



MichiganWomenForward



Rosa Slade Gragg

(1904 - 1989)

Inducted: **1987**

Era: **Contemporary**

Locale: **Detroit**

Group: **African American**

Area(s) of Achievement: **Civil Rights**

Rosa Slade Gragg was a civic leader who made contributions in the educational, social, and political arenas. She made history with numerous first achievements by a woman.

Born in Georgia, Rosa was a summa cum laude graduate of Morris Brown College in Atlanta. She furthered her studies at Tuskegee Institute, Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan.

Understanding the importance of education in the struggle for black progress, she founded the Slade-Gragg Academy of Practical Arts in 1947, the first black vocational school in Detroit. Known as the Tuskegee of the North, it trained over 2000 women and returning veterans. This was the first black owned and operated business on Woodward Avenue in Detroit. Later she led in the establishment of a youth center, library, and archives for Bethel A.M.E., the second oldest black church in Michigan.

Rosa understood the needs of black women. In 1941 she founded a building for the Detroit Association of Colored Women's Clubs. In 1958 after being elected to the Presidency of the National Association, she succeeded in having the Fredrick Douglass home in Washington, D.C., declared a national shrine by Congress. She was known to fight for black people with skill, force, and money. She stated, 'We cannot advance dependent on other people; we must build up an economic responsibility ourselves.' In 1960 Rosa was elected vice president of the Council of Women of the United States, affiliated with the International Council of Women of the World. She was the first black president of the Detroit Public Welfare Commission. Through the years she has fostered better relations between blacks and whites, serving as a lecturer on race relations.

Rosa Gragg was an advisor to three U.S. Presidents. Under President Roosevelt she was the only black on the Board of the National Volunteer's Participation Committee of Civil Defense. She helped open Detroit's first Civilian Defense Office. Under President Kennedy, she served on the Status of Women's Commission, the National Women's Committee on Civil Rights, and the Commission on Employment of the Handicapped. President Johnson appointed her to the Citizens Committee on Community Relations and the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services. Her papers and memorabilia are in the Burton Historical Collection of the Detroit Public Library.