



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



May 2026 Her Story ENewsletter Women in the Automotive Industry

Many women have contributed to the success of the automotive industry over the years including Mary Anderson, who invented the windshield wiper and has been inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame; Alma Green, who edited *The Green Book* – the travel guide that provided information during the Jim Crow era of places that accommodated Black Americans; and Mary Barra, the first woman CEO in the industry. In this edition of our newsletter, we focus on two women: Stephanie Kwolek and Betsy Ancker-Johnson.



Chemist **Stephanie Kwolek** attended Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, today part of Carnegie-Mellon University. With the intention of going to medical school, she graduated with a BS in chemistry and then went to work for DuPont, to save up the money she would need for medical school. She became so intrigued with the work at DuPont that she never left. Kwolek spent her entire career doing polymer research.

At the time she discovered Kevlar®, Kwolek was endeavoring to produce a lightweight product that could be used in steel-belted radial tires, thereby improving fuel efficiency. The other polymers she had been working with had a syrupy consistency when dissolved. But this polymer, when dissolved, was runny and milky. After convincing the technician to “spin” her polymer, she got what she thought were unbelievable results. This new material was five times stronger than steel, and heat-resistant. Kwolek received several patents for her work with Kevlar® and a total of 16 patents during her career. Kevlar® is used in steel-belted tires, one of its more than 200 applications. Kwolek has been inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame and the National Women’s Hall of Fame.



The first woman vice president in the automotive industry, physicist **Dr. Betsy Ancker-Johnson** received her BA in physics from Wellesley College. She traveled to Germany to earn her PhD from the University of Tubingen. She worked first in academia – at the University of California, Berkeley and then at the University of Washington. Ancker-Johnson then became a research specialist at the Boeing Science Research Laboratories. She moved to the government sphere in 1973, when she became the first woman appointed to a position in the Department of Commerce.

President Richard Nixon appointed Ancker-Johnson Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology. She continued to serve in government through the administrations of Presidents Ford and Carter. She then joined General Motors in 1979. At General Motors she oversaw emission control. The span of her purview was immense. She managed pollution control across GM plants worldwide, as well as product safety, and global regulatory compliance. Other responsibilities included compliance with fuel economy, noise control, and electromagnetic interference standards. Her numerous awards included election to the National Academy of Engineering and induction into the Automotive Hall of Fame.

Stephanie Kwolek and Betsy Ancker-Johnson 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

[Visit Our Website](#)

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!