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NEW EXHIBITS AT BATTLEFIELD PARK VISITOR CENTER UNVEILED

By Anthony F. Hall

Earlier this week, the Lake George Battlefield Alliance formally introduced the new exhibits at the Visitor Center, which it operates on Fort George Road in Lake George.

Among them: a replica of a cannon that would have been used to defend Fort William Henry during the Marquis de Montcalm's 1757 siege; fragments of a 1758 bateau raised from the lake bed in the 1960s; and a relic of the more recent past, a mid-1950s diorama depicting the departure of 16,000 men and 1,000 boats from the head of Lake George, at the time the largest force ever assembled in North America, bound for Ticonderoga and a disastrous defeat under the command of British General James Abercromby.

According to Battlefield Alliance president John DiNuzzo, a ceremony was scheduled for Tuesday, July 11 to thank those whose generosity made the new exhibits possible: Fort William Henry; the New York State Museum; Adirondack Experience, the museum in Blue Mountain Lake formerly known as the Adirondack Museum; and the Town of Lake George.

Adirondack Experience donated the diorama to the Lake George Battlefield Alliance and the Town of Lake George used Occupancy Tax funds to pay for its restoration, said DiNuzzo.

The replica cannon and the bateau

fragments are long-term loans from Fort William Henry and the New York State Museum, respectively, said DiNuzzo.

"Fort William Henry has been very supportive of our efforts," said DiNuzzo. "We both acknowledge that whatever promotes the history of Lake George is good for both of us."

The diorama depicting General Abercromby's 1758 expedition to Ticonderoga could be seen at the Adirondack Museum when it first opened to the public in 1957.

"Dioramas can well portray historical events which we are unable to depict in any other manner," the Adirondack Museum's first director, Robert Bruce Inverarity, wrote in 1958.

The dioramas were accompanied by specially recorded, two-minute explanations which a visitor could hear by renting an earphone and plugging it into the base of one of them.

Placed in storage in the mid-1960s, the diorama required an extensive restoration before it could be displayed at the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center.

"It's really well done," said Bruce Venter, a historian of northern New York's 18th century military history and a trustee of the Lake George Battlefield Alliance. "It provides viewers with a clear sense of the numbers of troops and boats that were involved in the Abercromby



campaign.”

Each piece in the diorama would have been made by hand, with scrupulous attention to historic detail, probably by craftsmen trained at the New York State Museum, said DiNuzzo.

The diorama is itself a historical artifact, a lost art form, said Venter.

“For people my age, who remember dioramas from our youth, this recalls their popularity,” said Venter. “You had to use your mind to understand what was taking place. No detail – such as that dog – was too small. You could look at them forever.”

The wharf that is portrayed in the diorama, from which the flotilla is departing, was constructed by Abercromby’s army in 1758. A state historic marker, almost if not quite visible from the Visitor Center, directs visitors to its exact location.

Robert Bruce Inverarity also has a connection to another one of the new exhibits, the fragments of the bateau.

In 1965, Inverarity directed an Adirondack Museum project that raised three French and Indian War bateaux from the silt of Lake George.

According to maritime historian Joseph W. Zarzynski, the three bateaux brought to the surface were later confirmed to be remnants of “the Sunken Fleet of 1758:” scuttled battle craft, deliberately sunk by the British in order to hide them from the French and, perhaps, in anticipation of future campaigns.

Salvaged with a permit from New York State, the bateaux remain the property of the state.

The Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center is open Thursday through Monday, 10 am to 4 pm.