

Minutes  
**Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting**  
**April 11, 2014 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall**

**MEMBERS ATTENDING:**

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, T.E. Beck Jr., Richard P. Bell, Emmett W. Hanger Jr, John Higgs, Pamela Fox, Lynn Mitchell, Kenneth Plum, James Morris, William Sibert, Peggy Sheets, Norman Smiley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Benjamin Cline, Reo Hatfield, John Ijem, Steven Landes, Frank McDonough, Scott MacMillan, William Stanley, Cheryl Talley, Frank Wagner

**GUESTS ATTENDING:**

Elizabeth Culbertson, John Dod, James Feaganes, Emily Heacock, Gypsy MacMillian, James Russell, Judy Wyatt

**STAFF ATTENDING:**

John Avoli, Eric Bryan, Justin Reiter, Lydia Volskis, Merritt Schoonover, Frances Carrington, Cookie Toms, Sally Landes, Eryn Landry, Andrew Richardson

**CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9 a.m., welcomed attendees and asked each person to introduce themselves. He thanked the Museum staff for their work in preparing for the meeting.

The minutes of the September 2013 meeting were approved as distributed.

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

Executive Director John Avoli said that today's meeting will focus on the educational mission of the Museum and that several interpretive staff Members and volunteers will present information about the outreach and youth volunteer programs. He expressed appreciation to the Museum's staff and volunteers for their hard work over the winter and early Spring in the face of daunting weather conditions. Winter has been difficult at the Museum as bad weather has delayed several outdoor maintenance projects such as a new horse paddock and the Mt. Tabor Church project.

Mr. Avoli thanked the American Frontier Culture Foundation for their support of the Museum, and singled out Tom Sheets for his donations of lumber to a variety of Museum needs over the years. He also thanked Trustee Dr. Nwachukwu Anakwenze for the beautiful "material culture" items he has donated for the West African site, with a shipping container en route with more items. We should note that Dr. Anakwenze has recently received the title "Chief Dr. Nwachukwu Anakwenze Ndigbo" of the Igbo.

Then he thanked the Legislative Members of the Museum's Board who serve in the state legislature for their support for the Museum's budget requests which include financing for staff positions and planning funds for the Mill project.

He also reported that:

- Museum marketing efforts are proving successful, as visitation numbers and revenue are increasing.
- Property development planning is slow but positive.

- The two trips to Italy this year are full, with forty and thirty-eight people respectively; all proceeds go to the Foundation.
- Last year the Foundation fundraising trip to Germany initiated a student-exchange program. Three German teenagers from Hordt will visit the area this summer, staying with host families. (Next summer, students from those host families will visit in Germany.) While the German students are visiting in our area, they will spend some time volunteering on the German farm.
- A busy events season begins in April with Wool Days, and includes a large Igbo Cultural Festival in late July. Dr. Anakwenze noted that there is a potential for several thousand attendees from across the world and from around the United States.
- Museum staff and volunteers hosted a retirement party for longtime employee Mark Gatewood and named the Winter Lecture series focusing on the American Chestnut tree, in his honor.
- Justin Reiter has moved from being Museum Marketing Director to his new position as Executive Director of the American Frontier Culture Foundation, although for awhile he will function in both roles.

## **Budget and Finance**

Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover reviewed a new chart detailing special event attendance and revenue over the past several years. In FY2014 this revenue accounted for 24% of gate receipts and has increased by \$37,480 over last year. Summer camp reservations began in February this year, which contributed to an increase in winter revenue, and golf cart revenue has increased as well. She reported that donations can now be taken online, and that the Museum has collected \$140 by this method to date.

She reviewed the FY14 non-general fund revenue estimates. The majority of the Museum's non-general fund revenue comes from school and general admission fees, registration fees, the Sheetz lease, golf cart rentals, TIC rental, merchandise sales and pet fees. All of the reports presented are for the period ending March 31, 2014.

In presenting the expenditure report, which covered payroll, operating expenses, capital projects and cash with the Treasury, Mrs. Schoonover said that several internal budget adjustments must be completed before the end of the fiscal year on June 30. The Museum's expenditures are comparable with those at the same time in the last fiscal year. After her report, Mr. Vames thanked Mrs. Schoonover for her work and reminded the Trustees that they were welcome to ask questions or ask for more information at any time.

## **Information Technology**

Deputy Director Eric Bryan reported that the Museum has two Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA) laptops and that the Museum will soon add "Sharepoint" a cloud-based file-sharing program. Soon we will add several more VITA email addresses so that a number of staff members can both store and share information easily. With the new additions, the current agency VITA monthly cost is \$513; before the Museum reduced the number of VITA computers in 2011 the last monthly bill from VITA was \$9,395. The new admissions program "Outbound" and the new point-of-sale system "Counterpoint" are in place and working well. Information technology security issues will be raised as an Auditor of Public Accounts management recommendation to the Museum after our current regular audit; Mr. Bryan is currently serving as "designated IT security officer" but when the Fiscal Technician position is filled, that individual will assume that role.

## **Capital Projects**

Mr. Bryan reported that the administration building HVAC system plan has been sent to the Department of General Services for approval. Once the plan is approved, the project will be advertised and companies may submit bids to complete the work. The request for proposal for A&E services for planning the Early American Industries exhibit (Mill), which will be a pool-funded project, is open for bids until April 30. Paving projects for the loop road and Dairy Barn parking lot is pending in the current budget.

The dismantled Mt. Tabor church is in storage; site work for the reconstruction will begin soon.

## **Education and Interpretation**

Interim Education Director Andrew Richardson reported that the 10, 215 students served so far this year are mainly from the Shenandoah Valley and Piedmont, but a few groups came from farther away, even from West Virginia and North Carolina. Due to bad weather, Spring field trip reservations started slowly, but now nearly 5,900 are scheduled to visit before the end of June. Approximately 5,000 students benefitted from the Charles Fund grant which provided funds for transportation, entrance fees and lunches for students from Title I and disadvantaged schools.

Outreach programs presented by Museum staff served 4, 578 students this year (last year we served about 2,387), and were supported by funds from Target, the Berkeley Foundation and the American Frontier Culture Foundation, which held several fundraisers specifically to support the field projects. The schools do not incur any costs, as the Museum teacher's time, travel and materials are all provided. Mr. Reiter stated that next year, the Foundation will concentrate on supporting these outreach programs. Mr. Richardson reviewed how the grant funding process works, and noted that the Museum tries to concentrate funds on areas of the state not well-served with field trip visits.

Eryn Landry, a Museum interpreter, said that the outreach programs are a great representation of the Museum's mission and educational programs, and are hands-on and interactive like program offerings on site. Outreach teachers travel with artifacts, garments, and games to use in their presentations. She invited two Members of the Board to card wool, and distributed two clumps of flax, both processed and unprocessed, to illustrate the difference in texture.

The outreach programs, she continued, are like the onsite programs, and cover a variety of state Standards of Learning, and are a great way to introduce the Museum to both schools and the general public.

Delegate Plum asked if the outreach programs were all grant-funded; Mr. Richardson replied that they were. Mr. Sibert asked if the Foundation would offer more funding in future for these programs; Mr. Reiter responded that the Foundation intends to concentrate on support for educational program during the upcoming year.

Mr. Richardson reviewed the grants submitted for the upcoming year; about \$40,000 has been requested in addition to Foundation matching grants of \$19,000. He noted that this year the Museum's programs reached nearly twice as many children as last year with about the same amount of funds; and a number of the outreach programs were presented to larger audiences in auditoriums and similar spaces. He reported that through the evaluation of the outreach programs by teachers and students, we learned that 55% of teachers had never visited the Museum and 72% were interested in scheduling a field trip, while 74% of the students had never visited the Museum and 88% were interested in a field trip. Mr. Beck asked if the

outreach programs were most heavily used in the winter months, Mr. Richardson responded that they were, as those are the times when the Museum is less busy and staff can be spared to conduct the programs around the state.

In other education department news:

- Home School Day in October 2013 hosted 1,106 visitors, and the Museum is accepting reservations for the May 3 Spring Home School Day now.
- 2014 Summer Camp registrations began in February; we have reached about 2/3 capacity already! The Museum will again offer two camps for a total of six weeks each; children can register for one week or multiple weeks. One camp is for 5-8 year olds and the other is for 9-12 year olds.
- In 2014, Museum staff will continue development of the new education program brochure, as well as marketing these programs to teachers across the state. Also, staff will continue to refine programs to support the State SOL's and will attend social studies conferences and similar events as needed to promote Museum programs.

Sally Landes described the John Lewis Society; the Museum's volunteer program for youth aged 12-16, which has 59 Members this year. Last year the student volunteers donated 5,421 hours to the Museum. Alex Tillen, Sally Landes and Eryn Landry oversee the program. Benefits to the student volunteers are interpretive skills such as gardening, cooking, textiles and animal care, life skills such as public speaking, and general volunteer experience. Benefits to the Museum include help with interpretation, demonstration, school groups, events and special programs such as Creepy Tales and Lantern Tours. Mrs. Landes described some enjoyable activities the students participate in such as their annual overnight on the farms wherein they cook supper on the farmsites, play games and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students are allowed to spend the night on the farms; boys in England and girls in Ireland. Delegate Plum asked how often the students volunteer and she said that the Museum asks each person to commit to no less than two times a month, with some students able to volunteer more often.

John Lewis 3<sup>rd</sup> year member Elizabeth Culbertson described her experience in the Society, noting that she loves the historic costumes, sewing, "foodways", gardening and the whole process of living history. Gypsy MacMillian, also a 3<sup>rd</sup> year member, noted that she had wanted to volunteer at the Museum since she was a small child and especially enjoys working in costume and learning and teaching history in such a unique way.

In news from the Interpretation Department, Mr. Bryan reported that as of March 2014, the Museum has ten full-time and sixteen part-time interpreters, several staff who are able to work in costume if needed and several volunteers who work in costume on the farmsites. These staff and volunteers cover ten outdoor exhibits from March through December, offer educational programs, mentor John Lewis Society students, conduct outreach programs, and perform in special events such as Creepy Tales and Lantern Tours. He said that the Museum is slightly better staffed than it was four years ago, but that there are days when staffing is still too light, and the quality of the educational experience suffers.

### **Visitor Experience and Satisfaction**

Mr. Bryan has collected 150 report cards so far in FY2014; we receive few completed report cards although each guest receives a blank copy when buying a ticket. He reviewed several slides showing positive and not positive report cards. Of the cards received, 148 rated the Museum as good or excellent. Our goal is

to have 5% of attendees return their report card upon completion of their visit. However, it is also possible to receive feedback from our visitors via new methods such as social media and the website.

## **Marketing**

Justin Reiter introduced Emily Heacock, the Museum's marketing intern from Bridgewater College, where she majors in business and marketing. He reported that during the past year a variety of methods such as print, television, radio and online have been used to advertise the Museum's programs. He evaluated the strength of each type of advertising, towards planning for efficient use of our limited marketing funds in the future. Many of the Museum's television commercials get a high viewing rate when they are posted onto the Museum's Facebook page. Generally, and in all but a few specific ways, print advertising is "dead" and internet/online advertising reaches a far broader audience and is more effective.

He reviewed the process by which radio and television ads are made and how the Museum is billed, and compared this to online "click-through" counts for web advertising. He discussed the Museum's current and upcoming efforts to create a recognizable brand for its advertising, and highlighted the value of daily postings on Facebook and the newly launched Museum blog. The Museum has advertised in both Virginia Living and Virginia Wine Lovers magazine, and been commended in both, and has created a new rack card series. He also showed a slide depicting the Museum's simple yet effective signs on Richmond Road and Frontier Drive.

The Museum's visitation has increased by 17% over the same period last year. Mr. Reiter also reviewed the past year's marketing budget expenditures, including the percentage spent on the various modes of advertising. Ms. Heacock has been updating Museum information on about thirty popular travel websites, in addition to her other duties. The Museum will be a sponsor of the state Home-School Convention as well, in order to encourage more home-school families to visit the Museum. Delegate Plum noted that he was a Museum Facebook friend and that he enjoyed the daily postings and information.

## **REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION:**

Foundation President John Dod reported that Justin Reiter has been hired as the first Executive Director of the American Frontier Culture Foundation, and that he was working with Mr. Reiter and with Foundation Board Members to make plans for the future.

The Annual Fund has received 174 gifts so far in FY14 for a total of \$54,563; in FY13 at the same point the Annual Fund had raised about \$56,982. In FY14 the Shenandoah Society has 127 members; in FY13 at the same time it had 131 members, and this may account for the slight decline in Annual Fund revenue this year. He and Mr. Reiter will develop strategies to increase Shenandoah Society membership and plan other ways to increase Annual Fund revenue.

He also reviewed income and attendance from the Foundation's special events this fiscal year. Program grants received and awarded by the Foundation recently include grants from Target (\$7,500 for outreach programs), the Charles Fund (\$50,000 for field trip support), Dominion Resources (\$40,000 for the Mt. Tabor Church project), the Curry Foundation (\$1,000), the Berkley Foundation (\$1,000) and the Community Foundation. The Foundation has other pending grant requests with Dominion Resources and the Community Foundation.

Mr. Vames thanked Mr. Dod and the Foundation for their support of the Museum and reminded all Trustees to support the Foundation. Mr. Sibert also noted that Trustee members can recruit other donors and sponsors for the Museum as well.

### **Property Development**

Mr. Vames reported that the Committee overseeing property development plans is making slow but steady progress.

### **Miscellaneous**

Mrs. Sheets reported that she, Mr. Avoli and Mr. Reiter visited Richmond several times during the General Assembly Session, and thanked the Legislative Members for their support. She noted the importance to budget requests of detailed data about Museum performance.

### **NEXT MEETING DATE:**

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will be on September 19, 2014 at 9 a.m. in the Lecture Hall.

### **ADJOURNMENT:**

Mr. Toms made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Sheets, that the meeting be adjourned. There was no discussion, the motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.