



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN  
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



## August 2024 Her Story ENewsletter Women of Steel

Women involved in manufacturing and construction may have been rare in U.S. history – or invisible – but they did exist. Rebecca Webb Lukens ran a steel manufacturing company in the 1800s. Linda Alvarado thrived in the construction industry – using steel – from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Let's learn about these two amazing women.



In 1825 (with a newborn child), upon her husband's death, **Rebecca Webb Lukens** took over the management of the almost bankrupt Brandywine Iron Works in what is now Coatesville, Pennsylvania. This was the first American company to make boiler plate and hull plates for steam-powered ships and locomotives; it thereby played a prominent role in the industrial and transportation revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By her shrewd business decisions, courageous defense of her rights, and her ability to meet the demand for boiler plate, Rebecca Lukens became a significant figure in the nation's early industrial expansion. She managed and controlled the commercial end of her company by buying supplies, setting prices, making contracts, and meeting customers. She also studied legislation that might affect her business.

Lukens' success made her business the nation's chief manufacturer of boiler plate. Her plates became known to all steam engineers; her mill supplied boiler makers in Boston, Baltimore, Albany, New York, and New Orleans. By 1844, she was a rich woman. In 1859, the Brandywine Iron Works was renamed the Lukens Iron Works. The company that she built, renamed Lukens Steel, continued in existence until 1997.



Raised with five brothers in New Mexico in a home without indoor plumbing, **Linda Alvarado** found a love of outdoor work and construction during the time she spent working for a landscape contractor while she was in college. She launched Alvarado Construction in 1974 with a \$2,500 loan from her parents; banks would not even consider lending her the money at that time due to her gender and ethnicity. Her general contracting firm has done work for the Denver Convention Center, Denver International Airport, and the Broncos Stadium, among many others.

Alvarado's business acumen was recognized when she was 27 years old, and she was elected to sit on the board of directors of Norwest Bank. Over the years, she has sat on the boards of Qwest Communications, Pepsi Bottling Company, 3M, Pitney Bowes, and Lennox International. At the age of 39, Alvarado made history when she became the first woman and first Hispanic of either gender to participate in a successful bid to own a major league baseball team – the Colorado Rockies. She wears a huge ring from the 2007 World Series in which the Rockies played the Boston Red Sox. Alvarado has been inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame and the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Rebecca Webb Lukens and Linda Alvarado are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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