The McGregor story starts in 1877 when Amasa Stone, the legendary capitalist and preeminent Cleveland philanthropist, and his wife, Julia, built and endowed one of the first private organizations in Cleveland specifically for the care of seniors — the Home for Aged Women, later to be renamed the Amasa Stone House, on what is now East 46th Street and Cedar Avenue.

After training as a carpenter and building contractor in his native Massachusetts and moving to Cleveland in 1850, Amasa turned his considerable ambition to transportation. He built the Lake Shore Railroad, which ran between Erie, Pennsylvania and Cleveland as part of the New York Central. During the post-Civil War industrial boom, he found himself among America’s elite railroad builders. He also worked with his brother-in-law, William Howe, in designing a truss bridge to sustain heavy loads of rail cargo over short spans, like small gullies and ravines.

Over the years Amasa became one of Cleveland’s leading business figures, eventually moving to a mansion on Euclid Avenue — dubbed “Millionaires Row” by the press — near a
family named Rockefeller. Amasa and Julia had three children —
two daughters, Clara and Flora, who would distinguish them-
selves as philanthropists (Flora in particular), and a son,
Adelbert, who would drown in 1865 while attending Yale
University.

Besides being a powerful railroad man, Amasa also was a
canny and influential director of a number of Cleveland banks.
As a young man, his high forehead, piercing eyes, and large
chiseled nose gave him an air of absolute authority. As the
president of the Lake Shore Railroad, Amasa played a major
part in the deal that gave Rockefeller the leverage to start the most
famous corporation in the world — the Standard Oil Company.

Standard Oil had its origins in the booming market for
kerosene. By 1865, John D. Rockefeller and his partner, Sam
Andrews, owned two refineries along Kingsbury Run in the flats
of Cleveland (south of the I-90 bridge over the Cuyahoga River
near downtown), Standard Works and Excelsior Works. The
foreman of these refineries was a young man by the name of
Ambrose M. McGregor.

There were perhaps 30 refineries in Cleveland at the time.
Crude oil in those days was refined into kerosene. Refiners
shipped the crude in wooden barrels by railroad from newly
discovered deposits in western Pennsylvania to Cleveland.
By 1868, Rockefeller had taken on a new partner, the young, swashbuckling financial genius Henry M. Flagler. Flagler negotiated an exclusive arrangement with the Lake Shore Railroad and Amasa Stone on behalf of a new company: Rockefeller, Andrews, and Flagler, the future Standard Oil Company.

Stone arranged for the Lake Shore Railroad to ship oil from the Pennsylvania fields to Cleveland at far less than the competitive rates. In exchange, Rockefeller, Andrews, and Flagler supplied Stone’s railroad with a guaranteed cargo of 60 carloads of kerosene a day for shipment to the East Coast and then on to foreign markets. Rockefeller’s company had the clout to coordinate shipments with the other Cleveland refiners — because, by then, his company was the largest oil refining operation in the world.

The Lake Shore deal put both Cleveland and Rockefeller on the map. Ron Chernow, in his weighty biography of Rockefeller, *Titan*, writes, “From that moment, the railroads acquired a vested interest in the creation of a giant oil monopoly that would lower their costs, boost their profits, and generally simplify their lives.”

That monopoly was given the nondescript name of the Standard Oil Company.

Amasa Stone bought 500 shares of Standard Oil stock when the company was launched in 1870. As a power in
Cleveland banking, Stone made sure Rockefeller had access to cash enough to keep Standard Oil solvent as it went about the business of establishing its monopoly by buying out the competition. Rockefeller rewarded Stone with a seat on the Standard Oil board of directors. The Standard Oil representative who personally informed independent refiners of their option to sell to Mr. Rockefeller at his price was Ambrose McGregor.

Stone acquired more Standard Oil stock in January 1872 when the board raised the company’s capital assets from $1 million to $3.5 million in anticipation of significant growth. (Ironically, Frederick Arter, a lawyer who founded the former Cleveland firm Arter & Hadden and whose son, Charles, would serve on the McGregor Home’s board of trustees many years later, owned one of the acquired refineries. The Arter family also established a trust that still funds many of the features that distinguish McGregor, like fresh-cut flowers in the hallways and certain special activities for residents.)

Ron Chernow in *Titan* describes Stone as “cold, stern, and unapproachable,” some 20 years older than Rockefeller, and certainly not inclined to bow and scrape to the younger man. Rockefeller finally forced Stone to leave the Standard Oil board when Stone forgot to exercise the options on some shares of Standard Oil stock before the deadline. Under no circumstances would the company extend Stone’s deadline. Furious, Stone liquidated all of his stock.
Stone’s falling out with Rockefeller was a portent of the ill fortune that was beginning to engulf him. In 1876, the truss bridge he had built on the Lake Shore line near Ashtabula, Ohio, collapsed under the weight of a passenger train. Ninety-two people were killed.

Yet Amasa trudged forward, remaining true to form, and continued originating and arranging monumental deals. In 1881, he lured Western Reserve University from bucolic Hudson to busy Cleveland with the promise of a gift of $500,000. Adelbert College was named after his late son.

Tragically, an aging Amasa Stone, chronically weak from a carriage accident in Cleveland’s Public Square, in pain, and depressed over the Ashtabula bridge collapse and his son’s untimely death, took his own life in 1883 at age 65. In 1938, Lucia Bing Johnson, in her influential book *Social Work in Greater Cleveland*, wrote, “The thoughtful student may well ask whether a person lives longer only to be a burden to himself and to others. The problem is one which is not yet satisfactorily answered, but which must be faced for the social welfare.” Today, as a part of Amasa Stone’s formidable legacy, The A.M. McGregor Group has evolved to address this problem for seniors in Northeast Ohio by providing direct care and grantmaking, through two organizations:

First, The A.M. McGregor Home, operates a nursing facility, The Gardens of McGregor and Amasa Stone, opened early in 2004. The Gardens resulted from the 1987 merger between the A.M. McGregor Home in East Cleveland and Amasa Stone House in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland. Affordable independent housing and assisted living also are part of McGregor’s care setting.

Second, McGregor makes grants that support initiatives helping seniors in need, and those who serve them, in Cuyahoga County through The McGregor Foundation, established in May 2002.
Had there been no Rockefeller, no Standard Oil, no Amasa Stone, and no Home for Aged Women, it is unlikely that McGregor would exist today. Rockefeller and Stone dramatically changed the face of American business, but they also stood among the first of the great American philanthropists. McGregor is a vehicle for Cleveland’s extraordinary philanthropic lineage, a lineage sired largely by Rockefeller and Stone.

One of the challenges facing McGregor and senior care institutions nationwide is the increasing lack of qualified caregivers — health care professionals and paraprofessionals who specialize in senior care. The McGregor Foundation, the Group’s philanthropic arm, has taken as a special mission the recruitment, education, training, and retention of these caregivers.

The McGregor Foundation also makes grants for access to care for under-served populations, promotion of health and wellness, and total quality of life for seniors.

“Of course, one of the compelling reasons for starting The McGregor Foundation was to more widely distribute the benefits from our resources,” says Rob Hilton, president and chief executive officer of McGregor. “We are determined to assist seniors in need well beyond the McGregor campus.”

Until Amasa and Julia Stone built the Home for Aged Women in 1877, a badly run public institution known as the City Infirmary was the best that polite society had to offer seniors in Cleveland who had no families to care for them.

“The evidence suggests that a growing dissatisfaction with the City Infirmary impelled religious leaders and social reformers to establish special homes for the aged,” says The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History. The Encyclopedia notes that between 1870 and 1908 ten such institutions opened. The Montefiore Home, which opened in 1882 in Cleveland Heights, to serve Cleveland’s Jewish population. Altenheim, then on Detroit Avenue, was founded for German-Americans in 1885. In 1896, the Eliza Bryant Center opened as the Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People. Its namesake and founder was a former slave from North Carolina.
The Encyclopedia says that many of these institutions were manifestations of the concern of “women of the church for the dependent elderly,” adding, “The A.M. McGregor Home was started by women.” These women were the Barber sisters, Tootie and Sophia.

Sophia and her husband, James McCrosky, were well-known in East Cleveland for their work with the needy, as much as for their commitment to the First Presbyterian Church of East Cleveland. McCrosky was an Elder in the church for 30 years. They lived on a farm near what is now the intersection of Lee Road and Euclid Avenue. Another good Scottish family, the McGregors, lived nearby. Sophia’s sister, Tootie, married the son, Ambrose M. McGregor, in 1867.

McGregor had been born in 1842; he was 17 when the western Pennsylvania oil fields were discovered. He and his father made barrels for Standard Works, Rockefeller’s first refinery. Rockefeller liked the young man and hired him as Standard Works’ operations foreman in 1868. In 1874, McGregor, at 32, was promoted to superintendent of all six of Standard Oil’s refineries and manufacturing operations in Cleveland.

Rockefeller encouraged his close associates to take shares of stock in Standard Oil as part of their remuneration, and most took it gladly. McGregor was no exception. As a result, he was one of the richest men in America when he succumbed to cancer in October 1900. He had been a Rockefeller “mandarin” — one of a handful of men who worked behind the scenes at Standard Oil as a trusted counselor. His holdings in Standard Oil of New Jersey ultimately
provided the bedrock of
The A.M. McGregor Home
as well as The McGregor
Foundation — quite an
achievement for the son
of a rustic barrel maker.

Tootie and her sister
Sophia were descended
from old-line Cleveland
stock. Their grandfather,
Josiah Barber, and his
brother-in-law, Richard
Lord, had come to
Cleveland from
Connecticut in 1818 — Josiah already was 47 — to stake their
claim in the Western Reserve, having acquired large amounts of
property on the west side of the Cuyahoga River. They started
a real estate company and sold parcels in an area they decided to
call Brooklyn. Later, in 1836, they spun off Ohio City from
Brooklyn. Josiah Barber served, at 65, as the first elected mayor
of Ohio City.

The sisters’ father, Epaphras, did not seem to distinguish
himself as his father did. In an unsigned 50th anniversary history
of the A.M. McGregor Home, the anonymous author says, “Mrs.
McCrosky [Sophia] had not known the luxuries of life ... Neither
had Mr. and Mrs. McGregor been born into wealth.” The author
reports that the Barber sisters “had a morbid fear of being
reduced to the condition which they knew in their youth.”

Tootie and Ambrose were in their early 40s when John D.
Rockefeller moved his operation to New York City in 1883. By
then Rockefeller had created the Standard Oil Trust that con-
trolled virtually all of the oil production, processing, marketing,
and transportation in the nation.

The McGregors had all the accessories of 19th century wealth,
including a summer home in Mamaroneck, Long Island, and a
winter home in Fort Myers, Florida, where they were a celebrity
couple. McGregor Boulevard there is named after Ambrose.
However, life as one of Rockefeller’s most trusted business confidants also included unpleasant challenges. For example, a New York State criminal court indicted McGregor and other Standard Oil executives for allegedly participating in a plot to blow up a rival refinery in Buffalo. The judge threw out the charges, but the fact they were made in the first place is indicative of the animus many people in government, politics, and journalism felt for Rockefeller, his empire, and his aggressive business tactics.

McGregor’s staunch loyalty under such trying conditions made him one of Rockefeller’s favorites — that, and the fact that Rockefeller had known McGregor for so many years. When Ambrose died, Rockefeller — unfailingly loyal to those who were loyal to him — accompanied Tootie and her husband’s coffin back to Cleveland, in the McGregors’ private rail car, for burial in Lake View Cemetery.

Tootie, at 57, eventually remarried. Her second husband was Marshal Terry, a medical doctor she had known for many years. The Terrys and the McCroskys conceived and incorporated The A.M. McGregor Home for Aged People (its official name) between 1900 and 1904. Seymour F. Adams, a lawyer, incorporated the Home as a charitable organization in 1904.

Tootie and Sophia built the Home on the original McGregor farm in East Cleveland. The Home’s cornerstone was set in 1906, and the Home opened for business two years later. Tootie donated $5,000 a year during its first five years of operation, from 1908 to 1912, the year she died. She also left a generous amount of cash and Standard Oil stock.

The trustees call her endowment the Founders Fund. “The backbone of the Founders Fund was in fact Tootie McGregor’s Standard Oil of New Jersey stock,” says Owen Walker, a long-time trustee who chaired the investment committee for many years. “Today, of course, that’s the Exxon Mobil Corporation.”

The Rockefellers spent summers at Forest Hill — today, Forest Hill Park in East Cleveland.
What inspired the sisters to build The A.M. McGregor Home? Since neither woman left any memoirs, there can be no definitive answer. Various authors of McGregor Home small histories are agreed on one matter, however: The idea was Sophia’s, that it was her “dream.” There is another thing certain: Tootie’s money — that is to say, her late husband’s fortune — made the dream possible.

And, maybe most importantly, the record indicates that Mr. and Mrs. Amasa Stone’s Home for Aged Women inspired them, even if only through the McGregor Home’s first matron, Anna L. Huntley, who had previously worked at the Home for Aged Women.

Abraham Lincoln was another connection between the two homes. Along with his reputation for strict temperance and his caring for the needy, the Presbyterian Elder James McCrosky was known also for his friendship with Lincoln. At McCrosky’s funeral, the Rev. Henry Seymour Brown of the First Presbyterian Church of East Cleveland established the motif of his powerful eulogy in its dramatic opening lines:
“He knew Lincoln, we knew him — and that is apostolic succession.”

The Home for Aged Women’s connection to Lincoln was more direct. By the turn of the century it was Cleveland’s premier retirement home and had a board filled with the pillars of Cleveland’s business, finance, and legal power structure. Cleveland’s social elite were drawn to the Home by the cache bestowed on it by one of the original trustees, John Hay, who had been Lincoln’s personal secretary during the latter’s presidency — and who was Amasa Stone’s son-in-law. A poet, novelist, statesman, diplomat, and raconteur, Hay was married to the Stone’s oldest daughter, Clara, and had moved from New York to Cleveland after the marriage in 1874.

Further compelling evidence that the Home for Aged Women served as a model for The A.M. McGregor Home was their identical missions. Those early missions were to serve individuals who were well off at one time but who had fallen on hard times.

The Home for Aged Women looked for “Protestant Gentlewomen” 65 and older. It was not for invalids. Potential residents had to pass a physical examination. Lucia Bing Johnson in Social Work in Greater Cleveland, quoting from the home’s original charter, wrote that the home was “for ‘aged gentlewomen accustomed to surroundings of refinement and culture.’”

Johnson used the words “refinement and culture” as keywords again in her description of the McGregor Home’s mission: “The Home was planned for childless residents of Cleveland and vicinity accustomed to refinement and culture in more prosperous days.” The age threshold also was 65, and applicants had to be ambulatory and self-sufficient.

The only real difference between the homes was that McGregor took men as well as women. The joining of Amasa Stone House with McGregor would be far in the future, but in looking back, the merger seems to have been preordained.
Chapter 4

Standard Oil stock has been the engine that has powered The A.M. McGregor Home’s endowment. But the endowment is only one reason why the Home has shone so brightly. The other reason is even more important: the dedication of the families and individuals who, as staff and volunteers, made the success of the Home their life-long cause.

The original Articles of Incorporation, drawn up in 1904 by attorney Seymour Adams, hangs on display in the business office near the entrance to The Gardens. They state that the Home must always be in East Cleveland. The Articles therefore...
endow the Home with a special quality, a commitment to community. Most fundamentally, McGregor has always stood, as Emeritus Board President William D. Buss II likes to say, as a “neighborhood enterprise.”

Tootie and Sophia’s wish that the Home remain in East Cleveland no doubt reflected strong sentiment. The McGregor land that Tootie donated for the Home on the east side of Lee Road near Euclid Avenue included 23 acres of “ample gardens for fruit, flowers and vegetables,” as the newspapers said, on a wooded rise above Euclid Avenue. The quiet, attractive setting — first on Terrace Road and then up the hill on Private Drive — has always provided calm and comfort for McGregor residents, volunteers, and staff, with views down a long tree-lined meadow to the east, and out to Lake Erie and the skyline of Cleveland to the west.

In announcing the opening of the original Home, The Cleveland Plain Dealer of June 6, 1908, noted that Tootie had established the Home “as a suitable memorial to her husband.” The Home offered capacity for only 25 residents when it opened in 1908. Enlargements in 1916 and 1925 increased capacity to 65. An expanded home was built in 1940-41 up the hill on Private Drive.
Many of Greater Cleveland’s business and social elite lived in East Cleveland in those early years. Board member Nancy Shrader notes, “The names of the streets in East Cleveland say a lot about its early history: Bryn Mawr, Holyoke, Vassar, Amherst, Wellesley. The streets were given these names probably because Shaw High School graduates went to these colleges.”

McGregor’s early staff and volunteers were a diverse group, proud of their homes in East Cleveland and nearby areas such as Little Italy and Cleveland Heights. The just emerging artistic and high-culture hot spot of University Circle tied its philanthropic traditions to liberal Christianity and the encouragement of racial and gender diversity. The staff and volunteers found common cause in providing care and comfort to the elderly and made the McGregor Home very much, as William Buss points out, a neighborhood project — moreover, a family project.

One of the early group of volunteers made her living as an actress at the Cleveland Play House: the flamboyant Helen Watkins of Little Italy, a member of the Home’s original organizing committee. Watkins served for years as a trustee and later as chair of the House Committee. They called her “Matron.”

“When my mother was in charge, they didn’t use the title executive director,” said Helen’s daughter Louise Crane, who died in 2004 at the age of 89. Louise herself was appointed executive director in 1962. She served in the position until 1979. Thus, the Watkins women oversaw the daily life of the Home for two generations and nearly 100 years.

Louise Crane served as McGregor’s executive director during the 60’s and 70’s, an era when senior care underwent tremendous change. William D. Buss II was the president of the board during the 90’s, when the board made major decisions to build a new facility and to start a grant-making foundation.
Director William Buss, who served as president of the board during the 1990s, traces his McGregor lineage back three generations. Lillian Jenks King — the grandmother of Mr. Buss — and his mother, Jane King Buss, served a combined 50 years on the board.

During the extended stewardship at McGregor of these families and others, East Cleveland went through a dramatic change. In the early 1960s, as affluent families moved to the rapidly expanding suburbs, upwardly mobile African-Americans began moving in to take their place, attracted, in part, by the city’s environment of tolerance and diversity.

However, the city government failed to control the real estate companies and banks that exacerbated the volatile situation by redlining and blockbusting. This contributed to one of the most sudden demographic transitions in modern U.S. history.
“The McGregor Home was ‘up the hill’, as they say — and so it was at least partly isolated from what was going on in the ‘60s,” says Nancy Shrader.

Nevertheless, the Home had a rich relationship with a group called East Cleveland Senior Citizens (ECSC). Started by members of the First Presbyterian Church of East Cleveland, and headed for many years by Nancy Shrader, ECSC’s mission was outreach to the elderly.

Even dating back to the 19th century, there was a social class in East Cleveland that included John D. Rockefeller in its company. For that reason alone it is almost impossible for Rockefeller not to have been aware of the Home, and of its financial underpinnings.

Rockefeller had known Tootie McGregor for many years, of course, and in fact was a neighbor of the McGregors and the
McCroskys in East Cleveland. From 1877 to 1915, the year of Rockefeller’s wife’s death, the Rockefellers spent summers at Forest Hill — today, Forest Hill Park — the 700-acre estate that stretched beyond East Cleveland into Cleveland Heights, across the street from the McGregor Home.

Today Rockefeller lies next to his wife in a vault beneath a giant obelisk in Lake View Cemetery. Near the Rockefeller plot is the burial site of the Amasa Stone family, including Amasa’s sons-in-law, John Hay and Great Lakes shipping magnate Samuel Mather. And adjacent to the Stones are the modest graves of Ambrose and Tootie McGregor and their son, Bradford.

The enduring common legacy of all of these historic figures, The Gardens of McGregor & Amasa Stone, is just a few short miles away along the same bluff overlooking Lake Erie.
Amasa Stone House, one of Cleveland’s most notable philanthropists and Amasa Stone’s son-in-law, was the major force behind the Home for Aged Women’s move to University Circle in the early 1930s. The home was renamed Amasa Stone House.

Amasa Stone House, formerly the Home for Aged Women, merged with The A.M. McGregor Home in 1987. Flora Stone’s husband, Samuel Mather, had renamed the Home for Aged Women in the 80th and last year of his life, 1931, after funding and dedicating the construction of a new facility on East Boulevard.

In 1992, Amasa Stone House finally opened its doors, after 115 years, to male residents — one of many signs of the changing times. The missions of traditional “rest homes” such as Amasa and McGregor had evolved to include an increasing number of very senior residents. These seniors included the very sick and lower-income residents — people with greater needs. After a century, The A.M. McGregor Home found itself part of an industry that cared for a senior generation who had survived longer than any of their predecessors, and who therefore suffered greater frailties and financial hardships.

“Over the years, the needs of our seniors have evolved because of significantly extended life expectancy. At McGregor, we feel both fortunate to have evolved ourselves with changing needs and privileged to care for a much older resident population than in the past,” says Sue Neff, McGregor’s executive director.
In the late 1990’s, the McGregor board saw these unprecedented needs as an opportunity to better employ the organization’s unique resources by expanding beyond the base of traditional residents. In January of 1999, the board completed a new strategic plan that set a definitively more charitable course for the organization. While reaffirming McGregor’s commitment to residential care and providing for the modernization of the organization’s facilities, the new strategy established The A.M. McGregor Group and identified the need for a chief executive officer. Former banker Rob Hilton, chairman of the McGregor board at the time, transitioned to the top staff job in August 2001.

By the time he started work as McGregor’s president and CEO, the organization faced a full agenda. In partnership with Sue Neff and her staff, Hilton set to consolidating the nursing beds of the McGregor Home and Amasa Stone House into one new facility to enable greater efficiencies.

The result is The Gardens of McGregor & Amasa Stone, designed by the Cleveland architectural firm of Herman Gibans Fodor, Inc. Architects.
The facility features such amenities as an auditorium, an ice cream shop called Tootie’s Tea Room, a great room with a huge fireplace, a chapel, and six dining rooms. It also makes the best use of its location on the gently sloping hillside of the former McGregor farm with spectacular views of downtown Cleveland and Lake Erie.

As a part of McGregor’s recommitment to the east side of Cleveland — an area with a rapidly growing need for supportive housing for seniors — the organization decided to match prices and services to meet the needs of lower-income people. The renovated 1940 McGregor Home meets that purpose.

McGregor’s vision statement grounds all of these initiatives:

“McGregor is a direct provider and benefactor of housing and related health and social services for the elderly of East Cleveland and northeastern Ohio. Our target population is those who are otherwise unable to secure first-rate services and facilities. All facilities and services provided and funded by McGregor will meet the highest standards for quality, efficiency, innovation and compassion.”

Rob Hilton points out that America has come full circle in caring for the frail elderly. “We have gone from private initiatives for seniors in need, which originally established The A.M. McGregor Home and Amasa Stone House, to dependence upon government support. Now, with the proliferation of need, the government requires partners, and it’s back to private care,” he says.

“So we at McGregor must be more responsive than ever,” Hilton emphasizes. “We have to be prepared — and I think we are. The A.M. McGregor Group plans on being at the forefront of senior care in Northeast Ohio for years to come.”

“Our roots are deep in Cleveland’s history,” says Sue Neff. “We remain committed to the sound principles in the vision of our predecessors like Tootie and Sophia — giving the best care to the people who need it most. What an extraordinary privilege!”
“McGregor is a direct provider and benefactor of housing and related health and social services for the elderly of East Cleveland and northeastern Ohio. Our target population is those who are otherwise unable to secure first-rate services and facilities. All facilities and services provided and funded by McGregor will meet the highest standards for quality, efficiency, innovation and compassion.”
McGregor

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