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PIONEERING WOMEN IN PETROLEUM GEOLOGY—CELEBRATING 100 YEARS!

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If not recorded, vast annals of history are lost. Pioneering women in petroleum geology entered the field very shortly after men became valued and accepted in the oil exploration... and women were first employed in 1917—the year the American Association of Petroleum Geologists was founded! This was a result of men having been conscripted for World War I. And, notably, this was before women's suffrage.

Women became subsurface geologists at a time when the tools of the trade were rocks (no electric logs, no seismic, no paleontology) and surface surveying equipment. Interestingly, some of the greatest men in the profession were responsible for hiring, training, promoting, and keeping women in this career—names like Sidney Powers, Everette DeGolyer, George Matson, Alex McCoy, Wallace Pratt, and E. T. Dumble. Unfortunately, women were required to quit, usually, when they married and mostly only single women survived in the industry after WW I. Some as entrepreneurs, some as well site geologists, and a few, astoundingly, in corporate management. The rare company, Amerada Petroleum, welcomed married women to continue working.

Soon after World War I women were responsible for the biggest technological advancement in subsurface petroleum exploration...working out stratigraphy with micropaleontology...which, without well logs and seismic, became absolutely essential within all oil companies. This led almost immediately to immense improvement in the economics for drilling and ultimately the establishment of the Society for Economic Paleontology and Mineralogy (SEPM).

World War II created new opportunities again for women to enter the geologic workforce and they did in droves. With the onset of electric logs and seismic, women could venture into exploration using the newest technology. But again, careers were discouraged after the war, both when women married and also because a new social order was developing...a powerful social dynamic of putting the "little ladies" back in the home "free of the burden of working"—the June Cleaver era. For the next thirty years it was a struggle for a woman to get an exploration job...and if they did, it always came bundled with menial tasks and inferior pay.

In the early 1970s, the EEOC threatened oil companies with denying them federal leases if they did not have a "diversity" plan for hiring women and other minorities. An immediate response resulted in the hiring of great numbers of women. Affirmative Action actually worked and had lasting effects. Within a very few years women thought they were only hired for their brains! And by then, they probably were. But, the world had long forgotten the smart and enduring women who were the *real pioneers.*