

Kaitlin Calogera | Rebecca Grawl

111 Places
in Women's History
in Washington
That You
Must Not Miss

Photographs by Cynthia Schiavetto Staliunas



emons:

Foreword

For our foremothers and for our future



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We were professional tour guides long before we became authors. Storytelling is our strength, and exploring places is our passion. But as our careers and perspectives grew, we felt compelled to reframe the narrative. In order to bring history forward, women deserved better representation in public spaces.

An idea became a business in 2018 when Kaitlin founded A Tour Of Her Own (TOHO), the first tourism company in Washington, DC to focus exclusively on women's history. The vision to create a sustainable culture of women's tourism was manifested into reality with genuine support from Rebecca, whose knowledge and commitment helped propel the business forward significantly.

Just as we hit momentum in March 2020, the tourism industry was instantly devastated by COVID-19. During a time of prohibited travel, we pivoted to transfer tourism from the streets of DC onto the pages of this book; *111 Places* was our pandemic project. We certainly encountered obstacles trying to navigate a city recovering from unprecedented events, but, despite six feet of social distancing, we ultimately discovered connection. Our stories of people and places often intersected, and when pieced together, they formed a more comprehensive narrative.

The demands of modern women were heightening in real time, but just as our foremothers, they triumphed to emerge as essential healers in our collective wellbeing. Grateful for our health and mindful of this historic moment, we wanted to offer our own contributions. With intention, we designed a guidebook that would promote and rebuild the tourism and hospitality industries. With pride, we showcased sites that would express the character and legacy of our capital city. With respect, we wrote stories that would honor women who broke ceilings and crawled on glass for us. It is our pleasure to share with you our deep appreciation for women's history in Washington, DC.

1 AKA Sisterhood Mural

Kamala Harris, Madam Vice President

The date was January 20th, 2021, and Americans were preparing for the inauguration of the first woman to be elected as vice president. Ladies across the country laced up their Converse shoes and donned beautiful pearl necklaces in celebration of Kamala Harris. “Chucks” sneakers are a playful fashion preference for Madam Vice President, but the pearls are a symbolic jewelry of her sorority.

Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) was founded in 1908 at DC’s Howard University, a prestigious historically Black college, where Harris graduated from in 1986. The everlasting connection between all Howard alumni is quite remarkable, but the members of AKA form a bond stronger than friendship; they are a sisterhood. When Kamala Harris was sworn into office, she too was wearing her pearl necklace and representing not only the people of the United States, but also her nearly 300,000 sisters from Alpha Kappa Alpha (see ch. 89).

The *Sisterhood* mural is located on the back wall of the Xi Omega Chapter building and was painted by artists Rose Jaffe and Kate DeCiccio. It features several of the sorority’s founders, who are often referred to as “Twenty Pearls.” Their portraiture shows them wearing their necklaces and surrounded by bold words – “Service,” “Education,” “Justice,” and “Legacy.” Any trained eye will notice the more intricate representation of the sorority; the pink tea rose, their official flower, and the official AKA symbol and magazine name, *Ivy Leaf*. Notable members of Alpha Kappa Alpha include singer Marian Anderson, tennis star Althea Gibson, and astronaut Mae Jemison.

Another notable member is Maya Angelou (see ch. 63), whose presence was on stage with Kamala Harris on January 20th when Amanda Gorman delivered her poem, “The Hill We Climb.” As the youngest poet to ever perform at an inauguration, Gorman wore a caged bird ring, gifted to her by Oprah Winfrey in honor of Maya Angelou’s memoir, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*.

Address 4411 14th Street NW, Washington, DC 20011, www.muralsdcproject.com/mural/sisterhood | **Getting there** Metro to Columbia Heights (Yellow and Green Line); bus 54 to 14th & Webster Streets NW | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Artists Jaffe and DeCiccio also collaborated on a mural titled *Cup Of Community* near the restaurant Soup Up, owned by Donna Henry (709 Kennedy Street NW, www.petworthnews.org/blog/soupup-kennedy).



6 American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial

She served and sacrificed

Close your eyes and think of all the veterans who have served. Picture them in uniforms, saluting the nation. How do these veterans look?

Preconceptions about gender is just one of the struggles that women in the military have to confront, often having to validate their identity while simultaneously resisting stereotypes perpetuated in a patriarchal society. For women veterans with disabilities, the experience is multiplied. Not only are they at risk to suffer physical disabilities during their service but they also report the long-term mental health impact from Military Sexual Trauma (MST). While some wounded women navigate through their hardships in private, others have embraced the public as part of the healing process.

One notable woman is Senator Ladda Tammy Duckworth, an Iraq War Veteran and the first woman with a disability elected to Congress. As the daughter of a Marine who struggled to transition into civilian life, she had a desire to serve her country and make change from an early age. After earning her Master of Arts from George Washington University in 1992, she returned to deliver the 2017 commencement speech on the National Mall.

She referred to the day her helicopter was hit as her “Alive Day” and noted how she was grateful to be saved by her crew. “I survived to serve my nation again,” Duckworth said. “Maybe I was done serving in combat, but I could see the next step in my life’s path because it meant that I could serve my fellow veterans. After I got out of Walter Reed, I went to the VA, I ran for Congress and then I won my seat in the Senate.”

The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial honors all who have sacrificed. Women included in our collective memory are illustrated by silhouettes and images.



Address 150 Washington Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20024, +1 (877) 426-2838, www.avdlm.org | **Getting there** Metro to Federal Center SW (Orange and Silver Line); bus 30N, 30S, 32, 36 to Independence Avenue & First Street SW | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Gail Cobb Way is named in memory of the country’s first Black female police officer killed in the line of duty, a Washingtonian whose parents live on this corner (300 block of 14th Place NW, www.mpd.cdc.gov/page/memory-officer-gail-cobb).

16 — Cherry Trees of DC

Eliza Scidmore, the woman behind the blossoms

Each spring, DC is transformed by a burst of pink and white when the Japanese cherry blossoms bloom. This event, usually lasting no more than 10 days, brings an estimated 1.5 million visitors to admire the more than 3,000 flowering trees in DC.

There is no marker or plaque commemorating Eliza Scidmore, the woman responsible for this annual blossoming. Eliza was a world traveler, geographer, photographer, and author, who became the first woman to sit on the board of the National Geographic Society. Her brother was a career diplomat to Asia, and Eliza was able to accompany him on many of his travels.

Frequent travel to Japan inspired Eliza to propose the idea in 1885 of planting Japanese cherry blossom trees in the nation's capital. Eliza wrote, "[T]he blooming cherry tree is the most ideally, wonderfully beautiful tree that nature has to show, and its short-lived glory makes the enjoyment keener and more poignant." Initial response was cold, but Eliza continued to advocate for the cause, proposing it every year to the Superintendent of Public Buildings and Grounds, as well as advocating to the press and writing letters to the White House. At every turn, the men in charge turned her down or ignored her entirely.

Finally, in 1909, Scidmore wrote to First Lady Helen Taft and found an ally in her quest. Taft had also traveled to Japan and seen the cherry blossoms firsthand and actively supported the cause. The project then moved forward rapidly. Scidmore proposed planting a majority of the trees on the newly reclaimed land of Potomac Park, which Taft endorsed. When a Japanese delegation learned of the plans, an offer was made to contribute the trees. On March 27, 1912, Helen Taft would plant the first cherry tree, and Scidmore was the only private citizen recorded in attendance. A plaque marks the spot where the first trees were planted, but Scidmore is not mentioned.

Address Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20006, www.nps.gov/subjects/cherryblossom/index.htm | **Getting there** Metro to Smithsonian (Blue, Orange, and Silver Line); DC Circulator to MLK Memorial | **Hours** Unrestricted | **Tip** Eliza Scidmore's DC residence (also once the home of author John Dos Passos) was located on M Street NW, in the Dupont Circle neighborhood, and it's now the popular tapas bar Boqueria (1837 M Street NW, www.boqueriarestaurant.com).

