

The Lake George Examiner



Old Courthouse has a new look: Historical marker unveiling is a ‘foot forward’

April 27, 2024 by Gillian Burdett

“Today we unveil an updated marker to describe one of the few really important buildings that we have left in Lake George,” says Lake George Town Councilwoman Marisa Muratori. Muratori was one of several speakers who gathered at the Old Courthouse in Lake George on Friday afternoon to present the refurbished historical marker.

The ceremony, held on National Historical Marker Day, launches a program to refurbish historical markers across the Town and Village of Lake George. The program is a joint effort of the Lake George Historical Association, the Lake

George Battlefield Park Alliance, the Town and Village of Lake George and the Lake George Junior-Senior High School.

“Our rich history is of the utmost importance not only to our community but its significance ultimately to the formation of our nation,” says Village of Lake George Mayor Ray Perry. “The condition of these brightly colored markers should be kept to a high standard to educate our residents as well as our visitors and not be passed by or otherwise overlooked.”

Muratori spoke about the importance of the Old Courthouse, both in its first life as the County Seat and its repurposing after Warren County moved its offices to the Municipal Center further south. “The marker, as other state markers likely do also, recalls a place of many dramas,” she says. “[I]ts purpose after its decommissioning has a rich life and history as the Lake George Institute of History, Art and Science, as it was named. So, so many interesting chapters over the years concerning history, art and science have happened in this building in its second life since it has been an active courthouse.”

The building is currently home to the Lake George Historical Association and museum, the Lake George Arts Project, and the Lake Champlain-lake George Regional Planning Board and Community Maternity Services.

The brick structure, with its iconic clock tower, was built on the shore of Lake George in 1845 and stands today, says Muratori, first, because it can’t burn down, and second, because history-minded people — with Winifred LaRose of the newly reformed Lake George Historical Association being a powerful advocate for preservation — worked to save the building after it was decommissioned as the County Courthouse.

After several years of controversy, the Town of Lake George purchased and restored the Old Courthouse. It was rededicated on June 30, 1970, with a ceremony attended by Governor Rockefeller, as documented in archived issues of the Lake George Mirror.

Muratori praised the Town of Lake George for its meticulous maintenance of the building, noting that the flag on the Courthouse lawn is at half-staff this day to recognize a town in mourning over the recent passing of Town Supervisor Dennis

Dickenson, who "...loved the town's ownership and stewardship of this building and made sure that Jimmy Martino, his buildings and grounds department, was able to take care of her properly, and that was a priority for him. I don't think he ever said no to any of Jimmy's good ideas to benefit the courthouse and our buildings and grounds crew has done an extraordinary, and often heroic job ... it always needs a lot of work and we're always happy to do it. We love our building."



Francis Coccozza, Principal of the Lake George Junior-Senior High School also spoke at the unveiling ceremony saying, "On behalf of the school district, we're pleased to partner in today's ceremony and today's commemoration but also for the furthering of just our beautiful little village, our little slice of earth and the importance that our little county and village has played in the wider history of our state and our country."

Cocozza sees the involvement of students in the Historical Marker refurbishment project as a learning opportunity that goes beyond textbooks. It gets them outside and may help Lake George students better appreciate history. In the process, he says, "they may learn a little history."

Don Rittner, Executive Director of the Warren County Historical Society says there are 120 historical markers in Warren County, "and a lot of them are in pretty bad shape." He also noted that many markers have incorrect information. Many were put up in the 1930s and new research has changed what we know about the sites. To ensure people have up-to-date information about historic sites in the county, part of the refurbishment project will include adding QR codes to the signs that direct people to a website that offers an accurate and more complete description of the marked sites.

We're very proud of this marker being the foot forward for the community to recognize that we appreciate the history, and we're going to do things just to be sure this history is preserved and folks are aware of it when they come to visit." — John DiNuzzo, President, Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance

John DiNuzzo, President of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, says that he and Lake George Historical Society President Alex Parrott approached Lake George Buildings and Grounds Superintendent Jim Martino this past winter to ask what they could do, as a community, to address the "shabby" appearance of the town's historical markers. They wanted, says DiNuzzo, "people who come to the community to recognize not only that there is some significant history that's happened here but also that we care about it."

DiNuzzo says the Town and Village were immediately on board with the idea. Their positive response, "...unparalleled, I think in terms of participation and appreciation of history."

Anyone wishing to join in the effort may email the Alliance at info@lakegeorgebattlefield.org or the Lake George Historical Association at info@lakegeorgehistorical.org. The next step will be to inventory markers,

determine which ones need repainting or cleaning, and then project leaders will schedule work days, which will be on weekends.

Featured image: Local officials and Town employees stand beside the newly refurbished historical marker. L-R: Jim Farmer, Town Buildings and Grounds, Mayor Ray Perry, John Coccozza-Hill, Town Buildings and Grounds Working Supervisor, Alex Parrott, President Lake George Historical Association, Town Councilwoman Marisa Muratori, Francis Coccozza, Principal LG Jr.-Sr. High School.