

Aloysius Larch-Miller

“A martyr to woman suffrage”

September 27, 1886 – February 2, 1920



Born in Tennessee in 1886, Aloysius Larch-Miller’s family moved to Shawnee, Oklahoma Territory around 1903. Larch-Miller went to Central State Teachers’ College in Edmond upon graduating high school, then becoming a kindergarten teacher at Shawnee’s Harrison School, where she taught for several years. During World War I, Larch-Miller worked with the American Red Cross, and her performance as state secretary of the nursing department for her division earned her the position of teaching Red Cross nursing in the state’s colleges, eventually working as Pottawatomie County’s chairperson.

A lifelong Democrat, Larch-Miller also served as the secretary of the Oklahoma State Suffrage Ratification Committee. Oklahoma’s legislature adjourned without voting on ratification of the 19th Amendment, so the only hope left was to get Governor James Robertson to call a special session. Larch-Miller caught influenza just days before the Pottawatomie County Democratic Convention and her doctor ordered her to stay in bed. Upon learning that Oklahoma’s Attorney General S.P. Freeling would be present at the convention to argue against calling a special session, Larch-Miller violated the doctor’s orders and attended the convention, knowing she was a far better orator than Freeling. She was successful, with the convention voting two to one to call a special session, additionally with the legislators paying their own expenses. After speaking at the convention, Larch-Miller caught pneumonia in addition to her influenza and died two days later on February 2, 1920 at the age of thirty-three. Twenty-six days later, the Oklahoma legislature met and ratified the 19th Amendment.

After her death, Judge George Carl Abernathy of Shawnee moved to pass a resolution of sympathy for Larch-Miller, naming her “a martyr to woman suffrage.” Governor Robertson ordered the state flag flown at half-mast and Attorney General Freeling was among the numerous other state dignitaries who attended Larch-Miller’s funeral. Larch-Miller today has a memorial to honor her in Shawnee, remembered as a gifted orator with boundless energy and charm paired with impressive ideas. Larch-Miller posthumously received a certificate from the National American Woman Suffrage Association signed by Carrie Chapman Catt who said Larch-Miller “was entitled to a place on the Honor Roll of the brave army of men and women” who fought for the vote. In 1982, Larch-Miller was inducted into the first Oklahoma Woman’s Hall of Fame.

<https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LA040>

<https://documents.alexanderstreet.com/d/1009656437>

Alice Paul

“Founder of the National Woman’s Party”

January 11, 1885 – July 9, 1977



Born into a Quaker family in New Jersey, Alice Paul became involved in the suffrage movement from a young age, regularly attending suffragist meetings with her mother throughout her childhood. For a woman of the early twentieth century, Paul attained an unusually advanced level of education. She graduated from Swarthmore College in 1905, then proceeding to receive a master’s degree in sociology in 1907, a PhD in economics in 1912 from the University of Pennsylvania, and a law degree from Washington College of Law at American University in 1922.

Paul studied for a time in England in the early years of her education, meeting militant British suffragist leader Emmeline Pankhurst. Already interested in suffrage, Paul learned more disruptive methods from Pankhurst, including smashing windows and engaging in prison hunger strikes. Due to her involvement with Pankhurst and her group, British police arrested and imprisoned Paul several times. When returning to the United States in 1910, Paul devoted herself to the American suffrage movement, which was fading following the deaths of its initial leaders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in 1902 and 1906, respectively. Paul became chair of the Congressional Committee for the country’s main suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1912. In this capacity, Paul organized a Woman Suffrage Procession to take place in Washington, DC, on March 3, 1913, the day before the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson. Despite the careful planning Paul put into the march, the event turned into a riot when spectators began to assault the women and the police refused to assist, leaving the cavalry from nearby Fort Myer to restore order. The event led to growing animosity between Paul and the NAWSA leadership, leading Paul to found the National Woman’s Party in 1916, a party which did not endorse existing ones but rather punished those that did not support their movement.

Employing dramatic protests, marches, and demonstrations, the suffrage movement began to gain popular support nationally. Paul and the NWP began picketing outside of the White House, the first time anyone protested there, and faced harassment, beatings, and arrest by people who felt these protests during World War I were disloyal. Eventually, the women were arrested for “obstructing traffic” and sent to the Occoquan Workhouse prison in terrible conditions. In October 1917, Paul and other jailed protestors went on a hunger strike. Prison guards then restrained and force-fed Paul and the strikers through a tube, and in November, the prison superintendent ordered over forty guards to violently attack the imprisoned women. The women referred to it as the “Night of Terror,” following a night of beatings and chokings, some even losing consciousness. Despite the horrific experiences, Paul and the NWP continued to protest outside of the White House until 1919, when Congress passed the 19th Amendment and sent it to the states for ratification.

Even after the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, Paul continued her tireless work for the rights of women, reorganizing the NWP in 1922 to eliminate all discrimination against women. Paul also introduced the Equal Rights Amendment on July 20, 1923, founded the World Woman’s Party as the international arm of the NWP in 1954, and played an active role in getting language pertaining to women included in the United Nations Charter in 1945 and in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Paul died in 1977, leaving behind a clear legacy of fighting for women’s rights in every facet of public life.

Sources

<https://www.nps.gov/people/alice-paul.htm>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/wilson-alice-paul/>

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/alice-paul>