

NEWS

Lake George Battlefield's new center to tell tales of wars

Visitor's Center to open in June



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LAKE GEORGE — One of the region's most significant historic sites is perhaps the most misunderstood.

Located on the southern shores of the Queen of American Lakes, the Lake George Battlefield Park is 100 acres of early American military history.

It's the site of the Battle of Lake George in 1755, one of the initial clashes of the French and Indian War, and of the 1757 massacre at Fort William Henry. The latter, which was depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's novel "The Last of the Mohicans," saw the slaughter of scores of British soldiers who had surrendered to French troops and their Native American allies. It's also the location of Fort George, a supply post and general hospital for the Army where more than 1,000 American soldiers died during the American Revolution.

But the land, basically wide-open with a trio of statues and plaques, along with a ruins of Fort George, is more of a picnic area than a hallowed ground. The Battlefield Alliance, a friends group associated with the battlefield, hopes to end that this spring with the opening of a visitor's center, which would culminate a 20-year effort.

There, displays of artifacts as well as models of the buildings and forts, will give visitors a better idea of the park's significance.

"People walk through the park and have no idea what they are seeing," Lynda Karig Hohmann, president of the friends group, which is helping to erect and manage the visitor's center. "The visitors center is bringing that story, that long, long story of what happened in that park, to the public. It's never really been brought together in a meaningful way."

Hohmann said the friends group is partnering with the state, which owns the site.

The new center is expected to open in June, will include many artifacts that are now being stored at the New York State Museum in Albany. Many of the items, including buttons, musket shot, gun parts, shards of dinnerware and cannonballs, were unearthed by the late archaeologist David Starbuck who devoted much time to digging at the site. The center, which will also house state the Lake George Park Commission offices, will provide a timeline of history, descriptions of the statues and a replica uniform of a Pennsylvania battalion soldier who died there during the Revolutionary War.

Hohman said the center will include rotating exhibitions as well as a permanent display. One planned exhibition will feature photographs of powder horns made by John Bush, a Black soldier from Massachusetts who was at the fort between 1755 and 1757. He carved elaborate designs into animal horns that were used as gunpowder vessels.

"They are exquisite," she said.

She said she is also talking with The Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library in Glens Falls and the Mabee Farm Historic Site in Rotterdam about share exhibition items.

"We are trying to bring in links to the larger community," Hohmann said. "People have been extremely generous, sharing information and assistance. The folks at (the state Department of Environmental Conservation) and State Museum have been just wonderful."

The three-story building was paid for by state funds. The Alliance, however, received funding from Alfred Z. Solomon Foundation and the Stewart's Dade Foundation for historical content. The Alliance, which raised about \$30,000 for the project expects to raise another \$20,000 for exhibitions. The amount contributed by the state has not been disclosed.

Charles Vandrei, a state historic preservation officer and archaeologist who manages the park, said that the visitor's center will enhance the experience.

"It will increase people's understanding and appreciation of the role of the important historic events that took place in and around the park," he said.