JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE

VOLUME 7, NO. 2 **SPRING 1992**

MESA STATE COLLEGE

JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN SLOPE is published quarterly by two student organizations at Mesa State College: the Mesa State College Historical Society and the Alpha-Gamma-Epsilon Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta. Annual subscriptions are $10. (Single copies are available by contacting the editors of the Journal.) Retailers are encouraged to write for prices. Address subscriptions and orders for back issues to:

Mesa State College
Journal of the Western Slope
P.O. Box 2647
Grand Junction, CO 81502

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Mesa State College Historical Society

and

Phi Alpha Theta

Printed by Mesa State Printing Services

THE COVER: The cover artist, Nicole Axelsson, is a fine arts major at Mesa State College.

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Women Coal Miners, The Orchard Valley Mine, and the Efficacy of Affirmative Action

By Dona Gearhart

Women seeking employment in higher-paying, male-dominated professions of United States industry in the 1970s generated a new chapter in women's labor history. The movement of females into nontraditional jobs promised at least a partial remedy to the economic inequities between men and women. The woman coal miner represents one segment of this movement. This analysis focuses on the interaction between the social process associated with the employment of female underground coal miners and affirmative action. The case study describes the work experience of the men and women who worked underground at the Orchard Valley Mine in Paonia, Colorado.

The role of women as underground miners in the coal industry of the United States emerged after 1973. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, and the women's movement prepared the groundwork for women's entry into nontraditional jobs. The Civil Rights Act of 1964

prohibited discrimination in hiring and promotion and used language that required contractors to initiate affirmative action. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act required state and local governments to develop affirmative action plans. Affirmative action meant employers should act to ensure equal opportunity. The women's movement, most strident and vocal during the 1960s and 1970s, contributed additional muscle to the movement of women into non-traditional jobs.

Although the United States coal industry employed no female underground coal miners before 1973, women's labor history contains vivid descriptions of nineteenth-century women in the coal mines of Europe and Great Britain. A compelling study of women's labor history by Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zessner, describes how public opinion concerning the deplorable working conditions of women and children in the mines of Great Britain prompted the passage of protective legislation. A Parliamentary investigation of underground conditions revealed that women routinely worked half-naked in brutal conditions. In 1842, Parliament passed a law forbidding women, girls, and boys under the age of ten from working in underground mines. By 1914, this type of protective law prohibited women in England and on the European continent from working underground.[1] The success of the prohibitive laws explains the absence of female underground miners throughout most of the world until 1970.[2] Social legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, however, encouraged women in the United States to seek employment underground. Statistics show a 14% increase in the number of women employed in the United States as miners between 1970 and 1980, and an increase of 25.2% during 1979-1980.[3]

Was the mining industry and the United Mine Workers (the miner's union) prepared to accept and support women seeking employment underground? Was the threat of action by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the power of the women's movement, sufficient to open the

portals of American underground mines to women who desired to work in them? Once inside, would male co-workers accept them and would women be able to adapt to the harsh, brutal conditions of underground work?

The Orchard Valley Mine of Paonia, Colorado, provided an opportunity to examine these issues. The Orchard Valley Mine began producing coal in September of 1976. From the beginning, the mine owner, Colorado Westmoreland Inc., (CWI), expressed a commitment to hire and maintain a 20% female work-force. This policy significantly affected the entire social hierarchy of CWI. Did the experiment fail and if so, is the failure explicable? Did corporate CWI internalize the policy or merely attempt to avoid an Affirmative Action mandate? The employment of underground female coal miners at the Orchard Valley Mine represents a microcosm of the social changes produced by the growing female labor force in the male-dominated industries throughout the United States. The hostile, unpleasant, and dangerous working environment of the underground mine presented unique problems for the men and women of the Orchard Valley Mine. The solution to these problems required commitment to the idea of affirmative action by management and employees alike.

Ron Stucki, General Manager of the Orchard Valley Mine, from September of 1976 until its sale to Cyprus Minerals in 1988, attributed the implementation of the policy to Bud Ogden, President of Colorado Westmoreland during the mine's start-up phase. Stucki recalled that Bud Ogden felt strongly that women should have a place underground. "Even if the pendulum swung too far the other way," said Stucki, "Bud felt that was OK, because women had been treated unfairly."[4] Stucki reported that of the first thirty people hired for underground work at the Orchard Valley Mine, eight were women. Stucki interpreted the high percentage of women hired at that time as evidence of CWI's commitment to affirmative action. Admiration for Ogden motivated Stucki's own response to the policy. He stated, "I would have walked

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DELTA COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Portal of the Orchard Valley Mine, 1976.

on water for Bud Ogden if he had asked. I was young and eager to please him."[5] Stucki believed that Ogden's idealistic compliance and his own admiration for Ogden produced a successful policy.

Commitment of management to affirmative action policies represents important changes in labor and economic history. The employment of females in underground mines like CWI typifies these social changes, and the success of such policies depend on corporate motivation to comply with affirmative action. Elliot Aronson, a social psychologist and the author of a rigorous analysis of conformity and social influence, recognized three responses to conformity. According to Aronson, a response motivated by the desire to do what is right - internalization - is more enduring than if motivated by the promise of reward or threat of punishment - compliance - or if motivated by the desire to be like someone else or to please someone else - identification.[6]

The utility of CWI's affirmative action policy meant not only internalization of the commitment but the willingness to address the problems of transition to a gender integrated work-force. Interviews with former employees of Colorado Westmoreland reveal that CWI failed to prepare its supervisors adequately to handle this complex situation. Art Garcia, the CWI Mine Superintendent until the mid-1980s, considered women ill-prepared for the tasks of an underground miner. Women shovelled improperly and exhibited no basic knowledge of tool use, according to Garcia. "Men on the other hand, grew up learning how to use these skills."[7] Garcia recalled that CWI failed to prepare for this type of problem.

Supervising women in the underground work environment presented another problem, according to Dan Robinson. Robinson, formerly employed at Mid-Continent Mine in Redstone, Colorado which did not employ women underground, discovered that having women underground meant he must make some difficult adjustments. "Before, at Mid-Continent, you didn't have to worry about how you talked

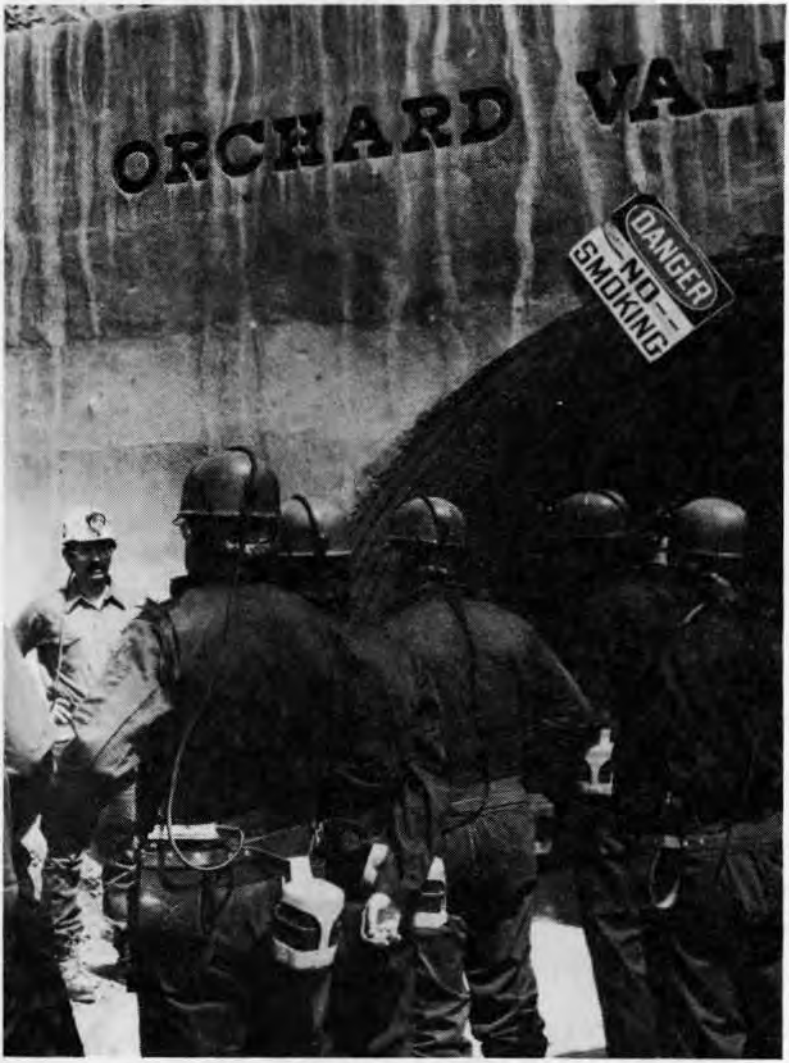

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GRAND JUNCTION DAILY SENTINEL

Art Garcia preparing an underground tour of the Orchard Valley Mine.

or acted," noted Robinson.[8] Robinson became a face boss and his adjustment became more difficult. *A face boss is a foreman who supervises the people and work where production occurs. The face is the surface from which the coal is mined.* Supervision of female coal miners forced Robinson to examine his approach to women. "I was socialized to take care of women." said Robinson. "You never mouthed your mother and it was real hard to chew a woman's ass."[9] Robinson recalls training in the management of people, but not specifically the management of women. Stucki defended the lack of Colorado Westmoreland's preparation to fully train its supervisors. "We were oblivious to what might happen, and what problems there might be." he admitted. "The situation was virgin territory and we did not know how to prepare for it." Management responded to these problems by reacting after problems arose. "Upper management heard of specific problems only after they became problems, and I'm hearing now about things that happened ten years ago," said Stucki.[10]

The response of individual miners influenced the outcome of the policy as well. The harsh reality of the underground work environment further complicated development of attitudes of the men and women toward one another. The underground coal mine represents dirty, dangerous, and hard work. Eight hours spent beneath tons of overburden causes unique stress. The subculture of the underground community constructs its own rules and norms. A different, adaptive language produces intense and emotional relationships. The underground environment demands that humans respond *immediately* to sights, sounds and other physical sensations.[11] Why would a female choose to work in such an environment? Interviews with women who worked at the Orchard Valley Mine demonstrate economic need as the primary motivation.

Twenty-one-year-old Kathy McCallister began work at the Orchard Valley Mine in 1976. The scarcity of jobs and the encouragement of friends influenced her decision. According

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DELTA COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Dan Robinson operating a load-haul-dump underground at the Orchard Valley Mine, 1977 or 1978.

to McCallister, the question became, "Why not? When you are twenty-one, you don't have any brains, and I had no idea of what I was getting into." McCallister remembers an initial feeling of disorientation, but no fear. The men on McCallister's crew demonstrated an attitude of protectiveness toward her but she also sensed that they felt, "OK, what do we do with her?"[12] Most respondents expressed this reaction because of the lack of an established role for women as coal miners.

Pam Easterday went to work at the Orchard Valley Mine in 1978, after graduation from college. Easterday admitted to being financially motivated to work at the mine. "When you live in a rural community like Paonia and that is the only job available," she said "that is what you do."[13] The darkness and the lack of clearance between the moving equipment and the rib impressed Easterday on her first trip underground but she does not recall being afraid. *The rib is comparable to the walls of a hallway.* Easterday joined a production crew shortly after her training for underground certification. *Individuals who work underground are required by law to be instructed as to Federal and State mining regulations and safety procedures and to be issued an underground certification before working underground. Such training and instruction is usually done in a two-week period before employment begins.* Easterday felt her male co-workers merely tolerated her. "Specifically," according to Easterday, "there was a range of reactions from the men, beginning with mere toleration to friendliness, to overt hostility." Easterday recalled an informal hierarchical pecking order among her male co-workers. It began with the biggest white male and worked downward. She noticed what seemed to be a strange ritual - "young male bonding" - which she attributed to a lack of self-esteem of most of the young men. *Young male bonding referred to by Easterday is a curious variation on the horseplay that is endemic to many production industries. Horseplay between males (especially young males) in an underground mine involves the pinching, thumping, taping (with electrical*

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAM BREZONICK

Kathy McCallister. Lunch time in an underground lunch room at the Orchard Valley Mine.

tape), and greasing of the male genitals. Female underground miners, on observing the ritual, usually turn away, walk away, or simply ignore the activity.[14]

Pam Brezonick needed the job to support her two children. Her sister, an underground miner, informed Brezonick on what to expect. Initially Brezonick worked on an outby crew, and hauled a load of timber into a pillar section on her first day underground. *The term outby in mining is defined by any mine area from the working face, outward toward the portal. The responsibility of an outby crew is the maintenance of entries, return air courses, abandoned workings, sealed areas - all areas not involved in the current extraction process. The outby crew is also responsible for supplying materials and support to the production crews. A pillar section is an area developed by the extraction of coal to form entries. Entries, comparable to hallways, containing roof, ribs, and floor, are supported by pillars of unmined coal. After the section - or group of entries - has been advanced to its conclusion, the supporting pillars are extracted in a methodical and controlled manner; allowing the roof to cave as the pillar is extracted. It is, perhaps, the most dangerous phase of mining due to the lack of predictability of when and to what extent a cave will occur.* The task proved difficult under the conditions, but Brezonick did well because of her experience at parking a horse-trailer. Brezonick expressed her reaction to her male co-workers in this manner, "I felt that most of the men were arrogant and chauvinistic. I was not impressed." She admits to being naive at the beginning even though she had spent many years working with cowboys. She became aware of different "mentalities" while working at Orchard Valley and discovered that coal miners represented a "whole different breed". She recalls what she perceived to be animal instincts the men developed in an underground environment. Brezonick believes, however, that women did not develop these animal instincts. "Women have a different set of values," she stated, "you reverted to survival techniques but you realized you could

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAM BREZONICK

Pam Brezonick underground at the Orchard Valley Mine.

not lose yourself. When you left the mine," she continued, "you changed back."[15]

Tina Vigueria, the daughter of coal miners, went to work for the Orchard Valley Mine in 1977 following graduation from high school. Vigueria took the job for the high wages, but she recalls the excitement of doing a man's job. Her first impression of the mine evoked a reaction of "what the hell am I doing here?"[16] Vigueria's co-workers expressed the attitude, "well here's another woman." She remembers trying very hard to be part of the crew - to be one of the guys. She felt that this attitude helped her to fit in and to concentrate on doing her job. *"Being one of the guys" represents one of the strategies used by the women at the Orchard Valley Mine in order to assimilate into the workforce.*[17]

The male response to female co-workers varied, and depended on the man's socialization. Ron Wilson went to work for CWI in 1977. He had never worked in a mine but when he discovered he would be working with women he thought, "this is going to be a struggle." He recalls thinking that working in an underground mine would be a hardship on women. Wilson tried to help the women as much as he could and felt no resentment or bitterness toward them. "I was an inexperienced miner, too!" he said, "and I knew my co-workers had the same rights as I did." When he thought of his co-workers as women, however, Wilson wondered "what the heck are they doing here?"[18]

J. Bob Davis, an experienced miner and foreman from Mid-Continent, assumed that women sought employment at the mine for the high wages. He felt that women did not belong in an underground mine. According to Davis, the language of the men became worse when women were around - "worse than it was at Mid-Continent where there were no women." Davis expressed concern that most of the women viewed mining as short term. Men generally planned to make mining a career - at least to work there for twenty-five years. Lack of interest or excitement at what happened in the mine

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAM BREZONICK

Brezonick and McCallister's crew. Lunch time at the Orchard Valley Mine.

on the part of women, concerned Davis. He commented, "If something out of the ordinary happened, men would talk about it for six months and women would forget it in a couple of days." *Davis refers to events which were out of the ordinary. Such events include "covering the miner" (the caving of roof or rib onto the miner), a shift of coal production which may have broken a previous prduction record, or perhaps an accident.*[19] Davis believed CWI management lacked the commitment required for a successful affirmative action policy and therefore, condemned it to fail.[20]

Dan Robinson felt that one of the most difficult things he had to learn required becoming the peer of a woman. He recalled that a man first treated women as women, then like a peer or a friend. Sometimes, according to Robinson, the comaraderie led to problems of relationships. *Robinson refers to personal relationships which developed between the men and women.* He feared "getting a woman hurt."[21] Robinson feels there is a place for women underground now and in the future of coal mining.

Did CWI's affirmative action policy fail or did it succeed? Does the absence of women working underground at the Orchard Valley Mine today mean that the policy failed? Opinions of those interviewed varied.

Kathy Geddes, employed by CWI as Director of Public Relations until 1983, worked closely with the women miners as an unofficial liaison between women and management. According to Geddes, the eastern mines of Westmoreland of Pennsylvania, corporate parent of CWI, operated as did most eastern mines - under union contract. She believes Westmoreland tried to create something unique at the Orchard Valley Mine - a non-union work-force consisting of male and female underground miners. Geddes speculated that Westmoreland challenged the anti-woman bias of the union. She also felt CWI's commitment to affirmative action demonstrated the motivation to do what was right. Geddes felt the policy worked very well in the beginning but admitted it

began to disintegrate. There were several possible explanations for disintegration, according to Geddes. CWI experienced problems with leasing, contracts, and a soft coal market; and in 1986 a mine fire resulted in the sealing of the mine. Things got tough and Geddes believes the idealism of the original commitment "gave way to more mundane, practical problems, and the loftier goals were sacrificed." Geddes believes the disintegration of the policy began at the bottom, where the women were. As men at the bottom began to work their way into middle-management, they brought their feelings and biases with them.[22]

Even though few women work in underground mines in western Colorado today, Geddes states CWI's policy did not fail. "It was definitely a benefit to most of the women. Most went on to something better and many went on to get a college degree."[23]

Ron Stucki admitted the policy began to change because of external conditions but he attributes the change to the lack of interest on the part of women to apply for underground jobs in the mid 1980s. The small number of women miners today, according to Stucki, is due to attrition. "There are tons and tons of experienced miners available now because of the lay-offs," said Stucki. *Industry-wide furlough of underground miners is a feature of the boom and bust character of the mining industry and Colorado mines were hit especially hard during the 1980s.*[24] "The men are the ones hired because they are experienced," continued Stucki.[25] He believes the opening of the coal market will mean opportunities for women - more so than before. Stucki thinks male and female miners eliminated the barrier between them in the 1970s and 1980s and that women should not have to start from scratch when mining jobs become available.

The benefit received by those involved at CWI suggests the policy of affirmative action did not fail. Most of those interviewed perceived some benefit from the experience. Art Garcia gained a deeper sense of what women were about and

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY GEDDES

Miner Digger Turnipseed installing roof support at the Orchard Valley Mine.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY GEDDES

Dangered-off cave area of the Orchard Valley Mine.

he felt the women benefitted as well.[26] Dan Robinson recognized that a man did not have to be "king of the world" to mine coal when women were doing the very same thing and doing it well.[27] J. Bob Davis, on the other hand, saw no benefit to the policy. According to Davis, the harsh conditions, lack of experience, and hostility from the men resulted in real emotional damage to the women.[28] Ron Wilson assessed the benefit as 1) it gave the ladies a job, 2) it provided an opportunity to develop closely woven relationships on a "coed level", and 3) it gave him a different perspective of women as workers and friends, not just as wives or girlfriends.[29]

The women who were interviewed felt they benefitted from the experience. Kathy McCallister recognized that working in the mine made her less naive about people and made her a lot tougher. "I'm not that twenty-one year old with no brains anymore. The work ages you. You grow up fast around people who never grew up at all."[30]

Pam Easterday remarked that women accommodated themselves to conditions and equipment created for males, and rotating shifts represented a negative issue of the job. "In fact," she says, "I'd probably still be there if it wasn't for graveyard." Benefits existed, however, admitted Easterday. She discovered that running heavy equipment was not a "big deal" and it abolished the mystique that operating heavy equipment was the exclusive purview of the male.[31]

Tina Vigueria experienced a sense of pride in knowing she could do a man's job and that other people recognized her capabilities. Pam Brezonick related that working in a mine made putting her two kids through high school easier, made being a single parent tolerable; and it allowed her to seek a college education.

Additional criteria exist by which to judge the success or failure of CWI's affirmative action policy. Several women obtained "fire boss" papers, one woman became an active member of the mine-rescue team, and one woman received "mine foreman" certification and attained the position of utility

foreman. *Certification as a fire-boss follows intensive training and instruction followed by a rigorous examination by State officials concerning State and Federal regulations and general mining procedures. After passing the examinations, an individual is issued fire-boss certification. A fire-boss is certified to examine any area of the mine and declare it safe for men and machines to enter. They are also certified to do pre-shift and on-shift examinations for imminent danger as required by law. A fire-boss is legally responsible under the law. A mine rescue team is a group of individuals who are trained in rescue techniques and emergency medical procedures. Each mine usually maintains at least one team. Teams are available for rescue work at their own mine or any mine that requires assistance. Mine Foreman certification follows the same process as fire-boss certification. A certified mine foreman, however, has been monitored and supervised by the official regulatory body at the mine in which fire-boss work is done. This body then recommends the individual for certification as mine foreman.*

CWI management initiated and fully supported an Active Integration Program which sought ways and opportunities to integrate the CWI work-force. During the first furlough of workers in 1985, women were judged on the same criteria as were the men in choosing those who would retain employment. *CWI, a non-union mine, chose to evaluate individuals on general skills, ability to operate key equipment, and fire-boss and mine rescue experience. Seniority was one criteria, but not a key issue.*[32] Many women kept their jobs, although it is unclear if the work-force remained at the company mandated 20% female level as records are unavailable at this time. The female foreman retained her position as foreman as a result of the furlough selection process.[33]

In June of 1986, the Orchard Valley Mine was sealed due to a mine fire. Most employees working at that time remained as surface workers until the opening of the new mine

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DELTA COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Smoke escapes from the return air shaft during the underground fire at the Orchard Valley Mine, 1986.

in December of 1986. The female foreman resigned in January of 1987 and graduated from Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado in 1992. Kathy McCallister works as an underground miner at the Twenty-Mile Mine in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Pamela Easterday currently practices law in Grand Junction. Pam Brezonick resigned in the fall of 1987 following an injury and is currently a student at Mesa State College. The Orchard Valley Mine in 1992, currently operated by Cyprus Minerals, employs only male underground miners.

This analysis of the affirmative action policy of the Orchard Valley Mine, based on observation and anecdotal evidence, falls short of empirical interpretation. A more detailed sociological study, using wider geographic parameters could yield a clearer understanding of the social phenomena of female underground miners and the efficacy of affirmative action.

THE AUTHOR: Dona Gearhart, a former employee at the Orchard Valley Mine, graduated in May of 1992, from Mesa State College with a B.A. in Selected Studies. Gearhart will enter graduate school in the fall.

NOTES

[1]Bonnie S. Anderson, Judith P. Zessner *A History of Their Own. Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present. Vol. I.* (New York: Harper & Row. 1988) 288.

[2]Department of Economics and Statistics. *Labor Force Statistics 1969-1980.* (Paris: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1982) 94.

[3]The President's Commission on Coal, John D. Rockefeller IV. *The American Coal Miner. A Report on Living Conditions in the Coalfields.* (Washington: 1980) 198.

[4]Ron Stucki, oral interview by author, Steamboat Springs, CO, 10 December 1991.

[5]Stucki interview.

[6]Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 5th ed. (New York: C.H.Freeman and Co., 1988) 33-45.

[7]Art Garcia, oral interview by author, Grand Junction, CO, 2 December 1991.

[8]Dan Robinson, oral interview by author, Hotchkiss, CO, 9 December 1991.

[9]Robinson interview.

[10]Stucki interview.

[11]Personal recollection and observation of author.

[12]Kathleen McCallister, oral interview by author, Hayden, CO, 4 December 1991.

[13]Pamela Easterday, oral interview by author, Grand Junction, 5 December 1991.

[14]Personal recollection and observation of author.

[15]Pamela Brezonick, oral interview by author, Grand Junction, CO, 5 December 1991.

[16]Tina Vigueria, oral interview by author, Paonia, CO, 10 December 1991.

[17]Personal recollection and observation of author.

[18]Ron Wilson, oral interview by author, Paonia, CO, 8 December 1991.

[19]Personal recollection and observation of author.

[20]J.Bob Davis, interview by author, Hotchkiss, CO, 2 December 1991.

[21]Robinson interview.

[22]Kathy Geddes, oral interview by author, Crawford, CO, 8 December 1991.

[23]Geddes interview.

[24]**North Fork Times,** 22 August 1985.

[25]Stucki interview.

[26]Garcia interview.

[27]Robinson interview.

[28]Davis interview.

[29]Wilson interview.

[30]McCallister interview.

[31]Easterday interview.

[32]Personal recollection of author.

[33]Personal recollection of author.

Women and their History in Kannah Creek
By Kristen Scott

The settlement of the American frontier required hard work on the part of both women and men. Often, however, history fails to credit the accomplishments achieved by women. Even when written history credits women with earned recognition, it quite often describes those accomplishments as passive assistance to the active role played by men. Many New Western scholars propose changes in the examination of women's role in settling the American frontier. The analysis of the contribution of the women of Kannah Creek represents this newer approach of frontier women as active participants. This oral history, grounded in the scholarly arguments of New West Historians, identifies the Kannah Creek Women as participants in the history of the frontier.

"I lived the history that I can tell. And of course the history today in books that's written a lot is not really the true thing, as it was lived."[1]

When May Wing spoke these words in the early 1900s, she recognized the importance of history representing women as active participants. Traditionally,

historians considered women marginal performers and minimized their paramount contributions. The contemporary historical movement of New Western History strives to negate the stereotypical classifications of women as either refined ladies, helpmates, or women of ill repute. New Western scholars question the validity of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and the Cult of True Womenhood as useful analogies in the analysis of the lives of western women.[2] A candid research of women's lives shatters the stereotypical images to which history often adheres, acknowledges the frontier experience from a female perspective, and allows the story to unfold by the narration of those women who lived it.

Portrayal of women as the genteel civilizer suggests women conveniently fit into stereotypical classifications as honorable, virtuous, domesticated, and subservient. Historians argue that Victorian women became responsible for national morality. They concluded, therefore, that men actively tamed the frontier and women passively tamed the men. These stereotypes obstruct the fact that frontier women engaged in meaningful work within the family's economic base and expanded their role into the political arena. Rural and urban women often differed in the obstacles they encountered.

Urbanization allowed access to employment away from the home, and produced a certain amount of autonomy for women. Public transportation expanded mobility and began to detach women from their families. The majority of female employment included factory jobs and other low paying wage labor. Not only did women suffer from gender segregation, the tendency of urban centers to intensify segregation by class structure isolated women from one another. The cities, however, enhanced the freedom of the women activists and reformers to more readily pursue their causes.[3] Although female activists gradually gained victories on the issues of suffrage and the removal of political

barriers, most women sought civic actions less threatening to their prescribed role. World War II required a female labor force to supplant the male labor shortage and drew an influx of women into the national labor pool. Consequently, women established political power within the work place, and challenged corporate power.[4] This is not to imply that rural women lacked political influence. Rural life, however, failed to promote either autonomy, mobility, or segregation.

Women played an integral part in the gender interdependence of the rural economic base. Typically men either mined, farmed, or ranched, while women cared for the house, children, and gardens. When men were called away on business or forced to seek additional employment elsewhere, women assumed responsibility for the welfare of business and family. A greater flexibility of gender related roles existed among rural individuals because survival depended on the interdependence of work roles.[5] Since children increased a woman's workload; the use of contraceptives, therefore, became a feature of the life of frontier women. The practice of birth control served not as a rebellion of the feminine role, but an attempt for women to enhance their performance within it.[6]

Women shared a knowledge of various forms of birth control with each other. Legal abortions remained available until the 1870s and since neither the public nor sympathetic juries showed a willingness to prosecute, they continued after passage of abortion laws.[7] Prostitutes, mid-wives, and an occasional doctor performed abortions. The immense financial pressure and the additional stress that followed childbirth, influenced many women to terminate pregnancies. Frequently women faced the dilemma of bringing a child into an impoverished environment. Seldom did the question of desiring children arise. The main concern became how many children a family was capable of supporting. The Comstock Law of 1873 banned

provisions or discussions on the subject of contraceptives, therefore, many physicians refrained from openly discussing the matter with their patients.[8]
The scarcity of doctors forced many frontier women to rely on mid-wives and home childbirth. Even though a mid-wife might be available, poor road conditions, arduous terrain, and severe weather meant babies were often delivered by a neighbor, a husband, or the mother herself. Rural women played other significant roles in the forming of the west as participants in the economic base, political arena, and decision making.

Research on the women of Kannah Creek region of Mesa County, Colorado, indicates that they too followed similar social patterns discussed by New West scholars. They contributed to the family's economic structure, involved themselves in the political arena, bore children, and utilized birth control. Their actions also question Turner's Frontier Thesis and the Cult of True Womenhood, as these women clearly stretched the boundries of their assigned role.

The political involvement of Kannah Creek women manifested a less vocal activism than contemporary women. They pursued a more civic mission, benefiting the cattle industry, their families, and their community. The women of Kannah Creek rarely questioned their feminine role and accepted it as the social norm.

These women actively contributed to the cattle industry. The majority of them acquired the necessary knowledge of cattle ranching at a very young age. A young girl expected to assist her mother and her father in ranching chores and therefore, learned the essential nature of merging roles. Youngsters contributed to the collective chores of the community, such as haying. Young ladies frequently drove the hay wagon, or assumed responsibility for hayraking.[9] Girls also attended to conventional duties such as canning, laundry, and

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINIFRED RABER

Winifred Raber and hay rake, 1952.

care of the younger children. Their socialization as children into the more flexible nature of rural gender roles gave women the required foundation necessary to achieve social stability.

Kannah Creek women maintained, as adults, the diversity of gender roles. The role of the ranching women extended beyond that of wife, lover, and mother. They repaired fences, drove cattle, and kept books. At a time when urban wives experienced segregated roles distant from their husbands, ranching women found themselves working alongside their spouses. The Kannah Creek women felt they worked equally as hard as their husbands.[10] If they were not needed as cattle riders, they remained at home to maintain the domestic sphere. The majority of food for the family's consumption was produced on the ranch and became an important part of that domestic sphere.

Women usually planted gardens each spring and the gardens contributed to the summer food supply. The canning of home-grown fruits and vegetables supplemented the winter food suppy as well. Canning was seldom a cooperative effort among the women, however, picking often was.[11] Ladies churned their own butter, baked their own bread, and milked their own cows. Weekly or bimonthly trips into Grand Junction provided the opportunity to trade excess provisions for items not produced on the ranch. They sold cream to the creamery, and eggs, pork, and beef to the markets. Although Kannah Creek residents struggled economically, they did not consider themselves poor.[12] Their ability to produce and barter, furnished the necessary provisions. Most cattle ranchers were exempt from income tax because their incomes failed to exceed one-thousand dollars, as most of their financial transactions consisted of barter and trade.[13]

Women accomplished their tasks without modern conveniences or running water. If one of them was fortunate enough to live on a hill, as did the Bradburys,

gravity-flow of cistern water meant indoor plumbing. In 1911 Kannah Creek began receiving water from the city of Grand Junction, Colorado. Residents hauled water by horse and wagon from taps located at designated areas. Refrigeration also proved problematic. Cattle butchering occurred in the fall because of the lack of refrigeration. Pigs were butchered in the spring. By curing and canning pork, families enjoyed meat throughout the summer.[14] Since most Kannah Creek ranchers had neither icebox nor icehouse, the Bradburys used their spring as a refrigeration system. The construction of a structure over the spring allowed them to store perishables by lowering hooks into the ice cold water.[15] Not only did these women accept responsibility for the home and help manage the ranch, they are credited for the family's social life.

The school served a dual purpose of educating the children and hosting community activities. For children to earn a high school diploma, the state mandated that they must attend their last two years at an accredited institution. This required students to attend school in Grand Junction, forcing many children to live away from their families during the week, and returning home on the week-ends. This became a hardship on the children and their parents because the older children provided additional help on the ranch. Affording additional housing for older students also proved financially strenuous for parents. Phyllis Bradbury explains, however, "it exposed us to subjects we may never have encountered otherwise, like Chemistry, Anatomy, Physiology, and higher Math. These subjects helped me in nursing school."[16] Female high school graduates had three choices; a college degree in nursing or education, employment as a secretary, or marriage. Most opted for marriage. Frequently women married men whom they had known all their lives. Hired hands also became fair game for matrimony. Teachers often married young gentlemen in the community, and this brought an inflow of women into the Kannah Creek region. Courtships reflected the simplicity and values of the community.

Commonly, a young man courted a young woman at her home by establishing a relationship with both her and her family. Double dating proved an appropriate fashion for young couples to institute a small degree of autonomy away from the family atmosphere. The community picnics and dances also provided an environment for young people to meet and socialize with one another. The Kannah Creek community served as the largest social milieu for its residents. Similar to all major events, weddings portrayed the collective attitude of the community.

Women cooperatively constructed quilts, and each bride received a quilt on her wedding day. Weddings also functioned as a community project among the women, each contributing to the festive occasion. The bride's mother assumed responsibility for her daughter's marital preparations.[17]

None of the Kannah Creek women knew of the birth control methodologies used by their mothers. Personal concerns and family matters were perceived as private, thus women seldom shared intimate matters with each other. Intimate relationships among women reflected communal principles rather than private concerns. The cooperative nature of this community extended beyond the social realm and into everyday work.

The immense task of driving cattle from the desert to the Grand Mesa required cooperation from all the ranchers. Ranching etiquette assumed that ranchers possessing the greatest number of cattle would provide the greatest number of ranch hands. Women rode on these drives with the same expertise as men. Winifred Raber, a long time Kannah Creek resident, proudly recalls, "we were the first women to ride under the rim - this was quite an accomplishment, considering that the men thought this area too dangerous for women."[18] Haying also functioned as a communal effort, demonstrating the strong bond between Kannah Creek ranchers. If a family experienced problems, they knew their neighbors would genuinely extend the necessary aid. "We never felt alone,"

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINIFRED RABER

Winifred Raber driving cattle home from Uncompaghre, 1980.

Raber recalls, "because we always had each other."[19] The community involvement proved invaluable and during celebrations or work, every person participated. Women's efforts provided an additional vital aspect in the cattle industry by their involvement in the "Cowbelles."

The Kannah Creek Cowbelles, an extension of the Colorado Stockgrowers Association, developed in 1952 out of a dispute between cattle ranchers and the National Forest Service. When the Forest Service proposed a cutback on the grazing rights of the Kannah Creek ranchers, the women recognized their ability to be more diplomatic than their husbands in such an explosive situation. The women set out to develop tours, sketches, and literature, so that a true story of the cattle industry could be told. Cattle ranchers argued that they were in fact the first environmentalists, as their dependence upon the land forced them to acknowledge the limitations of the land. Rotation of cattle grazing grounds was by no means a new concept to cattle ranchers, neither was the idea of protecting the water reservoirs. The Kannah Creek Cowbelles prided themselves as the first working chapter in the Grand Valley. The Cowbelles established a political entity which enabled women to politically express themselves and convert some of their ideologies into reality.

The Cowbelles sought to develop a working relationship between ranchers and hunters. Cattle ranchers did not object to hunters using their properties. They did, however, object to the methods used by some of the hunters. The Cowbelles exercised diplomacy in their quest to educate hunters on safety and etiquette. Frequently hunters failed to be conscious of what they were shooting at, and furthermore, they failed to close gates or remove their trash from the ranchers' property. Elimination of hunting rights was not the goal, although a workable, courteous relationship was. These legislative issues set the Kannah Creek Cowbelle chapter apart from the others. Additonally they participated in the more conventional purpose of promoting the cattle industry.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINIFRED RABER

Winifred Raber, Anita Clark, and Alta Wadlow taking cows to Uncompaghre, 1978.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WINIFRED RABER

Anita Clark taking cattle up to the top of Grand Mesa, 1967.

Education of beef cutting and beef cooking demonstrations aided in the popularizing of the beef industry.[20] By acknowledging the regional differences between the urban and rural populace, the Cowbelles attempted to bridge the gap by sponsoring "The Farm and City Week." This international event brought a better understanding to both communities regarding the lifestyle of others.[21] To further demonstrate their dedication to education, the Kannah Creek Cowbelles sponsored student loans for young people in the community pursuing a college degree. The organization actively solicited student participation for the scholarships.[22] Clearly the Cowbelle organization proved instrumental in transforming many of the concerns of the community into workable, plausible solutions.

The women of Kannah Creek, like other rural women, contributed a great deal of their efforts to establish a stable economic, social, and political foundation for the community. The settling and maintaining of the West heavily depended upon the hard work of these women. With New West Historians committed to the uncovering of the region's true nature, holistic histories have emerged. These histories credit ordinary men, women, and ethnic groups with their significant achievements and have broadened the realm of historical significance. A continuation of historical expansion will honor all people in their achievements in American history. Thus, as is the intent of history, a true story will be told.

Kristen Scott, a student a Mesa State College, will graduate in the spring of 1993 with a B.A. in History and will pursue graduate study in the field of New Western, Women's History.

NOTES

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[5]Armitage, 156.
[6]Mary Melcher, "Women's Matters," Montana: *The Magazine of Western History.* 41:2, (Spring 1991), 50.
[7]Ibid.
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[9]Mrs. P. Bradbury. Interview by author. 15 November 1991. Kannah Creek, CO.
[10]Anita Clark and Winifred Raber. Interview by author. 8 November 1991. Kannah Creek, CO.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Nina Brouse. Interview by author. 5 December 1991. Kannah Creek, CO.
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[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Clark and Raber interview.
[19]Ibid.
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[22]Mary Wadlow, "History of Western Colorado Cowbelle Council," *The Western Cowbelle.* February 1966, 1.

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