

1.03 History of Goodwill Industries

In the late 1890s, Methodist Minister Edgar J. Helms, pastor of Morgan Chapel in Boston's South End, found innovative ways to help his community's mostly immigrant, jobless poor. His church's "industrial school" offered work skill training; a rudimentary job placement service was set up as early as 1896. When the economic impact of the Spanish-American War began to shrink the pocketbooks of Helm's supporters in Boston's wealthier areas, the energetic Helms took a burlap bag and went door to door asking his well-to-do friends for discarded clothing and anything else he could carry away. Destitute men and women, who asked Helms to give them a chance not charity, were paid to repair and refurbish the donated materials, which then were sold; income from sales was used to pay workers' wages. Thus, the Goodwill Industries "method" of self-help enterprise was born.

After the Old Morgan Chapel was condemned as unsafe and razed, a new facility was built. It was here in 1902, at the new Morgan Memorial Chapel, that Goodwill Industries was truly born. It was the first "Goodwill Industries" operation, though named Morgan Memorial Cooperative Industries and Store, Inc. The words "Goodwill Industries" were first used in Brooklyn, New York. A Brooklyn group decided to adopt and adapt Morgan Memorial's methods of operation, and Helms was persuaded that Brooklyn's name of its workshop, "Goodwill Industries," was an improvement over the cumbersome name he had incorporated.

With Helms as the driving force, the Goodwill Industries concept spread across the United States. By 1926, he was touring the world, telling the Goodwill Industries of America story and laying the groundwork for an international movement.

Although individuals with disabilities were never excluded from Goodwill Industries programs, they were not the focus of the organization's efforts until the mid-1930s. Goodwill Industries saw a lack of services and felt a special mission toward those whose physical, mental, moral, and social condition prevented them from supporting themselves and their families.

Today, Goodwill Industries actively strives to achieve the full participation in a society of people with disabilities and others with special needs. Opportunities and occupational capabilities are expanded through a network of non-profit community-based organizations operating throughout the world in response to social requirements. To this end, Goodwill Industries of America became Goodwill Industries International in January of 1994.