

History of the ESU

The English-Speaking Union of the United States formally organized in the United States in 1920, two years after the establishment of its counterpart in the British Common-



wealth. The ESU arose from the conviction of its founder, Sir Evelyn Wrench, and a group of like-minded American

and British friends that maintenance of the close personal and national ties forged during World War I was necessary for the preservation of peace. Sir Evelyn firmly believed that given the opportunity to know one another personally, people who shared a common language would soon discover that they also shared similar values, whatever their differences in nationality or background. Its educational mission would be carried out by a host of activities allowing for personal contact between peoples at every level.



The English-Speaking Union
Southwest Virginia Branch
www.esuus.org/southwestva/

The Branch President's Message *Judy Bishop*

In honor of The Declaration of Independence, the following message is an overview of English spoken in the 17th and 18th centuries in America.

By the time the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, the English language had undergone major changes in structure and vocabulary (12,000 new words). Over the next 150 years words were borrowed from the Dutch, Spanish, French and Native Americans. Unlike the British, the Colonists combined words (grasshopper, catfish) and used contractions, which the British hated.

It is not clear when a distinctive American emerged. Men like George Washington sounded like their English counterparts. They said path and bath like we do today, but upper-class Brits in Southern England began to pronounce words with a broad 'a'. Also, unlike the variety of British accents, America has far fewer distinct accents. There is a slight lingering resemblance today to that of the 13 colonies from Massachusetts to Georgia.

Some eastern coastal islands and isolated Appalachian regions maintained old accents longer. The accent in Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay traces back to Cornwall and Southern England in the 1700's. Ocracoke Island in North Carolina has a unique brogue influenced by Native Americans, British sailors and pirates like Blackbeard.

English is an elastic language that binds us together. Here is a toast to the Mother Tongue! Welcome to the 2026-2027 season of the English Speaking Union.



English-Speaking Union
Southwest Virginia Branch

2026-2027



ESU Mission

The ESU celebrates English as a shared language to foster global understanding and good will by providing educational and cultural opportunities for students, educators, and members.

ESU Vision

The ESU, a nonprofit, non-political organization:

1. Advances global understanding by providing educational opportunities through programs and scholarships for students, educators, and members;
2. Promotes communication and open exchange of ideas among the world's speakers of English;
3. Enriches communities through active involvement of its branch members in outreach programs;
4. Offers financial assistance to students and educators to further academic pursuits in English-related studies; and
5. Develops common bonds through a shared interest in the English language and culture to strengthen friendship among members and those they serve.

ESU Programs 2026-2027

September 27, 2026 4-6pm

Garden Party Kickoff at the Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs at 3640 Colonial Avenue. Hors d'oeuvres, wine, and soft drinks will be provided. Guests are most welcome and are free.

November 5, 2026 6-8pm

Cocktails and dinner at the Shenandoah Club to hear Judy Bishop to speak on *The Two Georges*. This offers a comparison of two 18th century leaders and their contributions to the evolution of their respective governments.

December 13, 2026 Noon to 2 pm

Our annual Holiday Luncheon at the Shenandoah Club. Holiday attire is suggested.

February 18, 2027 3-5 pm

Afternoon tea and finger foods at the Shenandoah club to hear Ken Garren speak on *The Challenger Tragedy*: what happened and why we know the astronauts may have survived the initial 'explosion'.

March 18, 2027 6-8pm

Cocktails and dinner at the Shenandoah Club to hear Patrick Henry Jolly speak on *An Evening with Patrick Henry* – a direct descendant of Patrick and Sarah Henry, Mr. Jolly appears in costume to share the life of Patrick Henry and the history of his home, Red Hill.

April 29, 2027 6-8pm

Cocktails and dinner at the Shenandoah Club along with our Annual Meeting, followed by a presentation by Jeff Vick speaking on *English, The Language of Democracy*: how democracy first flourished among the English-speaking people of America and sprang from the written English word.

SWVA Branch Officers

President Judy Bishop

Past President Robert Habermann

Vice-President Programs Linda Habermann

Vice-President Membership Pegram Johnson

Secretary Anne Tiffany

Treasurer David Thurlow

For membership information, please contact:

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Annual Dues are:

\$75 for an individual
or
\$125 for a couple

For more information on the Southwest Virginia ESU branch please go to our website at:
www.esuus.org/southwestva/