Elizabeth “Sis” Hamilton

This activity is geared to achieve the following objectives:

- Learn about the credit union heroes who shaped the industry.
- Connect the personal and professional motives of these heroes to your own credit union career.
- Share what you learn about your credit union hero with the large group in a 2-3 minute presentation.

When sharing this story, your table group is encouraged to reflect on the following:

1. Who was this person, and what were their key achievements in credit unions?
2. What motivated them to action?
3. What’s their superpower?
4. How does this Hero’s story connect to the larger credit union purpose of helping the financial fortunes of poor and working people?



SIS HAMILTON

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Elizabeth “Sis” Hamilton’s credit union career began when she was a teenager, and spanned more than 70 years in total.
- An innovator. Under her leadership, Summit was one of the first credit unions in the state to offer products like Open-End Lending, Share Drafts and Home Equity Loans.
- Founded one of NC’s first CUSOs, which provided data processing and management services to struggling credit unions.
- At one point was managing six different credit unions in North Carolina.

- First female director elected to the NC Credit Union League (today known as the Carolinas Credit Union League) board of directors.
- Served as chairwoman of the NC Credit Union Commission. Board member at First Carolina Corporate CU (known today as Vizo Financial).
- National influence and leadership included service on the CUNA and NASCUS boards.

PERSONAL STORY #1

Sis served as a member of the Summit Credit Union board of directors for 70 years (1943-2013). At the time of her retirement from the board, she was the longest-serving director in the history of the US credit union movement. Sis also served as manager/CEO of Summit for many years and presided over its transformation from a small, single-sponsor credit union to a modern financial institution with a large geographic footprint in NC.

PERSONAL STORY #2

Sis grew up during the Great Depression and like many of her generation, developed a lifelong appreciation for hard work and saving money. Growing up on a farm, Sis learned about the value of hard work from her father. “My father believed that you got up at 4 a.m., seven days a week, 365 days a year. I was used to lots of work before and after school. That upbringing has stayed with me throughout the years.”

PERSONAL STORY #3

Hamilton was keenly aware of the need to balance social responsibility with running a sound business. “My biggest thing is don’t ever forget it’s a credit union – that your members are the owners of the credit union and your boss. The second thing is that you’ve got to operate your credit union like a business, meaning it has got to be fiscally sound. You have to find the balance of adhering to the credit union philosophy but operating like a business.”

INTERESTING TIDBITS

- Possessed a sharp intellect and could recall historical details with ease. Her contemporaries in the credit union movement called her powers of recollection “Sistory.”
- A lifelong learner who was a voracious reader of financial publications. Sis was also an avid gardener in her spare time.
- Upon her death, funds were created at Summit and the Carolinas Credit Union Foundation that provided scholarship opportunities for Summit members, as well as professional development opportunities for small credit unions. These funds reflected Hamilton’s love of learning as well as her support of small credit unions throughout her career.

NOTES: