

IN THEIR WORDS:

WOMEN IN MINING

Is this the image of a miner you are most familiar with?



Stan Gear & "Blondie" Campbell. Circa 1923. Archive # 895.10.9

Historically, women were not permitted to work underground. For almost all of Britannia's history, women in Britannia were either housewives, secretaries, school teachers, or nurses.

In the 1970s, there were many changes happening in Canada and at Britannia. With regards to work, women were being considered for jobs and careers not previously available. Below are two letters which show this change was just beginning.

The first is a request from Anaconda Britannia Mines (the Britannia Mine's name at that time) to the provincial mines inspector (representing the Minister of Mines, responsible for mine regulations) to employ a woman as a geologist underground. The second is the response.

What do these letters tell us about the attitudes of the era?

Today, women are an active part of mining. Women work in all fields in the industry, from executives to laborers. In fact, the industry is actively seeking women to enter into the industry to meet their future workforce needs.

In some skilled areas, companies are finding they prefer women. For example, companies have found women are better haul truck drivers than men. It turns out; they do not drive the trucks as hard, which reduces the maintenance costs. On average, they also are less risk taking, resulting in fewer accidents.

The following links showcase women in mining:

<http://www.miningaustralia.com.au/features/q-and-a-with-a-dump-truck-driver>

<http://barrickbeyondborders.com/2012/06/women-making-strides-in-mining/>

http://www.beyondthemine.com/2012/inspiring_our_people/diversity_and_global_inclusion/women_in_the_workforce

<http://www.bcmm.ca/careers-in-mining/site-coordinator>

<http://www.bcmm.ca/careers-in-mining/financial-analyst>

<http://www.bcmm.ca/careers-in-mining/environmental-permitting-manager>

<http://www.bcomm.ca/careers-in-mining/senior-process-engineer>

<http://www.bcomm.ca/careers-in-mining/process-engineer-metallurgist>

<http://www.bcomm.ca/careers-in-mining/geoscientist-in-training>

In contrast, below are excerpts from our aural histories from women talking about life at Britannia.

After reading the aural histories and letters, discuss how life today differs from life at Britannia for women. How would you feel if your life was like one of the Britannia women?

Discuss women in mining today.



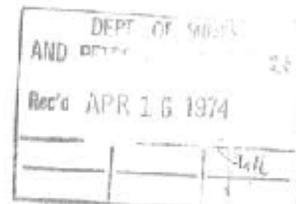
ANACONDA BRITANNIA MINES

DIVISION OF ANACONDA CANADA LIMITED

BRITANNIA BEACH, B.C. V0N 1J0 PHONE (604) 896-2221

April 9, 1974.

Mr. J. W. Peck,
Chief Inspector of Mines,
Department of Mines and
Petroleum Resources,
1837 Fort Street,
Victoria, B. C.



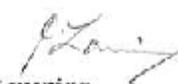
Dear Mr. Peck:

We wish to make application for your approval under Section 17(3) of the Mines Regulation Act to employ a female underground.

She is Mrs. Catherine Taylor Aimone, aged 25. Mrs. Aimone will be employed as a Geological Assistant, and it is not anticipated that her duties will require her to work underground more than once a month, and in all probability considerably less. Mrs. Aimone holds a B.Sc. degree in Geological Engineering and has been previously employed as a Geological Technician at Steep Rock Iron Mines, Atikokan, Ontario.

We trust that you will be able to give us the necessary approval.

Yours very truly,


J. Lovering,
Manager.

REC/je

April 19, 1974.

Mr. J. Lovering,
Manager,
Ascenda Britannia Mines,
Britannia Beach, B.C.
VON LJO

Dear Sir:

With reference to your letter of April 9th I would advise that it is in order to employ Mrs. Catherine Taylor Adams as a geologist assistant underground at Britannia.

For the employment of women underground our Department is asking that they be medically examined on an annual basis rather than two years which is permitted under Section 13 of the Mines Regulations Act. We do not know if environmental conditions underground such as high humidity, lack of sunshine, possible fumes, have any different effect on females and thus we should set up a record to determine this.

Yours very truly,

JWP:ln

J.W. Peck, P.Eng.
Chief Inspector of Mines.

JOAN EHLE – WORKED AT BRITANNIA 1962-1974

Well it started out with just looking for a job. Came to Britannia in 1962. Had a friend in Halifax, whose husband was in the navy and she wanted a companion to come on the train with her so I went with her. I kept asking where should I stay? I stayed in Vancouver, had a couple of tests and this job came up here in Britannia.

I got interviewed by Mr. MacDonald. I came at 12:00 and they closed for an hour for lunch and he said well can you wait for an hour until we get back. I went down on the wharf and it was the most glorious day of my life. The place was all green and blue, the sun was shining; all these stately trees going up the hill and the water and sky so blue and I thought, "Oh, if I could only live here, would I ever be happy!"

I came back and we talked for a while and Jim MacDonald said would you like to try it. I said when do you want me? He said how about tomorrow. He arranged for the Engineers to pick me up in Vancouver. They had an apartment here for \$10.00 a month so, the price was right. Good salary too in those days. It was \$267.50 a month in 1962 that was as much as a registered nurse was making.

I ran into some problems because I'm from fishing, and not mining. It was quite funny because I had to get somebody to interpret the reports. I was secretary for everybody. I typed for the manager, and did reports for the geologists and the different departments. Gradually they got a few females. It was quite interesting. Typical American company; they got their pound of flesh out of you. You did a lot of work.

We had a geologist come in one day and say "You girls should have hero medals . . . You girls are so busy all the time." We just kept working. It was quite interesting.

HANNA SWANSON – LIVED AT BRITANNIA 1914-1958 (MOVED HERE AS CHILD)

When I first started to work I worked in the telephone office and then I came to Vancouver for a couple of years and took stenography work. So I worked in the office, first of all as a typist and I did work relief work on the IBM machines. They had IBM machines there in the late twenties when the repairman had to come up from Seattle and there was no print out. It just showed on a thing-a-ma-jig on the machine and the idea of having things correct was to punch everything twice and then they'd run these cards through and if you got the same number twice you assumed it was right. But then if you mistook a four for a seven once, because it was poorly

written it would be poorly written the second time. Then they later on got the very most modern IBM machines there. I didn't work on them. They did the payrolls mostly and the records of everything. Originally they started punching up cards for people and you could just take out their employment card and it showed their nationality, age and that sort of thing but it was mainly payroll, keeping track of the warehouse stock, which was done by hand before. They always had modern calculators. I remember they had these Burroughs, which were on the stand and you pulled the handle. I had an electric typewriter in the early 50's if not in the late 40's. I worked for the Secretary-Treasurer, CP Charlton so that you got to know a lot of the business. I always said he was one of the best bosses I ever had.

The office building is still standing there and it was a very well equipped office ever since I can remember; modern adding machines and typewriters and the IBM, they were rather a rarity. How many people worked in the office? Let me see. There was the manager and his secretary; the Secretary Treasurer and his (secretary) and another stenographer. There would be about four or five accountants and about four or so in the time office, and they also at the back, had a metallurgist and a chemist and a draughtsman in that back office. I don't know how many they had in the early days. They must have had a big payroll during construction but then at the peak when they were shipping their largest amount of ore, and they were also doing some construction work, they had well over 12, 13 or 1400 employees so of course they'd have more then with the bigger payroll, more warehouse stock to look after. The only women originally working in the office were stenographers and then when they got the IBM machine they had girls punching the IBM machines. Then they had a girl doing nothing but looking after the warehouse, keeping that stock in. Later on they had one girl doing bookkeeping.

DOROTHY FRISBY – ARRIVED IN 1925 AS A SCHOOLTEACHER AT TOWNSITE

GETTING THE JOB:

Her father was employed by BM& S and heard of the vacancy.

WORKING AT BRITANNIA:

It was an odd situation in that the secretary was the wife of the Superintendent. Only one secretary for the School Board. It was she who interviewed me and if anything was done at the school it was she who asked whatever it was she wanted.

We did have an inspector come up once a year, for half a day and that's all. We were on our own apart from an experienced teacher who had grades 5 to 8.

Inspectors are hired by the Provincial Government unless they are in a city and then they are hired by a school board, but in my case there was really not a school board or anyone who knew much about teaching except this teacher who had grades 5 to 8.

They (Company) were very generous to our school, but I was paid by Victoria, Dept of Education there, I received \$98 and then BM&S Company gave me a bonus of \$16 a month. There must have been some arrangement with Victoria that they were obliged to pay for something.

At that point in time, we were so glad to have a position and we were not in contact with other people as one is today. The communications were very minimal.

I wouldn't say that the community was involved in the school. The teachers were in charge and the secretary of whom I just spoke about.

They (company) supplied extras and we had great help and marvelous equipment if we ever put on a concert. I think the best thing we ever did was Peter Pan, which was very ambitious. The lady that was in charge of that was English; she had come to Britannia with her husband; he was a geologist; and she had been the first Peter Pan in England.

We had all the wires, all the engineers, helped with the equipment; we had wires that would have the children flying across the stage; something that had never been done before in British Columbia! It was quite exciting. She was very knowledgeable in plays and I took part in the plays and helped with the plays. I think I learned a lot from her.

Parental involvement in School? No, the teacher was highly respected but if a parent was not pleased he or she came directly to the teacher and asked, what is happening? I did not have any unpleasant associations with the parents. They all cooperated and I was trying to do my best.

Remember, I had no experience and she (Grade 5-8 teacher) would tell me certain things that were not suitable and I always cooperated. At nineteen, you don't argue with somebody that was three times your age!

I taught 3 ½ years in Britannia and the big wide world was waiting for me. In 1929 I saw this advertisement for a teacher in Penticton; I thought this is for me. I applied for it and got it.

The paper came up on the boat and it was picked up there and put on the skip and you got it the next day.

Differences in Penticton: this school had 10 rooms and I had only one grade instead of 4 grades (at Britannia)

It was much easier (Penticton) but they gave me a slow class. I worked as hard and they were all nice children. It was a different set up and it was a learning experience for me.

I returned to Britannia for personal reasons. (Went back to teach.) I would not have gone home. There was not enough money at that point in time to be dependent on my parents. Once I started to earn money I wished to continue and look after myself.

I think the children at Britannia had to do a lot on their own and if you can imagine, 10 beginners and 5 grade four students, you would know that I had the grade fours helping the grade ones and this continued. It was beneficial socially and it was part of growing up for the grade fours and they were very obliging.

I had the first four grades and I finally rebelled, having 58 children and four grades and my parents backed me in saying you can resign. You don't have to. It was very, very hard work! So, I went to the secretary of the so called School Board and told her I could not continue, I was resigning and she said no, you will not resign, we'll get another teacher.

And so then there were three teachers and what a relief! She came after Easter (probably in my third year) because it was then that I had said I would have to resign. We divided the grades between the three of us and instead of having four grades, I think I had two and 30-odd children, which was heaven compared to what I had had.

I also taught music. Music had never been taught there and the children who attended this school were the children of parents from mines in Scotland, England and Europe.

About a hundred (students at the school) - to have 30 children was really easy. But then I found when I went to Penticton, and taught there, that the children were not as well informed or as well behaved as they were in Britannia.

I am only speaking for Britannia Mines and remember I told you, there was a community at the Beach but we were up 3000 feet from that community. There was little contact as far as the children were concerned. The only

contact that the adults had, was going to the Beach for a Dance and the Beach people coming up to the Mine.

Well, Britannia Beach was at sea level. You had to come up on a skip, which was towed by a cable. The cable was attached to this open skip and up you went to the 2000 level. And there, you boarded another skip, which had an engine and you chugged away around the curves, to Britannia Mines and that was the Townsite.

We didn't have any mentally handicapped or physically handicapped.

Squamish was a very, very small place then, and we had better schooling at Britannia Mines and the Beach because there was money that was given towards education and the facilities.

Britannia Mines was a closed town or BM& S. The two communities were closed towns and that meant no one could live at the Beach or the Mine unless they were employed by the BM & S Company.

“Those who carried on their education certainly didn't come back except for holidays. Those who had their high schooling went to Vancouver and found various jobs. Some were, how shall I put it? They were intelligent but they were not interested in school, although they did their best when they were there. Then you had your student who was a natural learner and he or she were the ones who carried on and I cannot think of anyone who did not do well when they left Britannia because of the discipline of their parents and the type of lives that they lived as children.”

My mother came of a generation where she stayed home until she was married.

“In those days, there were three things that you could do. You could be a teacher you could be a nurse, or you could work in a store and my parents said you will be a teacher or a nurse. You're never going to stand behind a counter. And that was the thinking of my generation. I couldn't stand the sight of blood so I became a teacher!”

Britannia was very well organized and there were emergencies but it was all looked after by the employees. My responsibility was the children.

“I was respected and accepted and I was careful, being a teacher, that I had to maintain a certain decorum.”

“Now remember again, this was a closed town and if anything had happened the authorities would have backed me, not the individual.”

I didn't socialize during the week, I was marking papers every night. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays were my days and I only associated with my own age. It would be maybe 6 or 8 of us. But again, we all socialized together because everyone came to the dances or the entertainment on a Saturday night.

We did have a Church, United Church, it was, and I found myself as the choirmaster at 21 and I couldn't play the organ. They said, well we need someone and there isn't anyone, it's time we did, and people are asking for a choir. So, we got along and those who were in the choir, the singers, helped me and we got by and again, this was a marvelous experience for me and I loved music and I loved singing.

This lady whom I spoke about from London, was very interested in plays and getting the community to work together and she also wanted to teach people that there was so much outside in that big world that they would never see, unless they knew about it.

And so I took part in plays and the funniest one was when the Superintendent decided he would have a Band and they would have a Blackie night and so on the stage, all these people who worked in the Mine had black faces and wore tails, where they got them I don't know and they asked me if I could sing something and I said I could not sing a southern song. I didn't know any and it didn't seem appropriate. But I said I do have a friend who dances and we could perhaps put on a song and dance deal, which we did. We wore tails, we blackened our faces and we danced onto the stage, singing I never see Maggie alone. We brought the house down and we were so thrilled with ourselves when clapped and clapped that we kept coming back on the stage and we kept bowing and bowing until the band leader, who was the Superintendent, yelled at us to get off the stage!

The depression was on its way in 1929 and the 30's were called the dirty thirties and Britannia almost closed down. There was a skeleton crew and those were very bad times, fortunately my father continued there but many people, they just had to leave and you could not live there unless you were employed. And I should tell you that there must have been a hundred houses at least and they all had a number and the first house that we moved into was number 39, I'll never forget it and then we moved up onto the other side of the track, which meant we were people who were going to stay there and I think it was number 8 but I better not say for sure

Question from Interviewer: "So why did you leave?" To get married. You couldn't teach when you were married, that was a no, no, you simply didn't. I lived in Vancouver with my husband and then the war came along and he

was changed, we went to Victoria and we went to Chilliwack and my husband went overseas.

“There was something special about the friendships at Britannia and the good times that we had.”

ADA CURNOW - LIVED AT BRITANNIA 1922-23 AND AGAIN 1926-1949

First visit was to be with sister whom I hadn't seen for about 11 years.

I was so happy there, (1922-23) not only to be with my sister but that I had lived in cities those years and she needed me and I was very happy to stay during that length of time”

My sister passing away was the reason I went back three years later at which time I married my brother in law who had been at the Townsite for many years and was left with 3 little girls which I took care of until we left the mine in '49. And apart from being with the young children and being really happy there”

“I would say what impressed me most after living in cities, was the friendliness and the whole atmosphere of the townsite. Everyone made me feel welcome and I have many, many happy memories of those years spent there.

There was something to do...bridge parties watching tennis, swimming...and it was a delightful change for me.”

It was such a complete change I liked living there. I just loved the Townsite. It was such a nice family place. It was just delightful. I felt very badly when we had to leave.

They (the children) all went to high school at the mine and they took part in whatever there was to take Part in...It was perfect.. to bring up a family”

MARGARET ROBERTSON - MOVED TO BRITANNIA AFTER GETTING MARRIED AT THE AGE OF 22, IN 1939

MARGARET'S JOB WAS TELEPHONE OPERATOR AT BRITANNIA BEACH – EXTRACTED FROM HER WRITTEN HISTORY.

I used to work that old Magneto switchboard! I'd say “Operator” and then they'd say whatever they wanted, like “Rainbow Lodge.”

It was right at the front desk at the Mine. They all came in; I was the one that they saw. They would go through the switchboard, and I'd get whoever they wanted, all the way up to Bridge River and Lillooet. Whistler wasn't even on the map. And Duffy Lake, and Rainbow Lodge.

I was one of the few women who worked. I had two little kids. People would say "Oh! That Margaret Robinson has gone to work! Two little girls! Isn't it a shame? They'll come to no good end."

Times were really tough. I worked for BC Telephone before I was married, as soon as you married you were expected to quit and stay home. A more boring job! But I loved my job at the mine.

I worked after the girls were in school, not when they were babies. I didn't work until afternoon shift, and it was only for about an hour and a half until George got home. And I only worked weekends at first. In those days, married women with children did not work!