

Adirondack EXPLORER



HISTORY & CULTURE

Remains of Revolutionary War soldiers closer to permanent resting place in Lake George

By Gwendolyn Craig

April 19, 2024

Plans are underway for memorial and burial service for Revolutionary War-era smallpox victims

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The 18th-century remains of 44 people believed to have died from smallpox in the village of Lake George are closer to being laid to rest after their unmarked graves were unearthed during a construction dig in 2019.

The Adirondack Park Agency on Thursday authorized the construction of a memorial site and place of interment on the east side of Fort George Road in Lake George. At least one of the skeletons was a soldier with the First Pennsylvania Battalion in the Revolutionary War, based on unearthed buttons.

The park agency, which is charged with long-range planning and public and private development in the Adirondack Park, approved the memorial through an amendment to the 1981 Lake George Beach and Battlefield Park Unit Management Plan. The burial site will include six structures for the remains, a walkway, flagpole, stone benches, interpretive signs and new plantings. There will be a cooperative agreement with the town of Lake George for maintenance and reinterment.

The bones were discovered in February 2019 on Courtland Street in the village. Building contractors dug an entire foundation before calling the local sheriff about the grave shafts and splintered human bones.

Charles Vandrei, archaeologist with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, said there were 11 partially disturbed graves in addition to 70 dump-truck piles of soil that had to be sifted for bone fragments. It took 15 months with hundreds of volunteers to conduct the recovery.



Lyn Karig Hohmann and Charles Vandrei sift for artifacts and 18th-century human remains, discovered during a construction project on Courtland Street in the Village of Lake George. Photo courtesy of Lisa Anderson

Lisa Anderson, curator of bioarchaeology at the New York State Museum, and Julie Weatherwax, bioarchaeology technician, counted 833 loose teeth since then, and matched 781 to 42 people.

Anderson counted femurs and that pointed to 44 people. Most of the remains appear to be male teenagers. Two of the buried were likely under the age of 10. Five were likely over the age of 40.

In an interview with the Explorer at the museum, the archeology team showed what about a quarter of their work has yielded over the last five years.

White boxes separated a few femurs, jaws, teeth and bone shards. Sticky notes indicated where the bones were found, with details to help make matches.

“We had tables laid out, just going to each piece trying to match as many pieces as we could and put people and parts back together,” Anderson said.

Dan Barusch, director of planning and zoning for the town and village of Lake George, said a committee formed to help manage the future of the remains and has been meeting almost monthly since they were found. Barusch and members plan to

raise funds for the interment project now that the APA has signed off. Details are still being worked out.

John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, said he hoped the reinterment ceremony could align with the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the 250th anniversary of the smallpox hospital at Lake George in 2026.

“It would be a nice way to pay tribute,” DiNuzzo said.

The APA received about 40 comments on the amendment and the design. Most called for the board to approve the amendment.



A rendering of the proposed columbariums at the Lake George Battlefield. Screenshot from the proposed amendment to 1981 Lake George Beach and Battlefield Park Unit Management Plan

“Everyone seems to really be behind the project,” Barusch said. “We did our best with the design to try and make sure it’s compatible with the park and low impact.”

A few commenters were not in favor of the interment’s design and provided their own opinions of what it should look like. A few asked for the benches planned for the site to be facing the memorial rather than Lake George.

Lynn Karig Hohman, former president of the [Battlefield Park Alliance](#), has worked closely on the project, from helping sift through the remains to their planning their reburial.

“They deserve what couldn’t be given them during that time when the Hospital for the Northern Campaign was dealing with hundreds of ill and dying persons—a dignified hallowed interment site,” she wrote. “The Park is the ideal location for this as within its environs was the army hospital, although its specific location is not clear.”