

## The Howard M. Utter and Helen Pike Utter Scholarship Fund

Helen never collided with the glass ceiling many women encounter as they rise in their chosen fields. Indeed, the idea of any kind of a ceiling was incomprehensible to the pioneer lumber woman whose \$25,000 endowment to the Fulton County Community Foundation has been earmarked for the Pike Memorial Park in Akron.

“No holds are barred to women in the lumber industry,” she told colleagues, “You can put a floor on people, but you can’t put a ceiling on them. A woman can do anything in this field and go anywhere she wants to go.”

Proof of that came in her decision to become the fourth generation of the Pike family to enter an industry many considered “for men only.” She is believed to be the first woman in Indiana to have a timber buyer’s license.

The Great Depression had the country in its grips when Helen Pike told her father, D.A. Pike, that instead of returning to Manchester College for her junior year, she would prefer going to the woods. He promptly helped her acquire a \$300 portable sawmill, a Rumley steam engine, and a bunch of timber near Hanna, Indiana.

Operating as D.A. Pike Lumber Company (her father’s operation was known as Akron Sawmill), Helen and her crew cut railroad ties in northern Indiana and southern Michigan until her marriage to the late Howard M. Utter.

Eventually, the couple returned to Indiana and established a permanent operation in Akron that eventually evolved into today’s Pike Lumber Company, a firm that ships quality hardwood lumber all over the world and that has instituted timber and reforestation programs in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio.

Today’s Pike Lumber Company, with its state-of-the-art sawmills in Akron and Carbon, is a far cry from the earlier, crude mills Helen Pike operated. Her leather boots, which she described as protection against snake bites rather than a fashion statement, and the trusty yellow Studebaker roadster that was traded for a truck because her new husband said they needed it a damned sight more than they needed a car, have been relegated to memory.

Helen Pike Utter worked actively in the company she founded until Alzheimer’s dimmed her pioneering spirit and she was forced to retire. She was cared for by her three children and ten grandchildren. Sadly, her husband passed away in 1995, and Helen passed away five years later on November 8, 2000.

Like her gift to the Fulton County Community Foundation, however, her legacy lives on. There still aren’t many women in the lumber industry, but, as Helen Pike Utter learned more than 60 years ago, those who choose that field quickly discover there are no ceilings—only opportunities waiting to be developed.

