

❧ FORT GEORGE ADVICE ❧

The Newsletter of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance

PO BOX 26, LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK 12845

Spring 2007

Lake George - Things To Know

By Edward J. Dodge

What do you know about Lake George? Today it is a major resort area and in the past it has seen three major military battles, if not four.

The lake is in an old glacier trough. The mountains on either side are primarily composed of granite that dates from the Paleozoic age which was some three hundred thousand years ago. The lake is considered to be in the Adirondack Mountains. To the west the mountains are some 2200 feet high and to the east some 2600 feet high. As to whether they were formed by volcanic action or earth quake as they are just south of the St. Lawrence Fault Line is probably up for debate.

The lake is known as the tail of Lake Champlain. It is orientated south to north, flowing through the narrows or portage, dropping some 250 feet into Lake Champlain. The glacier that created the lake receded some 10,000 years ago. The lake is 32 miles long, 1 to 3 miles wide with 109 miles of shore line. It contains some 44 square miles of water, 300 islands and at its deepest is 195 feet deep. It's color is deceptive. Up close it has a brownish hue caused by the heavy iron deposits in the area. At a distance it appears blue, green or a combination of the two colors.

Artifacts recovered from archaeological excavations at the south end of the lake which is square shaped, reflect that man camped on the shores of the lake as early as 5000 years ago. It appears that these were fishing camps and of short duration. Summer is nice at the lake although it can get some violent storms. Winter on the other hand is extremely severe with temperatures well below freezing if not below zero degrees Fahrenheit.

The area where the lake is located was known to the Native American tribes of the northeast and Canada as The Great Wilderness. The lake has had many names from various sources. To the Native Americans it was Andiatarocete; to the French it was Lac St. Sacrament; to the early settlers it was Iroquois Lake and to the British Army it was one of the Little Lakes (Loon Lake, Schroon Lake, etc.). Sir William Johnson named it Lake George in honor of his king, King George. The writer James Fenimore Cooper referred to it as Lake Horican in his novel "The Last of The Mohigans".

Time moved forward as did the history of the lake. On 8 September 1755, The south end of the Lake was the site of a major battle between the French and British, again in March of 1757 and again in Au-

gust 1757. The fourth major military engagement was British Major Carleton's Raid in October 1780 during the Revolutionary War.

The town of Lake George was originally the town of Caldwell. The village of Lake George became an incorporated village in 1903. Further down the lake, in August 1910 six months after the Boy Scouts of America was founded, would be the very first American Boy Scout Summer Camp. It was held at Silver Bay YMCA Camp. One hundred and twenty-five boys attended.

Now these are just a few of the things to know about Lake George. For further information, the reader is referred to your most favorite Encyclopedia; "New France and New England" by John Fiske, Heritage Books; "Notes on the History of Fort George" by B. F. DeCosta; "Fort William Henry, A History, Lake George, New York" by Stanley M. Gifford; "Relief is Greatly Wanted" by E. J. Dodge, Heritage Books - just to name a few - or stop by and visit with Mr. Todd DeGarmo or browse the collections at the Folk Life Center, Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, New York. ■

President's Message

By Herman C. Brown

Welcome to the year 2007, the year of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance's sixth anniversary and the 250th anniversary of the French capture and razing of Fort William Henry.

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- ◆ Christopher R. Sabick, *Lake Champlain Maritime Museum*

The past six months have been both bitter and sweet. On the bitter side, we mourn the passing of Dr. Charles Fischer a long standing member and avid supporter of the Alliance. To Chuck's wife Karen and his family, we extend our sincerest condolences and Best Wishes for their future. On the sweet side, we note the continued growth of the Alliance to seventy-five memberships hailing from twelve different States across the country and the Board of Trustees entering into a contract with TDT Consultancy of Crown Point, NY to complete the Lake George Battlefield Park's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU goes Stelfer Steel & Pipe, LLC of Fairfield, CT and The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York for their Sponsor Membership support. A SPECIAL WELCOME is extended to Stephen E and Jacqueline G. Schlate of Suffern, NY our newest Sponsor. A HEARTY THANK YOU is extended to ALL new and renewing members. It is because of YOU ALL, that the Alliance is able to continue to carry out its mission and goals.

The Alliance Board of Trustees met on February 24th and adopted an action plan and operating budget of \$8,530 for fiscal year 2007-2008. Major goals for the new year include: (1) complete the park's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places; (2) continue working with our commissioned artist (Mr. Ernest Haas) as he paints the scene of General Jeffrey Amherst's 1759 encampment at Fort

George (the unveiling of this historic art work continues to be planned for the year 2009); (3) continue supporting the DEC staff at the park as they strive to maintain, improve and develop the park and assure its historic preservation, conservation and interpretation; and (4) spread the word, both far and wide, of the historic significance of our beloved site. In that regard, you may wish to note that I am speaking to the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New Hampshire at their meeting in Concord, NH on May 5th and before the Rensselaer's Darrin Fresh Water Institute during their 2007 Summer Lecture Series in Bolton Landing, NY on August 13th. The latter presentation is open to the public. For more information on the Institute's Summer Lecture Series I commend you to their website www.rpi.edu/dept/DFWI.

The Alliance's new fiscal and membership year began on April 1st. If you have not yet remitted this year's dues to the Secretary please do so at your earliest convenience. A copy of the budget and last year's financial report will be presented at this year's annual membership meeting. Advance copies are available by request from the Secretary.

Our sixth annual membership meeting and picnic will be held on Saturday, August 25, 2007 at the pavilion at Lake George Battlefield Park, Lake George, NY. Please make a commitment to attend. Mark your calendar now. I hope to see you all there. ■

Pewter Buttons of the 2000 Fort George Excavation

By Christopher R. Sabick

The last artifacts being conserved at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum of the 2000 excavation are the collection of fourteen pewter buttons. This small assemblage of buttons demonstrates a number of different forms and two of them carry markings. Buttons are typically classified by the material they are made of and the design of the button body and shank (the loop on the back of the button with which it is attached to an article of clothing). In the case of this collection all the buttons are composed of pewter but we have a variety of body types and shank designs.

Figure 1 shows the backs of 4 buttons from this collection each of which demonstrates a different button design. Button 1 is a one piece cast button and shank. With this design molten pewter was poured into a mold forming both the body of the button and the shank as a single unit. Button 2 is also a one piece button, but you can see that it has what is known as a birdcage, turret, box, square, or four-way shank. On this type of button thread could be fed through the four holes in this "birdcage" and attached to the clothing. Button 3 is a two piece button with an iron wire shank attached. The body of this button was molded as two separate concave pieces that were fused together and the wire shank was braised onto the hollow body. Button 4 is a one piece button with a raided boss on the back into which a wire shank would have been attached, unfortunately in this example the wire shank is missing.

Button 4 is also one of the two buttons in this collection that has a mark on its face. This button carries the mark



(Figure 1) Examples of Pewter buttons excavated at Fort George in the year 2000 and conserved at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum's Conservation Laboratory. (courtesy of Christopher R. Sabick, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum)

for the 26th Regiment on its face. The other decorated button is fragmentary but clearly has the "USA" marking on its face. This marking suggests that it was employed before the War of 1812 during which most buttons carried the simplified "US" marking. All of these buttons date from the second half of the 18th century or very early 19th fitting nicely into the historical context of the site. ■



Meeting Notice!

Sixth Annual Membership Meeting

When: Saturday, August 25, 2007.

Where: Lake George Battlefield Park Picnic Pavilion.

Schedule of Activities:

- ◆ **10:00 to 11:15 AM:** An interpreted tour of the Fort George Garrison Grounds (open to the public).
- ◆ **11:30 AM to Noon:** The Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance membership business meeting (members and invited guests only).
- ◆ **Noon to 1:00 PM:** Picnic lunch catered by the East Cove Restaurant. Guest Speaker TBA. (members and invited guests only).
- ◆ **1:30 PM:** Board of Trustees Meeting.

Archaeological Trivia from the Test Pit

Dr. Andrew Farry

In a previous column I expounded the virtues of Geographical Information Systems analyses (or GIS) in historical archaeology. I mentioned the increasingly pervasive nature of GIS applications, the ability of GIS databases to handle complex and multiple data sources, and the unique feature of being able to link spatial and tabular data. All of these aspects make GIS an ideal tool for the historical archaeologist. Indeed, GIS has become so ingrained in my own daily activities as an archaeologist that I'm no longer sure I could function without access to the software! The following provides a brief summary of one specific application of GIS technology to historical archaeology (in general) and to Fort George (in particular).

One of the more powerful yet easy-to-use functions of GIS is called Viewshed Analysis. Put simply, this function allows a person to pick a specific vantage point on a map and determine all those surrounding locations that are within view. To accomplish this task the GIS software first displays what is called a Digital Elevation Model (or DEM; available for free download). The DEM is basically a topographic map of a given area, and the software can display this map as a three-dimensional surface. After an observation point is selected somewhere on the DEM, the software is then able to determine which parts of the 3D surface are within that point's viewshed and which are not. In selecting the observation point it is also possible to offset it some specified elevation from the 3D surface, the intent being to simulate, say, the height of a person standing on the ground, or maybe the height of fire lookout tower.

This type of analysis has obvious applications to colonial military fort sites, particularly the larger, Vauban-style fortifications like Fort William Henry or (the intended) Fort George. Line-of-site from these martial strong points was paramount, as was command of the local topography. To this end, I attempted to see what would have been visible from the grounds at Fort George based on topography by employing Viewshed Analysis. Rather than a single point I used a broad area to represent the grounds at Fort George. Once this area was displayed on the 3D DEM surface, the GIS software easily computed the visible and not-visible areas surrounding Fort George. Overall, the resulting image demonstrates the long site lines extending down the length of the lake as well as across the general vicinity of the south end of Lake George (including what was probably the course of the military road to the south). My Fort George viewshed is, admittedly, limited in the sense that the computations are taken from ground surface rather than from the height of a curtain wall or stockade, but this is easily adjusted. The viewshed also does not consider any factor other than topography, so does not accurately model the influence of vegetation or other surface features affecting sight lines. This potentially confounding factor, however, may not be all that confounding among colonial military sites if surrounding areas were kept relatively open.

With the click of a few buttons, GIS software enables one to re-create the visual landscape surrounding a site like Fort George. While simple to conduct, such an analysis sparks a myriad of additional questions: What was the view like from the walls at Fort William Henry, and how did this actually relate to Montcalm's posi-

tions? Did other locations at Lake George afford better or more strategic views than those originally chosen? How important was viewshed as a factor in settlement location for the whole of the Hudson River-Lake George portage? These and other questions are enabled, in part, by the power of GIS software, which will no doubt become increasingly ingrained in the practice of historical archaeology. ■

Welcoming New Members

by Nadine Battaglia

Yet again, late winter snowflakes are swirling through the air, deepening the already icy layers of crystalline snow resting upon the hallowed grounds of Fort George.

For nearly 250 years, Fort George, our own Colonial American historic gem, has slumbered between the mountains and under the towering pines at the quiet headwaters of Lake George, virtually little known. But now, thanks to the dedication and hard work of the Alliance membership, our own Fort George, the brilliant crown jewel on the diadem of historic sites on Lake George is being polished, shined and re-set to its proper place in our awareness and for posterity! The meaning of their lives, their actions and deeds of those earlier Americans who lived, fought and sometimes died on that battlefield should not and will not be forgotten.

To that noble end, we express a sincere message of gratitude to our standing membership and offer a warm welcome to the most recent additions to the Alliance:

- ◆ Renee Thorpe, Queensbury, New York
- ◆ Glens Falls National Bank & Trust Company, Glens Falls, New York
- ◆ Adirondack Community College, Queensbury, New York