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The League of Women Voters:
They've Come a Long, Long Way

Lavinia Engle of the LWV



PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUGLAS CHEVALER

Fifty-six years ago Lavinia M. Engle of 500 Pershing drive in Silver Spring started one March afternoon to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue to dramatize the efforts then being made to obtain the vote for women. But Miss Engle and the thousands of other women who gathered at the foot of Capitol Hill for the march never

got to the other end of the avenue. Crowds, made up mostly of men, surged into the street and the police broke up the march. This was on March 3, 1913, and the next day Woodrow Wilson was inaugurated as President.

The uproar over the women's march did not end with Wilson's first inaugural, however. Two days

later the Senate District Committee convened a hearing to look into the disturbances arising from the march. Among the witnesses was Alice Paul who, as a leader of the Woman's Party, organized the march. Today Miss Paul is the president of the Woman's Party and lives in the 19th century brick house across from the U.S. Su-

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preme Court at 144 Constitution Ave. ne. which also serves as the headquarters for the Woman's Party. For 46 years the party has been pressing for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing equal rights to women.

After conducting its investigation of the march, the Senate District Committee concluded that "the line of march was not cleared and the parade was not protected as it should have been." The Committee also concluded that "some of the uniformed and more of the special police acted with apparent indifference and in this way encouraged the crowd to press in upon the parade."

Miss Engle, now 77, was in 1913 a 21-year-old graduate of Antioch College who aligned herself with the National American Woman Suffrage Association, pushing for integration of women into the existing political system, rather than with the more militant Women's Party, which advocated a completely feminine slate on all ballots: local, state and national. (One recent interviewer compared the past differences between the two groups to the present-day differences between integrationist civil-rights leaders and black militants.) Becoming an organizer for the Suffrage Association, she later advanced to field secretary and once traveled on mule back up a dry creek bed in West Virginia to argue (successfully) with a legislator for his support for a suffrage amendment to the State's Constitution.

The Suffrage Association became the League of Women Voters when the vote was won nationally in 1920, and in the 20s, Miss Engle was director of the Maryland League of Women Voters. In 1930 she became the first woman Montgomery County Delegate to the Maryland Assembly and later was appointed (but defeated for elec-



tion) to the County Commission. In the mid-30s she went to work for the Social Security Board and remained with it and its successor agencies until finally retiring three years ago. Today Miss Engle is still and active member of the League of Women Voters and not only remembers the 1913 parade vividly but also has the gold-and-black banner proclaiming "Votes for Women" which she wore across her bosom as she and thousands of

others vainly tried to march down Pennsylvania Avenue.

Her Quaker mother had been an early crusader for women's suffrage. And "early crusader" is exactly the term Miss Engle would use. To her, "suffragette" is an offensive word meaning the radical Women's Party members who poured ink into mailboxes and chained themselves to gates. Her weapons, she says, were "justice, logic and persuasion."