

Lavinia Engle, Women's Advocate

By Richard Pearson
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Lavinia M. Engle, 87, a retired government official, a former member of the Maryland General Assembly and an advocate of women's rights for more than 65 years, died Tuesday at the Bethesda Retirement and Nursing Center in Chevy Chase after a stroke.

On March 3, 1913, Miss Engle participated in a march down Pennsylvania Avenue in behalf of obtaining the vote for women. The parade began at Capitol Hill and was to continue to the White House.

But the marchers, mostly women, never made it. The onlookers, mostly men, surged into the street and police broke up the demonstration.

An investigation by the Senate District Committee shortly afterward reported that "the line of march was not cleared and the parade was not protected as it should have been. 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 considered herself an "early crusader" for women's rights. But she said in an interview in 1969 that she found the term "suffragette" an offensive one, feeling it applied to the radical Women's Party members who poured ink into mailboxes and chained themselves to gates. Miss Engle said that her weapons were "justice, logic, and persuasion." She said her recipe for a good speech was to "stand up, speak up, and shut up."

She worked as an organizer and field secretary with the old National American Woman Suffrage Association from 1913 to 1920. The goal of the association was to obtain the vote for women. She traveled throughout the country on the association's work.

She once made her way up a dry creek bed in West Virginia to get the support of a legislator for a suffrage amendment to that state's constitution.

The association became the League of Women Voters in 1920, the same year the 19th Amendment went into effect giving women the vote. From 1921 to 1936 Miss Engle served as executive secretary of the Maryland League of Women Voters.



LAVINIA M. ENGLE

League investigated a variety of social problems and lobbied for health services and similar programs for women and children.

In 1930, Miss Engle became the first woman to represent Montgomery County in the Maryland House of Delegates. She served in the House from 1930 to 1934, and was the first woman to become a member of the Ways and Means Committee. She was defeated by six votes in a bid for reelection.

Miss Engle was a member of the Montgomery County Commission during the mid-1930s. She served as a member of a state commission on the reorganization of the executive department, on the Maryland State Commission on Higher Education, and

as chairman of the Montgomery County Welfare Board.

By this time, Miss Engle already had become interested in national politics and was being sought after as an administrator in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

In 1932 Miss Engle, a Democrat, had headed the speakers' bureau for Roosevelt's first presidential campaign. In 1936, when the Social Security Act passed, Frances Perkins, the secretary of labor, asked her to head up field services for the new agency.

She became a regional director of the old Social Security Board and was serving as assistant for staff development to the commissioner of social security at the time on her retirement in 1964.

Miss Engle was a member of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging and was a delegate to the 1972 White House Conference on Aging.

Her honors included the Certificate of Distinguished Citizenship from the state of Maryland, the Susan B. Anthony Medal of the League of Women Voters, and the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Civil Service Commission.

Miss Engle was born in Forest Glen, Md. Her father, James M. Engle, was a Treasury Department official. Her mother, Livinia Hauke Engle, once appeared before Congress with Susan B. Anthony to testify for women's suffrage and later was the first president of the Montgomery League of Women Voters.

During World War I, Miss Engle helped organize the Suffrage Field Hospital, a unit staffed entirely by women. She once recalled that finding a woman plumber was the most difficult part of the project.

Following the war, she went to Europe with the YMCA Canteen Service and helped run canteens in France, Belgium and occupied Germany.

Miss Engle was a member of the American Political Science Association and the American Society for Public Administration. She had been president of the Metropolitan chapter of Public Administration Society.

Survivors include a sister, Rilla M. Schroeder, of Miami, and two brothers, Melvin D. Engle, of Allentown, Pa., and Parke Engle, of Arlington.