



**The Board of Directors of
Friends of Wilderness Battlefield
Host the 2024 Membership Meeting
November 9th, 2024,
at the historic New Hope Baptist Church,
Orange County, Virginia**

Friends of Wilderness Battlefield

2024 Officers and Board of Directors

Executive Committee

Bob Lookabill, *President*

Beth Stenstrom, *Vice President*

Stephanie Bianchi, *Secretary*

Jeff Slunt, *Treasurer*

Peter Kolakowski, *At Large*

Board of Directors

Suzanne Baxter Gary Close

Beverly Ellis Ben Hamm

Kevin Hunt Joe Lafleur

Lynn McDonald Greg Mertz

Ruth Pavlik Don Shockey

Annual Membership Business Meeting

November 9th, 2024

AGENDA

Call to Order

Bob Lookabill, President

Declaration of a Quorum

Stephanie Bianchi, Secretary

Approval of 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

FoWB Membership

2023 Financials

Jeff Slunt, Treasurer

President's Remarks

Bob Lookabill

Election of Members to the Board of Directors

Pete Kolakowski, Governance Committee

Announcements/Questions/Adjournment

Lunch will follow the business meeting and then our **Guest Speaker**, Mike Block of Emerging Civil War Inc., will give a presentation on the Battle of Mine Run.

FoWB Annual Membership Meeting- Saturday, 4 November 2023 Minutes

President Bob Lookabill called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m. Secretary Stephani Bianchi affirmed a quorum. Motion was made, seconded, and passed to accept the minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting.

Jeff Slunt presented the treasurer's report, which is included in this agenda booklet, which is provided to all attendees. There were no questions, and it was accepted unanimously. Bob L. noted FoWB is in excellent financial shape.

Bob L. noted that his remarks are also printed in the agenda booklet. Bob L. noted guests from the American Battlefield Trust (ABT) and the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust (CVBT) were in attendance. He also stated that he and Governance Committee Chair Pete Kolakowski examined the FoWB bylaws to be certain FoWB is allowed to pivot to working with the Battlefield Trusts.

Membership Committee chair Ruth Pavlik stated the Committee has been contacting lapsed members, hoping to restore our membership to pre-Covid levels. Bob Epp noted that the Membership Committee has been split to form and add a separate Heritage Committee. Communications Committee chair Beth Stenstrom's committee is updating the FoWB webpage.

Bob L. noted that our property management agreement with the State of Virginia gave us standing to join a multi-party lawsuit against the Wilderness Crossing development. FoWB could position itself for standing in future similar actions if FoWB were to become a property owner, preserving the land we interpret. CVBT is willing to help us pursue grants toward a property purchase.

Bob L. noted that changes in the leadership of the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Park radically changed the Park's management style and purpose. Lengthy negotiations with current management left no room for FoWB needs and desires. The proposed changes included: no access to Ellwood without a Park employee present, no FoWB training program, no FoWB attire, no living history programs, no school presentations, no tours of Ellwood. The FoWB Mission Statement has been amended to remove all mention of the National Park Service (NPS). Our severance from the Park leaves FoWB free to thrive and develop other works and programs without restrictions.

FoWB is going forward with stewarding Payne's Farm, which is owned by ABT; setting up living history events; continuing to support the marker replacement program at the Confederate Cemetery; and hosting Civil War canoe trips, among other activities. Bob L. also noted that FoWB has awarded two scholarships over the last two years to history students graduating from Orange County High School.

Pete Kolakowski, chair of the Governance Committee, noted there were no unfilled vacancies on the Board, as all five members of the Class of 2023 agreed to continue to serve and become the Class of 2026. There being no nominations from the floor, the vote was unanimous for the continued service of current members Ben Hamm, Gary Close, Pete Kolakowski, Joe Lafleur, and Beth Stenstrom. The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Stephanie Bianchi

From the President

I have used the words “eventful” and “chaotic” to describe my first two years as president of FoWB. This year the word is “progress.” We are strengthening our relationships with other nonprofit preservation organizations and making considerable progress in our goal to protect and preserve the battlefields in the Wilderness area. We expanded our commitment to interpret the Mine Run Battlefield, an American Battlefield Trust (ABT) property. We had interpreters present at the Payne’s Farm Battlefield, part of the Mine Run Battlefield, every weekend from 8 June until 17 August to provide maps and engage with visitors. We also spent many days with the ABT land manager working to eradicate invasive plant species on Payne’s Farm. If left unchecked, these invasive plants will choke out beneficial native plants and trees. This effort helps to preserve the Battlefield for the enjoyment of future generations.

Reenactments. Additionally, in conjunction with Historic Impressions Inc., FoWB hosted a historic reenactment at the Wilderness Run Winery to celebrate the 160th Anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness. Over 800 reenactors participated. We have received permission to host a historic encampment in conjunction with Historic Impressions Inc. for the 161st anniversary of the Battle of Payne’s Farm in November 2025.

Education. Educating future generations of folks interested in the Civil War is an additional area of our focus. Each year we continue to provide a \$1,500 scholarship to a local high school student with an interest in history. The award this year went to Devon Carville of Orange County High School; she attends the University of Virginia. We also presented a Civil War program for local schoolchildren for their fourth grade history program. In conjunction with the Lake of the Woods Civil War Study Group, we contribute \$1,000 annually to a grant to send a teacher to an ABT educational seminar.

Recruitment. Recruiting new members and interpreters continues to be high on our list of goals. We staff booths at local street fairs, recruiting all manner of support. We also recruit members for our Heritage Program at these events. The Heritage Program recognizes any relative who participated in any of the Civil War Battles in the Wilderness area, including Mine Run. Our Heritage Committee will research the relative and provide a beautiful certificate to acknowledge the family relationship.

Maintenance. As mentioned earlier, FoWB continues to work with ABT to expand a ground maintenance program and keep the Payne’s Farm Battlefield in excellent condition for visitors. The emphasis here is on the Battlefield’s walking trails, rather than the Battlefield itself. The field is leased to a farmer who mows the grass several times a year. This maintenance will continue to be a major area of emphasis. We continue to maintain the old Walmart Tract at Routes 3 and 20 for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

I wish to express my gratitude for all the work done by the Board of Directors on behalf of the Friends. It goes without saying that the organization could not function without the hard work and dedication of the Board. We are a committee based organization, and it is these committees that power us. Next January we will say farewell to a Board member for the first time in over three years. I think that is a

remarkable statistic, and I again thank the Board for their commitment. It has been a challenging three years for everyone.

Looking forward to 2025, we have numerous projects in the planning stage. We hope to expand the trail network at Payne's Farm and add signage to enhance the visitor's experience. Our research efforts in the Heritage Program and other aspects of the battle will also be expanded. Our members and donors also deserve our thanks. Without your many contributions to the cause, we would not be able to continue to preserve and protect these local Battlefields for your enjoyment. Feel free to email or call me any time.

Treasurer's 2024 Annual Report

As of September 30, 2024

Luminaria Checking Account

Balance 9/30/2023	\$ 6,959.58
Balance 9/30/2024	\$11,377.54
Change	\$ 4,417.96

FoWB Operating Checking Account

Balance 9/30/2023	\$75,942.02
Balance 9/30/2024	\$78,434.84
Change	\$ 2,492.82

FoWB Money Market Account (Reserve)

Balance 9/30/2023	\$20,323.38
Balance 9/30/2024	\$20,574.94
Change	\$251.56

Total Cash assets 9/30/2023	\$96,265.40
Total Cash assets 9/30/2024	\$99,009.78

FoWB is a not-for-profit 501(C)(3) Tax ID 42-1689437; its books are kept on a cash basis.

Committee Reports

Operations Committee

Don Shockey, chair. The Operations Committee is responsible for the managing the operations at the Payne's Farm Battlefield in coordination with the American Battlefield Trust (ABT). FoWB is now working with ABT to help preserve, protect, and interpret ABT's properties in the Wilderness area, especially the Mine Run Battlefield. In our first full summer of interpreting the Payne's Farm property we had some successes and some disappointments. We added new interpreters to our list of qualified volunteers. Our training session was excellent, although bad weather truncated the field portion. We had volunteers on site every weekend throughout the summer from early June and through mid-August. So while we had numerous successes, we were disappointed by the small number of visitors. We anticipate that additional marketing such as rack cards, signage, publicity, and events will generate larger numbers of visitors going forward.

Battlefield Resources Committee

Kevin Hunt, chair. The Battlefield Resources Committee provides resources and manpower to the ABT for the physical maintenance and upkeep of the Payne's Farm Battlefield portion of the Mine Run Battlefield. We spent National Park Day, under the auspices of ABT, clearing trash and other items left behind by the previous owners. We hauled a huge load of material to the landfill; work remains to be done. We are coordinating with the ABT land manager to eradicate invasive species and to thin trees to improve the view shed. We are working to improve visitor signage. FoWB Board Member Joe Lafleur continues to maintain and steward the Wilderness (Old Walmart Tract) for the state of Virginia (Director of Historic Resources). His work and liaison efforts allow Scouts and JROTC units to use the property for camping.

Program Committee

Joe Lafleur, chair. The Program Committee enhances the FoWB's visibility by conducting and sponsoring programs and events that focus on the Wilderness and surrounding Battlefields, including Mine Run, particularly Payne's Farm. FoWB, in conjunction with Historic Impressions Inc., sponsored a large living history demonstration on the Wilderness Run Winery property to commemorate the 160th Anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness on 3 and 4 May. Over 800 living historians took part. FoWB also helped sponsor several tours of Payne's Farm Battlefield this year. We plan to sponsor nature walks and bird watching activities on the property, and 5K and 10K runs are scheduled for 2025. We hope to eventually raise the number of programs back to pre-COVID levels.

Heritage Program Committee

Bev Ellis, chair. The Heritage Program Committee gives members and non-members an opportunity to affirm either the role that their military ancestors played at battles within the Wilderness area (Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, or Mine Run), or a civilian connection to the area. The Heritage Program has added at least six new members this year, and several are pending. Committee members assist interested individuals to research and prepare a package for Heritage membership. Membership includes a FoWB certificate, inclusion of your relative's biography on the FoWB website, and a one-year membership in the Friends. Bob Epp is the point of contact via the FoWB website. Milbrey Bartholow also assists in research and package preparation.

Education and Outreach Committee

Chair pending. The Education and Outreach Committee conducts and sponsors educational and informational activities that focus on the Wilderness area and its related history. The committee provided a Civil War program to over 200 fourth graders at Locust Grove Elementary School. We hope to grow this into an annual event in conjunction with the school. The History in Our Backyard series will be revitalized to provide interesting and informative articles for various publications in the area.

Membership Committee

Ruth Pavlik, chair. The Membership Committee maintains all membership records and develops and manages programs that grow and sustain the FoWB membership base. The committee sends out thank you notices to renewing members and reminders to those not renewing. As an organization we continue to struggle with maintaining membership numbers generally; this remains an area of concern and focus going forward.

Communications Committee

Beth Stenstrom, chair. The Communications Committee coordinates and implements internal and external communications to ensure that a consistent and appropriate message is presented to target markets. The committee members are responsible for the FoWB website, the Facebook page (3,000 likes and 3,300 followers), and the Constant Contact account (over 1,000 contacts). They also send out a comprehensive quarterly newsletter and distribute press releases. They attend Street Fairs to hand out FoWB membership and Heritage Program brochures. They greeted tour participants and handed out appropriate literature at Mine Run Battlefield events in September.

Governance Committee

Pete Kolakowski, chair. The Governance Committee provides assistance and advice to the Board of Directors to maximize the effectiveness of FoWB. The Governance Committee had a relatively quiet year. The routine work consisted of answering questions about and interpretation of the bylaws. The major work this year, as required by the bylaws, was the committee's designation by the President as the Nominating Committee for proposing a slate of Board candidates for election at the 2024 Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee identified the slate of candidates for the FoWB membership to consider for election to the Board at the Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting will be presented with a slate of five nominees for a term of three years; this will be the Class of 2027.

The Governance Committee will recruit new members in 2025 from the general membership. Craig Rains, a valued long-term member, has retired from the committee and will be missed. We wish him well. FoWB members who may be interested in serving on the Governance Committee are encouraged to let the chair know and provide contact details.

Finance Committee

Jeff Slunt, chair. The Finance Committee is responsible for all financial standards, practices, and policies related to FoWB operations, including receipt of funds and disbursement for expenses. Jeff publishes the FoWB annual financial review and develops and recommends the annual budget to the Board.

Board of Directors

**Incumbent nominated for Reelection*

*** Suzanne Baxter (2024)**

Suzanne is a graduate of SUNY at Geneseo. She has a BS in Library Science and an MS from Niagara University in Educational Administration. Suzanne's career included 26 years in Catholic education as a high school librarian; she retired as head librarian. In addition, she worked many years in private industry as a technical librarian. She has previously volunteered with the Humane Society of Fairfax, in Girl Scout adult education, and as a PTA president. She currently volunteers at several historical sites in the area.

Suzanne and her husband Mark retired to Lake of the Woods in 2016 because it was close to their children and grandchildren and near a lake and a golf course. Suzanne was born and grew up in Niagara Falls, NY. She and Mark met in high school, married after college, and lived in Niagara Falls and Fairfax before coming to Orange County. They have two children and five grandchildren.

*** Stephanie Bianchi (2024)**

Stephanie received a BS in Biology with minors in Chemistry and Anthropology from the University of Arizona and an MS in Information Science from the University of Maryland. She served as a reference librarian at Georgetown University, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Department of State. She was library director at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Corvallis Research Laboratory, and the National Science Foundation.

Stephanie has lived in Fredericksburg since retiring from federal service. She enjoys caring for her mule and dogs, gardening, and making quilts. She is a fan of Old Time Radio and has an extensive collection of radio programs from the 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. She participates in the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Gary Close (2026)

A native of San Diego, Gary grew up in and around Petersburg, living amid Civil War forts and artifacts. He received a BA, magna cum laude, in English Literature from the University of Virginia (Wise) and a Juris Doctorate from the College of William and Mary. He also completed two years of graduate studies in Mass Communication at the University of Tennessee.

Gary practiced law in the Culpeper area and in 1992 was elected Commonwealth's Attorney. He served 20 years in that position before retiring. He developed an interest in genealogy,

which in turn led to an interest in Civil War history. He had discovered that he is the descendent of three Union soldiers. One fought in the Battle of the Wilderness. Besides his careers in journalism and law, Gary is an avid artist. His work is in the collection of the Culpeper County Museum and in private homes in Europe and the United States. He is the author of "Breakout: The Roswell Legacy." Gary met his wife Linda during college; they married a year after graduating and have two children.

Beverly Ellis (2025)

Beverly grew up in western Pennsylvania until her family moved to Woodbridge when she was 14. Beverly has BA and MA degrees in U.S. History from George Mason University, with an emphasis on the antebellum South and the Civil War. She taught U.S. history for over 30 years and worked in teacher support part-time for seven years. She retired in 2015. She and her husband Norman moved to Fredericksburg in 1996 and built a home in the Chancellorsville area. They have two sons, five grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Beverly and Norman have traveled around the world, including to Israel, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Mexico, France, Spain, and England. She is an avid reader, quilter, knitter, and scrapbooker. Beverly is active in her church, which she and her husband planted in 1999.

Ben Hamm (2026)

Ben grew up in a suburb of Pittsburgh. When he was in eighth grade he wrote his first term paper on the Battle of Gettysburg. He was cited by his teacher for outstanding work and received an A+. He later attended Gettysburg College, where he spent many weekends roaming the battlefield. He graduated with a degree in political science and joined the Peace Corps, working in Afghanistan in a rural development program. He later backpacked through East Africa and Asia, camping on the Serengeti, viewing mountain gorillas, and trekking in the Himalayas and Burma.

He received an MS degree in Forest Ecology and Soil Science from the University of New Hampshire. He spent the next eight years as a Soil Scientist in Utah, on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska and on the Navajo Tribal Reservation in Arizona. He spent the next 22 years working for the EPA cleaning up contaminated properties in the Superfund Program. He worked on the Community Empowerment Board in the Office of Vice President Al Gore. He has been an interpreter at Ellwood for two seasons. In his spare time he reads books on American history and hikes and bikes on local battlefields.

Ben and his wife Maureen have three adult children and two grandchildren. Ben and Maureen are both Master Naturalists

Kevin Hunt (2025)

Kevin was born in Worcester, MA. He graduated from UMass-Dartmouth (then called Southeastern Massachusetts University) with a BS in Mechanical Engineering and from George Washington University with an MS in Engineering Administration. He moved to Virginia in 1979 and worked at the U.S. Army's Night Vision Laboratory as a systems engineer until he retired in 2013. Since joining FoWB in 2014, he has volunteered as an interpreter and has served as chair of the Battlefield Resources Committee since 2016. He has always been interested in history and was excited to move to Spotsylvania. His interest in Civil War history peaked when he had the opportunity to participate in several staff rides, including tours of Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Antietam.

Peter Kolakowski (2026)

Peter was born in Manhattan and grew up in St. James on Long Island. He earned a BA in History and Political Science from Ripon College in Wisconsin and an MPA from American University. Peter was a resident of Fredericksburg from 1972 until he moved to Madison, Wisconsin.

Over his 40-year public service career, Peter served in the U.S. Army for five years and spent six years in executive management positions with the City of Fredericksburg, the last four as City Manager. He spent 15 years in executive positions with the Virginia Department of Transportation. His last 14 years before retirement were spent at the Naval Surface Warfare Center-Dahlgren Division as department head for operations. Peter has been an active participant and member of several nonprofits that preserve land and provide interpretation of the Civil War, the U.S. Navy, and other historical aspects of the area. Peter lives in Madison, WI, and continues to support American history and preservation work.

Joe Lafleur (2026)

Joe was born in Montgomery County, MD, and educated in Darnestown through junior college. After three summers in Spain, a few university courses, and various certifications, Joe was drawn to construction management jobs in Northern Virginia. Years of managing large commercial construction projects and residential contracting jobs gave him frequent work and led him to fall in love with the Wilderness.

Joe and his wife Katy bought their home on the Wilderness Battlefield in 2005, piquing his interest in exploring and studying the area. Walking his dog at Ellwood, Joe met the ground force and joined. In 2015 he began as an interpreter and also took stewardship of the Wilderness Old Walmart Tract, which Joe maintains for Boy and Girl Scout camping and studies.

Bob Lookabill (2025)

Bob holds MAs in History from Marshall University and in Strategic Studies from the Naval War College. After teaching history for 10 years, he took a position with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). After his retirement from DIA, he worked for several contractors. He is now fully retired. He is also a retired Navy Reserve Captain, culminating his 42-year Naval Reserve career. A member of FoWB for 13 years, he is also a member of the Fredericksburg and the Rappahannock Valley Civil War Roundtables and the Winding Creek Community Church. He has two adult sons and three grandsons.

Lynn McDonald (2025)

Lynn grew up as an “army brat” until her parents landed in Virginia in the 1970s. Her educational upbringing and working life were spent in Northern Virginia. She provided administrative and technical skills for The MITRE Corporation, where she produced technical reports for over 30 years.

Lynn’s interests are primarily in history and nature. One of her favorite childhood memories was family camping trips, especially in a wilderness setting. Her parents lived on Mine Run Road, where she discovered the Wilderness Battlefield. When she learned it was the site of the first battle between Grant and Lee, Lynn did a deep dive into the story and is now involved with the work to preserve the legacy. Lynn resides in Orange County. She has one son, Zach, living in Northern Virginia and extended family in the area.

****Greg Mertz (2024)***

Greg was born and raised in St. Louis. His interest in the Civil War developed as a result of the annual hiking and camping trips his Boy Scout troop took to Shiloh National Military Park, which helped him earn his rank as Eagle Scout. Greg earned his BS in Recreation and Park Administration from the University of Missouri in 1978. Six years later, while working for the National Park Service (NPS), he received his MS from Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. Greg began his NPS career in 1980 as a Park Ranger at Gettysburg National Military Park (NMP) and the Eisenhower National Historic Site. Four years later he was assigned to the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania NMP. He initially served as site historian at the Stonewall Jackson Death Site. His next assignment was as site historian and curator at the Chancellorsville Battlefield Visitor Center. Greg’s last assignment was as the Supervisory Historian for the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania NMP in charge of visitor operations. Greg retired in 2021 after 40 years with the NPS.

Greg now conducts tours for Battlefield Tours of Virginia for different Civil War organizations. He is vice president of the Brandy Station Foundation, training and scheduling volunteers, greeting visitors, and giving tours at the Graffiti House. He also serves on the Boards of Directors for FoWB and the Rappahannock Civil War Round Table.

Greg has trained hundreds of seasonal employees, interns, and volunteers on researching and conducting interpretation. Greg has conducted tours and written many articles on the Civil War for national publications. He authored the book "Attack Them at Daylight and Whip Them: The Battle of Shiloh, April 6-7, 1862."

*** *Ruth Pavlik (2024)***

A native of suburban Pittsburgh Ruth graduated from Clarion University in Pennsylvania with a BS in Elementary Education. However, most of her professional life was spent in the field of volunteer administration. For 14 years she was the Volunteer Coordinator for Hospice of the Rapidan (now Hospice of the Piedmont) in Culpeper. She retired in 2015.

Ruth has made Virginia her home for most of her adult life--beginning in Arlington, with two stops in Fairfax County, then Warrenton, and her current home in Lake of the Woods in 2005. When planning her life after retirement, FoWB was at the top of her list of prospective volunteer opportunities. Ruth is a member of the FoWB Membership Committee and often volunteers to represent FoWB at welcome tents or at community street fairs. She is an NPS Volunteer at Ellwood. Ruth also volunteers at the Orange County Visitors Center and provides clerical services for LOWLINC, a senior citizen assistance group. In addition to volunteering, she is an avid sports fan, especially football and baseball, and loves to read, do needlework, and travel. Ruth is the mother of two daughters and grandmother of four.

Don Shockey (2025)

Don was born and grew up in Lafayette, Indiana. He holds a BS in Business Management and an MS in Business Administration and is DA Certified Level III in Acquisition Logistics. Don joined the U.S. Army serving in the areas of communications and intelligence. In addition to a number of stateside assignments he had overseas assignments to Korea, Germany, and Italy. He retired as a Chief Warrant Officer.

After retirement he continued to serve the U.S. Army as an Army civilian with the Communications - Electronics Command, serving as a Branch Chief. He retired in 2016. Don has had a lifelong interest in Civil War and family history. Five of his great-grandfathers served in the Civil War. One of those ancestors was in the 10th Pennsylvania Reserves and served with the 5th Corps at the Battle of the Wilderness. He has been an interpreter since 2016.

Jeff Slunt (2024)

Jeff holds a Ph.D. in Microbiology from the University of Virginia. He works from home for Syneos Health as a Medical Scientist on a large colorectal cancer clinical trial. His wife is professor in the Chemistry Department at the University of Mary Washington. They have two children, Todd and Madeline.

In addition to his treasurer responsibilities at FoWB, Jeff also volunteers at Mary Washington Hospital. An avid student of the Civil War, he takes every opportunity to learn more about the subject. He frequents Park activities such as the “History at Sunset” series and other lectures and symposiums.

Beth Stenstrom (2026)

Beth is the vice president of FoWB, as well as Communications Committee chair. She currently maintains the website, the Constant Contact list, and the Membership Database.

Beth is also First Vice Regent of the Washington-Lewis Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution; Historic Preservation Chair for District IX, Virginia Daughters of the American Revolution; and an active volunteer with the Fredericksburg Walking Club, which is part of the American Volkssport Association. She is a member of the American Battlefield Trust, the Central Virginia Battlefield Trust, Friends of Chatham, and the National Society United States Daughters of the War of 1812. She recently joined the Civil War Roundtable of Fredericksburg.

Beth and her husband Jim have a son, a daughter, a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, three granddaughters, one grandson, and two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.

NOTES