

❧ FORT GEORGE ADVICE ❧

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

PO BOX 26, LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK 12845

Spring 2016

Building Fort George 1759 ❧

By Russell P. Bellico

Professor Emeritus, Westfield State College

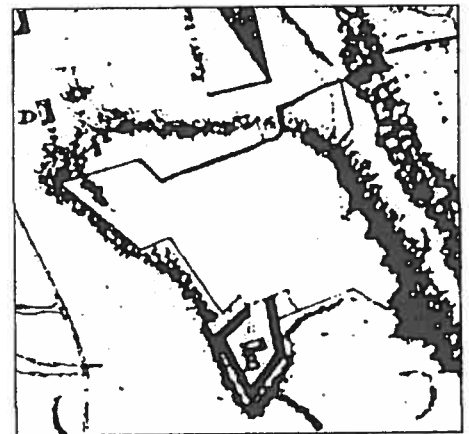
Seventeen Fifty Nine ushered in another change in the landscape of southern Lake George. As a result of French and Indian attacks during the previous year, the new British commander in chief, 42-year-old Major General Jeffery Amherst, formulated plans for new fortifications at the lake and along the military road to Fort Edward. Without a substantial fort that could withstand a siege at Lake George in 1758, British and provincial troops had been forced to dismantle their wooden defenses and sink their war vessels at the end of the year to avoid destruction by French raiding parties over the winter.

On the morning of June 22, 1759, the day after Amherst and his army had reached the lake, Colonel James Montresor, the chief engineer, walked the lakeside with Amherst to select "the ground for building a fort," settling on a site "at [William] Johnson's [1755] Camp."¹ (A month earlier Montresor had provided Amherst with an estimate "of the number of artificers ... to execute what has been proposed at the lake."²) Two days later, Montresor ordered William Brasier to survey the area and on June 28 he altered the plan for the fort after consulting with Lieutenant Colonel William Eyre, who had earlier designed and supervised the construction of Fort William Henry. On the same day, Eyre began construction of a stockaded (wood) fort closer to the lake (see *Fort George Advice*, Spring/Summer 2014). On June 30 Montresor submitted the revised plan to Amherst and on July 2 the "founda[tion] of Fort G[e]org[e] [was] Laid."³ On the same day Captain-Lieutenant Henry Skinner of the Royal Artillery Regiment wrote that

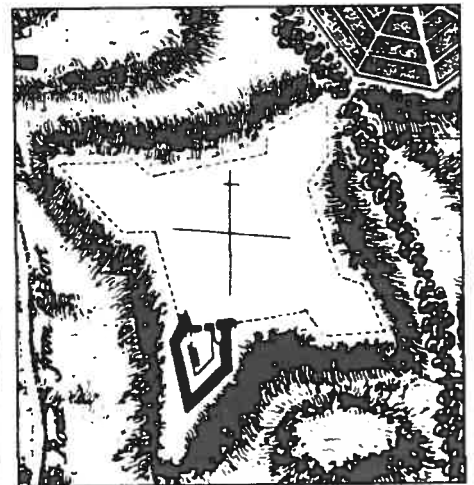
the army [was] employed in erecting an irregular fort on a rock, which is to be built of stone, casem[a]ted [bombproof rooms built under a rampart], and large enough to contain a garrison of 600 men" situated between "swamp[s] 600 yards broad ... They have good stone for lime and clay for bricks on the spot."⁴ In a letter to his wife dated July 12, Chaplain Henry True, attached to the New Hampshire provincial regiment, noted that some of his regiment were employed "making brick, some lime, some digging rocks, some assisting in building a fort with stone and lime, where ye old breastwork was, encompassing about 2 or 3 acres of foundation."⁵

During the early morning hours of July 21, Amherst departed with his troops from the southern end of Lake George aboard a fleet of vessels to capture the French fortifications on Lake Champlain, but he left Montresor behind with "a Body of 1500 Men" at the Lake George camp to continue with the construction of the "Stone Fort."⁶ (The designation Fort George, named for King George II, appeared in late July 1759.⁷) On July 25 Montresor examined "West Creek for a place for a saw mill," ordering "one to be built, with a log house for a Ser[ge]ant & 12 men."⁸ Montresor made progress on Fort George, but the swift British seizure of the French forts at Ticonderoga and Crown Point lessened the need for a strong fortification at Lake George. On August 3 Amherst ordered tools and nails be sent to Ticonderoga. During the first week of August, Lieutenant William Henshaw, serving with a Massachusetts regiment, recorded that the walls of the new fort were "about 14 Feet thick built of Stone & Lime."⁹

Montresor's fort was still under construction during September; 238 carpenters were mustered on September 3. In response to a September 6 letter from Amherst requesting an accounting of the masons and a time frame for finishing the fort, Montresor reported that 72,960 cubic feet of materials had been



Detail of the "Plan of Encampment of the Army at Lake George June 1759," showing "B. detached Bastion." (National Archives of Canada)



Detail of the "Plan of Part of Fort George, with the Barracks & c Erected in the Year 1759," from Mary Ann Rocque's *A Set of Plans and Forts in America, Reduced from Actual Surveys*, showing the completed bastion and a section of the octagon-shaped garden in the upper right corner. (National Archives of Canada)

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Secretary's Notes

By Nadine Battaglia

Farewell to the lovely Mrs. John Blanchfield, one of our Fort George Alliance Founders, who passed on January 6, 2016.

For those not having met the Blanchfield's, let me share a memory or two. Prior to the Alliance's chartering in 2001, John and Patricia were among the original folks who joined to consider the uncertain future of Fort George, its heritage and antiquities.

This led to the formation of the Alliance, an engine designed to cultivate benefit for Fort George by securing its history, and to protect it from harm arising from simple poor planning, across the spectrum to acts of sheer greed.

The idea seems unthinkable now, but earlier, the hallowed Battlefield earth

upon which our colonial American soldiers lived and fought and sacrificed their lives, was being considered for conversion into campgrounds. The Blanchfield's and their friends stepped up and stopped that plan. Mr. Blanchfield was a genuine war hero – while serving in the US Army during WWII, he was captured, and then escaped from a POW camp in Germany. Mrs. Blanchfield gave ease and saved lives in her career as a registered nurse.

So Godspeed, John and Patricia! Thank you for protecting Fort George – our most sensitive and historically rich gem slumbering above the headwaters of Lake George, lying at the heart of our colonial American history. ■

2015 Excavations in Lake George Battlefield Park

By Dr. David Starbuck,
SUNY Adirondack and Plymouth State University

Originally published in "The French and Indian War Society Newsletter", reprinted by permission of the author and the Society.

Fort George was meant to halt French advances from New France (Canada) during the French & Indian War (1754-1763). Positioned on high ground at the southern end of Lake George, the construction of this British fort by Colonel James Montresor of the Royal Engineers began in the summer of 1759 on the orders of General Jeffery Amherst who commanded an 11,000-man army. If completed, it would have become the largest British fort in North America. However, Amherst's army successfully took Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga) that summer, and only one enormous corner bastion was actually completed. This bastion contained a solitary barracks building,

and other rooms were added and occupied even as British and Colonial armies came and went. The final destruction of Fort George came in 1780 at the hands of a British-led army from Canada known as Carleton's Raid.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and numerous other historical luminaries visited the fort. A substantial stabilization effort of Fort George occurred in the 1920's. Now managed within the Lake George Battlefield Park by the State of New York, the scenic ruins of Fort George are an annual attraction for the thousands of summer visitors to Lake George. Still, until recently there was no awareness of what

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President's Welcome

By Lyn Karig Hohmann

Welcome to the Winter 2016 *Fort George Advice*! We have particularly interesting news to share in this newsletter. In the late fall of 2015, the Town of Lake George Director of Planning and Zoning, Dan Barusch, reached out to the DEC and the Fort George Alliance to discuss the possibility of submitting an American Battlefield Protection Program Battlefield Preservation Planning Project Grant Application focused on Lake George Battlefield Park. This began a series of meetings and correspondence with Dan, Chuck Vandrei (DEC Historical Preservation Officer), Marisa Muratori (Town Board Member), Margy Mannix (Town of Lake George Historian), and myself which resulted in the submission of the grant application on January 11, 2016. The grant application titled, "Analysis of Military Campaigns Associated with Fort George and Environs", seeks funding to identify through historical document review, map analysis and field work any unknown/unrecognized features in the Town of Lake George connected with the French and Indian War and/or Revolutionary War and to develop plans for ensuring more detailed documentation and potential for preservation of these sites. Since the Battlefield Park is already protected, this will allow us the opportunity to ensure other related historical sites are evaluated for potential preservation in consideration of the ongoing tourist and business development of this area. We would like to thank all those individuals and organizations who supplied letters of support for this project. We will know in early spring if we have passed the first hurdle of consideration and need to submit additional information. Wish us luck!

Those who attended the annual meeting last August were fortunate to be able to view the interior walls of Fort George as described and drawn by Jared Sparks in 1830 (see for reference, *Empires in the Mountains*, Russell P. Bellico, pp. 274-275). In spring 2015, Chuck Vandrei and I toured the park to discuss the upcoming dig and other

planning needs. When we were walking up in the Fort site, we saw a stone wall that I had not seen before, likely due to plant growth. During the summer archaeological dig under Dr. David Starbuck, this wall was identified to be part of an intact interior wall of Fort George, consistent, as noted above, with the 1830 drawing. Yes, we were very excited! At the end of the dig season, after copious notes and pictures, the site was completely filled to protect these walls. Dr. Christina Reith, the state archaeologist, was a weekly visitor to the site and even brought her trowel and assisted with the dig. Dr. Starbuck contributed an article to the French and Indian War Society on the summer dig. We have received his permission and the permission of the French and Indian War Society to publish that article in this newsletter. Dr. Starbuck has finished his report on the dig and will be working with Dr. Reith and Mr. Vandrei to determine opportunities for a dig next summer again in the park. I would hope this would allow continued exploration of the Fort site.

Continuing with the theme of Fort George, Dr. Bellico has provided us an article on the building of Fort George. I would encourage you to also review another article on the ruins of Fort George, also contributed by Dr. Bellico, found in the Summer/Fall 2013 Advice.

We have begun our planning for our Annual Memorial Day Remembrance honoring the Four Unknown Soldiers of the Battle of Lake George buried in the Park. We will again be working with the Lake George Fire Department, the America Legion, and Fort William Henry on this event. Each year the attendance has been increasing. We hope you will take this opportunity to visit the park and share in this special remembrance. We will be providing a tour of the park after the Remembrance.

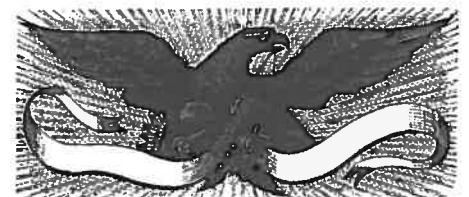
We are pleased to welcome Dr. Bruce Venter to our Board of Trustees. Bruce is a noted historian, author (*The Battle of Hubbardton, Kill Jeff Davis*), and president of America's History, LLC historical tours.



Interior Wall of Fort George.

Last year, we received permission from the DEC to develop a visitors' center in the Beach House at the Million Dollar Beach. We have obtained several estimates on the cost of such a project and are waiting a final approval of the plan by DEC. It is unfortunately a slow process!

I am pleased with the progress we have made in this last year, bringing the Park to the people and making new friends. Our exhibit at the Lake George Historical Society has been very well received. We are working now with that historical society to have the 2000 artifacts brought to their museum for exhibit. Our tours continue to be popular. We participated in a Fort Ticonderoga teachers' seminar. We worked with Fort William Henry as volunteers for their annual fall encampment. (see story and picture) Much is happening and we are happy that you continue to be part of it! ■



Building Fort George 1759

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raised at Fort George and made suggestions on how to end the current work, but predicted that two more working seasons would be required to complete the fort. In response, on September 8 Amherst ordered him to "finish the Citadel Bastion, retrench [abridge] it at the Gorge [open area at the rear of the bastion] . . . that it may form a small Fort of itself. If it holds 150 men . . . [it will be] sufficient. The Hospitals may be given up."¹⁰ Amherst suggested that the stockaded fort "with Barracks within it added to the Citadel Bastion will do for the present," urging that the work be completed as fast as possible in order to send the stone masons to Crown Point.¹¹ Two days later Montresor noted that Amherst had approved of his proposal for "finishing the Citadel Bastion Powder Magazine [etc.] & Barracks for 150 men."¹² Work accelerated on the fort – on September 13, workers "Began on the east flank of the Bastion Ten feet to raise in the afternoon," a week later carpenters began "sawing & squaring . . . the Bastion," the powder magazine was started on September 22, but four days later "4 or 5 regular masons refused to work."¹³

With winter approaching and with the completion of barracks at Crown Point and Ticonderoga, Amherst departed at the end of November with his regulars, boarding bateaux at the northern Lake George landing during a fierce snowstorm. Amherst inspected Fort George with Montresor, viewing the "Bastion & round the works & Barracks & seemed well pleased," according to Montresor, but ordered "casemates under the Rampart of the East Flank of the Bastion."¹⁴ In a letter written a few days earlier (November 24) to the commanding officer of Fort George "and those that shall hereafter Succeed him [in 1760]," Amherst ordered that 1,500 yards from the "Sali[e]nt Angles of the Bastion . . . [be] allotted for the Defense" of the fort and that no new structures be erected in said area unless by order of the commanding officer; he also suggested that Fort George was "of the greatest Importance for keeping up an uninterrupted and safe Communication" between the Crown's posts

linking the Hudson River to Ticonderoga.¹⁵

Amherst asked Montresor to remain at the fort to receive French prisoners being paroled to Canada in exchange for English captives who had been released two weeks earlier. One of the parolees, Captain Pierre Pouchot, stayed overnight at the fort on December 1, 1759, dining with Montresor. In addition to a brief observation of the stockaded fort, Pouchot described Fort George as a "square fort measuring 80 toises [about 510 feet] on each exterior side. The lower part of the rampart is more than 18 feet thick and made of masonry. The parapet [defensive wall on the top edge of the rampart] is of timbers placed one on top of the other, all well cut to size and banked up with earth twelve feet thick . . . a bastion completed, entirely casemated like a redoubt."¹⁶ A small winter garrison remained at the fort to protect the recently-built structures and the fleet of vessels docked at the fort's wharf. The ordnance left at the fort consisted of only two brass six pounders, six iron four pounders, six swivel guns, and one seven-inch iron howitzer.¹⁷

The British military plans for 1760 envisioned a final push by British and provincial armies into New France (Canada). In May Amherst ordered "Capt Lt Williams Engineer" to Fort George to finish the works and dispatched troops from Massachusetts in early June "to help" with the project.¹⁸ On his return trek through Lake Champlain and Lake George after the surrender of French forces in Canada on September 8, 1760, Amherst visited Fort George on October 29, commenting that "the bastion enclosed . . . is very neat, mounts 15 Guns, is very small and a bad defense," but it was "the shortest, cheapest & best method of finishing" the fort without costing "a large sum."¹⁹ (Three weeks before Amherst's inspection, Colonel George Williamson observed "11 embrasures" - openings for cannon - in the stone bastion.²⁰)

According to J. Clarence Webster, the editor of *The Journal of Jeffery Amherst*, critics of Amherst suggested

that the construction of Fort George was unnecessary - - a waste of "time, labor, and money," which fatally delayed the British advance into Canada planned for 1759, and was the product of his "over-cautious nature."²¹ In reality, the time required to raise and refit the war vessels that had been intentionally sunk in Lake George for protection from French raiders over the winter, as well as the time needed to build new vessels (radeau *Invincible* and provision boat *Snow Shoe*) delayed the expedition until the third week of July.

Fort George was an important post - - but perhaps more so for the Americans than the British during the next war. Many historians debate whether Lieutenant General John Burgoyne's 1777 defeat at Saratoga was due in part to the delays that his army experienced passing through Wood Creek (south of present-day Whitehall) rather than moving his troops south on the traditional military route of Lake George.²² According to Burgoyne, one of the reasons for not transporting his troops on Lake George was the presence of Fort George, which would have "oblige[d] me to open [siege] trenches, and consequently to delay me."²³ Although this is questionable, nevertheless the fort played a significant role during the American Revolution. ■

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Please plan to attend the
**Memorial Day Remembrance
 for the Four Unknown Soldiers
 of the Battle of Lake George.**
 The four colonists, our earliest
 governmentally recognized
Unknown American Soldiers
 represent the many other soldiers
 of this Battle who died and were
 buried in unknown graves near
 where they fell.

May 30, 2016

10:30 am • At the Memorial

“I wish you less Business & a continuation of Health...”

The Story of Jonathan Potts, MD

By Lyn Karig Hohmann, PhD, MD

Unfortunately neither wish in this closing of a letter to Dr. Jonathan Potts on July 29, 1776 by Bernard Romans (best known for his role in the surrender of Fort George, May 12, 1775) was to come to fruition. Dr. Potts served as the main physician at the small pox hospitals at Fort George during 1776 as one part of his meritorious service during the Revolutionary War.

Dr. Potts was descended from one of the first English families to settle in Pennsylvania after arriving in 1678 on a ship with other members of the Society of Friends. Jonathan was born in 1747 into a large and wealthy family. He intended to begin his training in medicine at the renowned University of Edinburgh and sailed on August 31, 1766 with Benjamin Rush of later political and medical fame to that end. The two landed in London where they received letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin on December 20, 1766. (1) Unfortunately, soon after arriving in Edinburgh, word arrived that his fiancée, Grace Richardson, was very ill. He immediately returned home to find that she had recovered. They were subsequently married on May 5th, 1767 at Reading, Pa. After his marriage, he again entered training to become a physician, this time at the College of Philadelphia, from which he graduated with a bachelor degree in the summer of 1768 in the first medical class graduation in America. He subsequently earned the degree of doctor of medicine in 1771.

Dr. Potts began practicing medicine in Reading, Berks County, Pennsylvania. He, as did so many others, watched the deteriorating situation between the American colonists and the British government. Even though Quakers, sides were taken in this large family, with Dr. Potts firmly on the colonial side. He and others in his community formed a committee of safety for Berks County.

In April 1776, it is recorded in the journals of the colonial Congress that

he petitioned to be director of hospitals for Canada. On June 9th, he was appointed as surgeon for Canada and Lake George and, by June 25th, he was already headquartered in New York City. On arrival, he received the following note to General Sullivan from Washington's secretary: "Sir: The bearer of this, Dr. Jonathan Potts, has been appointed to the direction of the hospital in Canada. He is a gentleman of character in every respect, and most indisputable zeal in the public cause. As such I beg leave to introduce him to your notice and acquaintance.

Wishing you all honor and success,
I am, sir, your most ob't and
humble servant,
Jos. Reed

New York, June 25, 1776" (1)

The following day, he began his travel north in the company of General Gates. Upon arrival at Crown Point on July 7, he became aware of the difficulties with the northern campaign in Canada. Also, despite his understanding of his status, he became subject to the orders of Dr. Samuel Stringer who was Surgeon General with General Philip Schuyler. He was directed to Fort George to manage the numerous ill soldiers, many of whom had small pox.

Dr. Potts apparently was popular with the military staff, including General Gates, as well as with his medical staff. However, this upside did not diminish the downside of the severe shortage of medicine and other supplies at this site. While some shortages were due to general shortages throughout the colonies because of the British control or blockade of colonial ports (2), many were also due to the politics being played out between the medical senior staff. Dr. Stringer ostensibly went to Philadelphia on July 27th to search for the needed medicines and supplies, but was also working his politics against his rival, Dr. John Morgan, the Surgeon General of the Continental Army. Dr. Stringer did not return to Albany until October 4th, leaving Dr. Potts to do without or seek supplies from the limited local

resources. Unfortunately, Potts was not only attempting to find medicines and supplies for his own area, but also for the other military surgeons still in the northern department. A broadside in the collection of Fort Ticonderoga circa July 31, 1776 by Dr. Potts is directed to the "good People of Albany" requesting bandages and herbs, "particularly Sage, Balm, Mallows, Wormwood, Centenary, etc. "(3) for which payment would be provided. Letters (1) from both Dr. Stephen McCrea with Arnold's fleet and other medical staff at Ticonderoga attest to the desperation to acquire needed materials to treat the wounded and ill.

As winter of 1776 set in, Dr. Potts himself became quite ill and was granted furlough on November 12, 1776 to return home to Reading to recover. He, however, continued his medical work for the colonials, particularly in procuring supplies for the nearby military hospitals. During this same time, numerous complaints about the lack of adequate supplies and actions of both John Morgan and Samuel Stringer led to Congress abruptly dismissing both on January 9, 1777.

Four days later, Dr. Potts was directed back into the northern campaign, but was again delayed due to supply and medicine shortages. He returned to Albany by April 2. He supervised the hospital constructed at Mount Independence (4), participated in the evacuation of Fort Ticonderoga and continued south to join with General Gates. After the successful battle of Saratoga, General Gates added in his letter announcing the victory to Congress: "I cannot close my letter without requesting your Excellency to inform Congress of the good care and attention with which Dr. Pott's and the gentlemen of the General Hospital have conducted the business of their Department. I must beg that some honorary mark of the favor of Congress may be shown to Dr. Pott's and his subordinate associates." Potts received the commendation of Congress and

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The Story of Jonathan Potts, MD

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returned to his home in Reading on November 16, 1777. He continued to assist the medical services of the army as Deputy Director General of the Middle Department and later Purveyor General of the purchasing department for medical supplies.

Unfortunately, he died at age 36 on October 15, 1781, never seeing the final independence of his country for which he had worked so tirelessly.

We are fortunate that the papers of Dr. Potts have been preserved. Four volumes of these papers are preserved at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Additional papers are in the collection of Fort Ticonderoga and were published in the Bulletin of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum, Volume XIV, #2, Winter 1982. ■

References:

- 1) Biographical sketch of Doctor Jonathan Potts: Director General of the hospitals of the northern and middle departments in the War of the Revolution, with extracts of his correspondence. Rev. Edward D. Neill, 1863.
- 2) Drug Supplies in the American Revolution, George B. Griffenhagen, United States National Museum Bulletin 225, 1961, accessed on line through the Gutenberg Project, www.gutenberg.org.
- 3) The Northern Medical Department 1776-1777, Morris H. Saffron, The Bulletin of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum, Vol. XIV, Winter 1982, #2, pp. 81-120
- 4) The General Hospital at Mount Independence: 18th-Century Health Care at a Revolutionary War Cantonment, David R. Starbuck, Northeast Historical Archaeology, Vol 19, Issue 1, pp. 50-68.



2015 Excavations in Lake George Battlefield Park

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might have survived from the barracks or later construction, even though this had become known as the only British fort on Lake George to have spanned both major 18th-century wars.

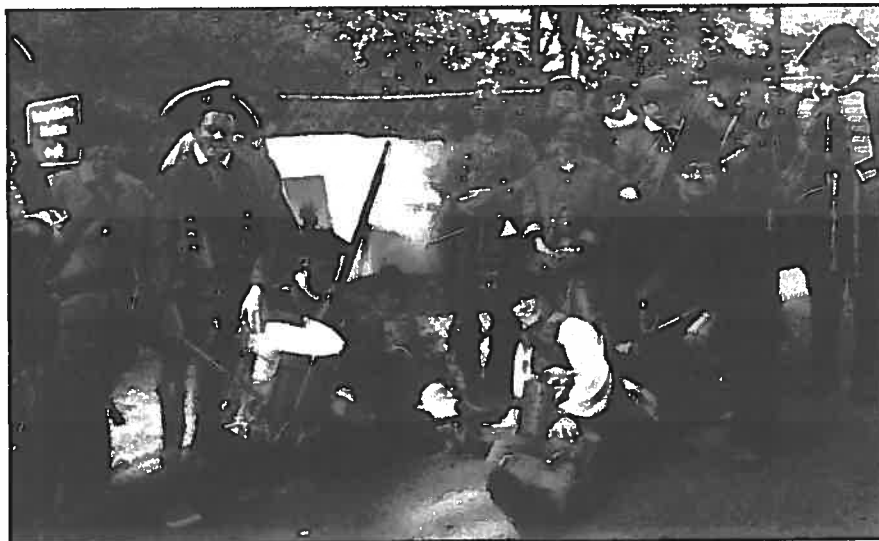
This image began to change in the summer of 2001 when the State University of New York at Adirondack excavated a few pits in the entrance to the bastion, followed by much more extensive testing in the summer of 2015. Earlier digs directed by Dr. David Starbuck and SUNY Adirondack at other, contemporary British sites in Lake George and nearby Fort Edward had only revealed the charred remains of log walls from the short-term forts that dotted the British frontier in the 1750's. This did not prepare archaeologists for the substantial, well-mortared stonewalls that were discovered in 2015 inside the bastion of Fort George, where British and Colonial soldiers had sheltered themselves for at least 22 years. What appear to be below-ground casemate rooms – probably for the storage of supplies and munitions are

surrounded by walls that are nearly five feet thick and at least six feet high.

While tourist artifacts are abundant in the shallower soil layers, much collapsed building debris (quarried stones and mortar) lies underneath. Finally, at the very base of the stonewalls, scattered atop the natural bedrock, lie soldiers' artifacts that include tin-glazed earthenware pottery sherds, buttons, butchered bones, musket balls, and gunflints. The solitary lives of British and American soldiers on the northern frontier of Colonial America are becoming a little bit clearer, and we now know this is one of the few settings in northern New York where the British army built relatively permanent architecture.

The 2015 SUNY Adirondack field school also tested several other locations in the Battlefield Park, with crews that averaged about 20 students and volunteers throughout the 6-week field season, and the field laboratory was fortunate to be based inside the Cemetery Building on the grounds near Fort William Henry Museum. ■

The March to Rogers Island



On October 2, 2015, a number of reenactors participating in the Reenactment of the Battle of Lake George/Fall encampment also reenacted the March from Fort William Henry to Rogers Island, a distance of 15 miles. Showing that they were as tough as their forbearers, they made it! The Alliance was pleased to be able to provide their first water stop as well as guard duty in their camp!