

The Lake George Examiner

Professor Hart presents Battlefield Park archaeological study findings

February 24, 2025 by Gillian Burdett



In June 2024, Professor Siobhan Hart, Chair of the Skidmore College Anthropology Department, led an archaeological exploration in Lake George Battlefield Park. She returned to Lake George this Saturday to discuss her team's findings at an event sponsored by the [Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance](#).

Her investigation was the first in the park since David Starbuck's series of archaeological work in 2014, 2015 and 2016. "As archaeologists," Hart said, "David and I shared an interest in learning about people's experiences in the past through the debris of their lives, the things people left behind, the things they forgot or threw away, as well as the places that people lived, worked and experienced their day-to-day lives. With hindsight, we know that these were extraordinary times when we figured out the times they were living and working at the Lake George Battlefield."

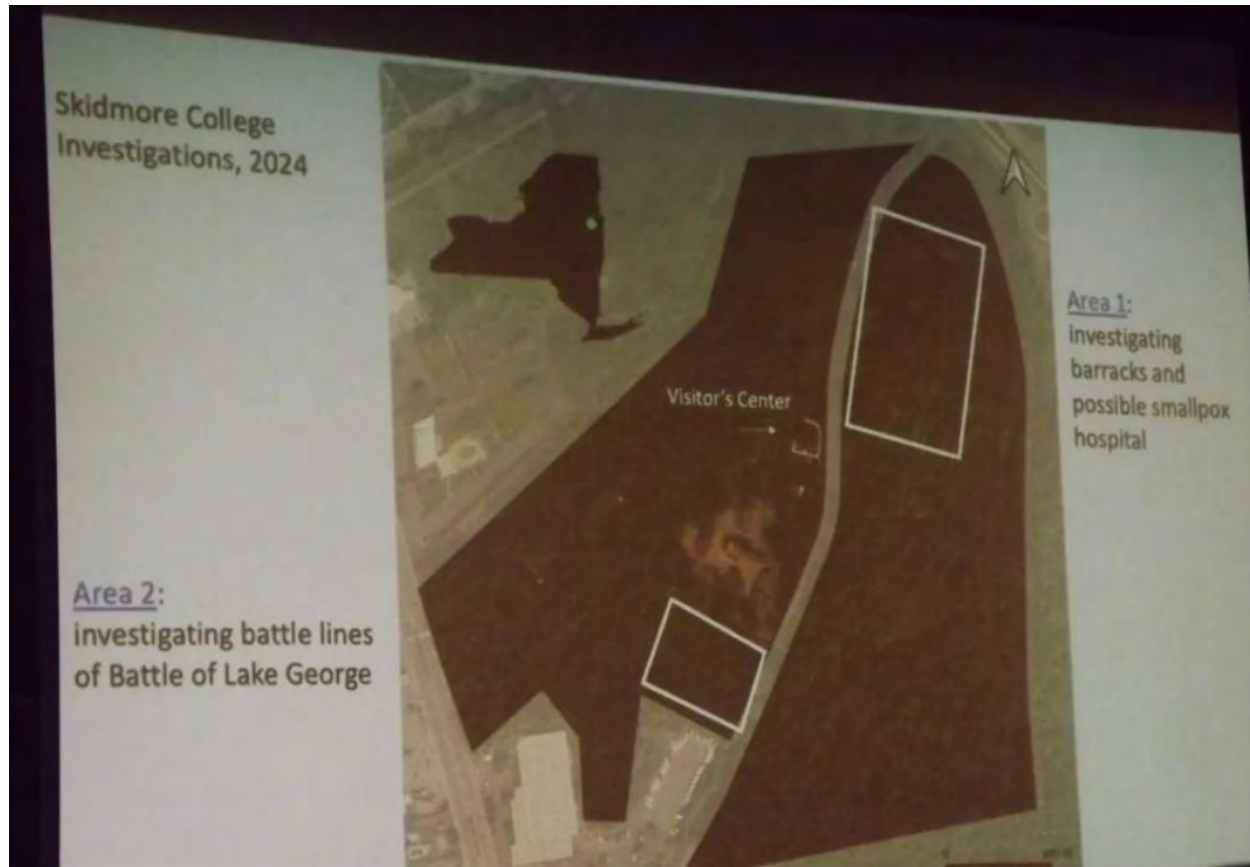
The land that makes up the 35-acre park was purchased by New York State in 1898 and is managed and protected from development by the state Department of Environmental Conservation. The park is a mix of pine groves and lawns that gently roll down to the head of Lake George. Historical monuments and interpretive signage identify the land's historic significance.

Buried beneath the picnic areas and walking paths are the ruins of military occupations through two major wars, the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. In a [2018 work](#) on

Adirondack archaeology, in which he summarized his team’s findings, Starbuck called the site “easily one of the last relatively untouched military sites along the historic corridor that runs from New York City to Canada.”

In the fall of 2023, Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President John DiNuzzo contacted Hart and asked if she would be interested in conducting research in the park. She met with Alliance members and toured the park. The group determined the research should focus on two questions — is there evidence of the 1755 Battle of Lake George battle lines, and where was the Revolutionary War-era smallpox hospital?

The smallpox hospital, the largest in the American colonies, has recently moved to the forefront of interest following the 2019 discovery in the Village of Lake George of a cemetery that archaeologists have determined held the remains of hospital patients. The 44 individuals whose graves were disturbed by a construction project were associated with the Continental Army and are believed to have perished in 1776 as a smallpox epidemic raged. A [major project](#), “The Repose of the Fallen,” is currently underway to reinter the remains in Battlefield Park.



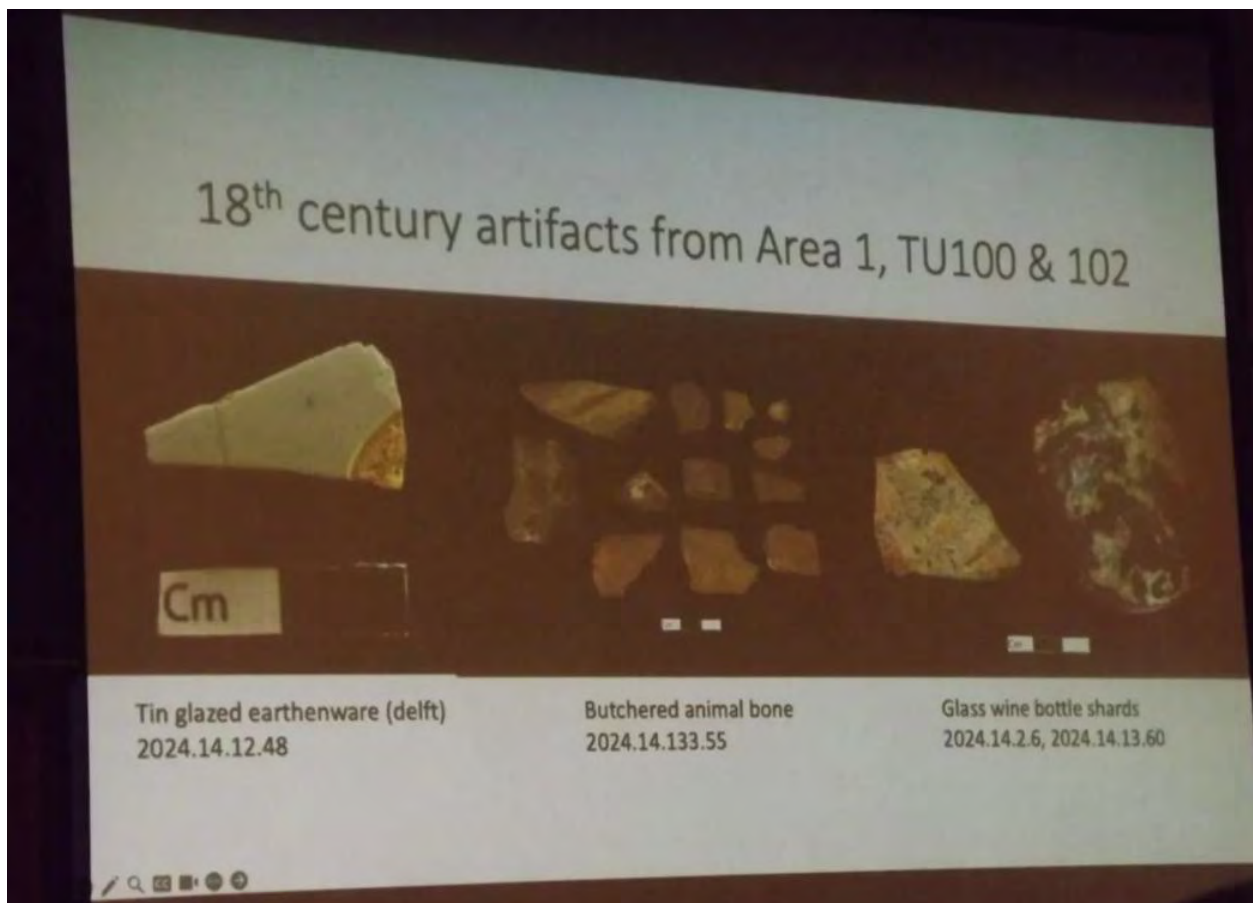
Map of areas investigated, June 2024 Battlefield Park archaeological study. Fort George Road bisects the park.

Using Ground Penetrating Radar, Hart and her team identified anomalies that indicated possible human activity hidden underground. They opened three test units in what they labeled Area 1 in the North end of the park to the east of Fort George Road. This area could possibly reveal evidence of a

hospital. A second area, Area 2, located just south of the DEC Maintenance Shop on the West side of Fort George Road was investigated as possibly producing evidence of the Battle of Lake George battle lines.

“We did find substantial 18th-century activity in Area 1,” says Hart. They found bones of butchered domestic animals, sheep and pig, that would indicate food preparation and consumption. They found late 18th Century-era earthenware and glass wine bottle shards. Cracks in the bedrock were filled with debris and mortar indicating the surface was a barracks or kitchen floor.

“There was no direct evidence that the area was used to house smallpox patients,” says Hart. She noted that David Starbuck’s investigation of the hospital on Roger’s Island in Fort Edward uncovered glass vial shards, bandage pins and medicine cups, things directly related to the care of the sick. No definitive evidence of such items was found in the Area 1 test units.

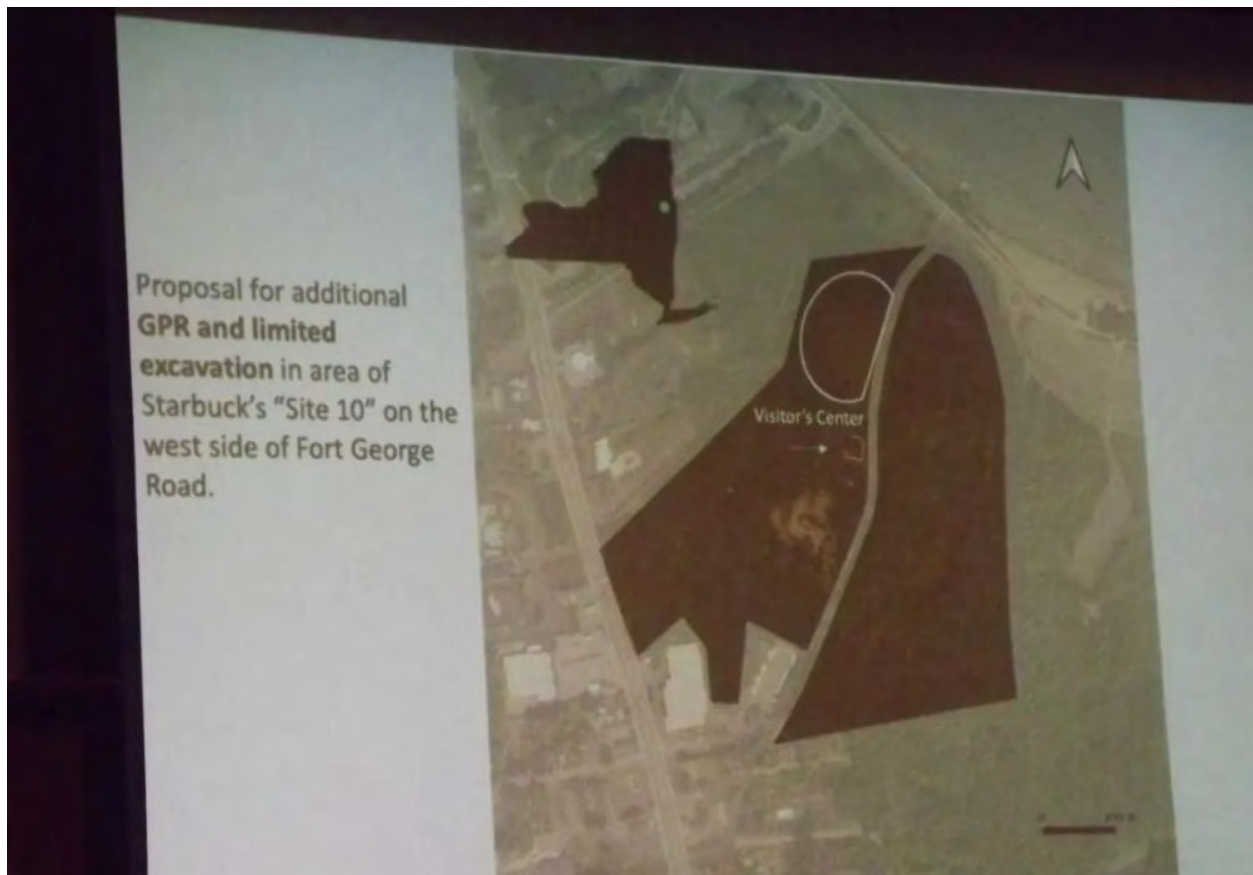


“...learning about people’s experiences in the past through the debris of their lives, the things people left behind, the things they forgot or threw away...”

In Area 2, they were unable to use ground penetrating radar as the area is dense with undergrowth that would have required extensive clearing. They selected three areas and opened 1-meter by 1-meter test units. “We didn’t find definitive evidence of battle lines in this area, but we did recover evidence of land use from the 18th century through the present including a plow zone.” It tells us, says Hart, that the area was used for agricultural purposes sometime after the Revolutionary War.

Although the initial questions concerning the smallpox hospital and the Battle of Lake George battle lines were not answered with this session, “Archaeology is an accumulative research endeavor,” says Hart, “and rarely do we find the ‘amazing things’ when we’re beginning a project. It’s really about the accumulation of data and knowledge.”

Dr. Hart is in the process of obtaining permits to continue research in the park next June. She is proposing to continue Starbuck’s exploration of the field on the West side of Fort George Road. In 2016, Starbuck’s team uncovered a dump that contained materials indicating it was trash from an officer’s dwelling. A 1766 British coin found at the site suggests it was used in the time between the two wars. Hart would like to find the boundaries of the dump as well as evidence of camps and huts in the field that overlooks Lake George.



Professor Hart is seeking permits to explore a site on the West side of Fort George Road, north of the Visitor Center, in June 2025.

Meanwhile, her students at Skidmore College have embarked on a project to catalog Lake George Battlefield Park artifacts held by the New York State Museum. This will enable researchers to better access the collection.

DEC Office of Indian Nation Affairs Director Peter Reuben also spoke at Saturday’s event. He lauded Professor Hart’s work noting that archaeological work in Battlefield Park is an opportunity to connect with the public. “It’s one of those great opportunities that we have here to have this history, and have it explained and have the public interest.”

Hart closed her presentation with a David Starbuck quote:

“The Battlefield Park is slowly coming into its own as a truly major military attraction on Lake George, and it has survived so well because the Department of Environmental Conservation, local residents, and most recently the Fort George Alliance [Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance] have worked extremely hard to protect its integrity and ensure that modern development does not disturb these exciting ruins.

All these constituencies are eager for the park to receive visitors, and the ruins and artifacts must be preserved so that those who come after us will have the same opportunity to understand what an eighteenth-century military encampment looked like.” — David R. Starbuck, “Archeology in the Adirondacks: The Last Frontier.”

The Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance will be organizing volunteer opportunities for those who wish to join Hart and her team in their June 2025 investigation. Contact the Alliance at info@lakegeorgebattlefield.org. The Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Center will open for the season on Memorial Day Weekend 2025.