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# BATTLEFIELD PARK RENEWED

## TO THE RESCUE

### Lake George Community Restoring the Historic Statues of the State's Battlefield Park



Monuments to Isaac Jogues, William Johnson & King Hendrick and to an anonymous Native American, located in Lake George Battlefield Park, will be restored this year with the support of the Lake George Park Commission and the generosity of past and present residents.

By Anthony F. Hall

The 85-year-old bronze and granite monument to Father Isaac Jogues in Lake George's Battlefield Park is to be restored this winter at a cost of \$16,980. The refurbishing of the Park's two other bronzes – the 1903 sculpture of Sir William Johnson with the Mohawk chieftain King Hendrick and the 1921 statue of an anonymous Native American – will begin this spring, said John DiNuzzo, the president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance.

"We're currently engaged in securing grants to complete the work on the Johnson-Hendrick sculpture, and contributions to the Battlefield Park Alliance for that project are welcomed," said DiNuzzo, who said a private donor has offered to underwrite the entire cost of the restoration of the Native American warrior.

The Battlefield Alliance initially proposed "a beautification of the sculptures" to the Department of Environmental Conservation, which manages the state-owned Battlefield Park, in 2023 – a proposal accepted by the agency.

"These sculptures are magnificent works of art and history," said DiNuzzo.

The statue of Father Jogues – the 17th century Jesuit martyr said to have "discovered" the lake and who is credited with giving it its French name, Lac du St. Sacrement, – will be restored with the assistance of a \$9,540

grant from the Lake George Park Commission.

At its December 17 meeting, the Commissioners voted unanimously to contribute the funds to the non-profit Alliance, a designated "Friend" of the Park which operates a Battlefield Park Visitors Center in the state-owned building that also houses the Park Commission.

According to the Park Commission, the agency is empowered by state law not only to protect Lake George's water quality and recreational assets, but also, to "promote the study of history, science and lore," enabling it "to partner on this important project," to quote from the Dec. 17 resolution.

### Two Prominent Lake George Natives Assisting with Restoration

More than two decades have passed since the DEC devoted any resources to maintaining the monuments. In 2000, it removed overgrown vegetation that hid the public's view of the Jogues monument. Since then, the Christian cross borne by the saint (he was canonized in 1930) has been damaged, knocked backward, in all likelihood, by a fallen tree limb. The Native American was refurbished in 2015. But like the statue of Johnson and Hendrick, it, too has been damaged and has lost parts.

The restoration of all three pieces will be conducted by

the Kingston NY-based firm, Workshop Art Fabrication. According to its plan for the restoration of the Jogues statue, the firm's craftsmen will remove, repair and re-attach the cross, pressure wash the granite plinth and clean, wax and restore the statue's bronze patina.

The firm, which is co-owned by a Lake George native, Andrew Pharmer, was brought to the attention of the Lake George Battlefield Alliance by another Lake George native, Dan George, whose career as a sculptor of civic spaces has included commissions for Brooklyn, Boston and Belfast, Ireland as well as Prospect Mountain and Warrensburg, NY, where in 1988 he installed "riverrun yes," a series of sculptures along the Schroon River.

According to John DiNuzzo, George contacted the Alliance earlier this year and, without being aware of the organization's discussions with the DEC about plans to refurbish the monuments, offered "to help spruce them up."

Interviewed in December, George, who now lives and works in Kingston after having spent most of his career in New York, said that he was in Lake George last summer to attend a niece's wedding and took advantage of the opportunity to revisit the statues.

"My wife and I were walking around Battlefield Park and I was astonished by the lack of attention to the monuments," said George. "Both Andrew

and I can remember going to Battlefield Park as school kids. Name me another town the size of Lake George that has bronze statues as wonderful as these, monuments that kids can learn from and an entire community can appreciate."

George said that Andrew Pharmer agreed that something should be done to restore the monuments.

"Andrew, who runs this huge foundry, which does top of the line, multimillion dollar projects for the most prominent artists in the country, said he would be happy to become involved," said George. "He's essentially volunteering his time to fix these pieces."

George himself has volunteered to fund the services of art historian Susan Cooke, a former Associate Director of the Estate of David Smith, to manage the project and hire a grant writer.

### The Statue of Isaac Jogues

The statue of Father Jogues was formally dedicated on July 4, 1939. According to the Lake George Mirror, more than 5,000 people attended the dedication and "as a result of the great number of Catholic dignitaries who participated, the ceremony was most impressive."

That July 4 ceremony was the culmination of a three year-long effort by New York State to "select an appropriate site on State Park lands on the shore of Lake George for the erection of

a monument to perpetuate the memory of Father Isaac Jogues who discovered Lake George in the year 1646."

In 1936, the chairman of a special commission appointed by Governor Herbert Lehman to select a site, Warrensburg Assemblyman Harry Reoux, took the members on a scouting tour of the lake and after a no doubt festive lunch, showed them the site he thought most appropriate: Fort George Park.

The sculptor chosen to create the piece was Charles Keck, one of the few sculptors still creating traditional, civic sculptures for public spaces in the 1930s and 40s, and certainly the most well-known.

Keck was also responsible for Ticonderoga's 1924 Liberty Monument, a gift to the town from Horace Moses. Keck is also famous – or infamous – for the statues of Confederate generals such as one of Stonewall Jackson, presented to the city of Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1921, decades after the Civil War ended and intended by groups such as Daughters of the Confederacy to assert the righteousness of the South's cause. Keck also made the sculpture in the US Capitol of North Carolina governor Charles Aycock, an avowed White Supremacist who used his office to disenfranchise African Americans. That statue was replaced by one of evangelist Billy Graham in May, 2024.

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## The Two Other Sculptures

Fortunately, the creators of Battlefield Park's other monuments are less morally compromised.

According to Dan George, the sculptor commissioned to pay tribute to Native Americans, Alexander Phimister Proctor, was considered second only to Frederic Remington as an artist of the American frontier. The restoration of that bronze and steel monument, which incorporates a fountain, will entail reproducing two bronze arrows that were lost through vandalism.

The statue of Sir William Johnson and King Hendrick, formally known as "The Battle of Lake George – Sept. 8, 1755," was commissioned by the Society of

Colonial Wars and was dedicated on September 8, 1903. That, too, has missing elements that must be reproduced in bronze.

The surfaces of both statues are also scheduled to be restored, for a total cost of \$9,100 and \$18,370, respectively.

### Renewing Respect for the Past

Dan George said that growing up in proximity to the sculptures, "may well have had some influence on me and my decision to pursue a career in art. I was always especially impressed by the fountain with the statue of the Iroquois warrior." He said he hopes the restoration of the monuments "will help residents and visitors appreciate Lake George's important role in American history more than

many do today. It is so rich in history, which is often ignored. People should value and be more aware of it," he said.

According to John DiNuzzo, the restoration of the Battlefield Park's three monuments will complement the new memorial to those who perished at Fort George in 1776 and whose remains were discovered in Lake George Village in 2019. The memorial, where those remains will be interred, will be dedicated in July, 2026.

"With the restoration of these sculptures, along with some improvements to Battlefield Park made this year by the DEC, the entire park will have been given a terrific facelift that will be visible to the thousands of people we expect to all see here, drawn by the reinterment of the Revolutionary War soldiers' remains," said DiNuzzo.