Women in Cleveland

Morton, Marion

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Growing old, like growing up, has been redefined over the last two centuries. The camera has caught this redefinition—from turn-of-the-century portraits of Cleveland women in rocking chairs or with grandchildren to today’s action shots of aging athletes and political activists.

For most of American history, few men or women lived long past their labor-productive years, but life expectancy, especially for women, has lengthened dramatically just in this century. For financially secure Americans, longer life has meant years after retirement in which to travel, pursue hobbies, join organizations such as Golden Age Clubs, or discover and develop new skills and talents. For those on fixed or limited incomes, however, the rising cost of living has created hardships. Older Americans have formed vigorous political action groups such as the Cleveland Senior Citizens Coalition to address these concerns. Both government and the private sector have responded by providing special programs and services such as transportation for the elderly.

Since families are smaller and more geographically dispersed, Americans are more likely than ever before to grow old in retirement and old-age facilities such as Menorah Park or the Gates Mills Manor Nursing Home. Since women generally live longer than men, women are likely to grow old alone.
Emily Allen Severance enjoys the peaceful serenity of old age at the turn of the century. Western Reserve Historical Society
A vacation at Hot Springs, Arkansas, provides a change of scenery for the Sackett family, ca. 1890.
Western Reserve Historical Society
Three grandmothers dote on Helen E. Milliken, ca. 1890. Western Reserve Historical Society

Growing old in a new country is a difficult, wrenching experience for some Jewish immigrants, ca. 1905. Western Reserve Historical Society
The Golden Age Club performs at the Karamu House in the 1950s. Western Reserve Historical Society

*Opposite top:* A proud grandmother and her grandchildren smile for the camera, ca. 1910. Western Reserve Historical Society

*Opposite bottom:* An outdoor summer concert, one of the special events sponsored by Menorah Park for its clientele, ca. 1949. Western Reserve Historical Society
Opposite: An elderly couple relax in their garden in the 1950s. Western Reserve Historical Society

Mrs. Ida Hoare Weber and Mrs. Margaret Snell enjoy ice cream in 1952. Cleveland State University Archives

The Golden Age Center Orchestra in 1958 includes Andrew Hutter, violinist and director; Mrs. Elsie Hendershot, mandolin; Mrs. Mabel Kagler, accordionist; Mrs. Louise Moore, drummer; and Mrs. Elizabeth Temior, pianist. Cleveland State University Archives
Cleveland Mayor (and host) Ralph Perk dances with Mrs. Eleanor Ockulz at the “Senior Prom” at the Hanna Mall in July 1975. Cleveland State University Archives

In 1978 the Senior Citizens Coalition marches on the East Ohio Gas Company to protest rising utility rates. Cleveland State University Archives
Observing religious rituals such as lighting Chanukah candles remained important to Rose Wiseman at the Gates Mills Manor Nursing Home in 1979. The Plain Dealer
Ninety-year-old Mary Turner was still skating several times a week in 1986 with her partner John McNamara. The Plain Dealer
In the 1990s, communities provide more services for older citizens, including transportation such as this special bus. The Plain Dealer
Margarita Jolles, Rowena Coghan, and their dogs enjoy this moment together on a Cleveland Heights park bench in 1987. The Plain Dealer