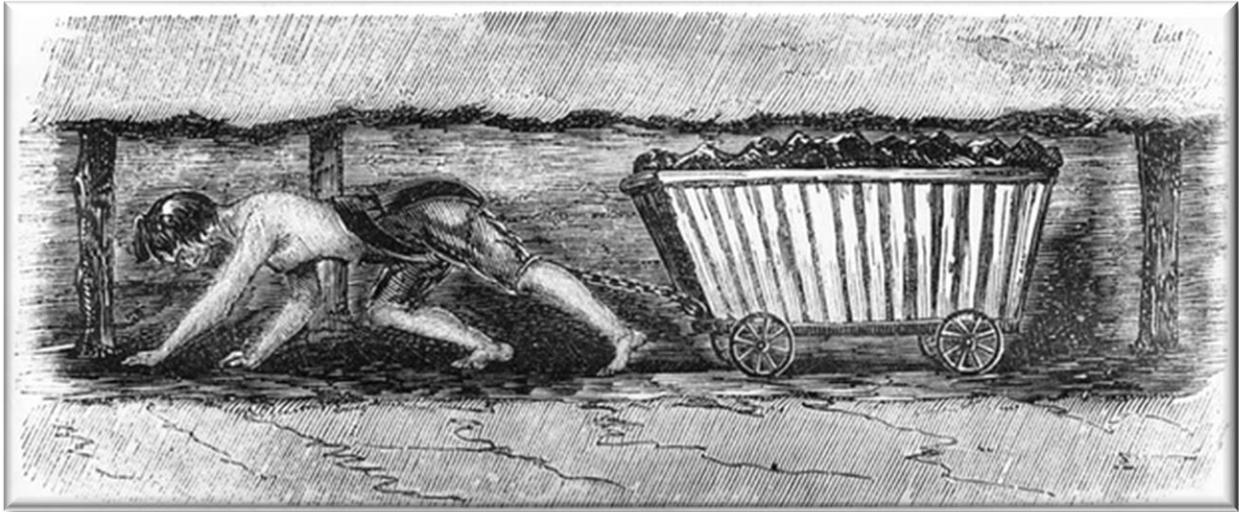


# Women in Mining

By Rebecca McGrew



***A sketch of a young woman miner pulling a cart filled with coal. (From the report of the Royal Commission, c1842.)***

Honoring women in mining always creates a dichotomy for me. You see, I don't think of myself as a woman in mining, nor do many of the women I know in the industry. Rather, we think of ourselves as MINERS... period. However, as a woman who chooses mining as a career, I profoundly admire the women who came before me, especially during the early years in mining, and I share my gratitude for a culture which provides opportunity for hard-working, talented and determined women.

In the early 1800s, women routinely worked alongside men in the underground coal mines in Britain, often helping male family members. It is reported this was a transition from an older system of mining when whole families worked together to extract coal from underground operations. In May 1842, British newspapers reported trousered women and girls working underground where they dragged heavy carts of coal. The sensationalized newspaper coverage led to a populist movement resulting in the prohibition of women working underground. In late 1842, the Mines and Collieries Act made it illegal to employ a female of any age or a boy under the age of ten in an underground mine. Unfortunately, mining had been the only employment option for some of these women, and they suffered significant hardship due to the lack of other jobs.

After passage of the law, female workers began to work around the surface of the mines. They became known as "Pit Brow Lasses". They carried a reputation as women who did not fear hard work – they were often responsible for cleaning, sorting, and hauling tubs of coal. In 1887, Margaret Parks organized a march on Parliament with the Pit Brow Lasses to defend their right to work. Unfortunately, Parliament waited until 1911 to recognize that the moral standards of Pit Brow Lasses were not compromised due to the physicality of their labors.



***Pit Brow Lasses from an unknown colliery in Wigan, Lancashire, c1887. (Photograph by Herbert Wragg. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Coal Mining Museum for England)***

Fast forward to 2020. Undoubtedly, a woman's ability to succeed in the mining world is attributable to the many visionary women who came before. However, in this great United States of America, I genuinely believe success results from intellectual talent, work ethic, determination, dedication, and excellence – all of which are genderless attributes.

Mining, fundamentally, relies on a team effort, and any team is strengthened by diversity. Diversity of all types – gender, culture, age, and race – fosters creativity and innovation. Research tells us women excel in emotional intelligence attributes, such as self-awareness and empathy, and are particularly good at rapid learning, conflict management, adaptability, and teamwork. Understanding what strengths team members bring to the table only fortifies the team and yields better results.

Arleen Lorraine, an educator in Brooklyn, New York, said “be the change you want to see happen”. The message I wish to convey is this: Be your best person. Give your best effort. Strive to excel and think critically. Be self-aware. Work hard and be a team player. Regardless of gender, culture, age, or race, prove that you were the best person for the job.

In my career with North American Coal, I’ve had the privilege to work with female engineers, attorneys, accountants, heavy equipment operators, safety and HR managers, marketing professionals, and environmental experts. Each of these individuals brings unique abilities and strengths to our team. Through the hard work and commitment to excellence of many, many women in mining, I continue to enjoy life in the mining world.