

THE DAILY GAZETTE

WHEN CREDIBILITY MATTERS

Lake George Battlefield Park Visitors Interpretive Center to open in August

By Karen Bjornland | July 4, 2021



PHOTOGRAPHER:

The soon-to-open Lake George Battlefield Park Visitors Interpretive Center would not have become a reality without the work of the late archaeologist David Starbuck, inset,

LAKE GEORGE — Most people who picnic in the peaceful state park near Million Dollar Beach have no idea of what happened there more than 250 years ago.

Major battles of the French and Indian War and the American Revolutionary War were fought on this land, now called Lake George Battlefield Park, and more than 1,000 soldiers died in a hospital on those grounds. There are some signs and statues, and one can see the stone ruins of a fort and other buildings, but it's hard to imagine the lives of the military men and Native Americans who once walked here.

But in early August, when the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitors Interpretive Center opens its doors, important chapters in North American history will become more understandable, thanks to the late archaeologist David Starbuck and the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, a volunteer group that dreamed of such a center for 20 years.

"David Starbuck did five archaeological digs in the park," says Alliance president Lynda Karig Hohmann.

"We now have tons of artifacts: military artifacts, clothing artifacts, food artifacts. I would say that 99.9 percent are from David's work."

Starbuck, a Chestertown native who died in December 2020, was a dear friend of the Alliance.

"If it wasn't for David, we wouldn't have the Alliance. If it wasn't for the Alliance, we wouldn't have the visitors center," Hohmann says.

Starbuck, an anthropology professor at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire, also did digs at nearby Fort William Henry and at Rogers Island in Fort Edward.

"Our goal is to take our understanding of the surface archaeology and the features that are obvious in the park and bring them together with the artifacts in the visitors center," says Hohmann.

Alliance members are working closely with Charles Vandrei, the state historic preservation officer and archaeologist who manages the park, and the New York State Museum, where the artifacts are stored.

"The curating will be a combination of their work and our work brought together," she says. Visitors will see a re-created Revolutionary soldier's uniform, muskets, buttons, shards of dinnerware, cannonballs and a clothing cabinet with a person's name on it. There will also be a special exhibit about John Bush, a black soldier known for his intricate carvings on powder horns, the horns of cows and oxen used to carry gun powder.

"This isn't just about Europeans. This is about everybody. We're just trying to make that history visual for people," Hohmann says.

Admission is free. The Alliance also offers guided history walks in the park.

Other history walks will be listed on lakegeorgebattlefield.org and visitlakegeorge.com, where you can download a self-guided tour of the battlefield.