

# GENERATIONS *of* GIVING

THE HISTORY OF THE  
CLEVELAND H. DODGE  
FOUNDATION

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## INTRODUCTION

*“There was wisdom in his philanthropy.”*

—REV. A.H. MOMENT, 1883, ON WILLIAM E. DODGE

“THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY WAS PREPARED a few years [ago], at the urgent request of Mr. Dodge's children, moved by the laudable desire to know something of their ancestry, and to preserve some record of a life eventful, long and eminently useful,” wrote Matson Meier-Smith, a prominent Boston Reverend in 1854. He explained further that, “no one can read it without finding an example of earnestness, decision, perseverance, and uniform adherence to principle, radiant, moreover, with Christian consistency and dignity...” Meier-Smith, a later confidant of President Abraham Lincoln, was referring to the life of David Low Dodge, a Massachusetts merchant born in 1774 who later moved to New York City to help form the New York Peace Society following the War of 1812. As the editor of a volume that contained Mr. Dodge's manuscripts, letters, and autobiographical sketches, Meier-Smith concluded that such a book on Mr. Dodge's life would be useful to people “whether within or without the circle of family relationship, who duly appreciate the importance of the private individual, and the value of every man who, with true and honest spirit, goes manfully through life's duties and conflicts.”<sup>1</sup>

What Meier-Smith could never have imagined—nor David Low Dodge himself when he began his first attempt at writing an autobiography in 1808—is that future descendants of the Dodge family would share uncannily similar sentiments over two hundred years later. *Generations of Giving: The History of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation* is written with the same underlying purpose: to illuminate, in part, the history of Dodge family philanthropy and the Dodge Foundation so that future generations “can know something of their ancestry,” full of individuals who exemplified service, morality, and “true and honest spirit.”<sup>2</sup> Tracing this ancestry back from the time of David Low Dodge in the late eighteenth century to the present day leadership of the

Dodge Foundation reveals that these early family impressions remain accurate descriptors of the family three centuries later. The actions of multiple generations of Dodge descendants, and more recently over the last one hundred years with the creation and support of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, founded in 1917, are all part of this continuum.

David Low Dodge, a third generation American colonist and a farmer-turned-religious schoolteacher, eventually became a merchant, among many of his life roles. Seemingly following suit, David Low Dodge's son William E. Dodge (who, with his siblings, had urged his father to write the aforementioned memoir), grew up to become one of the foremost entrepreneurs in post-bellum New York City. William's business success was eventually continued and expanded through the growth of his (and his partner's) company Phelps Dodge by the next two generations—William E. Dodge, Jr. and ultimately, Cleveland H. Dodge. The growth of Phelps Dodge into one of the country's largest copper and mining companies led various historians and biographers beginning in the late 1890s to write about the lives—primarily the entrepreneurial rise—of William and William Jr.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while Cleveland H. Dodge continued the capitalist enterprise of Phelps Dodge along with many other business ventures, he also took a substantial role in public life, becoming well-known as a philanthropist and notably, as an advisor to President Woodrow Wilson. His economic wealth and philanthropy aside, Dodge's close friendship with Wilson would also make him a recorded figure in American history, like his father and grandfather before him.<sup>4</sup> However, also like his forebears who were devoted to the public good, Cleveland's philanthropy has been less noted in history, particularly the incubation of his namesake foundation in 1917 that still exists today under Dodge family leadership.

This book specifically details the unwritten history of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation and its ancestral origins, primarily discussing a select number of Dodge family members in relationship to the Foundation from its establishment in 1917 to its current leadership under the founder's great-grandson, William Dodge Rueckert. (It is important to note that this book does not seek to be a comprehensive Dodge family history, nor does it give proper diligence to the matriarchs of the family who were just as important as the men, but whose historical records are much more scarce.) Although the philanthropic roots of the Dodge family run deep, past histories and footnotes that discuss the lives of William, William Jr., and Cleveland H. Dodge have rarely

focused on each individual's philanthropy and personal commitment to societal uplift. Therefore, in order to understand the history of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, it is first essential to understand the history of the people who set it in motion. The Foundation, of course, did not introduce ideas about sharing wealth or helping those less fortunate; instead, the Foundation was only a cementing of valued family principles that were passed on from generation to generation—learned, inherited, and embodied by family members—all of which continues today. Appropriately, Part I of *Generations of Giving* discusses the earliest ancestors of the Dodge family, explaining the role that philanthropy played in each of their lives and how their deeply-engrained commitment solidified the ideas that would form the Foundation's focus on education, international welfare, and service, guided by long-standing Christian principles. Part I concludes with the establishment of the Foundation in 1917—as well as an overview of the founder's sister, Grace Hoadley Dodge, who served as an inspiration for the Foundation—and its early years during the rise of philanthropy in early twentieth-century America.

Building on this history, Part II of *Generations of Giving*, then, documents the actual work of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation throughout the majority of the twentieth century, including its financial ebbs and flows each decade, its changes in personnel and leadership over time, and brief interwoven histories of important grantee organizations. Most of all, this book details the ongoing, if perhaps inevitable, balancing act between making sure the Foundation honors the vision of the founder while also meeting the demands of a changing society and growing family tree. The history of the Foundation, in part, is also a history of organizations that are seeking to make a positive difference in the world—the Foundation's impact ultimately relies on the meaningful work of the organizations that receive Dodge grants. In this vein, this book also focuses on the broad actions of the Foundation, not its internal politics. While there were certainly disagreements among board members over the decades and sure to be controversies, a book encapsulating more than a hundred years of history must prioritize the outcomes. In this way, looking historically, the book emphasizes the results of the Foundation's work—what grants were made and how the Foundation changed over time, for example, more than the personal processes of the people involved.

Despite a century of providing grants to hundreds of different organizations in New York, across the country, and all over the world—totaling approximately \$100 million—there has been no consolidated history of the

Foundation. Starting with Cleveland E. Dodge, Cleveland H.'s son, who took over as president of the Foundation in 1926 following the death of his father, Part II traces the growth of the Foundation under his principled leadership for almost 60 years. If the founder created the skeletal blueprint and the initial vision for the Foundation, his son Cleveland E. Dodge was the beating heart during most of the twentieth century that helped it flourish. Cleveland guided the Foundation through the Great Depression and helped it grow in the 1950s and 1960s when the number of philanthropies boomed in American society. He then steered it during the 1970s and into the early 1980s to make sure the Foundation both retained the vision of Cleveland H. Dodge and, above all, remained a family foundation many decades removed from its origins. The book concludes with chapters on the last few decades—the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s—discussing the challenges and opportunities of this family foundation in the modern era, under the leadership of Cleveland E. Dodge, Jr. and eventually William Dodge Rueckert. These chapters describe the evolution of the Foundation's grant-making philosophy, such as a movement toward funding more New York City-based organizations, and most significantly, the many changes in Foundation infrastructure due to the growth of the Foundation's board in parallel with the growth of the family. Finally, a brief chapter provides a capstone to the book, offering reflections on the past, present, and future of the Dodge Foundation.

### **A History of Philanthropy, Service, and Family**

IN ORDER TO best tell the story of the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation, this book focuses on three key themes that have resonated throughout the entire Dodge family history: philanthropy, service, and, most importantly, family itself. The first, *philanthropy*, or, more simply, the idea of giving to those less fortunate, has been a staple of each Dodge ancestor. Starting with William E. Dodge and onward, early Dodge family members (and then Cleveland E. Dodge via the Foundation) donated generously to educational organizations—both foreign and domestic—as well as organizations that modeled Christian principles. This long pattern of monetary giving to educational organizations such as Teachers College, Columbia University, international organizations such as the Near East Foundation, and community organizations that promoted general welfare such as the YMCA, would continue and later form the core of the Foundation's beneficiaries. The Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation's

long-standing relationship with each of these three organizations, and many others like International House or the American Red Cross, is an important part of the Foundation's story.

The second theme that is essential to the Dodge family and to a history of the Foundation is *service*—the idea that people, regardless of wealth or status, have a responsibility to also provide their time and energy to help worthwhile causes. This principle has also been a staple of the family, as those who led and served on the board of directors of the Foundation frequently dedicated their time outside the Foundation in service-oriented roles, such as non-compensated leadership positions in community and educational organizations. Furthermore, as discussed later in the book, this family characteristic of service has also become embedded in the organizational structure of the Foundation in recent years and remains important to the Dodge family today.

Finally, perhaps the most important theme of all is *family*. Acting as a central component, family has always been essential throughout each Dodge generation—the patriarchs and matriarchs have worked to maintain strong family relationships between and within generations. Materially, each generation has passed on mementos to children and grandchildren; yearbooks, letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and other documents have been saved and shared with family members over time, while in recent decades, family outings that reconnect each other to shared ancestors and places have become an important family tradition.<sup>5</sup> However, the idea of family is more than just these tangible efforts, as important as they surely are—the idea of family has often been a guiding principle in how to live one's life. Looking back to Dodge ancestors, across family branches, has helped future generations learn about the first two themes—philanthropy and service—and provided a blueprint and inspiration for how to live nobly and justly.

Most relevantly with regards to the Foundation, there of course exists a tight, interwoven relationship between the Foundation and the Dodge family. For one, the family has certainly kept the Foundation strong; unlike most philanthropies that were similarly founded out of a surplus of wealth in the early twentieth century, the Dodge Foundation has *remained* a family foundation throughout its century-long existence, led by direct ancestors of its original founder. Few foundations today can make that claim. However, the Foundation has also been—in the words of its current President William Dodge Rueckert—a “vehicle to keep the family together.”<sup>6</sup> The Dodge Foundation has been very meaningful to the entire Dodge family as an institution that not

only provides an outlet for descendants to be philanthropic, but as a method to keep the family connected in a globalized world.

Like any family history, there are certainly outliers, and like any long-running Foundation, there have been internal tensions—this book briefly discusses one such issue in the last few decades—but in totality, the Dodge Foundation has overwhelmingly been a positive force for good. Over the last one hundred years, the Dodge family and the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation have pushed the world, on a grand scale, to become a smidge better in solving problems and a little bit more kind in its humanity. In an era where the world's problems may sometimes seem too big or too hopeless, any story about a family that works earnestly to solve them and combat these cynical narratives is a story that deserves to be told. The Dodge family and their Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation is one such story.