

Native American Habitation and Legacy

Thousands of years before Europeans ever viewed Lake George, Native Americans inhabited the area. Archaeological digs at the southern end of Lake George have unearthed spear points, arrowheads, fragments of pottery, milling stones, knives, and other artifacts that date from the Middle Woodland era (100 BC – 1000 AD) to as far back as the Early Archaic period (8000 BC – 6000 BC).

Several thousand years before Fort William Henry was constructed, Native Americans used the same piece of land during their seasonal fishing and hunting excursions. Archaeologists found prehistoric (Early Archaic) artifacts, including projectile points and stone tools, on the grounds of the fort during the 1950s. More recently, pottery shards and two “roasting platforms” (used for smoking fish) were found, which dated from the Middle Woodland era.

The New York State Museum excavated an area just east of Fort George during 2013 – 2014 and discovered



Archaeological grid, showing a large number of projectile points at the site of a 2013–2014 excavation near the Million Dollar Beach. (New York State Museum’s Resource Survey Program)



Seventeenth-century image of a Huron warrior with armor and a shield made of woven wood (E) and a Huron mother holding a child and an ear of corn (F). From Samuel de Champlain’s *Les Voyages* (1619).

stone projectile points, scrapers, and hammerstones, as well as hearths and fire-cracked rocks. The materials were dated from the Early Archaic to Late Archaic periods (8000 BC – 1800 BC). Beginning in 2000, significant finds also occurred within the Battlefield Park. Under the direction of Dr. David R. Starbuck, archaeological diggers recovered hundreds of Native American artifacts – stemmed projectile points, arrowheads, drills, scrapers, and chert flakes used to make and sharpen stone tools. Most finds date from the Middle and Late Woodland periods (100 BC – 1500 AD).



Bifurcate (two-sided) stone projectile point discovered during the 2013 – 2014 archaeology dig. (New York State Museum’s Resource Survey Program)



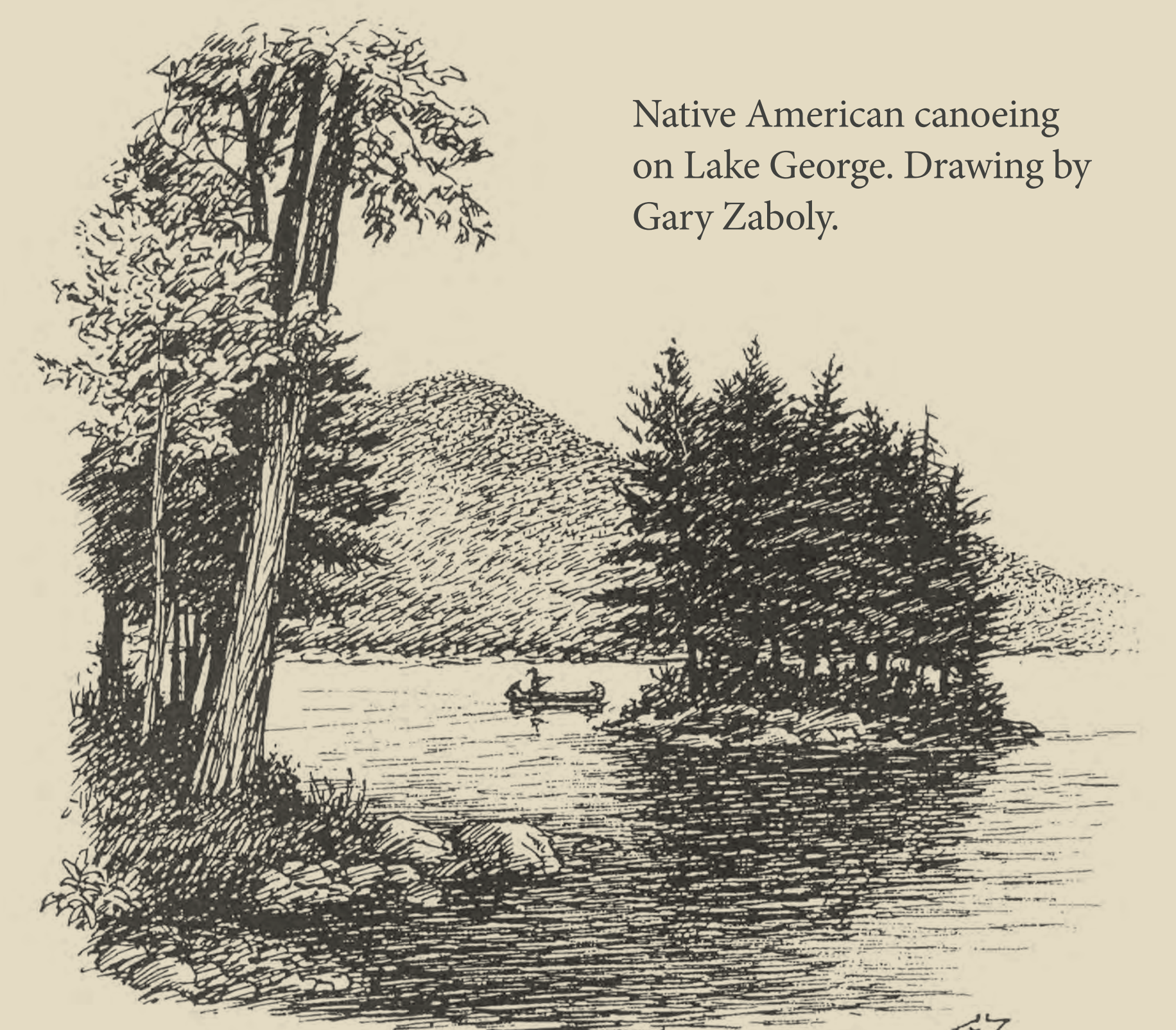
Iroquois warrior by Jacques Grosset de Saint-Sauveur. Engraving by J. Larocque. (National Archives of Canada)



The Native American Fountain in the Battlefield Park, sculpted in bronze by Alexander Phimister Proctor, using a Blackfoot Native American as a model. Gifted to New York State by George Pratt in 1921. (American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1922)

Lake George remained a transient fishing and hunting destination for Abenaki, Iroquois, River Indians, and other Native Americans during subsequent centuries. By the late seventeenth century, the route through Lake George, known as the “Kayaderosseras Trail,” was used frequently for raids on English settlements and Iroquois villages by Native Americans allied with New France. The rivalry between France and England for control of North America escalated thereafter into three wars: King William’s War (1689 – 1697), Queen Anne’s War (1702 – 1713), and King George’s War (1744 – 1748), and culminated in a decisive conflict, the French and Indian War (1754 – 1763). Hundreds of Mohawks of the Iroquois Confederacy fought alongside British and provincial troops (American colonials) during the conflict. Between the wars, Native Americans continued to make use of Lake George as a fishing and hunting ground. During the American Revolution, many Iroquois sided with the British Crown against the Americans.

Often the place names along the Lake Champlain-Lake George-Hudson River shorelines are Europeanized versions of original Native American names—a lasting legacy of their presence.



Native American canoeing on Lake George. Drawing by Gary Zaboly.

1755

Battle of Lake George

The French and Indian War (1754 – 1763) represented a century-old struggle by England and France for control of North America. Under a 1755 British plan to drive the French from their forts in disputed frontier areas, William Johnson was commissioned a major general and commander



William Johnson. (New York State Museum)

of a provincial army (American colonials) tasked with the capture of Fort St. Frédéric, the French fortress at Crown Point on Lake Champlain.

On August 28, 1755, Johnson reached the pristine southern shore of Lake St.

Sacrement with 1,500 provincial troops, along with some of the artillery and 150 wagons loaded with supplies. Six days later, an additional 1,100 provincials, led by Major General Phineas Lyman, second in command, arrived at the camp. On the same day, Johnson wrote to British officials in London that he had changed the name of the lake to “Lake George” in honor of King George II.

On the morning of September 8, 1755, after receiving a Mohawk scouting report of an imminent French attack on Fort Lyman (later renamed Fort Edward), 1,000



Death of Colonel Ephraim Williams. Painting by Frederick Coffay Yohn. (Glens Falls Ins. Co.)

troops under Colonel Ephraim Williams, along with 200 Mohawk warriors, headed by King Hendrick, a Mohawk chief, were dispatched from Lake George to Fort Lyman to defend the outpost. The detachment

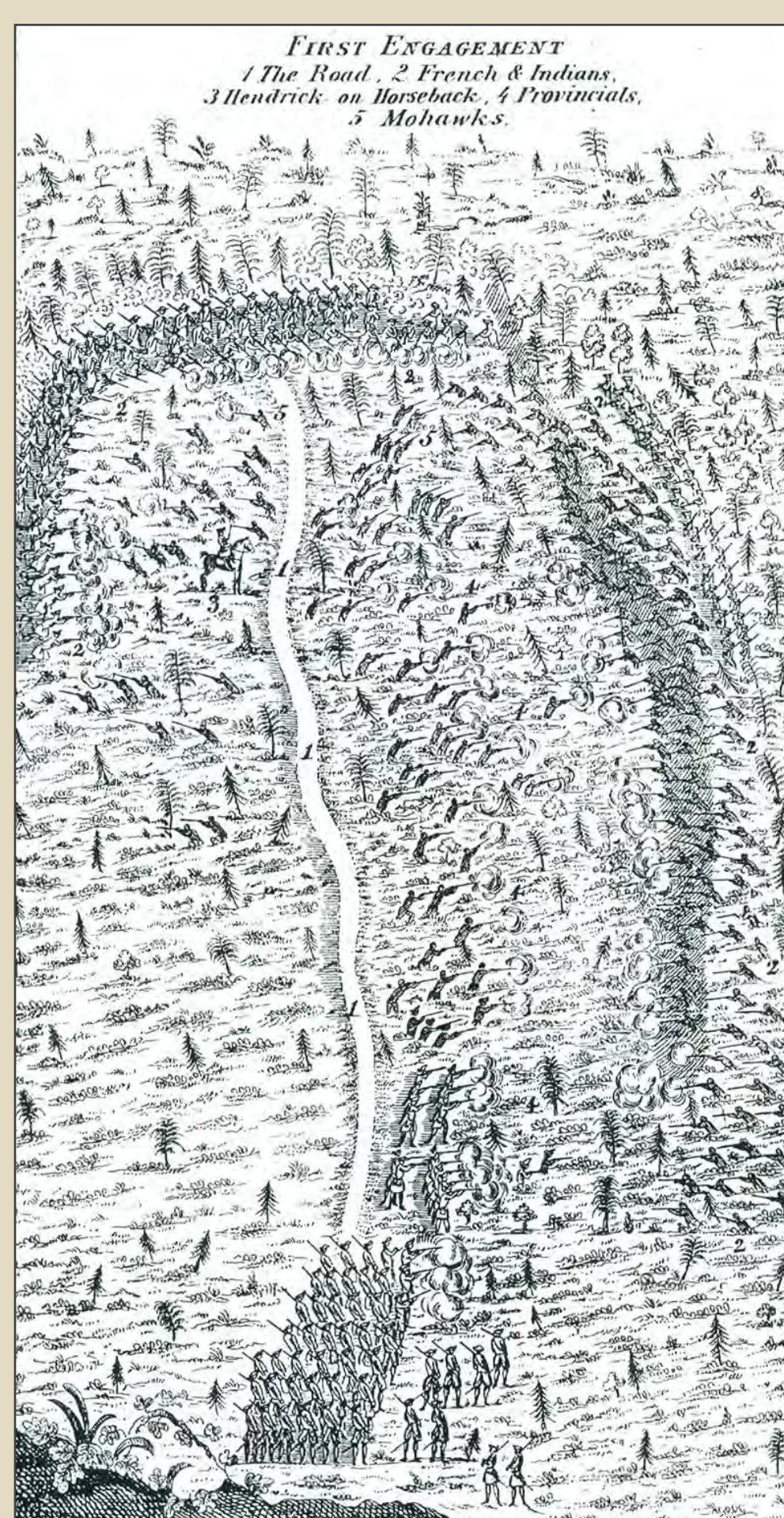


King Hendrick, Mohawk sachem Theyanoguin. (Library of Congress)

was ambushed on the road south of Lake George by a French army, Canadian militia, and Native Americans, led by Major General Jean-Armand Dieskau. The battle became known as the “Bloody Morning Scout.” Both Williams and Hendrick died in the battle.



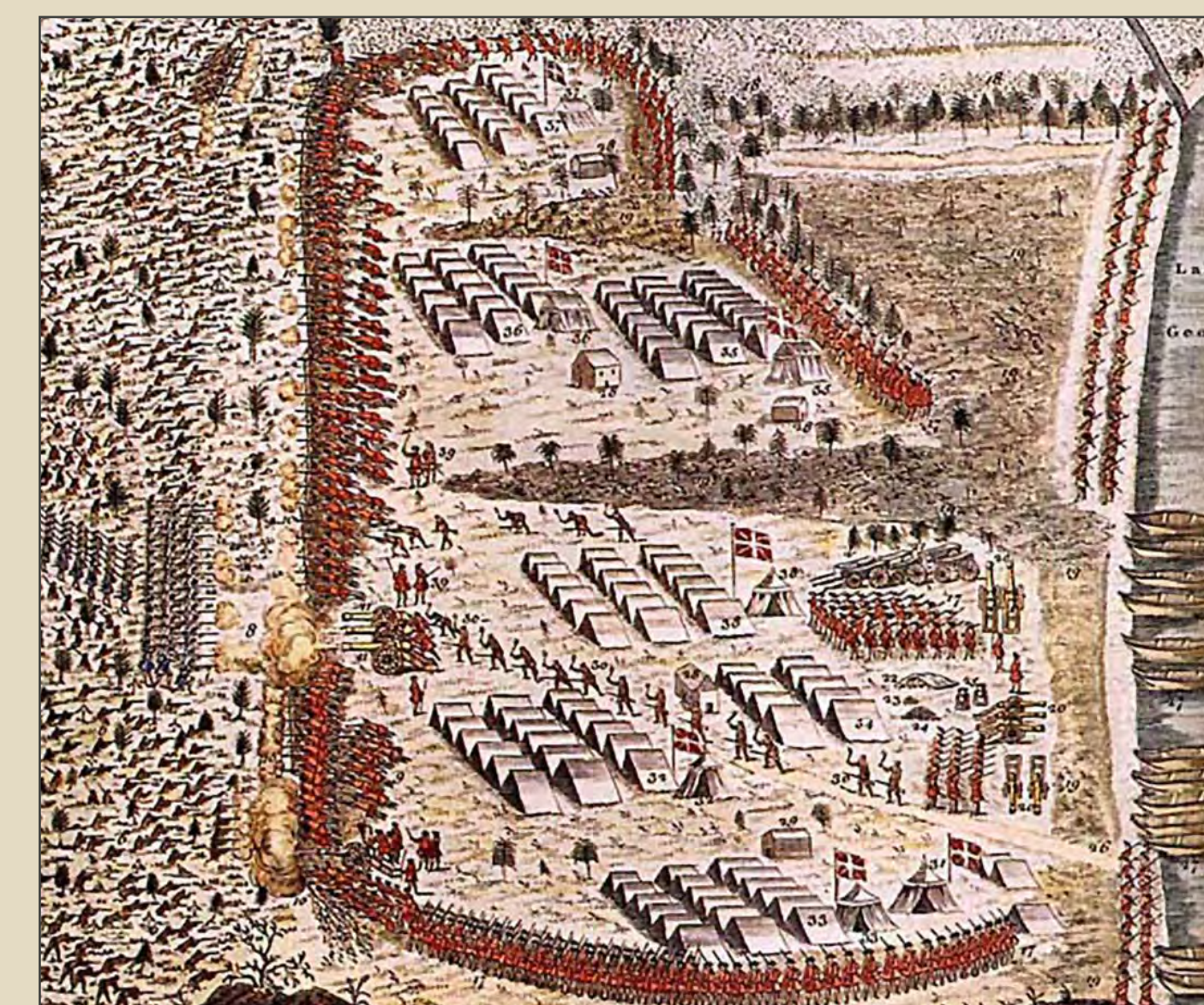
Battle of Lake George. Painting by Frederick Coffay Yohn. (Glens Falls Ins. Co.)



Ambush of provincial troops under Colonel Ephraim Williams and Mohawks led by King Hendrick on September 8, 1755, depicted in “A Prospective - Plan of the Battle near Lake George” by Samuel Blodget. (American Antiquarian Society)

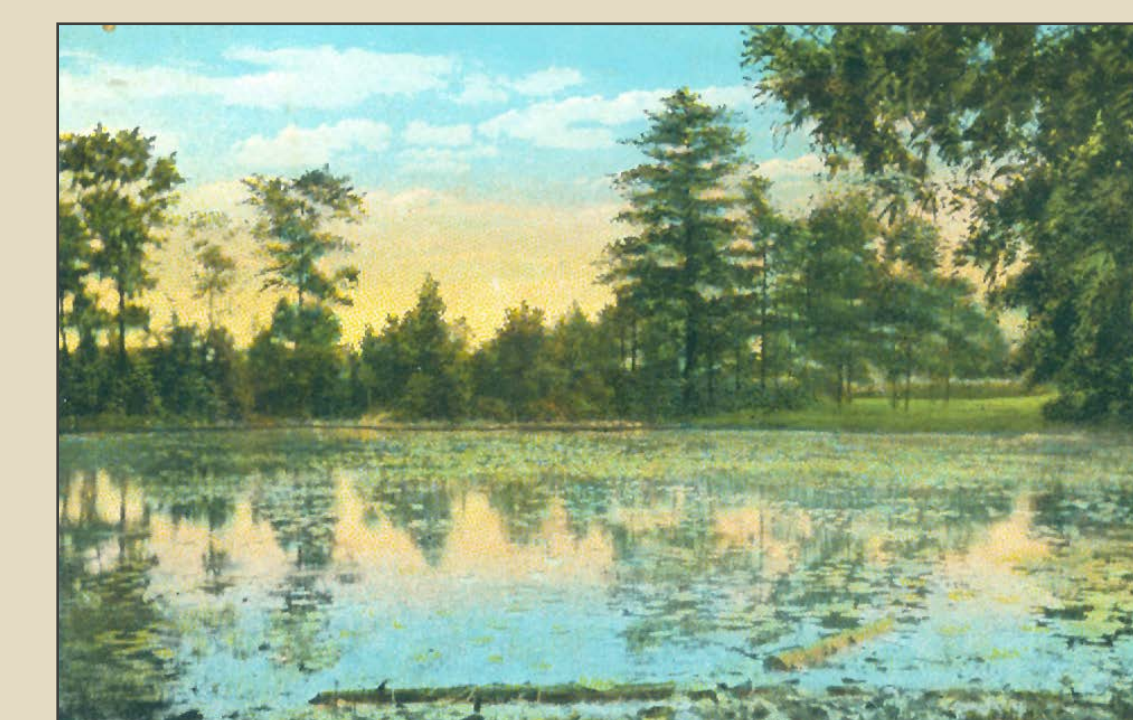
The surviving provincials ran desperately back to the camp at Lake George. Shortly thereafter, the French force began an attack on Johnson’s main army at Lake George, barricaded behind a hastily-constructed breastwork of felled trees. Captain William Eyre, the commander of the artillery and the only British regular officer on the expedition, effectively utilized his cannons to check the French advance.

For five hours, the battle raged on the shoreline of Lake George. Finally, with heavy casualties on both sides, the French fled, leaving Dieskau wounded on the battlefield. Late in the afternoon, a relief force of provincial troops from Fort Lyman encountered Canadians and their Native American allies on the military road, retrieving their packs and looting and scalping the provincial troops killed during the first



“A Prospective – Plan” of the Battle of Lake George on September 8, 1755, by eyewitness Samuel Blodget. (Brown University Library)

engagement. The ensuing battle has been called the “Battle of Bloody Pond” as a result of bodies being discovered at the pond. Four skeletons found near the pond during a highway project in 1931 were later reburied in the Battlefield Park.



Bloody Pond. (Postcard)

The Battle of Lake George was the only substantial British victory in 1755 and demonstrated that a provincial army composed of American citizen soldiers could prevail over highly-trained French regulars. Although the goal of capturing Fort St. Frédéric failed in 1755, the British success at Lake George advanced their northernmost foothold in the region, especially after the construction of Fort William Henry in the fall of 1755.

1756

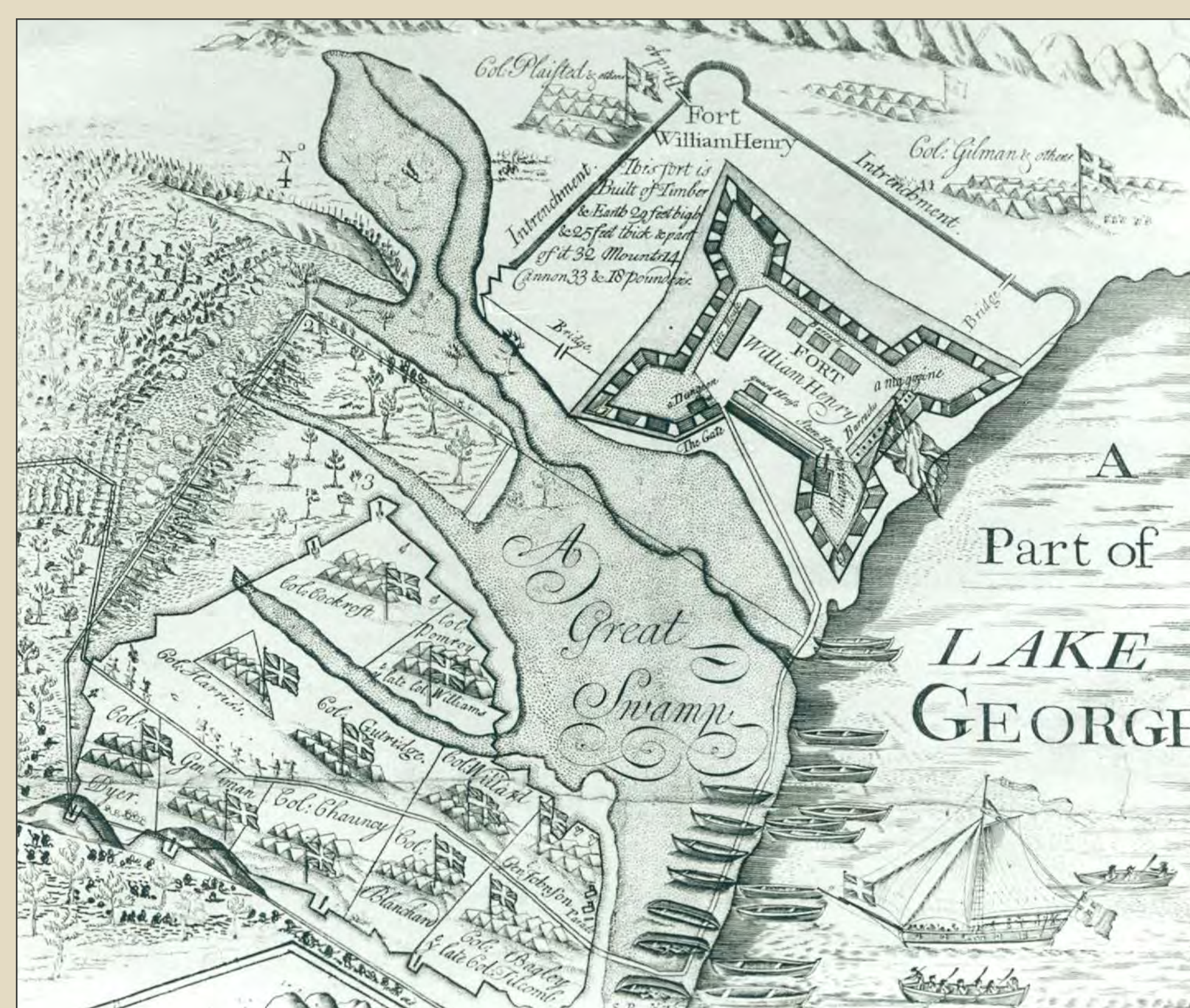
Suspension of the Campaign

The 1756 British campaign to capture the French fortifications on Lake Champlain never materialized. The provincial army (American colonials), similar to William Johnson's force a year earlier, failed to advance beyond the southern shore of Lake George. The failure to move northward was the result of problems associated with a change in the commander in chief of the British forces in North America and the defeat of the British army on Lake Ontario. The new British commander, John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun, arrived at his Albany headquarters in late July. On August 20, six days after the surrender of the Oswego garrison, Loudoun ordered Major General John Winslow of Massachusetts, commander of the provincial army at Lake George, to cancel his advance to Lake Champlain. The garrison at Lake George, almost entirely composed of provincial troops and officers, totaled 2,600 in August 1756, while 2,746 troops garrisoned Fort Edward.



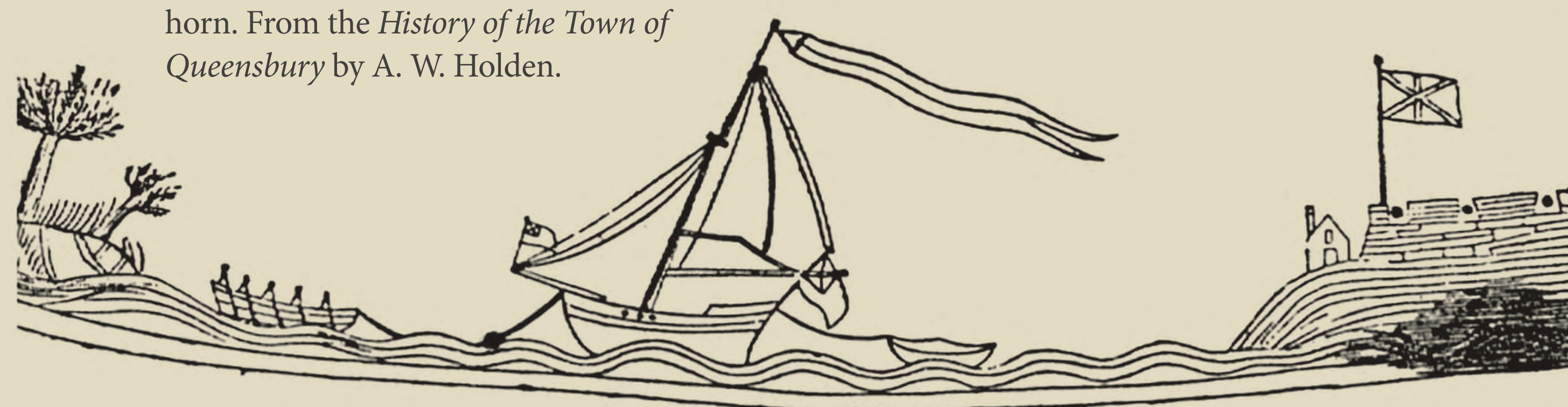
John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun, appointed the British commander in chief in 1756. (New York State Library)

log barracks. During the summer of 1756, provincial troops at Lake George strengthened the defenses of Fort William Henry, including raising the walls by three feet and constructing additional defensive works. Provincial soldiers' huts were built on the east side of the fort, along with two storehouses adjacent to the fort, a seven-foot-high breastwork of small logs around the large temporary encampment on the west side of the fort, and lime and brick kilns east of the fort (present-day Battlefield Park).



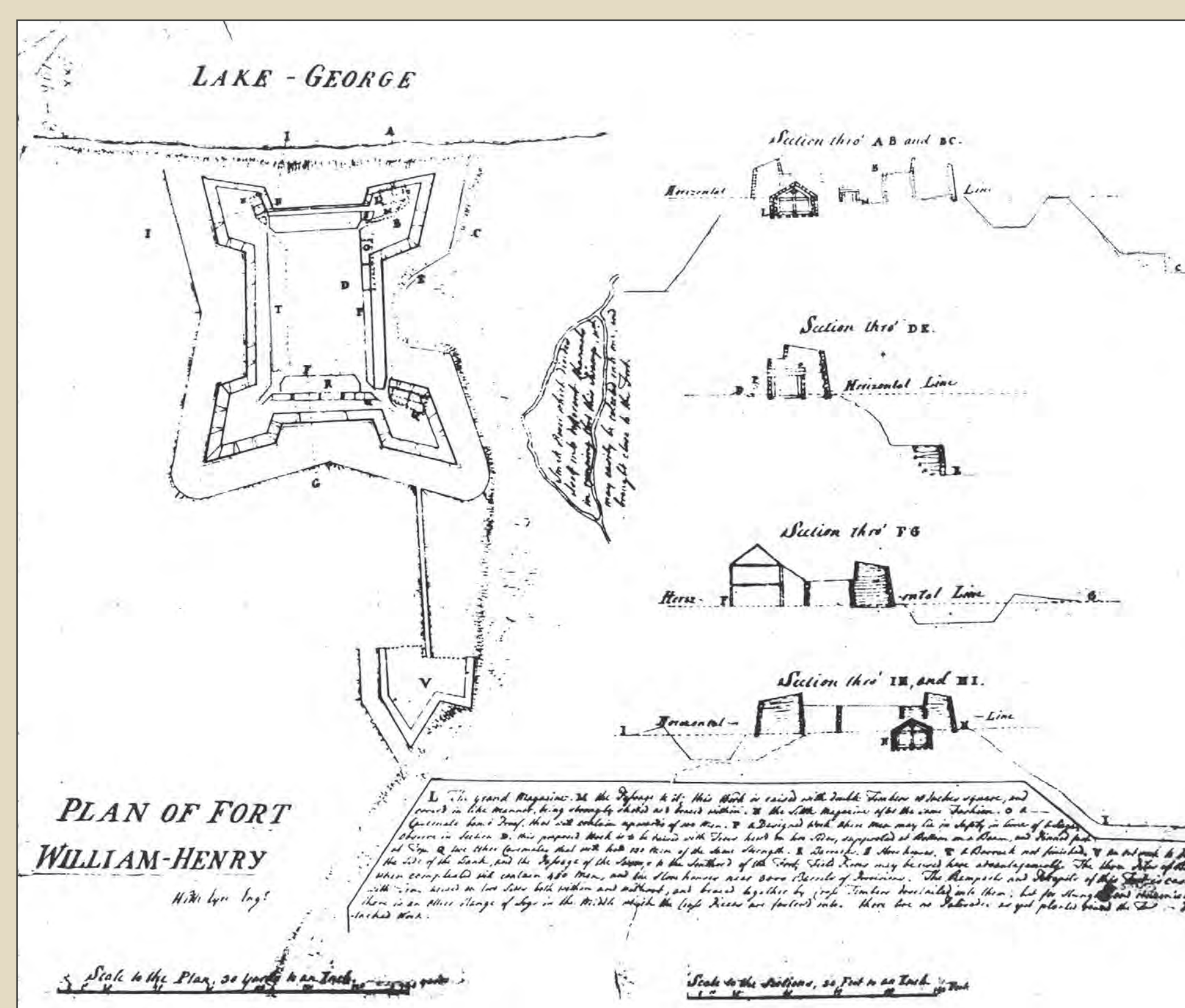
Fort William Henry in 1756 and the adjacent provincial encampment in the present-day Battlefield Park. Engraving by Thomas Johnston. (American Antiquarian Society)

A sketch of a sloop at Fort William Henry in 1756 carved on a provincial powder horn. From the *History of the Town of Queensbury* by A. W. Holden.



"Recruitment and Training: Firing at marks Fort William Henry, 1756." Painting by Gary S. Zaboly.

Built of large pine logs, Fort William Henry had four bastions connected by 30-foot thick walls "filled with Earth," 15-foot wide ramparts, capped with parapets, embrasures (openings) for cannons, and two-story



"Plan of Fort William Henry" by William Eyre. (National Archives of Canada)



British sloop burned at Fort William Henry in March 1757 by French troops, raised in 1903. (Photo by A. N. Thompson)

A large contingent of provincial troops were engaged in boat building at Lake George. One sloop, the 40-ton *Earl of Loudoun*, was launched on August 23, 1756, but a second of the same size was never completed, remaining on the stocks into 1757. Two smaller sloops were also built at the lake, as well as a number of bay boats, bateaux, scows, and other vessels. In March

1757, a 1,600-man French army burned bateaux and two large sloops: one on the stocks and one in the water, probably the *Earl of Loudoun*. The sloop in the water was likely tied to the

165-foot-long wharf built in late 1756. The two smaller sloops survived but were taken by the French army after the surrender of Fort William Henry in August 1757. The hull of a 44-foot sloop, laden with military relics, was raised from the lake at the southern end of Lake George in July 1903.

Despite suffering from a range of camp disorders, including "Continual Fevers & D[y]sentery," provincial troops completed a significant amount of work in 1756. On November 11, provincial regiments marched out of Fort William Henry headed for home, replaced by a winter garrison of 400 British regulars and 100 rangers, under the command of Major William Eyre, who had designed the fort a year earlier.

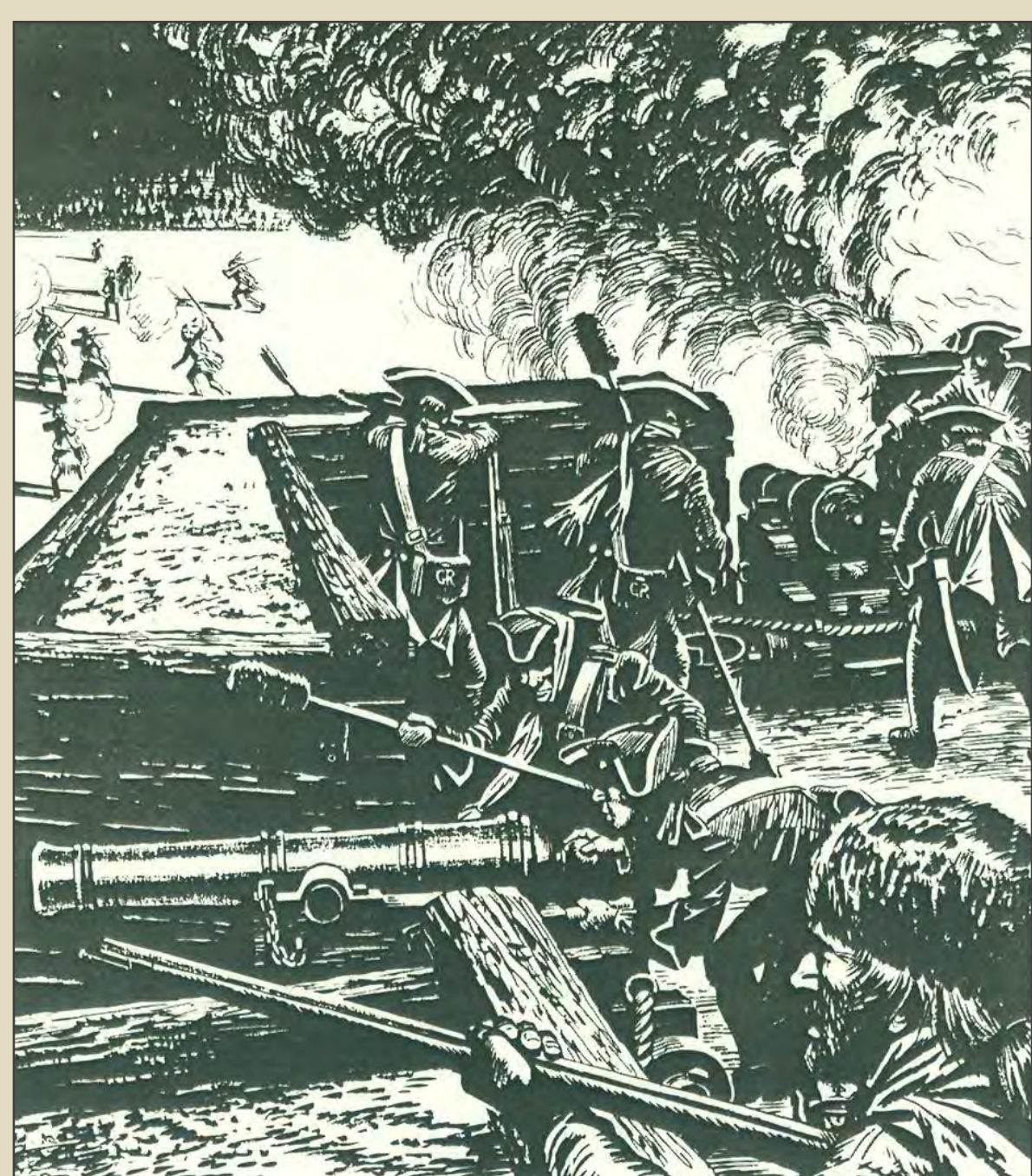
1757

Siege and “Massacre”



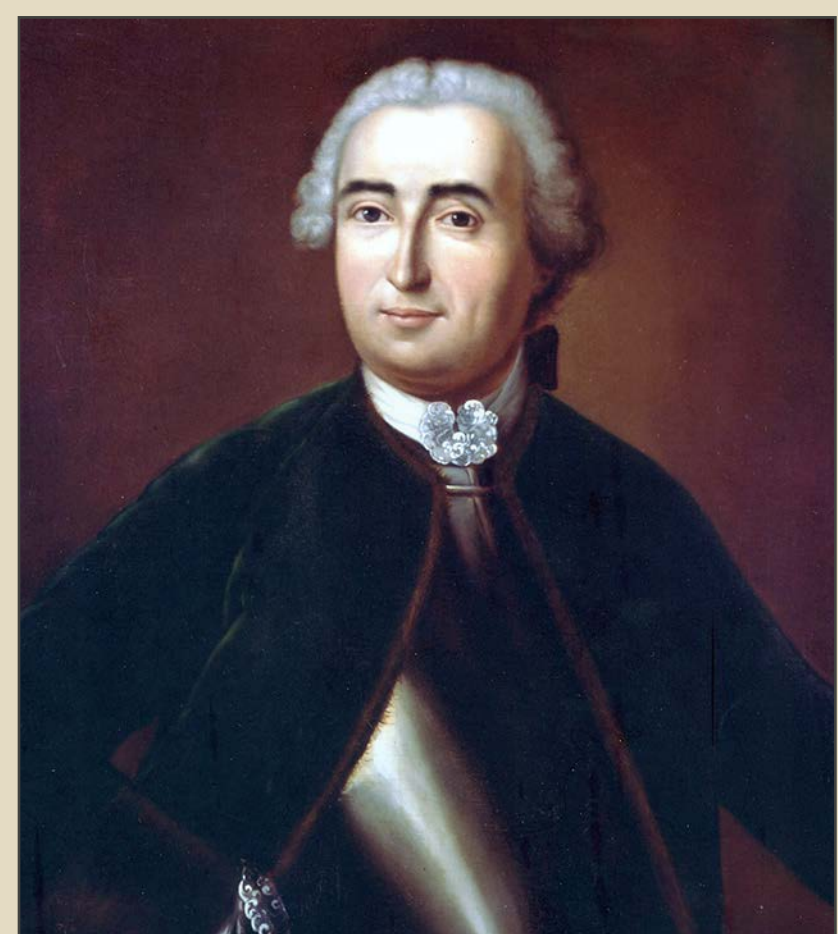
At the close of the 1756 campaign, Fort William Henry remained the northernmost outpost of the British and provincial armies and represented a significant threat to the French, thus French officials formulated plans to destroy the fort.

After a March 1757 attack on Fort William Henry by a 1,600-man French force, the British suspected that another attack on the fort was likely. By the end of July, Major General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, commander of



Attack on Fort William Henry, March 1757. Drawing by Frederic Ray.

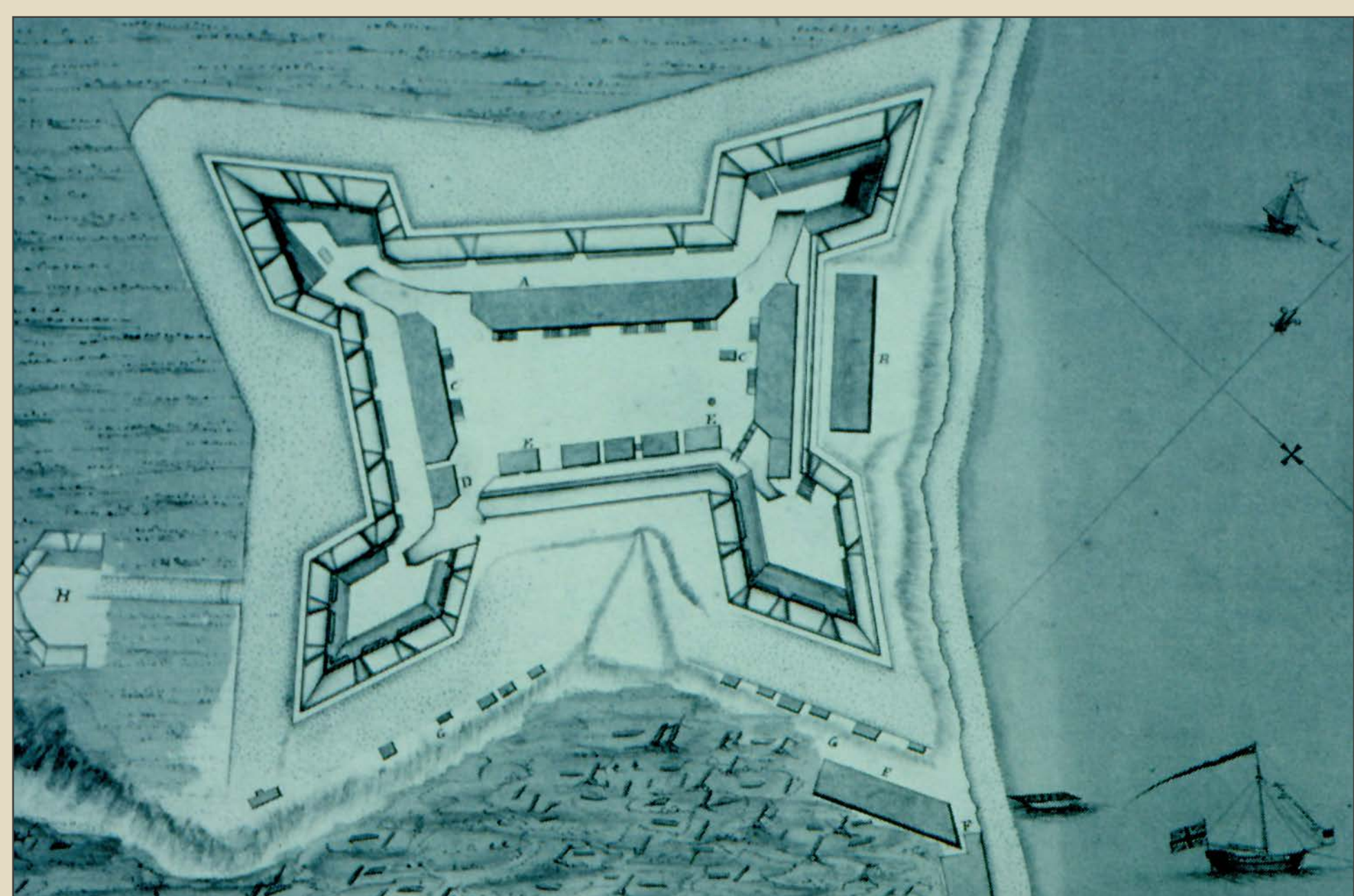
French troops in North America, had assembled an army of 8,021 men at Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga), consisting of French regulars, Canadian militia, and Native Americans, for an assault on Fort William Henry.



Louis-Joseph de Montcalm. Painting by Théophile Hamel. (National Archives of Canada)

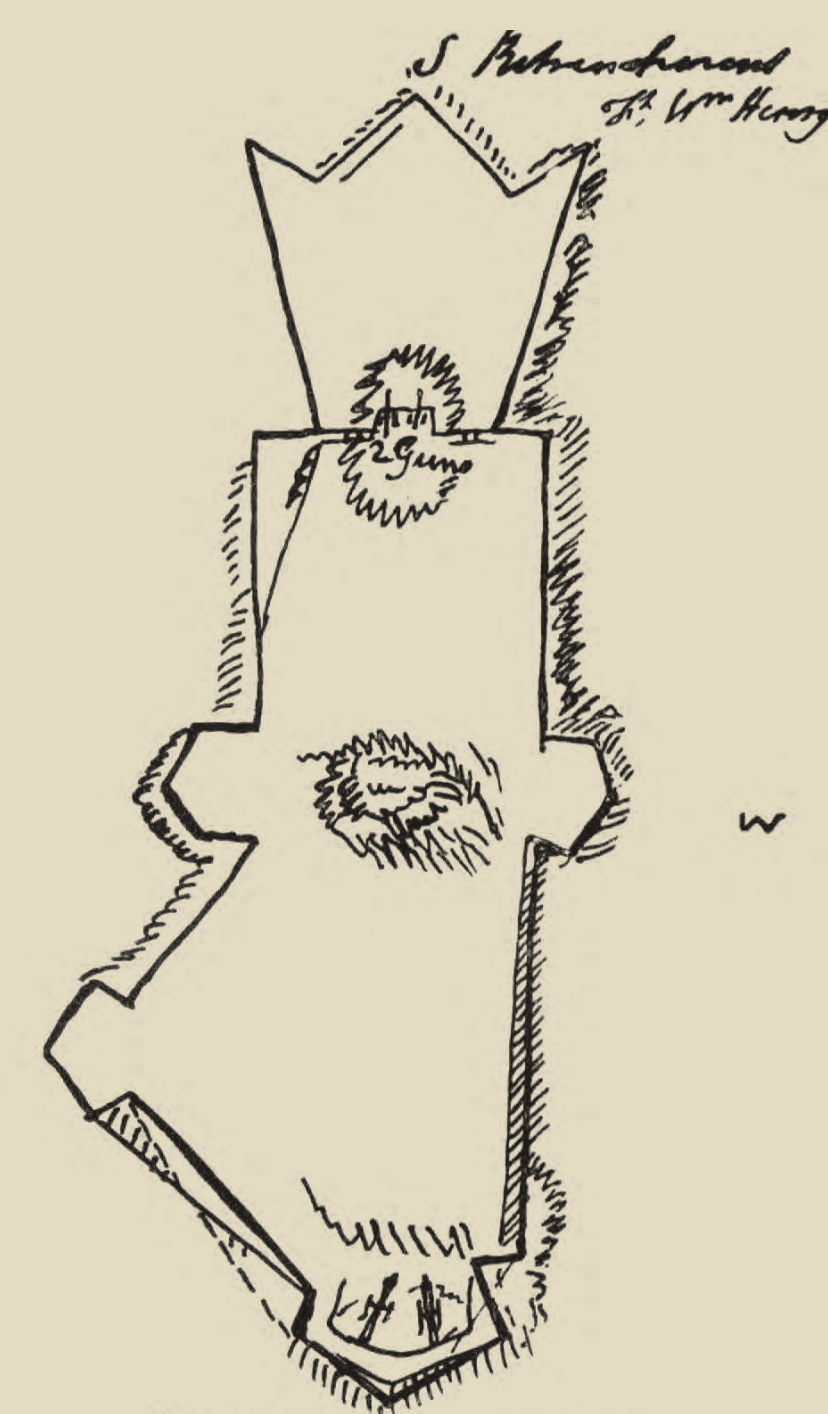
In early August, the garrison at Lake George numbered only 2,372 men, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Monro

of the 35th Regiment of Foot. Because Fort William Henry was only designed for a garrison of about 500 soldiers, most of the troops were bivouacked outside the fort. In late July, the British camp, located west of the fort, was relocated onto high ground east of the fort in today’s Battlefield Park. British engineer Major



“A Plan of Fort William Henry” 1756 by John Williams. (Crown Collection, New York State Library)

James Montresor designed an entrenched camp to follow the curve of the hillside. When Montcalm’s army appeared on August 3, Monro and the majority of British and provincial troops were posted in the entrenched camp, protected by six cannons and swivel guns behind a crude log breastwork. Less than 500 men were stationed at Fort William Henry.



Fort William Henry in 1757. Tracing from a pen and ink drawing by Col. James Montresor.

“Plan” of the 1757 entrenched camp in the Battlefield Park by James Montresor. (Collections of the New-York Historical Society)

After a week-long artillery bombardment of the fort and entrenched camp, Monro was forced to capitulate. The surrender terms guaranteed safe passage to Fort Edward for the British and provincial troops, but Montcalm’s Native American allies sought “trophy of war.” The entrenched camp played a prominent role in the subsequent chaos. Twice on August 9, Native American warriors entered and looted the camp. The



“Attakes Du Fort William-Henri,” August 7, 1757, by Lieutenant Contgen Therbu. (Fort William Henry Museum)

next morning, as the English parolees were preparing to depart, the warriors “got over the Breast Work and began to plunder,” also scalping 17 wounded men. The pandemonium escalated as the warriors returned to their camps with spoils, and others dashed to the entrenchment to gain their share of the plunder. In a



French attempt to restrain their Native American allies in August 1757 prior to the British march to Fort Edward. Painting by J. L. G. Ferris. (Glens Falls Ins. Co.)



Nineteenth-century engraving of the massacre of English parolees in August 1757. (Fort William Henry Museum)

state of great trepidation, the British soldiers, followed by provincials, departed from the entrenchment. The warriors began assaulting the rearmost contingent as they left the entrenchment, stripping, killing, and scalping them. The episode was called a “massacre” in original journals, official letters, and period newspapers.

The entrenched camp was reestablished the following year. Today, visitors can still visualize the borders of the camp in the Battlefield Park.

The story of the siege and aftermath was immortalized in James Fenimore Cooper’s 1826 classic, *The Last of the Mohicans*.

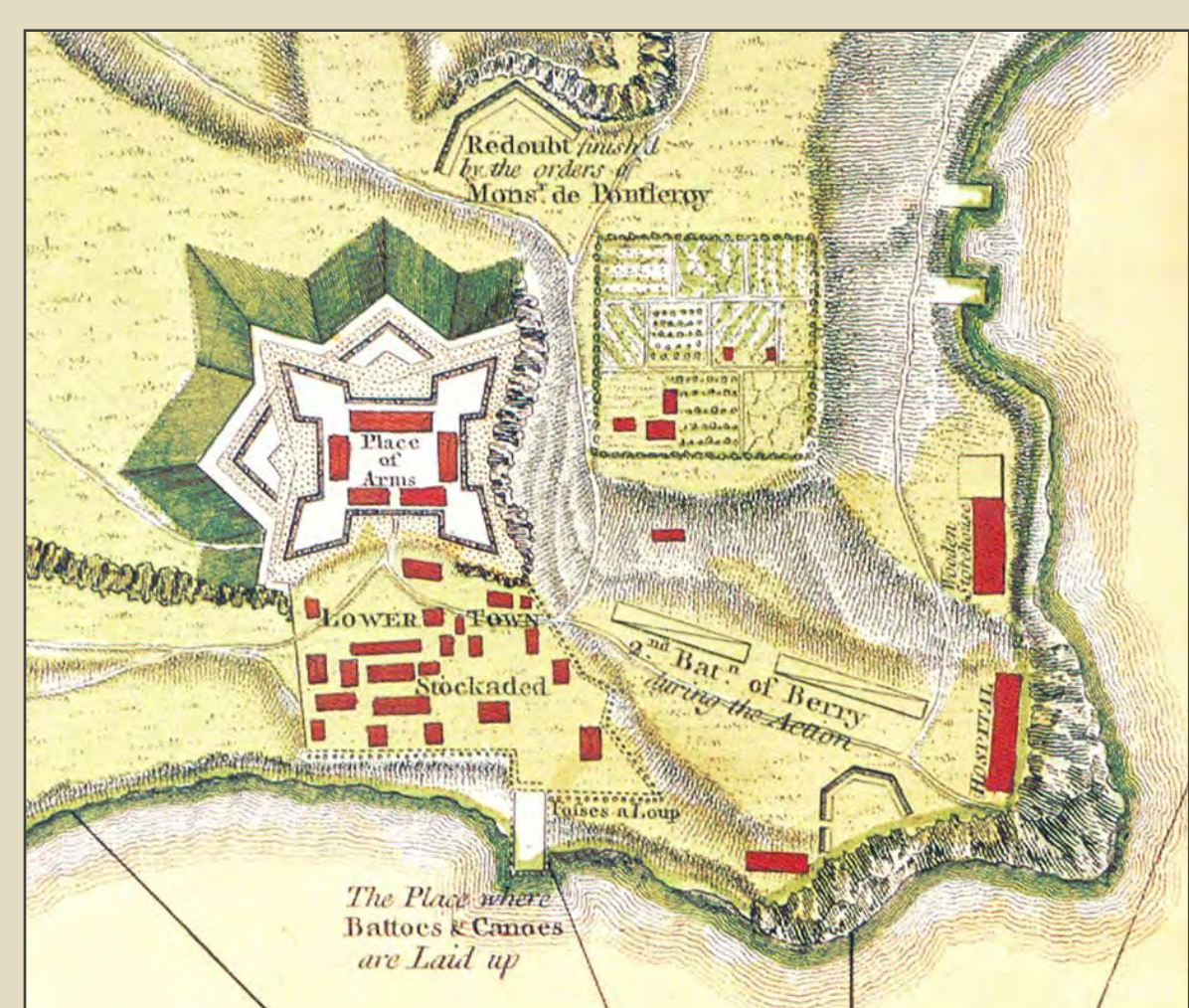


Archaeologist Scott Padeni examining the wreckage of one of the British sloops taken by French forces in August 1757. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

1758

Aftermath of a Failed Expedition

After the total destruction of Fort William Henry by the French in 1757, British officials began making preparations for a new campaign to capture



Detail of a "Plan of Fort Carillon" by Thomas Jefferys. (Fort Ticonderoga Museum)

Fort Carillon and Fort St. Frédéric before advancing into Canada. The 1758 British expedition to Carillon, under the command of Major General James Abercromby,



Major General James Abercromby. Oil painting by Allan Ramsay, ca. 1760. (Fort Ticonderoga Museum)

would be the largest and bloodiest campaign of the war.

By the beginning of July, Abercromby had amassed the largest army ever assembled in North America. Virtually all the open land surrounding the southern end of Lake George was covered with tents, housing 17,100 troops. Two stockaded (log) forts were erected: one on

the northernmost hillside of today's Battlefield Park and another over the northern section of the ruins of Fort William Henry.

The army departed for Ticonderoga on July 5 aboard a huge armada of vessels, only to return four days later "all dejected" and "melancholy" after a staggering defeat on July 8, resulting in 1,944 soldiers killed or wounded. Following the defeat of Abercromby's



Departure of the Abercromby expedition on July 5, 1758. Painting by Frederick Coffay Yohn. (Glens Falls Ins. Co.)



Detail of map of the 1758 camp at Lake George. (Fort Ticonderoga Museum)

army, provincial troops were assigned to a number of construction projects at the southern end of Lake George: a stockaded post to protect a shipyard at the southeastern corner of the lake, a hospital/barracks in the stockaded fort on the northern hillside in the present-day Battlefield Park, hospital cabins, houses for officers, huts, storehouses, a breastwork around the whole encampment, a stockaded fort (Fort Gage) on a hill southwest of the main camp, several advanced guard posts, and a breastwork on the northern end of Diamond Island to serve as an early warning post.

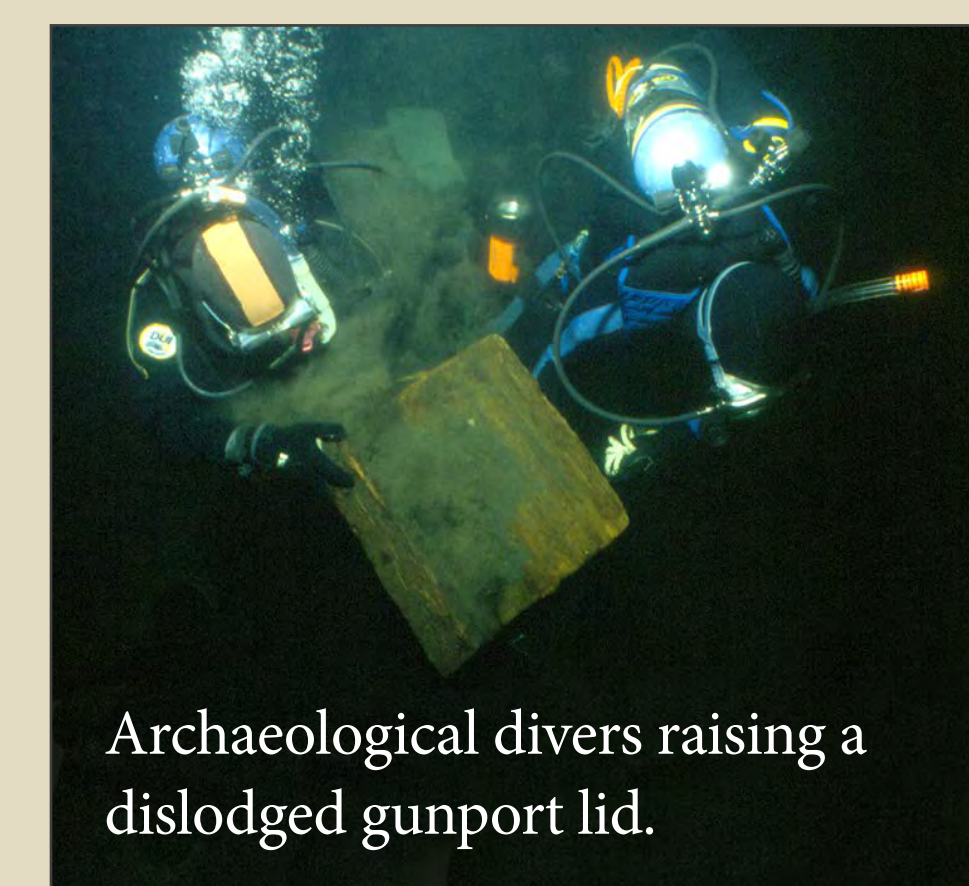
Provincial carpenters also engaged in an ambitious shipbuilding operation in anticipation of a renewed campaign against Fort Carillon. Only a month after the debacle in Ticonderoga, the 100-ton sloop *Earl of Halifax*, armed with more than a dozen cannons, was launched at the shipyard. By the middle of September, two 40-foot row galleys and several similar-sized vessels were completed. In October the *Land Tortoise*, a large, seven-sided radeau (floating battery), was launched. The vessel was propelled by 26 oars and designed for two masts with square sails and seven heavy cannons.

In September, stories of a renewed offensive against the French still circulated at the Lake George camp, and a sizable army remained at the lake. However, by the end of the month, Abercromby decided to end the campaign. Without a strong garrisoned fort over the winter at the lake, the new buildings were either

dismantled, and the boards buried or burned to prevent them from falling into French hands. Some smaller vessels were hauled away, but most were sunk in the lake for retrieval the next year. The 52-foot *Land Tortoise* was very difficult to sink and settled in 107 feet of water. The vessel was discovered in 1990 by an archaeological team led by Joseph W. Zarzynski, and eight years later the "oldest intact warship in North America" was designated a National Historic Landmark.



The deliberate sinking of the radeau *Land Tortoise* on October 22, 1758. Painting by Tim Cordell. (Lake George Historical Association)



Archaeological divers raising a dislodged gunport lid.



Bow lying in 107 feet of water.



Port stern section.

Discovery of the *Land Tortoise*. (Photos by Russell Bellico)



Bateau raised from Lake George in the early 1960s, formerly on display at the Adirondack Museum. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

1759

Fort George Constructed

Under the competent leadership of Major General Jeffery Amherst, the new British commander in chief in 1759, over 10,000 soldiers were assembled at Lake George in preparation for a renewed expedition against the French forts on Lake Champlain. On the morning of June 22, 1759, Amherst walked in today's Battlefield Park with his chief engineer, Colonel James Montresor, to select "the ground for building a fort."



General Jeffery Amherst.
(National Gallery of Canada)

The troops at the lake were tasked with a number of other projects, including digging up cannons and other material buried at the end of the 1758 campaign, repairing the wharves, building lime and brick kilns, and raising vessels sunk at the close of 1758. Bateaux, whaleboats, and two row galleys were retrieved, and after ten days labor, the largest vessel, the sloop *Earl of Halifax*, was "Drag[g]ed" to the wharf. Because the radeau *Land Tortoise* could not be relocated in the lake, a new seven-sided radeau, the *Invincible*, armed with "four 24 pounders and four 12 pounders [cannons]," was built. In addition, a large elliptically-shaped sailing scow, the *Snow Shoe*, was constructed to haul provisions, cattle, and horses.



A View of the Lines at Lake George, 1759, showing the radeau *Invincible* and sloop *Halifax*. Detail of a painting by Thomas Davies. (Fort Ticonderoga Museum)

Colonel Montresor made considerable progress on Fort George during the summer, but the British capture of the French forts at Ticonderoga and Crown Point lessened the need for a strong fortification at Lake George. With resources needed to build the huge fort at Crown Point, Amherst ordered Montresor to "finish the Citadel Bastion... that it may form a small Fort itself" and "Barracks for 150 men." In November 1759, Amherst ordered Montresor to build "Casemates under the Rampart of the East Flank of the Bastion." In October 1760, after France surrendered North America, Amherst revisited Fort George, noting the "bastion enclosed... is very neat mounts 15 Guns." The fort was manned by British regulars as late as 1767 and became a vital supply hub and base during the American Revolution.

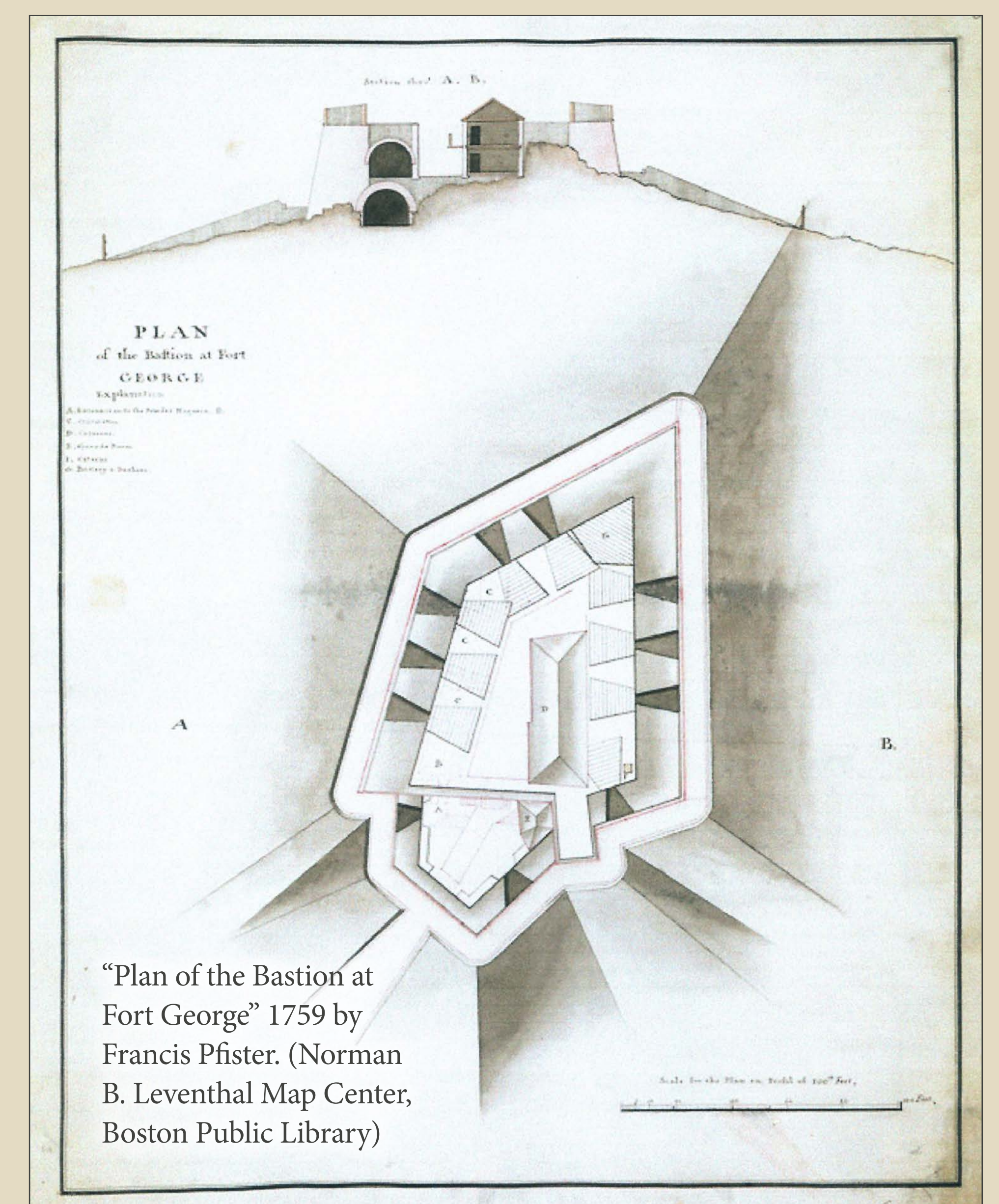


Plan of Fort George 1759, showing the location of the stockaded fort, barracks, the stone bastion, and the garden. From *A Set of Plans in America* by Mary Ann Rocque, 1765.

Using 1,500 men, construction of a planned four-bastion stone fort, with casemates (rooms under the ramparts) and walls 14 feet thick, began. A smaller wood stockaded fort with three bastions was also under construction on a hillside closer to the lake, taking advantage of the footprint of the 1758 stockaded fort. It was to serve as an interim fortification while the larger stone fort was under construction. The 1759 stockaded fort, built of horizontal timbers, contained two barracks with additional barracks and hospital buildings adjacent to the fort.



"A Perspective View of Lake George." Colorized drawing of Captain-Lieutenant Henry Skinner's original drawing that appeared in a 1759 issue of *The Universal Magazine*, showing the radeau *Invincible*, sloop *Halifax*, and the west side of the stockaded fort. (Stephanie Pell Dechame)

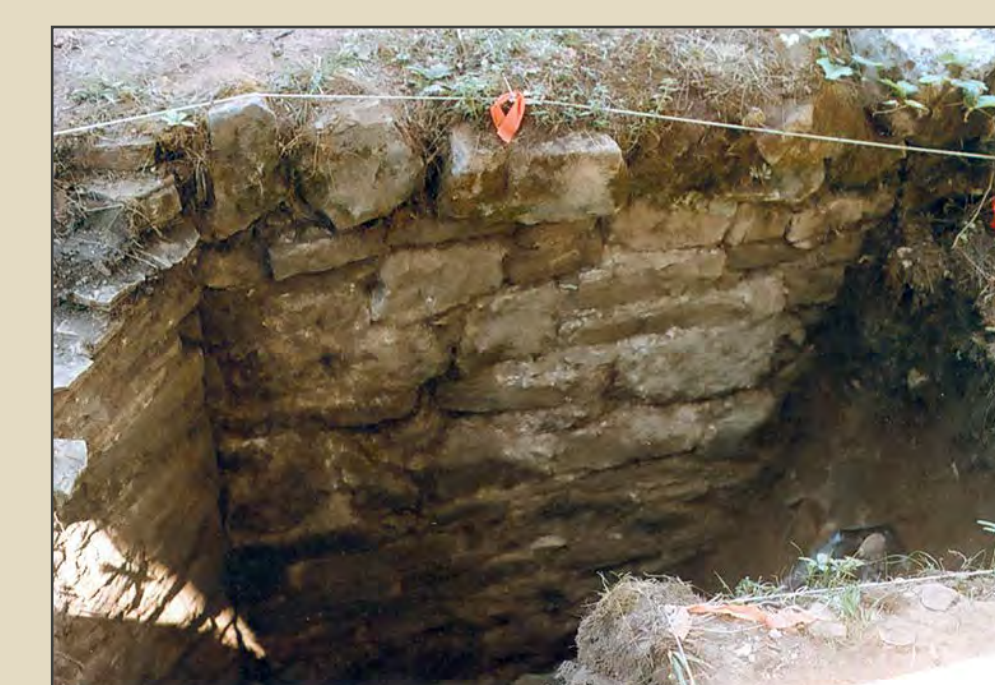


"Plan of the Bastion at Fort George" 1759 by Francis Pfister. (Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)



Fortifications along the military road between Fort George and Fort Edward in 1759. Detail of a painting by Gary S. Zaboly.

Archaeology students, under the direction of Dr. David R. Starbuck, discovered two mortared, limestone barracks foundations during a 2000–2001 field school at the site of the 1759 stockaded fort. A 2015–2016



Interior walls of Fort George excavated during the 2015 archaeological dig. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

field school explored the bastion of Fort George, finding well-mortared stonewalls, including five-foot-thick casemate walls, and the foundation walls of the barracks.

1775

The American Revolution Begins

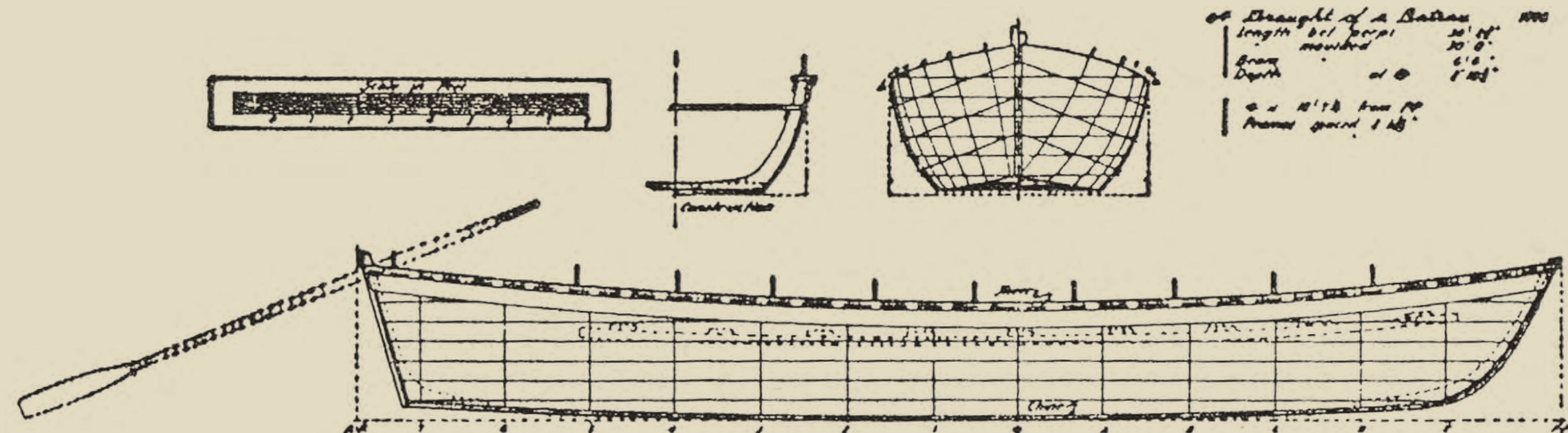


In 1775 war clouds once again engulfed Lake George. Following the capture of Fort Ticonderoga by American patriots on May 10, 1775, Lake George would become the key passageway of American forces enroute to Lake Champlain. On May 11, American militia seized control of Fort George. Although Captain Bernard Romans is credited with the “capture” of the fort, American militiamen had taken “possession” of the outpost earlier.



Major General Philip Schuyler. Painting by Alonzo Chappel. (New York State Library)

Soon after the American Revolution began, American officials recognized the need for troops at Fort George to thwart British attacks in the area. On July 17, Major General Philip Schuyler, the commander of the Northern Department, arrived at Fort George. Finding an undisciplined garrison of 334 men, Schuyler issued voluminous orders regulating sanitary conditions, alcohol consumption, work schedules, repairs to the fort, etc. He also hastened the construction of bateaux; by the end of July, more than two dozen were completed at the Fort George shipyard.



Draught of a 36-foot-long bateau. Drawing by H. I. Chappelle from an Admiralty drawing.



Remains of the Fort George wharf built in 1759 and used during the American Revolution. The remains were archaeologically surveyed by Bateau Below, Inc., in 2002–2003. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

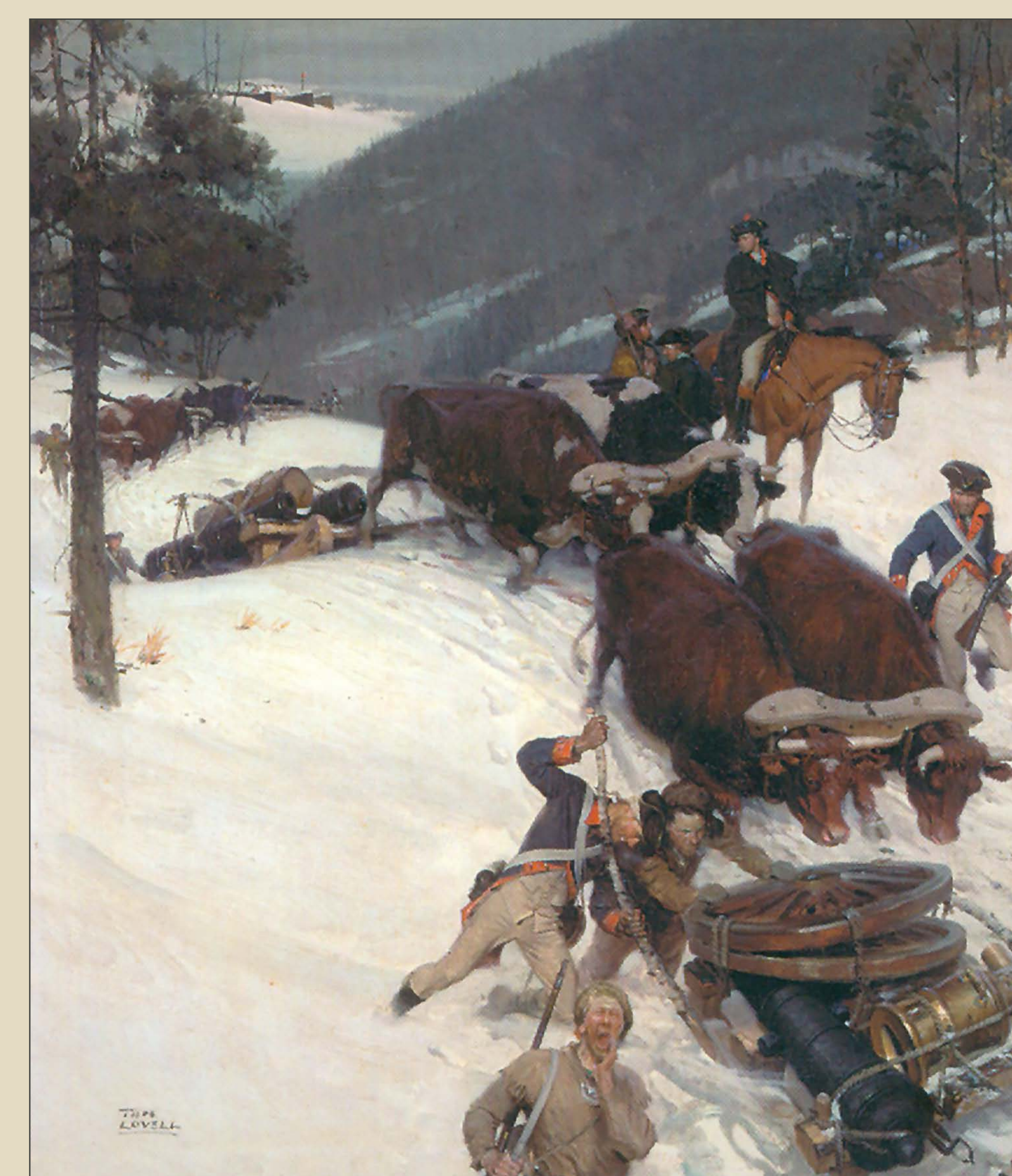
Map by Joseph Sauthier (1776). From *The North American Atlas* by William Faden (1777). (Library of Congress)



In December 1775 Colonel Henry Knox was dispatched to Fort Ticonderoga by George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental Army, to transport cannons to Boston to break the British occupation of the city. Fort George played an important role as a key transit point for moving the artillery. On December 9, Knox placed 59 artillery pieces, weighing 119,000 pounds, as well as barrels of flints and boxes of lead, aboard several vessels at the northern Lake George landing. All the artillery pieces reached Fort George by December 15. With the help of Schuyler, Knox employed enough men, oxen, horses, and sleds to deliver the artillery to Boston by late January 1776.



Henry Knox. Painting by Charles Willson Peale. (Independence National Historical Park)



“The Noble Train of Artillery” moved by Colonel Henry Knox and his men from Fort Ticonderoga to the northern landing on Lake George. Painting by Tom Lovell. (Fort Ticonderoga Museum)

On July 19, the Continental Congress voted for an invasion of Canada, using the traditional water route of Lake George and Lake Champlain. Fort George became a vital link in the northern theater, and Lake George quickly emerged as a crucial water highway, carrying supplies and reinforcements for the American army during the invasion. Hundreds of barrels of pork, flour, and other provisions were transported to Fort George from Albany in wagons. Troops destined for Canada camped on several hundred cleared acres adjacent to the fort. Although most of the troops lodged in tents, some were accommodated in the brick barracks positioned between the stone walls of the fort’s bastion.

The work of constructing bateaux continued at Fort George during the winter of 1775–1776 and the following spring. During the summer of 1776, the fort and adjacent grounds would play one of its most important roles as the largest smallpox hospital in North America.

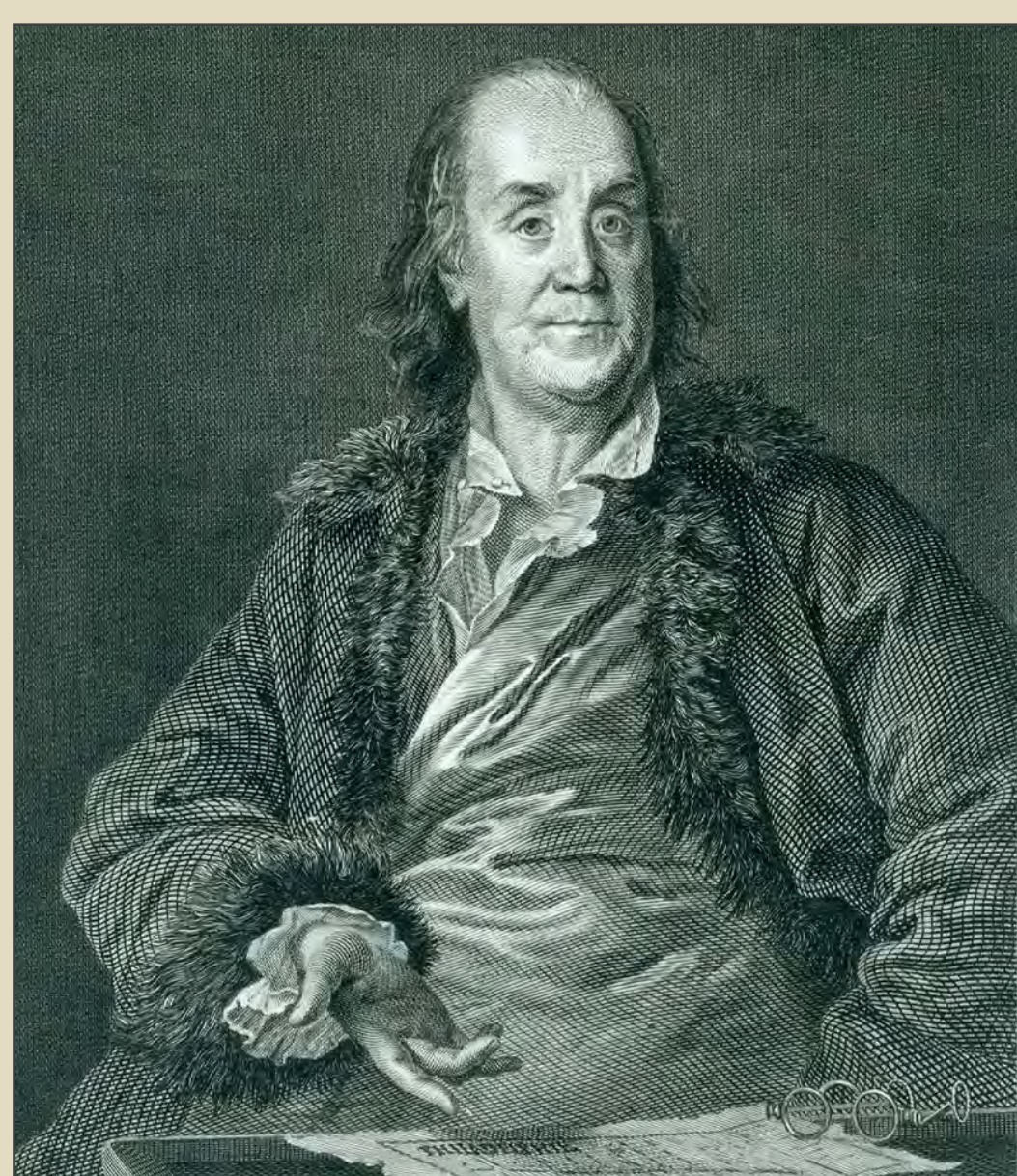
1776

Chaos and Recovery



Aerial view of Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence. In 1776 Fort George served as the supply hub for the Lake Champlain forts and the smallpox hospital for the Northern Department. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

In 1776 the American army experienced a year of dramatic setbacks and measured successes in the Northern Theater. Fort George served as a vital supply hub, a boat-building establishment, and as the largest smallpox hospital during the war. With the American army still in Canada in early 1776, Fort George continued as a key supply center and a bivouac area for reinforcements.

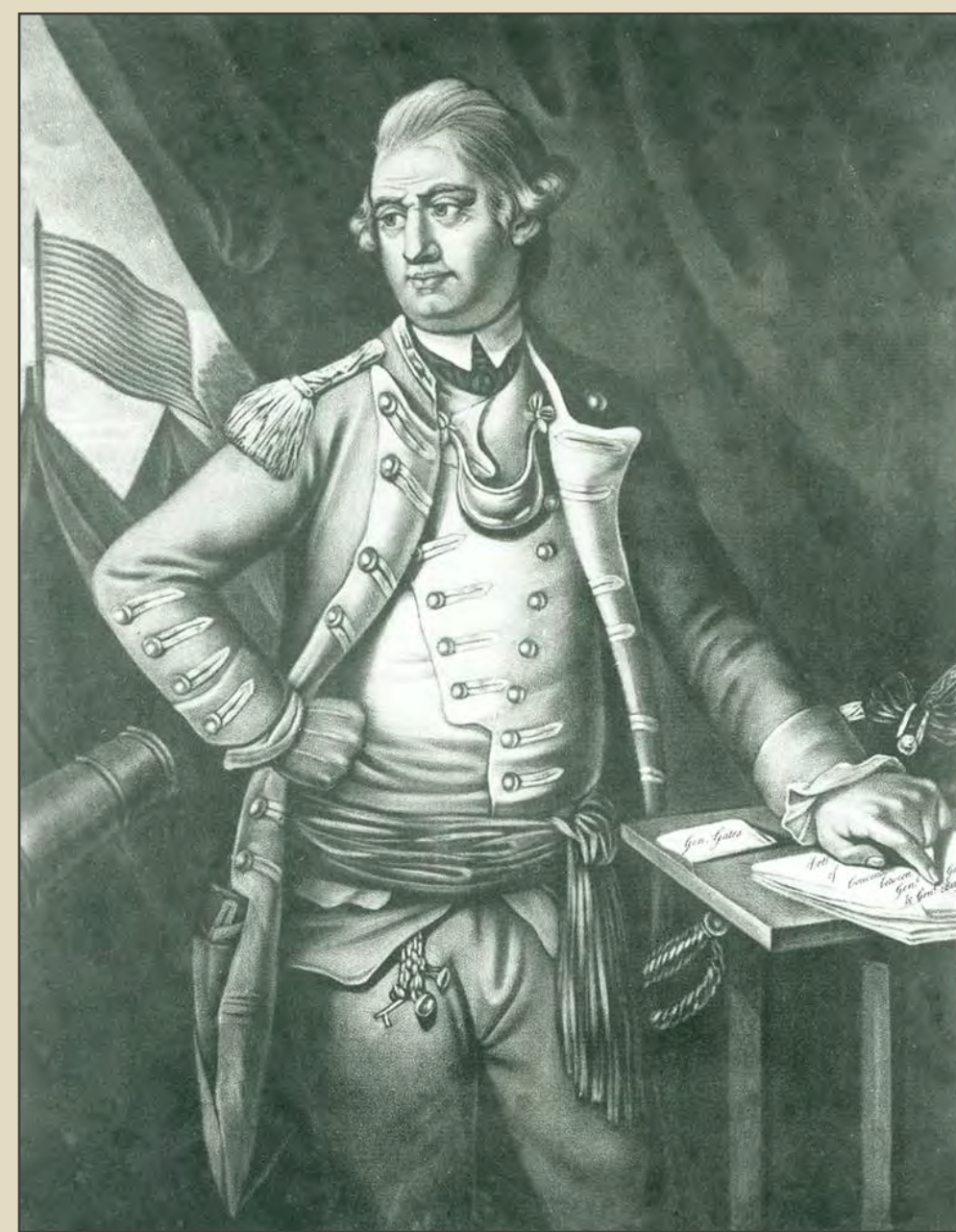


After staying at Fort George, Benjamin Franklin made a voyage north on Lake George aboard an open bateau in April 1776. (Library of Congress)

In January 1776, Major General Philip Schuyler, the commander of the Northern Department, began making arrangements for additional carpenters to travel to Fort George to build bateaux to move men and supplies north. From April 12 to June 9, the fort served as Schuyler's headquarters. On February 15, the Continental Congress approved a plan to send a committee to Canada to gain support for the war from the Canadians. The three-man committee, including 70-year-old Benjamin Franklin, lodged at Fort George in April before traveling north in a bateau. Major General John Thomas, the newly-appointed field commander of the American army in Canada, also stayed at Fort George in April, along with 1,315 American reinforcements destined for Canada.

A reversal of fortune awaited the American army in Canada during the spring of 1776. They were forced into a desperate retreat due to the arrival of fresh

troops from England. The American army in Canada had been devastated by smallpox and dysentery. In July Major General Horatio Gates, field commander of the Northern Department, established a "General Hospital" at Fort George to isolate all the smallpox patients to one post.



Major General Horatio Gates, field commander of the Northern Department. Painting by Alonzo Chappel. (New York State Museum)

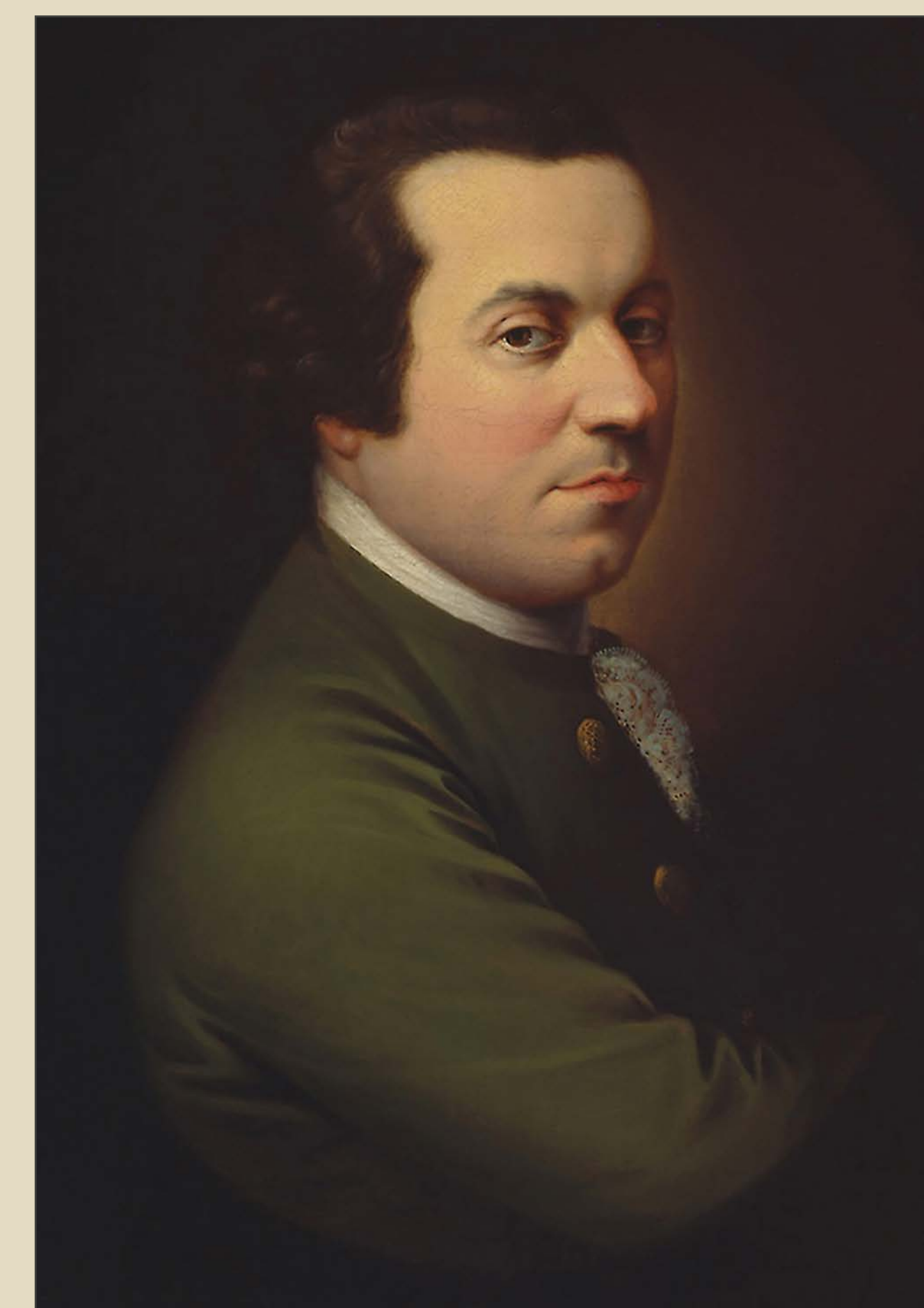


Aerial view of the southern end of Lake George. The 1776 smallpox hospital covered much of the land adjacent to the southern shore of the lake (ca. early 1950s). (Photo by Richard Dean)

The Fort George hospital was a scene of unimaginable suffering, with patients spread across the land that today encompasses the Battlefield Park and the site of Fort William Henry. On August 10, Dr. Jonathan Potts, who was in charge of the hospital, described "the distressed situation of the sick... without clothing, without bedding, or a shelter sufficient to screen them from weather." In mid-August, Chaplain Ebenezer David "found near 2000 sick" lying in "large sheds called Hospitals," and "between 20 & 30 dying" each day. Chaplain Ammi Robbins visited the "west hospital" (probably on the site of the ruins of Fort William Henry), concluding that he had never witnessed "such a portrait of human misery,"

and the next day he "visited the long hospital," located near Fort George. By the end of August, the worst was apparently over.

The aftermath of the deadly 1776 smallpox epidemic is still with us today. In 2019 the partial remains of more than 30 skeletons were uncovered during a construction project in Lake George Village. Uniform buttons and other artifacts found at the site have been linked to American soldiers who had been patients at the Fort George hospital.



Dr. Jonathan Potts (1745-1781), director of the smallpox hospital at Fort George in 1776. Oil painting by Henry Benbridge (ca. 1770-1776). (The Art Institute of Chicago)

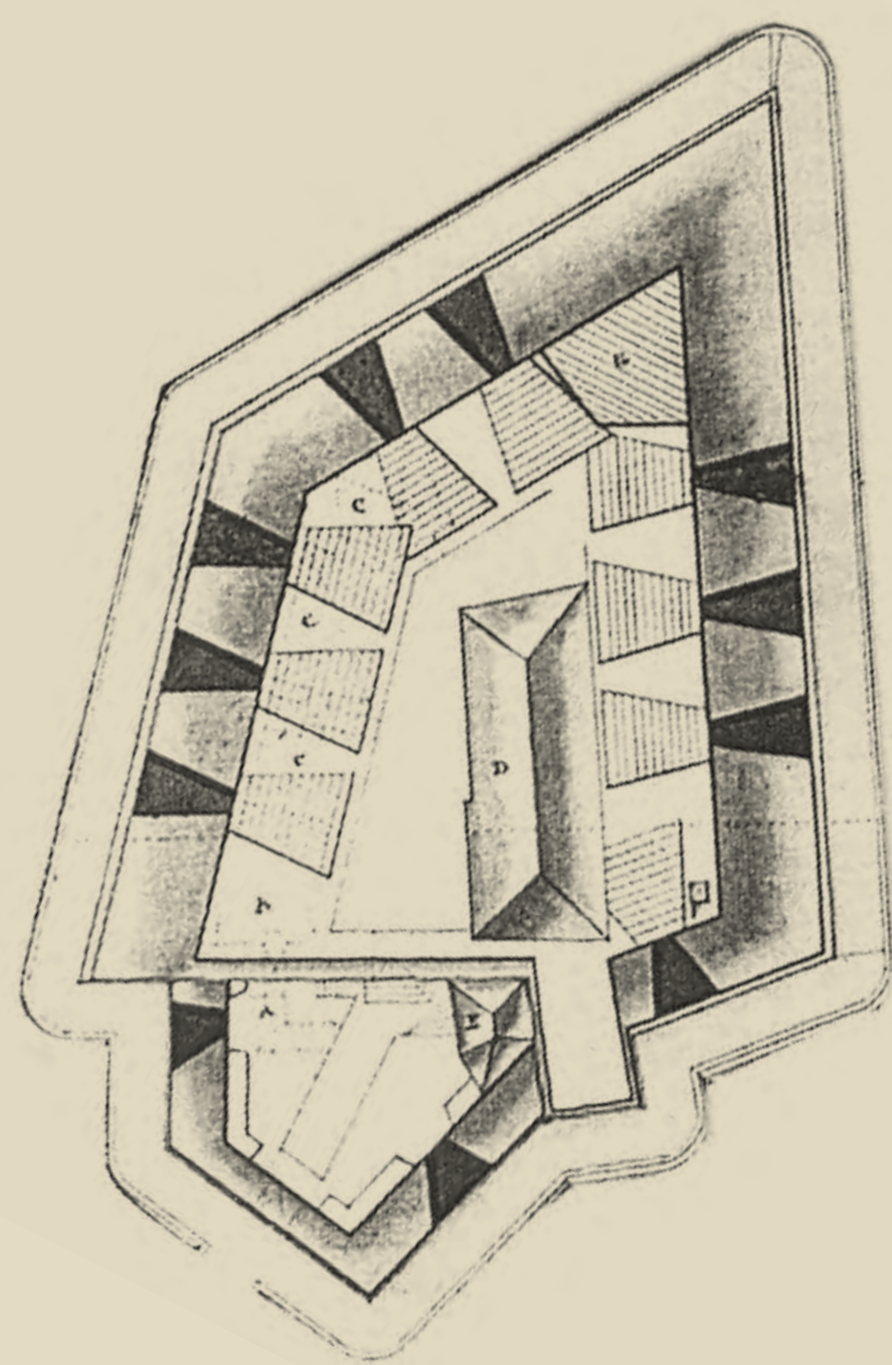


Horrible conditions existed in American military hospitals in 1776. Detail of a watercolor by Greg Harlin (*Smithsonian Magazine*). Most of the hospital structures at Fort George in 1776 were large open sheds.

1777

British Occupation of Fort George

In 1777 American troops engaged in defensive preparations at Fort Ticonderoga, Mount Independence, and Fort George in anticipation of a British invasion. On March 24, Major General Philip Schuyler, the commander of the Northern Department, ordered “two strong Schooners of Sixty feet Keel” and three row galleys be built at Fort George. A general hospital was also established at Fort George in May 1777 to isolate the expected arrival of smallpox-infected troops from the garrisons at Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence.



Detail of the “Plan of the Bastion at Fort George” by Francis Pfister. (Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)



Lieutenant General John Burgoyne. Painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds. (Library of Congress)

Despite a request by Schuyler for 10,000 troops to blunt the British advance, the American forts on Lake Champlain remained drastically undermanned during the early summer. Both Congress and George Washington incorrectly believed that the majority of British troops in Canada were destined for a campaign farther south. The Americans were forced to abandon the forts in early July when Lieutenant General John

Burgoyne’s army of British and German troops landed. Under orders from Schuyler, Fort George’s commander employed several caravans, consisting of 40 to 50 wagons each, to move ammunition, bateaux, supplies, and 20 pieces of artillery southward. On July 16, the Americans evacuated and burned Fort George; the powder magazine, storehouses, and all the newly-constructed vessels, including two still remaining on the stocks, were destroyed.



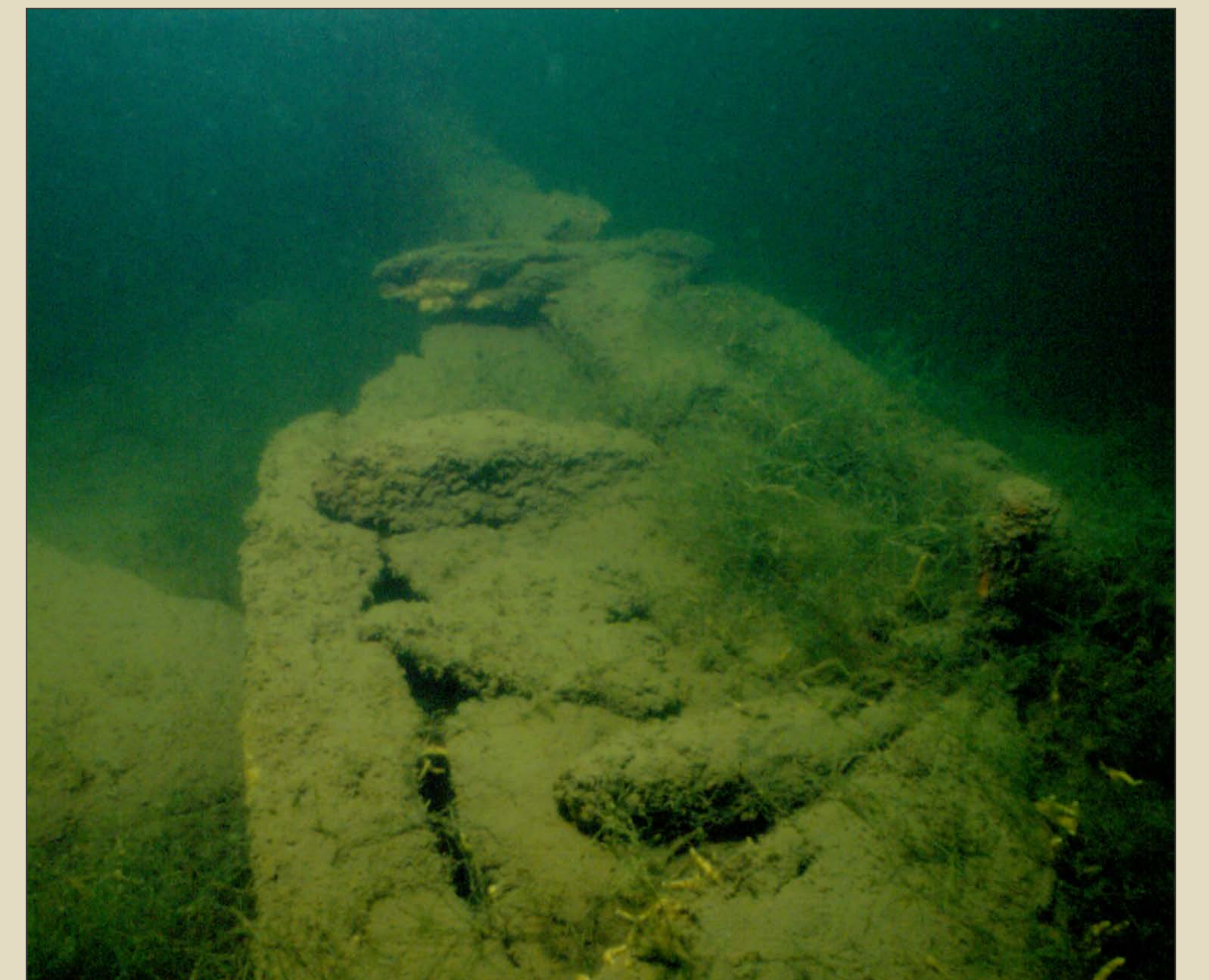
Detail of a watercolor by James Hunter (1777), depicting one of the 26 British gunboats carried into Lake George. (National Archives of Canada)

On July 28, British troops, aboard 26 gunboats, arrived at Fort George. The fort was described by a British officer as “a small square fort faced with Masonry,” containing “Barracks for about a hundred Men secured from Cannon Shot.” Under British control, Fort George served as a key transshipment hub for supplies, provisions, and artillery for Burgoyne’s army.



Aerial view of Diamond Island. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

The British also used Diamond Island, lying three miles north of Fort George, as a military depot for stores. The island was defended by two companies of the 47th Regiment, along with a contingent of German troops. The British had six cannons mounted behind breastworks and



Stern section of a wreck identified as one of Colonel John Brown’s abandoned vessels. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

two gunboats. On September 24, Colonel John Brown attacked the British post with 420 American militiamen aboard a three-gun sloop, two gunboats, and 17 bateaux, all captured from the British at the northern end of the lake. For more than an hour, the armed vessels and shore batteries engaged in a heavy cannonade. Brown’s damaged sloop had to be towed away and one gunboat was “so damaged” it was abandoned. The Americans ran the flotilla into Van Wormer Bay on the eastern shore and burned most of the vessels. However, one gunboat with a 12-pound cannon was later retaken by the British.

After Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga, Fort George was burned once more, and the remaining British troops retreated back to Canada in early November.



“The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga.” Painting by John Trumbull. (National Archives)

1780

The Last Military Conflict

By 1779, Fort George was garrisoned by troops from Colonel Seth Warner's Vermont Continental Regiment. Some repairs were made on the fort, and one report suggested that a "barracks near the water side" had been built. On July 15, a detachment from the fort's garrison, along with several family members, was brutally attacked by 25 Mohawks and three British Tories on Fourteen Mile Island. Nine Americans, including the fort's commander, were killed and scalped; eight were taken prisoner.



Aerial view of Fourteen Mile Island, scene of a 1779 attack on a detachment from Fort George. (Photo by Russell Bellico)

In the fall of 1780, the British launched their biggest expedition against military targets in the lake valleys since their 1777 invasion. On October 11, following the capture of the American garrison at Fort Anne, Major Christopher Carleton's army approached Fort George. At the same time, 30 British troops were traveling south on Lake George aboard two bateaux, carrying two mortars for use in the siege of the fort.

A messenger sent to Fort Edward from Fort George on the 11th to request provisions barely eluded capture by Carleton's Native American allies. The courier dashed back to Fort George with a report of "a small party of savages near Bloody Pond." Captain John Chipman, commander of the fort, dispatched



Map drawn from Lieutenant John Enys's 1780 manuscript map, showing the route of the British army. From *The American Journals of Lt. John Enys*. (Adirondack Museum/Syracuse University Press)

Captain Thomas Sill with 48 men to "make discoveries of them." Sill's detachment inadvertently passed the British force, but on their "Return" to the fort they encountered Carleton's army. Surrounded by a larger enemy, Sill's men were defeated in a brief, but bloody engagement, leaving 27 American dead and 8 captured; 13 fled into the wilderness.

Learning from the American prisoners that the garrison had virtually no provisions, little ammunition, and only a handful of troops, Carleton sent a flag of truce to the fort calling for surrender, without waiting for the arrival of his siege artillery. With little choice and agreeable terms of capitulation, Chipman



"Fort George." From *The Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (1851) by Benson J. Lossing.

surrendered the fort. A British officer described the walls of Fort George as "Stone with a thick earth parapet and good Bomb proofs for the garrison," but the walls had been burned "and were in bad shape." The British troops burned the fort once more and the next morning they loaded bateaux recovered from the lake with supplies and prisoners for the voyage to Ticonderoga. When a burying detail of militiamen from eastern New York later arrived at the site of Sill's battle, they discovered the ghastly sight of "slaughtered and mangled men ... their scalps taken."

No garrison occupied Fort George after the 1780 surrender. However, George Washington visited Fort George in 1783 on his inspection tour of military posts in New York. The grounds at today's Battlefield Park



George Washington pausing on the military road to Fort George during his 1783 inspection tour. Painting by J. L. G. Ferris. (Glens Falls Ins. Co.)



"Perspective Painting of Lake George (with the Fort)." Painting by Ezra Ames, ca. 1812. (Albany Institute of History & Art)



"Lake George, from the top of Fort George, Caldwell Village." Woodcut by William R. Miller. Print from *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, 1854.

were a setting for military activity once again during the War of 1812. In early September 1814, 4,000 American troops, under Major General George Izard, bivouacked on the garrison grounds at Fort George before their march westward to Lake Ontario.