



BLAZING THE TRAIL FOR WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION OF LAND SURVEYING

By NYSAPLS Public Relations Committee

At a glance, the small number of women in the land surveying field may look disheartening. But this ignores the ongoing revival that is currently underway. It's true – land surveying is inarguably one of the largest male-dominated fields in the country. Nonetheless, in recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of women entering the field and reclaiming a space that has always been meant for them. As we enter Women's History Month, we acknowledge the efforts that paved the way for an inclusive and progressive movement of women in this field and look back on one women's determination over 200 years ago that paved the way for today's surveyors.

In the early 1800s, Alice Fletcher changed the landscape of American history by becoming the first known woman land surveyor in the United States. Her journey, like many who have entered the industry, was catalyzed by her curiosity to learn and combine her diverse areas of expertise that would become integral in her development. As an early land surveyor, Fletcher quickly understood the magnitude of her craft and the defining solutions it could provide. Revered as the "Measuring Woman," she would later use her surveying skills to protect the Omaha people who were at risk of being removed from their native lands and sequestered to Indian Territory. Fletcher fought for the right to their legal titles, and by 1884 had secured 75,931 acres in 954 allotments to 1,194 Omaha people.



Alice Fletcher set the trailblazing pace that would be replicated by many more women to come. But in addition to that inspiration, there was still more work to be done. Irene Barclay became the next woman land surveyor to make an impact during a time of heightened gender discrimination.

After the passing on the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1922, Barclay pursued a degree in the previously banned profession of surveying – making her the first woman in the UK to qualify as a certified surveyor. Like Fletcher, Barclay used the profession as a tool for advancement and worked

tirelessly to improve poor housing and living conditions plaguing the city of London. Although, these are but two women in the revolutionary timeline of surveying, Fletcher and Barclay understood that their placement in this field was not to be dismissed but enhanced through the betterment of those around them.

According to Emily Pierce, a member of the New York State Association of Professional Land Surveyors (NYSAPLS), the spirit of women in this profession has and continues to be one of perseverance and limitless expression. She believes that it is incredibly satisfying to use her skills to definitively provide answers where there had previously only been speculation or guesswork. Someone coming into the profession can specialize in one or multiple of aspects of the field of surveying, or you can do it all, from start to finish. If people knew what an amazing career it provides, there would be a waiting list of candidates.

Women have worked for generations to break into the field of land surveying and now make up about 16 percent of all workers. However, the work is not over and there are many more seats at the table ready to be filled.

Ashley Metz, another fellow member of NYSAPLS, finds it fulfilling to be a land surveyor, and she's never shy about sharing that. She knows that people are always going to buy land, and people are always going to need land surveyors. She also believes that it's important to have a number of women entering the field so we can carry on that tradition.

That tradition that is still well and alive – and becoming increasingly in demand for more women to take the helm. With a general shortage of surveyors in the market, employers are keen to hire the best talent, whether you happen to be a man or a woman. This has allowed more women to showcase their skillsets in an industry leaning in their favor. The time is now for women to embrace a field that has been influenced and molded by the revolutionary women of surveying. Their efforts to dismantle arbitrary beliefs of gender-based skills have opened the door for many with the hopes of becoming more than a surveyor, but an advocate for the greater wellbeing of all who call this land home.