Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Since the publication of Philippe Ariès’s classic *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Random House, 1962), the bibliography on the histories of early stages of life in the United States has grown enormously. Particularly recommended are the works of John and Virginia Demos, Philip Greven, Tamara Hareven, Joseph Kett, and Maris Vinovskis. A splendid model of research using cohort analysis is Glen Elder’s *Children of the Great Depression* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).


3. This generalization is based on a systematic analysis of the year(s) suggested for old age that appeared in the literature examined from 1790 to the present.

4. This distinction is found in medical and popular dictionaries throughout American history, although the terms used to distinguish the two stages have varied. The meanings of medical terms, moreover, change over time. As I shall show in Part I, for instance, tracing the meaning of “senility” in the nineteenth century offers clues about medical definitions of old age. The distinction between “young-old” and “old-old” was advanced by Bernice Neugarten, an eminent gerontologist, in “Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 415 (September 1974): 187–98.


9. I have two reasons for distinguishing between “perceptions” and “attitudes” in this monograph. First, the materials I investigated constitute written definitions and observations intended for public consumption. While a historian obviously must pursue the assumptions and
rationale inherent in such documents, it would be reckless to assume that examining only this type of evidence enables a researcher to probe the private (and often inchoate) notions or range of attitudes of a person he/she has never met, much less interviewed. Second, I decided to trace ideas about old age and the aged that went beyond idiosyncratic notions about a particular aged individual. Hence I mention specific cases primarily to illustrate overall patterns of thought or to highlight important deviations from the prevailing trends under consideration. (See also appendix technical note A.)

CHAPTER I

7. This observation is based on a survey of more than a hundred different almanacs, published between 1790 and 1860 in diverse parts of the nation, housed in the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
8. For illustrative examples, see Niles Weekly Register 9 (1815): 98, 300, 402, 404, 430; ibid. 14 (1818): 151, 296; ibid. 23 (1823): 145, 354; and ibid. 41 (1832): 448.


30. An American Dictionary of the English Language, 1st ed., s.v. "venerate." The definition of "venerate" did not change in successive editions of Webster's dictionary for fifty years. Richard M. Rollins ("Words as Social Control," American Quarterly 28 [Fall 1976]: 415–31) argues that Webster used his dictionary as a vehicle to express his concern about social authority and control. This may be so, but it should not be inferred from this important finding that Webster was the only person who described the aged as "venerable" or that his contemporaries necessarily shared his fears or his philosophy. For other examples of "venerable," see North American Review 2 (November 1815): 142; Niles Register 17 (30 November 1819) 192; ibid. 19 (9 December 1820): 225; ibid. 22 (18 May 1822): 192; Robert B. Thomas, Farmer's Almanac for 1805 and 1812, and the Orwigsburg Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1830, p. 50.


33. Caldwell, Effects of Age, pp. 6, 14–18; Oliver Wendell Holmes, Autocrat of the Breakfast Table (1858; reprint ed., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1883), pp. 150–63. See also Robert B. Thomas’s Farmer’s Almanac for the years 1846 (p. 25), 1857 (p. 39), and 1864 (p. 2).


41. It is important to note that Harrison’s death was attributed, not to the infirmities of age, but to “the vanity of man and the mutability of things temporal.” See, for example, Horatio Potter, Discourses on the Death of William Henry Harrison (Albany: Hoffman, White and Visscher, 1840), p. 257.


49. *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, s.v. “retirement.”


55. *Niles Register* 29 (1 October 1825): 70–71. See also ibid. 14 (28 February 1818): 15; ibid. 21 (15 September 1821): 34; *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 3 (September 1838): 26–28.


**CHAPTER 2**


8. The word “fogy” originated in Scotland in the latter part of the eighteenth century to describe an invalid or garrison soldier. The word sometimes had age connotations in America before 1880 (when it first appeared in Webster’s dictionary, and when the O.E.D. lists the first American reference). See, for instance, A. Wallace Hunter, “Old Abram,” *Knickerbocker* 50 (September 1857): 292. Yet authors of an article in *U.S. Democratic Review* 30 (April 1852): 367–76, entitled “The Nomination—The ‘Old Fogies’ and the ‘Fogy Conspiracy,’” claim not only to have coined the expression but to give it political overtones not associated with being old per se.


23. Some romantic writers, it should be noted, applied this line of reasoning not only to amplify the republican contention that older people were ideally qualified to put life into perspective, but also to justify their claim that the aged were uniquely qualified to serve as society’s promoters of health, guardians of virtue, and veterans of productivity (roles described in Chapter 1, above). For a more systematic development of this point, see W. Andrew
NOTES TO PAGES 34–39


27. For comparable sentiments in a variety of other media, see Pline Earle, “Stanzas,” Knickerbocker 16 (July 1840): 28; “Youth and Age,” Living Age 49 (April–June, 1856): 100; Ahlstrom, A Religious History, pp. 587–89.


CHAPTER 3


It is important to note that favorable estimates of the aged’s place in society were not confined to middle-class, white, native-born writers. Religious bodies, such as the various branches of Judaism, and sects, such as the Quakers and Shakers, described the aged’s status in positive terms because of their spiritual tenets. Several immigrant groups also maintained respect for the aged in the new land in accordance with cultural assumptions they had adhered to in the old world. See, for instance, Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 256–57.

NOTES TO PAGES 39–43

1875), p. 97; George Murray Humphry, Old Age: The Results of Information Received Respecting Nearly Nine Hundred Persons Who Had Attained the Age of Eighty Years, Including Seventy-four Centenarians (Cambridge: Macmillan and Bowes, 1889), pp. 140–41; and John M. Keating, How to Examine for Life Insurance (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1891), pp. 177–78.


6. This argument is consistent, I believe, with the finding that there was an increasing contemporaneous reliance on “professional” judgments pervading American culture itself. For fuller analyses of this point, see Charles E. Rosenberg, No Other Gods (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 2–4; Burton Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 80, 90, 99.


8. Lester Snow King, Growth of Medical Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 218; Thomas Bonner, American Doctors and German Universities (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 111. It is worth noting that the concept of disease specificity itself is quite old: it had been expressed in more general terms even before Morgagni of Padua demonstrated in 1761 that disease processes were often localized in organs. See Richard H. Shryock, Medicine and Society in America, 1660–1860 (New York: New York University Press, 1960), pp. 63–64.


12. There was at least one work, already published in English, that shared Charcot’s assumption that subtle, latent changes in the aged organism modified ordinary diseases and produced peculiar symptoms. See John Gardner, Longevity: The Means of Prolonging Life after Middle Age (London: Henry S. King, 1874), pp. iii, 18–19, 28–35, 144, 157–58. Unlike Charcot, however, Gardner did not link the causes of old-age diseases to the concept of localized pathology.


20. Idem. “Old Age,” in *Smithsonian Institution Annual Report, 1903–4* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), p. 548. Metchnikoff was not the first scientist ever to classify old age as a disease; variations on this idea had been circulating since at least classical Rome. But the theory as Metchnikoff formulated it seemed particularly credible because it was consistent with other medical principles in vogue in late-nineteenth-century America. In that particular context, Metchnikoff’s ideas were more widely discussed and accepted in both medical and nonprofessional circles than they might have been at an earlier point in time.


NOTES TO PAGES 46–50


34. Metchnikoff, Nature of Man, p. 131. Interestingly, Metchnikoff does not cite statistics on women committing suicide. It is worth noting that Emile Durkheim’s study of suicide (1897) stated that suicide “achieves its culminating point only at the final limits of human existence” (Emile Durkheim, Suicide, ed. George Simpson [New York: Free Press, 1968], pp. 101–3).


38. See, for example, Peter Finley Dunne, Mr. Dooley’s Opinions (New York: R. H. Russell, 1901), p. 183.


54. Hendrick, “The Superannuated Man,” p. 120.


CHAPTER 4


2. See tables 5.1 and 5.2 below.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


7. For the regional breakdown by sex and place of birth, see Achenbaum, "Old Age," pp. 538–39.

8. Note that the growth rate of each group quickened somewhat between 1900 and 1910. This may merit further investigation (especially the increase in New England's foreign-born population) but its transience casts significant doubt on its long-range importance in shaping negative perceptions of older persons.

9. The following observations are based on analyses of data found in the 1865–95 Rhode Island censuses, the 1885, 1875, and 1895 New York censuses, and the 1895 Michigan census as well as urban-rural statistics in the 1910–40 federal censuses. For more information, see Achenbaum, "Old Age," pp. 542–45. For the sake of consistency, I used the Bureau of Census definition of an urban area as any incorporated place having a population over 2,500 people.

10. See Appendix technical note B for a discussion of some deficiencies and limitations in census data on occupational status.


14. See Appendix technical note C for a detailed explanation of how the estimate was derived. For the 1890 baseline, see Gertrude Bancroft, The American Labor Force (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), p. 207.


16. In 1840, roughly 48% of all men employed in the state were farmers; another 35.3% were engaged in manufacturing and trades. By 1885, only 13.7% of all working men were in agricultural pursuits; the percentage of men employed in manufacturing and trade has risen to 66.8%.


17. On the basis of presently available evidence, this hypothesis can be neither confirmed nor rejected for nineteenth-century America. Peter N. Stearns, however, attests to the phenomenon in France in Old Age in European Society (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976), p. 53. Tamara K. Hareven cites twentieth-century evidence to document changes in employment opportunities over an individual's life cycle in "The Last Stage: Historical Adulthood and Old Age," Daedalus 105 (Fall 1976): 20. Forthcoming work by Professors Hareven and Howard Chudacoff, using the life cycle and family cycle approach, should elucidate the matter.


21. This information was derived by using the references in table 103, “Civil Liability of the Child for Support of Relatives,” in Chester Garfield Vernier, *American Family Laws*, 5 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931–38), 4: 96–105. I determined when the statute cited for each state was enacted by going backward through the statutes and codes until I found the earliest reference.


23. Sharon R. Custard found comparable household patterns in an unpublished case study of approximately four hundred men and women in Warwick County, (southern) Indiana, in 1880. Research in progress using the 1900 federal census manuscript by Michel Dahlin, Mark Friedberger, Richard Jensen, and Daniel Scott Smith, at The Newberry Library in Chicago should clarify the issue considerably.


32. Murray Webb Latimer, *Trade Union Pension Systems and Other Total Disability Benefits in the United States and Canada* (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors,
33. Some companies underwrote the entire cost of the program; others required employees to contribute a certain percentage of their salaries. Eligibility varied, though most companies did set age and service criteria: retirement age ranged from fifty-five to seventy years old; workers generally had to be employed continuously for twenty to thirty-five years to receive benefits. Some firms insisted on mandatory retirement; a few made retirement voluntary before seventy; still other established specific rules for mandatory and voluntary retirement. See Squier, *Old Age Dependency*, chs. 3–4; Albert DeRoode, “Pensions as Wages,” *American Economic Review* 3 (June 1913): 290–95. See also William Graebner’s forthcoming monograph on the evolution of retirement policies.


Edward T. Devine, *Misery and Its Causes* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909), pp. 48, 227–29. An exception to this viewpoint was Robert Hunter, *Poverty* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904), pp. 56–58. Hunter was probably the earliest American writer to cite the impact of the new social order on old-age dependency. Yet it is important to note that he offers little proof of his claim. Neither does he explain how and why industrialization per se adversely affected the old.


CHAPTER 5


4. Ibid., pp. 5, 7


16. U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics*, pt. 1, pp. 132, 139. While fundamental changes in the occupational structure as well as the manner in which the census classifies data preclude a more detailed and systematic discussion, the major tendencies are unmistakable.


24. Cited in Schulz, *Economics of Aging*, p. 42. The figures do not add up to 100% because older people often have several income sources.


CHAPTER 6


5. Hollingworth, *Mental Growth*, pp. 310–11; Thorndike et al., *Adult Learning*, pp. 1, 131. Not everyone agreed. A research project conducted by Dr. Irving Lorge in the 1930s indicated that older people earned lower test scores because time limitations in the testing situation biased the scores downward. Hence Lorge argued that older people did not necessarily decline mentally, but they did respond more slowly. See Irving Lorge, "Never Too Old to Learn," *Vital Speeches* 3 (1 April 1937): 364. It is important to note, however, that the hypothesis that learning capacity declined with age was not seriously questioned before World War II and was not severely undermined until recent times.


15. Marie L. Dallach, "Old Age, American Style," *New Outlook* 162 (October 1933): 50. See also "Youth Is Always Right," *Nation* 114 (15 March 1922): 307–8; Will Payne,


26. U.S., Social Security Board, *Economic Insecurity in Old Age*, pp. 18–19, 154–55. For the situation in the 1930s, see Chapter 7, below.


CHAPTER 7


13. See, for example, Walter S. Gifford, “Are Old Age Pensions Un-American?,” *Survey* 63 (15 March 1930): 700. This article first appeared in the February 1930 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*.


20. For the original wording of Title I, see U.S., Social Security Board, *Social Security Bill, Summary of Provisions, Comparison of Text of Original Bill, and Ways and Means Redraft, Compilation of Proposed Amendments, etc., for Committee on Finance* (Washington,
NOTES TO PAGES 135-40


22. For provisions, see Title II, Social Security Act, 49 Stat. 620, ch. 531.
34. Title VII, Social Security Act, sect. 702.
36. These statistics were calculated on the basis of data in U.S., Social Security Board, Economic Insecurity, pp. 4–5. For a more comprehensive analysis, see Achenbaum, “Old Age,” app. 4, table J.
37. Ibid., p. 7.

CHAPTER 8


20. U.S. Fact Book, pp. 401, 403. Comparable trends have persisted since the 1950s, when such data were first collected on the aged. See James Schulz, Economics of Aging (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1976), ch. 2.

NOTES TO PAGES 151–54


26. Although income is an important factor determining living arrangements among the elderly, it obviously is not the only factor. Advancing age and the death of a spouse cause changes in residential patterns in ways that had obtained prior to 1935. Furthermore, it is probable that increased adult longevity and long-term changes in the elderly male–female ratio have been more responsible than the existence of old-age assistance and insurance benefits for the rising likelihood that older women will be found living alone. (Indeed, only twenty percent of all older people were living alone in 1940, compared to fifty percent in 1970.) For more thorough analyses of changes in living patterns during the past forty years, see Matilda White Riley et al., *Aging and Society*, 3 vols. (New York: Russell Sage, 1968–72), 1: 168; Hugh Clark and Paul Glick, *Marriage and Divorce* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 155; Paul Glick, "A Demographer Looks at American Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37 (February 1975): 24; A. Chevan and J. H. Korson, "The Widowed Who Live Alone: An Examination of Social and Demographic Factors," *Social Forces* 57 (1972): 45–53; James N. Morgan et al., *Five Thousand American Families*, 4 vols. to date (Ann Arbor: Institute of Social Research, 1974–), 4: 158–71.


32. Among the earliest reports in this vein were Jerome A. Mark, "Comparative Job Performance by Age," *Monthly Labor Review* 80 (December 1957): 1467–51; Shock,

33. James E. Birren, Klaus F. Riegel, and Donald F. Morrison, “Intellectual Capacities, Aging and Man’s Environment,” in Processes of Aging, ed. Williams, 1: 37–38. Birren’s path-breaking work has been known for nearly three decades. For an early reporting, see “Why We Grow Old,” Newsweek 36 (2 October 1950): 42, 44. See also Kimmel, Adulthood and Aging, pp. 376, 381; Hendricks and Hendricks, Aging, pp. 140–44.


NOTES TO PAGES 158-63


46. For a fuller development of this point, see Lampman, “What Does It Do for the Poor?,” and Gilbert Y. Steiner, “Reform Follows Reality,” Public Interest, no. 34 (Winter 1974).


56. For example, Elaine Cumming and William E. Henry argued, in Growing Old (New York: Basic Books, 1961), p. 14, that “aging is an inevitable, mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to.” Although most elderly people do withdraw from previous activities to some degree, Cumming and Henry’s formulation provoked heated controversy because it described modal tendencies as if they were innate and universal and because it played down important mediating circumstances and variations in the disengagement process. Indeed, the original tenets have been radically transformed as a result of subsequent research. Scholars now play closer attention to the problems of measuring social, psychological, and normative engagement and cross-sectional differences in race, sex, occupation, and location. The lesson is clear: gerontologists must exercise great care to ensure that their research does not compound problems of shaping programs for a population with diverse and fluid interests and needs. See Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Disengagement Theory: A Critique and Proposal,” American Sociological Review 40 (October 1975): 553–69.
NOTES TO PAGES 163–81


CONCLUSION


APPENDIX: TECHNICAL NOTE B


3. Ibid., p. 178.


