

The Lake George Examiner



Amy Baker of the Lake George Junior-Senior High School performs taps in front of the Battle of Lake George monument in Battlefield Park while young reenactors look on.

Battlefield Park ceremony honors 270 years of American soldiers' sacrifice

May 27, 2025 by Gillian Burdett

The Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance held its annual Memorial Day Remembrance at the burial site of the four unknown soldiers in Battlefield Park Monday morning. The Battlefield Park ceremony paid tribute to the four unknowns — casualties of the 1755 Battle of Lake George — and all the soldiers who gave their lives since to secure the liberties Americans cherish today.

As the ceremony participants assembled and officials conducted sound checks, a Haudenosaunee couple purified the people, the grounds and the ceremony with a smudging ritual, fanning smoke from a burning bundle of sage across the site. It is an Eastern Woodland Native American practice, reenactors Sue Brenz and Larry Francis, explained. It disperses negativity.



Reenactors Sue Brenz and Larry Francis perform a smudging ritual at the Battlefield Park ceremony.

The Rev. Laura Miller of St. James Episcopal Church gave the opening invocation, praying, “Today we pause to honor the brave men and women who have given their lives in service to this nation so we could live in the land of liberty ... Let this day stir in us not just pride, but purpose. Let their sacrifice inspire us to live deeper, to serve better, to walk humbly with you.”

Although it was twenty years before the first shots of the American Revolution were fired, the Battle of Lake George, and the sacrifice of the four unknowns and countless others whose remains are most likely buried beneath the rolling lawns of Battlefield Park, played a significant role in the formation of the United States, as explained by historian and Battlefield Park Alliance Trustee Bruce Venter.

Venter explained that early in the French and Indian War, a conflict between the French and British Empires for control of North America, the British launched four campaigns. Of those, two ended in a British defeat, and a third, with the help of the British regulars, captured two French forts in Nova Scotia.

“And now I come to the 4th campaign of 1755, where William Johnson built a military road from Fort Edward to right here, the spot you are on today.” Johnson’s goal was to capture Fort St. Frederic at the northern end of Lake George. Johnson didn’t make it that far. The French intercepted and a series of three conflicts known as the Battle of Lake George ensued. Johnson was able to repel the

French and capture the wounded French Commander, Baron Dieskau. It was the most significant action of the French in this area at that point in the war, says Venter.

“Why it was significant was that Johnson’s army was made up almost exclusively of Americans... and it proved that the Americans could stand up and fight French regulars as well as Canadians and native allies, and so we should remember this battle as the proving ground for American’s ability to stand up in combat, and many of the men who fought here on September the 8th, 1755, were also involved with the Revolutionary War where we were triumphant in our war for independence.”



Historian Bruce Venter discusses the significance of the Battle of Lake George.

Venter also asked his audience to reflect on a passage from a letter written in November 1775 by Robert Livingston to John Jay, both notable leaders in the formation of the United States. Livingston was traveling to Ticonderoga and stopped at the head of Lake George, where he viewed the remains of Fort William Henry and walked the battlegrounds. “I could hardly stir a step with imagining,” wrote Livingston, “that I walked over the grave of some unfortunate victim to the ambition of princes.”

“I think that’s a very, very interesting statement for him to make, and I think that you all should contemplate that there are probably hundreds of other bones that are under the ground right where you’re standing here, and that’s what we should venerate, those four men that we know about and all the other ones who died here at Lake George,” Venter said.

Following Venter, Command Sgt. Major Robert Van Pelt (retired) gave the Keynote Address. Van Pelt was drafted into the US Army in 1969 and served in

Vietnam. After being discharged from active duty, he served in the Army Reserves and the New York Army National Guard. He was selected to serve as the State Command Sergeant Major for the New York National Guard in June 2001.

"Little did I know what was about to happen three and a half months later on 11 September," he said. "For the first time since World War II, the entire National Guard was relied on to mobilize for war and support Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom."

Van Pelt said he has intense feelings for Memorial Day as he had the opportunity to serve with many of the nation's fallen. He told the story of a childhood friend who was killed in Vietnam, and he spoke of all the funerals he attended during his tenure as State Command Sergeant. Van Pelt spoke with great emotion about the time he was tasked with delivering the personal possessions of a slain soldier to his mom and dad. "I still remember thinking to myself as I did this, 'Here are the remains of your 21-year-old son.'"



Command Sgt. Major Robert Van Pelt (Ret.) gave the Keynote Address.

Van Pelt closed his address by quoting an unattributed social media post reminding those in attendance that Memorial Day is not the day to honor all who served; that is Veterans Day. “This one is in honor of those who paid in life and blood, whose moms never saw them again, whose dads wept in private, whose wives raised kids alone, and whose kids only remember them from pictures. This isn’t simply a day off. This is a day to remember that others paid for every free breath you ever get to take.”

Following Van Pelt’s address, the Lake George Volunteer Fire Department and American Legion Post 374 led the Pledge of Allegiance, the American Legion Auxiliary laid flowers on the unknown soldiers’ burial site and a member of the Fire Department and the Battlefield Park Alliance President placed a wreath at the site. Fort William Henry reenactors then fired a three-volley musket salute.

The Battlefield Park ceremony concluded with Amy Baker of Lake George Junior-Senior High School playing taps.

Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President John DiNuzzo said that next year’s Battlefield Park Memorial Day Remembrance will be particularly special. Memorial Day Weekend, 2026, the remains of 44 individuals, Continental soldiers and others who were stricken at Fort George in 1776, will be [reinterred](#) in Battlefield Park. The graves of these individuals were disturbed in 2019 during a construction project on [Courtland Street](#) in Lake George Village.



