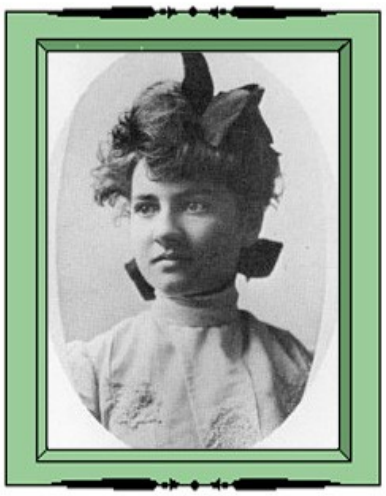

Sarah Ramsland

The Kamsack Influence
Great stories of Kamsack residents influencing Canadian history

Pioneer, Home-
maker, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Librarian 1882-1964

Sarah Ramsland became Saskatchewan's first female Member of the Legislative Assembly when she took over Magnus's seat in 1919 after his death from influenza. It is doubtful that Sarah ever thought she would make history in such a manner.

Born Sarah McEwen in Minnesota in 1882, she married Magnus in 1906. Magnus, also a native of Minnesota, had settled in Kamsack in 1903. He was instrumental in helping to found the town of Buchanan and in bringing settlers to the area. He brought his new bride home with him in 1907 and they settled down to raise 3 children: Adele, Lenore and Max-well. Mr. Ramsland owned a pool hall in Kamsack.

Magnus (Max) Ramsland threw his hat into the political ring in 1917, running for office in the Pelly district as a Liberal. He won handily, hardly a surprising development given how popular Magnus was in the area and how well-known he had be-come in the district as a community leader.

His death in 1918 of the deadly Spanish Flu shocked the community as well as his family. A devastated Sarah Ramsland was convinced by family friends to run for Magnus's vacant seat in the 1918 by-election winning by only 5 votes. Municipally, the town tended to split its support fairly evenly among the candidates; in the 1913, mayor Ed Johnston in an even closer race - the returning officer had to cast a tie-breaking ballot. Mrs. Ramsland was fortunate that her opponent was an independent "returned Soldier" candidate without the backing of a major political machine. The provincial Liberal Party's support for the widow was, at best, lukewarm: Premier Martin did not even mention her name when he addressed a rally on her behalf. In was a rancorous, brawling campaign which ended with Mrs. Ramsland's brother-in-law chasing an abusive crowd away from her home with a shotgun. When she was declared elected, a more serious riot occurred and a car was destroyed. Her victory marked the first time that a woman had ever been elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature. Indeed, the law had only been changed in 1917 to allow women to run for elected office in the province.

The sympathy factor could only carry Sarah so far in her aspirations. If she had not performed well in her duties, Sarah would surely have been voted out at the next general election. Sarah Ramsland was Pelly's MLA until 1925, after losing to the Pro-gressive Party candidate, Dr. Tran, however, showing that her constituents must have thought her a worthy representative of their interests.

Indeed, Sarah was reportedly a dogged defender of her constituents' needs. She once stalked a minister, camping out in front of his office door, so that he would sign an expenditure to allow her to fix a pothole in her constituency. She was also a de-fender of history, the first MLA to suggest marking sites of historical interest with signs.

After she lost the 1925 election, Sarah went to work as a librarian. She established and operated Saskatchewan's travelling library program and according to one source, she was also the Legislative Librarian. She retired in 1942.

That same year, Sarah Ramsland became Sarah Scythes after marrying prominent Regina businessman, William George Franklin Scythes. W.G.F. Scythes had started a music store in Regina in 1907, but by 1939 had begun to specialize in selling pianos – specifically the Scythes piano, a design created especially for his company. As befitted the wife of a local business scion, Sarah Scythes became very involved in community activities, volunteering her time and energy to a number of worthy local causes and clubs.

Sarah Ramsland Scythes passed away in Prince Albert in 1964. Ramsland Drive in Regina is named in honour of Sarah and Magnus Ramsland. Both Magnus and Sarah are resting at the Riverview Cemetery in Kamsack.

...because once wasn't enough!

Kamsack
Homecoming
2010