

**AGNES
ALOYIUS
LARCH-MILLER
(1886-1920)**



**MARTYR
FOR
WOMEN'S
SUFFRAGE**

There are only two statues of real women in Oklahoma: Angie Debo in Stillwater and Kate Barnard at the state Capitol. There are so many other Oklahoma women worthy of a statue. Did you know suffragist Aloyius Larch-Miller died for the cause? Bedridden with the Spanish flu, she got up and delivered an impassioned speech at a ratification rally, got sicker on the way home and died two days.

Aloyius Larch-Miller was born in September 1886 in Tennessee. Around 1903 her family moved to Shawnee, Oklahoma Territory. She graduated from Territorial Normal School (later Central State Teachers' College) in 1908 and taught kindergarten for several years in Shawnee but never married. During World War I, Larch-Miller worked with the American Red Cross, eventually supervising the teaching of Red Cross nursing at the state Normal Colleges.

Larch-Miller called the first mass meeting of Oklahoma suffragists. Voters passed a suffrage bill in November 1918, but the 7th Legislature adjourned without voting on ratification of the 19th Amendment, so the only hope left was to get Governor Roberson to call a special session. After meeting with Governor Robertson, Larch-Miller and Katherine Pierce of Ardmore learned he would not call a special session unless the attendees would cover the cost of the session. All of the state counties' Democratic conventions were being held in late 1919.

On January 31, 1920, the Pottawatomie County Democratic Convention was scheduled to meet in Tecumseh to vote for a special session and approval of the 19th Amendment. Larch-Miller had been sick in bed for about a week. Upon learning that Attorney General Freeling planned to argue against the special session, Larch-Miller defied doctor's orders, knowing she was a far better orator than Freeling.

She was successful, with the convention voting two-to-one to call a special session – and legislators paying their own expenses. Larch-Miller exclaimed, "Now it shall be done!" On the way home, she contracted pneumonia and died two days later. Newspapers called her a martyr for women's suffrage. On February 28th, the Oklahoma Legislature met in special session and became the 33rd state to ratify the 19th Amendment. The vote was 84 to 12.

Shawnee's Larch-Miller Park was built in her memory. She posthumously received a certificate from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) signed by president Carrie Chapman Catt stating that she was "entitled to a place on the Honor Roll of the brave army of men and women" of women's suffrage. In 1982 she was posthumously inducted in the first Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame class.

In 2020 a rededication ceremony was held at Larch-Miller Park to honor the 33-year-old schoolteacher. Women, dressed in white with purple and yellow sashes, acted as suffragists and progressed north on Broadway to the entrance to the park.

It's almost forgotten that the final push to win women the right to vote coincided with the Spanish flu pandemic, which killed 650,000 Americans. According to the New York Tribune, Larch-Miller gave a "speech seldom equaled on any political convention floor". The triumph cost Larch-Miller her life but her sacrifice wasn't in vain. The experience of Larch-Miller resonates even today as Americans in the midst of another deadly pandemic are still protesting against injustice.