

Women Who Led Tool Manufacturers

by Mark Stansbury

While we might think, with the different roles of women in society and business in the 19th and early 20th centuries, that there were no women owning or managing tool companies. However, while researching the histories of some of America's small and specialty tool and hardware manufacturers, I found several women in ownership and management roles. In addition, America's second-oldest tool manufacturer, W. Rose, had two unrelated women managers 80 years apart. This article lists seven women, and there may be others undiscovered. In chronological order of when they assumed control, they are:

1877 E. C. Stearns & Company, Avis Stearns Van Wagenen	1930 FIBCO, F.I. Blake Company, Ruth Alice Blake Beck
1887 W. Rose & Brothers, Sarah Jane Wilson Rose	1956 Kraeuter & Company, Marie-Louise Gairoard
1914 The Adjustable Clamp Company, Adele D. Van Pelt Holman	1967 W. Rose, Inc., Gertrude Murdoch Goodwin
1929 Rubberset Company, Elizabeth Albright Spurr	



Avis Stearns Van Wagenen

Avis Stearns (Jan. 1, 1841 – Jan. 3, 1907) was the daughter of George Noble Stearns (1812 -1882), the founder of tool and builder's hardware manufacturer George N. Stearns & Company of Syracuse, New York, which was later named E. C. Stearns & Company. Avis Stearns married Daniel Mead in 1861, and she taught at Townsend School in Syracuse while he served in the U.S. Army in the Civil War. By 1866,

she was listed as "Mrs. Avis Mead" in the Syracuse directory but with no listing for her husband, indicating that the couple were probably separated or divorced. No information could be found on his residence after the war or about his death. Avis lived with her parents through at least 1884.

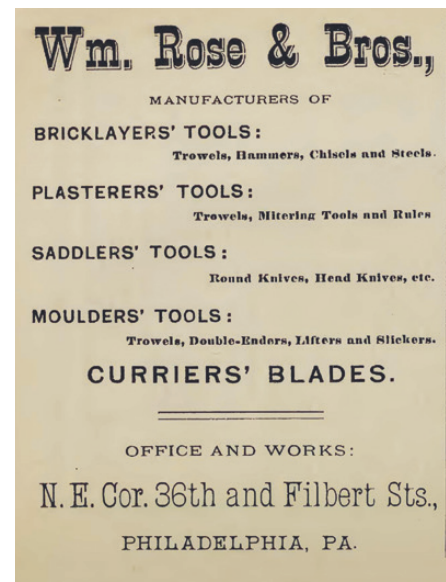
After teaching, Avis Mead went to work for her father at George N. Stearns & Company, then known for the hollow augers that he invented. When her father's health declined in the late 1870s, she and her brother Edward Carl Stearns (1856-1929) took over the company in 1877, changing the name to E. C. Stearns & Company. In 1880 Ms. Mead and her brother moved the plant and office to a larger building, and expanded their product line to include saw vises, parlor sliding door hangers, band saw setters, spoke shaves, spoke pointers and much more. In 1882 they built a new plant at West Adams and Oneida Streets.

Avis Mead married a second time in 1886 to Matthew Van Vliet Van Wagenen (1839-1905), a dump wagon inventor and manufacturer. She adopted two children with Van Wagenen

and two previously. Late in life she developed an interest in genealogy, and self-published a book on the Stearns family in 1901. It describes her as a "thorough, energetic, business woman, with marked executive ability, excellent judgment and keen foresight...."¹

Sarah Jane Wilson Rose

In 1886 the only surviving partner of trowel manufacturer W. Rose & Brothers of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was J. Wesley Rose. His brother William's daughter-in-law, Sarah Jane Rose (1843-1921), took over management from 1887 through 1894. Born Sarah Jane Wilson in Elkdale, Chester County, Pennsylvania, she was married to William's son John Frailey Rose (1841-1920), a physician in Oxford, Chester County, PA. In addition to day-to-day management, Sarah J. Rose supervised relocating the business from Philadelphia to Sharon Hill in Delaware County, PA. in 1889. Tools manufactured during this period include a full line of brick trowels, brick hammers, scutches, line blocks, plasterer's finish trowels, foundry molding tools, and round leather knives. In 1894 the Rose heirs sold the business to businessman Octavius Barrell Goodwin.





Adele V. Holman
passport photo,
taken some years
later, possibly age
60

Photo of the Arion
Lady Quartet

My best guess is
she's the blue star

Adele D. Van Pelt Holman

Ms. Adele Van Pelt Holman (Sept. 21, 1881 – June 9, 1932) was the first of five generations to own and manage The Adjustable Clamp Company of Chicago, Illinois, makers of Jorgensen and Pony brand clamps. Born Adele D. Van Pelt in Jerseyville, Illinois, she married Harry W. Holman in 1880, and they had a son, Harry V. Holman.

Ms. Holman was a gifted mezzo-soprano who was a church soloist at age 18 and singing elsewhere in Chicago as a soloist, including with the Theodore Thomas Orchestra. By November 1892, she had joined a professional vocal group, Arion Lady Quartet. With Ms. Holman as singer and manager, the group toured extensively from the Midwest to the East Coast, giving performances in theaters, opera houses, parks, Chautauquas, conventions, banquets, religious gatherings, fundraisers, and colleges. The quartet's mix of popular favorites and religious numbers received multiple encores and glowing reviews. In 1895 the group began several years of touring with Edmund Vance Cooke, a humorous poet and impressionist in the vein of Will Rogers. Ms. Holman performed with Arion Lady Quartet through 1900.

Adele Holman's husband, a railroad office worker, died in 1904 at age 43. Accustomed to being self-sufficient,

an experienced business manager, and with savings from her performances, Ms. Holman began looking for a business opportunity. She found it in the Adjustable Clamp Company, founded in 1903 by metalworker Hans Jorgensen and lawyer Marcus W. Russ.

Ms. Holman bought shares of the struggling business and became secretary of the company in 1907. Although Mr. Russ was president, Ms. Holman began to take charge, moving the business operations from Russ's law office to the factory. With Russ as traveling salesperson, Ms. Holman gradually assumed more responsibility. When Russ decided to leave, she bought his shares in October 1914 and became president. The business grew steadily, and by 1918 her son Harry was an employee. The 1930 US Census shows she remained president, with Harry as secretary-manager. Accustomed to hotel living and being independent from her years on the road, Ms. Holman lived in Chicago hotels, including the luxury Bismarck Hotel on Randolph St., which opened in 1926 (the Kimpton Hotel Allegro today). Ms. Holman died in Chicago.

Elizabeth Albright Spurr

In 1919 Elizabeth Albright Spurr (Oct. 25, 1869 – Aug. 25, 1934) became vice president of Newark, New Jersey, brush manufacturer Rubberset Com-

pany and its corporate parent Rubber and Celluloid Company, and she was president from 1929 to 1934. Ms. Spurr was a lifelong Newark and Essex County, NJ, resident and was active in civic organizations before and after joining the company. She was chair of the Newark Red Cross chapter during World War I and president of the Newark Young Women's Christian Association from 1920 to 1923, among others. She was married to Joseph George Spurr and they had three children.

Her father Andrew Albright Sr. invented a means of coating horse harness trimmings with hard rubber. He patented it in 1873, and began manufacturing them. Albright's additional research with uses of hard rubber led to setting bristles of shaving and paint brushes in rubber, and he formed a division to manufacture brushes. After the death of Andrew Albright Sr. in 1905, his son Andrew Albright Jr. became president, and he named the brush division Rubberset Brush Company in 1906. Andrew Jr. had an excellent understanding of marketing. He saw that the harness market was declining, and in 1908 began heavy newspaper advertising of shaving brushes, toothbrushes, and paint brushes. While the company was very successful, his large advertising expenditures took years to pay off, and in 1929 he lost the presidency in a re-organization to his sister. M. Spurr led Rubberset through the Great Depression, selling it in 1934 to Bristol-Myers, two months before her death in Newark, NJ.

Ruth Alice Blake Beck

The F. I. Blake Company, also known as FIBCO, was founded by machinist Frederick I. Blake in Worcester, Massachusetts between 1910 and 1918. Their primary products were inside and outside calipers, dividers, drawing compasses, scribes, screw gauges, putty knives, wall scrapers, and finishing trowels. After Blake's death

on 18 July 1930, his daughter Ruth (7 Apr 1892 – June 10, 1981) took over the business and managed it until at least 1962. Ruth Alice Blake was born in Worcester and married John H. Beck in 1918. In May 1935 Ruth Beck began using the brand name FIBCO, and she applied for a trademark Nov. 29, 1945. It is unknown when the F. I. Blake Co. went out of business, but it appears to have been the early 1960s. Ruth Beck died in Miami, Florida.



Marie-Louise Gairoard

Kraeuter & Company of Irvington, New Jersey was owned and managed by Marie-Louise Gairoard (Oct. 1 1907 – Apr. 13, 2005) from her father's death in February 1956 until July 1963, when she sold the

business to Symington Wayne Corp. Kraeuter was founded in 1878 by German immigrant August Kraeuter, and he sold the business to his son Arthur A. Kraeuter in 1902. Kraeuter's products included pliers, punches, steel chisels, arch punches, and rivet sets. Camille L. Gairoard (1876-1956), a native of France, went to work for Kraeuter in 1905, and became president in 1933. Mr. Gairoard apparently had exceptional business skills and knowledge of forged tool and cutlery manufacturing. He was also employed by J. Wiss & Sons from 1900 to 1942 and by Kroydon Company, a golf club manufacturer owned by Kraeuter beginning in 1920. Marie-Louise Gairoard was born in Newark, New Jersey, the only child of Camille Gairoard and Anna V. Kierns. She died in Caldwell, Essex County, New Jersey.

Forward from Kraeuter's spring 1958 catalog:



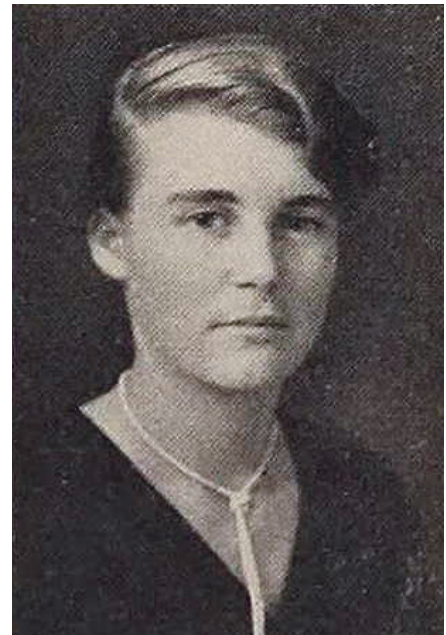
In 1956 I succeeded my father, Camille L. Gairoard, as President of Kraeuter & Co., Inc. It is my determination to perpetuate his memory by continuing the high standards of quality and workmanship demanded by him throughout his long association with our company.

Kraeuter & Co., Inc., will celebrate its 100th Anniversary in 1960 . . . a tribute in itself to the wisdom and enterprise of management and the skill and loyalty of employees. But more than being one of the oldest, Kraeuter & Co., Inc. is one of the most respected manufacturers in the country today. This reputation I pledge to uphold.

I take this opportunity to thank our many valued customers and users of our products. I appreciate your friendly cooperation.

Marie-Louise Gairoard

President
KRAEUTER & CO., INC.



Gertrude Murdoch Goodwin

W. Rose, incorporated in 1943 as W. Rose, Inc., was run by a second woman beginning in 1962. Ownership passed from Octavius Barrell Goodwin (1839-1908) to his son George Goodwin (1881-1967). George and his wife Emily H. Stocking had two daughters. One of those, Gertrude Murdoch Goodwin (Mar. 17, 1909 – Dec. 15, 1997), received a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Cornell University in 1931. She distinguished herself enough at college and in her career that the Gertrude Goodwin Papers are held by the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Gertrude Goodwin went to work as a mechanical engineer at W. Rose soon after graduating. In 1967 she became president of W. Rose, and ran the business until her retirement in 1989. She never married, and lived in what had been her parent's home in Sharon Hill, within walking distance of the W. Rose plant.

1. Genealogy and Memoirs of Charles and Nathaniel Stearns, and Their Descendants, Volume 2, by Mrs. Avis Stearns Van Wagenen, Courier Printing Co., Syracuse, New York, July 1, 1901