

Mt. Vernon Voices

AAUW advances gender equity for women and girls
through research, education, and advocacy.

Volume 68 Issue 8

April 2025

Mt. Vernon Branch



CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE



On March 29, 2025, Elaine and Patsy, along with five other branch members, attended the State Conference at the Sheraton Suites in Old Town Alexandria. The event was the celebration of exactly 100 years since the founding of AAUW of Virginia.

The conference theme was **"1925-2025: 100 Years of Changing the Conversation."**

Our Conference Attendees were Elaine Kolish, Mary Ellen Mehler, Cheryl Spohnholtz, Solveig Eggers, Anne Simpson, Bev Dyer, and Patsy Quick. (Janet Hedrick, dual Mt. Vernon member and founder of the Fredericksburg Area Branch, also attended.)

We are devoting the Presidents' Letter to sharing some of the highlights of the conference as well comments from some of our attendees which will continue on pages 3-5.

Elaine and Patsy

PROGRAM APRIL 17, 1:30 P.M.

AUTHOR TALK Thursday, April 17, 2025, 1:30 P.M.
Sherwood Regional Library

Please join us to hear Author Diana Parsell speak about a previously unknown woman of substance and her research to uncover her:



**How Gilded Age Journalist Eliza Scidmore
Gave Washington Its Famous
Cherry Blossoms**

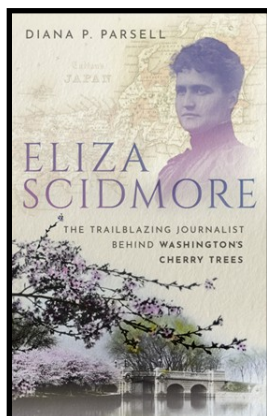


Born just before the Civil War, Eliza Scidmore broke gender barriers as a prolific newspaper correspondent, a globetrotting travel writer from Alaska to Asia, and the National Geographic's first female photographer and board member.

Local author [Diana Parsell](#) will describe how she uncovered Scidmore's long-overlooked story and her legacy as the visionary behind Washington's beloved Japanese cherry blossoms. (See more information on page 2.)

OUR SPEAKER ON APRIL 17: DIANA PARSELL

Diana Parsell, author of *Eliza Scidmore: The Trailblazing Journalist Behind Washington's Cherry Trees*



Diana Parsell is a writer, editor and former journalist, and the author of *Eliza Scidmore: The Trailblazing Journalist Behind Washington's Cherry Trees*. In a 40-year editorial career she worked for many publications, including National Geographic and The Washington Post, and for several major science organizations in Washington and Southeast Asia. A resident of Falls Church, she did much of her research at the Library of Congress and now volunteers there as a docent for public tours. Diana is a member of the McLean Area Branch.



BRANCH LEADERSHIP 2024 – 2025

Elected Officers

Co-Presidents:	Patsy Quick Elaine Kolish	Directory Distribution:	Mary Ellen Mehler
Program Vice President:	Solveig Eggerz	Nominating Committee Chair:	vacant
Membership Vice President:	Susan Farmer	Hospitality:	vacant
Treasurer:	Anne Simpson		
Secretary:	Joanna Crane		

Appointed Chairs

Bylaws:	vacant
AAUW Funds:	Cathy Krebs
Public Policy:	Mary Ellen Mehler
Newsletter/Website:	Bianca Daugherty
Newsletter/	

Interest Groups

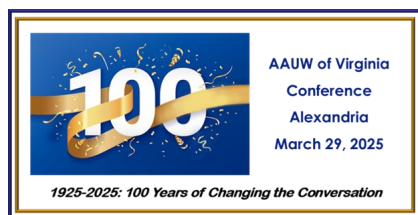
Book Group:	Liz Promen
Dining Out:	Cathy Conron Paula Lettice
Game Night:	Bianca Daugherty Paula Lettice
ImpromptEvent:	All Members

Contact Email: AAUW.MtVernon@gmail.com

In principle and in practice, AAUW values and seeks an inclusive membership, workforce, leadership team, and board of directors. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographical location, national origin, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE: AAUW VA CONFERENCE

A 100-year celebration is pretty special!



Attending the State 2025 Conference and 100-Year Celebration in Alexandria was, for me **Patsy**, wonderful! I always enjoy seeing friends from around the state. The speakers were knowledgeable, informative, engaging, and often used humor to soften some of the more depressing news. Our state leaders did a great job to ensure that the conference went off without a hitch. Our state president, Lane Stone (Alexandria), always speaks eloquently and inspires me, as she did this weekend.



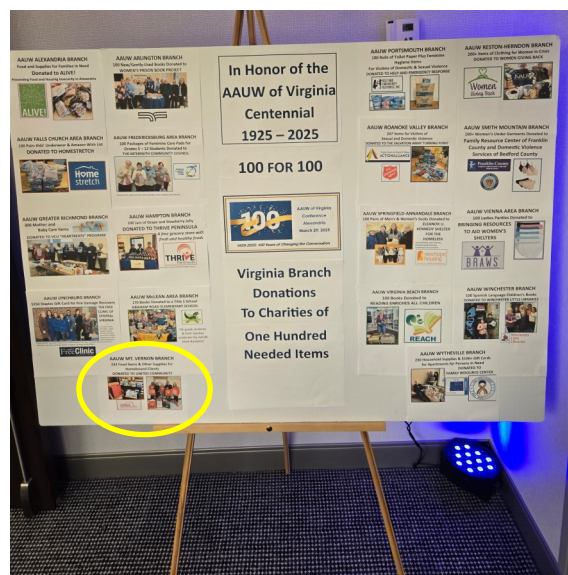
Conference Attendees from left to right: **Elaine Kolish, Mary Ellen Mehler, Cheryl Spohnholtz, Solveig Eggers, Anne Simpson, Bev Dyer, and Patsy Quick.**

In addition, **Cheryl** and **Cynthia Jacobus** were drivers, taking conference attendees to the pre-conference tour locations. **Solveig** was responsible for one of the tours and **Patsy** was Conference Time Keeper and Layout Editor of the 2025 Conference Program Book.

Our branch participated in the **100 for 100 Donations** to honor AAUW VA's 100 years. Our contribution was highlighted on the Conference poster at the right. Many branch members made donations of personal care products and **Anne Simpson** and **Joanna Crane** delivered the items to UC as was described in our [January newsletter](#)



The **Welcome Bags**, prepared by our branch committee, were well-received! **Many thanks to Cathy Conron, Joanne Clark, Joanna Crane, Bianca Daugherty, Sandy Doyle, Bev Dyer, Solveig Eggerz, Elaine Kolish, Susan Farmer, Mary Ellen Mehler, Patsy Quick, Anne Simpson, and Mary Stauss.** These members donated items, purchased items, printed items, cut-and-pasted items, and /or assembled/delivered the bags.



Continued on the next page...

PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE CONTINUED

Here are what our attendees had to say about their Conference 2025 experiences:

Bev Dyer. The most memorable moment was at the outset when President Lane Stone informed us that a Junior ROTC color guard from a high school could no longer participate in our event by order of a DoD letter noting AAUW's stand on diversity.....chilling. **Elaine's note:** It was one of my highlights too. To imagine the depths the administration has sunk to. At the same time, AAUW was proud that our stand on DEI was of interest! We are powerful.

Bev. The most impressive speaker was Alexandria Mayor Alvia Gaskins - she had poise and spoke eloquently without notes, acknowledging the troubled times we are in while sharing the positive steps she is taking. **Elaine's note:** I loved her too and thought this woman is going to go far. **Patsy:** I agree! She will definitely have a great future! Most impressive!

Bev also shared that she "liked the walk through Old Town guided by Gayle E. Converse, Co-Founder and Vice-President of Alexandria Celebrates women. She shared the accomplishments of Alexandria's courageous women of the past, including suffragists, founder of the first medical clinic and the first library - a reminder that we have been in challenging times before. She also noted that she learned lessons from the presentations from the AAUW branches who were awarded mini-grants and used them effectively. Solveig's eloquent summary is below.

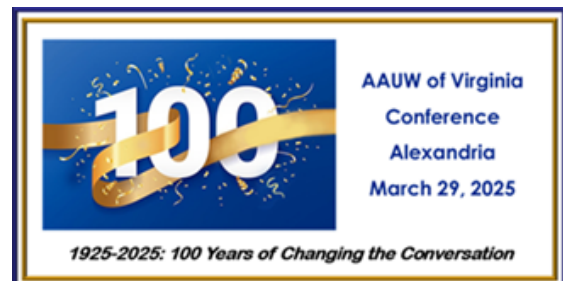
Solveig Eggerz. The keynote speaker, Representative Jennifer McClellan (D-VA) encouraged attendees to "stay woke," noting we're living "in the mother of all backlashes." She lamented the current destruction of the Department of Education, given its role in enforcing the Civil Rights Act. If everyone has an education, she noted, "it's a lot harder to pull the wool over people's eyes." As we approach the 250th birthday of this country, Rep McClellan said, the ongoing

war on DEI is "actually a war on the ideals upon which this country was founded."

Solveig also commented that Tonya Williams Brown of Hampton gave an inspiring presentation on how she and fellow branch members used their AAUW-VA mini grant to introduce middle and high school girls to STEM fields as a career. In conversation Tonya told me "rather than go to the institutions, we found women from STEM fields in our community." The so-called "stemnists," offered the girls an all-day program, featuring choices of workshops, culminating in a field trip to Christopher Newport University.

Elaine's note: most of the girls had never been on a college tour so it was a great new experience for them. **Solveig again.** One of girls is now a student at Christopher Newport in a STEM field. Tonya emphasized that most of the "stemnists" were quite young, so the girls could see themselves in STEM careers.

Solveig remarked that on Friday 18 conference attendees visited Freedom House Museum, 1315 Duke Street. Formerly known as the Franklin and Armfield Slave Pen, this was once headquarters for the largest domestic slave trade in the US. Museum Educator, Karen Wilkins, explained how the owners became millionaires from the domestic slave trade in the US, by buying slaves that were no longer needed on Virginia tobacco farms once the soil was depleted and selling them to the Deep South. During 1828-1861 slaves were marched in coffles (chained together) over 1,000 miles or shipped along the coast to auction blocks in Mississippi and Louisiana. Wilkins explained that the slaves were hydrated and fed and clothed so they'd look their best for the sale.

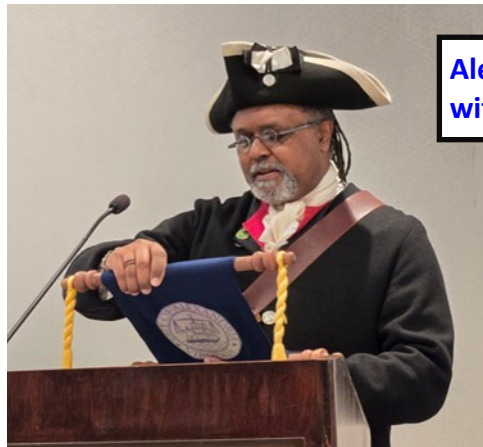


PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE & CONFERENCE CONTINUED

More comments from attendees:

Mary Ellen Mehler: I enjoyed lots of things about the conference, but most of all was the chance to meet members from other areas. I ate lunch with several members from various other parts of the state, and getting their perspectives and concerns was enlightening.

Cheryl Spohnholtz: For me the most important thing was being able to reconnect with my AAUW sisters. I also learned a lot about Title IX. Representative Jennifer McClellan gave an inspiring keynote speech and reminded us that there is power in letting our elected officials know how we feel. Even though it was only one day, the agenda was jam packed with relevant speakers and fun centennial celebrations.



Alexandria Town Crier opened the Conference with a two-page resolution and welcome.



Lane Stone, AAUW VA President (left) with Alexandria Poet Laureate, Zeina Azzam, who wrote a poem on the celebration of AAUW VA's centennial year. (The poem is found on page 6.)



Lisa R. Varga, Executive Director of the Virginia Library Association (left) and Rose Dawson (right), Alexandria Library Executive Director spoke about sit-ins and book banning.

AAUW-VA Program Co-VP, Leslie Tourigny is in the center.

AAUW VA CENTENNIAL POEM

Lessons from the Moon

On the celebration of AAUW of Virginia's centennial year, March 2025

From Alexandria to Wytheville
we are 24 branches of the AAUW tree
planted in Virginia a century ago.
The state chapter came alive in 1925
under a waxing crescent moon,
the lunar phase that tells of intentionality and
growth,
clarity and change.

For 100 years we have struggled and aspired,
untiring, to amplify the W in our logo—
the oversized letter that stands for
Women and their rights.
Women's Well-being.
Women's Work and Worth.
Women's Words of Wisdom
for our imperfect World.
We, the Women.

We are changing the conversation,
redirecting the thinking,
illuminating the territory,
advancing what's fair.

We believe in the melding of science
and hard work and intuition, research and caring,
the art of knowing and the skill of doing.
Like the moon's nurturing light,
Women embrace the world to change it,
to birth goodness, new beauty, new life
with the power of a strong and persistent
Women-led movement.

We, the Women of Virginia's AAUW
continue to fight for teachers' rights
and for funding free public schools.

We advocate for the civil liberties of Women and
girls of color.
We champion access to STEM programs.
We promote women's reproductive rights.
We ensure equity and inclusivity in the workplace.
We uphold the noble principles of Title IX:
no sex-based discrimination in education.
We affirm that the ERA must become
the 28th Amendment of the US Constitution.

We are changing the conversation,
redirecting the thinking,
illuminating the territory,
advancing what's fair.

We applaud all—
the conversation trail-blazers and cutting-edgers,
the conversation sowers and spreaders,
the conversation modelers and engagers,
the conversation leaders and motivators,
the conversation changers.
We recognize all—in AAUW and in the community—
proudly, lift up their work.

How lovely and meaningful
that tonight we have a new moon
modeling new beginnings,
reminding that our work for a new century is before
us.

We cannot see the shadowed moon
but we feel its promise.
As the coming crescent thickens each night
we grow with it and welcome its glow and gleam.
The moon will become more and more luminous
like our shared hopes,
our bright, essential mission.

© Zeina Azzam, March 2025
City of Alexandria Poet Laureate

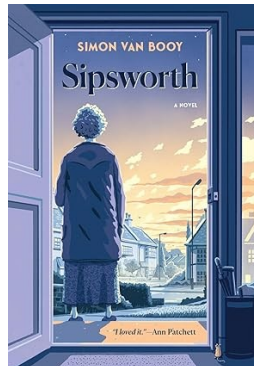
BOOK GROUP MONDAY, APRIL 21

Please inform the hostess whether or not you plan to attend.

HOSTESS: Joanna Crane

6511 Princeton Drive
Alexandria, VA 22307
joanna.crane@gmail.com

CO-HOST: Joanne Clark



BOOK: Sipsworth

by Simon Van Booy

REVIEWER: Susan Farmer

NEXT BOOK: Girl with the Louding Voice
by Abi Dare

GAME NIGHT



Join us for a fun evening with various games.

Friday, April 25, 2025, 7:30 P.M.

Home of Anne Simpson

Paula will send out reminder and address to the group via email.
Spouses and significant others are welcome to join in!

Contact Paula Lettice or Bianca Daugherty
if you would like to join the group.

AAUW.MtVernon@gmail.com

LTA FUNDRAISER WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18

Our Annual Fundraiser at the Little Theatre of Alexandria will be held on Wednesday, June 18. PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

We will need volunteers for ticket distribution and sales, the food committee, and set up and clean-up committees. **PLEASE ANSWER THE CALL!**

This year we are responsible for and setting up and decorating as well as providing savories and wine. There is money in our branch budget for these items. We will need donations of red, white, and rose wines.

The play is hilarious! It will be a welcomed good laugh and distraction!



Save the Date

**AAUW Mount Vernon
Annual Potluck – Dinner and Awards**



**Thursday, May 29th
6:00 p.m.
Invitation and Details to Follow**

2024 - 2025 MT. VERNON BRANCH PROGRAM YEAR

Meeting Date and Place	Focus/Activity
Thursday, September 12, 2024, 1:30 PM Sherwood Regional Library 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306	Fundamentals of Estate Planning (estate planning, wills, trusts, beneficiaries) Speaker: Gretchyn G. Meinken, Esq.
Tuesday, October 15, 2024, 1:30 PM Sherwood Regional Library 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306	Election 2024 Speaker: Liz White of Upvote VA and Chris DeRosa & Janice Morris , of the League of Women Voters of Arlington/Alexandria "Ranked Choice Voting" team. (Discussion of Rank Choice voting.)
Saturday, November 2, 2024, 10:30 AM Sherwood Regional Library 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306	Speaker: Annie Ray , Grammy Award Winning Orchestra Teacher
December Location, Date and Time TBD	Holiday Event
Saturday, January 11, 2025, 10:30 AM Sherwood Regional Library (Zoom if bad weather)	AI Unleashed: The Future and Its Risks Speaker: Jennifer Swann , Director of Information Security at Bloomberg
Thursday, February 20, 2025, 1:30 PM Sherwood Regional Library (Zoom if bad weather)	Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions Speakers: Meg Tuccillo and Patty Hagen
March 15, 2025 Zoom, 10:00 AM	Annual Business Meeting
March 28-29, 2025 Sheraton Suites of Old Town Alexandria	AAUW-VA Conference
April 17, 2025, 1:30 PM Sherwood Regional Library 2501 Sherwood Hall Lane, Alexandria, VA 22306	Eliza Scidmore: The Trailblazing Journalist Behind Washington's Cherry Trees Author Diana Parsell will speak about her book and research.
May 29, 2025, 6:00 PM Home of Paula Lettice	Annual Potluck
June 21, 2025, 10:30 AM Sherwood Regional Library	Annual Planning Session
Wednesday, June 18, 2025 7 PM Reception / 8 PM Performance Little Theatre of Alexandria 600 Wolfe St, Alexandria, VA 22314	LTA Annual Fundraiser The Play That Goes Wrong

IN MEMORY OF...



Lowry Mann, husband of Mt. Vernon AAUW member Barbara Mann, passed away peacefully on March 10, 2025, at Sunrise, Mount Vernon, VA, four days shy of his 88th birthday. Barbara and Lowry were married 61 years and raised their son and daughter in the area.

Lowry participated in Mt. Vernon AAUW's Gourmet Group (now defunct), Dining Out, and Game Night. He was a kind and compassionate man who was very easy to be around. His AAUW friends will miss him greatly.

The family graveside service will be held on Monday, April 7 at 2:00 pm at Grace Episcopal Church in Keswick, VA.



April 2025



- **17 Branch Program, 1:30 P.M.**
Contact Solveig Eggerz
- **21 Book Group, 7 P.M.**
Contact Liz Promen
- **25 Game Night, 7:30 P.M.**
Contact Paula Lettice
- **26 AAUW VA Annual Business Meeting 2 P.M. Zoom**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	8	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 Branch Program	18	19
20	21 Book Group	22	23	24	25 Game Night	26 AAUW VA ABM
27	28	29	30			



Check out our website <https://mtvernon-va.aauw.net/>
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