

Revolutionary War soldiers are finally laid to rest in Lake George

The remains of 44 individuals, mostly young soldiers, traveled from Albany to Lake George after years of work by New York State Museum

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The Grand Union Flag covers a casket containing the remains of a Revolutionary War soldier during a dignified transfer from the State Museum to be taken by motorcade to Lake George Battlefield Park on Wednesday in Albany. Forty-four people believed to have been associated with the Continental Army were taken by motorcade to be buried at the Lake George Battlefield Park. (Will Waldron/Times Union)

Seven years ago, Lisa Anderson surveyed what then seemed like an insurmountable task: sifting 70 dump-truck piles of soil filled with 18th-century human bones.

It took 15 months of sifting and years of piecing back together what they could of the Continental Army soldiers. Anderson, one of the bioarchaeologists at the New York State Museum, would count

femurs and 833 teeth to determine that contractors digging an apartment building foundation in the village of Lake George had disturbed 44 graves.

Most of the remains were those of young men in their teens and 20s, and a few older than 40. One was a child younger than 10 and one was a young woman.

On Wednesday, they all made their final tour from the laboratories of the museum in Albany to their resting place at a new memorial site called “Repose of the Fallen” off Fort George Road in Lake George Battlefield Park.

The NY-Penn Military Vehicle Collectors Club carried the remains in four of nine military vehicles from the Vietnam and Korean wars. They were flanked by police, sheriff’s officers and members of the Patriot Guard Riders motorcycle club.



The remains of Revolutionary War soldiers are transferred from the State Museum to a historic U.S. military vehicle for a ceremonial transport to Lake George on Wednesday in Albany. (Will Waldron/Times Union)

Jim Marshall, assistant state captain for the Patriot Guard Riders of New York, has ridden “700 or 800” missions escorting fallen soldiers and first responders to their final resting places. But Wednesday’s motorcade proved especially memorable for the volunteer group.

“Why this one here is even more special is because these are the veterans who stood up, in the very beginning, to create this country,” Marshall said. “We normally stand for veterans who are defending this country and standing for what we already have.”

More information on Friday's public memorial service

At 9 a.m. on Friday, a horse-drawn caisson, a historical kind of military wagon, will deliver the four remaining caskets from Sacred Heart Church on Mohican Street, to the corner of Elizabeth Little Boulevard and Beach Road in Lake George.

At 10 a.m., Revolutionary War historians and reenactors will carry the caskets to the Father Isaac Jogues statue in the Lake George Battlefield Park. A memorial ceremony will begin at 11 a.m., at the "Repose for the Fallen" memorial site commemorating the 250th anniversary of the nation and honoring the soldiers.

Many of the 35 volunteer riders were from New York state, but two — Raymond "Rusty" Fancher and his wife Mary — drove all the way from Virginia to join the Patriot Guard's escort. It's the farthest the couple has traveled for such an event.

"It's really an honor. I couldn't turn it down," said Raymond Fancher, a veteran of the Army and FBI.

From 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the motorcade traveled north on state Route 9, with stops in downtown Saratoga Springs and Glens Falls for observances before arriving in Lake George.

The day had started cloudy, but as the motorcade approached the memorial site, the sun shone bright. A crowd encircled the marble columbaria to witness the end of an extraordinary journey, both in time and space.

Patriot Guard Riders and members of the NY-Penn Military Vehicle Collectors Club carried the pine caskets, 28 inches long, 12 inches wide and 8 inches tall made by the Northeastern Woodworkers Association, and placed them in the marble shelves. Each box is labeled with a number.

The Rev. Joseph Busch of Sacred Heart Church in Lake George, led a prayer.

"We must remember that behind every uniform is a heart of courage, the story of sacrifice, a life dedicated to greater good," he said.



After years of work led by the New York State Museum, the remains of 44 individuals, mostly young Revolutionary War soldiers, traveled back to Lake George for reinterment. They were discovered when a 2019 construction project disturbed a burial site. Will Waldron/Times Union

Four of the caskets containing the most complete skeletons will be laid to rest during a public memorial on Friday. They were draped in flags: three Grand Union Flags, the predecessor to Betsy Ross' design, and one First Pennsylvania Battalion flag to honor the soldier found with a battalion button nestled in his rib cage, said Larry Arnold, trustee with the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance.

Most of these Revolutionary War soldiers' uniforms would have been burned. They were likely sick with smallpox or some other disease, following their unsuccessful attack on Canada in 1776. In 1775 and 1776, the southern shore of Lake George was the site of a smallpox hospital, where historians say up to 1,000 people died. Soldiers often travelled with their families, so Anderson and her colleagues were not surprised that a child and woman were among the young men.

She looked out at the memorial site overlooking Lake George. "It's kind of overwhelming, but in a good way," Anderson said, noting that it was seven years to the day when she and volunteers began sifting. "So many other people are feeling very much involved and wanting to honor these people."

Dan Barusch, town of Lake George planning and zoning director, has ushered the project from the beginning while fielding new zoning protocols in an attempt to avoid disturbing other remains believed to be in the area.

One of the five columbaria is for about a dozen French and Indian War remains that were found at Fort William Henry in the 1990s. Another will remain empty with the anticipation of unearthing more remains in the future, Barusch said.

That's another piece to this story that Anderson is grateful has changed from this experience.

At that time of the initial recovery — the majority of it started on May 20, 2019 — New York was one of four states in the country without a law to protect unmarked graves.

The case would spark the “Unmarked Burial Site Protection Act,” which was passed in 2023. The law requires specific protocol when human remains are found. It also makes it illegal and a possible misdemeanor to not report the discovery of human remains or funerary objects, or to intentionally remove them. And it makes it a potential felony to knowingly destroy a burial site, human remains or funerary objects.