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Business Leaders

In December 2013, General Motors announced that its first woman CEO would take the reins in January 2014. As part of the celebration of Mary Barra's achievement in being the first woman to head a major automobile company, this month we profile two women business leaders from our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. The women we selected were early business leaders: Rebecca Webb Lukens and Rose Markward Knox.

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 19th century.



Rebecca Webb Lukens



Rose Markward Knox

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 very 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.

Before she married, Rose Markward Knox did piecework in the glove industry; she worked in her home by placing silk stitches in gloves. After her marriage to Charles Knox, she saved money from the allowance she was given to run the household. With a considerable sum in those savings, the couple purchased a discontinued gelatine business in Johnstown, New York.

In the late 1800s, housewives made their own gelatin through a very time and labor intensive process that involved cooking cow shinbones, straining the liquid, recooking it, and clarifying it with egg whites. The Knoxes decided to make a granulated product that was easy to mix. In addition, Rose Knox helped promote the family business by writing cookbooks. Often when her recipes appeared in newspapers, it was under the heading "Mrs. Knox says . . ."

In 1908, Rose Markward Knox took over the business upon the death of her husband. She ran it for more than forty years, during which time it became the largest such company in the U.S. She established experimental kitchens to find new uses for her product in both business and medicine. Her company produced the first pharmaceutical gelatin (gel caps) and a plasma extender to be used in intravenous solutions as a blood plasma substitute during World War II. She was still chair of the board of directors at the time of her death. Knox was the first woman to be elected director of the American Grocery Manufacturers

Association. She is also well-remembered as the "Grand Old Lady of Johnstown" and the "City's leading benefactor" for her many philanthropic acts.

We are proud to stand with Mary Barra on the shoulders of these amazing women.

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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