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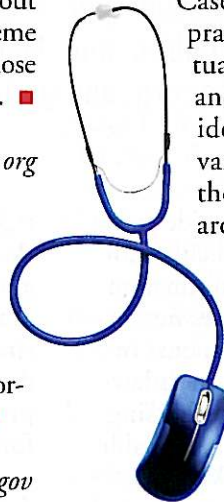
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## Book Review

### A Passion for Justice: A History of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, 1905-2005

by Carol Poh Miller; 2006, \$30. Order forms are available at [www.lasclev.org/](http://www.lasclev.org/).

“History never looks like history when you are living through it.”<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about the history of civil legal assistance in the United States. Most relate the story of legal services for the poor as it was originally viewed and how it has progressed through the years. These documents have provided invaluable resources that will help to preserve the story of civil legal assistance as it has developed.

So, too, should Carol Poh Miller's *A Passion for Justice: A History of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, 1905-2005*. Replete with scores of original photographs and countless quotations, this document describes in evocative detail the history of one of the

oldest legal aid programs in the country. Miller's work captures the struggles that Cleveland's legal aid program has faced. She seamlessly weaves the story of this one program into the larger history of the legal aid movement nationally.

The program was founded in 1905 by a group of progressive Clevelanders for the purpose of rendering “legal assistance gratuitously or for moderate charge to deserving persons not otherwise

able to obtain the services of competent attorneys.” In its first year, the Legal Aid Society handled 456 cases for poor residents of Cleveland with a small cadre of volunteers and one paid attorney. It was the fifth legal aid society in the country. By the time

it marked its 100th anniversary, the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland had reinvented itself numerous times and had grown into an institution that employed approximately 75 staff members with a budget of more than \$7 million.

Throughout its history the legal aid society fought to serve individual clients with their legal problems while making systemic change to better the lives of the low-income client community. In its second annual report the fledgling program formed a legislative committee, one of whose goals was to abate the abuses of Ohio's justice courts. As Miller says in her concluding words: “In the face of overwhelming need, the latter-day advocates of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland—staff and volunteer alike—held fast to the plain idea that had motivated its founders, its early leaders, and

its first advocates, to help the poor obtain simple justice.”

I recommend *A Passion for Justice* because it is a concise, well-written account of the evolution of one of our nation's premiere legal aid societies. I also recommend it in the hope that it will serve as an example to those in other civil legal assistance programs who have “lived through it” of the importance of capturing the histories of their own programs. We owe that to ourselves and to future generations of legal aid advocates who need to know why they are here. ■

#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup>John W. Gardner, U.S. administrator and secretary of health education and welfare (1965-1968), quoted by Bill Moyers.

—Linda E. Perle  
Cleveland

