



# Friends of Andersonville

"Fostering public understanding of the role Andersonville National Historic Site plays in our Nation's History"

January 12, 2023

## Board of Trustees

Fred Boyles  
Chairman

Sybil Smith  
Vice Chairman

Wallace Mays  
Secretary

Melanie Grace  
Treasurer

Donna B. Becton  
Administrative Manager

Jim Covington  
Americus, GA

Randy Jones,  
Americus, GA

Alan Marsh  
Lizella, GA

Hershel Smith  
Americus, GA

Wayne Waddell  
Marietta, GA

Ed DeMent, Trustee Emeritus  
American Ex-POW

Also serving as Ex-Officio  
to the Board  
DGR Group  
(Financial Advisors)  
Lewis Webb  
Steve Stanfield

Jimmy Skipper - Attorney

National Park Service  
Gia Wagner, Superintendent  
Andersonville National  
Historic Site  
Andersonville, GA

## Chairman's Message

The National Park Service has long enjoyed the support of private philanthropy in performing its mission. Some of the truly special stories are of the Rockefeller family's gifts that created both Grand Teton and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. The Mellon family donated substantial funds to create both Cape Hatteras and Cumberland Island National Seashores. Perhaps the largest campaign in recent memory was the \$350 million combined efforts of multiple corporations and individuals to restore the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

At Andersonville National Historic Site, we are fortunate to have a remarkable corporate partner in The Bennett Family of Companies. Since 2017, the Taylor Family Foundation and the Bennett Family of Companies have been a sponsor of Wreaths Across America at Andersonville National Cemetery. In 2021, we reached a remarkable goal of placing a wreath at every grave in the National Cemetery. That was 20,000 graves. Bennett trucks traveled to Maine to collect the Wreaths and bring them to Georgia. And even though Bennett did not pay for all the Wreaths, they paid for most of them. At \$15 per wreath, and through a 3 for 2 sponsorship program, it takes more than \$200,000 to purchase all the wreaths. Personally, I did not think that we could replicate the 2021 Wreaths

Across America event. But it was in 2022.

In 2022, the leadership at Bennett reached out to another important corporation to assist. Truist Bank was asked to contribute by purchasing half of the Wreaths for Andersonville. After considering the proposal, Truist signed on with a \$100,000 donation to the project. This past



December 17th, over 1,000 volunteers placed roughly 20,000 Wreaths at each grave in the National Cemetery.

It was interesting to me that one of Bennett's 12 Core Values is patriotism and is, "We love and support our country, pledge our allegiance, and honor the service and sacrifice of our military service members who defend our country and protect our freedom." I can conceive no better way to demonstrate that core value in honoring those buried at Andersonville National Cemetery. These two public spirited companies eternally honor the sacrifices made by those buried at Andersonville National Cemetery.

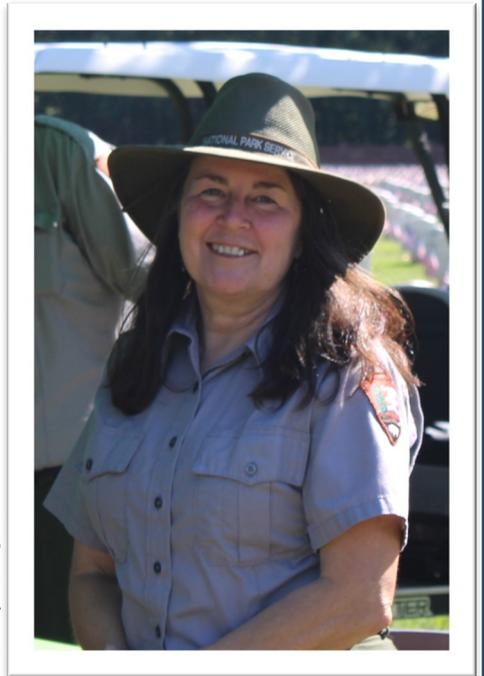
Fred Boyles

## Superintendent's Corner

By Gia Wagner

Greetings from Andersonville. There are times when everything just works; we are grateful for a highly successful year so far. The year started during the holidays when The Friends of Andersonville, AX-POW, Bennett International/Taylor Foundation and Truist Bank came together to honor our veterans in a big way for Wreaths Across America. We had roughly 2,000 attendees and laid 20,300 wreaths in 15 minutes! Our most attended event in recent memory.

We continue to add staff through numerous NPS funded projects and Inflation Reduction Act funding. Most recently we hired a horticulturist who will be working on national cemetery projects over the next 4 years. The NPS has recently focused on the condition of its 14 national cemeteries and Andersonville National Cemetery is leading restoration efforts. We are focusing on the condition of the trees, new plantings, turf, and restoration of monuments this year. We will also be developing a Preservation Maintenance Plan that will serve as a month by month "to do list" for staff and this will become the template for the other 13 NPS national cemeteries. We hope to be well along in our work to recontour and open the large section in the southeast corner of the cemetery by this time next year.



Visitation is up 52% from last year: we attribute most of this to school trips and staff rides which have picked up significantly. The National Park Foundation funded an intern to work on the "Women Who Saved Andersonville". Our intern developed impressive new Women's Relief Corp displays for the museum as well as an interpretive program on this topic. We are in the process of hiring a permanent museum technician to help with the curatorial workload and allow us to change temporary exhibits more frequently. Staff are working diligently to prepare for the April anniversary event advertised in this newsletter and our annual Memorial Day event. Follow us on Facebook for additional programs to be given throughout April.

We will be removing the metal fencing along highway 49 and replacing it with split rail except at the funeral entrance. We believe this will allow us to maintain a better appearance since the fence is always getting hit by cars and wildlife. We are also working towards renovations to the museum restrooms, a new HVAC system, and the replacement of the internal working of the water feature at the museum. We expect we will need to close the museum for a short time during the HVAC installation. We are focused on minimizing any closure time and look forward to being able to control the humidity in the museum to preserve artifacts.



The picnic area shelter project is moving slowly but it is moving; we have had an accessibility assessment and a design contract is being let shortly. We are so grateful for the continued support of the Friends as we work to meet the park mission. I hope to see many of you on April 22nd.

The large open space behind the graves shown is Section Q, the largest unused portion of the National Cemetery.

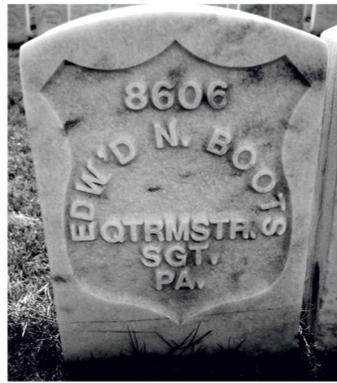
## Story Behind the Stone: Edward Boots

By: Davis Duffey, Park Guide



Portrait of Edward Boots taken in 1862 while he was serving as Sergeant of Company H of the 101st Pennsylvania Infantry. Image credit: NPS/ANDE

Born in Pennsylvania in 1834 to English immigrants, Edward Boots enlisted in the 101st Pennsylvania Infantry on October 29, 1861. By November 13, 1862, he had risen to the rank of Quartermaster Sergeant. In the spring of 1864, his unit was serving in North Carolina and fought in the Battle of Plymouth. On April 20, 1864, the entire Union garrison was forced to surrender after becoming trapped between Confederate naval and land forces.



Boots was subsequently sent to Andersonville where he arrived in May of 1864. During his imprisonment, Boots saw and endured some of the prison's worst conditions. He witnessed the trial of the Raiders and the high death rate of August 1864. During his service Boots wrote letters home and he was able to write and send a letter home before his death at Andersonville.

The last letter he sent was dated June 23, 1864.

In the letter he tells his family he is healthy, and that he wants to hear from them. He also hopes a prisoner exchange would occur soon. He never lived to see an exchange. Boots contracted scurvy near the end of August. He died on September 12, 1864, and is buried in grave 8606.

## An Object Lesson: John D. Vecchiola's Backpack

By Christine Hoffmark-Coffey

While assigned to catalog the collection of John D. Vecchiola, I came across an object simply labeled as "Backpack". Expecting something like a modern backpack what I found instead was a square, forest green bag with a brown and black cowhide flap. This piqued my curiosity. How had John Vecchiola acquired this item? By reading his accession file, I learned about his time as a POW, his escape from captivity and finally, how he came across this backpack.



The Vecchiola backpack inside the box fabricated to better preserve it.

John Vecchiola was a ball turret gunner on the B-17 "Pappy Yokum", part of the 15th Air Force, 817th Bomb Squadron, 483rd Bombardment group. He flew bombing missions over German held areas from Italy. On July 30, 1944, flak tore off the tail section of his plane. He was captured and then brought to Stalag Luft IV in Gross Tychow. During a forced march further into Germany, he managed to escape with a fellow POW, avoiding capture for five days until meeting up with the advancing British 11th Armored Division. During his days evading capture, John Vecchiola had come upon a dead German soldier and taken his boots and backpack. The backpack cannot go on exhibit without extensive conservation. The leather piping on the sides of the cowhide flap is peeling off and the canvas fabric that makes up most of the backpack is fragile and stained. To help preserve the condition of the backpack, I made a special box to keep the bag stabilized so that none of the spots that are actively deteriorating are rubbed. I also made a custom insert for the backpack to rest on so there is less strain on it. Someday this backpack may have its moment within the museum on display. Until then it has been fascinating to learn and share with you the history of this object.

## Wreaths Across America 2022



For a second year in a row in 2022, the Wreaths Across America event at Andersonville National Cemetery were able to place a wreath at each of the 20,300 graves. This remarkable accomplishment was a part of the nationwide event to place holiday wreaths on graves of veterans at National, State and private Cemeteries on Saturday December 17th. At Andersonville National Cemetery, a ceremony was held at noon to highlight the significance of the event, followed by volunteers placing wreaths at each grave.

Over 1700 volunteers came to place wreaths. They comprised youth groups, civic clubs, veterans' organizations and family

members of those buried at Andersonville that assisted in a task that could have only been possible with the help of many hands.

A ceremony at the Cemetery Rostrum opened off the event. The service paid tribute to three veterans who interned in the Cemetery in 2022. They were Coast Guard Boatswains Mate Second Class Carl Israel, Army Staff Sergeant Grover Rogers and Air Force Chief Master Sergeant Vernon Phillips. All three veterans were represented at the ceremony by their family members as their military service accomplishments were shared with the audience. An honor guard presented wreaths for each of the service branches.

Two companies made the event possible. The Bennett Family of Companies, a McDonough, Georgia based transportation and logistics company, provided nearly half the funding to purchase wreaths for the event. They were joined this year by their banking partner, Truist Bank with a \$100,000 gift to purchase the rest of the wreaths. Bennett also provided five trucks that traveled to Maine to transport the wreaths to Andersonville. They had adorned all the trucks with images and messages about the Wreaths Across America project so they could share that message as they traveled. "We were honored that Truist joined with us in making this event possible," stated Lee Gentry, Executive Vice President of the Bennett Family of Companies. "Bennett supports Andersonville's Wreaths event because patriotism is one of our company's core values. And those are not just words, they are engrained is everything we do," Gentry added.



## Wreaths Across America (cont'd)



During the ceremony, Bennett Family of Companies' President, David Pittman urged each of the volunteers to not get in a hurry placing the Wreaths. He told all those assembled, "Every wreath is a teaching moment, when you place the wreath, straighten the bow, step back, pause and say the name out loud on the stone." During the afternoon, volunteers could be seen reading the names and saluting. The mission of Wreaths Across America is to Remember our fallen U.S. veterans, Honor those who serve and Teach your children the value of freedom.

"The National Park Service is deeply grateful to the generosity of the Bennett Family of Companies and Truist Bank for their support of this remarkable event," stated Gia Wagner, Su-

perintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site, "These two companies are the catalyst that brings together funding and volunteer support to honor the memory of those veterans and their families buried in this hallowed place."

## Faces of Andersonville NHS

### Highlighting the Staff

Hello! My name is Christine Hoffmark-Coffey and I was the 2022-2023 Cultural Resources Collections Intern at Andersonville Historical Site. Before my time here at Andersonville, I was the Collections Manager for the Mission Inn Hotel and Spa in Riverside, California, a registered historical building. I received my Bachelors in Art History from the University of California, Irvine in 2015 and my Masters in History from Claremont Graduate University in 2018.

I am a native Californian, but when my husband got stationed to the Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany, we became temporary Georgians. I thought it would be a wonderful way to get to know the history of the area by working at one of the nearby National Parks. When I received word that I had this opportunity I was excited to dive right in. As my term comes to an end, I can say I have a more in depth understanding of the history surrounding Andersonville as well as the stories of the POWs whose collections the park protects.

During my term, I was able to work with some fascinating collections and help catalog some interesting objects, such as John D. Vecchiola's collection from his time as a POW in Stalag Luft IV, which included letters from home and a backpack (see "An Object Lesson") and Carl Hedin's collection from his time as a POW at Stalag Luft I, which included photographs of prison life.

My experience working at Andersonville has been a wonderful time. I would like to thank the Friends of Andersonville for funding my position, as well as my supervisor Bridget and the staff of the National Prisoner of War Museum for allowing me the opportunity to gain so much insight into National Park collections.



## Friends of Andersonville Participates in Hill Day



Congressman Sanford Bishop poses with Friends of Andersonville Chairman Fred Boyles in his office after their meeting as a part of Hill Day sponsored by the National Park Foundation.

The Friends of Andersonville joined with 40 other National Park support organizations to participate in Hill Day in Washington, DC on February 7, 2023. The National Park Foundation sponsored the event to educate members of Congress about how groups like the Friends of Andersonville provide philanthropic support for park projects.

Fred Boyles, Chairman of the Board of the Friends of Andersonville, took part in the event. He met with staff members from Senator's Ossoff and Warnock's office. He also met with Congressman Sanford Bishop and three staff members. The primary message shared with those elected representatives visited was the numerous years of support that the Friends have provided to Andersonville National Historic Site. They were also enlightened about the new agreement between the Friends and the American Ex-Prisoners of War to create the American Ex-Prisoners of War National Prisoner of War Museum Legacy Fund.

“Congressman Bishop and all the congressional staff we spoke to were impressed with the commitment of the Friends of Andersonville to the historic site over such a long period providing over \$1million in support to the park,” stated Fred Boyles, Chairman of the Friends of Andersonville Board, further adding, “Above all, we wanted to thank them for their support for the National Park Service and Andersonville.”

The National Park Foundation sponsored the coordinated effort of the organizations representing parks from all over the nation. The Foundation is the official partner of the National Park Service by generating private support for the parks and builds strategic partnerships to protect and enhance support for all the parks. The 2022 Hill Day was the first time such an event was held. The Friends of Andersonville received a grant from the Foundation that funded the travel for participating in Hill Day.

## Save the Date, National Prisoner of War Museum 25th Anniversary

Andersonville National Historic Site invites you to  
join us on Saturday April 22nd  
for an afternoon honoring POWs  
and commemorating the 25th anniversary  
of the opening of the National Prisoner of War Museum.



Programming for the day will begin at 1:00 pm with Meredith Funderbirk, ACE intern, presenting a talk about the 50th Anniversary of Operation Homecoming in the museum's theater. Following the talk, please join us outside at 2:00 pm under the big, white tent as we commemorate the opening of the museum with remarks by notables who were a part of its creation. Light refreshments will be available.

Please call 229 924-0343 to RSVP.

## **Leaving a Legacy**

by Lewis D. Webb, AAMS

Wealth Advisor to The Friends of Andersonville, The Andersonville Trust

Let's take a look at some of the ways you can leave a legacy to those you wish to support and wish to remember you.

- **Last Will and Testament.** You can direct all or a portion of your estate to be left to the charity or charities of your choice.
- **IRA.** The IRS allows for some tax-free distributions directly to eligible charities. You may also make a charitable organization the beneficiary of your IRA. See [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for details and contact your CPA for complete information.
- **Charitable Remainder Trust or CRT.** You can establish a trust in which you place your assets that can pay you an annual benefit each year – the percentage is based on your age. The remainder of this trust is passed to the charity you named. Some may choose to purchase an insurance policy with a portion of the income from the CRT that can provide for your heirs upon passing. The CRT can possibly provide a tax advantage for you and your heirs as well as larger financial donations to the charity of your choice. Check with your professional advisory team – your attorney, CPA, and financial advisor to see if this is right for you.

The Friends of Andersonville the Andersonville Trust has benefited from many like yourselves who have planned to leave a legacy. These gifts have allowed the Friends of Andersonville to provide an annual gift to the Park and the POW Museum for projects that could not otherwise be funded. These projects include:

- A traveling exhibit for the POW Museum
- Construction and beautification projects
- Marketing literature and a website
- Support of the POW MIA symposium
- Visiting story tellers

As you think through what you wish to do with your estate – large or small – it is essential to consult your team of advisory professionals – your attorney, certified public accountant (CPA), and financial advisor. We will be happy to assist you in providing advice as to the financial considerations that might be best for you. Please feel free to contact us at 229-924-9296 or [lewis.webb@thedgrgroup.com](mailto:lewis.webb@thedgrgroup.com).

Any tax or legal advice should be discussed with your tax or legal advisor prior to implementation.

Securities and advisory services are offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor. Member FINRA/SIPC.

Lewis Webb and LPL Financial are not endorsed by or affiliated with The Friends of Andersonville, The Andersonville Trust.



Friends of Andersonville  
PO Box 113  
Andersonville, GA 31711



The crowd of volunteers assembles at the Cemetery rostrum before the ceremony for Wreaths Across America.

Finished reading the Andersonville Dispatch? Don't toss it or delete it, pass it along to someone else who may be interested in Andersonville.