

Fact and Fiction in "Last of the Mohicans"

Caton Deuso



Nick Junkerman

Lake George, home to the French and Indian war's siege of Fort William Henry, has a history that does not always match the scenes in James Fenimore Cooper's American classic, *The Last of the Mohicans*.

In a presentation from Skidmore College Associate Professor Nick Junkerman, the fateful historical events that took place in and around the fort during August 1757 will be explored along with some differences in the fictional account depicted in Cooper's novel.

Junkerman (pronounced YUNK-er-man) is an associate professor of English Literature.

The Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance will discuss that presentation at the Fort William Henry Conference Center at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 3 a press announcement says.

John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, said that all history is important for a society's progress.

For the Lake George/Warren County area to have been the location of some of the most important American history of the 18th Century is a blessing, he said.

“The outcomes of the French and Indian War are foundational to what occurred 20 years later during the American Revolution,” he said.

“The military knowledge gained during the French and Indian War by American provincial soldiers gave them the experience and the confidence to overtake the British and ultimately earn our independence.

“When people understand that—both local residents and tourists—there's a whole new appreciation for Lake George's history. That's why we invite the public to the presentations we sponsor such as Nick Junkerman's and previous ones about Philip Schuyler, Henry Knox, and others. They're all connected to here,” he said.

Cooper's story is one of five works of historical fiction he wrote between 1823 and 1841, collectively called *The Leatherstocking Tales*, a press release about the presentation says. Cooper's heroes were Natty Bumppo (also called “Hawkeye”), born to white parents but raised among indigenous people of the Northeastern Woodlands, his foster brother Chingachgook, and Chingachgook's nephew Uncas.

“Mohicans” has been adapted into numerous film versions, most recently in 1992 with Daniel Day-Lewis as Natty Bumppo.

That movie was filmed in North Carolina, but renewed interest in the Lake George region where the real-life events occurred and where Cooper set his novel. Although the actual fort burned in 1757, a replica

was built in the 1950s where the original once stood, press materials say.

DiNuzzo said that he believes Junkerman will address why Cooper fictionalized his book.

“The context of this book is that it was written nearly 70 years after the events at Fort William Henry. Cooper already had an established track record as a novelist, and it made for a much more marketable tale by adding imagined elements (such as romance) to the baseline story of war's brutality,” DiNuzzo said in an interview.

Because Cooper’s depiction of the siege was so popular, it became the most recognized event of the French and Indian War, Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance trustee Russell P. Bellico said in the press materials.

“The 1757 siege of Fort William Henry and the adjacent entrenched camp (present-day Lake George Battlefield Park), and the subsequent ‘massacre’ were indelibly etched into the psyche of American colonists through vivid contemporary newspaper accounts,” he wrote in the release.