

**Minutes**  
**Frontier Culture Museum Board of Trustees Meeting**  
**September 19, 2014 9:00 a.m. - Lecture Hall**

**Members Attending:**

T.E. Beck, Jr, Joseph Fitzgerald, Pamela Fox, Dianne Fulk, R. Steven Landes, John Higgs, John Ijem, Peggy Sheets, Kenneth Plum, Elly Swecker, Nanalou Sauder, William Sibert, Norman Smiley, Emmett Toms, Paul Vames

**Members Absent:**

Nwachukwu Anakwenze, Richard Bell, Benjamin Cline, Clifford Garstang, Emmett Hanger Jr., Reo Hatfield III, William Stanley Jr, Frank Wagner, Tony Wilt

**Guests Attending:**

Elizabeth Griffin (Office of the Attorney General), Savannah Funkhouser (Legislative Assistant, Delegate Richard P. Bell), Chad Funkhouser (Legislative Assistant, Delegate Tony Wilt), John Dod (President, American Frontier Culture Foundation), Justin Reiter (Executive Director, American Frontier Culture Foundation), Megan Sullivan (Museum Intern).

**Staff Attending:**

Executive Director John Avoli, Deputy Director Eric Bryan, Marketing Director Joseph Herget, Operations Manager Lydia Volskis, Education Director Andrew Richardson, Interpretation Director Alex Tillen, Foundation Administrator Frances Carrington

**CALL TO ORDER AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Board Chair Paul Vames called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and each person attending introduced themselves. The minutes of the April 2014 and July 2014 meetings were approved unanimously as distributed.

**BOARD ELECTIONS**

Mr. Sibert said that according to the Board Bylaws, every two years, in even-numbered years, the Board elects a Chair and Vice-Chair. He reported that the Executive Committee has recommended Paul Vames for another term as Chair and Peggy Sheets as Vice-Chair. He made a motion that the Board elect Paul Vames as Chair and Peggy Sheets as Vice-Chair for a two-year term. The motion was seconded by Mr. Beck, there was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Avoli welcomed all attendees and gave a special welcome to the new Trustee Members. He recognized the Museum staff for their hard work and dedication, and expressed appreciation to both the Board of Trustees and Board of Directors for their unwavering support of the Museum, even in difficult budget times. He introduced new Marketing Director Joe Herget, who will tell more about himself later in the meeting.

The Naturalization Ceremony on Tuesday was a great success, with 80 new citizens taking the Oath of Citizenship. The Museum was honored to host Governor Terry McAuliffe as the keynote speaker. Staunton Elks Lodge 351 provided a pizza lunch for attendees which included about 400 schoolchildren.

This summer, the Museum was happy to host several exchange students from the German town of Hordt, the original home of the German farmhouse. The exchange was arranged between the Museum and Hordt town and education officials, including Foundation Board Member Berndt Doltt, a former Vice-Mayor of Hordt. The students stayed with local host families and spent part of their time volunteering on the German farm.

Mr. Avoli thanked the Members of the Board of Trustees who serve in the Legislature for their support in obtaining maintenance reserve and capital project funds during the last budget cycle. The funds have been used to replace the canopy over the Museum Store entrance, replace the aging HVAC systems in the administration building complex, repave portions of Cochran Parkway, and for the upcoming repaving project for the loop roads and pathways within the Museum. He also recognized the members of the Real Estate Committee, who, together with Members of the Foundation Board, have worked diligently to finish the property development plans. He expressed the Board's appreciation to Ms. Elizabeth Griffin, the Museum's Counsel from the Office of the Attorney General, whose help has been vital in preparing the proper legal documentation for the property development and other museum initiatives.

He called the Board's attention to a number of upcoming events; this weekend's Good Times, Tastes and Tradition Festival sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce, the Foundation's fundraiser Golf Tournament, Oktoberfest, and then Halloween Fright Night tours and Holiday Lantern Tours at Christmas,

Mr. Avoli reviewed the challenges facing the Museum during the upcoming year or two, which include recently having submitted a budget reduction plan for 5% for FY15 and possibly 7% for FY16. At this time, he does not anticipate any layoffs as we have several vacant funded positions to use to make up the required amount. As the Museum's budget is approximately 85% personnel costs, any substantive budget reduction usually requires cutting positions. Mrs. Sheets reminded the Board that when we hire, train and costume the many part-time staff, we make a large investment in them as Museum employees. When we have less available fulltime positions to offer them, the Museum loses well-trained staff to jobs in other organizations. Mr. Vames agreed and commended the staff and volunteers for consistently making the Museum an excellent experience and value with slim resources. He noted that very few if any similar venues have grown and prospered as the Museum has even under difficult financial circumstances, and especially commended Mr. Avoli's strong leadership of the Museum over the years during some particularly bad economic times and repeated state budget reductions.

Mr. Bryan said that as Fiscal Director Merritt Schoonover is away leading a training session for the Commonwealth's new accounting system "Cardinal", he would present the financial reports. He reviewed the revenue report for FY14, which ended June 30 and the revenue report to-date for FY15; noting that in FY14, revenues increased over FY13 by about \$53,000. While our budget for Non-general fund revenues in FY14 was \$414,900, actual NGF revenues were \$460,600, so we were able to "roll" \$45,600 of the extra

revenue into FY15. He also reviewed the expenditure report for FY14 and the expenditure report to-date for FY15, reminding the Board that about 85% of the Museum's expenditures are for personnel. He also said that in the first two months of FY15, revenue has increased, due in part to a restitution payment and careful monitoring of expenses. Mr. Beck thanked Mr. Smiley for his input which resulted in the new format for the finance reports.

Delegate Landes asked about the Museum's current VITA (Virginia Information Technology Agency) expenses. Mr. Bryan responded that in addition to the two current VITA computers, we have added two VITA computers, for personnel system connectivity and to prepare for the launch of the new Cardinal Accounting system which requires one extra person to have access the system, due to separation of duties requirements. Our monthly cost is \$900, still a great deal less than the \$10,000 per month we were struggling with several years ago before drastically reducing our VITA usage. The current cost is not expected to rise in the near future.

Mr. Bryan reported that as many as six fulltime interpretive and maintenance staff may be eligible to retire within the next couple of years, and the ability to replace them is of significant importance to the Museum. We have a large pool of talented and well-trained part-time staff, and if the current budget climate persists, we may need the assistance of our Legislative Trustee Members to retain and rehire the positions. These staff are vital to maintaining the Museum's quality educational experience for our guests and especially for the thousands of schoolchildren who visit each year expecting to cover the state-mandated Standards of Learning. The Museum's full-time and part-time staff and several costumed volunteers staff and teach at 10 outdoor exhibits at the extensive Museum site seven days a week year-round, as well as conduct outreach programs, special events and holiday and special programs. Mr. Sibert said that the buildings we have are nice, but that it is the people – staff and volunteers – who give the Museum its vitality and its unique ability to “bring the past to life”, and that we could use twice as many staff as we currently employ, to serve the audiences we hope to engage as the Museum grows. Delegate Landes agreed, noting that in last year's state budget, funding for additional part-time workers was included, but removed when the state's revenues declined and budget reductions were needed. He suggested that until state revenues improve, we should prepare strategies to retain the previously mentioned positions whose occupants may retire within the next couple of years.

Ms. Swecker asked about the Museum's recruitment costs; Mr. Bryan responded that as a state agency, we are required to post all openings on the Virginia Jobs line, a state job bank, and that many online and local job listing services gather the information from the Jobsline. In recent times, we have not had to do any advertising beyond this and generally receive dozens and in many cases hundreds of applications for each opening.

The state's new accounting system “Cardinal” is set to launch on October 1, and replaces a thirty-plus year-old system with many glitches. Reporting will be available in a more contemporary format to agencies as needed on a 24/7 basis, rather than the older method of month-end reporting sent out by the central office. The Commonwealth is switching from cash accounting to modified accrual, and is integrated with other key state computer systems.

The Museum has taken charge of the Annual Pass program from the Foundation as of July 1. The Annual Pass program replaces the old membership program and includes a range of affordable passes from \$10 - \$250. So far, 96 passes have been sold for a total of \$3,200 in revenue.

Museum staff have spent the summer recruiting an Arts and Engineering firm for the Early American Industries Exhibit (Mill), and now the draft Memorandum of Understanding is being drafted. Once this has occurred, the Mill Committee will meet and begin more detailed planning.

The Mt. Tabor United Methodist Church project Site preparation work has begun and the reconstruction is expected to be complete by the end of October. Dr. Ijem asked if the local African American community would be involved in the project as it progresses; Mr. Bryan responded that a church service dedication is planned, and that the local Methodist Church District Superintendent is enthusiastic about encouraging the seven historically black Methodist congregations in the district to participate.

## **B. Education and Interpretation**

Education Director Andrew Richardson reported that total school visitation for FY14 was 22, 970 of which 17, 581 were field trips and 5,389 were served through outreach programs. IN FY13 the total was 20, 585 and in FY12 the total was 15,032. Reservations for this Fall and even the Spring of 2015 are beginning.

Delegate Landes asked whether more elementary, middle or high school students visited; Mr. Richardson responded that due to block scheduling, high school students visit the least, middle school visitation is moderate, and elementary school students comprise the largest group of field trip attendees. He estimates that about 80% of students visiting are elementary school students, 15% are middle school students and 5% are high school students. Delegate Landes asked if the Museum programs were all supportive of the state Standards of Learning (SOL's); Mr. Richardson said that they are, and described some new programs relating to the Science SOL's that we have piloted successfully for middle schools. The Museum has a large beautiful outdoor site, so some Science programs may also be offered to teachers seeking multiple SOL coverage.

About 5,000 students were able to come to the Museum or receive an outreach program due to the generosity of the Charles Fund, which grants the Museum \$50,000 a year to support education programs for underprivileged schools. The grant supports admission, lunches, transportation and gift bags in some combination for the schools. Mr. Reiter reported on the background of the Charles Fund and its founder, Museum Board Member and longtime champion, Mr. Edward Eisenhart. Mr. Eisenhart was introduced to the Museum by Mrs. Lee Cochran, and he helped arrange the acquisition of the German Farm via his friend, Baron Nikolas von Shrenk. Mr. Eisenhart also covered much of the expense in acquiring the German Farm. The Charles Fun and Mr. Eisenhart's estate has also supported the Museum's orientation video and the English Farm fund. His gifts have totaled \$715,000 to the Museum over the years.

Outreach programs in FY14 were supported by grants from Target (\$7,500), Berkeley (\$1,000) and matching funds from the American Frontier Culture Foundation. Schools incur no costs, and all expenses are covered by the grants. Museum teachers can present programs to auditorium-sized groups or individual classrooms. Many schools within the geographical boundaries for certain grants have assisted with letters of support for the grant funding, and in turn are offered a chance to receive an outreach program if the grants are successful. Mr. Richardson showed several photographs of outreach programs in classroom and auditorium settings. We are awaiting news of the status of several grant applications.

Home School Day on the Spring of 2014 was a great success, with 449 students and families, and Fall Home School Day on Friday October 3 has 86 reservations so far. Generally, reservations are made closer to the date, as families check the weather forecast before making a decision.

The new Education brochure has been mailed to teachers across the state, and is already generating contacts and reservations. Mr. Richardson spent a significant amount of time researching individual teacher names and contact information, to ensure that the brochures were received by those who make field trip decisions and plans. He will continue to prepare SOL-related programs and attend several state social studies and teacher's conferences to make contacts and advertise the Museum's programs. Mrs. Swecker asked if the brochure included follow-up activities for classroom use; Mr. Richardson responded that it did.

The summer camps in 2014 were extremely popular and sold out, with two separate camps, one for 5-8 year olds and one for 9-12 year olds. Over three hundred children attended, 156 in the younger camp and 152 in the older camp.

Mr. Avoli introduced Interpretation Director Alex Tillen, who has been at the Museum for about 26 years. Mr. Tillen added to the summer camp report, noting that in order to preserve the unique aspect of the Museum's camps, and allow the maximum hands-on activity for each child, each session of the camps can only enroll 25 children. However, a week or two of extra camps could be added in the summer to maximize overall enrollment. He said that for the past several years, the camps have filled without any advertisement – but by “word of mouth”. Mrs. Sauder asked how our camps compare to others in the area; Mr. Tillen responded that we offer the camps for a good price, enjoyable and unique activities such as cooking, gardening and crafts, and good “buzz” among the children and their friends. Many campers attend for several years and then apply to be in the Museum's youth volunteer program, the John Lewis Society.

The Museum has nine fulltime interpreters, one fulltime blacksmith, fifteen part-time interpreters, one supervisor and several costumed volunteers to staff ten outdoor exhibits March through December; more positions are an important goal for the future as the Museum expands and grows. Museum site staff must care for the ten sites, interpret to school groups and regular visitors, mentor John Lewis volunteers, participate in special events, offer outreach programs and spend time preparing for upcoming seasons and programs. The Museum has several less farm animals than we did at this time last year, but we have deployed and housed the animals in areas closer to public areas for the visitors to enjoy.

The John Lewis Society, the Museum's volunteer program for 12-16 year olds, has 59 members this year – the biggest class ever! Last year, the youth volunteers contributed nearly 5,000 volunteer hours to the Museum. The program is filled each year by “word of mouth” and needs no advertising; The number of students is limited however, by the number of staff available to mentor them. The John Lewis Society volunteer learn interpretive, cooking, gardening and animal care skills, as well as public speaking and volunteer experience. Mrs. Fulk asked how the students handle the lack of technology in their work at the Museum; Mr. Tillen said that they seem to enjoy it, but often have their cell phones hidden for use during breaks!

### **C. Marketing**

New Marketing and Sales Director Joe Herget, who began work at the Museum on August 1, greeted the Board and described his work experience. He arrived just after the start of the new Fiscal year, and former Marketing Director and now Foundation Executive Director Justin Reiter had already arranged for a number of media and marketing services for the upcoming year. Mr. Herget complimented the new branding campaign which is also already underway. The Museum's marketing campaign takes two forms, the first is event-specific marketing, and the second is Museum “branding”, which includes continuity and complimentary content and visual themes for maps, guidebooks, brochures, online, rack cards, local and regional media, placemats etc...

The Museums uses a variety of marketing media, including print, radio, online and occasionally television, based on the availability of marketing funds. A recent example of television marketing is the Oktoberfest advertisement featuring Museum Interpreter Gottfried Pikel. Mr. Herget noted that Facebook is an especially strong communications tool for the local community and region. Digital advertising is growing, and many older print advertising platforms are fading in usefulness and popularity. Digital marketing includes the Museum's website, many forms of social media and our event and program partner websites.

Mr. Herget reviewed attendance for FY14, which increased by 9% over FY13. He reminded the Board that due to being an outdoor venue, the Museum's attendance is often significantly affected by the weather, especially during certain times of the year. So far, FY15 attendance looks strong, especially due to

summer camp and general admissions. He reviewed promotional plans for the Museum's remaining Fall and Holiday events, and said that he will institute a new planning system for marketing beginning in January and February of 2015, with review of past spending, identification of growth opportunities, staff input, and the formulation of goals, objectives and strategies for the upcoming year. Mr. Smiley suggested that although it is difficult to track some aspects of marketing activity, we should track or closely monitor as many areas as we can in order to make the most efficient use of our limited marketing funds. Mr. Herget agreed and noted that planning ways to track and evaluate the results of marketing initiatives would be included as a part of the planning process in early 2015.

## **REPORT FROM THE FOUNDATION**

American Frontier Culture Foundation President John Dod greeted the Trustees and especially the new Trustee Members. He reported that in FY14, the Foundation supported the Museum with \$100,000 for part-time interpreter salaries, \$85,000 to support programs in Interpretation and Education as well as Buildings and Grounds needs, and \$80,000 in field trip grant support. The Annual Fund had a goal of \$75,000 and raised \$76,603, a 27% increase over the last fiscal year. The Annual Pass program had a goal of \$19,200 and raised \$17,340, while not quite meeting the goal was still a 6% increase over the previous fiscal year. The Annual Fund for FY15 will have a new "look" and brochure with new descriptive levels and categories of giving. In FY15 Foundation goals include a gift renewal of 75%, 20% more new donors, increase giving from past donors by 20% and an overall increase of 25% in funds raised over FY14. He reviewed attendance at Foundation fundraiser events and distributed the golf tournament brochure. Delegate Plum asked for clarification on how many part-time interpretive jobs were supported by the Foundation; Mr. Reiter responded that the Foundation supports approximately eight to ten jobs, depending on the number of hours.

Mr. Vames stated that the goal is to have 100% of both Boards support the Museum financially, as this is an important indicator to grant organizations of the internal support for the Museum's offerings. Mr. Sibert agreed and noted that Board Members could also become a Member of the Museum through an annual pass or donate items in kind, or contribute financially – there are a variety of ways Members of both Boards can support the Museum.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

No items of old business were discussed.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

At 11:10 Delegate Landes said:

*I move that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia enter closed session for:*

*Discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community, pursuant to the exemption in Virginia Code*

*§ 2.2-3711(A)(5), and related to the potential sale or lease of real property conveyed by the Museum to the American Frontier Culture Foundation.*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Beck, there was no discussion and the motion passed unanimously. All attendees other than Board Members left the room.

At 11:30 a.m., Mr. Sibert made a motion that the Board enter Open Session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Beck and there was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Then Mr. Landes said “*Whereas, the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia convened in closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and*

*Whereas, Virginia Code § 2.2-3712 requires a certification by this Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;*

*NOW, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge:*

*(1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under Virginia law, and*

*(2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened*

*were heard, discussed, or considered in the closed meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Frontier Culture Museum of Virginia.*

The motion was seconded by Mr. Beck and there was no discussion. Each Member affirmed by roll call vote that no other business had been discussed, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is set for Friday April 17 at 9 a.m. in the Lecture Hall.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to discuss, Mrs. Sauder made a motion that the meeting adjourn. The motion was seconded by Dr. Ijem and there was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.