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Northland Farm

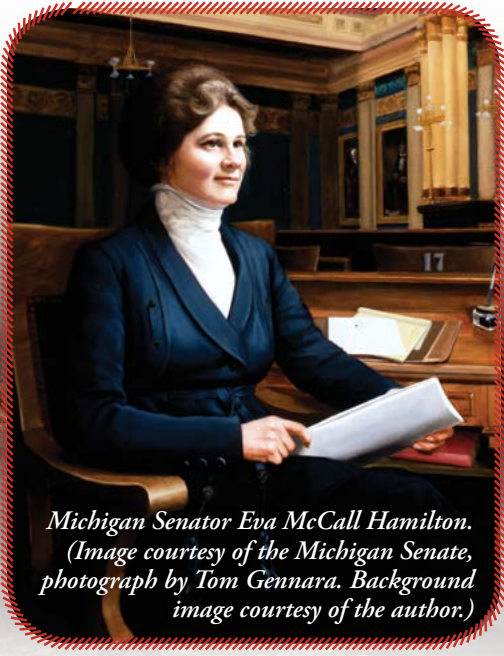
Here a Chick, There a Chick

**From Libya to Lake Linden:
The Lady Be Good
Propeller Memorial**

**Kempf's Magnificent
Model City**

**Nuts About Acorns:
Michigan's Hidden Flour**

From Suffragist to Senator Eva McCall Hamilton



*Michigan Senator Eva McCall Hamilton.
(Image courtesy of the Michigan Senate,
photograph by Tom Gennara. Background
image courtesy of the author.)*

Eva McCall Hamilton was born on December 13, 1871, in Memphis, Michigan. After marrying Charles B. Hamilton, founder of the Grand Rapids Furniture Association, she moved to Grand Rapids to work as a teacher.

It wasn't long before Hamilton became involved in local and state politics and began encouraging women to take a larger role in public affairs. In Grand Rapids during the 1910s, she worked to improve the Michigan mothers' pension legislation and establish the first farmers' retail markets in the city.

But Hamilton's most noteworthy role during that period was that of a leader of the women's suffrage movement in Michigan. In the early twentieth century, women in the United States still did not have the constitutional right to vote in local, state, and national elections. Hamilton led a group of suffragists in Grand Rapids' annual homecoming parade in 1910, mailed out tons of "Votes for Women" materials to citizens across the state in 1912, and helped establish the Michigan League of Women Voters in Grand Rapids

in 1919. Michigan Governor Chase Osborn applauded Hamilton for her efforts for women's suffrage, writing that "I think no one has done better work for the cause than you."

On August 6, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law, giving women in the United States the right to vote. That same year, with Michigan women eligible to cast their votes for the first time in history, Hamilton ran for a seat in the Michigan Senate to represent the people of Grand Rapids in Michigan's 16th district. Running as a Republican, she won the general election and became the first woman ever elected to the Michigan Legislature.

Senator Hamilton arrived in Lansing determined to work for Michigan's women and children. In the state senate, she chaired the Industrial Schools Committee, which oversaw the state's training schools for juvenile offenders, and served on four other committees: Banks and Corporations, Insurance, Normal Schools, and Taxation. Hamilton also helped pass a number of successful bills, some of which provided pay increases for

by Christopher N. Blaker

teachers and secured funding to assist disadvantaged children.

Hamilton ran for reelection in 1922 but was defeated in the Republican primary by Charles R. Sligh, a Grand Rapids furniture manufacturer. Though she only served one two-year term in the state senate, she remained involved with political and civil causes for the rest of her life.

When Hamilton died on January 28, 1948, she was still the only woman ever elected to the Michigan Senate. In 2012, she was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, and her portrait is currently displayed in the Senate Chamber of the Michigan State Capitol in Lansing.

Eva McCall Hamilton's service to Michigan remains one of the state's most enduring legacies. Not only is she notable for being the first woman elected to the Michigan Legislature, but she was also instrumental in securing the right to vote for women throughout Michigan and across the United States. ❏

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