

A WOMAN'S PLACE IS UNDER THE DOME

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

A celebration of the women
who have served in the Michigan Legislature
in the first century since
the 19th Amendment.

*Dedicated to
Senator Eva McCall Hamilton,
Representative Cora Reynolds Anderson,
and each of the 200-plus women
who have served
—and are serving—
in the Michigan Legislature.*

“When we think of the women’s suffrage movement,
we often think of the national movement.
We think of women in white dresses
marching in parades
in Washington, D.C. and New York City.

But we don’t often pause to think about the women
who were working in communities across the state
for this same goal.”

—Valerie Marvin,
Michigan State Capitol Historian and Curator

From the editors: This publication is a compilation of information on the women who have served in the Michigan Legislature, as well as those in the state’s four top elected executive branch offices—Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney General—since the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. With limited exceptions, information is current as of August 26, 2020, the centenary of ratification.

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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 3.

A joint resolution ratifying the proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States extending the right of suffrage to women.

Introduced by Senator James Henry

Whereas, The Sixty-Sixth Congress of the United States of America, at its first session, in both Houses by the Constitutional majority of two-thirds thereof, has made a proposal to amend the Constitution of the United States of America, by resolution as follows:

“Joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

“Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to

the Constitution, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.

“ARTICLE—

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

“Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

Resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the State of Michigan, That, in the name of the people of the State of Michigan, we do hereby ratify the said

proposed amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

Resolved further, That a copy of this preamble and resolution, certified by the President and the Secretary of the Senate and by the Speaker and the Clerk of the House of Representatives, be transmitted to the Governor of the State of Michigan, and by him to the Secretary of State of the United States.

Adopted by
the Senate (25-0):
June 10, 1919.

Adopted by
the House of Representatives (84-0):
June 10, 1919

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

The President laid before the Senate the following:

The women of Michigan wish to express their appreciation and gratitude to the honorable members of the Michigan Senate for its prompt action in ratifying the Constitutional Amendment for Woman Suffrage.

We hope and believe that this step when taken throughout the United States, will make for a better and more representative government and that the ideals for which women stand will more speedily be emphasized in the body politic.

Signed—

THE WORKERS FOR EQUAL SUFFRAGE
Per Mrs. Huntley Russell

June 11, 1919

(Chronological index is on page VII.)

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EVA MCCALL HAMILTON

Senator, 16th District (Grand Rapids), 1921–1922

Republican

Born: December 13, 1871, Memphis (Mich.)

Married: Charles B. Hamilton (m. 1893)

Died: January 28, 1948, Grand Rapids

Education: Normal (teacher) Training (institution unknown)

First woman elected to the Michigan Legislature



Image courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

“Mrs. Hamilton is the first woman elected to the Michigan senate.”

It’s such a simple sentence, but it says so much. Placed near the end of Mrs.—or rather, Senator—Hamilton’s official *Michigan Manual* biography, it is both an important declaration, and an extreme understatement.

Senator Eva McCall Hamilton wasn’t just Michigan’s first female Senator. She was Michigan’s first female legislator. She was a longtime unofficial lobbyist, who spent years traversing the halls, committee rooms, and chamber galleries of the Capitol before running for, and being elected to, state office. She was a suffragist. A former teacher. Someone deeply concerned about public health, and the way state law affected women.

She was, in a very real sense, the manifestation of the woman suffrage movement, which first sprang up in Michigan in the early 1870s. To some her presence was a victory. To others it was a threat.

She was brave, polite, humorous, circumspect, and industrious. Her position brought her privilege—and intense, widespread scrutiny. Some showered her with conspicuous praise. Others waited to see if, when, or how badly, she would fail.

If there is one lesson that Senator Hamilton embodied, it is that being the first wasn’t always glamorous.

Many days, it was very, very hard.

Eva (or Evelyn) Mary McCall was born on December 13, 1871, to Anna Pearce and John McCall. She and her six siblings grew up in a farming family in Memphis, situated on the border of St. Clair and Macomb counties. Little is known about her education, save for the fact that she finished high school, studied at an unnamed normal (teachers) college, and took “special courses.” Upon obtaining the necessary certification she taught school and was an instructor in what was then called physical culture—a health, fitness, and strength training movement.

Sometime in the 1890s, Miss McCall met Mr. Charles (C.B.) Hamilton, a Canadian-born businessman living in Mt. Pleasant, where he co-owned a grocery and provisions store and was an active member of the local First Baptist Church. On July 7, 1893, Eva and Charles were married at the McCall home in Memphis.

Mr. and Mrs. C.B. Hamilton, as the couple was often identified, made their home in Mt. Pleasant, where Eva quickly became involved with the Baptist Church. By 1894 she was active in the Young People’s League, and in 1896 she was elected Church Clerk. At the same time Charles was expanding his business, and both Hamiltons were actively participating in the local Reading Circle.

In 1898, Eva and Charles moved to Grand Rapids. Over the next several years Charles built up a successful career in sales and advertising.

At various times he worked for the Fox Typewriter Company and Berkey and Gay Furniture, two of Grand Rapids' most widely known and successful manufacturers. By the late 1910s the Hamiltons were living a fashionable neighborhood—now known as Heritage Hill—and summering at Walloon Lake.

Once again, the Baptist Church proved to be an important social and educational conduit for Eva. The Hamiltons attended and became members of the prominent Fountain Street Baptist Church. It didn't take long until Eva was once again active in the Young People's League and was the leader of its "Hamilton Division" of women which sought to improve members self-culture through reading and music. Given the size and social prominence of the congregation, it's clear that membership at Fountain Street provided Eva a space to grow both her faith and her position in Grand Rapids society.

By 1910 Eva's name began to appear in the newspapers attached to a new cause—that of equal, or woman, suffrage. It's hard to know just when or how her interest in, and support for, the topic was piqued. Perhaps it stemmed from her childhood on the farm, as the Grange was one of the earliest and most vocal supporters for woman suffrage in Michigan. Maybe she was influenced by her fellow church members, and the growing popularity of suffrage in Grand Rapids. Or maybe her uncle Thomas McCall's two terms in the state House (1905-1908) kindled a desire within her to find and use her own political voice.

Eva's suffrage advocacy began in Grand Rapids, where she was a founding member of the Equal Franchise Club. Her work soon took her to the Capitol, where she attended statewide Michigan Equal Suffrage Association (MESA) conventions and lobbied the Legislature to put a suffrage amendment on the ballot. Newspaper coverage from this period suggests that, like many of her peers, she knew she had to maintain an enthusiastic, helpful, and womanly persona, so as not to be classed among the stereotypically dour, unattractive, and bitter women suffragists. "She has a charming personality and an ease of address which wins the sympathy of those whom she approaches upon the subject of votes for women . . . she believes in persuasion as the proper method of attaining the desired result instead of blatant force and brick-throwing," one journalist attested. Ultimately Eva would rise among the ranks of Michigan suffragists to serve as the chair of MESA's Advertising Committee. In 1915 she was part of a state delegation that visited Washington, D.C. and attended a suffrage fête hosted by President Wilson at the White House.

Obtaining the vote was not Hamilton's only policy goal. Over the years she studied and publicly advocated increasing Mother's Pensions, which provided support for women "serving in the double capacity of fathers and mothers." She believed that mothers should have equal guardianship of their children, and that women must retain control over their own earnings and property. She advocated for sanitary improvements to schools, supported anti-tuberculosis efforts, and in 1915 helped found a Grand Rapids chapter of the Woman's Peace Party.

In 1917 the Grand Rapids Press congratulated Eva on her successful effort to establish a farmer's market in the city. "Woman as Heroine Wins City Market: Mrs. C.B. Hamilton Bests Alderman in Fight for Municipal Trading Site," a headline proclaimed on March 20. By this point Mrs. Hamilton was increasingly seen as an unrelenting reform advocate who was unafraid to publicly cross swords with her male opponents.

All of these experiences doubtlessly served Hamilton well when she decided to run for office in 1920. After defeating two former State Representatives in the August primary, Hamilton won the 16th district seat with a majority of 8,872 votes (out of 32,314 cast). Newspapers across the state and country carried news of her election in articles bearing titles ranging from "Ten Women Elected to Michigan Offices" to "Fair Member to Grace Michigan Senate." Clearly there were different ways to interpret Eva's election.

On January 5, 1921, Evelyn Mary McCall Hamilton walked onto the floor of the Senate Chamber to find her desk—No. 16—adorned with congratulatory flowers sent by her sister suffragists. Alongside her 31 colleagues she swore the oath of office as administered by Supreme Court Chief Justice Joseph H. Steere. It was a momentous day for Senator Hamilton—and for women across the Peninsular State who could now see someone that looked like them serving in the Legislature, authoring and amending state laws.

Senator Hamilton's familiarity with the legislative process ensured that she was prepared for the work before her. On the second day of session it was announced that she would chair the Industrial Schools Committee and serve as a member of the committees on Banks and Corporations, Insurance, Normal Schools, and Taxation. Soon she began introducing the dozen bills she authored. One-third of them provided the official appropriations for various state entities, including the Soldiers Home, the Industrial School for Boys, the Board of Correction and Charities, and the Board of Registration for Nurses. The rest dealt with a variety of financial and policy matters including relief for the blind, teaching the United States and Michigan Constitutions to schoolchildren, and the protection of lotus flowers (water lilies).

Not all of her bills passed. Doubtlessly many men, and more women, across Michigan were disappointed when Senate Bill No. 180, a bill to establish a teacher's retirement system in Michigan, died in the Education Committee.

Nearly every day, somehow, Senator Hamilton made history. On her first day of session she cast her first vote and offered a resolution to create a committee to wait upon the Governor and inform him that the two houses were ready to receive communications from him. The resolution was adopted, and the President of the Senate promptly appointed Senator Hamilton one of its three members. The day after (January 6) she became the first woman member to attend speeches by the outgoing and incoming governors in the House Chamber. (The incoming Governor's speech was not yet called the State of the State, but it served a similar purpose.) At the end of January, she introduced her first bill. On April 8 she ascended the Senate rostrum and wielded the gavel as chair of the Committee of the Whole.

A hush crept over the chamber on March 17, 1921, when Senator Hamilton rose to give her "maiden speech" in support of a bill that would have required applicants for marriage licenses to supply proof that they were free of sexually transmitted diseases. The spread of such diseases, she told her colleagues that day, doomed countless young wives to "involuntary suicide." The bill failed by a vote of 14 to 16, but undoubtedly few in the room soon forgot the courage and fortitude exercised by one woman on behalf of countless others.

Some people heartily approved of, and supported, Senator Hamilton's work. Others did not. She lost her 1922 primary bid for re-election to Charles Sligh, a prominent (and undoubtedly powerful) furniture manufacturer who garnered the labor vote. Multiple newspaper articles suggested that her campaign was doomed by her failure to support a movie censorship bill. At the heart of this matter, of course, stands the fact that many in Michigan were still struggling to understand how women thought about politics, and what motivated their votes.

Eva's governmental achievement and her public service work continued to define her after her one term was over. She was active in the Michigan League of Women Voters (the predecessor of the League of Women Voters of Michigan) from 1919 onward and was both an officer and committee chairman of the National Order of Women Legislators in the 1930s and 1940s. While on a European tour in 1928 she was the guest of the Speaker of the House of Commons in the British Parliament.

In 1946, members of the Senate welcomed Mrs. Hamilton back for the purpose of recognizing the 25th anniversary of her service. It was undoubtedly a bittersweet moment for Eva who was still the only woman to sit in Michigan's upper chamber. "You are using me as a means of conveying to the women of Michigan your regard for them," she told them. "There are many women in Michigan who have been trained to occupy positions of public trust." And yet, Where are they?, her speech implied.

Less than two years later Eva McCall Hamilton died at her home in Grand Rapids on January 23, 1948, eleven days after her husband. Both were cremated. Obituaries and articles published across the state acknowledged her ground-breaking election and service—as well as the fact that no woman had yet followed in her senatorial footsteps.

Just over a year later a bipartisan group of politically-involved women, led by former Representative Elizabeth Belen (page 6), commissioned a portrait of Senator Hamilton for display in the Capitol. It hung for many years on the Senate's south wall before being removed due to condition issues. A second portrait of Senator Hamilton, depicting her sitting at desk 16 in the chamber, was commissioned and unveiled by the Senate in 1995. Today, one hundred years on, many visitors, employees, and sitting female officeholders continue to draw inspiration and strength from seeing Senator Hamilton in Michigan's State Capitol.



Senator Eva McCall Hamilton (standing, center) looks on as Governor Alexander J. Groesbeck signs a bill into law. Image courtesy of the Griffiths Rare Book Room, Library of Michigan

CORA REYNOLDS ANDERSON

Representative, Iron District (L'Anse), 1925–1926

Republican

Born: April 10, 1882, L'Anse

Married: Charles H. Anderson (m. 1903)

Died: March 11, 1950, L'Anse

Education: Haskell Indian Institute

First woman elected to the House of Representatives



Image courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

The first woman elected to the Michigan House of Representatives and the first identified Native American to serve in the Michigan Legislature, Cora Belle Reynolds Anderson holds a unique and important place in Michigan history.

Born on April 10, 1882, in L'Anse, she was the second daughter of Robert Bailey Reynolds and Mary Madeline Bachaud, a member of the Keweenaw Bay Chippewa/Ojibwa tribe. Cora studied at the local Zeba Indian Mission school before graduating from L'Anse High School in 1899. Over the next few years, she attended multiple normal schools (including the Haskell Indian Institute—now the Haskell Indian Nations University—in Lawrence, Kansas) and taught in the L'Anse area.

On December 25, 1903, she exchanged marriage vows with Charles H. Anderson, a lumberman and farmer. During their first year of marriage they operated the Thomas Hotel in downtown L'Anse. Eventually the Andersons purchased a 160-acre farm that they worked for many years. This led Cora to join the Grange, an advocacy organization dedicated to improving the economic and social positions of farmers and rural communities. Elected to the prestigious office of State Flora in 1912, she held the post until becoming U.P. Deputy Grand Master in 1920.

Public health was also very important to Mrs. Anderson. Prior to running for office, she was secretary of the Baraga County Anti-Tuberculosis Society and led the local effort to fund and hire a county health nurse. Together with her husband, Cora also campaigned aggressively for Prohibition, helping turn Baraga County and the state dry in the mid-1910s.

Slowly, as the years passed, Cora evolved into a public, admired figure. In 1924 outgoing Iron District Representative Patrick O'Brien encouraged Anderson to run for his old seat. She agreed and won the Republican primary with an eight-hundred-vote plurality. This sealed her place in history, as she had no Democratic opponent in the general election.

As a freshman Representative, Cora received assignments to the Agriculture, Insurance, and Northern State Normal School committees, and was named chair of the Committee for the State Industrial Home for Girls. She introduced six bills regarding cosmetology licensing, sanitary conditions in public inns, fishing rights for Native tribes, and accounting and reporting in township offices. As a sitting member she publicly voiced her opinions on a variety of controversial issues including a gas tax, an income tax, the death penalty, and child labor.

It was not easy to be the first woman in the House. Reporters noted her every move, publishing comments about her dress,

hair, complexion, and where she liked to shop. They asked her how she was going to vote and suggested that she would try and exert a particular feminine influence over her male colleagues.

Her efforts to improve hotel cleanliness led to her being deemed “the first practical bed-maker in the legislature.” When she introduced House Resolution No. 11, in which she thanked staff for their recent improvements to the chamber, it was reported that “The only woman member of the legislature today diverted the attention of the assembly from weighty matters of state to house cleaning.”

Throughout her time in the Legislature, Cora endured. As with all trailblazers, she knew that her behavior had to remain superior to that of her detractors if she was to leave a fertile legacy for others. She kept her head high, supported the issues that were important to her, and refused to publicly call out or denounce those who sought her failure.

Representative Anderson lost her re-election bid in 1926. In a final insult her successor, William Birk, made sure to note in his official legislative biography that he defeated the only woman ever elected to the House of Representatives.

A few years later the Andersons left L’Anse for Bay City, where Charles worked as a Prohibition agent and an investigator for the United States government.

Yet it was L’Anse that always remained home. Here Cora Reynolds Anderson died on Saturday, March 11, 1950, and is today buried with her husband and parents.

The Cora Reynolds Anderson House Office Building

In December 2000 the House of Representatives named their new office building for Representative Anderson. A beautiful portrait of its namesake, inspired by period photographs in the Baraga County Museum, was commissioned and installed in the lobby of the Anderson Building in late 2016.



Image courtesy of Baraga County Historical Museum

ELIZABETH BELEN

Representative, Ingham County 1st District (Lansing), 1937–1938

Democrat

Born: December 22, 1886, Westphalia

Married: Christopher Belen (m. 1909)

Children: 3

Died: July 24, 1975, Meridian Township

Education: St. Mary's School of Nursing, Grand Rapids



*Image courtesy of the Forest Park Library & Archives,
Capital Area District Library*

On January 6, 1937, Elizabeth Lehman Belen became only the second woman in state history to take a seat in the House of Representatives. At a time when most women were homemakers, she enjoyed professional careers as a nurse and a florist. She was an active, well-respected figure in the Lansing community for decades.

Born in Westphalia to Joseph and Theresa (Miller) Lehman, Elizabeth grew up in a large Catholic family. As a young woman she studied at St. Mary's School of Nursing in Grand Rapids, graduating in 1908 with her nursing diploma.

In 1909, Elizabeth married Christopher F. Belen, who was also a Westphalia native. They moved to Lansing only a few years later where they raised three children: Lucile (1912–2010), Frederick (1913–1999), and Virginia (1918–1964). As the years passed, their family became known for two things: Belen's Flowers (a longtime Lansing florist) and public service.

Belen's service began as a young woman during World War I, when she was active with the Red Cross, efforts to establish soup kitchens, and nursing flu patients during the 1918–1919 pandemic. Determined to improve the health of her fellow Lansing residents, she helped establish the Visiting Nurse Association and her obituary states that she assisted at the home births of over 1,600 babies.

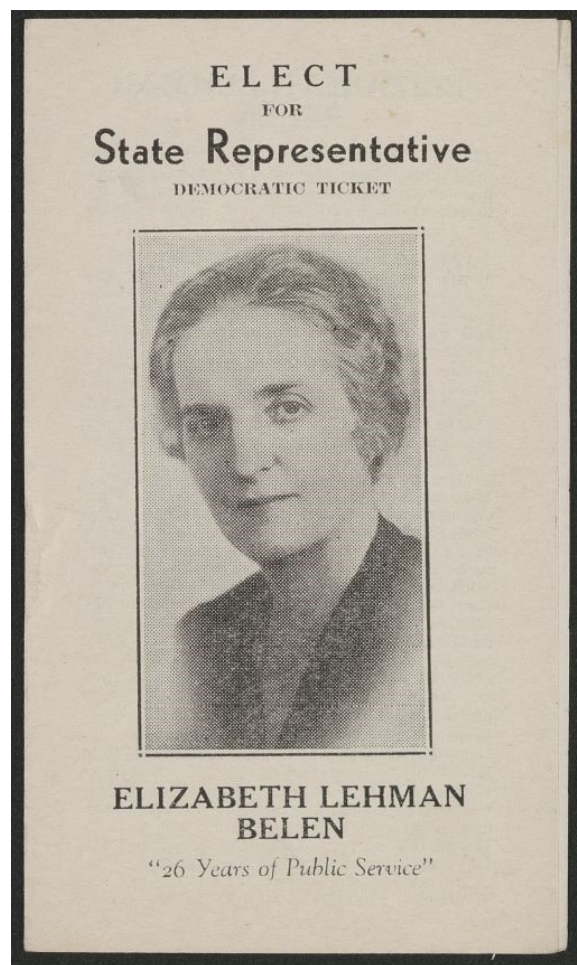
In 1936, Elizabeth became the second woman, and the first female Democrat, elected to the House of Representatives. Representative Belen was appointed the chair of the House Committee on the Girls' Training School (a reform institution in Adrian) and the Horticulture Committee. In addition, she served on the committees for Labor, Religious and Benevolent Societies, the University (as there was only one), and, of particular importance to her Lansing home, the Michigan School for the Blind Committee. She was an active legislator, introducing a broad variety of bills on topics including public schools, employer liability, elevator inspections, the proposed regulation of osteopathy, the promotion and distribution of Michigan apples by the unemployed, the protection of the blind, and appropriations for claims for medical and surgical treatment relating to the deadly 1934 Hotel Kerns fire in Lansing.

Belen credited her interest in politics, and her party affiliation, to the influence of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Though she failed to be re-elected in 1938, she remained active in Democratic circles in Michigan. From 1939-1943 she served as the vice chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee, and she helped found the Michigan chapter of the Eleanor Roosevelt League of Women. She was a delegate to the Democratic party conventions in 1940 and 1944 and was an active member of and twice president of the National Conference of Women Legislators.

Following the 1948 death of Senator Eva McCall Hamilton (page 1), Belen led an effort to commission a portrait of the ground-breaking figure (who was a member of the Republican Party). The portrait, sponsored by the Michigan Women's Government League, was unveiled in the Senate Chamber in 1949.

After a long and productive life, Elizabeth Belen died in Lansing on Thursday, July 24, 1975. An article announcing her death in *The State Journal* referred to her as the “Grand Old Lady of Ingham County’s Democratic Party.” Belen was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame in 2014.

(Belen’s daughter Lucile carried on her mother’s tradition of public service as a member of the Lansing City Council for nearly four decades. She also led a successful campaign to stop the removal of trees from the State Capitol lawn in order to create more parking. The younger Belen was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame in 2001.)



*A 1936 campaign leaflet
Image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library,
University of Michigan*

DORA HALL STOCKMAN

Representative, Ingham County 2nd District (Lansing), 1939–1946
State Board of Agriculture, 1919–1931

Republican

Born: August 4, 1872, Marilla
Married: Francis M. Stockman (m. 1889; wid. 1936)
Gustof Weinkauf (m. 1947)
Children: 4
Died: May 25, 1948, Berkeley, Calif.

Education: M.A., education, Hillsdale College

First woman elected to statewide office



*Image courtesy of the Michigan State University
Archives & Historical Collection*

In the spring of 1919, just a few months after Michigan men voted to amend the State Constitution and grant women the right to vote—and a year and a half before Eva McCall Hamilton (page 1) would be elected to the Senate—Dora Hall Stockman was elected to the State Board of Agriculture, making her the first woman elected to a statewide office in Michigan.

Born on August 4, 1872, to Leander and Lucy (Bennet) Hall, Dora grew up on her family’s farm in Marilla Township in northeast Manistee County. She attended Benzonia schools and began teaching at the age of 16. Around the same time, she met her future husband Francis at a religious revival meeting. They married when she was 17 and he was 34.

As a young woman, Stockman started writing for publication. Throughout her life, she penned at least three books and numerous songs, poems, and plays. Her master’s thesis, written while she attended Hillsdale College, focused on the life of Christ and was printed by the American Sunday School Mission. In addition, she contributed many articles to agricultural and educational publications. Stockman also taught for three years, including at Hillsdale.

Farming was central to Stockman’s life. In 1903, she and her husband bought a farm near what is now the intersection of North Grand River Avenue and Delta River Drive, where they educated their two youngest sons and raised Holstein cattle. As farmers, the Stockmans were active in the Grange and in 1914, Dora Stockman was elected State Grange Lecturer. That prestigious office gave her access to—and constant interaction with—farm families across Michigan. She gave dozens of talks on topics such as food preservation and home economics. Like many Grange members, she also supported and advocated for temperance—Stockman was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and a Dry candidate for the convention to ratify the 21st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—and woman suffrage. Stockman was also instrumental in establishing a junior Grange called the 4-Leaf Clover Club, now 4-H, and was also the editor of the *Michigan Patron*, the official paper of the Grange.

In 1919, Stockman was nominated on the Republican ticket for the State Board of Agriculture. Her candidacy struck a particular chord with women and she won her seat handily, earning just over a half-million votes. Since the board’s main purpose was to administer Michigan Agricultural College, Stockman worked to promote the school’s liberal arts curriculum and focused on improving the education of female students and women who attended summer agricultural and homemaking institutes on campus. She served two terms—12

years—on the board and in recognition of her accomplishments, was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1934, the first woman to be so honored by the college.

By the mid-1930s, Stockman was a widow and struggled with health issues but she was not finished with politics. At the urging of her friend and Lansing automotive magnate Ransom E. Olds, she was elected to the first of four terms in the House of Representatives in 1938. While in the House, having seen the effects of poor health in her own family and knowing how difficult it was for rural farmers to obtain insurance, she co-authored legislation encouraging the creation of nonprofit hospital service corporations and a nonprofit medical care plan. As a result, the Michigan Medical Service was formed—a forerunner of today's Blue Cross/Blue Shield—and she served on the board until her death. Representative Stockman was also a co-author of legislation requiring political party committees to have a chair and vice chair of opposite sexes.

The year after she left the Legislature due to complications of diabetes, Stockman married Gustof Weinkauf. She died in May 1948 in California.

A historical marker honoring Stockman stands on the Michigan State University campus in the area between Morrill Hall—home of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources—and the Hannah Administration Building, and she was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 2006. She is interred in Hurd Cemetery in DeWitt with her first husband.



*Representative Dora Stockman (second from left) joined with three other unidentified women as Governor Luren D. Dickinson (seated) signs a bill
Image courtesy of the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan*

RUTH THOMPSON

U.S. Representative, 9th District (Whitehall), 1951–1956
Representative, Muskegon County 1st District
(Muskegon), 1939–1940

Republican

Born: September 15, 1887, Whitehall

Died: April 5, 1970, Plainwell

Education: Muskegon Business College, 1905

First woman to represent Michigan in Congress



1939–1940 *Michigan Manual*

The daughter of a Norwegian father and a Swedish mother, Ruth Thompson was born in Whitehall and attended school there. She graduated from the Muskegon Business College in 1905. That same year, Thompson was appointed registrar of the Muskegon County Probate Court, serving there for 20 years. During this time, she studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1924, the first woman in Muskegon County to do so. She challenged the incumbent probate judge in 1924—he fired her upon losing the election—and was probate judge of Muskegon County for the next 12 years. She was president of the Michigan Association of Probate Judges.

In 1930, she was selected as a delegate by President Hoover to the National Child Welfare Conference in Washington, D.C.

Thompson was elected to the House of Representatives in 1938. In the Legislature, she chaired the Girls' Training School Committee, and also served on the Judiciary, Revision and Amendment of the Statutes, Social Aid and Welfare, and State Psychopathic Hospital committees.

In the early years of World War II, Thompson worked in various civilian roles for the federal government, including the Old Age and Survivor's Insurance Division of the Social Security Board in Washington, D.C., and the Labor Department's Wage and Hour Division. In 1945, she went to Europe to work in Headquarters Command of the U.S. occupation forces in Germany, and on the Adjutant General's staff in Denmark. She returned to private law practice in Michigan a year later, and was chair of the Women's Prison Commission of Michigan.

In 1950, Thompson was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first woman to represent Michigan in Congress. Among the candidates she defeated in the Republican primary were the Muskegon County G.O.P. chairman and a former lieutenant governor. Additionally, she was the first woman ever appointed to the House Judiciary Committee. She introduced a bill to establish a formal academy for the pages of the House and Senate, proposed the creation of a federal Department of Peace, and supported the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. In her three victories, she never earned less than 55 percent of the vote in the general election.

She lost her Republican primary in 1956 to Robert Griffin, and subsequently retired from politics. At age 77, she went into a nursing home and died five years later in the Plainwell Sanatorium. She was never married and had no children.

A state historical marker honoring Thompson was erected in 1994 in Whitehall, and she was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1998.

EVELYN NOWAK



1945–1946 Michigan Manual

Representative, Wayne County 1st District (Detroit), 1945–1946

Democrat

Born: May 18, 1913, Detroit

Married: Francis J. Nowak (m. 1939)

Children: 1

Died: September 30, 2013, Germantown, Tenn.

Education: A.X., real estate, University of Michigan

A native of Detroit and the daughter of John W.—a Detroit Fire Department captain—and Emma Marschick, Evelyn Marschick attended Western High School. She earned an associate degree in real estate from the University of Michigan, and was a clerk in the office of the Wayne County Register of Deeds for six years in the early 1930s and for the Wayne County Board of Auditors for two later that decade.

On July 1, 1939, she married Francis Nowak—who had just been elected to his first term in the House of Representatives. They had one daughter, Carole. Nowak was a stenographer for the House for several sessions in the 1940s. She was, for a time, president of the Dearborn chapter of the Women’s Council of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers.

Francis was successful in the Democratic primary in 1944 (his fourth term) but was convicted—along with 16 other current and former legislators—on a graft charge. Evelyn was then named by the Wayne County Democratic Party to run in his place. She was subsequently elected as one of 21 members for the Wayne County 1st district, and, with Ingham County’s Dora Stockman (page 8), was one of two women in the House.

Representative Nowak chaired the Girls’ Training School Committee; and was a member of the Michigan Children’s Institute, Private Corporations, Social Aid and Welfare, and State Prison of Southern Michigan committees. (Interestingly, this prison is where her husband was serving his sentence.) Nowak lost her bid for re-election in 1946. After leaving the Legislature, Nowak worked for the Dearborn Public Library.

Nowak was a member of Immanuel Evangelical Church and the Order of the Eastern Star. Francis Nowak died in 1976; and Evelyn died in Germantown, Tennessee in September 2013, aged 100.

BERNICE WATSON

Representative, Genesee County 1st District (Flint), 1947–1948

Republican

Born: August 16, 1901, Breckenridge

Married: Bert (m. 1928; wid. 1945)

Children: 1

Died: April 15, 1980, Flint

Education: A.B., Central Michigan College of Education



*Image courtesy of the Clarke Historical Library,
Central Michigan University*

Bernice Margaret Fox was born on August 16, 1901, to William and Ida Fox of Breckenridge. The eldest of three children, she attended the Central Michigan College of Education (now Central Michigan University) and obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree with a life certificate in teaching. Additionally, she took courses in public speaking and dramatics at the Misner School of the Spoken Word in Omaha, Nebraska, and did graduate work in political science at Michigan State College and the University of Michigan.

Like many women of her generation, Bernice found work in the growing public school system. After serving successive one-year appointments as principal of the Maple Rapids and Middleton high schools, she moved to Owosso, where she taught high school English, public speaking, and drama for two years. Next, her career took her to Flint, where she spent several decades in the classroom teaching public speaking, history, and government.

In 1928 Miss Fox married Mr. Bert Watson, an electrician and World War I veteran. The couple welcomed a son, Ronald, who was still a young child when his father died in 1945.

After being “drafted” to run for office in 1946, Mrs. Watson was elected to the House of Representatives following a campaign supported by her students. “For years I’ve been telling my students that if they want good government they have to take an active part in it,” Mrs. Watson was quoted in a 1947 newspaper article. “Now I’m finally taking my own advice.”

The first woman from Genesee County to serve in the Legislature, Representative Watson was appointed chair of the Committee on the State Library, and was a member of the committees on the Central Michigan College of Education, Public Health, Education, Social Aid and Welfare, and the Revision and Amendment of the Constitution.

While in the House, Representative Watson authored or co-sponsored a dozen bills and two concurrent resolutions on matters ranging from taxes to the penal code, appropriations, Sunday hunting, education, and the local selection of regional library board trustees. Four of her bills—including one that gave teachers work credit for attending teachers’ institutes (or professional development)—gained the approval of the Legislature and were signed by Governor Kim Sigler.

Watson’s experience in public speaking served her well during her legislative term. As Michigan’s only sitting woman solon, she gave speeches on the radio and in-person before local, regional, and statewide organizations. After joining the National Order of Women Legislators (a group which counted Representative Elizabeth Belen [page 6] among its members), she was invited to speak at their 1948 convention in Washington, D.C.

Like her predecessors, Watson found herself the object of much attention in the Capitol and the press. A poem, written by her colleague Representative Hermann and printed in the House Journal for March 18, 1947, highlights her otherness in the male-dominated House. While probably considered complimentary by its author, its tone reveals much about the demeaning attitudes of her co-workers.

“Little lady sits in front
 Respect and admired.
Represents her district well
 Does everything required.

She is loved by all the members,
 All of whom are her defenders.
Little lady, you are bright
 You will keep us doing right.”

Ultimately, Watson needed to earn a living and support herself and her son—something she could not do on a legislator’s part-time salary. She returned to her classroom in the fall of 1948, her legislative career over.

Bernice Watson died in Flint on April 15, 1980. In an odd twist, her obituary in *The Flint Journal* noted that she was a member of the National Order of Women Legislators, but failed to mention her 1947–1948 term in the House of Representatives.



*Representative Bernice Watson sits proudly at her desk near the House rostrum
Image courtesy of the Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University*

NORMA DEE EDWARDS

Representative, Wayne County 1st District (Detroit), 1949–1950

Democrat

Born: July 11, 1912, Spring Arbor Township

Married: Seward Alexander Kenyon (m. 1934; div. 1939)

Died: October 26, 1994, Royal Oak

Education: LL.B., Detroit College of Law, 1947

A.B., Wayne State University, 1941



1949–1950 Michigan Manual

Born in rural Jackson County as one of 11 children, Norma Edwards lived in Detroit from 1913 until 1920, then moved to Sanilac County, attending school in Applegate and Croswell. She left home and returned to Detroit in 1925, attending the Detroit public schools while working as a maid. In 1931, Edwards moved again and worked as a clerk in the Saratoga County, New York welfare department—advancing to home investigator and later assistant to case supervisor. She returned to Detroit in 1935, and earned her bachelor's degree from Wayne State University in 1941.

After graduation, she worked in the research department of the United Auto Workers-Congress of Industrial Organizations—UAW-CIO—and later for trucking companies in Detroit. In 1947, Edwards earned her law degree from the Detroit College of Law and went on to practice law for 45 years.

In 1948, Edwards won election to the House of Representatives as one of 21 members (including Martha Griffiths [next page]) for the Wayne County 1st District.

As an attorney, Edwards had a part in *Romano v. Auditor General* (1949) upholding the constitutionality of a pay raise enacted by the Legislature in late 1948 for the subsequent Legislature after the adoption of a constitutional amendment that November.

She was unsuccessful in primaries for the Senate in 1950 and for the House in 1952 and 1954. She was also unsuccessful in the primary for delegate to the 1961 constitutional convention.

Edwards was a longtime season ticket holder at the Hilberry Theatre at Wayne State University (formerly Wayne University). She died in 1994.

MARTHA WRIGHT GRIFFITHS



1949–1950 Michigan Manual

Lieutenant Governor, 1983–1990

U.S. Representative, 17th District (Detroit), 1955–1974

Representative, Wayne County 1st District (Detroit), 1949–1952

Democrat

Born: January 29, 1912, Pierce City, Mo.

Married: Hicks G. Griffiths (m. 1933)

Died: April 22, 2003, Armada

Education: LL.B., University of Michigan Law School, 1940

A.B., University of Missouri, 1934

First woman elected Lieutenant Governor of Michigan

By 1982 when Martha Griffiths became the first woman elected Lieutenant Governor of Michigan, she had already had a long and groundbreaking career. In her decades as an attorney, state legislator, judge, and congresswoman, Griffiths was a pioneer for women in politics.

Martha Griffiths was born to Charles and Nell Wright in Missouri in 1912. Griffiths graduated valedictorian from Pierce City High School in 1930 and attended the University of Missouri, where she graduated with a political science degree in 1934. Griffiths met her husband Hicks G. Griffiths in college, and the couple attended law school at the University of Michigan together, becoming the first married couple to graduate from that school in 1940. Griffiths took a job in the legal department of the American Automobile Insurance Association in Detroit in 1941 and during World War II, she worked as a contract negotiator in the Detroit district for Army Ordnance. After the war, Martha and Hicks Griffiths opened a law office together, and a year later, future Governor G. Mennen “Soapy” Williams joined them in the practice.

In 1948 Griffiths was elected to represent the 1st district of Wayne County in the House of Representatives; she was elected to a second term in 1950. In April 1953, Governor Williams appointed Griffiths a recorder and judge of recorders court in Detroit. She was the first woman to serve in this position and conducted more than 430 criminal examinations during her short term. In 1954 Griffiths was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, just the second woman to represent Michigan in Congress, she went on to win election to nine more terms, serving for 20 years.

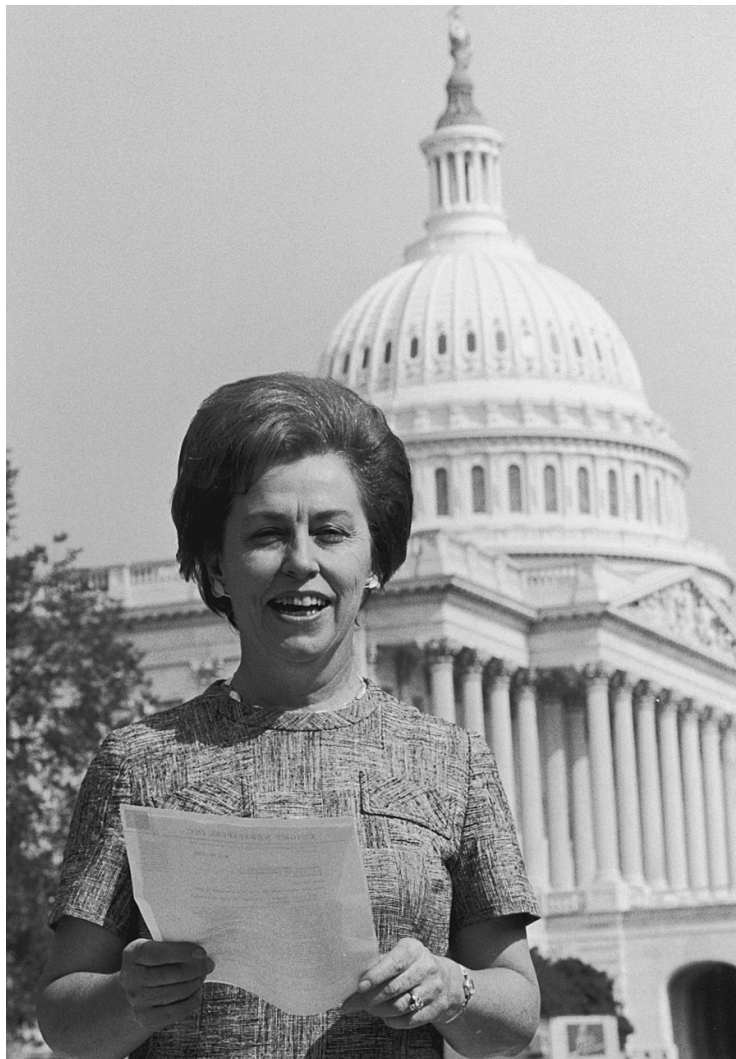
During her career in Congress, Griffiths concentrated on civil rights and tax reform. In 1962 she became the first woman assigned to the Ways and Means Committee where she served till 1975. In this position, Congresswoman Griffiths introduced laws to provide tax relief for single parents, amend tax laws to assist married couples and widows, and reduce social security taxes paid by low-income families.

Griffiths also made significant contributions to women’s rights, eliminating laws that denied women employment, housing, credit, pensions, and educational opportunities. During discussion on landmark civil rights legislation, Griffiths worked to add an amendment to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which protects individuals against sexual discrimination in employment. Known as the ‘mother of the ERA’ Griffiths introduced legislation for the Equal Rights Amendment every year after she entered the U.S. House in 1955. After years of effort, Griffiths was able to move an ERA bill to the floor for a general debate, and with her advocacy, the U.S. House passed the

ERA in 1971, followed by the Senate in 1972. Ultimately the ERA was not ratified by the requisite 38 states and did not become a part of the U.S. Constitution.

In 1974 Griffiths declined to run for another term in Congress, and in 1982 she became the first woman elected to serve as lieutenant governor, running on a ticket with James Blanchard. After two terms as lieutenant governor, Griffiths resumed her law practice. Griffiths was inducted to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1993, and today she is commemorated by the Martha Griffiths Rare Book Room at the Library of Michigan.

Martha Griffiths passed away at her home in Armada in 2003. Remembered for her quick wit and strong sense of conviction, Griffiths once said in a 1990 *Chicago Tribune* interview "I don't know really that I have so much perseverance as I do a sense of indignity at the fact that women are not justly treated... If we are America, then we ought to be what we say we are... What people sought in this land was justice."



*U.S. Representative Martha Griffiths outside the United States Capitol in 1970.
Image courtesy of the Library of Congress*

CHARLINE WHITE



1951–1952 Michigan Manual

Representative, Wayne County 11th District (Detroit), 1955–1959;
Wayne County 1st District (Detroit), 1951–1954

Democrat

Born: September 1, 1920, Atlanta, Ga.

Married: Christopher M. Crawford (m. 1943; div. 1945)
LeRoy G. White (m. 1945; div. 1954)

Died: September 7, 1959, Detroit

First African American woman to serve in the Legislature

When Charline Rainey White was sworn into office on January 1, 1951, she was the African American woman to serve in the Legislature. She would go on to serve in the House for five terms.

Charline Rainey was born on September 1, 1920 in Atlanta, Georgia to Cargile Rainey and Fanny Hurley. The oldest of four children, White had three younger sisters, only one of whom was born when, in 1923, the family moved to Detroit. Like many African American families who moved north during the Great Migration, this was likely inspired by a wish for greater economic opportunity and to escape the segregated conditions in the southern states.

White graduated from Cass Technical High School in Detroit and attended Poro College and Wayne State University. After her time in school, Charline White worked as a florist and owned a florist shop. In June of 1943 she married Christopher Marlowe Crawford another florist living in Hamtramck. The marriage lasted two years.

By the time of her election to the House of Representatives, Charline White was working in the advertising industry. She worked for a time as vice president of Wayne Record Distributor, Inc., treasurer of Vest Advertising Agency, Inc., and vice president of B. & W. Advertising service. She was also married to LeRoy G. White, a politically involved advertising executive and the host of the Detroit radio program “Rockin’ with LeRoy”. This marriage lasted nine years, but also ended in divorce.

In 1950, White decided to run for the House of Representative in the Wayne County 1st District. At this time, the voters in the first district in Wayne County voted to fill 21 seats. This resulted in her facing off against 109 other Democrats in the primary and 67 other candidates in the general election. White came in 9th, winning one of the 21 seats. White was re-elected four times; however by 1953, the Legislature had passed a law requiring cities to divide into multiple districts once they reach a certain population. From that point, White would run to be one of two representatives for her new district.

During her time in the Legislature, Representative White advocated for a number of public health reforms including licensing for certain professions and increased reporting of communicable diseases. She also introduced legislation related to civil rights including a bill to prevent employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry. White supported women’s rights by sponsoring bills calling for the equal pay of women and men and expanding employment opportunities for women. She also supported establishing a minimum wage and increasing retirement benefits.

On September 7, 1959, Charline White passed away while in office at age 39. She had missed session several times in the previous year due to illness. Her funeral was held at Second Grace Methodist Church in Detroit. White’s death, while significant in its own right, was

also newsworthy because the House of Representative was evenly divided in 1959. Her death led to the Republican Party gaining a temporary 55-54 majority in the House.



Representative Charline White (right) and Senator Cora Brown with the first portrait of Senator Eva McCall Hamilton in the Senate Chamber in 1953. Image courtesy of the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

CORA BROWN

Senator, 3rd District, 1955–1956;
2nd District (Detroit), 1953–1954

Democrat

Born: April 19, 1914, Bessemer, Ala.

Died: December 17, 1972, Detroit

Education: LL.B., Wayne University
A.B., Fisk University



*Image courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection,
Detroit Public Library*

First African American woman to serve in the Senate

A newspaper reporter described Senator Cora Brown, only the second woman to serve in the Senate, as quiet and statuesque when she took the oath of office on January 14, 1953. Clearly the reporter failed to sense the steel core for which she would soon become known. For “Madame Senator,” as he called her, was fueled by a deep, abiding sense of justice, and a conviction that power must be used to help those who needed it most.

Cora Mae Brown was born April 19, 1914, to Alice (Steinbeck) and Richard F. Brown, Jr. An only child, she moved from Bessemer, Alabama to Detroit with her parents at 7, part of the Great Migration.

The Browns, a tailor and a cook, prioritized the education of their bright daughter. After graduating from Cass Technical High School in Detroit, Cora enrolled at Fisk University in Tennessee, where she completed a degree in sociology in 1935. She then returned to Detroit and got a job as a social worker for the Works Progress Administration. From 1941 to 1946 Miss Brown worked in the Detroit Police Department preparing legal cases. She quit to study law at Wayne University—now Wayne State—earning her LL.B. and passing the bar in 1948.

After four years in private legal practice, Cora ran for, and was elected to, the Senate in 1952. Senator Brown quickly established herself as a principled legislator unafraid to take independent action. Less than two months into her first term she successfully rallied colleagues in both parties to defeat a bill that would have required the defense in criminal trials to give contact information for character witnesses to the prosecution. It was, a reporter said, a “hands-down victory” for the freshman.

Her legal experience inspired her to author a series of bill assisting court employees. One successful package granted county employee status to circuit court stenographers and made them eligible for county social security plans, thereby providing long-term security for many working men and women.

Brown used her voice and position to advocate across the state. A popular speaker, she addressed many organizations, including the NAACP, the Eleanor Roosevelt League of Women, YMCA forums, Sunday school classes, and a summer camp for Farm Bureau women. Numerous organizations, including Zeta Phi Beta, the Prince Hall Masons, and the National Council of Negro Women recognized her work with awards and honors.

Voters returned Senator Brown to Lansing in 1954. As a second-term member she continued to write and support progressive legislation. While her proposals to prohibit wage discrimination between sexes and create state-level commissions on fair employment and the aged failed to pass, she did win stiffer penalties for businesses who failed to provide full and equal accommodations with uniform pricing. Under the amended law businesses who failed to comply could be stripped of their professional licenses. Brown and her allies called it a

“hammer” that could be used to truly enforce anti-discrimination statutes.

Senator Cora Brown voted her conscience and spoke her mind. She supported civil rights, expanding the highway system, the 18-year-old vote, and better care for the mentally disabled. She consistently worked to improve the judicial system and address inequalities in the law. Her colleagues didn't always agree with her, but they did respect her. They too came to understand that Madame Senator was both steely and statuesque.

In 1956, Brown tried unsuccessfully to win the Democratic nomination for the 1st U.S. House district. Like many civil rights reformers, she broke with her party to endorse Dwight D. Eisenhower for President. The following year—in August 1957—the Eisenhower administration appointed her a special assistant general counsel in the Post Office Department—the forerunner to today's United States Postal Service. In this position, she fought against the distribution of pornography through the mail. After four years working for the federal government, she moved to Los Angeles where she practiced law for nearly a decade.

In 1971, Brown returned to Detroit and was appointed a referee with the Michigan Employment Security Commission, the first Black woman to hold this post. She died in Detroit in 1972. Obituaries in *The Detroit Free Press* and *The (Lansing) State Journal* recalled her position as the “perennial thorn in the conscience of the Michigan Democratic Party.”



Image courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

JOSEPHINE D. HUNSINGER



1955–1956 Michigan Manual

Representative, 1st District (Detroit), 1973–1976;
16th District (Detroit), 1965–1972;
Wayne County 12th District (Detroit), 1955–1964

Democrat

Born: October 28, 1914, Acosta, Pa.
Married: Raymond L. Hunsinger (m. 1930)
Children: 1
Died: October 5, 2010, Union Lake

Born before American women achieved full suffrage, Josephine Hunsinger was the first woman to enjoy a multi-decade tenure in the Michigan Legislature. In a career that lasted over twenty years, she brought a unique female, first-generation, working class, pro-union perspective to the Capitol.

“Josie,” as she was known to her family, was born on October 28, 1914, to Catherine (Moskal) and Joseph Drivinsky, Polish/Austrian immigrants living in Acosta, Pennsylvania. When she was a child, her father broke his back in a coal mining accident, which left him bedridden for the next several decades. Watching him lie there, unable to work and having received little compensation or care from his employer, Josephine resolved to do what she could to right such wrongs. “I said to myself that someday I would try something to correct situations that allow this kind of thing to happen,” she told an Associated Press staff writer decades later.

As a youth, Josie attended parochial, night, summer, sewing, and business schools in an attempt to piece together an education that would result in viable employment opportunities. In 1930, at the age of only 15, she married Raymond Hunsinger, a Detroit factoryworker. Five years later she gave birth to their daughter Irene. Together the family participated in the labor movement in the late 1930s. When Raymond’s plant went on strike, Josephine helped organize a food kitchen for workers and their families.

In the early 1940s, Hunsinger got a job checking cars for General Motors. Soon she was an active member of the United Auto Workers, serving as a board member and political action community volunteer for Local 130. By the mid-1950s, leaders within the Wayne County Democratic Party were recruiting her to run for office. She threw her hat in the ring for a House seat in 1954 and obtained the most votes in a twelve-way Democratic primary. That November, voters in Wayne County’s 12th district elected her and Raymond Dzendzel to serve as their two representatives.¹

As one of three women in the 110-member House, Representative Hunsinger quickly learned that her position brought her both the ability to speak on behalf of other women and the barbs of her male colleagues. When another Representative introduced a bill to cut the number of hours a woman could work, Hunsinger made sure to tell a nearby reporter that while its sponsor might think it noble, it was in fact another threat to the professional aspirations of many women. “They’re going to hear from me on this one,” she promised.

While in office, Hunsinger introduced numerous bills designed to further women’s political representation. In 1963, she pushed her colleagues to add “sex” to the list of types of discrimination that a new Michigan Civil Rights Commission would investigate, along with religion, race, color, and national origin. In the early 1970s, she suggested amending the State Constitution to ensure that two of the seven Supreme Court justiceships be held by women. She fought to retain women’s traditional dower rights (which guaranteed a widow 1/3 of her husband’s property upon his death), and, in 1974, introduced a resolution urging all political parties to nominate female candidates for the office of lieutenant governor. The trouble, she argued, was “that [b]oth political parties endorse total equality for women but they do not see fit to endorse qualified women for top positions.”

All eyes were on Representative Hunsinger in January of 1959, when a new session opened in the Capitol. The November 1958 election produced a split House, with 55 Republicans and 55 Democrats. When Josephine was confined to the hospital for “major abdominal surgery,” thereby decreasing the number of Democrats to 54 on opening day, the G.O.P. declared itself the majority and seized control, electing leadership and appointing committee chairs. The House Democratic caucus—and a recovering Hunsinger, who was photographed looking grim in her hospital bed—were not pleased.

Throughout her two decades in the Legislature, Representative Hunsinger worked on a number of complicated and controversial issues. She supported establishing a state-licensed osteopathic medical school in southeast Michigan (it was eventually relocated to MSU). In keeping with her union roots, she voiced support for a prevailing wage law in 1965. During the heated session of 1959, she joined several of her Democratic colleagues in reluctantly supporting a Republican-sponsored tax increase to save the state from bankruptcy. She supported the adoption of daylight saving time, opposed cross school district bussing (intended to racially integrate schools), and fought to abolish the state's unique one-man grand jury.

Of all the contentious issues Representative Hunsinger tackled, nothing gleaned as much negative press as her opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Legislature voted to ratify the amendment in 1972. Billing herself as the defender of Michigan's housewives, Hunsinger introduced a joint resolution to rescind the state's approval in 1974. As a result, she was removed from the House Women's Rights Committee and drew the ire of many within her own party.

At the height of her legislative power, Representative Hunsinger was elected Majority Whip, the first woman to hold the position in the Michigan House. But, as the years passed, her politics became too conservative for her increasingly liberal district. She lost elections for the State House, Senate, and Congress in the mid-1970s, and, after several poor showings, retired from politics in the mid-1980s.

Josephine "Josie" Drivinsky Hunsinger died at age 95 in 2010.

¹ In 1953 the Legislature passed and Governor Williams signed Public Act 77 establishing districts in large cities that elected two or three members each.



*Representative Hunsinger posed for a picture while hemming Bicentennial-themed drapes for her Capitol office in 1975.
Image courtesy of the Petoskey News-Review*

LUCILLE H. McCOLLOUGH



1955–1956 Michigan Manual

Representative, 31st District (Dearborn), 1965–1982;
Wayne County 16th District (Dearborn), 1955–1964

Democrat

Born: December 30, 1905, White Rock

Married: Clarence McCollough (m. 1925)

Children: 3

Died: March 18, 1996, Dearborn

Education: Western State Normal School

Lucille McCollough was born in White Rock in 1905 to H. William and Stella Hanna. McCollough became the oldest of four surviving siblings, her youngest brother having died in infancy. Her mother Stella died of tuberculosis at the age of 34 and as a result, her father temporarily placed the children in the care of other family members. McCollough spent part of her childhood living with her grandmother.

In 1923 McCollough graduated as valedictorian of her class at Harbor Beach High School. She attended Western State Normal School—now Western Michigan University—and taught in a one-room schoolhouse in Sherman Township, Huron County for a short time. She also worked as a secretary in the personnel office of the Graham-Paige Motor Company before marrying Clarence L. McCollough in 1925 and settling in Dearborn. She and Clarence had three children together, and by the time McCollough passed away she had eight grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.

McCollough was active in many community organizations including the Dearborn Historical Society, the Dearborn Business and Professional Women's Club, Littlefield Boulevard United Presbyterian Church, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1494. She was also a founding member and director of the Dearborn Federation of Civic Associations. McCollough started her political career as a member of the Dearborn City Council, and then won election to the House of Representatives in 1954. Representative McCollough served in the House through 1982. Except for 1967–1968, she was chair of the Education Committee from 1965 until leaving the House. She also served on committees concerned with colleges and universities, public health, and the care of senior citizens and youth. In 1970, her son Patrick was elected to the Senate, making them the first mother and son serving simultaneously in any legislative body in the United States.

She was known an early advocate for special education services and motor vehicle and voter registration laws, and also sponsored Michigan's first homestead property tax exemption legislation in the early 1960s. In 1982 McCollough lost her re-election to Representative William Runco. During her 28 years in the Legislature, Representative McCollough maintained a 100 percent attendance and voting record. On the last day of session in 1982, Speaker Bobby Crim and the Clerk of the House presented a certified copy of the last roll call vote she cast as an affectionate token of a record which the Speaker said "will never be equalled or broken." After leaving office, she remained active in the Dearborn community and served on the Michigan Commission on Aging.

McCollough died in 1996 aged 90 from complications of a stroke and is interred in White Rock Cemetery.

McCollough described her political career in a 1984 article in *The Detroit Free Press*, saying "I made up my mind... that I would try to set a record for women. I wanted to overcome the feeling that women were not just as capable as men." She was a 2002 inductee into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

MAXCINE YOUNG



1965–1966 Michigan Manual

Representative, 23rd District (Detroit), 1965–1966;
Wayne County 2nd District (Detroit), 1960–1964

Democrat

Born: June 1, 1907, Laurens, S.C.

Married: Luther Cowan (m. 1924)
Harold Young

Children: 1

Died: March 12, 2000

A native of the Palmetto State of South Carolina, Maxcine Young was born in Laurens and attended South Carolina State College. She married Luther Cowen in the summer of 1924 and gave to birth to their son, John Luther Cowan, the following year. The pair split before the end of the decade.

Maxcine moved to the Bronx in New York City with Harold Young, a truck driver, in the late 1930s. Here Mrs. Young became politically active as part of a successful campaign to open jobs driving city buses to African Americans. She along sang in the choir of Abyssinian Baptist Church, where Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. ministered.

Sometime in the 1940s the family moved to Detroit, where Mrs. Young worked on the census, sold real estate, and became the city's first female disc jockey at WJLB. She also continued her political efforts, working on G. Mennen Williams' 1948 gubernatorial campaign and organizing Democratic groups in two Congressional districts. She also served as a precinct delegate for fourteen years, was an active member of the League of Women Voters, and helped form the Junior Deputy Sheriffs of Wayne County in an effort to fight juvenile delinquency.

Young first won election to the House in 1960 to fill a vacancy in the Wayne County 2nd District when Representative Frank Williams resigned. After serving in the second extra session of the Legislature that year, she won election to the subsequent full term.

During her time in the House, Representative Young served on committees ranging from Educational Institutions and Religious & Benevolent Societies to Local Taxation and Social Aid & Welfare. In her final term, she chaired the Committee on Public Safety—one of the first three African American women to chair a committee in the Legislature—and was vice chair of the State Capitol & Public Buildings Committee.

Young's career was not without controversy. In 1961 she was accused of forging signatures on nomination petitions for Eugene C. Keyes, an unsuccessful candidate for the Democratic nomination for Lieutenant Governor in 1960.¹ The matter drew considerable negative press, leading Governor Swainson to strongly suggest that she should resign. Ultimately Young was indicted for conspiracy to violate state election laws, but the charge was dismissed in 1963 upon the death of the state's only witness in the case. While in the House, Representative Young supported Equal Pay legislation. She was honored as one of the "Top Ten Women of 1962" by the AFL-CIO. Young attended a White House reception hosted by President John and Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy in 1963 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

On May 24, 1966, House Bill No. 4001—which renamed the county social welfare departments as county social services departments—was named the "Maxcine Young Social Service Bill." Later that year she lost her bid for re-election to a young man named Jackie Vaughn.

After leaving the House, Young served on the Wayne County Commission for eight years. She died in March of 2000.

¹ Under the 1908 State Constitution, the governor and lieutenant governor did not run as a ticket but were elected separately.

MARIE HAGER



1963–1964 Michigan Manual

Representative, Ingham County 1st District (Lansing), 1961–1964

Republican

Born: February 24, 1894, Thompsonville
Married: Ernest H. Hager (m. 1913; wid. 1936)
Died: January 24, 1976, Boynton Beach, Fla.

A native of northern Michigan and the daughter of a newspaper publisher in Beaverton, Marie Dann worked as a teacher in the 1910s before marrying Ernest Hager in 1913. The next year, he purchased a coal business which Marie help run in addition to keeping house for their family. They moved to Lansing in the 1920s.

After nearly a quarter-century of marriage, Ernest died in October 1936. Not long after, Marie sold their company. In 1944, she was hired as a clerk at the C. G. Brenner Plumbing and Heating Company in Lansing, where she advanced to office manager, active manager, and ultimately president and principal owner. She joined the Lansing Business and Professional Women's Club in 1940, ascending to its presidency from 1947–48. She also served as a club delegate to the women's division of the Greater Lansing Safety Council—now the Lansing Area Safety Council—in 1944, president of the local women's division from 1948–49, and chairman of the Michigan Safety Conference's women's division in 1952.

Hager was also appointed to civil defense roles by Mayor Ralph Crego of Lansing and Governor G. Mennen Williams, and was an active leader in the Ingham County Republican Party. In 1959, future Governor George Romney named her to the "Committee of 100" for the Citizens for Michigan campaign, where she represented the Michigan Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs.

In 1960, Marie continued her public ascendancy. After being named Lansing's Woman of the Year, she was featured in a full-page newspaper spread that detailed her public life. In a portion subtitled "Wealth of Experience," she voiced some prescient thoughts on the roles of men and women in government. "Why speak about qualified women for governmental posts? Do you speak of 'qualified men'? The city, the county, the state and the nation need women as well as men administrators."

That same year, she was elected to the State House, becoming the first Republican woman to represent Lansing in the Legislature (the first woman overall was Elizabeth Belen [page 6]). During her two terms in the House, Representative Hager was chair of the State Capitol & Public Buildings Committee, and a member of the Aeronautics and Apportionment committees. She also served on the Mental Hospitals, Labor, and Mental Health committees for one term each.

Representative Hager was best known for her interest in wage legislation. She authored, and Democratic Representatives Lucille McCollough (page 23) and Maxcine Young (page 24) were named co-sponsors of, an Equal Pay bill that passed both chambers and was signed by Governor John Swainson on April 12, 1962. Hager's initial attempt to establish a minimum wage failed, but her second attempt in 1964 proved more successful. "Rep. Marie L. Hager, R-Lansing, who wept openly when the House killed a state minimum wage bill in 1963 looked today to be on the verge of tears—but this time, tears of joy. 'I'm in seventh heaven,' she said after learning that the 1964 minimum wage bill had cleared the Senate. 'I want to say that I think all the men did a wonderful job,' she said." Governor Romney signed the bill on May 19.

Representative Hager lost her bid for re-election in 1964 when Democrats flipped 21 seats to take control of the House. In a nod to her service, Governor Romney appointed her chairman of the Wage Deviation Board created by the minimum wage law.

Hager died in January 1976 in Florida, and is interred in Delta Township, Eaton County.

DAISY ELLIOTT



1973–1974 Michigan Manual

Representative, 8th District (Detroit), 1973–1978, 1981–1982;
22nd District (Detroit), 1965–1972;
Wayne County 4th District (Detroit), 1963–1964

Democrat

Born: November 26, 1919, Filbert, W. Va.

Married: Robert Elliott (m. 1936; div. 1950)
Charles Bower (m. 1964)

Died: December 22, 2015, Detroit

Education: Detroit Institute of Commerce

The lead sponsor and one of two namesakes of Michigan’s civil rights law, Daisy Elliott (née Lenoir) was born November 26, 1919, the sixth of eight children, in a former coal town in the southernmost part of West Virginia. The family moved to Beckley, W. Va. where she graduated from high school. In 1936, she married Robert Elliott. In the early 1940s, the Elliotts moved to Michigan and then California where she was first a ‘Rosie the Riveter’ and later a inspector.

By the beginning of the next decade, Daisy Elliott had divorced and returned to Detroit. Having taken classes in California, she graduated from the Detroit Institute of Commerce in 1950. Elliott worked selling real estate and rose to be assistant manager of a Secretary of State branch office in the city. She married Charles Bower in 1964 and continued her education at Wayne State University.

Meanwhile, Elliott began sowing the seeds of a career in public service. After no fewer than five unsuccessful attempts to become a member of the Legislature, Elliott was elected one of eleven female delegates to Michigan’s 1961-62 constitutional convention. There she championed the creation of an appellate court and the enshrinement of the Civil Rights Commission. To this day, the commission remains the only such body enshrined in a state’s organic document. The ‘Con-Con Eleven’ were inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame in 2013, the 50th anniversary of the Constitution.

Elliott finally won election to the House of Representatives in 1962. On April 1, 1966, Speaker Joseph J. Kowalski appointed Representative Elliott to serve as Acting Speaker, making her the first woman to preside in the House in state history. Representative Elliott chaired or was vice chair of the House’s constitutional revision committee from 1965 through 1978, and in the early 1980s she became the first woman to chair the Labor Committee. She received a Citation of Honor from the State Bar of Michigan in 1962, and the first Martin Luther King award in Michigan in June 1968.

On January 9, 1975, Representative Elliott, along with Representatives Mel Larsen and Lynn Jondahl, introduced House Bill No. 4055. Building upon the state’s 1885 civil rights act and the Michigan Supreme Court’s decision in *Ferguson v. Gies*, the bill declared as a civil right, “[t]he opportunity to obtain employment, housing and other real estate, and the full and equal utilization of public accommodations, public service, and educational facilities without discrimination because of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, or marital status.” The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act was signed by Governor Milliken on January 13, 1977. In 2012, the law was named the 37th Michigan Legal Milestone by the State Bar of Michigan.

Elliott unsuccessfully sought a seat in the Senate in 1978, but was back in the House in 1980. Redistricting in 1982 put her in the same district as Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick. That April, Elliott was charged with driving a stolen vehicle. She lost the Democrat-

ic primary in August, and in November was convicted.

Daisy Elliott died on December 23, 2015. In memorializing her, the House noted “her commitment to equal rights and making Michigan a better place for all of its residents, including her constituents in Detroit for whom she tirelessly advocated.” The resolution also remembered her as a “remarkable public servant who worked relentlessly for the betterment of the state and advocated strongly on behalf of workers, senior citizens, women, and minorities who sought equal treatment in Michigan.”

Elliott was inducted (in her own right) to the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame in 2016. In 2020, Governor Gretchen Whitmer renamed the Lewis Cass Building on Walnut Street the Elliott-Larsen Building, “[i]n honor of Daisy Elliott’s and Melvin Larsen’s efforts to protect the civil rights of the people of this state.”



Image courtesy of the Michigan State Capitol Collection

ROSETTA A. FERGUSON



1965–1966 Michigan Manual

Representative, 20th District (Detroit), 1973–1978;
9th District (Detroit), 1965–1972

Democrat

Born: July 1, 1920, Florence, Miss.
Married: Mitchell Ferguson (m. 1935)
Children: 4
Died: November 18, 2015, Royal Oak
Education: Detroit Institute of Technology

A native of Mississippi who spent part of her youth in New Orleans, Rosetta Sexton married Michael Ferguson in 1939. Together the couple welcomed four children before eventually divorcing.

Rosetta pursued her education at the Detroit Institute of Technology. She worked in real estate for many years, and was involved in several Detroit community organizations, ranging from the Cub Scouts and Red Cross to the NAACP and the Wayne County Democratic-Republican Human Relations Council on Civil Rights.

Ferguson was first elected to the House in 1964, prevailing by three votes in a nine-candidate Democratic primary field. Throughout her tenure, she focused on civil rights, serving as the chair or vice chair of the Civil Rights Committee in all but her first term.

In 1966, she authored Public Act No. 127, which stated that people selecting textbooks for private, parochial, or public schools “shall give special attention and consideration to the degree to which the textbook fairly includes recognition of the achievements and accomplishments of the ethnic and racial groups.” The cultural reverberations of this legislation echoed all the way to Louisiana, where the city of New Orleans presented Ferguson with a key to the city in thanks, and the Michigan House adopted a resolution in 1970 calling the law an “educational measure to achieve better human understanding among all races of the State’s population.”

Representative Ferguson introduced an important bill prohibiting discrimination against women in public places in 1971. This legislation echoed the 1885 law prohibiting discrimination in public places based on race or color. Some initially panned the bill, noting that it would make it illegal for sports teams to offer discounted “ladies day” tickets. Representative J. Robert Traxler of Bay City went so far as to suggest that the legislation reminded him of the book *Animal Farm*. “We are told there that all pigs are equal, but some pigs are more equal than others.” Despite having vocal detractors, the House and Senate finally approved the bill and Governor Milliken signed it on April 18, 1972.

As a member of the House, Ferguson fought to give women more legal protections relating to property and the acquisition of real estate. In 1971, she and her female colleagues successfully blocked the passage of a bill striking down a portion of women’s dower rights dating to 1846. The bill would have permitted a married man to sell property owned singularly by him without the official approval and acknowledgement of his wife. She offered an explanation of her vote against the bill, saying in the House Journal, “I voted no on Senate Bill No. 252 because it would have caused many women and their children to be homeless. It would have created many cases for ADC¹ and welfare. I thank the men and women who voted to defeat Senate Bill No. 252.”

¹ ADC likely refers to Aid to Families with Dependent Children, a former federal assistance program created by the Social Security Act of 1935, that was replaced in 1997 by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Representative Ferguson also wanted to make it easier for women to purchase, lease, or rent property. She introduced bills prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex or marital status at least three times during her career. "It is the American dream to own your own home, and women shouldn't be denied that privilege," she told a report for *The (Lansing) State Journal*. "More and more women now are the heads of households, many have children to support while others who are single are simply looking for a place to live." While Ferguson did finally convince the House to support the matter in 1973, the Senate refused to take it up.

As the years passed, Ferguson became known for her increasingly short temper. During her last term in the House, she grew enraged when Representative Perry Bullard accused her of lying in a speech on the House floor regarding contentious marijuana legislation. "You pot smoker! You pot smoker," she cried. "Mrs. Ferguson...lunged at Bullard, bashing him in the head with one hand and clenching a heavy, glass ashtray in the other hand," a United Press International writer reported. Her actions made news across the state. Though both apologized the next day, Ferguson became infamous as the woman representative who hit her male colleague on the head with an ashtray.

Ferguson did not seek re-election in 1978. She died in Royal Oak in 2015 and is interred in Good Hope Missionary Baptist Cemetery in Florence, Mississippi.



FACE-TO-FACE—Boy's Training School residents Terry Holt (right) and Sherman Clark pause for a discussion with their legislators, Reps. James Bradley and Rosetta Ferguson, both Detroit Democrats, during a tour of the Capitol Tuesday. The Capitol tour and visits by legislators to BTS are part of a program to expose the youngsters to the persons who represent them. About 24 youngsters visited the Capitol Tuesday. (State Journal Photo)

The (Lansing) State Journal, February 11, 1970

JOYCE SYMONS

Representative, 30th District (Allen Park), 1965–1982

Democrat

Born: September 10, 1927, Detroit

Married: Clarence Symons (m. 1945)

Children: 3

Died: June 14, 1994, Allen Park



1969–1970 Michigan Manual

The daughter of Harold and Josephine (Curtis) Smith, Joyce Smith was born in 1927 in the booming city of Detroit. She graduated from Western High School at age 14 and entered the workforce. In 1945 she married Clarence Symons, a theatre manager ten years her senior. Together the couple had three children: Gary, Mark, and Jill. Unlike many of her peers, Joyce continued to work outside of the home; the 1950 Census identifies her as a receptionist at an auto factory working 40 hours a week.

Joyce also found time to be active in her Presbyterian church, join the PTA, and belong to the Women of the Moose fraternal order. By the early 1960s she was also a member of the Women’s Traffic Club, and a board member of the Michigan and International Motor Rate Councils.

In 1964, Symons was elected to the House of Representatives, representing Allen Park, Melvindale, and parts of Dearborn and Lincoln Park in Wayne County. She quickly became a multi-term member on the Committees on Public Utilities, Towns & Counties, and Public Health. She chaired the Mental Health Committee for four terms, where she sponsored legislation to create Michigan’s new Mental Health Code. Then, in 1977, she shifted her focus from policy to funding when Speaker Bobby Crim appointed her the first woman to serve on the House Appropriations Committee.

Perhaps her greatest act on behalf of the people of Michigan was authoring legislation requiring the Secretary of State to print “See reverse side for medical data or anatomical gift” on licenses in hopes of increasing the pool of organ donors. It’s impossible to know just how many lives this bill, signed by Governor Milliken on December 23, 1976, has helped save.

Symons took controversial positions on multiple issues related to the state and United States constitutions. She was one of three women in the House (out of seven total) who voted against the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1972. She vocally supported a proposed state constitutional amendment to prohibit “busing” in Michigan.¹ And, in 1973, the Representative introduced a joint resolution to amend Michigan’s constitutional ban on the death penalty. She felt, and 51 co-sponsors agreed, that the ban should not apply to people convicted of “murders of policemen or firemen, for snipers or persons who use explosives, and for kidnapers.” Ultimately the resolution (one of five concerning the death penalty proposed that year) stagnated and died.

Joyce Symons ultimately served 18 years in the House of Representatives, having been elected to nine sequential terms. Her winning streak ended in the August primary of 1982, when she lost to liberal Democratic Representative Jeffrey Padden, who had been drawn into the same new 30th district. Their contest was, according to the *Detroit Free Press*, “the mostly closely watched House race” of the campaign.

Symons died from complications of diabetes in 1994, aged 66. Congressman John D. Dingell, Jr. remembered her as a “wonderful woman and a fine legislator,” and said that “her great energy, courage, and determination [would] be missed.”

¹ Known colloquially by this one word, “busing” meant transporting students by bus to schools outside of their neighborhoods in order to achieve better racial and socioeconomic integration with a district.

N. LORRAINE BEEBE



1967–1968 Michigan Manual

Senator, 12th District (Dearborn), 1967–1970

Republican

Born: June 19, 1910, Kalamazoo

Married: Leonard Clair Beebe (m. 1938; div.)

Children: 2

Died: August 12, 2005, Portage

Education: Ph.D., University of Michigan
M.S., clinical psychology, Wayne State University
B.S., Western Michigan University

Nellie Lorraine Boekeloo was born on June 19, 1910, to Henry and Genevieve (Richards) Boekeloo in Kalamazoo. The only child of a printer and homemaker, Lorraine earned a Bachelor of Science degree in physical education from Western State Teachers College (now Western Michigan University). After a brief stint as a clerk for the Upjohn Company, she obtained a teaching position in the public schools.

In 1938 Lorraine married Leonard C. Beebe of Dearborn. The enumeration of the 1940 Census found the couple working as athletic directors in Leslie. (Lorraine's entry further specifies that she was employed by the WPA, or Works Progress Administration.) In 1945 the couple welcomed their first child, Peter, followed by Anne in 1950.¹ The family eventually returned to Dearborn, where Leonard climbed the corporate ladder at the Ford Motor Company and Lorraine taught psychology at Henry Ford Community College after obtaining a master's degree from Wayne State University.

In 1964 Beebe, a Republican, came in second in a five-way primary in Wayne County's Senate District 12, losing to Douglas Thomas. Two years later she beat Mr. Thomas in another four-way primary rematch by 359 votes. That November she upset Senator Edward J. Robinson by 908 votes.

Only the third woman to win election to the Michigan Senate, Mrs. Beebe quickly became the subject of news stories. "State's Only Woman Senator Scores Upset," an unnamed AP reporter wrote in an article that ran on the "Women's Page" of the *Battle Creek Enquirer*. The piece noted her age, suit fabric, the color of her hair, and that "she showed her womanly ways Wednesday when she postponed for three hours an appointment for a newspaper picture to make herself 'presentable' for the camera." Its author likewise asked the Senator-elect if she'd be basing her decisions (or votes) on "women's intuition." In response, Beebe stated that "My training as a psychologist has taught me to keep an open mind until I have all the needed information. I won't talk about a subject unless I know what it's all about."

It didn't take Beebe long to begin using her voice on behalf of other women. She authored a bill to create a Michigan Women's Commission, which Governor Milliken signed into law on February 19, 1968, as Public Act No. 1. Comprised of 15 gubernatorially-appointed members as well as the heads of the civil service, education, labor, and social services departments (serving in an ex officio status), the Commission was instructed to

- (a) stimulate and encourage throughout the state study and review of the status of women in this state;
- (b) strengthen home life by directing attention to critical problems confronting women as wives, mothers, homemakers, and workers;

¹ A second son, Leo, appears in the 1950 Census but then disappears quickly from records. Senator Beebe always later stated that she had two children: Peter and Anne.

- (c) recommend methods of overcoming discrimination against women in public and private employment and civil and political rights;
- (d) promote more effective methods for enabling women to develop their skills, continue their education, and to be retrained;
- (e) make surveys and appoint advisory committees in the fields of, but not limited to, education, social services, labor laws and employment politics, law enforcement, health, new and expanded services, legal rights, family relations, and volunteer services; and
- (f) secure appropriate recognition of women's accomplishments and contributions to this state.

Perhaps in a nod to this accomplishment, Senate Republicans chose Beebe to be the Assistant Majority Leader in early 1969—the first woman in the Senate to hold a leadership position.

But that June, Beebe became instantly famous—or infamous—for something else. After two days of debate over Senate Bill No. 287, which would have increased access to abortions (in the case of rape or incest, when the pregnancy would seriously impair the mother's physical or mental health, and when there was "significant risk that the child would be born with serious physical or mental defect"), the only female member stood up to speak. What she said was so radically singular that her colleague, freshman Senator Alvin J. DeGrow, asked that it be printed in the Journal.

Mr. President and members of the Senate, you know we can stand up here and we can read briefs; we can talk about legal decisions; we can read from books. I am going to tell you something right now, you cannot lump women in one category. We are as different and as individualistic as every and each man is here in this Senate . . .

I want to speak to this bill as a woman, as a mother, as a woman who was told she had one chance in a million of ever having a child. I am a member of a church of a faith, the Episcopal Church, which supports liberalized abortion change. I am also a woman who has had a therapeutic abortion² in a Roman Catholic Hospital performed by a Roman Catholic doctor and supervised by the mother superior. When I had to make that decision to have an abortion, believe me, gentlemen, on the basis that I had been told my chances were negligible to ever have a child, don't think I didn't come face to face with my conscience. But, thank God, I had a good doctor. I had good advice because if I had not had that abortion my life was in jeopardy although we did not know it at the time . . .

She closed her remarks by asking her colleagues "when you think about this bill that you think about it as much as you can from the point of view of a woman."

The room was silent while she spoke; everyone's attention focused on the 52-year-old mother of two. When she finished, newspaper articles reported that women in the Gallery and on the floor began clapping. Senator John F. Toepp rose and thanked Beebe "for your outstanding speech and delivery on a most delicate situation." Then other members responded, and the bill failed with 16 yeas and 17 nays.

The outcome of the vote—and Beebe's remarks—filled newspaper headlines from Lansing to New York City the next day. "State Senator Defends Abortion By Tearfully Telling of Her Own," a *New York Times* article read. Some, including a piece in the *Detroit Free Press*, told readers that "she underwent her abortion to save her life from a malformed pregnancy. She has had six miscarriages."

Having revealed an intimately personal piece of herself, Beebe became the 'lady lawmaker who talked about abortion.' But she countered when other suggested this was her main issue. During the remainder of her term she worked on drug addiction, mental health, care for disabled children, child abuse, drunk driving laws, women's prison reforms, and she supported sex education in public schools.

Beebe lost her 1970 reelection bid, but she didn't leave politics or government. In the years following she served on the Youth Parole & Review Board and the Michigan Women's Commission, which studied, took testimony across the state on, and eventually supported the Equal Rights Amendment. In 1972 Governor Milliken appointed her executive director of the Michigan Consumers Council. She continued to urge her fellow Republicans to strive for social change, and later worked closely with Planned Parenthood. Beebe was the Republican candidate for Secretary of State against Richard H. Austin in 1974.

Lorraine Beebe died in Portage in 2005 at the age of 95. Perhaps not surprisingly, articles about her death all focused on her 1969 speech.

² The term "therapeutic abortion" was then used to define what today would be called a "medically-necessary abortion."

NELIS J. SAUNDERS

Representative, 11th District (Detroit), 1969–1972

Democrat

Born: September 3, 1923, Orlando, Fla.

Married: Robert (div. 1954)

Died: February 10, 2012

Education: Wayne State University, journalism
Florida Memorial College, A.A.



1969–1970 *Michigan Manual*

A native of Florida, Nelis was born to Ethel James on September 3, 1923. Raised by her mother and grandparents, she graduated from Middleton High School in Tampa, an all-Black institution. She earned an associate degree from Florida Memorial College before moving north and studying journalism at Wayne State University.

The 1950 Census placed Nelis, now married to Robert W. Saunders (a relief man in an auto factory) in Detroit with her younger sister Ollie. She was working as a press writer. Saunders would eventually spend almost a quarter-century as a journalist for the *Michigan Chronicle*, the city's largest Black newspaper, where she was church editor for 11 years. Saunders additionally wrote the "Stained Glass Window" column and edited the *Baptist Woman* for the National Baptist Women's Convention USA, Inc.

After several unsuccessful tries for both chambers, Saunders won election to the House of Representatives in a 1968 upset. In her first term, she was appointed vice chair of the Committee on Civil Rights, and served on the Labor, Mental Health, Social Services & Corrections, and Youth committees. She chaired the City Corporations Committee during her second term and was vice chair of the Mental Health Committee.

While in the House, Representative Saunders advocated for paid maternity leave for female state employees. In 1969 she introduced House Concurrent Resolution No. 50, requiring the Civil Service Commission reexamine its discriminatory practices against pregnant female employees. Up until that time, Civil Service rules gave authorities the power to let their pregnant employees go on unpaid "maternity separation," at the time of the authority's choosing. If the woman later wanted to return to work, she needed to inform the state personnel director in writing within a two-year period. If a position at the same service class opened in the next six months, she might be offered it. If no positions became available, she'd be laid off. In the meantime, she would receive no financial compensation. Husbands, on the other hand, could use sick days to stay home following the birth of a child. "A vote for this resolution is a vote for motherhood," Saunders argued. "Motherhood is a natural function of the female and she should not be penalized for it." The resolution was adopted by both chambers, and the Civil Service Commission amended its rules accordingly soon thereafter.

Representative Saunders authored and co-sponsored bills on diverse topics including construction codes, divorce, gasoline sales, workmen's compensation, library bond use, and creating a Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. Perhaps one of her most important—but ultimately failed—bills would have given married women the ability to enter into contracts.¹ The bill received a hearing, but died soon after.

Saunders' ideas and actions frequently generated controversy. Her wages were garnished at least three times for excessive long distance phone calls and unpaid bills. She attempted to send a heavy box of ashtrays with her name on them to Florida using state funds. Yet after she lost her reelection bid in 1972—to Representative Rosetta Ferguson (page 28) in the Democratic primary—she continued to work in the Capitol as a committee aide and legislative staffer.

Saunders died in Florida in 2012.

¹ At this time many married women could not obtain loans or open their own charge accounts in their own names, but single women could.

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In this bibliography, “HJ” and “SJ” stand for the House and Senate Journal respectively; “HB” and “SB” stand for House bill and Senate bill respectively; “HR” and “SR” stand for House resolution and Senate resolution respectively; “HCR” and “SCR” stand for House concurrent resolution and Senate concurrent resolution respectively.

The *Michigan Manual* was published by the Secretary of State from 1881 to 1967, including under the title *Official Directory and Legislative Manual*. From 1969 to 1987, it was published by the Department of Administration, later the Department of Management and Budget. Since 1988, the Legislative Service Bureau, under the direction of the Legislative Council, has published the *Manual*. In this bibliography, all versions are entitled the *Michigan Manual*.

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