

# The Lake George Examiner



## Battlefield Park Memorial Day Ceremony honors fallen soldiers from 1755 to the present day

May 27, 2024 by Gillian Burdett

The Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance held its annual Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony at the grave of the Four Unknowns in Battlefield Park on Monday, May 27. The site, overlooking Lake George, holds the remains of four soldiers who perished in the 1755 Battle of Lake George and is the oldest grave of unknown soldiers in the country. Speakers at the ceremony told of the importance of the service and sacrifice of these colonial soldiers and all the members of the military.

The service opened with an invocation by Pastor Ali Trowbridge of the Caldwell Presbyterian Church. The Pastor spoke of the soldiers who are unknown to us but known to God saying, "They, and all who through the centuries to the present

day served and died shall not grow old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, or the years condemn, but we will always remember them as we do here today ... Let us never lose sight of the Patriot's dream."



*Pastor Ali Trowbridge of the Caldwell Presbyterian Church gives the invocation at the Lake George Battlefield Park Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony.*

"We are honoring all those who contributed to the welfare of the United States during its long history and, actually, as exemplified by the Four Unknowns buried here, before the existence of the United States," says Alliance President John DiNuzzo. "Their heroism, in this case of the four unknown soldiers buried here, was for the Crown, but actually, their efforts were significant in American history, and World history."

Historian and Alliance Trustee Dr. Bruce Venter spoke about the importance of the Battle of Lake George to American History, noting that the significance of the battlefield at the head of Lake George doesn't receive the recognition it should. "This is an unappreciated, underwhelming battlefield in the course of America's history, and it should not be that way. It should be a primary battlefield in our

history, and I'm going to tell you why," says Venter. He went on to explain events leading up to the Battle of Lake George beginning with George Washington's failed Fort Necessity campaign that propelled the colonies into the war with France — the French and Indian War.



*Historian Dr. Bruce Venter explains the importance of the Lake George Battlefield to American history.*

In 1755, Great Britain organized four military campaigns against French Forts. "The first campaign was General Braddock," Venter explained. "He was going to capture Fort Duquesne in Pennsylvania. He was ambushed, mortally wounded, died in Pennsylvania, and his campaign was an utter disaster. Governor Willam Shirley from Massachusetts never got off the ground with his campaign to capture Fort Niagara out by Buffalo. A third campaign did capture a couple of small French forts up in Nova Scotia, but the commander, Colonel Monckton, actually had a good number of British Regulars with him. And then we come to Lake George."

William Johnson, an Irish immigrant, was developing his plantation in the Mohawk Valley when he was chosen to lead a force from Lake George to capture the French Fort St. Frédéric at Crown Point. To stop Johnson, the French, learning of Johnson's position on Lake George, launched what would come to be known as the Battle of Lake George. "He [William Johnson] fought a great battle here, right on this ground, on September 8, 1755. He was victorious. He captured the French Commander. He was knighted by the King. He was given £5,000 for his victory, and in terms of today's money, that would be about \$600,000." The Battle of Lake George was one of the first British victories in the war, secured the Hudson Valley for the British and proved the effectiveness of provincial troops.

Retired U.S. Army General F. David Sheppard gave the Keynote address and spoke of the Civil War-era origins of Memorial Day observances as told by Army historians. In the latter years of the Civil War, as General William Sherman marched his men through Georgia to conquer the South, the Confederates evacuated all the captured Union soldiers from the Andersonville, Georgia prison and relocated them to Charleston, South Carolina, Sheppard explained. The Union soldiers were imprisoned in Hampton Park, a horse racing course in Charleston. During captivity, several of these Union soldiers died.

"They were placed in what I would call inappropriate graves, some mass graves. In the city of Charleston, African Americans from local organizations and congregations organized appropriate burial services and gravesites for these Union soldiers, prisoners of war who passed away in this Hampton Court racecourse, eventually decorating the graves with flowers, and they established the local Memorial Day Observance on May 1, 1865."

A little less than a year later, April 5, 1866, local women decorated the graves of Confederate soldiers who died in the Battle of Shiloh. They decorated the graves with flowers, and this is known as one of the first Decoration Days. By 1890, every state in the union had either a Decoration Day or a Memorial Day, but it wasn't an official federal holiday until 1966.

"In the year 2000," says Sheppard, "and some of you may have lost sight of this, we also have the National Moment of Remembrance Act, and that calls for us to pause for a minute of silence at 3 p.m., or 1500, on every Memorial Day — pause

for a moment of silence to reflect on what these individuals did for us so we can maintain our way of life.”



*Retired U.S. Army General F. David Sheppard gave the Keynote address.*

General Sheppard also spoke about the sacrifices soldiers and their families make in service to the country. Soldiers leave their families to serve knowing they may never come back, but they go willingly. They miss the events of family life and suffer in isolation from family when stationed in far-off places. Their families sacrifice with the separation from their loved ones, from the military life that has them moving around the country and overseas.

“The militia that fought here in 1755 were from many provinces in the Northeast. They came from Rhode Island and Connecticut and from Massachusetts and of course New York. They volunteered to protect and defend our freedom and liberty just like soldiers of today. And they experienced these same types of sacrifices,” says Sheppard. “Soldiers lost in service to our country, including those

here in the Battle of Lake George, are somebody's sons and daughters, they have moms and dads, brothers, sisters, friends and even neighbors. They made the ultimate sacrifice, but they leave behind family and friends who have these emotional scars on them... the sacrifices live with them for the rest of their lives."

The Battlefield Park Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony ended with the Pledge of Allegiance led by the Lake George American Legion and Lake George Volunteer Fire Department Honor Guard, a wreath-laying ceremony, a Musket salute fired by Fort William Henry reenactors and the playing of "Taps" by Amy Baker, Lake George Junior/Senior High School Band Director.



The decorated grave of the Four Unknowns in Battlefield Park



Fort William Henry reenactors fire a military salute.



Lake George Band Director Amy Baker plays "Taps."