



# THE BRANCH

Poughkeepsie Branch of the  
American Association of University Women, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1908, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601



January 2026

[Poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net](https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net)



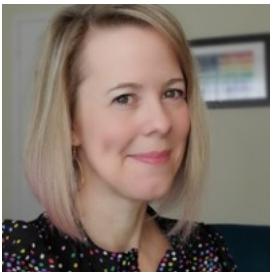
## Coming in February

### A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

**AAUW's Priorities, Issues & Projects**  
February 12 at 7:00 pm; on Zoom

**Guest speaker: Meghan Kissell,**  
**AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy**

We are all members of the National AAUW organization through our membership dues. But do we know the work AAUW does on the national level to promote our AAUW mission and to assist our nationwide branches?



Meghan will discuss the current AAUW issues and priorities and how they are addressed through their work.

She will tell us more about how their strategic plan is "leading the charge to equity" and the various ways they are assisting women pursuing higher education.

We will hear how the staff uses lobbying and grassroots efforts to push forward policies supporting our issues and how our members can help them in this effort to affect legislation.

**Meghan Kissell** is the Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy at AAUW. She leads AAUW's non-partisan and mission-driven public policy at the federal level and supports the grassroots advocacy work of AAUW's membership network.

## Join our virtual program

### Bias in Women's Healthcare Today

Thursday, January 8 at 7:00 pm; on Zoom  
Registration required: <https://shorturl.at/uwJbv>

**Presenter: Christie VanHorne, Founder & President, CVH Consulting**

Have you ever felt dismissed or ignored during a doctor's appointment? You aren't alone.

This eye-opening presentation explores why women continue to experience bias in healthcare today. We'll uncover the historical roots of this inequity—how decades of exclusion and misconception have left women misdiagnosed, undertreated, and unheard. But the conversation doesn't end there. Participants will leave with practical tools and strategies to advocate for themselves, ask better questions, and take back their power in clinical settings.



**Christie VanHorne** is a public health leader, educator, and advocate with over 20 years of experience advancing health equity.  
**See bio on page 6**



Contact: Barbara Van Itallie  
[program.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:program.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

## JANUARY CALENDAR

Online Calendar: <https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net>

Calendar listing: Beth DeFiglio

To contact interest groups: [interest.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:interest.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

### 2 Movie Mavens

View a movie in-person

Coordinator: Ruth Kava

### 5 Word Games: 1:30 pm

Coordinator: Sharon Fleury

### 6 World Travelers: 7:00 pm

Ecuador

Presenter: Paula Greenspan

Coordinator: Bonnie Auchincloss

### 8 Trekkers: 10am-12 noon

Walkway over the Hudson

Coordinator: Mary Scalise-Annis

### 10 & 24 Expanding Girls' Horizons: 8:00am-3:30pm

"A-Maze" Cadette Journey in a Day

Beacon, NY Scout House

Coordinator: Peggy Kelland

### 12 Program Planning Meeting: 10am by Zoom

Leader: Barbara Van Itallie

### 12 All those books...: 2:30 pm

*A High Wind in Jamaica* by Richard Hughes

Presenter: Peggy Kelland

Coordinator: Carol Loizides

### 13 Reely Together: 7:30 pm on Zoom

Discussion of the film, *The Friend*

Coordinator: Jackie Vierno

### 14 Bridge I: 1:00-4:00pm

Note date change

Cancelled if Wappingers or Arlington schools close due to weather

Coordinator: Susan Fink

### 16 Poetry and Plays: 12:30pm

Culinary Planning Luncheon

Coordinators: Maria DeWald and Jackie Sweeney

### 17 Days for Girls Poughkeepsie NY Team

Work session: 1:30-4:30 pm

Poughkeepsie United Methodist Church

Coordinators: Judy Longacre and Sabashnee Govender

### 19 Manderley Literary Society: 4:30 pm

*Penitence* by Kristin Koval

Coordinator: Joan Kimmel

### 20 Cuisine: Noon

Culinary Institute of America

Coordinator: Barbara Van Itallie

### 22 Bridge II: 11:45am or 1:00pm

Meet at a local restaurant for lunch, play at 1:00

Collegeview Towers Community Rm, 141 Fulton Ave

Coordinator: Sandy Goldberg

### 23 Art on the Go

Contact coordinator for details

Coordinator: Mary Coiteux

### 26 Craft 'n' Create: 1:30 pm

Gift tags and Planning

Hostess: Pat Luczai

Coordinators: Mary Ann Williams and Pat Luczai

### 27 Leading to Reading Planning Meeting: 1:30pm

Library, Freedom Plains United Presbyterian Church

Coordinator: Betty Harrel

### 27 Contemporary Literature: 7:30 pm on Zoom

*The Keeper of Lost Things* by Ruth Hogan

Coordinator: Linda Freisitzer

### 28 Mah Jongg: Noon - 4:00 pm

Dutchess Diner (Rt 9)

Lunch at 12 noon, play from 1:15 to 3:45ish

Coordinator: Blanche Bergman

## POUGHKEEPSIE BRANCH OFFICERS 2025-2026

President	Celia Serotsky
Program Co-VPs	Barbara Van Itallie
Membership VP	Kathy Prisco & Maureen Tremblay
Development VP	Sandra Rankin
Communications VP	Pat Luczai
Secretary	Cindy Emmer
Treasurer	Diane Jablonski
Membership Treasurer	Kathy Friedman

President: [president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

Board members: [board.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:board.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

Association: [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org) NY State: [www.aauw-nys.org](http://www.aauw-nys.org)

Poughkeepsie Branch: <https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net>

**MISSION:** To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

**VISION:** Equity for all.

**VALUES:** Nonpartisan. Fact-based. Inclusive. Intersectional. Empowering.

Poughkeepsie AAUW values and seeks an inclusive membership, leadership team, and board of directors. Though we are nonpartisan, we are not values-neutral. We fight to remove the barriers and biases that stand in the way of gender equity. We advocate for federal, state and local laws and policies to ensure equity and end discrimination.

**THE BRANCH** is published ten times a year, September through June, by the Poughkeepsie Branch of the AAUW, Inc. Submit articles to Cyd Averill, editor, by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding publication.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Celia Serotsky [president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

**Happy New Year!** I hope 2026 starts off on a healthy and positive note for you. Our branch continues to be an active and vibrant one, and that is due to your participation in committees, interest groups, and initiatives. Thank you! Here are some of the activities that we will be working on as we enter 2026:

- **The Annual Meeting Planning Committee:** This event is a celebratory one that takes place the second Thursday in June in place of a regular program meeting. It is our second required business meeting at which our new officers will be sworn in and when we reflect on all we have accomplished throughout the year. Honors and Awards will be given to members and recognition of long-term members will be acknowledged. The planning begins this month so let me know if you would like to be a part of this group. It is not a time-consuming task.
- **Neighborhood Groups:** As I have mentioned previously, we are implementing one of the objectives of our Strategic Plan 2024-2027 by creating Neighborhood Groups where members in a defined geographic area will be able to get together just to chat and socialize and maybe discuss policy issues that we want to advocate for. With this endeavor we hope to engage more of our members in ways that bring us together in a relaxed way and strengthen our organization.
- **Advocacy issues:** I will be contacting Fay Casatuta who is part of the League of Women Voters and with whom we have agreed to work to help get out the vote. There are numerous issues that our national organization has identified as important to our Mission Statement. One of the most important issues is the dismantling of the Department of Education. Concurrent with that is the redefinition of what professions are professional, which affects grants and loan applications for students entering those professions. Many of the professions that are listed as "not professional" are traditionally jobs women pursue, such as nursing and teaching. These are issues that affect women and girls and are critical to our mission of equity for them.

So, let's roll up our sleeves and get involved. AAUW Poughkeepsie not only offers social activities for women, but also opportunities to use your skills to continue our good work. We have new generations of leaders coming in, and they welcome your active support.

## CENTENNIAL ENDOWMENT FUND

Betty Harrel

### We Did It! Branch raises \$33.6K for DCC



Margaret Craig (DCC Foundation) accepts the check from Barbara Van Itallie (Program VP), Betty Harrel (Centennial Fund Chair), and Celia Serotsky (President)

In November, 2024, when we started our Centennial Fund Drive, our \$20,000 goal for a new Dutchess Community College scholarship seemed unattainable. We hoped to give a boost to a student entering a STEM-related field. We were very fortunate, though. We had a generous anonymous donor who offered to match our funds up to \$20,000. And.....we had many, many generous members who gave throughout the year. We had 100% participation from all our board members and were also supported by many of our off-board members.

Our campaign ended on November 30, 2025. At our December membership meeting, we presented our speaker from DCC, Margaret Craig, with the check.

**We raised \$13,619 and our donor gave the entire \$20,000 she had initially pledged!** Along with generating enough funding for a \$1200 annual scholarship for an entering student, we were also able to add funds to our existing endowment. That will now provide a \$1200 annual scholarship for a student graduating from DCC and attending a 4-year college. Since only the interest earned from the endowments is used for scholarships, the funds will continue to serve students in the future.

Our anonymous donor has a long history with the college and with AAUW. She received a lot of support when she wanted to major in math in college and is passionate about helping others attain similar goals. As a student, she was president of the Women in Science organization. After her son attended the DCC nursery school, she taught in their math and computer science departments. That college-level experience



allowed her to move to Marist College, where she taught math and computer literacy. She has often seen girls fearful of math-related fields. She has also been a community volunteer in many capacities and has served as an AAUW leader at both the branch and state levels.

**Our donor, Barbara Van Itallie, counts AAUW as an extremely**



important part of her life and wants to give something back to the organization. On behalf of all our AAUW members and those who will benefit in the Dutchess Community College community, we would like to thank Barbara for her vital role in this very successful project!

Thanks to all who participated in this exciting centennial event. Your enthusiasm and your generosity says a lot about our organization and our commitment to equity and advancement for women.

## MEMBERSHIP COUNTS

Kathy Prisco and Maureen Tremblay  
[membership.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:membership.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

### New Directory:

Since our Open House in September, we have gained about 25 new members. Our current membership numbers over 200. We are in the process of updating the membership list and member profiles, so you should expect to receive an updated and simplified profile form by email in early 2026. After the responses arrive, we will be completing the new directory which will be available as a printable copy emailed to each member. **The information will NEVER appear online in any form.**

**ATTENTION:** If you are due or past due for renewal, please go online to catch up as soon as possible, so you will be listed in our directory and can participate fully in the life of our branch.

If you need online assistance, please contact Kathy Friedman who will walk you through the process; it's actually not as daunting as it might seem. Since National is now accepting memberships and renewals on a rolling basis, we are making an effort to establish and maintain a reasonably accurate member list for our branch.

We hope you all have a pleasant holiday season and will arrive safely in 2026!



### January Birthdays:

Geraldine Allan, Susan Davis, Patricia DeLeo, Sharon Fleury, Patricia Gullick, Beverly Hanna, Mary Anne Hogarty, Susan Kinney, Patricia Luczai, Gael Morey, Kathy Prisco, Christine Romano, Marilyn Walsh, Mary Therese Yamamoto

## DEVELOPMENT

Sandy Rankin, VP Development

### Spotlight On: Leading To Reading

I will be doing a spotlight on our initiatives and general donation options over the next few months so we can all better understand the impact of the initiatives and what value is received from our donation dollars. The first spotlight is on Leading to Reading (LTR).

One of the key activities of LTR is to provide Reading Kits for parents/caretakers of young children. For each \$25 donated to Leading to Reading, a family can receive a Reading Kit that includes information on the importance of reading and reading tips for parents, 2 new books, and a craft activity for parents/children to do together. The \$25 also includes the materials costs of the bags, labels, paper and printing.

Since 2004, we have distributed over 57,000 books to 21 agencies, most of them through family Reading Kits and book giveaways.

## LEADING TO READING

Betty Harrel



### It's A Wrap!



Leading to Reading again sponsored holiday gift wrapping days at Hudson River Lodging, the short-term residence supported by Hudson River Housing. Mountains of gifts, along with two new books for each child, will be distributed at their holiday party. There are 124 children, ages 0-18, residing at

the facility. Our members had fun wrapping and have brightened the holidays for children who may need some extra joy this season.



A thank you goes to Kathy MacCarthy, the Lagrange Lions, and all the AAUW members who took part in the gift drive for Hudson River Lodging. After seeing that more gifts were needed, Kathy spearheaded the joint venture between our two organizations. Thanks to Judy Linville, Kathy MacCarthy and Flo Mondanaro for

chairing the gift-wrapping sessions.

Thanks to all for spreading holiday cheer!



## PUBLIC POLICY

Patti DeLeo

### Rub-A-Dub-Dub Who's In the Tub?

#### The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker.

The 14th century version of this rhyme referred to maids in a "tub" – a voyeuristic fairground attraction. While the early version was an admonishment to tradesmen behaving badly, the 19th century version removed the salacious element (rewriting history?). Because the melody and rhyme were popular, the maids were freed, the men placed in the tub and cast out to "sea."



The phrasing, "the butcher, the baker and candlestick maker," is now widely used to reference "people of all trades" or any position in a hierarchy symbolizing the "diversity of everyday and essential occupations that evoke a sense of community, tradition and respect." Work was so respected that people used their occupations as last names. Does this respect for one's labor carry into the 21st century? Unlike the past, it depends on the occupation.

Colloquially, a "job" is typically a way for earning money. It is paid hourly, requires little training, has short-term goals, or is salaried requiring some field experience and expertise with opportunities for financial advancement and benefits. A career/profession addresses specialized knowledge, requires advanced education (degree(s)), licensing in many fields, adherence to ethical standards, accountability within the profession, ongoing education and long-term career commitment. Salaries, benefit packages and incentives/opportunities for promotion and performance enhance the working conditions.

The U.S. Department of Education recently redefined its "professional degree" recognition. Career options once classified as top level have been reduced to non-professional. Unsurprisingly, the reclassification significantly impacts positions held by women: nurses (88%), physician assistants (73%), nurse practitioners (90%), physical therapists (70%), audiologists (86%), accountants (60%), educators (77%), and social workers (81%).

By declassifying these occupations and reducing them to non-professional status, federal student loan limits decrease, making basic and advanced training out of economic reach for many. This move limits borrowing potential to around \$20k/per year (non-professional study) as opposed to \$50k (for professional) and caps lifetime loans. It dissuades many women from pursuing bachelor and advanced degrees in several fields, limits where they can attend, and impacts their personal and economic growth and security. Because of the downgrade, employers could require less formal

education/training for positions, licensing and reduce salary schedules. Highly trained and credentialed employees may be relegated to working under the supervision of a "professional" who may have to train and supervise new employees. Shortages are expected in already understaffed fields. It is anticipated huge voids will exist in the medical, education and social science fields.

Why these fields? The Education Department targeted specific jobs and programs for financial relief. It aims to return education control to individual states and reduce federal dollars spent in that field, reduce federal bureaucracy, and cut spending impacting areas like student loans, civil rights enforcement, K-12 grants, salaries and research. Some view it as a way to remove women and DEI from the workforce. Others contend these fields are the most common for loan default and loan relief making them costly.

Current fees for SUNY/CUNY for In State-Tuition average \$7,000 to \$21,00 while In-State On Campus ranges \$25,000 - \$30,000. The Excelsior Scholarship program, state funded, offers free tuition at SUNY and CUNY for NY residents with family incomes up to \$125,000. Private colleges and universities usually exceed \$80,00-\$100,000 per year. With economic foresight, undergrad programs may be financially accessible under the guidelines, but post grad work and pursuit of advanced degrees may be out of reach. Colleges and universities will be reviewing and revising their curriculums to meet new career demands and expectations.

Who is most affected by this change in academic status? People who have historically been "underrepresented or marginalized" based on barriers to advanced degrees. Students will be forced into more expensive private loans, debt or out of advanced education altogether. Those seeking to serve underserved areas (rural, inner city, low-income) will be impacted as barriers increase. It will reduce diversity in recognized professions and will "devalue rigorous academic training."

**AAUW** maintains its goal of *affordable, high-quality* education access for women and LGBTQ+. They support policies ensuring **equal pay, fair lending and addressing systemic barriers**. It views this reclassification as a step backward that hurts women's **economic security and professional/intellectual advancement**.

Because of their access to educational opportunity and fair pay, the butcher went on to open Omaha Steaks; the baker was actually a woman who disguised herself as a man to break into the baked goods world her father established. The candlestick maker made enough money to fund his children for MBA's. You may have heard of their legacy, Yankee Candle. Unfortunately, the three maids found themselves out of work and sought employment on Little Saint James, a private island in the Caribbean. But that's a story for another day.



## PROGRAM NOTES: Christie Van Horne Bio

As the founder and president of CVH Consulting, Christie has partnered with organizations such as Planned Parenthood, the CDC, and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to design and implement impactful public health programs.

An adjunct instructor at Vassar College, Christie teaches courses on critical issues in women's health and public health, mentoring the next generation of leaders in the field. She is a tireless advocate for reproductive health and abortion access, and has engaged with policymakers at every level of government to advance equitable health policies. Her work is rooted in amplifying marginalized voices, translating evidence into action, and empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their health.

Christie is currently pursuing a Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) degree at Tulane University.

## CENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS: AAUW advocates non-partisan elections for Board of Education

Barbara Durniak

A deep dive into our branch's history with respect to school board elections reveals our organization's long-standing commitment to non-partisanship.

Up until 1942, when the law changed, members of the Poughkeepsie school board were appointed to their 5-year terms by the mayor. As local elections were being planned, a coalition of local organizations, including AAUW, advanced the idea of an a-political slate of candidates who would be "responsible only to the public as a whole."



Under the name the Citizens' Committee, a slate of 5 candidates was assembled. Among them was **Mary Louise Landon Sague**, chair of the chemistry department at Vassar College and a founding member of our branch, who ran for a one-year position. There was much opposition to the idea of elections in general, and to the addition of the Citizens Committee in particular, with one critic opining that "this group will turn out to be nothing more nor less than the third spoke in the wheel of the two political parties." None of the Citizens' Committee

candidates prevailed but Landon Sague had an impressive showing, losing by only 304 votes. After the election, party leaders and city officials declared that the small voter turnout did not warrant the "time, effort, and expense involved" and urged that if legally possible, the city return to the system of board designation by the mayor.



However, elections were here to stay. In 1943 **Isobel Sague Carter**, another prominent branch founder, ran as an independent candidate, even though she was a registered Republican. The day before the election, Frances Taylor Rawson, branch president, was quoted in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* as saying "We count on the people of Poughkeepsie to elect Mrs. Carter and keep the Board of Education out of politics." Sague Carter ran against two other women, both of whom were endorsed by their respective political parties, and won, with a total of 848 votes.

Both Mary Landon Sague and Isobel Sague Carter were founding members of AAUW. Read about them here: <https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net/files/2025/10/Founding-Members-sm.pdf>

As we say goodbye to 2025, a year marked with bitter political divides, let us take heart in our branch's commitment to effective change though non-partisan means.



## SUPPORTERS OF THE BRANCH

Many thanks to our newsletter Patrons (\$25 or more) and Sponsors (\$10 or more). Their annual contributions help defray the expense of publishing **THE BRANCH** and other communication expenses. To add your name, send a check, payable to: "**Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW, Inc.**" to Diane Jablonski.

**Patrons:** Ruth Aldrich Gau, Mary Ann Boylan, Sandra Goldberg, Shaileen Kopec, Margaret Nijhuis