



## Bina West Miller

(1867 - 1954)

*Inducted:* **1993**

*Locale:* **Port Huron and Columbus**

*Era:* **Historical**

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

In 1892 in Port Huron, Bina West Miller founded one of the first organizations in the country to offer life insurance to women. For the first time, women had the means to provide for their own financial security and independence. Prior to this organization, women had always been deemed uninsurable by the insurance industry because of the high mortality risk from the complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

In founding the Women's Benefit Association, a nonprofit, dues-paying organization exclusively for women, Miller not only established an insurance network for women, but also a primary support group as well. Chapter members met monthly because Miller believed that women joining together could lend each other emotional support and work together for their own betterment and their communities as well as provide financial security for themselves.

With \$500 in borrowed capital, Miller traveled across the United States and Canada selling memberships in this fraternal organization and establishing local chapters wherever she went. Within ten years, she had enrolled 100,000 members. The organization, now known as Woman's Life Insurance Society, continues to fulfill the vision of this farsighted woman.

In addition to her role as a pioneering female executive, Miller was also a notable figure in local, state, national, and international politics. She became an outspoken advocate for women's suffrage and traveled throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Near East, urging that women be given the right to vote. A lifelong Republican, she served on presidential commissions and advisory councils and in 1928 was chosen to make one of the nominating speeches for Herbert Hoover. Among her many honors was inclusion in the 1914-15 *Women's Who's Who in America*. In 1928 she was named the state's top businesswoman in a *Detroit Free Press* poll, and at one time the Associated Press called her "one of the five greatest women in America."

Miller was chief executive officer of the Women's Benefit Association for more than 56 years. Her years of service stand as testimony to her lifelong commitment to improve women's status in society by providing financial security along with opportunities for social and community involvement and self-improvement.