Women in Cleveland

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Meeting the Challenges

In 1935 almost 1,900 women in Cleveland were homeless, living under bridges or sleeping in police stations, kept from starvation by private charities. Eight years later 82,000 women earned high wages as crane operators, electric welders, spike packers, and cold-press operators in Cleveland’s booming wartime factories. In less than a decade, the fortunes of Cleveland women, and their city, turned around as the nation moved from the desperation of the Great Depression to the prosperity of World War II.

The hard times of the 1930s and the flush 1940s had a forceful and visible impact on women’s roles: pushed into lower-paying jobs or out of the workforce and into the home during the Depression, women were urged out of the home and back into the workplace and “men’s jobs” by wartime needs. Both emergencies presented women with unprecedented personal challenges as well as new opportunities for public service and professional advancement. (See Figure 72.)

Cleveland’s economy, heavily dependent on manufacturing, especially iron and steel and automotive parts, began to sag in the late 1920s. Within months of the dedication of the Terminal Tower in 1930, tens of thousands of Clevelanders were unemployed, and the Tower’s developers, Mantis J. and Oris P. Van Sweringen, were bankrupt. By 1931 the Great Depression had begun in earnest, and more than 30 percent of the workforce of 500,541 was unemployed.
Most adult women in Cleveland survived the Depression as wives, whose chief economic responsibility was to make the smaller family budget go farther. Local newspapers carried articles on low-cost meals and other money-saving ideas. Cleveland Associated Charities (CAC) reissued its booklet *A Suggestive Budget for Families on Small Incomes*, advising mothers of the importance of “planning the meals [and] careful buying of food” and estimating that it should cost $2.50 a week to feed an adult and $1.45 to feed a four- to six-year-old child. (One dinner suggestion was spaghetti with kidney beans and meatballs, raw carrot strips, bread, beverage, and vanilla cream pudding.) CAC also wrote a pamphlet, *Eating in Different Languages*, for the African American and ethnic communities.

Families postponed childbearing, and the numbers of births in Cleveland dropped for the first time since the city had begun keeping records. The special anguish of motherhood during the Depression was later recalled by a *Plain Dealer* reporter: “The young woman, late in her pregnancy, . . . came to a West Side Associated Charities office seeking a layette for her first-born. Her face was thin and pale, and she was uncomfortable. She’d never been there before. The social worker was soothing, trying to ease the idea that asking for help carried a terrible stigma. . . . When did she expect her baby? . . . Her labor had begun early that morning. The social workers moved fast. Within an hour the woman was in a hospital bed, the layette for the coming new-born on a table beside her. . . . This is one face I can’t forget—tired, drawn, vulnerable.” The reporter found desperation even in the suburbs. “Always these young mothers seemed tired and afraid. Always they had one utility disconnected, usually the gas. The Cleveland Heights mother warmed her baby bottles in her gas oven, using torn-up papers for fuel.”

Unemployment created strains within marriages, and sometimes these worsened when wives could get jobs and husbands could not. Social workers were often as uncomfortable with working wives as were husbands. The CAC newsletter in April 1930 told of a woman whose out-of-work husband could no longer pay their debts for a car, furniture, and groceries. The woman herself was so anxious for work that she offered to clean the CAC office. The story ended almost happily: “She got a regular job within the week at a clothing factory and the children are going each day to the day nursery while their mother is the temporary breadwinner.”

The Depression reversed or slowed down the progress that working women had been making. In 1930 women had made slight gains in the professions, which employed 11.9 percent of the female labor force (up from 9.6 percent in 1920); but in 1940, only 9.6 percent of women were employed as professionals. The proportion of women in clerical work remained slightly more than a third from 1930 to 1940, down from 40.2 percent in 1920. The most telling increase was in the lowest-paid,
lowest-status female job, domestic service. In 1920, 14.8 percent of all female workers were domestic servants; in 1930, 20.3 percent; and in 1940, 26 percent.

Differences in job opportunities for white and African American women remained. In 1930 only 2.7 percent of black women held professional jobs, and only 2.6 percent had clerical jobs. The vast majority—almost 70 percent of employed women—were in domestic service.

Hard times forced more women to do piecework at home for the garment industry. In 1937 a Consumers League survey discovered women making knitted sweaters and dresses who earned only four or five cents an hour. The league also received growing numbers of complaints about exploitative employers, such as this one filed by Mrs. Frances Ruzewicz: “She started to work Thursday, August 31 and worked eight hours on Thursday, eight hours on Friday, and one-half day on Saturday. . . . She received $1.98 after Social Security was deducted. She worked the following Tuesday and one-half day on Wednesday, and was laid off at noon on Wednesday. She has not yet received her pay for this day and one-half. Her work was embroidering and sewing on buttons. She was required to pay for her needle.”

More women were driven into prostitution. The vice squad led dramatic raids and closed down brothels in the Roaring Third police district during 1932–33. Prostitutes then moved to downtown hotels, and after another series of raids, City Safety Director Eliot Ness claimed in 1940 that there were only 100 known prostitutes in the city. (In 1941, however, a Welfare Federation study found that 897 women suspected of prostitution had been picked up by police. Most were repeat offenders: 592 women had been arrested in 1941 alone.)

Like men, women lost their jobs. Unemployment figures were seldom broken down by sex and were based on numbers of persons who told relief officials that they were out of work, which many women may have been reluctant to do. However, according to a special census, the number of unemployed women rose from 5,224 in 1930 to 17,832 in 1931.

In general, however, women’s jobs were safer than men’s, less susceptible to layoffs than men’s jobs in industry, and not attractive to men, even unemployed men, because they were considered “women’s work” and did not pay well. (See Figure 73.) In 1930 the federal census found 35,960 unemployed men, and in 1931, 81,620. Based on the number of gainful workers in 1930, women’s unemployment rate in 1931 was 18 percent, men’s almost 28 percent. In addition, the census recorded 22,045 men and 3,327 women who were temporarily laid off.

Fewer women than men became transient and homeless, possibly because women were less willing to leave their children and other family members. In March 1933, 955 women and girls were given shelter, or more often just food, by CAC, the Jewish Social Service Bureau, the YWCA, Cleveland City
FIGURE 73. Fashionable elevator hostesses greeted and directed shoppers at Higbee’s during the 1930s. Cleveland State University Archives

Hospital, and the Women’s Bureau of the Police Department; 5 women were found in railway stations. By way of comparison, 4,345 men and boys were given shelter or food by various private agencies. Only two years later, however, the Cuyahoga County Relief Agency counted double the number of homeless women.

As these figures suggest, social welfare agencies provided for men and women differently. Agencies’ policies assumed that men were the primary breadwinners and women the primary homemakers and child-rearers. This meant that men were more likely to get work relief (and lodging), and women, especially if they were the sole supporters of children, were more likely to get direct relief.

CAC found work for men in several projects, including large community gardens, but placed women only in its Sewing Room, where they mended donated clothing for those even less fortunate. In 1930 the city initiated short-lived public works projects designated for unemployed men whose families were in dire need: 17,700 applied for the chance to work three days
a week at sixty cents an hour. The city provided no employment for women.

Federal work-relief programs also shortchanged women. The Civil Works Administration provided jobs for women in sewing rooms, offices, and schools, but when funds were cut in 1934, the first to lose their jobs were persons (women) who had a spouse on work relief or single persons who were not the sole support of the families with whom they lived. In 1938, 54,849 residents of Cuyahoga County received work relief, building new roads, bridges, and schools or refurbishing parks and playgrounds. Like the city public works jobs, almost all were designed for men. (See Figures 74 and 75.)

A few women were employed by the Works Progress Administration artists’ projects. Cleveland was the site of two federal theater companies. One gave successful performances of two realistic dramas written for the theater project, The Living Newspaper and Triple A Ploughed Under. A black company, the Community Laboratory Theater, performed at the racially integrated Playhouse Settlement. The federal musicians’ projects included a choral group, which produced The Mikado, a symphonic orchestra, a string quartet, and an African American dance band. The biggest employer was the Writers Project, which hired men and women as editors, authors, historians, and researchers. In Cleveland these writers produced two guides to Cleveland newspapers, The Annals of Cleveland, 1818–1935, and the Cleveland Foreign Language Newspaper Digest, as well as a survey of the city’s ethnic communities, The Peoples of Cleveland.

Having established a solid professional foothold in the visual arts, Cleveland women found jobs in the projects, begun in December 1933 and continued under the Works Progress Administration, which produced accessible art for public buildings and spaces. Gladys Carambella produced murals portraying children’s fairy tales for the children’s wards of City and Sunny Acres hospitals and for several elementary schools. Other muralists included Louise Morris, Clara McLean, and Doris Hall. Several women, including Emilie Scrivens, Elizabeth Seaver, and Grace Luse, created ceramic figures for children’s libraries. The most prolific of the ceramists was Edris Eckhardt, a 1931 graduate of the Cleveland School of Art. Eckhardt’s five-piece set of figures from Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland won first prize in the 1936 May Show and was given to the Cleveland Public Library; her Mother Goose series is on permanent display in the library’s Lewis Carroll Reading Room. (See Figure 76.)

At the outset of the Depression there was already a direct relief program designated specifically for women, the state mothers’ pensions for widows or deserted women with dependent children, so that they could be cared for in their own homes rather than institutionalized. Aid to Dependent Children, established by the Social Security Act of 1935, added federal moneys to this state stipend.
Figure 76. Sculptor Edris Eckhardt, shown here in 1943, led the ceramics division of the Federal Arts Project in Cleveland from 1936 to 1939. Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University

Perhaps the most precise gauge of the devastating impact of the Depression on women was the growing number receiving this direct relief. In January 1928, 435 women received mothers’ pensions, and in January 1933, 1,010; in 1937, 1,116 women received Aid to Dependent Children. By 1938, 42 percent of Cleveland families receiving direct relief from the city were headed by women.

Drawing upon their long experience as dispensers of charity and their briefer experience as professional social workers, women played a crucial part in private and public efforts to relieve poverty. In 1922 the city of Cleveland had relinquished its responsibilities for direct relief to private agencies. The oldest and best-established was Cleveland Associated Charities (CAC), which from 1928 to 1933 was also the largest distributor of direct relief to the city’s needy.

During the 1920s, CAC had continued to expand and professionalize its staff, and by 1927 that staff had already noted with alarm the growing numbers of unemployed. As the Depression worsened, CAC’s caseloads skyrocketed. In 1928 the
agency provided direct relief to 1,379 families and single women; in 1933, to 28,929 families and single women. The CAC definition of family included those headed by single women, which historically had constituted a significant percentage of CAC’s clientele; in 1929, CAC served 3,171 married couples with children and 1,205 families headed by widowed, deserted, divorced, or separated women. By 1933 the regular staff, supplemented by 448 volunteers, mostly women, sometimes unemployed themselves, struggled to distribute the agency’s meager supplies of food, clothing, or rent money. When the Roosevelt administration assumed responsibility for direct relief, it mandated that public funds could be distributed only by a public agency, so the Cuyahoga County Relief Agency (CCRA) was established. The agency’s personnel—for the most part, trained women social workers—were drawn almost entirely from CAC. In 1935 CCRA turned direct relief back over to the city. Although CAC became Cleveland Associated Charities, Institute of Family Service, it provided as much relief as family services until the onset of World War II.

The woman who took charge of CAC during these difficult days (CAC workers were occasionally attacked physically by clients and verbally by the Communist Council of the Unemployed) was Helen W. Hanchette. Hanchette came to the agency after attending Lake Erie College and in 1910 began her professional training under James R. Jackson. Hanchette was CAC’s associate general secretary from 1917 until 1934, when she became its first woman executive secretary, a position she held until 1953.

Elizabeth Magee, executive director of the Consumers’ League of Ohio from 1925 to 1965, shaped both local and national relief policies. Like Marie Wing, Magee worked for the YWCA, and she succeeded Wing as executive secretary of the CLO when Wing was elected to Cleveland City Council. In 1928, as the city’s unemployment problem worsened, Magee and the league drew up a plan for unemployment insurance which became known as the Ohio Plan. In 1931 Magee was appointed director of the Ohio Commission on Unemployment Insurance, and in 1934 to the National Committee on Economic Security, which helped to draft the Social Security Act, based in part on the Ohio Plan. (See Figure 77.)

Women also held important public relief posts. In 1932–33 Cleveland’s director of public welfare was Bernice Secrest Pyke, the first woman to be appointed to a mayor’s cabinet. Pyke, a former suffragist, was a Democratic activist and served as collector of customs for the port of Cleveland from 1934 to 1953. Bell Greve served as director of the Cuyahoga County Relief Board from 1937 to 1944. She became the second woman to serve in a Cleveland mayor’s cabinet as director of the Department of Health and Welfare from 1953 to 1957.

Historian and civic booster William Ganson Rose maintained that during the 1940s, Cleveland achieved “greatness.”
FIGURE 77. Labor and consumer advocate Elizabeth Magee enjoys some vacation time, ca. 1930. Western Reserve Historical Society

ELIZABETH STEWART MAGEE (29 June 1889–14 May 1972) graduated from Oberlin College in 1911 and received a master’s degree from Columbia in 1925. After her work on unemployment insurance during the Depression, she was appointed to the Woman’s Bureau of the Department of Labor in 1941, overseeing the working conditions of women and children. From 1943 to 1958, she served as general secretary of the National Consumers’ League and lobbyist for the league’s agenda of labor legislation for women, children, and migrant workers and for the expansion of old-age insurance. She was also appointed to President Harry S. Truman’s Commission on the Health Needs of the Nation, which lobbied unsuccessfully for national health insurance.

At the very least, the city, like the nation, recovered from the Depression. Clevelanders went back to work in industries revitalized by wartime orders: from 1940 to 1944, the labor force grew by 34 percent. Clevelanders also contributed to the war effort by investing $2.5 billion in war bonds, conducting scrap drives, planting victory gardens, and raising moneys for relief funds. More than 160,000 Clevelanders served in the armed forces; almost 4,000 of them died.

As they had in earlier wars, Cleveland women fought on both the military and the home fronts. Less than a month after
Pearl Harbor, the Cleveland section of the National Council of Jewish Women declared that the “war for the United States found Council ready and eager to give its ultimate to defend our country against invaders and to preserve our democratic way of life.” Council members were urged to volunteer at soldiers’ lounges, hospitals, and the Red Cross, to conserve gasoline and electricity, to save paper, rags, and old metal, and to buy defense bonds. The Federation of Women’s Clubs of Greater Cleveland quickly established a War Service Department, and in May 1943, forty-six clubs—ranging from the Berea Sorosis to the Yugoslav Club—reported on their members’ war activities: 4,690 had worked at the Red Cross; 8,000 had bought or sold war bonds; 824 had worked in civilian defense; 974 had volunteered at the USO, and others at draft or ration boards. Two members of federation clubs had joined the Army Wacs, and two the Marines. (See Figure 78.)

Cleveland’s fourth annual Festival of Freedom, on July 5, 1943 (July 4 had threatened rain), honored the city’s “women at war,” especially those in the armed services. The parade of five thousand, which marched from Euclid and East 21st Street to the Stadium, celebrated the nation’s military might, featuring men in uniform, jeeps, trucks, guns, and “Flying Fortresses” overhead. Behind the men marched the women of the several auxiliary corps: Wacs, army nurses, Waves, Marines, and Spars. Then came women from the Red Cross, the civil air patrol, and civil defense, and factory workers from the Ohio Crankshaft Company, wearing blue uniforms and welders’ helmets. Drill teams of Waves and Spars performed to the “Washington Post March.” Rudolph Ringwall conducted the Festival of Freedom Orchestra in “The Military Medley,” and, perhaps acknowledging the women’s participation, the crowd of 135,000 sang “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” and “I Want a Girl.” (See Figure 79.)

Seventy-two Cleveland women served as nurses in the Fourth General Hospital, Lakeside Unit, successor to the Lakeside Unit of World War I. The unit had begun to mobilize in 1940, and only seventeen days after Pearl Harbor it was asked to set up the first American hospital overseas. The unit operated a hospital of 2,900 beds in Melbourne, Australia, for two years. In 1944 the unit was moved to New Guinea, and in summer 1945, anticipating the invasion of Japan, to Manila. After the Japanese surrender, the unit was disbanded, having treated 46,200 patients.

The wartime economy offered women unparalleled job opportunities. Most worked in stores or offices, but encouraged by private industry and the federal government (“If you’ve made buttonholes on a machine, you can spot-weld a plane bound for Berlin,” advised the Department of Labor), tens of thousands of Cleveland women entered factories, working at jobs left by servicemen and created by military needs. Most of
Cleveland’s leading manufacturers, including American Steel and Wire, Cleveland Graphite Bronze, Cleveland Twist Drill, Cleveland Welding Company, General Electric, Reliance Electric, Warner and Swasey, Thompson Products, and Parker Appliance, hired women. By August 1943, the 82,000 women employed by the largest manufacturers of war materials constituted 28.7 percent of the manufacturers’ total employment: 15.6 percent of the employees in plants making iron and steel products, 49.5 percent in plants making electrical equipment. (See Figure 80.)

In 1944, possibly to offset the bad press created by a recent violent labor dispute, Republic Steel, one of Cleveland’s biggest employers, published Republic Goes to War, a detailed account of its successful production of parts for planes, tanks, war vessels, and weapons and its employment of women. Republic’s management was initially reluctant to hire women but, once persuaded, wooed them with movies and radio announcements and advertisements on streetcars, in downtown store windows, and distributed from house to house. In October 1942 Republic employed 585 women; in July 1943, 7,080. New assembly-line techniques and training programs allowed women to work at traditionally male jobs. Women earned good wages but, because their work was defined differently, probably less than male employees. Republic Goes to War noted, for example, that 90 percent of the workers who made airplane flaps were women, but that they did the “light” work and men supervised or did the “heavy or complex” work.

New jobs created new strains as women tried to juggle work and family responsibilities. The most pressing problem was child care. CAC and the Cleveland Day Nursery Association helped to establish and staff thirteen daycare centers by early 1943.

The ever-vigilant Consumers’ League noted new gains and new hazards. At a 1942 league-sponsored conference, “Women War Workers Speak for Themselves,” Mary Socash told of her work making bombs at the Ravenna Arsenal: “The arsenal is working three shifts a day seven days a week. All work is carried out under complete secrecy. . . . The work is dangerous, but all precautions are taken to prevent accidents. . . . The basic wage rate is 65 cents an hour. Men and women get equal pay.”

African American women made gains too but, as always, lagged behind white workers. Another conference speaker, Esther Evans, had become “one of the first Negro girls to become a member of her union,” the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. She reported that “relations between the Negro and white girls in the [garment factory] have been very fine.” The league newsletter noted, however, that black women often found it difficult to get good jobs and asked, “Is it not an unwise social policy to deny the Negro the right to

FIGURE 78. Nurses leaf through applications for Army and Navy Nurse Corps personnel, ca. 1942. Western Reserve Historical Society

FIGURE 79. The Cleveland Woman’s Orchestra rehearses with Hyman Schandler in 1959. Cleveland State University Archives

THE CLEVELAND WOMAN’S ORCHESTRA was founded in 1935 by Hyman Schandler, a violinist with the Cleveland Orchestra, and his wife, Rebecca White Schandler, also a musician. Under Hyman Schandler’s direction, the orchestra has performed several concerts annually, featuring distinguished soloists and the Cleveland premières of many compositions.
Working women, such as these two at the Cadillac Tank Plant in 1944, filled a large void in the workforce left by men who had gone off to serve in the armed forces during World War II. Cleveland State University Archives

work for victory in the home front while he is dying for it on all the battlefronts of the world?" According to the Cleveland Urban League, the number of black women in manufacturing jobs rose from about four hundred in 1940 to six thousand in 1945. At the war’s end, however, 60 percent of African Americans in the Cleveland labor force were still holding unskilled jobs.

Cleveland found much to celebrate at its Sesquicentennial in 1946. The war had been won, Clevelanders had gone back to work, and the city’s industrial base had been rescued. On July 16, Sesquicentennial Women’s Day celebrated women’s own accomplishments.

Most visible of those accomplishments was the election of a second generation of public officials. Lillian Mary Westropp was appointed assistant county prosecutor in 1929 and municipal
judge in 1931, a position to which she was reelected until she retired in 1957. While on the bench, Westropp initiated the court psychiatric clinic, which is still in use. Like other women in politics, she was a member of the League of Women Voters and the Women’s City Club, and in 1923 she was chosen a member of the executive committee of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party. Westropp and her sister Clara E. Westropp had opened a savings and loan bank in 1922, the first to be owned and managed by women. In 1935 the bank received a federal charter, and in 1937 it was named Women’s Federal Savings Bank.

The Women’s Sesquicentennial gave special honor to Cleveland’s best-known national woman politician and the first woman from Ohio to be elected to Congress, Frances Payne Bolton. Bolton inherited her husband Chester’s seat in the United States House of Representatives after his death in 1939 but retained the seat on her own until 1968. In Congress she gained wide expertise in foreign affairs. She had begun her political career as an opponent of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s foreign as well as domestic policies, voting in 1940 against Lend-Lease to the European nations at war, and in 1941 against an extension of the peacetime draft. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Bolton, like most other Republicans, supported the war effort and the United States’ postwar global commitments. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, she traveled to Europe, the Soviet Union, the Near East, and Africa. In 1953 she became the first congresswoman appointed to the United Nations General Assembly. Although she opposed much of the domestic agenda of the Democratic administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, she voted for the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Her dozens of awards and honorary degrees included the Certificate of Honor of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (1951) and an honorary LHD from Tuskegee Institute (1957). (See Figure 81.)

During the 1930s and 1940s, African American women also emerged for the first time in prominent professional and political positions. In 1929 Mary B. (Mrs. Alexander H.) Martin became the first black woman elected to the Cleveland school board; she was reelected to a second four-year term in 1933. In 1939, with the endorsement of the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Citizens League, Martin ran again for the school board on a slate that included two men. She won easily but died of a cerebral hemorrhage before she could take office. A new elementary school building was named in her honor. (See Figure 82.)

Like Martin’s election, the appointments of black women to administrative posts within the Cleveland school system reflected the growing political power of black Clevelanders as well as the changing racial composition of the schools. In 1938 Myrtle J. Bell became the first black woman high-school administrator when she was appointed assistant principal of Central
FRANCIS PAYNE BOLTON (29 Mar. 1885–9 Mar. 1977), the daughter of prosperous industrialist Charles W. Bingham and his wife, Mary Perry Payne Bingham, was educated at Hathaway Brown School and Miss Spence’s School for Girls in New York. Her lifelong interest in the nursing profession began when she volunteered with the Visiting Nurses Association. While her husband did a stint in a federal agency during World War I, she persuaded former Cleveland mayor, then secretary of war, Newton D. Baker to establish an Army School of Nursing, and in 1923 she endowed the school of nursing at Western Reserve University, now the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing. In Congress, Bolton continued to support the nursing profession, in 1943 introducing a bill providing for the training of nurses for the armed services.

High School, a post which she retained until 1966, when Central merged with East Tech High School. (See Figure 83.) Hazel Mountain (Mrs. Joseph R.) Walker combined successful careers in education and theater. She taught at Mayflower Elementary School from 1909 to 1936, when she was appointed principal of Rutherford B. Hayes Elementary School. From 1954 until her retirement in 1958, Walker was principal at George Washington Carver School. Often credited with choosing the name for Karamu House, Walker began performing at the interracial theater in the mid-1920s, starring in a wide range of plays for the next twenty-five years. Her credits include roles in Henrik Ibsen’s Ghosts, Federico García Lorca’s Blood Wedding, and as solo performer in the 1951 centennial celebration of the famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” by women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth. A member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the

FIGURE 81. Congresswoman Frances P. Bolton at the "Atomic Annie" nuclear test at Frenchman’s Flat, Nevada, 27 May 1953. Western Reserve Historical Society

MARY B. MARTIN (1877–19 Nov. 1939) was born in North Carolina to former slaves and in 1886 was brought to Cleveland, where she attended public schools. With a certificate from Cleveland Normal School, she taught briefly in southern schools but returned to Cleveland in 1905 and married Alexander H. Martin. In the 1920s she became a teacher in the Cleveland public schools.

MYRTLE J. BELL (1895–2 Sept. 1978) was educated in the Cleveland public schools and graduated from the College for Women of Western Reserve University. After teaching at Tuskegee Institute for two years, she returned to Cleveland. After several years of substitute teaching, she got a post at Kennard Junior High, where she taught mathematics and black history in 1930. Two years later she went to Central High School, her alma mater, as a math teacher. She received a master’s degree from Western Reserve University in 1938. In recognition of her important administrative role at Central High School, Bell served on the city’s Community Relations Board from 1945 to 1949.

Urban League, Walker was an articulate advocate of racial equality. Asked about the school desegregation case then pending before the Supreme Court, Walker told a reporter: “Abolishing separate schools without abolishing slums and ghettoes will not usher in the millennium. We have no Jim Crow schools in Cleveland, but still this school [Rutherford B. Hayes] and others in the Central Area are nearly 90 percent colored because the residents of the area are more colored than white.” (See Figure 84.)

When World War II ended, the estimated 100,000 women employed in war factories faced unemployment. A Cleveland Press reporter commented a month after the surrender of Japan: “Women made an immense contribution to the war. . . . It’s doubtful if there was a gun, a bullet, tank, ship, or airplane turned out that wasn’t made at least in part by women workers. Many women are glad to quit their jobs and go back home. But
FIGURE 84. Civic activist and Karamu performer Hazel Mountain Walker in January 1959.
Cleveland State University Archives

HAZEL MOUNTAIN WALKER (16 Feb. 1889–16 May 1980) was born in Warren, Ohio, in 1889, received a teaching certificate from Cleveland Normal School, and earned master’s degrees in both elementary and secondary education at Western Reserve University. In 1919 she received a law degree from Cleveland Law School and used her legal expertise working with the juvenile court. Walker served on the Cuyahoga County Republican Party executive committee during the 1930s and belonged to the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Women’s City Club, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, and Alpha Kappa Alpha.

many others worked before the war and will have to go right on working for economic reasons. But now there will be no high war-time incomes.” Having survived the Depression and fought the war, Cleveland women now faced new challenges.