



MichiganWomenForward



Anna Sutherland Bissell

(1846 - 1934)

Inducted: **1989**

Locale: **Grand Rapids**

Era: **Historical**

Area(s) of Achievement: **Business, Philanthropy**

Anna Sutherland Bissell was a successful businesswoman in an age when the manufacturing business was considered a field for men only.

At 19, she married Melville Bissell and became a joint partner in their crockery and china business. When he invented the carpet sweeper in 1876, Anna Bissell became a salesperson traveling from town to town selling the sweeper for \$1.50.

After her husband's death, Bissell became chief executive officer of the company. She established new guidelines on trademarks and patents and moved Bissell carpet sweepers into the international market. By 1899, she had created the largest organization of its kind in the world. As president of the corporation and chairman of the board, Bissell introduced progressive labor policies including workman's compensation and pension plans long before these practices were widespread in industry.

It was said of her that she studied business the way other women of her time studied French. She kept pace with the growing complexities of industrialism and knew every facet of the Bissell operation.

She was a charter member of the Ladies Literary Club of Grand Rapids, a life member of the Women's City Club and an active member of Zonta. She served on the board of The Clark Memorial Home and was for years the sole female member of the National Hardware Men's Association.

Bissell was a generous philanthropist. She was the first female trustee of the Methodist Episcopal Church and was actively involved in Bissell House, a recreation and training program for Grand Rapids youth and immigrant women. She also served on the board of what was to become Blodgett Home for Children.

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