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LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK, August 23, 2024

LG Battlefield Park Alliance Pays Tribute to Chuck Vandrei

By Mirror Staff

The late Chuck Vandrei, the Historic Preservation Officer for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, was celebrated at the Lake George Battlefield Alliance's annual meeting, held August 17 in the park's picnic pavilion.

Vandrei, who died at the age of 69 on July 19, was among the individuals most responsible for the creation of a non-profit Friends Group for Battlefield Park, the construction of a Visitors Center and the reinterment of the remains of the Revolutionary War dead in Battlefield Park.

“Chuck's connection to the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance goes back to our organization's origins in 2001,” said John DiNuzzo, the president of that friends' group, now known as the Lake George Battlefield Alliance.

DiNuzzo noted that Vandrei helmed the Battlefield Park's application to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, its pursuit of American Battlefield Protection Program grants, numerous archaeology projects and the construction of a Visitors Center on state-owned land.

“Most recently, Chuck was the point person in the investigation of the Courtland Street site that yielded the remains of 44 individuals who perished from smallpox at the Continental Army's hospital at Lake George in 1776, and steered the proposal to reinter them in the park through the State approval process,” said DiNuzzo.

Among Vandrei's last official

acts on Lake George was to serve as a speaker at the June 14 ceremony in Battlefield Park honoring the Revolutionary War dead.

(By design, the ceremony took place on the day that DEC finalized the amendment to the Unit Management Plan (UMP) for Lake George Battlefield Park, permitting the construction of six above-ground columbarium structures within the Battlefield Park to store funeral urns.)

Vandrei's daughter, Dr. Martha Vandrei, a Senior Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Exeter, UK, attended the annual meeting and spoke about her father.

“I am so proud of my dad and the things that he achieved at places across the state - Fort Niagara, Crown Point, Santanoni, Tahawus and the Lake George Battlefield. I know that my love for the past grew from these places. They were a huge part of my childhood. These places brought history to life to me and make me the historian I am today. And I have my father to thank for that,” she said.

Vandrei cited Marc Bloch, the French historian who was executed by the Nazis in 1944, and who, she said, asserted “that historians don't study the past because they love dead things. They study the past because they love life and they love living things.”

“And that was my dad,” Vandrei said. “He loved living things. He treated everyone - living, dead, past, present - with generosity, kindness and dignity. As a historian, that's something I carry with me.”

Vandrei, an intellectual historian who received her undergraduate degree from SUNY Albany and her Ph.D. from King's College London, is the author of “Queen Boudica and Historical Culture in Britain: An Image of Truth,” which was published by Oxford University Press in 2018.

The tribute to Vandrei concluded with reminiscences from friends and colleagues, who attested to his remarkable zest for life and American history and to his personal and professional code of ethics. As more than one person said, when Chuck was asked what should be done, his answer, invariably, was “do good work and do the right thing. Always do the right thing.”



Above: Chuck Vandrei, the Environmental Conservation Department's Historic Preservation Officer, speaking on June 14 at the Lake George Battlefield Park. Right: Dr. Martha Vandrei, speaking about her father on August 17.

