

Visionary Women of Wealth: One Family, One Moment of Time
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There is little written history about women prior to the 20th Century. What we do know is that there was a distinct difference between the socio-economic classes. Marriages were arranged and spouses were often chosen to be of equal social ranks, to elevate them, or to increase family wealth.

One of the wealthiest families of the 19th Century in Lebanon County were the Coleman's. Much is written about the men in this family. Little has been written about the Coleman women, daughters, sisters, wives and cousins who played a role in history in Lebanon County and beyond.

The patriarch of the Coleman family, Robert W., was born in Ireland and arrived in the United States around 1764. He became a successful ironmaster and businessman in the later 18th Century.

At the time of Robert's death in 1825, his four sons inherited his estate. He also included provisions regarding rights for future heirs and those they designated. William and Edward sold their shares to their brother, Thomas Bird Coleman. The fourth son, James retained his inheritance.

Thomas Bird Coleman had six children including four daughters, Anne C., Margaret C. Isabella, Sarah H. and two sons, Robert W. and William. Thomas died in 1826. As specified by his will, Robert and William continued the family business as ironmasters opening and managing several furnaces in Lancaster and Lebanon Counties.

William died in 1861 leaving his wife, Susan Ellen Habersham Coleman and two young children, Robert H and Anne. Within four years, Robert also died. He had no children. Both men died without wills. The provisions in R. W.'s original will transferred the assets to the surviving sisters and William's children.

This group became "R.W. Coleman Heirs and Company," which was composed of Anne C. Alden, Margaret C. Freeman and Sarah H. Coleman, and Robert H. Coleman and Anne Coleman. Collectively they owned and operated Bird Coleman Furnaces, Cornwall Anthracite Furnaces, and Cornwall Furnace. The R. W. Heirs group dissolved in 1882.

During 1872 and 1873 Margaret C. Freeman independently erected the North Cornwall Furnace in Cornwall Township. Lackawana Iron and Steel Company leased the furnace in 1898. Reflecting upon this time period, it was quite an accomplishment.

Anne, Margaret and Sarah eventually gained ownership of Cornwall Furnace. In 1886 the women formed a new company, the Cornwall Iron Company LTD, with E. C. Freeman, W. C. Freeman and R. Percy Alden. This company controlled the furnaces at Bird

Coleman, Donaghmore and the operations at Cornwall Furnace, which ceased production in 1883.

This corporation dissolved and remerged as the Cornwall Iron Company in 1901. Ownership transferred to Isabel C. Freeman, E.C. Freeman, Margaret C. Buckingham, R. Percy Alden, and Sarah C. Derby. The family group continued to control the Bird Coleman and North Cornwall furnaces until operations ceased by 1917. The group dissolved in 1920.

Margaret Coleman Freeman Buckingham, great-grand daughter of Robert Coleman, donated the Cornwall Furnace to the State of Pennsylvania. In 1949 she also deeded her estate to the Methodist Church, which is the present site of Cornwall Manor.

Ellen Habersham Coleman, William Coleman's widow, bestowed money set aside by her husband to purchase the land for building St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Lebanon. She was raised as an Episcopalian in Georgia. Ellen also established several free parochial schools. Later she endowed one of the boy's parochial schools to an Episcopalian Bishop. This school operated as Talbot Hall in Jonestown until 1981.

Ellen and Mrs. Chandler Hare wife of St. Luke's pastor led the St. Katherine's Guild of St. Luke's Church in establishing a parish hospital. This free clinic was located at 711 Chestnut Street and later evolved to being the Good Samaritan Hospital.

James Coleman's son, G. Dawson Coleman married Deborah Brown of Philadelphia. During her marriage she served as hostess to many diplomats including President Ulysses S. Grant and his family. Upon her husband's death, it appears she may have assumed a limited role in the North Lebanon Furnaces as listed in the Pennsylvania Furnace Source Book.

G. Dawson and Debbie Coleman had several children; among them were daughters, Deborah Coleman Brock, Sarah Coleman Brock and Ann Coleman Cavarollo.

Deborah Norris Coleman (Mrs. Horace Brock) also served on the St. Katherine's Guild with Ellen Coleman. Her efforts included raising funds that enabled Good Samaritan Hospital to build a new facility at Fourth & Walnut Streets.

Mrs. Brock also founded the Women's Club of Lebanon 1897. In 1898 she was elected the national President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. In March 1909, Mrs. Brock was among many society women who voted to form "The Association to Oppose the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women". An article printed in the New York Times, March 28, 1909 features Mrs. Brock.

In 1910 she is listed as President of the PA Anti-Suffragette Movement. The National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage organized in November 1911 with Mrs. Brock serving as one of the vice-presidents.

Mrs. Brock's sister, Anne Coleman Cavarello also gained a role in history in France. She served as a medical intern in Paris, France, where she met and married Dr. Cavarollo of Spain. They purchased and renovated a chateau. Part of the chateau was used as a hospital. Ann and her husband landscaped their gardens as an extension of their home. The Gardens at Chateau Villery in the Loire Valley have lived on. Ann became known as an international landscaper.

In closing, the Coleman women played a significant role in the history of Lebanon County by providing jobs to stimulate the local economy of their day and by preserving buildings of significance through preservation efforts for us to enjoy and appreciate today.

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