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Elevation rendering of the proposed reinterment memorial in Lake George Battlefield State Park. Studio A, Landscape Architecture and Engineering, volunteered its services to design the addition.

PROVIDED IMAGES, LAKE GEORGE AND STUDIO A

ALEX PORTAL

## FINAL REST FOR THE UNKNOWN FALLEN

A reinterment site for Revolutionary War soldiers is approved for Lake George Battlefield State Park

AMERICA 250TH

LAKE GEORGE – The Earthly remains of 44 individuals who are believed to have died of smallpox approximately 250 years ago will soon find a final resting place overlooking Lake George.

On April 19, the Adirondack Park Agency approved plans for several "low profile columbarium structures," to be placed within the Lake George Battlefield State Park along Fort George Road.

"It was determined Lake George Battlefield Park, which already has four unknown soldiers from the French and Indian War interred in it, would be the best spot," said John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance.

In 2019, human remains were discovered by construction workers excavating for an apartment building at the intersection of Courtland and Mohican streets in Lake George Village.

That prompted a full archeological investigation by local officials and representatives from the New York State Museum. That investigation yielded the remains of 44 individuals of various ages. Clothing fragments and other materials found along with the human bones placed the time of burial at roughly the same time as when the village of Lake George Village housed Fort George and a smallpox hospital during the American Revolution.

The Lake George Battlefield State Park, at the southern end of the lake near Million Dollar Beach, is located on the grounds where the fort and hospital once stood.

Buttons excavated with the remains were found to be from uniforms worn by members of the First Pennsylvania Battalion who were part of a failed attempt by colonial troops to take control of Quebec in 1775. The months long invasion was ultimately lost and left the American forces weakened and depleted; forcing them to retreat back to Crown Point near Fort Ticonderoga in May, 1776.

"At that point it was decided, because so many of these soldiers were infected with smallpox, that they wanted to segregate those infected

soldiers from the ones who weren't. That's when they decided to create the small pox hospital at Lake George," DiNuzzo said.

The hospital housed about 1,500 patients between the summer of 1776 and the end of that year.

"And unfortunately hundreds of them died," DiNuzzo said, adding that makeshift gravesites have been found throughout the village ever since.

"We know there were soldiers, there were also some younger people (who) might have been families, camp-followers if you will," he added.

DiNuzzo said the plans for the reinterment site are meant to be a tribute to the lives represented by the remains, but also an attractive place for the general public to congregate and use. The site will consist of six vaults, a flagpole, a walking path connected to the existing trail, benches, and interpretive signage. It will be landscaped with native plants.

Early construction is slated to begin this summer, but additional funding for the approximately \$500,000 project will still be sought through fundraising efforts and possible grant applications over the next few years.

DiNuzzo hopes to have the memorial completed no later than 2026, in order to coincide with the 250th commemorations planned for the area.

"This will be, certainly a regionally significant dedication, if not nationally significant," he said. "We would be including officials from Pennsylvania presumably, as well as New York State, and the federal government."

In May 2023, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat of New York, called on federal officials to join in the commemoration of the remains found at Lake George.

"These soldiers were among America's first heroes, who made the ultimate sacrifice fighting in the Revolution for the birth of our nation. Local historians and archeologists have been working for years to unravel this mystery, and now it is our duty to give these patriots the honor they deserve and a respectful burial near the location where they drew their final breaths in the fighting around Lake George Battlefield site," Schumer said in his announcement.

The 44 individuals found on Courtland Street were not the first, nor have they been the last human remains discovered in the area.

DiNuzzo said the remnants of around 10 individuals had been uncovered from the area around Fort William Henry, dating back almost two decades before the smallpox hospital was built.

In October, 2023, another set of remains had been discovered in another area of Mohican Street. DiNuzzo said the research so far into that discovery has shown one individual, from the smallpox era, but it is not known if they were a soldier, or a camp-follower. Those remains, as well as those from Fort William Henry will be laid to rest along with the 44 individuals from Courtland Street, at the proposed memorial.

"Because of the number of soldiers who were in the area from 1755 through 1780, I think it's safe to say hundreds, if not thousands of remains are in the ground," DiNuzzo said.

With that in mind, the proposed reinterment site has been designed so that any future remains may be laid to rest there as well. Four unknown soldiers from the 1755 battle of Lake George are already

reinterred at the park, marked by a single standing stone. DiNuzzo also said there are many unmarked burial sites throughout the park, including that of Gen. Frederick William Woedtke, also known as Baron de Woedtke, who was part of the ill-fated Quebec Campaign.

"We're thrilled that the reinterment is happening at our park," he said. "We think it's already a nice, hallowed ground. This will add that much more to the site and to the experience to the public."