




Writing Her Story
31 Women in 31 Days

INDIANA
COMMISSION
for women

Virginia Jenckes

Terre Haute, Vigo County

November 6, 1877 – January 9, 1975

Virginia Ellis Jenckes became the first woman from Indiana elected to the United States Congress. A Terre Haute native, Jenckes entered politics in 1926 when she became concerned about flooded farmland, later organizing the Wabash-Maumee Improvement Association. During her tenure, she spearheaded an effort to gain navigability of the river corridor from Lake Erie to the Gulf of Mexico.

Jenckes first campaigned for a Congressional office in 1932 when she ran for U.S. Representative of Indiana's 6th District. Recently undergoing redistricting that year, this new district ran along the Wabash from Vigo County to Warren County and was populated by farmers. During her campaign, she gave over two hundred speeches in nearly every district township. Due to her efforts, she upset a 16-year Republican incumbent to win the seat.

During her first term, she distinguished herself by successfully obtaining an \$18 million appropriation for the Wabash River Basin. She was re-elected in 1934 and again in 1936. In 1937, she made her first trip to Europe to represent the United States at the InterParliamentary Union annual conference in Paris, France, where she became the first woman ever to be appointed as a delegate.

After losing her reelection campaign in 1938, Jenckes remained in Washington to work for the American Red Cross and was involved in the nation's first blood bank. She again received national attention when she assisted five priests escape Hungary during the 1956 Hungarian uprising and served as a liaison between Hungarian Freedom Fighters and the American government. After reaching the age of ninety, she returned to Indiana in 1969 and later died in Terre Haute in 1975.

For more information about Virginia Jenckes, go to:
<http://history.house.gov/People/Detail/15792>.

For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to:
<http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Photo: Crutchfield, Tim (15 September 2003). *Virginia Ellis Jenckes*. Retrieved from: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=7775361>.