Nashville Chapter by Carolyn Wilson

The Nashville Chapter had its beginning with an organizational meeting on May 20, 1955, with twenty-seven people attending. Earlier, a larger group had heard Anne Richter, from the New York chapter, speak about the WNBA organization. At the May meeting, officers were elected. Mary Kate Ellen Gruver, juvenile editor at Broadman Press, was the first president. Nashville became the fourth WNBA chapter.

In the early years, chapter members were educators (school, college, and university), librarians, authors, members of the local publishing community, and booklovers. In the ensuing years, members came from many other areas of the book community.

In 1987 the chapter participated in the Tennessee Literary Homecoming Celebration, an event that eventually became The Southern Festival of Books. From the early years of the festival, chapter members formed a core group of volunteers, and participation has grown into major support in all areas of this notable October event. In recent years, the chapter has hosted one of the signature events at the festival, Breakfast with Authors; its panel of high-profile authors always attracts a large audience.

In 1990, the chapter formed the Tennessee Writers Alliance, assuming oversight of the group until it became a more self-sufficient body in 1994. Many WNBA members served as members of the TWA Board of Directors through the years.

In an effort to provide children’s materials on Tennessee history, the chapter published *Tennessee Trailblazers*, written by Nashville natives Patricia and Frederick McKissack.
and published by March Media, owned by board member Etta Wilson. It has become a staple across Tennessee in libraries and through book sales. In another publishing venture, the chapter produced the *Literary Allusions Cookbook* in 1982.

Another chapter activity of long-standing is the Summer Reading and Book Discussion Series, held for twenty-six years at Lipscomb University. It features six weeks of book discussions facilitated by scholars from local schools and colleges. The series initially highlighted books from the WNBA’s “75th Anniversary List of Books by Women Authors,” and its popularity led to a recurring summer event directed by member Carolyn Wilson. Popular themes for the series have included Southern literature, Humor, Writing About Food, International Writers, and Books into Movies. The program was renamed “The Willodene Scott Summer Reading and Discussion Series,” honoring Willodene Scott, a charter member of the chapter. Built on the success of the summer reading and discussion series, a smaller book group began meeting at a branch library, which initially focused on the Great Group Reads selections.

In 1995 the chapter joined with the Tennessee Bicentennial Committee and the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English to produce a literary map of Tennessee. This map hangs in the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress along with other state literary maps. For many years the chapter has participated in the ATHENA Awards, considered the highest recognition of women of achievement in Nashville. Chapter members Donna Paz and Sue Bredensteiner were representatives of the WNBA on the awards committee. Each year the chapter nominates an outstanding member for the award.
Many programs have been developed to promote the value of books and reading to youth audiences. “Books Change the World” was a Saturday discussion at public libraries featuring successful Nashville women sharing the importance of reading in their lives. In the spring of 2005, a day focusing on writing was held at the Hume Fogg Academic Magnet School: *Connecting: A Day for Readers and Writers*. Fourteen writers joined in this effort with keynote addresses presented by authors John Egerton, Tony Earley, and storyteller Estelle Condra. It was directed by member Alice Sanford, with proceeds from the event providing scholarships for the Tennessee Young Writers Workshops. This program has continued and expanded in subsequent years. For many years directed by WNBA member Lee Fairbend, the chapter has supported Book’EM, a local incentive that provides disadvantaged children with books of their own. Each year volunteers go into the public schools in metro Nashville to read to children. Honoring a commitment to education, scholarships are offered to young students pursuing careers with books, libraries, and writing. The present scholarships are given to the Young Writers Workshops, held each summer by Humanities Tennessee.

When the new downtown Nashville Public Library opened in 1998, an event was held to raise money for the library featuring Tennessee writers Ron Kidd, Cherie Bennett, and Patricia McKissack. In 2002, again supporting the new Nashville Public Library, the chapter donated two original watercolors by Caldecott Award winner Jerry Pinkney from Patricia McKissack’s book about the old Nashville Public Library, *Goin’ Someplace Special*. In 2005, chapter member Kathy Gore led the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the chapter, which included an exhibit of chapter history at the new public library, an

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anniversary dinner with guest author Jeanne Ray, and a commemorative poster created by Nashville artist Gary Gore.

The Nashville Chapter remains a vital force in Nashville and surrounding areas with diverse programs, cooperative ventures with other book-related groups to promote the value of books and reading, educational activities through schools and libraries, and by raising the recognition of outstanding women who have been part of the book community. We consist of a widely diverse membership bringing much expertise and enthusiasm to our planning and programs and to our mission.