other jobs. Those without skills, however, and those who were unable to secure other work continued to need employment. Older or disabled adults, in particular, lacked any source

⁶⁸ Charles Wesley Fisher, "The Development of Morgan Memorial as a Social Institution," Diss. Boston University Graduate School, Boston, Mass. 1949, p. 242.

⁶⁹ As this jobs-creation enterprise grew, it generated enough income to be about 80% self-supporting. Eventually, in order to pay its workers, it could not finance other Morgan Memorial activities. Those activities were paid for through donations, as was a small share of this industrial venture.

of guaranteed support in an era before a national social security system and therefore had difficulty competing for employment. For their sake, Helms continued to operate his employment venture.⁷⁰ By the turn-of-the century, Helms had transformed his used clothes and furniture operation into the centerpiece of the organization. In 1905, this enterprise was separately incorporated as Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores.⁷¹

In the early 1900's, Helms met the Henry brothers of New Hampshire. The two wealthy industrialists shared Helms' Methodist faith and his vision of industrial cooperation, and they decided to donate to his venture. In 1913 the Henry brothers gave \$100,000 to construct a large factory next door to the Children's Settlement. In future years they would continue to give generously to build a warehouse next to the factory and help pay for other Morgan Memorial projects.

Once Helms had the space to expand his industrial enterprise, he put in place a systematized operation for the collection, repair, and sale of clothing and furniture. Morgan Memorial donation bags became a common sight in churches and homes across Greater Boston. They were picked up by the Morgan Memorial's employees and transported back to the factory. The items were then disinfected, laundered, sorted, and sent to the different repair departments for clothes, shoes, and furniture. Those items which could be repaired were then sold in Morgan Memorial's store located nearby.

⁷⁰ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 69 and Christmas, pp. 46-7.

⁷¹ Around 1915 a mission for the poor in Brooklyn, known as the House of Goodwill, copied Morgan Memorial's industrial effort and changed its name from House of Goodwill, to Goodwill Industries. As agencies modeled after Morgan Memorial were established elsewhere in the country, they became known as Goodwill Industries. Helms retained his Boston organization's tribute to Henry Morgan and it became known as Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries.

Helms' dream involved more than providing employment for the neighborhood's poor and unskilled. Helms believed Morgan Memorial was creating an environment which would foster the worker's spiritual redemption and set the example for a future, utopian industrial order. He described the venture as a form of industrial evangelism. Helms applied this notion of redemption both to the workers and to the articles produced. He believed nothing should be wasted--neither the untapped capacity of the unskilled, the elderly, and the disabled, all of whom were deemed unfit workers by other industries--nor the used goods with which they worked. Every item collected was put to use; if shoes couldn't be sold they were burned for fuel. If clothes couldn't be salvaged, they were sold in bulk to manufacturers for rags or used as material for Morgan Memorial's rug making venture.

Helms also defined Morgan Memorial's jobs venture as a cooperative industry. He believed it presented an alternative to competitive industry by promoting cooperation among workers and between workers and their managers. Furthermore, it promoted a mutuality between the industry and the larger community. Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries provided jobs to the neighborhood's very poor at decent wages, and the workers produced articles which were then sold at reduced rates to other poor people in the community who could not afford to shop elsewhere. Helms applied this same cooperative philosophy to his employment bureau. Whenever possible he tried to match a person seeking work with an applicant to Morgan Memorial's welfare bureau who had a need to be met. Years later, looking back at the role of the employment bureau, Helms told a story--a parody on the house that Jack built--to describe the value of such mutual aid: the out-of-work cobbler was hired to mend the shoes of the children of the woman, who was repairing the pants of the man, who sawed firewood to build a fire for the rheumatic husband of the wife, who was put to work scrubbing the attic for poor old Grandma M.⁷² Helms summed up his

⁷² Helms, *Pioneering*, pp. 74-5.

notion of cooperation and community with the saying, "The best help is the help which helps others to help themselves by helping someone else."

The expectations placed upon the industry's workers exemplified Helms' philosophy of redemption and cooperation. Morgan Memorial employed people in two categories. The "opportunity workers" were hired on a temporary basis and paid by the article produced. This category included neighbors who needed to earn additional money in an emergency or people who couldn't afford something from Morgan Memorial's store, but were willing to pay by doing a set amount of work. Then there were the "regular workers" who received a minimum wage and put in 38 hours a week. In addition, they were required to give another 10 hours a week of service to Morgan Memorial's religious or social service activities. Religious services were also held each morning before work and workers were invited, though not compelled, to attend.⁷³

In 1907 a benefactor donated land in rural South Athol, in western Massachusetts, to be used for a fresh air camp for Morgan Memorial's children. As Morgan Memorial became well-known and well-liked in South Athol, additional land was donated to the organization. Within twenty years the organization had amassed 760 acres and built 29 camps and buildings. Morgan Memorial's Fresh Air Farm and Industrial Plantation at South Athol offered summer camps for boys and girls from the South End, an entertainment hall for guests from the South End and residents of South Athol, and camps for adults either in recovery from alcoholism or on vacation from the city. Morgan Memorial eventually moved its rug factory operation to the South Athol site, started a mineral water bottling company, and ran a farm.

⁷³ Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores, Inc, *Prospectus and Manual of Morgan Memorial 1922* (Boston: Morgan Memorial Goodwill Press, 1922), p. 92 and Christmas, pp. 63-5.

After the creation of a camp at South Athol, Helms' next major project was the establishment of the Seavey Seminary Settlement for Men. During this period, in addition to his work with Morgan Memorial, Edgar Helms was serving as chaplain at the Suffolk County jail. The sheriff, Fred Seavey, was impressed by Helms' success in training and employing men released from jail. Upon the sheriff's death, his family donated funds in his honor for the construction of a hotel for homeless men. The Seavey Seminary Settlement, completed in 1915 and located next door to the Children's Settlement, was a cross between a modern day shelter, transitional program, and lodging house. The seven-story building included a dormitory and private rooms for a total of 55 men, a cafeteria, a library, and additional suites for Boston University seminary students who assisted with the Seavey's activities. The staff included part-time social service workers, a psychologist, a physician, and a dentist.

The man who came to the Seavey transitioned through a series of stages involving increased employment responsibilities and improved residential care. His first night he was put up for free in the dormitory on the Junior Floor. The next day the staff evaluated him and gave him temporary opportunity work in Morgan Memorial Industries. With his wages, he contributed to his stay at the Seavey. After a period of time, he was evaluated by the vocational staff and progressed to the Middler's Floor. He was then assigned a position of greater responsibility in Morgan Memorial Industries and expected to help orient newcomers to the Seavey. If he stayed long enough, he moved to a private room on the Senior Floor.

Temperance and religious mission were the prevailing philosophies at the Seavey. Sobriety, cleanliness, work, and attendance at religious services were expected of all guests. "There must be a desire on the part of a guest to live the Christian life," read Morgan Memorial's requirements for the Seavey, further noting a guest need not change

his church affiliations.⁷⁴ An expectation of sobriety and hard work was balanced by an appreciation on the part of the staff of the guest's need for leisure activities. "The program at the Seavey . . . places a generous emphasis on recreation. The building contains a library, a reading room, social parlors, and other facilities designed to make the stay of the men as pleasant as possible."⁷⁵

By 1918 Helms' service empire stretched across a series of blocks in the South End and included the Children's Settlement, the Morgan Memorial Industries' factory and warehouse, and the Seavey Settlement. There was still one other building to be added to the group. This building, a small Gothic cathedral, called the Church of All Nations, was the realization of Helms' dream of an interdenominational and international church. Although a devout Methodist and evangelist, Helms shunned what he termed "the ugly mission halls" Protestants used to try to convert the foreigner. Instead, he created a church which incorporated some of the beauty found in the cathedrals of the Old World.⁷⁶

The Church of All Nations had a separate board of trustees under the New England Conference of the Methodist Church, but included board members of different denominations. The Church was divided into English Speaking, Italian, Syrian, and Portuguese Departments, each with its own pastor and each offering classes in its respective language and culture, as well as clubs and outreach activities to its immigrant group. There was also a black minister to work with black church members, although the minister stated this department was "not a 'mission to colored' nor a separate Church" but a way to build a group identity and foster "racial leaders" through club activities and

⁷⁴ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 183.

⁷⁵ Christmas, p. 100.

⁷⁶ Helms, *Pioneering*, pp. 67-8.

services.⁷⁷ Once a month the church hosted an international night of hymns and sermons in the different languages. Helms maintained that the Church did not proselytize; its ministers worked together "in the common task of community uplift" and encouraged those rescued from sin "to unite with the denomination of their choice."⁷⁸

Within a few years of its creation, the Church of All Nations had a 500 member congregation, 54% of whom were white Americans, 27% black Americans, and the remainder Italians, Syrians, and other immigrants.⁷⁹ Hundreds of additional children attended the Church's Sunday School, and children and adults who were not members used the educational, recreational, and other services of its various ethnic departments. According to Earl Christmas, who wrote about Morgan Memorial's activities and mission, the Church of All Nations sought to inculcate Christian principles, but did not proselytize. "(I)f it can make a better Catholic, it is happy to do it. As a result, many Catholics and Jews attend the services at the church."⁸⁰

The department at Morgan Memorial that linked together the organization's many programs was the Parish Welfare Bureau. Pastors from the Church of All Nations and welfare bureau workers known as "parish visitors" made home visits. In response to home conditions they assisted their neighbors in a variety of ways. They helped families secure better housing, ran errands for the elderly and disabled, provided emergency food, and made referrals to charitable organizations for additional emergency relief. The welfare bureau also served as a clearinghouse for Morgan Memorial, making sure neighbors seen

⁷⁷ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 39.

⁷⁸ Edgar Helms, "Introduction," in *Manual 1922*.

⁷⁹ Carroll, p. 136.

⁸⁰ Christmas, p. 114.

by parish visitors were linked up with the appropriate Morgan Memorial programs. In particular, the welfare bureau worked closely with the employment bureau. Based on the home visits of its workers, it referred neighbors who sought employment to Morgan Memorial's Co-Operative Industries and Stores or for an outside job placement through the employment bureau.

By the early 1920's Helms had built a comprehensive neighborhood organization offering vocational training; jobs; housing for men; church services; child care, classes, camps, and other activities for children; and a variety of educational classes and activities for adults. In addition Morgan Memorial continued to operate an employment bureau to help people locate jobs outside its own industries, a welfare bureau to make home visits and address other family needs, a medical clinic staffed by a nurse, and a legal service bureau. Morgan Memorial also sponsored movies, concerts, and other recreational and cultural events for the benefit of the whole neighborhood.

In its organizational manual of 1922, Morgan Memorial reported on the number of people it had served over the past year. Nearly 1,500 children participated in the activities of the Children's Settlement, 1,000 men stayed at the Seavey Settlement, and 4,000 persons worked for the Morgan Memorial Industries either as regular or opportunity workers.⁸¹ Morgan Memorial's full-time staff numbered 100, 85% of whom were employed in the industrial and retail operation. Its part-time staff, mainly teachers in the Children's Settlement and Education Department, numbered 77; in addition Morgan Memorial depended on the assistance of 32 outside volunteers.⁸²

⁸¹ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 14.

⁸² Carroll, p. 134.

Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores had become a large operation with a ten-truck fleet collecting donations from 100,000 homes and churches. Its operation included the factory and warehouse in the South End and the rug factory in South Athol. In addition, its retail operation had grown. Its store located around the corner from the factory had become the size of a small department store and it was complemented by eight branch stores across Greater Boston.

During the 1920's Edgar Helms and his staff added two other ventures to their list of projects. Both concerned the provision of housing. One addition was the Eliza Henry Home for older working women. The other was the creation of a housing affiliate, the Massachusetts Housing Association.

For a number of years, Helms had hoped to secure the funds to open a lodging house for women, employed by Morgan Memorial, who lived in small rooms without heat, comfort, or companionship. In 1924 the mother of the Henry brothers, Morgan Memorial's prime benefactors, donated the funds to purchase a hotel in the Back Bay. The Eliza Henry Home provided 31 rooms for older working women. An additional 16 rooms were provided to students enrolled in Boston University's School of Theology, who contributed their services to Morgan Memorial in return for lodging.

The second housing-related program, the Massachusetts Housing Association, was established in 1928. Like so many other Morgan Memorial ventures, its creation was made possible by a generous donation from the Henry family. The Massachusetts Housing Association was established for the purpose of securing better homes and lodgings for poor and working-class people and for the elimination of unhealthful and immoral housing

conditions in the neighborhood.⁸³ The Housing Association financed mortgages for Morgan Memorial workers and purchased 14 apartment houses on surrounding streets which it rented to families and individuals known to the staff at Morgan Memorial. In addition, the Housing Association assisted with the acquisition, rehabilitation, and maintenance of Morgan Memorial's properties in Boston and South Athol.

By the 1920's Morgan Memorial had reached the height of its development as a neighborhood organization. It had become one of the seven major social agencies serving the South End with the third highest enrollment in its activities, after South End House and Lincoln House.⁸⁴

In the 1920's the South End's poor still made their homes in the district's overcrowded tenements and lodging houses and struggled to secure unskilled, low paying jobs. Given their poverty, the South End's residents continued to turn to Morgan Memorial for services, activities, and jobs. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, the organization continued to try to meet many of its neighbors' needs. Helms remained at the head of Morgan Memorial, but his enormous vision and ambition could no longer be contained within a single neighborhood organization. He had set his sights on promoting his dream of industrial cooperation on a national scale.

A number of organizations across the country had already copied Helms' model and had launched local versions of Goodwill Industries. In 1918, the national organization of the Methodist Church made Goodwill Industries a bureau within its Department of City Work, claiming the Goodwill to be a model for addressing the needs of the urban poor. A

⁸³ Cited in Lachlan Ferguson Blair, *Morgan Memorial Planning Program: Working Paper 6, The Massachusetts Housing Association* (June 1965), "Statement of Purpose, the Massachusetts Housing Association, Inc., as Amended October 18, 1934," Appendix 1.

⁸⁴ Carroll, pp. 74-5.

year later, Edgar Helms became Executive Secretary of the National Association of Goodwills. By 1922, there were 21 Goodwills across the country. Although each functioned as an independent agency, many received assistance from the Methodist Church's national organization; most looked to Boston's Morgan Memorial as the example to replicate. Helms began to travel across the country promoting the development of more Goodwill Industries. By the late 1920's, he was even taking his promotional efforts abroad.

The Goodwill Industries in the 1930's: A Change in Focus

In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt committed the federal government to an activist role in leading the country out of the Great Depression. Among his first acts was the creation of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which planned to bolster state efforts to assist the unemployed with a federal appropriation of a half billion dollars. Then came passage of the National Recovery Act (NRA), which promised to set minimum labor standards and to eliminate unfair competition by reviewing industry practices.

Edgar Helms believed the Goodwill Industries was exactly the type of organization the federal government would want to fund under FERA. Between 1928-38, during the worst years of the Depression, Goodwill Industries nationwide provided employment for 395,000 Americans, either as full-time employees or as short-term opportunity workers. Already by the early 1930's Goodwill affiliates in almost 100 cities employed thousands.⁸⁵ Helms claimed that every \$1 invested in the Goodwill produced \$5 in benefits to the needy. With federal assistance, Goodwills could create thousands of additional jobs. Moreover,

⁸⁵ John Lewis Fulton, *Goodwill: For the Love of People* (Washington, DC: Goodwill Industries of America, 1977), pp. 219-20 and p. 186.

Helms looked forward to the government's promotion of the Goodwill as a model of industrial cooperation.

Helms readied the Goodwill Industries to become eligible for federal funding. To comply with the NRA codes for industries and to become eligible for work relief dollars, he submitted a proposal to FERA. Helms promised that any Goodwills receiving federal relief would pay their workers 30 cents an hour. To avoid NRA scrutiny as a business, Helms agreed that any products produced by federally subsidized employees would not be sold on the open market. Finally, he was also prepared to have each Goodwill affiliate submit monthly reports outlining the progress of each subsidized employee towards self-sufficiency.⁸⁶

The Director of Work Relief and Special Projects for FERA failed to find reason for supporting the Goodwill model. He replied that Goodwill Industries was ineligible for FERA funding. He took issue with Helms' presentation of the Goodwill as an industrial cooperative. He informed Helms that grants to cooperatives would only be made to "cooperative organizations of the unemployed" and he termed Goodwill Industries "a philanthropic organization doing things for the unemployed."⁸⁷ FERA's rejection ended Helms' dream of expanding his industrial cooperative in partnership with government.

Unfortunately, it was fast becoming apparent that Helms had more to worry about than Goodwill's expansion; he needed to concern himself with its survival. In July of 1934, Glenn Leighbody, who headed the Goodwill of Buffalo, New York, wrote Edgar Helms a letter in which he predicted Goodwill's work with the poor was about to be taken

⁸⁶ Fulton, p. 190.

⁸⁷ Fulton, p. 191.

over by the government. The organization's survival depended on specializing in the care of the handicapped:

(W)ithin the coming months the Government will assume responsibility for the group we now have, known as social handicaps, which are nothing more than unemployed people, most of them inefficient, without trades or direction. . . . I do believe that if we now set up our organization to take on handicapped people we will not only be allowed to continue but will be recognized as leaders and given assistance in the whole set-up.⁸⁸

The problem was larger than the changing role of government and the unwillingness of government to support the Goodwill Industry in its current form. Changing economic and social conditions were making it harder for Goodwill Industries to survive without also changing. By the late 1930's, labor organizers were attempting to organize workers at different Goodwill affiliates. Furthermore, the federal government was about to set a minimum wage standard higher than that which most Goodwills were able to pay.

At a national meeting of the Bureau of Goodwill Industries in 1937, Helms proposed increasing Goodwill wages which he recognized had become "lamentably low."⁸⁹ At the same meeting, Glenn Leighbody, the author of the prophetic letter to Helms of three years before, gave a more blunt assessment of Goodwill's problems. He noted that his Goodwill in Buffalo was able to pay its highest paid piece workers no more than \$17-18 a week and its office workers between \$18-25, even though organized labor's recommended guidelines were \$38. He raised other issues, as well. He thought it demeaning to refer to Goodwill employees as handicapped when no more than a minority were actually disabled. He also found a growing resistance among Goodwill employees to

⁸⁸ Fulton, pp. 198-9.

⁸⁹ Fulton, pp. 210-1.

the organization's emphasis on religion and attendance at chapel services. He summed up his concerns: "We are hiring normal people and then paying them starving wages and then cramming religion down their necks."⁹⁰

The Goodwill's national committee, charged with standardizing the practices of its affiliates, soon recommended the establishment of an absolute minimum wage of 25 cents an hour, with a goal of 30 cents an hour. These wage guidelines were in keeping with the anticipated minimum wage which was to be set by the federal government the following year (1938). This same committee made another recommendation. To ensure that Goodwill Industries would not be identified as a commercial employer, and thereby place itself out of the running for federal funding for social services, the committee decided on the following: "to conform to the language of social service legislation all opportunity workers should henceforth be known as 'clients'." ⁹¹

In order to secure government support, the Goodwill Industries recast its model, as Leighbody had recommended, and began to specialize in assistance to the disabled. The focus was no longer on the promotion of the Goodwill as a model industrial cooperative for the unemployed, but as a model sheltered workshop for the handicapped.

Conclusion

In 1939 Edgar Helms stepped down as the national organization's executive secretary. Although he no longer led the organization, Helms did not stop working to promote Goodwill Industries until his death in 1942 at the age of 79.

⁹⁰ Fulton, p. 212.

⁹¹ Fulton, p. 218.

Edgar Helms had envisioned his Goodwill model as an alternative to the competitive and exploitative industrial conditions of his day. By marrying evangelism and industrial production, Helms hoped to uplift the worker and usher in greater cooperation and fellowship within the industrial setting. By 1938 Helms' vision, which had begun with the original Morgan Memorial in Boston's South End, had resulted in the creation of 104 Goodwill Industries in this country and around the world.⁹²

Helms' achievements in building Morgan Memorial and the nationwide Goodwill Industries had been enormous. With the beginning of the 1940's the Goodwill would enter a new era and its focus would change. Nationally, the Goodwill's emphasis shifted from employment of the poor to rehabilitation of the disabled. Locally in Boston, this changed focus meant Morgan Memorial no longer attempted to serve all of the very poor within its geographic neighborhood, but a specialized population drawn from many parts of the city.

Although Morgan Memorial remained a large organization, it lost its neighborhood focus and became less comprehensive in its approach. Morgan Memorial continued to operate its day nursery and Children's Settlement until the 1960's. But once the organization's mission had changed--from the creation of neighborhood-based services for the poor to the rehabilitation of the disabled--these programs became holdovers from an earlier era. These activities did not relate to Morgan Memorial's new mission. In addition, the people employed by the rehabilitation program were usually not the parents of the children using the day nursery or Children's Settlement. By this point, Morgan Memorial had largely phased out its activities for those parents. Morgan Memorial had become a large organization with a variety of disparate services that were neither inter-connected nor targeted to meeting the needs of the different members of a family or of the neighborhood.

⁹² Fulton, p. 206.

The organization's array of services were no longer part of a comprehensive approach to addressing its neighbors' needs.

Morgan Memorial had eliminated some activities in order to focus the organization's efforts on services to the disabled. It also had reduced many of its parish activities, such as home visits, night time entertainment, and the temperance saloon, that had strong religious overtones or were intricately connected with the Church of All Nations. Morgan Memorial had become a more secular organization dependent on funding from the government and from other secular sources which would have disapproved of its earlier explicitly evangelical mission.

Morgan Memorial's role as a neighborhood organization was brought to its final end in the 1960's when its neighborhood center of 22 buildings was wiped out. In 1963 the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority seized most of these buildings by eminent domain in order to make way for the highway's extension. Five years later, the Boston Redevelopment Authority took several other buildings as part of its plan for urban renewal. Not only had Morgan Memorial lost its facilities, it had also lost its neighborhood. The new highway extension separated the section of the South End where Morgan Memorial was located from the remainder of the district. This section became known as South Cove, or Chinatown. With the highway extension and urban renewal, hundreds of families who had once used Morgan Memorial's child care, classes, and other programs were forced to relocate. The area also became more of a commercial district than it had been before.

The destruction of Morgan Memorial's complex of buildings--its factory, warehouse, Children's Settlement, and Church of All Nations--along with the dispersal of the neighborhood's families, were blows too devastating to overcome. Morgan Memorial continued to operate in Boston, where today it is one of the city's largest rehabilitation

programs. But Morgan Memorial's loss of its neighborhood base, coupled with its narrowed programmatic focus, marked the end of its history as a multi-service neighborhood organization.

CHAPTER 4

An Analysis of the Approach of Morgan Memorial and the Settlement House Movement

Introduction

Morgan Memorial reached its height as a neighborhood organization at the turn-of-the century providing jobs, lodging, and diverse services and activities to thousands of South End children and adults. Having accomplished this much in one neighborhood, Edgar Helms' next ambition was to recreate his employment model on a national scale. By the 1920's Helms had become Executive Secretary of the National Association of Goodwill Industries and was dedicating the bulk of his time to the Association's activities. Today, Helms is best remembered among Goodwills nationwide as the visionary and institution-builder who made possible the rapid expansion of this unusual employment model.

In this thesis, I have chosen to focus less on Helms' work to expand the Goodwill model nationally and worldwide and more on his earlier efforts to create a multi-service neighborhood organization in the South End. A number of things made possible the creation of Morgan Memorial, not the least of which were Helms' personality, skill, and dedication.

Edgar Helms was a true entrepreneur for the poor. He was a masterful fundraiser, securing generous financial support from several wealthy benefactors, such as the Henry family. After construction of the Children's Settlement in 1901, Helms never again borrowed money to finance Morgan Memorial's expansion. He was able to create his entire neighborhood organization--its factory, warehouse, church, lodging houses, apartment buildings, and other facilities--through the donations of his wealthy supporters. Helms had exceptional skill as an organization-builder, creating an efficiently run large

organization offering multiple services and activities to its neighbors. He also was a visionary with a focused religious mission. His dedication to spreading his gospel of service, goodwill, and care for the poor drove him to work tirelessly for Morgan Memorial. His religious purpose and personal charisma attracted many other dedicated workers to join with him in his efforts.

Critical to Morgan Memorial's success was the commitment and contribution of its staff, both laymen and ministers. Edgar Helms was able to create a vast and tight-knit web of services because his devoted staff--some of them Methodists, others recent converts to Morgan Memorial's mission--shared his sense of religious purpose and missionary zeal. They saw it as their calling to transform their section of the South End and the lives of their individual neighbors. Unlike the settlement workers, Morgan Memorial's staff did not reside at their agency's neighborhood center. Yet, like the settlement workers, Morgan Memorial's staff functioned as a community. Where the settlement workers built a bond and sense of shared purpose through communal living, Morgan Memorial's staff did so by coming together for daily religious worship. The settlement house workers dedicated themselves to a few years of community work usually without pay. Morgan Memorial's staff received meager financial reward for their labor. Helms, himself, earned little and depended on the generous help of Morgan Memorial's benefactors to support his large family.

Both the settlement workers and Morgan Memorial's staff were driven by a sense of religious purpose. For the settlement workers, their religious motivation remained a source of personal inspiration. Except for those settlement houses affiliated with churches, the settlements kept their activities secular. Morgan Memorial's staff had a more explicit religious mission than their counterparts in the settlement movement. They did not compel their neighbors to convert to Methodism; nor was the staff all of the same denomination.

All of the staff were of one mind, however, on the over-arching religious purpose of their work. Morgan Memorial's management articulated this common religious mission in their ten-point Statement of Faith that was a part of the organization's employee manual.⁹³ This statement outlined their belief in the Fatherhood of God; the Brotherhood of Man; and their dedication to serve their neighbors and to promote love, religious faith, and fellowship.

Morgan Memorial's religious ties also enabled the organization to expand, because it opened doors to church support. Although the Methodist Church did not have organizational oversight of Morgan Memorial, it occasionally provided funding. In the early 1920's, the Methodist Bureau of Home Missions promoted Morgan Memorial's employment venture. Methodists across the country responded by donating approximately one million dollars to replicate the Morgan Memorial model through Goodwill affiliates elsewhere in the country.⁹⁴ This support was critical to the expansion of Helms' vision nationwide. Helms was also able to launch many of Morgan Memorial's local neighborhood projects because of the generous support he received from fellow Methodists.

Edgar Helms created his jobs, housing, and service empire in the South End because of several organizational assets: his remarkable skills, vision, and religious dedication; the commitment of his staff of fellow urban missionaries; and the support of the Methodist church and of wealthy donors who shared his vision. This combination of leadership, purpose, and outside support made possible Morgan Memorial's rapid development. Helms' success was also facilitated by the era in which he worked, a period of social, religious, and political activism in American history, particularly focused on efforts to transform poor neighborhoods.

⁹³ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922* , "A Statement of Faith," pp. 13-4.

⁹⁴ Huddleston, p. 257.

In this thesis, I have focused on Morgan Memorial because I believe Helms' unusual philosophy and approach to neighborhood work merits further attention. Many features of Helms' approach were similar to those of the settlement house movement. Other features were unique. By comparing Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses in the following analysis, I hope to demonstrate the many ways in which Helms drew from the settlement philosophy in doing his neighborhood work. I shall also emphasize those features of Helms' philosophy and work that were distinct. In my analysis of both Morgan Memorial and the settlement house movement I suggest that an important part of their legacy was their creation of comprehensive neighborhood-based services for the poor.

Two aspects of their philosophy and approach to this neighborhood work were most significant. First, Edgar Helms and the settlement leaders looked at their neighbors' problems and needs as complex and inter-related and they responded accordingly. They did not try to segment or isolate needs by creating specialized services. Rather, they were generalists. They created a diverse combination of services to better the lives of the individuals they served and they worked to ensure that this variety of services was well-integrated rather than fragmented. They also were flexible and experimental in their approach, changing tactics and activities to respond to new and evolving needs. The result was the creation of a network of comprehensive services. Morgan Memorial's mix of services was particularly unique because it even included the provision of jobs.

Second, they were committed to neighborhood reconstruction. Edgar Helms, Robert Woods, and the other leaders in this work understood neighborhood reconstruction to have both a physical and social meaning. Settlement workers organized and fought for housing and zoning codes, sanitation services, the creation of playgrounds and parks, and many other improvements to the physical environment of their neighborhoods. Morgan

Memorial's staff, while less involved in these efforts, worked to build an institution offering model physical spaces: a beautiful church, a unique factory, a center for children's services, and model lodging houses and apartment buildings.

Helms and the settlement workers also sought the social improvement of their neighborhoods. There are two features of this social reconstruction that I believe were most important. One, was the strengthening of social and family networks; the other was the creation of opportunities for participation by neighbors in the provision of services and activities.

Having told the story of Morgan Memorial in the preceding chapter, I will attempt to analyze Morgan Memorial's strengths and weaknesses in this one. In doing so, I will discuss the extent to which Edgar Helms' philosophy and approach incorporated the above-mentioned key elements: a comprehensive approach with a particular stress on employment needs, and a strategy of neighborhood reconstruction. I will also return to the story of the settlement houses, presented in chapter two, and review how the settlement workers integrated most of these elements.

In examining Morgan Memorial's philosophy and approach, I will also analyze the organization's success and failure at creating comprehensive, neighborhood-based services that resulted in stronger, overall communities. Attempting to provide services in a holistic fashion while also building a stronger neighborhood is an enormous task for a community organization. In some ways Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses did a far better job of it than do organizations today, even if their efforts fell short in many ways. The ways in which they fell short underscore the difficulty of attempting to meet these objectives, both then and now.

A Comprehensive Approach to the Provision of Services

When Edgar Helms arrived in the South End in 1895 he set out to acquaint himself with his neighbors and to identify their needs. He believed his most important task to be the creation of services that would better the lives of as many of his neighbors as possible. Helms did not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the complexity of neighborhood problems or the breadth of his neighbors' economic, social, educational, and other needs. Little by little, over the next several decades he expanded the services and activities of Morgan Memorial. Eventually, his once-tiny "institutional church" became a large multi-service neighborhood organization offering jobs, housing, vocational training, social services, recreational activities, church services, cultural events, clubs, classes, and more.

By providing a full range of services to his neighbors, Edgar Helms was like other leaders of the settlement houses and institutional churches of his time. Most of them dedicated their efforts to the development of similar kinds of services. While the smaller organizations often were limited in their ability to create extensive programs, the larger of these social and religious institutions, like Morgan Memorial and South End House, established an array of services and activities that was truly comprehensive in scope.

Helms and the settlement leaders believed that bettering the lives of their individual neighbors demanded more than the creation of comprehensive services, however; it required the creation and integration of a particular mix of services. Some services were needed to meet the most pressing and immediate needs of their neighbors. These services which "fed the body" included emergency food and financial assistance, medical care, and child care for working parents. Morgan Memorial added another important component to this mix of essential services. It offered vocational training and employment on a scale not attempted by any other social or religious institutions of its time.

Other activities were less urgently needed, but considered equally important, such as clubs, art classes, summer camps, gym programs, and recreational and cultural activities. As mentioned in chapter two, these were the kind of activities Robert Woods believed to serve a recuperative function. They nurtured the spirit, promoted a happier existence for neighborhood children and adults, and improved the overall quality-of-life. Edgar Helms understood people's needs to be many and diverse and he set about responding to those needs by creating an organization that offered critically-needed services, such as vocational training and employment, as well as activities to improve the quality-of-life.

To address their neighbors' most immediate and urgent needs, Edgar Helms and his staff created jobs, ran day care programs, provided lodging, taught vocational classes, and made home nursing visits. Like Henry Morgan, his predecessor, Edgar Helms believed it was insufficient for an urban church to focus solely on "feeding the spirit" of its impoverished parishioners. He created an institutional church providing social, medical, educational, and employment services because he recognized the importance of "feeding the body" as well. But Helms did not forget the importance of activities, both religious and otherwise, which nurtured and lifted the spirit. To achieve that end, Helms built a beautiful little cathedral offering interdenominational church services. He and his staff also organized social clubs; ran a summer camp program; taught classes in handicrafts; established recreational programs; created a small music school offering piano and violin lessons; and sponsored plays, movies, and lectures.

As a child growing up around the corner from Morgan Memorial, Mary Antin, along with the other children on her street, flocked to Morgan Memorial every Saturday night for its free entertainment. In her autobiography, Antin recalled the music, recitations,

and other performances at those Saturday night events. To the childish sensibilities of Antin and her friends, the entertainment seemed exceedingly artistic; it also served as a window onto a world beyond their dreary and impoverished environment: "We were all a little stage-struck after these entertainments; but what was more, we were genuinely moved by the glimpses of a fairer world than ours which we caught through the music and poetry."⁹⁵

Morgan Memorial provided Mary Antin a glimpse of a world of culture, recreation, and education beyond her tenement district. She caught her first glimpse of this world by attending Morgan Memorial's entertainment nights and by participating in its art and dance clubs. Antin came into further contact with the world of literature, the arts, and recreation through her attendance at some of the South End's settlement houses, like Hale House and Ellis Memorial. These activities which exposed children like Antin to a larger world were not unique to Morgan Memorial. It was the settlement houses that originated much of this work to "feed the spirit" while also addressing more essential needs.

The settlement house philosophy stressed the importance of activities to nurture the spirit and broaden the intellect of the slum dweller. As Jane Addams explained, educated men and women settled in the nation's slums less out of a desire "to feed the hungry and care for the sick," although they appreciated the necessity of carrying out this work as well. Rather, they settled among the poor in order "to give pleasure to the young, comfort to the aged, and to minister to the deep-seated craving for social intercourse that all men feel."⁹⁶

The settlement house residents also believed the best way to narrow the divide between rich and poor was to introduce the educational and cultural privileges of the rich

⁹⁵ Antin, pp. 266-67.

⁹⁶ Addams, p. 88.

into the lives of the poor. By hosting art events; sponsoring lectures and dances; and recruiting wealthy and educated volunteers to teach classes in the arts, music, literature, and the like, the settlement leaders hoped to expose the poor to a better life, transform them into better-educated and more responsible citizens, and bring the worlds of rich and poor a little closer together.

The settlement houses were the first social institutions in poor neighborhoods with this explicit mission to serve the poor by improving their quality-of-life. Activities initiated by the settlement houses to nurture the spirit were quickly adopted by the institutional churches, such as Morgan Memorial. This balance between services to meet pressing needs, such as child care, vocational training, job referrals, and nursing visits, and activities to improve the quality of life, such as art and music classes, lectures, drama presentations, and social clubs, was one of the things that made the approach of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses truly comprehensive.

A second unusual feature of Morgan Memorial's approach was its attention to one of the most pressing needs of its neighbors: employment. In this regard, Morgan Memorial was unique. Social and religious institutions before Morgan Memorial had offered work to the poor. The wood yard at the rescue mission providing men a way to earn lodging and a meal, or the sewing circle at the institutional church where destitute widows were able to earn money to support their children, pre-dated Edgar Helms' business venture. Helms shared the philosophy of these earlier providers that when the poor were given charity, without the opportunity for work, they were turned into paupers. Helms set out to do more than provide temporary work, however. He wanted to provide useful vocational training; give sustained employment to the elderly, disabled and others who were unable to secure competitive jobs; and to do all of this through an enterprise that produced community benefits. Helms confronted the problems created by his industrial

age--exploitative work conditions and fierce competition--in a way that none of the settlement houses did: he created a model industrial alternative.

The industrial arm of Morgan Memorial was the organization's most significant feature. Helms took a social service organization and church and used it to launch a business that provided training and employment for hundreds of people. Morgan Memorial Cooperative Industries and Stores was without parallel in the South End at the turn-of-the century. Indeed, until the creation of other Goodwill affiliates nationwide, there were few other enterprises like it anywhere in the United States. By creating an industrial venture, Helms could respond to the employment needs of the men and women who came to him for help, not merely by making an employment referral or attending to ancillary needs, but by providing a job.

Helms' model served as an important alternative to the prevailing methods and goals of capitalist industrial production. Most industries hired the strong and weeded out the unfit; Helms made a special effort at Morgan Memorial to hire the most vulnerable, least employable workers. Most turn-of-the century industries profited by keeping wages low, compelling workers to toil long hours, and investing few resources into the improvement of factory conditions. Helms paid decent wages for that time and expected workers to give no more than 38 hours to their industrial task and an additional 10 hours to social or religious service at Morgan Memorial. He also replaced the ruthless competition that pervaded most industries by promoting cooperation between managers and workers.

Finally, and perhaps most important, he created a jobs-producing industry whose objective was not making profits, but bettering the community. Morgan Memorial's business was dedicated to providing clothes, shoes, and furniture at reduced prices, thereby enabling the poor to purchase badly-needed necessities at prices well below those

offered at other stores. With each new employment initiative--the rug factory, the mineral water bottling venture, the South Athol farm, or Morgan Memorial's new stores or industrial departments--Helms sought to generate employment opportunities through the creation of products that benefited Morgan Memorial's neighbors, even if the benefits were modest. At the very least, each new venture generated income to provide paid employment for additional neighbors.

Morgan Memorial was an especially important resource to neighbors during the national depression of the mid-1890's when many residents of the South End found themselves without work. It continued to be a source of employment during other economic hard times, including the Great Depression. Morgan Memorial not only filled a gap for the unemployed during hard times, it helped to sustain the unemployable on a longer-term basis. It gave training to the unskilled and steady employment to those with no other means of support, such as the disabled, the elderly, and others who were deemed unemployable in the era's competitive industrial environment. By establishing an industrial enterprise, Edgar Helms created a network of services far more comprehensive than that offered by any of the settlement houses.

Morgan Memorial addressed an individual's needs by creating a variety of services that were integrated rather than disconnected. The man who showed up at Morgan Memorial's door homeless and unemployed was given a bed and meals at the Seavey Settlement; a job in the Morgan Memorial factory; medical care; a social worker's assessment; and the opportunity to attend church services and to participate in the organization's entertainment and recreational events such as movies, lectures, and clubs. In a similar way the widowed mother who lived near the Morgan Memorial was provided with training and a job for herself; child care for her youngest children; after school clubs

and classes for her older children; and other recreational, cultural, and religious activities for her entire family.

Origins of Morgan Memorial's Comprehensive Approach

Helms' comprehensive approach was, in large part, a product of his religious philosophy. To Helms, Morgan Memorial was an institutional church, therefore its goal was to balance feeding the spirit with feeding the body. All of the organization's activities, even those that fed the body by providing jobs, vocational training, housing, nursing care, and the like, were meant to lift the spirit. It was the redemption of his neighbor's soul that was Helms' ultimate objective.

Helms' commitment to the spiritual redemption of his neighbors shaped his notion of rehabilitation. He understood the rehabilitation of the impoverished person to involve a transformation on many fronts--spiritual, moral, vocational, educational, and more. A commitment to religion might redeem "the tramp's" soul, but it alone might not end his poverty or alcoholism. Similarly, religious faith alone would not feed the children of the destitute mother nor secure her employment. To restore the person's body and soul required not only convincing the person to make a religious commitment, but providing him or her with employment, housing, vocational training, social services, cultural entertainment, and recreation. Redemption, from Helms' perspective was a process that depended on the person's complete rehabilitation, spiritual, physical, educational, and otherwise. Such rehabilitation was achieved through the creation of inter-connected and comprehensive services.

Helm's most important creation, Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores, had as its precise purpose the spiritual redemption of its workers through a holistic

approach to rehabilitation. The unemployed, impoverished, and disabled men and women who came to Morgan Memorial had been deemed useless by society. Unable to secure employment, their talents and capacity for work went wasted. In a similar way, the cast-off clothing that Morgan Memorial collected from the homes of the well-to-do were all articles that would not have been put to their fullest use had they not been donated to the organization. Helms' goal was to redeem both the garment and the person: "The Goodwill Industries take wasted things donated by the public and employ wasted men and women to bring both things and person back to usefulness and well-being."⁹⁷ Helms' spiritual understanding of rehabilitation guided him in his creation of Morgan Memorial's activities and services. To achieve such comprehensive rehabilitation he provided employment along with services and activities to meet a person's spiritual, educational, cultural, recreational, and many other needs.

Robert Woods, Jane Addams, and most settlement leaders had similar motives, even though they described them in less explicitly religious terms. Religion, especially the social gospel, was an important source of their inspiration. Their efforts to create a variety of activities to feed the spirit was rooted in their desire to nurture the development of their neighbor's spirituality. Although they were less evangelistic than Helms, they too sought to effect a sort of spiritual transformation of their neighbors through the rehabilitative process.

By seeking to uplift the poor or effect their spiritual redemption, settlement workers, and Edgar Helms, at times placed more emphasis on creating better citizens and better Christians than on addressing systemic causes of their neighbors' poverty. Morgan Memorial staff focused a great deal on overcoming the individual failings of their neighbors, such as alcoholism, gambling, or a lack of religious faith, just as settlement

⁹⁷ Helms, *Pioneering* , p. 72.

workers sought to overcome their immigrant neighbors' ignorance of American customs, culture, and political ideals. Helms and the settlement leaders were generally more concerned with securing the moral and educational uplift of the poor and increased cooperation between rich and poor than with changing the economic forces that had produced so much poverty in the first place.

Helms defined Morgan Memorial's work in moralistic terms, not political ones. He wanted to provide the means for the moral uplift of his neighbors. By creating jobs, lodging houses, recreational activities, and the like he intended to facilitate his neighbors' moral transformation. Helms understood that poverty and exploitative industrial conditions took a toll on his neighbors' lives, but he never shed his Methodist perspective that uplift of the poor was best achieved by giving people the opportunity to develop and demonstrate self-help, honesty, thrift, and hard work.⁹⁸ He focused his efforts on creating caring institutions that engendered these virtues, rather than on fighting for larger economic, social, and political reform.

On the other hand, by emphasizing the importance of services and activities to better the lives of individuals, Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses filled a range of educational, cultural, recreational, and other needs of their neighbors. In these ways they directly improved the quality-of-life of neighborhood children and adults. And while they did not overcome their neighbors' poverty, they offered them privileges and opportunities that were not available in places like the South End slums before the establishment of the settlement houses and Morgan Memorial. Furthermore, while Edgar Helms did not overcome the exploitative and competitive conditions which most workers in the South End endured in their jobs, he provided an alternative industrial environment offering training and employment to thousands of men and women.

⁹⁸ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 194.

A Strategy of Neighborhood Reconstruction

Edgar Helms' emphasis on neighborhood was an outgrowth of his comprehensive approach. Helms understood that the individuals who came to Morgan Memorial did not have needs that could be isolated and segmented. Their needs for housing, employment, social interaction, recreation, vocational classes, child care, and the like, were all connected. Helms not only made the connection between these needs, but between the needs of each individual and those of his or her family members and neighbors. He also understood the relationship between individual needs and conditions in the surrounding neighborhood. Like his counterparts in the settlement house movement, Helms placed the individual in the context of his or her neighborhood. His intent was to uplift both the individual and the neighborhood.

This effort to uplift the neighborhood was something Robert Woods referred to as the process of neighborhood reconstruction. Neighborhood reconstruction involved both physical and social improvement.

At the turn-of-the century, settlement houses played a lead role in the fight for the physical improvement of slums. It was settlement workers who first investigated and publicized the horrors of slum conditions through books like Robert Woods', *The City Wilderness*, and Jacob Riis', *How the Other Half Lives*. Settlement workers organized and battled for improved tenement construction, reduced housing density, paved streets, regular garbage collection, and the creation of open space for playgrounds and parks. Settlement workers interacted with the leaders of America's fledgling urban planning movement and they educated planners about neighborhood needs. "More than anyone, (Robert) Woods, preached the gospel of neighborhood planning when most contemporary

reformers preferred to view urban problems from a citywide vantage point."⁹⁹ Settlement reformers urged planners to start with the neighborhood unit and through its improvement thereby to effect the city's overall transformation.

Morgan Memorial was less involved than the settlement houses in the fight for physical improvement of the slums. Helms' primary method of changing his South End neighborhood was through the construction of alternative institutions. Over the course of more than four decades, Helms established an entire Morgan Memorial complex spanning several neighborhood blocks. Morgan Memorial offered physical spaces for work, living, and social activities that were a vast improvement over those in the neighborhood. Its two lodging houses and 14 model tenement buildings offered accommodations better than those of many district tenements and lodging houses. Its Church of All Nations was beautiful, its Children's Settlement large and well-equipped, and its factory provided a work environment far better than that of most of the area's industrial establishments.

To secure physical improvement of their neighborhoods, settlement workers engaged in political organizing and lobbying. Helms kept out of all but one of the fights for neighborhood reform spearheaded by the South End's settlement houses. During his first ten years in the South End, Helms waged continuous warfare against the neighborhood's saloons, gambling halls, and similar establishments. In his fight to clean up the neighborhood he and his staff acted as community organizers and reformers. They also linked efforts with the staff at other settlement houses and churches in the district. In keeping with Helms' outlook, he was spurred to action for neighborhood reform when the issue at hand was a moral one. The proliferation of seamy entertainment establishments

⁹⁹ Christopher Silver, "Neighborhood Planning in Historical Perspective," *APA Journal* (Volume 51, Spring 1985), p. 162.

posed a threat to his neighbors' moral well-being; for this reason these "dives" needed to be removed.

Helms realized that the problem of his slum neighborhoods went far beyond an abundance of dives. He recognized that the neighborhood's deterioration was also the result of the horrendous state of neighborhood housing, the health risks posed by a lack of sanitation services, and the need for open space and recreational facilities. When his staff commissioned Professor Carroll of Boston University in 1923 to survey Morgan Memorial's neighbors and their needs, they also had Carroll and his students investigate housing and other neighborhood conditions. Helms and his staff wanted information on Morgan Memorial's neighborhood so that they could respond to its needs. Their response was not to engage in community organizing and political reform. Rather, they created new and better institutions and facilities--a factory, stores, a church, lodging houses, and model tenements--as a way to improve their neighborhood.

Edgar Helms was more focused on the social improvement of his neighborhood than on its physical change. He tried to build a stronger sense of community among his neighbors and to improve their social conditions. Yet, the social could not be extricated from the physical--something the settlement house workers appreciated perhaps more than Helms. Robert Woods certainly never separated the two when he spoke of the process of neighborhood reconstruction. In fact, much of the strength of the settlement approach was the settlement workers' appreciation that building a stronger more vibrant neighborhood required physical changes and physical planning as much as it depended on improved social conditions, the creation of stronger ties between neighbors, and the development of a stronger sense of community. Just as they looked at individual needs in terms of the whole person, settlement workers understood their neighborhood in terms of all of its needs, both physical and social.

Helms shared the settlement workers' perspective regarding neighborhood needs, but he focused his attention on improving the neighborhood through changes in its social fabric. There were two things Edgar Helms and the settlement workers did quite well as part of their work of social reconstruction: they attempted to strengthen social and family networks and to foster the participation of neighbors in settlement and Morgan Memorial activity.

Social and Family Networks

To improve social networks in the South End, Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses established neighborhood centers. In part, these centers served as places neighbors could go when they faced an emergency--if they needed employment, child care, medical attention, or a referral to a charity organization for financial assistance. These neighborhood centers were meant to be more than service centers, however. They were social centers where neighbors could meet one another and form closer ties.

Helms, Woods, Addams, and other neighborhood workers understood that men flocked to the local saloons in part because those were the only places in the neighborhood where adult men could get together and socialize. Similarly, teenage boys hung out in gangs on the street corner and became involved in petty crime in part because they lacked anywhere else to go or anything else to do. Morgan Memorial and the settlement house were meant to be alternatives to the saloon, the street corner, the overcrowded tenement unit, or the isolated lodging house room. Helms, Woods, and the others involved in this work, offered their neighbors a variety of educational, recreational, and cultural activities in which to participate. These neighborhood centers, and the activities they offered, were a particularly important way to draw the single lodging house resident out of his room and

into the neighborhood center where he might meet other neighbors. They also served as a way for the immigrant newcomer, isolated from the mainstream of American culture, to become acquainted with a world beyond her immediate family and friends and take part in activities of the larger neighborhood.

Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses also tried to strengthen ties among neighbors by creating a combination of services and activities offering something for every age group. For children, Morgan Memorial offered child care, kindergarten, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, religious and recreational classes, and summer camp. For teenagers, it hosted plays, movies and social events; sponsored clubs that channeled local gangs into constructive activities; and offered vocational training. For working-age adults, Morgan Memorial provided job training and employment, church activities, educational and recreational classes, and cultural events. For the elderly, Morgan Memorial provided employment, particularly to those elderly without financial resources, while also sponsoring church activities, and social clubs. Morgan Memorial's staff also made friendly visits to neighbors in their homes, such as the homebound elderly, to offer companionship and to help them with errands. The settlement houses operated a similar range of services for different age groups, lacking only the kind of employment program offered by Morgan Memorial.

In addition to serving people of all ages, Morgan Memorial opened its doors to all groups within the district's population regardless of "cash, creed, color, caste, or character."¹⁰⁰ Edgar Helms' commitment to making Morgan Memorial's services and activities available to all of his neighbors was a distinguishing feature of the organization. Its doors were even open to those kept out by the settlement houses.

¹⁰⁰ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 50.

Helms was committed to serving all people living in his neighborhood, the families, the lodging house population of single adults, and the "tramps." This last group were the people few organizations, other than rescue missions, were willing to serve. These men, typically alcoholic, were homeless unemployed or sporadically employed transients. Robert Woods stated that one of the reasons for creating a federation of Boston's settlement houses was to work together for "the gradual elimination of the unfit from the poor and crowded neighborhoods of the city, beginning with tramps and drunkards." ¹⁰¹ To create a stronger neighborhood free of the problems associated with deterioration, such as alcoholism, prostitution, and gambling, meant removing from the neighborhood its least desirable inhabitants. Neighborhood-building, from the settlement perspective, required ridding the neighborhood of the tramps. Edgar Helms, on the other hand, understood neighborhood work to mean service to all of the neighborhood's inhabitants, even the tramps.

When Helms first arrived at Morgan Chapel, he shifted the church's focus from work with the tramps to work with families. Once he had established a program of activities for the neighborhood families, he then addressed the needs of the tramps. He had showers constructed in the church for their use, provided meals, and created an alcohol-free "saloon" where men who were struggling to remain sober could get together and socialize. With the establishment of the Seavey Settlement, Helms offered temporary lodging to men while they established their sobriety and gained increasing responsibility through employment in Morgan Memorial's factory. Helms' work with the tramps had a distinctly moralistic bent. It was part of Morgan Memorial's mission to convert these men from a life of alcoholism to a life of sobriety, hard work, and Christianity. Morgan Memorial expected guests of the Seavey Settlement to "live the Christian life." Guests could do so consistent with their own religious beliefs, but they clearly were to abide by

¹⁰¹ Woods, *The Neighborhood in Nation-Building* , p. 114.

Morgan Memorial's moral standards.¹⁰² Helms' approach, while moralistic, reflected his unusual commitment to serving all of his neighbors. He welcomed the tramps, offering them the means to overcome their alcoholism and become integrated into their neighborhood, at a time when the settlement houses not only failed to help these residents of the South End, but wanted them removed from the district.

Helms understood his mission to be service to all residents, even the most down-and-out. He also understood it to mean service to all neighbors, be they black or white. Morgan Memorial was located in a section of the South End where a sizable portion of the district's black residents lived. Edgar Helms claimed Morgan Memorial was open to all regardless of color. Although it is difficult to determine whether the doors of Morgan Memorial were completely open to blacks, they clearly were far more open than at most settlement houses.

At the turn-of-the century there were only six social and religious institutions in Boston that served a considerable number of African-Americans, other than those agencies specifically established as all-black institutions. For two of these organizations, no more than 10% of the people served were black. A third organization served both blacks and whites, but in segregated programs. A fourth, Robert Gould Shaw House, was an outgrowth of work at South End House. While ostensibly open to both races, it was primarily dedicated to serving black residents through a separate settlement house. Morgan Memorial was one of only two organizations that offered integrated services to a sizable number of black neighbors. About 300 of the 1,000 children who participated in Morgan Memorial's activities in 1914 were black.¹⁰³ In addition, blacks comprised over one-quarter of the members of the Church of All Nations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 183.

¹⁰³ Daniels, pp. 190-6.

Morgan Memorial, much like the settlement houses, served a predominantly white, multi-ethnic constituency. Helms, like most settlement workers, understood the work of neighborhood-building within a diverse immigrant neighborhood to involve providing a neighborhood center and activities for all of these ethnic groups. Helms and the settlement workers wanted to overcome ethnic differences and forge ties among members of different ethnic groups, while also encouraging each group to appreciate its unique traditions.

Helms created the Church of All Nations specifically to bring together the neighborhood's international residents. The church had different ethnic departments offering cultural activities and classes that celebrated the heritage of each ethnic group. The settlement houses offered a similar variety of cultural clubs and classes for different ethnic groups.

One of the ways Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses sought to unify their diverse neighbors and overcome ethnic rivalries was by encouraging the adoption of a common set of American habits and ideals. Morgan Memorial and many settlement houses held classes in English, and in American history, culture, and citizenship. While they encouraged their immigrant neighbors to adopt the habits, thinking, and ideals of the American middle-class, both Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlements' workers believed America's culture might be enriched by exposure to these other traditions. Morgan Memorial's stated objectives were to instill "the best of American ideals" through its "schools of Americanization, University Extension, Handicraft, Music and Art" while also encouraging immigrants to contribute to America the treasures of their own culture.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Carroll, p. 136.

¹⁰⁵ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, "Particular Objectives," p. 17 and Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 55.

Although the doors of Morgan Memorial were open to all immigrants, and appear to have been somewhat open to African-Americans, it is less clear whether Morgan Memorial's religious orientation discouraged some neighbors of different faiths from participation. Edgar Helms professed a commitment to serve all neighbors regardless of creed. He explicitly created his Church of All Nations as a religious center that was both international and interdenominational. Yet the Church of All Nations was only interdenominational among Protestant sects. As noted in chapter two, Robert Woods criticized religious settlements for not being truly ecumenical. His criticism seems to apply to Morgan Memorial. The Church of All Nations was part of the New England Conference of the Methodist Church. Although members of other faiths were represented on its board, all of its clergy were Protestant ministers. Morgan Memorial's factory workers and lodging house residents were encouraged to attend the Protestant church services held every morning; similar religious services were incorporated into other Morgan Memorial activities as well. In the early days, Helms and his staff also took to street corner preaching and hosting revivals complete with music and sermons on the steps of Morgan Memorial.

Morgan Memorial was first and foremost a Protestant church. It promoted a Protestant religious message in a neighborhood with a large population of Catholics and Jews. Morgan Memorial's participants included children and adults of different religious faiths--a fact that is testament to Edgar Helms' commitment to open Morgan Memorial's doors to all of its neighbors. Yet it is also very likely that some neighbors rejected Helms' claim of religious inclusivity and were suspicious of the organization's decidedly Protestant message. Jews, in particular, appear to have used Morgan Memorial's services in far fewer numbers in relation to their presence in the community than did Catholics. According to Carroll's 1923 survey, almost 14% of the population in Morgan Memorial's section of the South End was Jewish; about 24% was Catholic. Yet, statistics for 1927

indicate that of the 1,840 children and adults enrolled in Morgan Memorial's clubs, classes, and other programs of the Children's Settlement and Education Department, less than 2% were Jewish while at least 20% were Catholic.¹⁰⁶

By creating a neighborhood center offering activities for all members of the community, Morgan Memorial sought to build bonds of friendship and fellowship among neighbors. It also sought to strengthen the bonds of affection and respect between family members. Both Edgar Helms and the settlement workers appreciated the relationship between the home and the neighborhood. Deteriorated neighborhood conditions, such as overcrowded housing and a lack of recreational facilities for children and adults, contributed to family instability. In fact, it was with the intention of opposing that threat that Helms waged war against the saloons and other dives. It was with a similar resolve to strengthen family life that he created many of Morgan Memorial's activities for children and their parents.

Helms began his work at Morgan Chapel by providing child care, clubs, and classes for children. As he and his staff became familiar with the children, they visited the parents in their homes in order to determine their needs. Both Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement workers made "friendly visits" to the homes of their neighbors a regular part of their work. In this way they were able to investigate home conditions and ascertain all of the family members' needs.

During the depression of the mid-1890's Helms discovered that the mothers who brought their children to Morgan Chapel for child care desperately needed employment. He responded by creating jobs in the repair of clothes. Once the mothers started coming for

¹⁰⁶ Carroll, pp. 88-9 and Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores, "Report of Director of Education to the Board of Directors," Board report, 1928, Morgan Memorial archives, Boston University School of Theology Library.

work, their unemployed husbands soon followed and Helms expanded his operation. Helms realized it was not enough to meet the needs of one family member, the child, if critical needs of the parents for jobs and the like, went unaddressed. To serve the whole family and strengthen its bonds required addressing the specific needs of every member.

Morgan Memorial also sponsored activities and events that brought family members together. Its Church of All Nations hosted religious plays and other events in which both children and adults participated. The Children's Settlement sponsored fresh air outings to the country and vacation stays at the South Athol camp particularly for mothers and their young children.

By attending to the children, Helms discovered other ways Morgan Memorial might strengthen family ties. As he and his staff became acquainted with the children, they realized many children could not speak the language of their immigrant parents. These children often could barely communicate with their parents, since the parents typically knew little English. Even worse, they were developing a disdain for their parents' immigrant ways. Helms' response was to create activities to narrow the divide that increased among family members as immigrant children became assimilated into American ways. Helms instituted afterschool classes for children in the languages, literature, and ethnic history of their parents'. The result, according to Helms, was a "heightened respect and appreciation" on the part of children for their parents.¹⁰⁷ Jane Addams created the Hull House Labor Museum with a similar intention. The Labor Museum gave parents the opportunity to teach and exhibit their native handicrafts. Children who previously had looked contemptuously at their parents as impoverished, backward immigrants gained a new-found respect for their parents' talents, skills, and culture.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸ Addams, pp. 171-77.

Participation of Neighborhood Residents

A second important way that these organizations furthered social reconstruction of their neighborhoods was by encouraging neighborhood residents to become active participants in Morgan Memorial and settlement house activity. Helms and the settlement house workers rejected society's glorification of individualism and competition. They believed society's well-being depended on citizens learning to act collectively and cooperatively within their neighborhood unit. Vital communities depended on the full participation of neighbors in the community's political and social life, as well as in the workplace. The settlement house and Morgan Memorial were seen as the training ground for the kind of active citizenship necessary to a well-functioning neighborhood. Helms and the settlement workers, therefore, conceived of their mission as far more than the provision of social services. They believed a big part of their task was to shape their neighbors into responsible citizens. Neither Helms, Woods, nor any other settlement leaders ever fully articulated their philosophy on participation, but the value they placed on participation is implicit in their strategy and approach.

In *The Settlement Horizon*, Robert Woods and Albert Kennedy state that most settlement workers attempted "to prepare people and particularly the young for greater and more responsible participation in industry, government, and higher leisure-time interests." To help their neighbors achieve such responsible participation, the business of the neighborhood organizer was "to assure those groups which show themselves capable of collective self-management ever increasing opportunities of expansion and fulfillment."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Woods and Kennedy, *The Settlement Horizon*., p. 373.

The particular objectives to be achieved by encouraging collective self-management were four-fold. First, Helms and the settlement workers hoped to train their neighbors to become more informed citizens who would further democracy at the local level. They particularly wanted to instill in their immigrant neighbors an appreciation of America's democratic tradition and the skills to become participants in the political process.

Second, they understood good citizenship to mean joining with one's fellow neighbors in creating a better cultural and social life for the neighborhood in ways that overcame divisions between neighbors and between rich and poor. Citizens needed to have opportunities to join with others in their neighborhood, and with more privileged outsiders, as participants in such local activities as social clubs, neighborhood theatrical groups, bands, or sports teams.

Third, Helms, in particular, sought to create opportunities for every member of the community to participate in the mainstream of economic life. He emphasized the importance of providing employment to those whose capacity and skills for work were not being tapped.

Finally, Helms and the settlement house workers envisioned a future where people would work and live far more collectively and cooperatively. To achieve that end Helms, in particular, sought to encourage the development of cooperative social experiments.

To achieve their first two objectives and train their neighbors to become citizens active in political, social, and cultural life, Helms and the settlement workers created a variety of activities that fostered participation. The primary one was the social club. The settlement houses began the practice of organizing clubs, for children, teenagers, and adults. Some clubs were started by settlement workers, others were the inspiration of a

particular settlement volunteer with an interest in launching a dramatics, literary, or other speciality club. Still other clubs were the creation of area neighbors who turned to the settlement house simply for a space where club members could meet. Edgar Helms also adopted the settlement house club model, offering a variety of clubs for children and adults through the Children's Settlement and the Church of All Nations.

There was a significant difference between a club and a social service program. The latter provided people a service without necessarily demanding their active participation in creating and running that service. The club, on the other hand, was set up for the explicit purpose of engaging its members in organizing and running social, cultural, and recreational activities. It offered more participatory roles to neighbors than did other social service programs.

By seeking to train their neighbors in the prerequisites of good citizenship, Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement house residents were particularly focused on socializing their immigrant neighbors to American ways. Some neighborhood workers who were less broad-minded may have believed their neighbors were incapable of becoming responsible American citizens on their own. Even so, they believed responsible citizens needed to be capable of collective self-management, therefore neighbors were given the opportunity to help create and run many of the clubs, plays, exhibits, classes, and similar activities of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses. The neighborhood worker's intent may have been nothing more than to help her neighbors assimilate to their new culture. The outcome, however, was neighbors were given the opportunity to become participants in the task of social reconstruction, not just passive recipients of social services.

Edgar Helms achieved his third objective through Morgan Memorial Co-Operative Industries and Stores. A primary reason for his creation of Morgan Memorial's industrial

arm was to give unemployed, elderly, and disabled men and women the opportunity to participate in society's economic activity as workers. Helms' goal was to give as many of these individuals as possible training and temporary work and then to help them secure other permanent employment in the economic mainstream. For those individuals unable to secure work in a competitive environment, especially the elderly and disabled, Morgan Memorial became their permanent employer.

Helms emphasized that Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores was designed to offer its neighbors a chance not charity. Helms' Methodist emphasis on self-help made him quite moralistic. He often quoted from St. Paul that a man who does not work should not eat. Helms' saw charity as the assistance of last resort when a person was simply not able to work. While Helms' philosophy emphasized individual change, often to the exclusion of changes in the societal forces that produced unemployment, he created opportunities for people to become more than passive recipients. He gave people meaningful training and employment opportunities that went beyond charitable assistance.

Helms had a notion of participation that went far beyond affording an individual the opportunity to participate as an employee. His fourth objective involved the kind of total participation that would be necessary in a more cooperative and utopian society. Helms saw the economic cooperative as the ideal industrial model for a future economic order where cooperation and service to others would replace competition and exploitation. Helms' vision of the economic cooperative assumed this industrial model would be run by industry's workers. Helms believed an economic enterprise in which workers joined together in forwarding their business venture would foster mutual aid and service to others. The cooperative, according to Helms, was an economic model that not only promised to advance a worker's material status, but also would further his spiritual and moral development. His dream, therefore, was to adapt the European secular cooperative to his

religious mission by aligning cooperatives with the church. In this way he distinguished his cooperative vision from the secular cooperatives being developed in America in the early 1900's.¹¹⁰

Since his first visit to the cooperatives of England in the 1890's, Helms had dreamed of replicating the cooperative model in the United States. He named his industrial venture Morgan Memorial Co-operative Industries and Stores because he had wanted it to become a workers' cooperative. Although Helms originally included the word co-operative in Morgan Memorial's title, he realized his industrial venture was far from a true worker-run cooperative. Morgan Memorial's employees participated in the management of their workplace through worker representation on the Board of Directors and regular meetings within each factory department. Even this level of participation, while progressive for its time, fell short of Helms' ideal of worker participation. Looking back on his industrial creation years later, Helms attributed the pressing demands of the early days at Morgan Memorial as the reason he did not fully implement his cooperative dream.¹¹¹ Helms never gave up his dream of creating cooperatives dedicated to community service and run by workers. During his tenure at Morgan Memorial, he came up with several dreams involving the creation of cooperatives.

One idea was to create a consumers' food cooperative using produce grown at Morgan Memorial's South Athol farms.¹¹² Another cooperative vision of Helms' was to relocate hundreds of South End families to South Athol. He imagined that in the summer the families could cultivate their own farms and in the winter they could earn a living

¹¹⁰ Edgar J. Helms, "The South Athol Cooperative Colony," Lecture, 1938 Goodwill Industries Summer Training School, Morgan Memorial archives, Boston University School of Theology Library, p. 6.

¹¹¹ Edgar J. Helms, "The Enlarging Goodwill Industries' Program," p. 1.

¹¹² Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 79.

working in factories established by Morgan Memorial. These farmers were to form a self-sufficient and democratically-run cooperative colony.¹¹³ A third dream, perhaps his most ambitious, was to transform South Athol into a producers' cooperative supplying products to Goodwill Industries nationwide. Helms intended to start a blanket factory and to sell membership shares to Goodwill Industry affiliates. They would have a voice in the industry's management and receive dividends based on the quantity of blankets, sweaters, and other woolen goods that they purchased. The Goodwills would then sell these products in their stores. Helms imagined this cooperative plant could evolve into a sizable industrial complex which would be turned over to members of the South Athol community to run, thereby employing thousands of currently impoverished people.¹¹⁴

Helms never realized his dream of launching these ambitious cooperatives. His dreams, though, reveal much about his philosophy on the participation of people in guiding their own economic course. Helms at once believed in promoting economic and moral advancement by instilling in his neighbor's personal moral virtue. In this way he hoped to promote virtues that were at the core of Methodist belief--self-help, hard work, and thrift. Yet the attainment of individual virtue was not enough. The economic, social, and moral well-being of Americans also depended on their acting in fellowship as a group. Like the settlement leaders, Helms believed that collective participation, through mutual aid and service to one's neighbor, was critical to society's advancement. The cooperative was the model Helms hoped to use not only to overcome poverty, but to promote fellowship among neighbors.

While Helms' cooperative dreams would have given participants a great deal of control in managing their workplace and their model communities, Helms was more

¹¹³ Helms, "The Enlarging Goodwill Industries' Program," p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Helms, "The South Athol Cooperative Colony," pp. 6-7.

interested in promoting cooperation among people than in providing the poor with greater economic and social control. In this way Helms was much like the settlement workers. They maintained an optimistic faith in the power of cooperation to overcome society's divisions, even as this ideal seemed increasingly unattainable. In an era of growing conflict between labor and capital and rich and poor, Helms and the settlement workers held fast to a belief that the solution to these problems was greater cooperation between the classes, rather than a redistribution of economic resources and power.

The level of participation by Morgan Memorial's neighbors in the organization's industry and social activities never reached Helms' original ideal. All the same, the neighbors who went to Morgan Memorial were accorded a variety of participatory roles. They played an active part in organizing and running clubs, as did members of the settlement houses. They also were given an opportunity to learn a trade and earn a living. As a result even the disabled were able to participate in securing wages instead of simply receiving charity. To some degree, Morgan Memorial's employees also participated in the management of their work environment. These participatory roles fell far short of control by participants in fully running Morgan Memorial's industry, lodging houses, or other services. Although the nature of participation by neighbors remained limited, the opportunities for participation at Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses went well beyond that offered by other charities. The charitable organizations simply provided financial relief without creating ways for people to participate in securing that assistance. Such an approach kept the recipient in a far more passive role than did that of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses.

Origins of Morgan Memorial's Strategy of Neighborhood Reconstruction

Helms' strategy of neighborhood reconstruction, like his comprehensive approach, was largely a product of his religious mission. His commitment to serve his entire neighborhood stemmed from his understanding of the responsibility of a church. Helms referred to Morgan Memorial's neighborhood as his parish and he viewed all of its neighbors, whether members of his church or not, as his parishioners. Helms believed it to be the church's responsibility to minister to all members of the parish and to carry out this ministry through attending to the parishioners' economic, social, educational, recreational, and many other needs. This tradition was established by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in the slums of London over one hundred years before Helms set to work in the South End. While Helms adopted many settlement methods to achieve neighborhood reconstruction, he saw himself primarily as following in the path of Wesley for whom neighborhood-building and parish service were one and the same.

Helms also believed deeply that all religious people were compelled first and foremost to serve their neighbors. Settlement leaders believed the best way to combat society's excessive individualism and selfishness was through participation in collective, neighborhood activities. Helms shared this overall philosophy but gave it a religious slant. For him, collective participation took the form of "loving service to humanity." In fact, such service formed the credo of Morgan Memorial.

For Helms' service to others was both a means and an end. Service to others was an end in and of itself. Belief in God was not sufficient; the religious person had to manifest his religious faith through love and service to his neighbor. Such service not only benefited the recipient, it transformed the provider as well.

More importantly, service was a means. By serving others, each person would help create a better world where love and cooperation would replace exploitation and competition. The kingdom of God could be realized on earth if every person dedicated him or herself to such loving service to humanity:

If every man loved our Father God and his neighbor as himself, all men would walk the earth as sons of God and there would be a new race, where the excellencies of all would become the possession of each. There would be no poor--not even poor sinners, in that universe of love and goodwill. . . . The Kingdom of God would indeed be at hand and the world could be evangelized in one generation if business, politics, education, and religion were converted and born again to the Gospel of Service in the spirit of Goodwill.¹¹⁵

It was this religious vision that was the driving force behind Helms' tireless work to expand the services of Morgan Memorial. This vision motivated him to seek to transform his South End district. Helms imagined a world in which there was greater love of God and a spirit of goodwill, and where people came together in mutual service whether in the workplace, the political sphere, or through social activities. Promoting this spirit of love and goodwill required strengthening the bonds between family members and neighbors. Furthermore, every member of society, no matter how "lowly," needed to participate in the creation of this more ideal world.

In 1929, Edith McDowell, the director of Morgan Memorial's Education Department, described to a newspaper reporter the religious motivation behind all of Morgan Memorial's work. As she explained it, the organization's welfare work was concerned with more than a child's social and physical welfare, its classes were meant to teach more than a particular skill, and its clubs do more than encourage children to play together. "Back of every bit of club and class work is the passionate desire to help boys

¹¹⁵ Helms, *Pioneering*, p. 72-3.

and girls and men and women to live together and work together as sons and daughters of God."¹¹⁶ This, according to McDowell, Helms, and Morgan Memorial's other workers, was the ultimate goal of neighborhood reconstruction.

The goal of neighborhood reconstruction had its roots in Helms' religious philosophy. He also shared the settlement house philosophy that the social reconstruction of poor neighborhoods provided the way to transform the poor into responsible and better-educated citizens. Such a transformation would enable the poor to participate in America's political system, thereby preserving and furthering the country's democratic traditions. Neighborhood reconstruction, to Helms' and the settlement leaders, would inspire the poor to greater fellowship and mutual aid, recreating an idealized village life they imagined had existed before the advent of the industrial age. Finally, the creation of vibrant neighborhoods with educated neighbors was expected to bridge the huge divide between rich and poor that had left poor neighborhoods isolated and bereft of the educational and cultural privileges of the rest of American society.

Conclusion

Helms and the settlement house leaders realized that to transform the lives of their individual neighbors and to create more vital neighborhoods involved many things. First, the diverse economic, educational, social, religious, cultural, and other needs of neighborhood children and adults had to be addressed. To address them required the creation of comprehensive services including, in Morgan Memorial's case, the creation of jobs. Second, such services and activities were to be offered through neighborhood centers which brought people together on a social basis and involved them in group

¹¹⁶ Christian Science Monitor, "Ministering to Childhood at the Morgan Memorial," 16 April 1929.

activities. Third, to revitalize the entire neighborhood, these social centers had to be open to all members of the community, offering services that met the needs of the neighborhood's different sub-groups. Fourth, activities and services were to be designed to strengthen the bonds of friendship and affiliation between neighbors while also strengthening the bonds of respect and affection between participating family members. Finally, neighbors needed to be active participants in the activities of their neighborhood centers. In these ways, Helms, Woods, Addams, and other neighborhood workers imagined they could combat poverty and neighborhood deterioration, transforming these tenement districts as well as their inhabitants in the process.

It is difficult to determine how many South End children and adults had experiences similar to Mary Antin's. She attributed the activities and services of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses with profoundly affecting the future course of her life. Undoubtedly, there were others like Antin who got their first glimpse of a larger world at Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses and proceeded to pursue further education and cultural enrichment in ways they would not have done otherwise.

Thomas Philpott in his criticism of the settlement houses, claimed they never became the multi-service community centers their founders had contemplated. Most neighbors who used their services, such as the parents who put their children in the settlement nursery, spent little time at the center. Other neighbors who attended settlement activities may have attended no more than once or twice a week, hardly enough time to effect a transformation in someone's life. Moreover, the total of all neighbors who used these centers was only a tiny fraction of the area's population.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Philpott, Thomas Lee, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrant Blacks and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, Inc., 1991) pp. 72-5.

Yet with statistics like 4,000 people securing full or part time work at Morgan Memorial per year, 1,000 men staying at the Seavey Settlement, and about 1,500 children using the services of the Children's Settlement, clearly many people were taking advantage of Morgan Memorial's activities and services.¹¹⁸ Professor Carroll found in 1923 almost 20% of the neighbors in the surrounding district of 19,000 people had participated in some Morgan Memorial activity or service during that year.¹¹⁹

For some neighbors, participation probably extended no further than attendance at entertainment nights, or enrollment in an English class. On the other hand, Morgan Memorial's literature is filled with anecdotes of neighborhood children and adults whose lives were profoundly changed through involvement in this institutional church. Some were elderly or disabled adults who previously lived isolated and impoverished lives until they secured employment at Morgan Memorial and became involved in its many other activities. Others were children who participated year round in the organization's afterschool classes and clubs and attended its camp each summer for two months. Probably these individuals were the minority and most neighbors had more of a sporadic and distant involvement with Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses. At the very least, Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses provided their neighbors the opportunity to secure essential services like jobs, vocational training, and child care, and to become engaged in social and recreational activities.

Settlement workers also transformed their neighborhoods through their involvement in a variety of reform activities. They took the lead in seeking improvements in housing and sanitation, the provision of basic medical care, the construction of parks and playgrounds, and the creation of expanded school programs. They also fought for reform

¹¹⁸ Morgan Memorial, *Manual 1922*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Carroll, p. 146.

of municipal government and of the way government resources were allocated. As a consequence, government became far more involved in the provision of neighborhood services than it had been before the inception of the settlement house movement and slum conditions improved markedly.

While Edgar Helms did not participate directly in this kind of neighborhood-wide physical transformation, he worked to turn around the deterioration of Morgan Memorial's immediate neighborhood by ridding the area of its many absentee-owned sordid establishments. More importantly, he created an industrial enterprise that trained and employed the district's most vulnerable residents. And he did so in a way that fostered mutual aid and community service. He also encouraged community service, whether among his employees, the residents of his lodging houses, or through his church. And, he made it possible for those neighbors, even the most down-and-out transients, who sought out Morgan Memorial's assistance to benefit from a comprehensive range of services and activities. Prior to the advent of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses such a network of services simply did not exist in tenement districts like the South End. Moreover, these organizations were the first to apply a comprehensive strategy of social and physical reconstruction of their neighborhoods. Much about their approach to the creation of neighborhood-based services for the poor continues to offer relevant lessons to neighborhood organizations of today.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

I began my research of Morgan Memorial and the settlement house movement because I believed their efforts to create neighborhood-based services for the poor offered relevant lessons for groups doing similar work today. In concluding this thesis, I return to the concerns I raised in the introduction and offer the following eight lessons, drawn from this historical study, that might guide us in our work with poor and homeless people today.

Unfortunately, these eight lessons do not easily translate into a series of policy recommendations that contemporary organizations might follow. Organizations today face a very different set of constraints than did similar groups almost a century ago. The basic needs of the poor for housing, employment, social services, and the like may have changed little over the years, but the capacity of organizations to respond to those needs has changed a great deal. An examination of the past may not offer specific answers to our current problems, but it can help us reflect on what we might do better.

The first lesson drawn from this historical study is that a comprehensive approach to meeting individual needs is defined by several key elements: flexibility, adaptability, coordination, and integration. In the introduction to this thesis I suggested that one problem with our current approach is that our services are too specialized and our housing, employment, and social service systems too fragmented. One agency offers housing, another job training, another social services, and still others recreational activities. The result is that individuals' inter-related needs, whether for housing, education, employment, or social activities, are treated as separate and isolated issues.

Edgar Helms and the settlement house workers show us that there was a time when an individual's diverse needs were treated in a much more comprehensive fashion. Being comprehensive did not mean that Morgan Memorial, even with its broad range of activities, addressed an individual's every need. What made Morgan Memorial's comprehensive approach effective was that the services the organization did offer were well-coordinated and integrated into a cohesive effort.

Today when we attempt to create comprehensive services this usually involves coordinating the separate and specialized efforts of many agencies. While this may be an improvement over maintaining a disconnected service system, it is not the same as what Helms and the settlement workers attempted to do. They were not specialists, at best coordinating segmented service systems. They were generalists who played a variety of different roles. Moreover, they adapted their efforts and tried new approaches as conditions changed. In our effort to create comprehensive services today we would do well to look beyond the coordination of disparate and specialized housing, employment, and social service systems to becoming generalists in the way that these earlier neighborhood workers attempted to be.

A second lesson is that a comprehensive approach must both address an individual's pressing needs while also responding to needs deemed less essential that help improve the quality-of-life. To address such a multiplicity of needs requires a neighborhood worker to form a friendly and neighborly relationship with the people he or she hopes to assist.

In this thesis I have emphasized that Edgar Helms and the settlement workers addressed essential needs for housing, vocational training, and employment, at the same time as they attempted to improve an individual's quality-of-life by offering social clubs, art

classes, and summer camp programs. In fact, part of what made their approach comprehensive was that Helms and the settlement workers did not make these distinctions, classifying some activities as essential and others as less so. All of these services and activities were deemed a part of what enabled people to lead fuller and better lives.

Furthermore, Helms and the settlement house workers appreciated the importance of creating a diverse range of activities and services because of the type of relationship they had with the people they served. They viewed the people in their district as their fellow neighbors, or parishioners, not as their "clients" or "cases." Their goal was to develop a long-term relationship with their neighbors and to interact with them around many issues. The same neighbors who came to Morgan Memorial in search of a job, better housing, or child care also might have participated in a play, musical band, or religious service hosted by the organization. By interacting with their neighbors in a variety of settings, Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement workers came to develop a relationship with their neighbors that was much broader than that typically had today by social service staff with their clients.

As Jane Addams stated, the settlement workers came to know their neighbors "through all the varying conditions of life, to stand by when they are in distress, but by no means to drop intercourse with them when normal prosperity has returned."¹²⁰ Many contemporary housing and service providers seek to develop the same kind of long-term, neighborly relationship with their clients as the settlement workers and Morgan Memorial's staff had with their neighbors. The problem is that as services become more specialized and fragmented providers have fewer opportunities to get to know people beyond the immediate crisis. Organizations also tend to assist people with a limited range of services and their staff see only one side of the life of their clients. The experience of Morgan

¹²⁰ Addams, p. 125.

Memorial and the settlement houses reminds us that for a comprehensive approach to be effective entails much more than the creation of multiple services. Housing and service providers must also have the opportunity to get to know the people they serve beyond an immediate crisis and through " the varying conditions of life." Only then can we move beyond seeing people as "clients," defined by their immediate emergency, specific deficits, or pressing needs, and appreciate them as full and complex individuals and neighbors.

The third lesson is that a comprehensive approach to meeting an individual's needs must address the person's need for employment. The work of Morgan Memorial in particular demonstrates the importance of this lesson.

In Edgar Helms' day it was easier to create an employment venture that gave poor people more than they had, since they had so terribly little. At the turn-of-the century, many people earned no more than a subsistence wage and the disabled and elderly were not provided any form of public assistance. By creating paying jobs for people who otherwise might have earned nothing, Helms was able to do a great deal. By the late 1930's the relative value of those wages had declined as the federal government began to provide support for the elderly and disabled and set a general minimum wage. Helms and Goodwill directors across the country faced a dilemma. Either they had to cut back on the number of people they employed, since their enterprise did not generate sufficient income to pay wages considered livable by more modern standards, or they had to secure additional financial support. They opted for the latter tact and secured government assistance by specializing in rehabilitation of the disabled.

Although Helms ultimately was forced by changing conditions to redefine his employment venture, industrial enterprises like the one he created at the turn-of-the century are still needed today. Many chronically unemployed and disabled people remain in poverty

for lack of vocational skills and adequate employment. If we hope to address their needs, we must give greater consideration to Helms' philosophy regarding employment and his approach to jobs creation.

Edgar Helms' goal was to give people on-the-job training and eventually to help them secure other employment. Those with more severe physical and mental disabilities, who could not compete elsewhere, were offered ongoing employment in Morgan Memorial's factories and stores. Helms believed in self-help, but he also realized not everyone could cope in a competitive industry and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, people still needed the opportunity to participate in the work world. Helms appreciated the damage done to an individual's self-confidence and sense of worth when that person was not given the opportunity to contribute his or her skills and capacity to a job. It is a message we would do well to reconsider today

Helms' experience at attempting to create jobs for the very poor and the disabled reminds us of the challenges we face today. It is not enough to create employment; jobs need to provide a livable wage. More importantly, if we are to target jobs to people who are chronically unemployed, physically disabled, or mentally ill, we need to accept that not all of these individuals will be able to attain economic self-sufficiency. The challenge then becomes finding ways to enable such individuals to apply their skills and energy to a job even if it means supplementing their earnings to ensure a decent standard of living.

A fourth lesson drawn from this historical study is that organizations seeking to better the lives of poor individuals should not focus on an individual's needs in isolation. At the beginning of this thesis, I suggested that a problem with our contemporary approach is that we address an individual's needs as if they could be divorced from the person's connection to his or her family members and neighbors, and from neighborhood conditions

in general. Edgar Helms and the settlement house workers appreciated that a comprehensive approach involved linking people to their family and neighbors and attending to the state of the neighborhood. They set as their mission neighborhood reconstruction and they did not distinguish between social reconstruction and physical development. Both were part and parcel of what it took to improve a neighborhood; to forward one was to forward the other. Efforts to create decent, less crowded housing helped stabilize family life, just as activities that brought neighbors together socially might also induce them to battle for the construction of a playground or the elimination of a neighborhood gambling hall.

A fifth lesson is that if we hope to improve poor neighborhoods we need to create neighborhood centers that can play the same role in a neighborhood that Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses played in theirs. Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses served a much broader function than do contemporary neighborhood centers. Today, we have multi-service centers that provide social services, and community centers that offer social and recreational activities. Helms and the settlement workers created places where people could go for social services and for social activities.

It is rare to find centers today that perform both sets of functions. While some exist, most of these centers serve a specialized population. For example, one contemporary institution somewhat analogous to these earlier centers is the small-scale shelter for homeless people. Smaller shelters typically provide essential services, such as lodging, meals, and assistance with securing housing, health care, and the like. They also function as social and recreational centers. They operate play rooms for children, host holiday parties, sponsor social outings, and carry out similar efforts to build stronger bonds of trust and friendship between the staff and the shelter's homeless families or single adults. Shelter providers often report that once people leave the shelter they leave behind this sense

of companionship and belonging. These individuals find themselves isolated in neighborhoods where they do not know anyone and where there are no neighborhood centers to replace the social role the shelter played in their lives. It is a sad set of circumstances if overcoming homelessness means moving from a shelter of friends to a neighborhood of strangers. If we are to learn from the experience of Helms and the settlement workers we need to find ways to recreate neighborhood centers that combine the provision of vital social services with opportunities for socializing, and that are open not only to homeless families, homeless single adults, or to some other specialized group, but to everyone in the neighborhood.

A sixth lesson is that neighborhood reconstruction needs to include all members of the community, even the very poor. Edgar Helms, more than the settlement house workers, understood his mission to be service to his entire parish. He appreciated that a neighborhood organization needed to serve all of its residents, no matter how "lowly" and that in this way the entire neighborhood would be improved.

Helms was unusual in his inclusive approach. The settlement workers claimed to be dedicated to working with all of their neighbors, but they focused on serving white working-class immigrants to the exclusion of other groups. Most settlement leaders believed improving the neighborhood meant excluding those deemed undesirable. For instance, at the turn-of-the century the Boston Social Union, the coalition of Boston settlement houses, sought to eliminate the tramps and drunkards from settlement neighborhoods. Settlement house workers by and large also excluded African-Americans from participation in their activities claiming they should be served through separate and segregated neighborhood houses. Ironically, although Edgar Helms ran a Protestant organization, his approach to neighborhood service was much more inclusive than that of the secular settlement houses. He welcomed in the tramps and drunkards; he targeted his

vocational training to the people deemed least employable, and he ran programs that were far more racially integrated than those of other organizations of that time.

Many neighborhood organizations today, much like the earlier settlement houses, are unwilling to serve those individuals who a century ago were referred to as "undesirables," or who today are known as "the homeless." Edgar Helms reminds us that it is possible to work for neighborhood improvement without necessarily excluding the neighborhood's poorest and most troubled individuals. We might learn from his philosophy and from the array of activities and services he created to guide us in our creation of organizations that reach out to all of the people in our neighborhoods.

The seventh lesson to be learned from the work of Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses is that neighbors, themselves, need to be involved in the process of reconstruction. Neighborhoods can not thrive when people are encouraged to be nothing more than passive recipients of housing, social services, and the like. Vital neighborhoods depend on residents becoming active in the neighborhood's political, social, cultural, and recreational life. They also depend on people working cooperatively and collectively to attend to the neighborhood's issues.

Morgan Memorial's staff and the settlement workers appreciated that it was not enough to offer neighborhood services. Their larger objective was to encourage people to become active citizens who would run social clubs, fight for neighborhood political reforms, or in Morgan Memorial's case, help to manage operations in their work place. Helms and the settlement house workers teach us that if an organization's goal is simply to meet people's needs for housing, jobs, or social services, people will be encouraged to become no more than mere recipients of services. When the goal is to promote active

citizenship and cooperation among neighbors, people are more likely to become participants in securing their services and in improving their neighborhoods.

The eighth and final lesson learned from Edgar Helms and the settlement house workers is that to be effective at bettering the lives of individuals and reconstructing poor neighborhoods depends on having a broad vision and strong sense of mission. Both Helms and the settlement house workers saw themselves as urban missionaries dedicated to forwarding a vision of a better world through their work in their neighborhoods. Edgar Helms was motivated by his deep religious faith to seek the creation of a religious utopia on Earth where people would live according to a gospel of goodwill, service to others, and cooperation. The settlement workers were motivated by a similar vision, though they defined it in less religious terms.

Helms and the settlement workers sought to help people advance economically and to achieve greater self-sufficiency, but these were not their ultimate goals. Today in our effort to help people become more self-sufficient we often lose sight of the sort of vision they had. Helms and the settlement workers appreciated that it was not enough to promote individual self-sufficiency; a well-functioning society also depended on achieving greater mutuality among neighbors and neighborhood transformation. As we struggle today to address the problems of poverty and homelessness in ways that help people overcome their sense of isolation and their loss of a sense of neighborhood, we might learn from our historical forbearers. Their vision of a more cooperative world composed of citizens working together to create better communities infused their work, defining the kinds of services they provided, the way they structured their activities, and their understanding of success.

Edgar Helms and the settlement house workers achieved a tremendous amount in a few decades, creating organizations that met a variety of their neighbors' needs and that began to improve the neighborhood's physical infrastructure and to strengthen its social fabric. Their belief that it was in their power to better people's lives and to transform their neighborhoods drove them to take on all sorts of roles, from social service providers to community organizers to investigators and lobbyists. They did whatever needed to be done. They were generalists committed to creating comprehensive services and to building stronger, more vital neighborhoods.

Neither Edgar Helms nor the settlement house workers ever fully realized their mission. Eventually their organizations became specialized and less focused on neighborhood-wide improvement. As they grew they lost much of their autonomy. They became dependent on funding from government contracts, wealthy board members, and the Community Chest and they needed to respond to the dictates and priorities of those funders. As they grew into sizable institutions they also became less flexible, less able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. By the 1930's Morgan Memorial and the settlement houses had become specialized organizations, less focused on bettering the lives of all of their neighbors through a comprehensive approach and less committed to neighborhood transformation.

Although their mission eventually changed, their efforts at the turn-of-the century remain a model for organizations who work with the poor and homeless today. In this thesis I have particularly focused on Morgan Memorial because I believe Edgar Helms' vision and his creation of a remarkable jobs, housing, and service empire have much to teach us as we attempt to tackle issues similar to those he confronted almost a century ago. We need to reflect on the lessons learned from Helms' philosophy and approach, and from

that of the settlement house movement. The challenge, I believe, is not only to grasp these historical lessons but to find ways to apply them to our contemporary practice.

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