

The Lake George Examiner

Battle of Lake George: Weekend of reenactments and presentations brings history to life

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The thrum of a military cadence on the skin of a snare, the deep drone and contrasting high-pitched wail of bagpipes, leaders barking commands and the explosion of musket fire followed by the cries of the wounded as they fall to the ground — these sounds of 18th-century warfare filled the air in Battlefield Park this weekend, Sept. 22-24, as more than 250 reenactors set up camp in Lake George to commemorate the 268th Anniversary of the Battle of Lake George. The event, hosted by the French and Indian War Society with the assistance of the Fort William Henry Museum and the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, included lectures, battleground tours and reenactment of the 1755 Battle of Lake George.

Several hundred spectators surrounded the battlefield to watch the action. Battlefield Park became an encampment with rows of canvas tents and reenactors preparing meals over open fires. A sutlers market sold baked goods, wood-crafted items and period clothing. The public was invited to tour the encampment and was encouraged to ask reenactors questions about military camp life.

“The Hudson River-Lake George-Lake Champlain corridor was of great value as a conduit for communication, travel, trade, and a pathway for war,” explained historian John-Eric Nelson in his presentation, “The Battle of Lake George: Clash of Empires 1755.” Centuries ago, “Dutch, English, French and Amerindians struggled to control this superhighway connecting New York to Montreal,” Nelson says. “It should not be surprising that the empires of France and England would contest ownership of this valuable piece of real estate, with the English claiming all the way north to the South Shore of the St. Lawrence River and the French claiming south all the way to Albany and the Mohawk River. So, it is with little wonder that this area was a powder keg just waiting to explode.” Powder did

explode on the south end of Lake George on the morning of Sept. 8, 1755, in a series of three conflicts that came to be called the Battle of Lake George.

British Provincial forces from New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire, under the command of Major General William Johnson, with support from 200 Iroquois under the leadership of Mohawk Chief Theyanoguin (King Hendrick), marched north from Albany in a campaign to capture the French fort at Crown Point. "Crown Point," says Nelson, "was a thorn in the side of New England." Fort Saint-Frédéric, on Lake Champlain, gave the French control of the lake and was a stronghold from which the French could attack the British colonies to the south.

At "The Great Carrying Place," a critical portage between the Hudson River and Lake George/Champlain, Major General Phineas Lyman was charged with establishing an encampment and building a fort, Fort Lyman, which was renamed Fort Edward by Johnson later that year. Johnson moved his forces 16 miles north to Lac du Saint Sacrament, arriving there at the end of August, and reinforced British claims to the territory by changing the lake's French name to Lake George.

On September 7, Johnson received intelligence from Native American scouts that the French were planning an attack on Fort Lyman. The next morning, Johnson sent a force led by King Hendrick and Colonel Ephraim Williams to reinforce the fort. However, the French, under the leadership of Baron Jean-Armand Dieskau, changed their plans to attack the encampment at The Great Carrying Place, which by this time had a substantial fortification erected, and instead marched north. Dieskau was aware that Johnson had forces traveling the road to Fort Lyman, and about three miles south of Lake George he set up an ambush.

The British forces marched into what Nelson describes as a fishhook ambush. In this first battle, the Bloody Morning Scout, Hendrick and Williams were among the casualties. The British made a hasty retreat to Lake George with the French on their heels.

Back at the lake, alerted by the sounds of battle, Johnson's forces had quickly erected a breastwork of downed trees, and overturned wagons and boats. His lines, which ran through what is now Battlefield Park, Battleground Campground

and the Tiki Resort, were strong enough to repel the French during the second battle. Dieskau was wounded and captured. The French retreated.

The smoke from the battle could be seen from Fort Lyman, and the commander sent reinforcements. About two miles south of the lake, troops from Fort Lyman encountered the French. In this third battle, the British ambushed the enemy, driving the French from the area and tossing the bodies of the fallen French into a pond, hence the conflict's name, the Battle of Bloody Pond.

Nelson says the Battle of Lake George pushed the British Empire's boundary 60 miles north of Albany, allowed the construction of two new forts, and proved that an army of Provincials could defeat a professional, European-trained force. In a 2018 speech, historian and former Alliance President Lyn Karig Hohmann said she believes this knowledge, that they could beat trained French troops, emboldened the Colonists so that 20 years later they could challenge the British in the American Revolution.

Casualty numbers, both British and French, are disputed. Nelson notes that one diarist of the time wrote that several hundred were buried but did not record where they were buried. Nelson sweeps his arm over the rolling lawns of Battlefield Park, "Where are they?" He notes that more than two and half centuries later people are still unearthing remains from the French and Indian War and the American Revolution.

In the 1930s, a road construction crew uncovered the remains of four soldiers along State Route 9 south of Lake George. They were confirmed to be the remains of British killed in the Bloody Morning Scout. The remains were reinterred in Battlefield Park. Their grave is marked as the Grave of the Unknowns and the Battlefield Park Alliance honors them each Memorial Day with a service. In 2019, a construction project uncovered the remains of 40 Revolutionary War-era soldiers in Lake George Village. Nelson believes many more will be found.

Visit the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance website to learn more about the region's history and upcoming history-related events. The Alliance also maintains a YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@LakeGeorgeBattlefield> where

visitors may view Alliance presentations. A virtual tour of Battlefield Park may be found at <https://youtu.be/by-Bz8kgIQY?si=gqewB84FlbVCxJWp>



Historian and reenactor John-Eric Nelson narrates the reenactment of the Bloody Morning Scout.