On May 24, 1978, WNBA national president Ann Heidbreder Eastman met with a group of women and men interested in organizing a WNBA chapter in the D.C. area. Ann Eastman, Mary Gaver (also a past national president) and others had been interested in this project for a number of years, observing that Washington was a natural location for WNBA’s special professional contributions. With encouragement from Sandy Paul of the New York Chapter and others, Carol Nemeyer, then Assistant Librarian of Congress for National Programs, agreed to chair meetings of an organizing committee. As a result of these meetings, the chapter was born amid great enthusiasm and interest, with Carol Nemeyer as its first chapter president. Organizing members, including Susan Bistline, the chapter’s first vice president and co-founder, agreed that the Washington/Baltimore area was ripe for WNBA’s special ability to develop a strong network within the book and publishing communities in these two neighboring cities.

The chapter’s official birthday is September 14, 1978, when more than 100 people came to a meeting at George Washington University to officially establish the WNBA Washington/Baltimore Chapter and discuss the topic, “The Importance of a Network.” At the second meeting on November 21, 1978, at the National Press Club, panelists explored another Washington D.C.–oriented topic, “What is this thing called Government Publishing?”

By January 1979, membership had risen to eighty-two paid members and represented all stripes of book- and publishing-related professionals. The concept of co-sponsoring
programs with other related groups in the metropolitan area was initiated early in the chapter’s history. On January 24, 1979, Doris Grumbach, noted author and critic, gave an insightful talk on reviews and the review process to a joint gathering of the WNBA Washington/Baltimore Chapter and the Washington Book Publishers at the headquarters building of the Carnegie Endowment, prominently located on the Embassy Row section of Massachusetts Avenue in D.C.

The personality of the D.C. Chapter is probably unique among the various chapters, with so much representation of government and association publishing in addition to trade and university presses, as well as professionals connected to the world of books and publications from such great institutions as the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Geographic Society, the U.S. Government Printing Office, and the Brookings Institution, to name only a few. In addition, the chapter has members from professional and trade organizations such as the American Library Association, the Association of American Publishers, and the American Historical Association, as well as a number of freelance writers, editors, authors, picture researchers, reviewers, literary agents, librarians, technical writers, booksellers, and other professionals involved in the world of books and publishing in its many diverse facets. Bringing together such a varied group challenged the new chapter to search for common interests for the chapter’s monthly professional development programs, defining “book” in its broadest sense.
In 2000 the chapter produced a four-color, poster-sized *Literary Map of Metropolitan Washington, DC*, developed by Martha Hopkins, an exhibit director of the Interpretive Programs Office at the Library of Congress, and produced in partnership with the Library of Congress, Center for the Book. The map celebrates locations associated with forty-four authors who have lived or worked in Washington and surrounding areas, including Rachel Carson, Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, Sinclair Lewis, Clare Booth Luce, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman, along with other information.

The chapter has regular monthly programs from September through June, many in conjunction with other organizations in the two metropolitan areas. Two of the chapter’s monthly gatherings are traditionally “Chapter Brunches”—professional/social events that give members and their guests a chance to mingle with other congenial professionals in a relaxed setting, usually at the home of one of the chapter members. Other monthly programs cover a broad spectrum of topics, including children’s book writing, local publishing efforts, career-development topics, author panels, trends in the publishing world, and tours of local facilities such as the book conservation labs at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

The first issue of the chapter newsletter, *The WNBA Signature*, was published in 1980. During the mid-1980s it grew to 15 to 20 pages per issue and was mailed to over 400 addresses. The newsletter has been one of the chapter’s most popular communication tools. It is now produced and distributed online, with e-mail updates and chapter announcements distributed online as well.
The chapter experienced some organizational difficulties, resulting in a decline in membership, during the early 1980s as officers and board members struggled to cope with the problems inherent in maintaining board representation and program offerings in two cities more than 30 miles apart, along with their other professional commitments. This challenge was finally resolved in 1984, when the Chapter Board agreed informally to concentrate the chapter’s efforts, including board membership and monthly programs, in the greater Washington metropolitan area. A formal name change to the “WNBA Washington Chapter” was approved by the chapter membership in January 1987.

One of the chapter’s strengths continues to be its close association with other related professional associations in the Washington metropolitan area. In addition to exchanging newsletters and other timely information, most of the chapter’s programs are co-sponsored with other appropriate local professional groups, including the Washington Book Publishers, the Washington Edpress Association, the Washington Independent Writers, the D.C. Library Association, the Society of Children’s Book Writers, Women in Communications, American Society of Picture Professionals, the Baltimore Area Conservation Guild, and the Baltimore Publishers Association, to name just a few. Cooperation with other related professionals has been a real strength for WNBA in this city where networking and connections are so important. During the mid-1980s the chapter’s membership grew steadily to reach almost 300 by 1988. In 1988,
the Washington Chapter celebrated its tenth anniversary with a special reception and program at the Embassy of Australia.

Several *Washington Chapter Membership Directories* have been produced over the years, listing names and contact information for all chapter members, as well as providing an organizational listing of members' professional affiliations and a Resource/Networking Index of members by their professional specialties.

With special recognition and thanks to its devoted and hardworking members, the Washington Chapter continues to connect like-minded professionals not only through its directory but with periodic professional programs, twice-yearly networking brunches, monthly small-group social gatherings, online newsletter and email updates, an annual holiday party, and many volunteer opportunities.