

The Earliest Women Geologists in Geophysics

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Abstract

As we approach and celebrate the 100th Anniversary of AAPG, the AAPG PROWESS committee has investigated the 100 earliest women in petroleum geology. Two of these pioneers chose a geophysical path, paving the way for subsequent women interested in a geophysical/geological career. Elizabeth Stiles and Anne Frank Robbins began their careers acquiring their degrees in geology.

Elizabeth Stiles was a student at the University of Texas (1910) and studied there over two years and worked at the BEG. Eventually, she went to work in Houston, continuing her career during WW I when oil and gas companies readily hired women. She was one of nine women founders of the Houston Geological Society in 1923. She was with Gulf Production, Geophysical Department when she joined AAPG in 1927. Elizabeth became fascinated by geophysics early on and incorporated the science into her life and career. She was a Founding member of SEG in 1930, the only woman along with 29 men. She was active in the society and was Vice President in 1927 and was on the Executive Committee as Secretary/Treasurer in 1937-38. She co-authored a few of the early papers published by SEG. She was one of the first two associate editors of GEOPHYSICS. In 1938-39, she became "acting manager" until someone was hired. Her colleagues felt she "set the standard" for volunteer efforts.

Anne Robbins Frank came into the profession 25 years after Stiles during WW II. After working a year with the Ohio Company in Illinois, she found that she intensely disliked the climate and was determined to find a job elsewhere. She had befriended "doodle buggers" working for the Ohio Company and she got an offer to join General Geophysical to help replace field crew members going to fight in WW II. She was the first female geophysical crew chief and spent 11 years moving about the Gulf coast residing in more than 40 different towns, helping to gather, process and interpret geophysical data. Withstanding the culture shock alone was a worthy accomplishment - going from a relatively sheltered East Coast intellectual environment to the rough and sometimes crude world of doodle bugging took an amazing amount of fortitude and thick skin. Some of her seismic interpretations were drilled and led to discoveries. She rarely got to enjoy those successes, but she always enjoyed the work. She married a fellow crew member and eventually had a baby boy, but kept working. She was fortunate she did, as her husband died young and she needed to raise her son alone.