



Newsletter

WWW.LAKEFREDERICKTRAVELCLUB.COM

MEETS THE 2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH FROM 11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M. IN RACHEL'S KITCHEN

2025 Committee

George Darnell

President

Doc Holladay

Vice President

Gary McDowell

Treasurer

Cindy Holmes

Membership Coordinator

Nanci Bowers

Newsletter Coordinator

Pam Toliver

Website Coordinator

Dan Mortland

Program Director

Greg Payonk

Cruise & Foreign Travel

JANUARY 2026 ISSUE

President's Message

[Happy New Year!!](#)

I hope you had a blessed and joyful holiday with family and friends. Michelle and I spent Christmas day with our schoolteacher daughter and her family near Warrenton, Virginia. And then on Saturday we celebrated with all four of our living children, some of their spouses, some of our adult grandchildren, and the youngest five of our nine great grandchildren. Michelle gave the great grandchildren story books with their names in the stories.

[December Trips Were Not What We Planned](#)

We try not to schedule our trips on weekends. But the Grand Illumination on the Antietam National Battlefield Park was only offered on Saturday. Perhaps that is why we could not reach our minimum and had to cancel. The Wreaths Across America celebration in Winchester National Cemetery was also on a Saturday, as in the past, but again, we did not reach our minimum. On the bright side, the Candlelight Tour of Mount Vernon sold out early, and the Bull Run Winery and Festival of Lights was almost sold out despite the cold weather. Read the trip reports in this issue.

[Holiday Luncheon Well Attended](#)

Our December meeting was held on Wednesday rather than Monday so that we could have the Lodge catered for us. They set us up in the Arts and Exploration Studio, complete with tablecloths and decorations for a sandwich buffet. Some of us took advantage of the Inglenook Bar to complement the lunch. The Travel Club subsidized the lunch to keep the cost down for our members. I think everyone enjoyed a break from our potlucks.

[Registering for Travel Club Trips](#)

If you have any trouble registering for our trips the Lodge Concierge should be able to help you. This includes club members who are not MTL members and family and friends travelling with a club member. Or send me an email with questions.

[Trip Ideas for 2026](#)

See our Trip Ideas for 2026 in this issue. If you have any suggestions, especially if you can help in the planning, please send them to me with as much information as you can.

We will start the year with a Mystery Winter Wine Tour on January 15, planned by Shenandoah Shuttle. See the announcement in this newsletter.

We hope to include Sam Kerns' Pennsylvania Disasters and Railroads overnight trip in the Fall of 2026. And the Men's Bible Group is working on a trip to the Museum of the Bible to see the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit at the beginning of Holy week.

We will return to using Shenandoah Tours for some of our trips. Doc Holaday has selected several of their trips to include in our calendar. See his list in this newsletter.

Shenandoah Tours will be joining us again this year for our January coffee and cookies lunch to give us a preview of their 2026 calendar of trips.

Bring a batch of cookies to share. The Lodge will provide coffee.

I hope to see you around campus and at our January 12 Coffee and Cookies gathering in Rachel's Kitchen at 11:30 a.m. Please wear your name badge. Contact James (Doc) Holaday if you need one.



George Darnell, President

703-850-2132

darnellgd@hotmail.com



Candlelight Christmas at Mount Vernon

December 12, 2025

By Mike Ericksen



The trip began on a sunny but frosty day, tolerable because there was, fortunately, very little wind. Everyone arrived at the lodge, and after a quick head count, we departed. The trip to Mt. Vernon was uneventful with moderate to normal traffic as we neared the inner DC area. Our first stop was Cedar Knoll Restaurant, renowned for its historic atmosphere and enchanting view of the Potomac River. It did not disappoint. This dinner location was a change from the published original plan. When confirming the final reservation at Mount Vernon Inn, that restaurant hostess had problems seating our large group, not only at the same table but also not likely in the same room; (and possibly only in separate shifts, yikes). Our event tickets were time-stamped, so Cedar Knoll became the fallback option. Unfortunately, once again, our group was divided into four tables. They were only staffed to handle one table at a time. Not detracting from Cedar Knoll, it was a lovely, high-end establishment, and food and wine were first-rate, but even when pressed, this restaurant also was not equipped to accommodate our timeline. The size of our group was the issue. All were served, but the last table was quite inconvenienced due to time constraints.

It was just a two-minute van ride from Cedar Knoll to the drop-off place at the Mt. Vernon ticket entrance. There, a gatekeeper held us to the exact time printed on our tickets. We passed through security and then waited a short stay in the Ford Orientation Center. Here we viewed themed Christmas trees and experienced a live music ensemble.



Re-enactors greeted our group at every step of the way. Once a vibrant plantation in the 18th century, George Washington's Mount Vernon estate is now one of the nation's most visited historic sites. We heard stories of Christmases past from costumed interpreters portraying Washington's family, friends, and enslaved or hired staff.



A candlelit tour guide enlightened our group with tales about historical traditions in 18th-century Virginia. We learned about period music and dancing in the greenhouse. George Washington once paid 18 shillings to bring a camel to Mount Vernon for Christmas. Today, Mt. Vernon continues that tradition, hosting the annual guest, Aladdin the camel.

Various stops in the house and around the estate revealed the story about the build-up to the American Revolution. This included a soldier's encampment which represented what it was like to be a Continental Army soldier stationed outside of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1775. A reminder that this was the first Christmas of the Revolutionary War, 250 years ago.

After about 90 minutes, our group completed the entire tour. This included both the guided and self-paced parts: soldiers' encampment, camel petting, tavern games, ginger cookies, themed music, and traditional dance activities. We returned to the Ford Orientation Center, where we got a good head count. Interesting note: No parking was provided for the tour bus. Our clever driver had to get creative. Some were disappointed that all the gift shops were closed before we arrived in the park. Thanks to everyone being cooperative and on-time we kept on schedule. Our return trip was safe and uneventful.

Fun Facts:

- It was a long ride over land from DC to Mt. Vernon. Steamboats ran as early as 1874 to Mt. Vernon, the first the *Mary Washington* was built by Quaker Paul Hillman Troth in 1874. It held 1,500 passengers and would run round trip to Mount Vernon for 50 cents and included admission to the estate.
- In 1892, construction began on the Alexandria & Mount Vernon Electric Railway which connected Alexandria and Mt. Vernon. The trolley was cheap, convenient, and enormously popular, immediately replacing the steamboat as the preferred means of visiting Mount Vernon.
- Thomas Edison installed electricity at Mt. Vernon in 1916.
- Henry Ford donated a built-to-order fire truck, effectively creating the Mt. Vernon Fire Department.

Bull Run Winery & Festival of Lights Trip Report

December 14, 2025

George Darnell



We had planned to make this trip on Monday, December 15, until we discovered that the Festival of Lights allows buses on weekends only. When we changed the date, we lost some travellers who had other plans for Sunday. But, by the time we reached the cutoff date we had 23 travellers registered.

When I arrived the Lodge, about 3:15, I found some of our travellers gathered in the vestibule. I wondered why until I went inside and discovered that Brunch with Santa was still going strong. The Lodge had tables everywhere, including the Grand Living Room and the Market Place. A magnificent Santa was strolling around the tables greeting the children, much to their delight. The host stand had been moved to the Concierge Desk. There was barely standing room for some of our travellers to wait in the warmth. Did I mention that it was a really cold day?

As Julie arrive in her Shenandoah Shuttle it was snowing. We climbed aboard, took a quick head count, and then headed up I-66 to the Winery at Bull Run. It is located off US 29 just north of Manassas Battlefield Park, thus the name. They assured us they would be open on Sunday and have food available, pizza and a food truck, until 6:00 p.m. But they warned us that they were expecting several groups and that we might not be able to sit together



Julie got us as close as possible to the entrance walkway, but there was still some distance to walk uphill. Everyone made it safely inside and found that it was not as crowded as we expected. We easily got our glasses or bottles of wine from the long bar with ample servers, ordered food from the winery kitchen or the food truck parked in the cold outside, and settled in groups around the winery to enjoy ourselves. The winery has showcases of Civil War artifacts which are better viewed in the daylight.

Julie met us at our drop off point and we reboarded the bus. There is no left turn leaving the winery. So, Julie had to find a place in Manassas to make a U-Turn to head North on Rt-29. She found the narrow two-lane road that crosses over I-66 into the Festival of Lights. We stopped at the toy soldier guard house to give the attendant our ticket, before proceeding into the park with light displays on both sides of the bus. We had to wipe the fog off the windows to get a clear view because of the cold. The light display was worth the trip, and it is a good place to take grandchildren. You can buy tickets online.



By the time we reached the festival village at the end of the drive no one wanted to get off the bus to visit the village, which seemed strangely dark. (I discovered in an email from the park the next day that they had closed the village because of the weather.) So, we left the park and made our way to Centreville to pick up I-66 West and head back home. Once you pass Haymarket, I-66 is very dark. We arrived at the Lodge a little ahead of schedule, thanked and tipped Julie, said our good-byes, and headed to our homes on a very cold night.

Mystery Winter Wine Tour January 17, 2026

What better way to spend a cold winter day than visiting Virginia wineries with friends? For this trip our bus company, Shenandoah Shuttle, selected three wineries not too far from us that we have not visited before. What will we discover on this trip?

Schedule:

10:30 a.m. Gather in Lodge
10:45 a.m. Leave Lodge
11:30 a.m. Arrive First Winery
1:00 p.m. Depart
1:45 p.m. Arrive Second Winery
3:15 Depart
4:00 p.m. Arrive Third Winery
5:30 p.m. Depart
6:00 p.m. Arrive Lodge



All times are approximate and subjects to change.

The minimum for this trip is 12 and maximum is 18.

Registration is \$60 for transportation. Food, tastings, and driver's tip are not included.

Please register on MTL Events and drop off your registration check, payable to "Lake Frederick Travel Club," with your contact information and the date of the trip, with the lodge concierge no later than January 10, 2026.

TRIP IDEAS 2026, VERSION 5**JANUARY**

- January 15--Mystery Winter Wine Tour Surprise

FEBRUARY

- Presidents Day Outing to Smithsonian History Museum

MARCH

- March 17--Mystery St. Patricks Pub Crawl
- March 30—Museum of the Bible Dead Sea Scrolls Exhibit

APRIL

- Blue Ridge Spring Odyssey (Overnight in Roanoke)

MAY

- Battles of Fisher's Hill & Cedar Creek
- Monticello, Michie Tavern, & Montpelier

JUNE

- Frontier Heritage Tour
- Shenandoah County Wine Tour

JULY

- July – Trail Ride & Brewery Lunch

AUGUST

- Harpers Ferry Tour

SEPTEMBER

- 16--Gettysburg Tour

OCTOBER

- 13-14--PA Disasters & Railroads Overnight Trip
- Sperryville & Little Washington Tour

NOVEMBER

- Fall Wine Tour

DECEMBER

- Wreaths Across America
- Candlelight Christmas at Mount Vernon

Note: We will include selected trips from Shenandoah Tours when their 2026 catalogue is public

Calendar of Shenandoah Tours Trips for 2026, V2



<p>May 5-7 – Celebrate Spring at the Biltmore and Grove Park Inn by motor coach. 3 Days/2 Nights/ 4 Meals; \$775 pp double/\$909 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page 6) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>	<p>Nov 18-20 – Magical Smokey Mountain Christmas by motor coach. 3 Days/2 Nights/3 Meals; \$709 pp double/\$879 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page 42) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>
<p>June 8-11 – Niagara Falls “Moments to Remember” by motor coach. 4 Days/3 Nights/ 4 Meals; \$1029 pp double/\$1419 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page 11) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>	<p>Nov 27-30 – A Country Christmas at Opryland Hotel by motor coach. 4 Days/3 Nights/ 2 Meals; \$1499 pp double/\$1999 single; Deposit \$150 pp. (Page 43) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>
<p>Sep 14-17 – Niagara Falls “Moments to Remember” by motor coach. 4 Days/3 Nights/ 4 Meals; \$1029 pp double/\$1419 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page 11) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>	<p>Dec 1-3 – Candlelight Christmas at Biltmore Estate by motor coach. 3 Days/2 Nights/4 Meals; \$979 pp double/\$ 1099 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page 44) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>
<p>Sep 23-29 – Iceland “Land of Fire and Ice.” 7 Days/6 Nights/7 Meals; \$4618 double/\$6377 single; Deposit \$699 pp. (Page 33) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>	<p>Dec 8-10 – Virginia’s Festival of Lights by motor coach. 3 Days/2 Nights/4 Meals; \$819 pp double/\$999 single; Deposit \$100 pp. (Page46) Contact: Shenandoah Tours.</p>

NOTE: For Shenandoah motor coach tours, we need a minimum of 8 people for pick up in Lake Frederick. Otherwise, pick up is at Routes 522 & 50 in the Red Roof Inn parking lot.