



Photo by Anders Skandsen, watch the video at [youtu.be/xf0mabg\\_wQU](https://youtu.be/xf0mabg_wQU)

Belle Grove Plantation's Board of Directors and staff send greetings of the season and gratitude for your support in 2025.

Belle Grove is now in its 59th year of preserving Shenandoah Valley history and stewarding its built and natural heritage. Our small and mighty staff, dedicated Board, and devoted volunteers are key to our success. We ask you join us by making a year-end gift.

While our non-profit organization does not rely on regular support from governmental entities, many federal grant programs were eliminated this year, narrowing our future options.

We are pleased to report that donors answered the call to fund the replacement of the white board fencing around the property. Thanks to generous gifts, we reached our goal and this project will be completed this spring.

The multi-year campaign for the restoration of Belle Grove's 1797 Manor House windows is advancing and the last four windows will be restored this winter.

An anonymous donor pledged a matching challenge for the next phase of the window-restoration project. We need to have a film applied to the window panes to reduce harmful ultraviolet rays and heat that could damage the historic interior and collections. The exterior woodwork of the windows also needs repair. Our donor will match 1:1 every contribution received for this project. Gifts of any size are appreciated.

As our country marks 250 years of its founding, that story is made local at Belle Grove, through many individuals who fought for and sought to realize freedom. See page 3 for the ways we will be commemorating this milestone. We hope to see you at one of these events.

With all best wishes to you and yours for a lovely holiday,

*Miranda* *Kristen*

Miranda Delmerico Board Chair  
Kristen Laise Executive Director

## How to Donate

Use the enclosed envelope to donate by check or credit card. Note if wish to designate your gift to "window restoration."

Visit [bellegrove.org](https://bellegrove.org) and click the blue "Donate" button to make a contribution with a credit card or PayPal.

If you are over 70 1/2 years old and have a tax-deferred IRA, you may make a "Qualified Charitable Distribution" donation from your IRA to Belle Grove without paying taxes on the donated amount. Consult your IRA trustee for details. Belle Grove's EIN is 54-1047175.

Belle Grove may also accept gifts of stock. Contact us for further information.

Belle Grove is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and registered as a charitable organization in Virginia. A financial statement is available upon request from the Office of Charitable and Regulatory Programs. Your donation is tax deductible and will be acknowledged in writing.

## 2025 ACHIEVEMENTS

Belle Grove had another busy year, with 15,000 visitors to date in 2025. Here are some of the activities we are actively pursuing:

### Preserving History

A unique opportunity presented itself this summer when a colleague spotted business papers of Isaac Hite Senior on auction. These detailed records from 1764 to 1777 outlined household expenses, purchases of goods from overseas, and transactions related to farming tobacco. They provide insight into the household in which Isaac Hite Jr. was raised and the business he inherited in 1795. It also references the leasing and sale of enslaved people, for whom a paper trail is rare.



Belle Grove had the funds to participate in the auction thanks to the Nancy Lee Comer Fund for Belle Grove Collections, established in 2021 by Stephen and Annette Comer in honor of their aunt. Interest from this endowed fund, managed by the Community Foundation of the Northern Shenandoah Valley, may be spent to acquire and care for collections. The competitive auction could not have been won without these funds available.

When a second, smaller set of papers from this collection came up in a separate auction, Belle Grove purchased them as well.

The 64 pages of documents are now with a paper conservator for minor repairs. They have also been digitized so that researchers may use them without handling the originals.

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park coordinates volunteers virtually to transcribe primary sources related to the Park and they are including these documents to make the information more accessible soon.

### Restoring a Landmark



Photo by Anders Skandsen

The restoration of Fort Bowman, funded by a generous gift from the James L. and Mary Jane Bowman Charitable Trust, is nearly complete. Exterior landscaping, grading, and masonry projects were accomplished this summer, and interior painting and other final projects are underway. Weather permitting, Belle Grove will host open houses this winter for Belle Grove members and friends.



Photo by Eric Santiful

### Innovating Storytelling

To engage with history in a new way, Belle Grove commissioned Bleu Do'zia, a playwright and founder of Selah Theatre Project, to tell the story of Abba, a woman enslaved by several members of the Hite family

for her entire 70-year life. *When a Trumpet Cries*, moved beyond stereotypical depictions of slavery, sparking profound conversations between the cast and audience that are still resonating and informing future programming. A recording of the play and more about Abba's life is at [virtual.bellegrove.org](http://virtual.bellegrove.org).

### Building on Success



Photo by Katherine Manley

Belle Grove recently hosted the sixth annual Kris Kringle Market, an event that began during the pandemic as a way to support local business with a safe gathering outdoors. For the last three years, the event has attracted nearly 5,000 attendees.

This year, Belle Grove staff and a volunteer Festival Committee instituted a juried vendor application process to improve the quality and variety of offerings. Several new revenue-producing aspects of the event were successful, making this popular community happening an increasingly beneficial fundraiser for Belle Grove.

### Expanding Traditions

Shenandoah Sips, was launched this year, replacing Belle Grove's long-running "Of Ale and History" Beer Festival. This newly branded event focused primarily on wine, cider, and spirits but has the flexibility to feature a variety of other locally produced beverages in the future.



## Honoring the Past

The first of the two quilts honoring the people enslaved at Belle Grove is complete and now mounted on its frame.



Photo by Pam Pampe

It has the names of 175 men, women, and children hand-

stitched on the blocks by 114 volunteers coordinated by the Winchester Chapter of Embroiderers' Guild of America. Quilter Carole Staples designed and pieced the quilt top, arranging blocks by family.

Quilting expert Pam Pampe constructed the quilt and she and her husband, Bob, traveled to nine events this year to teach and assist 177 community members to quilt it.

The second quilt displaying 95 more names has just arrived. It is being prepared for quilting and opportunities to participate in this project will be announced soon. The quilts will be installed at Belle Grove as part of the *Unearthing Enslaved Lives* exhibit.

## IN MEMORIAM

Sadly, 2025 brought losses. These Belle Grove friends gave their time and talents to make this organization better. They are missed.

John Clancey served on the Board 2015-2022 and was a Board Chair and Treasurer. He was a knowledgeable and engaging docent with a deep love of history.

James Gable was on the Board from 2012-2017 and worked on the product development for Belle Grove 1797 Whiskey Chocolates.

Richard Leith was a dear friend, faithful supporter, and husband of past Board member Lyne Leith. He shared his love of Scotland at many a fine feast at Leith Hall.

## "LET FREEDOM RING" AT BELLE GROVE



To honor the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of America, the Manor House is decorated this holiday season with the theme of *Let Freedom Ring*.

Through their decorations, area garden clubs and Belle Grove volunteers remember the contributions of the Patriots and founding fathers and mothers, as well as those who have worked to make our country a more perfect union, whether through the Underground Railroad or women's suffrage.

In the *Unearthing Enslaved Lives* exhibit are 270 candles, one for each man, woman, and child enslaved at Belle Grove. The candles are arranged in family groups and are illuminated daily 2-8 p.m.

December 5-30, Belle Grove is open daily, except for Christmas Eve and Day. Guided tours are hourly Monday-Saturday 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sunday 1-5 p.m. On Friday and Saturdays, 4-8 p.m., the Manor House, lit by candlelight and featuring live music, is open for self-guided tours.

The Museum Shop is full of great gifts such as goods from area artists and artisans, local food products, holiday décor, and history books.

Belle Grove members receive 10% off in the Museum Shop in addition to free admission for touring. December is the perfect time to renew your membership or give it as a gift. Visit [bellegrove.org/membership](http://bellegrove.org/membership).

## 250<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY PLANS

Belle Grove is commemorating the 250th anniversary of the nation with research projects and programs.

In the Revolutionary War, Isaac Hite Jr. of Belle Grove served as an aide de camp to Colonel Peter Muhlenberg. Many of his Hite and Bowman cousins also fought in the Continental Army. At Belle Grove's Annual Meeting in September, noted expert Gabriel Neville presented *Hites & Bowmans in the Revolution* (recording at [tinyurl.com/3cm6x4zd](http://tinyurl.com/3cm6x4zd)).

In 2026, Belle Grove will be producing an online exhibit about Isaac Hite Jr.'s military service. Ranger Christopher Mattingly will also present a talk on that topic, "For the Cause of Liberty" (date to be announced).

Work continues on an extensive online exhibit about his wife, Nelly Madison Hite, and it includes what the war years were like for her, her family, and her community in Orange, Virginia.

April 20-June 7, 2026, Belle Grove will host the traveling exhibition *Give Me Liberty: Virginia and the Forging of a Nation* thanks to a sponsorship from the Winchester-Frederick County VA250 Committee. Produced by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation and the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, the exhibit highlights Virginia's leading role in the Revolution.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture has launched a 250 Passport Program, which features Belle Grove as one of 70 sites statewide.



## THANK YOU 2025 SPONSORS AND DONORS

Belle Grove is grateful for the many supporters who have given time and funds this year. We particularly thank and acknowledge the following exceptional individual and corporate donors, event sponsors, and Belle Grove's Madison, Heritage, and President's Society level members.

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