Women in Cleveland

Morton, Marion

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Most women’s work outside the home is still linked with their familial and domestic responsibilities. These photographs of Cleveland women illustrate this important link as well as the “unwomanly” work which women have also done.

Women have always been part of the paid labor force. When Cleveland became a commercial town, women opened shops or worked as clerks. When Cleveland industrialized, women entered factories, especially garment factories such as Richman Brothers, and when their unions struck, women struck with their fellow workers. In the postindustrial economy, women have found jobs in the white-collar service sector. Their contributions to the Cleveland economy are captured in these photographs of teachers, librarians, domestic servants, and beauty operatives.

But the camera has also recorded unconventional women, who have held such “men’s” jobs as construction workers, engineers, nuclear pharmacists, and lawyers. Their numbers continue to grow as women demand equal job opportunity, as in this demonstration by Cleveland Women Working, and the demarcations between women’s and men’s work and lives continue to blur.
A librarian distributes books to neighborhood children at the Home Library on Hill Street, 1900.
Case Western Reserve University Archives
Morris and Anne Horwitz pose proudly with a customer and banana stalk in their neighborhood grocery store at E. 53rd and Scovill, ca. 1910. Western Reserve Historical Society, courtesy of M. Benjamin
Machine operators manufacture blouses at the Richman Bros. factory, ca. 1914. Western Reserve Historical Society

African American women at the Phillis Wheatley Association wait to be called for jobs, ca. 1920. Western Reserve Historical Society
A women’s military unit marches on Public Square in front of the Terminal Tower during a downtown victory parade, 1945. Western Reserve Historical Society.
Students in a class at the Mary Belle Coleman School of Beauty Culture train each other in salon techniques and procedures, ca. 1940. Western Reserve Historical Society

A teacher instructs young students in arts and crafts, ca. 1950. Case Western Reserve University Archives
Leaders and members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union picket Higbee’s as part of a strike against Judy Bond Blouses in the late 1960s. Courtesy of the ILGWU and the Greater Cleveland Labor History Society

Dr. Cheryl Weinstein utilizes a dermajet gun to administer a swine flu inoculation, 1976. Courtesy of the Archives of the Cleveland Clinic Foundation
Engineering students from Case Western Reserve University visit Parker-Hannafin laboratories as part of a program sponsored by the Society of Women Engineers, November 1978. Case Western Reserve University Archives

Yolanda Duncan prepares a time study at an Eaton Corp. factory in Cleveland, 1979. The Plain Dealer
A 1980 demonstration by Cleveland Women Working in the lobby of National City Bank's downtown headquarters protests low wages. Cleveland State University Archives

A construction worker on site at Lakewood Hospital, 1982. The Plain Dealer
A Cleveland Public Schools high-school science teacher explains an upcoming experiment to her students, ca. 1980. Robert E. Dorksen
Photography/Western Reserve Historical Society

Opposite top: Kim Clelland, part of Goodyear’s Office Services Department, instructs her daughter Jenna in computer typesetting for in-house publications on “Take Our Daughters to Work Day” in 1993. The Plain Dealer

Opposite bottom: Lab technicians Debbie Duraj and Pamela McKenna (right) help staff pharmacists Leslie Pudlak and Margaret Morgenstern (left) process orders at Syncor International’s Cleveland nuclear pharmacy lab, 1994. Courtesy of Wendell Morningstar Photography