



March 2019 Her Story ENewsletter Entrepreneurs

Women have started businesses for centuries both in order to earn money to support their families and to satisfy their own economic objectives. This month we profile two entrepreneurs: Polly Bemis and Linda Alvarado.

Polly Bemis's resilience and unquenchable spirit led her to become the foremost pioneer on central Idaho's Salmon River. Born in China, Bemis in 1872 was sold by her family for bags of seed during a famine. She ended up in Warrens (today Warren), Idaho as either a prostitute, concubine, or in some other form of sexual slavery. There she worked in a saloon, learned English and somehow managed to maintain her self-respect and dignity. After she obtained her freedom, she married Charlie Bemis, who ran the saloon next to a dance hall, and ran a boarding house in Warrens.



Polly Bemis

She and Charlie built a home along the Salmon River, the so-called River of No Return. She became well known for her garden and her loving care of animals. Their original house burnt, but their re-built house is today listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is named the Polly Bemis House. The story of her life was fictionalized in a novel and made into the 1991 film titled *Thousand Pieces of Gold*. At the dedication of her cabin, the Governor of Idaho stated "The history of Polly Bemis is a great part of the legacy of central Idaho. She is the foremost pioneer on the rugged Salmon River." Bemis has been inducted into the Idaho Hall of Fame.



Linda Alvarado

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 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 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.

Polly Bemis 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!

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