

She's Been Working on the Railroad

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Railroads have a special place in American history for their imagination and ingenuity, but women often found themselves struggling for equality on the railroad. Women fought for their place on the railway. They would challenge railroad leaders, and pursue legal redress through state and federal courts. Through an endless struggle of perseverance women would gain a forefront on the railroad.

World War II

Women are often not recognized by society for their contribution to the mobilization of



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a nation during its time of war.

Women took over the workforce when the men went off to fight.

They fulfilled their patriotic duty

by fighting on the home front and supporting their men on the war

front. Women would labor until near exhaustion to arm and feed

military forces. They were the key

to the national defense at home

and to keep the morale alive in the men. Women responded to the calls to keep Americans and troops fed, moving, and communicating.¹

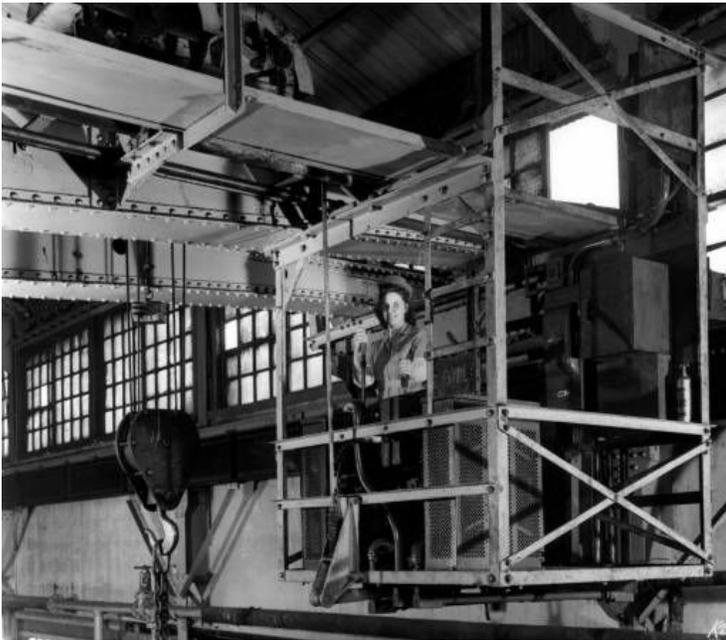
World War II allowed women to get ahead in the workforce as they took over the rolls that were normally granted to men. Railroad companies saw their employees decreasing as they went off to fight, but also the large population of men who were unemployed from the Great Depression also joined the war effort. Employers began to comprehend that they were going to have to hire personnel that were very seldom ever considered, women. Women were employed in record numbers, employing more than two million workers.² Many women fought to keep their jobs even after the war. It is estimated that from the time of the war to 1945 about 116,000 women were employed to the railroads.³

In 1941, women organizations began to visualize a greater role for themselves in the workforce. The Women's Army Corps (WACs), according to Judith A. Bellafaire, allowed women to assist in war effort both directly and individually.⁴ Women worked labor intensive jobs while on the railroad: hostlers, ticket agents, trainmen, train passenger representatives, telegraphers, brakemen, and welders.⁵

Before the war it was not socially acceptable for married women to work. Although, during the war women were seen as fighting and working on the home front, supporting their husbands and other servicemen, and fulfilling their patriotic duty. Women proved that they were just as capable to hold a job as men, all while still maintaining their responsibilities at home. Companies came to be impressed by women's ability to perform on the railroads. Many instances women were allowed to keep their jobs after the men returned home, but the companies were still reluctant to grant women equal pay even though they could perform the

same tasks as the men and in some cases even better. Women were not often granted seniority. If women could do the same job equally as well as men they deserved equal pay.

Women were often employed as cleaning ladies or for clerical work, and on occasion hired for advertisement of the railroad. Many of the jobs women partook in were considered unglamorous but women portrayed precision and attention to intricate detail, prevailing stereotypes and proving that womanpower was definitely needed for victory. During the war women were also hired as telegraphers, yardmen, shop workers, at times conductors, and even as train[wo]men.⁶ Women also became brakemen, and were heavily relied on by the Commuter lines. The New York commuters nicknamed the women who worked as trainmen, “Wheels.”⁷



Women took the jobs that were so desperately needed to be filled in order to sustain the home front war efforts. Women engine wipers did their job with thoroughness and diligence, and at many times better than a man.⁸ They impressed the foreman with their integrity to work on the dirty locomotives. By 1944, women comprised almost 8% of the railroad workforce, and Dorothy Lucke was

one of them.⁹ Lucke was an engine wiper for the Chicago & Western Railway. She displayed pride and grit on the railroad, and was one of the real-life “Rosie the Riveters.”

Advertisements, like “Rosie the Riveter,” were created to symbolize the millions of women who joined the workforce during World War II. Rosie would also become an iconic American image for the fight of women’s civil rights.¹⁰ Magazines and posters played an important part in the effort to recruit women for the wartime workforce. A real Rosie, Rose Bonavita-Hickey, and her partner, Jennie Florio, were acknowledged for their riveting work at the former General Motors Eastern Aircraft Division in North Tarrytown, New York.¹¹ These women became identified as one of the real “Rosie the Riveters,” who filled “men’s” jobs across the nation. The “get-women-to-work” campaigns glorified the jobs as patriotic so women would be persuaded to take the jobs and stick to them.¹² Women answered the call. At the beginning of 1941 about 13 million women were the workforce, and by the 1943 there were 15



million women workers.¹³ The workforce would never be the same again.

Campaigns helped to overcome the opposition of women in “men’s” jobs. Women were recruited in record numbers. Advertisements stressed to women that their domestic

“homemaker” skills could be used in manufacturing and production work.¹⁴ Women showed their patriotism by proving they were strong enough to engage in jobs that were traditionally male dominated.

Women who worked during the war and decided to continue working laid the groundwork for future women employees. Women would continue to provide support services essential to efficient and effective operation of the nation's railroads even after the war. Women discovered their sense of pride and independence, and according Inez Sauer who worked as a Boeing tool clerk, "...I found a freedom and an independence that I had never known. After the war I could never go back to playing bridge again...when I knew there were things you could use your mind for."¹⁵ They realized that their work was just as valuable as men's, and that they could do more. Women joined unions and gained benefits from labor representation.¹⁶ They fought the battle on the home front and won, but the battle for work equality had just begun.

Equality on the Railroad

American railroads have been offering women jobs throughout history, but not without discrimination. Women could be denied a job simply because of their gender, and even denied equal pay. All these hardships would be addressed when one courageous heroine refused to be denied a career because of her gender.

Leah Rosenfeld fought for women's equality for working on the railroad. She was a persistent advocate of a hard worker, who dedicated her career to the railroad but also made it her mission to see justice in the network.¹⁷

In October 1944, during World War II, Leah and her husband were in desperation for extra income, so she took it upon herself to complete telegraphy and clerical courses, and went on to work at Southern Pacific Railroad.¹⁸ She worked as a railroad telegrapher and station

agent, and in 1953, after her divorce, she began to work mostly in desert areas because most men were reluctant to take these jobs. An opportunity arose for Rosenfeld to be promoted in 1955 in Saugus, California, and although she had ten year seniority she was denied the position.¹⁹ Southern Pacific Railroad claimed that the California's "women's protective laws" banned women from lifting over 25 pounds or working for more than 8 hours a day. For eleven years Rosenfeld fought for her application to be accepted, but each time she was deprived of employment opportunities, and the Transportation Communications International Union did not take her seriously. Rosenfeld would not give up so easily.

The passing of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employers to discriminate against the hiring of women, Rosenfeld knew this was the opportunity she needed to make her fight known.²⁰ Rosenfeld worked just as hard, if not harder, as the men on the railroad, and she deserved the same pay for doing the same work. On August 30, 1968 Rosenfeld filed a lawsuit against the Southern Pacific Railroad.²¹

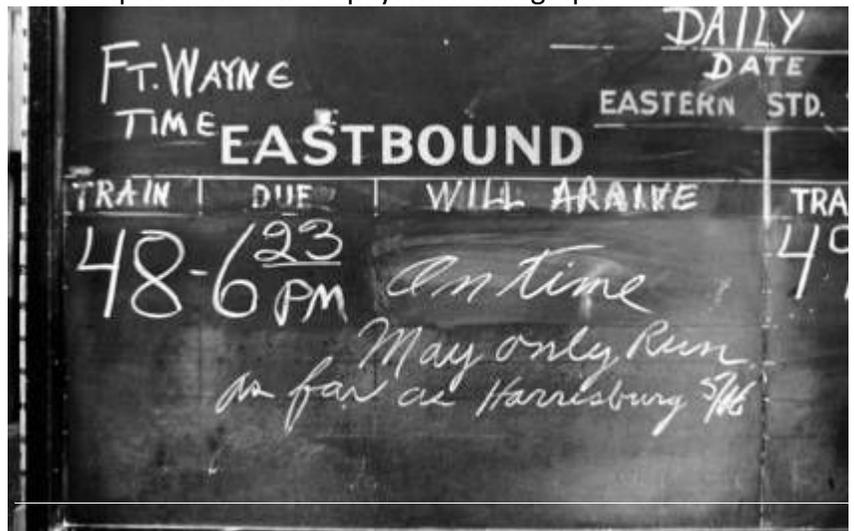
November 25, 1968, with the help of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Leah Rosenfeld finally won the battle against job and wage discrimination.²² Women were now ensured the same opportunities as men in the railroad industry. Rosenfeld received her promotion and pay increase right before her retirement, but because of her persistence the railroad industry respected women in the work employment. 1971, California's Protective Laws were considered unconstitutional and women now had an equal footing.²³ Rosenfeld's reluctance and dedication to working towards equality allowed for helping women all over the United States.

Leah Rosenfeld left a legacy that her twelve children can be proud of, and she laid the track for other women to find their place in the railroad. Stereotypes were broken and Rosenfeld won the battle of gender equality on the railroad.

Other Women

Elizabeth Cogley is one the first recorded female telegrapher. She worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad in Lewistown, from 1855-1864.²⁴ She was extremely skillful and was later transferred to Harrisburg in 1864 where she worked at headquarters till 1900. She was one of the pioneers that allowed for more women to be hired as railroad telegraphers. Women telegraphers were skillful at their occupation, and could perform their job just as well as their male colleagues, but women rarely received equal treatment or pay. Male telegraphers could

make as much as sixty dollars a month (\$1,422.56 in 2015), while women rarely made more than forty-five dollars (\$1,066.92 in 2015); it was also extremely difficult for women to attain jobs as first-class telegraphers.^{25,26}



Railway companies may have discriminated women working on the railroad, but there are some extraordinary stories of women who were able to work. Jeannie Richardson was the first woman to operate an electric railway in passenger service.²⁷ Women were always fighting for their right to work on the railroad.

Susan Morningstar was one of the first women to be hired on railroad. She worked at the Baltimore & Ohio in 1855. The women were in charge of keeping the station clean and in top condition.²⁸

Kate Shelley from Boone, Iowa was the daughter of Michael Shelley, a section foreman for the Chicago & Northwestern Railway. She saved some of the crew members lives from the No. 11 in 1861.²⁹ She was fifteen years old when the engine crashed and became submerged in icy water. Kate ran to the nearest station and guided a rescue team to the survivors of No. 11. For her acts of selflessness Kate was rewarded by the railroad. In 1899, Kate found herself again a train wreck. A mail train derailed while going around a curve, Kate and her sister were among the first to respond and begin caring for the injured. In 1903, she was offered a job with the Northwestern where she sold tickets. The trainmen scheduled a stop to take Kate to and from work. She worked at the station until her death in 1912.³⁰

On some railroads women were considered too much of a “distraction” for their male workers that they forced women to dress as men to keep the workflow steady.³¹

Harvey Girls were what the women who worked at Fred Harvey’s dining established were referred to.³² The women wore plain dresses and starched collars. They brought modification to the west since most of the women were from the east and Midwestern regions.

Since women were accustomed to discrimination they were prone to working harder, more diligently and efficiently, and missing fewer days of work. A poor job performance could mean being replaced by a man. Women did preform labor intensive duties on the railroad.



Because men were in fear of losing their jobs to women they enacted lifting requirements and

also restricted the number of hours a woman could work. Some men even refused to work with women so companies would refuse to hire women.³³

Men disliked women in the workforce, but some women obtained railroad jobs because of the men in their family. One of Northern Pacific's women employees was Natalina Indendi.³⁴ Indendi's family emigrated from Italy and moved to Livingston, Montana, to work for the railroad.³⁵ During World War I Natalina worked on the railroad wiping engines, greasing wheels, and operating turntables in the roundhouse. She found joining the workforce had an economic opportunity and a sense of patriotism, but she quit in 1921 when she married. Although, Natalina was not the only "dirty dozen" women who worked on the railroad. Bertha Grimm Gonder worked alongside Natalina and remained working in roundhouse for thirty years—the only woman of that generation to work for the Northern Pacific.³⁶ Bertha immigrated to the United States from Switzerland. She was widowed when she began work on the railroad in 1918, and was determined to keep her family together and to keep her job after the war ended. She was a single mother and a woman railroad laborer who did the "currying an iron horse...eight hours a day, seven days a week," she had a mystique that intrigued the media and a nation but also inspired.³⁷ Her sons followed in their mother footsteps and worked on the railroad. Gonder dedicated thirty years to Northern Pacific and retired in 1948 as one of the first women of the railroad.

Katherine L. Dick's came from a family of railroad workers. Her grandfather laid rail, and her father sold tickets. Katherine worked as a ticket seller, as well. In 1901, she became a full-time agent-operator in Royerton, Indiana for thirty dollars a month.³⁸

Female Advertisements

Phoebe Snow had been the face of advertisement for the prominent Delaware, Lackawanna and Western (DL&W) railroad company. The company transported and used clean-burning anthracite, a clean form of coal. ³⁹

Phoebe Snow main advertisement slogan was, “stay white from noon ‘til night. All the way to Buffalo.” She was even portrayed by actress Marian Murray, Phoebe Snow’s public appearances and publicity photos were abridged because of the government’s control over the railroads.⁴⁰

The DL&W found itself in competition with big name railroads because they had the advantage of a quicker more direct route get from New York City to Buffalo. Long distance travel on passenger rail, though, was usually very hot and uncomfortable. Passengers would open windows to cool off, but by the end duration of the trip their clothing would be covered in black soot. This is where Earnest Elmo Calkins created an advertising campaign that became a cultural icon for DL&W and anthracite coal.

With an abundance of anthracite around DL&W’s lines they could provide a more enjoyable ride for their passengers and guarantee that their clothing would remain clean for the duration of the trip. Lackawanna railroad’s “Phoebe Snow” promoted the use of anthracite coal. She was designed by Calkins, a NYC advertiser hired by DL&W, and she based on a young woman who regularly traveled by train. She was portrayed wearing a stylish long white dress, with a matching white hat, gloves, and shoes. Advertising posters of Phoebe Snow were often accompanied with a catchy rhyme: “*Says Phoebe Snow, About to go, Upon a trip, To Buffalo;*

"My gown stays white, From morn till night, L

clean ride that was extremely successful, chal

their own, and boosted the DL&W's

ridership almost immediately. She is by far

one of these most effective advertisement

campaigns during the turn of the century.



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The campaign came to a halt with

the beginning of World War I, when

anthracite was greatly needed for the war effort and was illegal for railroads to use. The face of

anthracite said farewell with this last jingle: *"Miss Phoebe's trip, without a slip, is almost o'er,*

*Her trunk and grip, are right and tight, without a slight, Good bye, Old Road of Anthracite!"*⁴²

Phoebe Snow was gone, but not without leaving behind a legacy. On November 15, 1949, the

Lackawanna Railroad revived her when they inducted a new streamlined passenger train

named, *Phoebe Snow*.⁴³

The *Snow* was a beautiful streamlined train featuring lightweight equipment that

traveled through breathtaking scenery, and gave the train a "down to earth" feel. This charming

and classy train evoked emotion in its passengers, and its marketing campaign of a beautiful,

young Victorian lady dressed in all white promoted the passenger rail to its peak. But *Snow*

struggled to survive with all the new transportation competition.

In 1960, after the merging of the DL&W and Erie Railroad, the *Phoebe Snow* could be

salvaged due to the decrease popularity of rail transportation. Passengers sought more efficient

ways to travel and thus another magnificent train was lost. Passengers would never again experience the beauty of the land while riding a beautiful train. On November 28, 1966, another classic American passenger rail, *Phoebe Snow*, retired.⁴⁴

Chessie the cat was another advertisement, used by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad to promote comfort and luxury passenger rail.

In 1933, a picture of a sleeping kitten first appeared in an issue of Fortune magazine with the slogan "Sleep Like a Kitten."⁴⁵ The etching was created by Viennese artist Guido Gruenwald. The magazine article caught the readers' eyes, particularly Lionel Probert.

Probert was an assistant to the C&O president, and in 1933 he was an official in public relations and advertisement when he was enthralled with Gruenwald's sketching.⁴⁶ Probert gained permission to use the picture and was later credited for the advertisement, and thus began the popular character that riders began to yearn for.

Probert derived the slogan "Sleep Like a Kitten and Arrive Fresh as a Daisy in Air-Conditioned Comfort," to popularize C&O's new air-conditioned sleeping cars.⁴⁷ The cat was named 'Chessie' as a derivation of the railroad's name. Chessie won the hearts of the Americans, and became the darling of the company. Chessie became the main advertisement for the company, and ridership began to increase along with her popularity.

Souvenirs became very popular: calendars, clothing, and even two children's books. In 1935, Chessie acquired two kittens named Nip and Tuck, and in 1937 she even got a mate named Peake.⁴⁸

Chessie was always involved in the nation's difficulties, the people could relate to her. During the beginning struggles of World War II Chessie gave the feeling of goodness and contentment. Chessie promoted the selling of War Bonds during WW II.⁴⁹ Chessie was shown working on the home front while she supported Peake who was fighting in the war. Chessie gave up her Pullman compartment for traveling soldiers. She helped bolster the American spirit of the depression-ravaged people. People could relate to Chessie because she had to make sacrifices just like the rest of the country.

Chessie advertisement continued until 1971 when passenger rail travel was consolidated under Amtrak because of competition. Chessie was one of the most successful corporate symbols in American history. Although, she no longer appears in advertisement she nevertheless is still alive in the hearts of those who loved and remember her.

She will always be known as "America's Sweetheart," and always be most remembered for promoting the "purr-fect transportation" experience for passenger rail.

In 1971, systems C&O, Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and Western Maryland Railroad, merged and formed the new railway, the Chessie Systems, and adopted the "Chess-C" logo with the silhouette of the Kitten, helping sell their freight service. The Chessie System later merged with other railroads and became the CSX.⁵⁰

Phoebe Snow was depicted as a passenger of the railroad not as a worker. Most companies reflected their advertisement women as riders not workers. It was not until after World War II that women were able to find equality on the railroad. By 1950, women made up

29% of the American workforce, and would continue to increase to one half of the workforce in the United States today.⁵¹

Conclusion

The American Council of Railroad Was established in 1944, and supported women to be hired by the railroads, and allowed the women to have a voice.⁵² The council has grown into an international organization, and reflects upon the women who helped make railroad history. Women paved the way for women to find equality on the railroad.

Women of today should be thankful for the sacrifices that many women made on the railroad. The economic and physical hardships, as well as discriminations and prejudices, were significant obstacles to overcome. As a woman in the 21st century, I desire to continue to work for equal opportunity and justice for all Americans.

Notes

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