

# Who were these LG Patriots of 1776?

**By Cathy DeDe**

**Chronicle Managing Editor**

The skeletal remains of 44 individuals, dubbed "Patriots," who were discovered in a 2019 construction site in Lake George reach their final resting place in the Repose of the Fallen monument at Lake George Battlefield Park. (See

**separate article** on page 6.)

**NYS scientists reveal individuals whose remains were found; now reinterred**

But who were these people believed to have died of smallpox in 1776?

New York State bio-archaeologist Lisa Anderson has led the effort to answer the question, starting at the excavation site.

Some graves were still partly intact when the bones were discovered. But most of the remains were in "an enormous mound of soil, about the size of a house," still on site.

"It was a big pile of dirt, and you could see some bone in it," Ms. Anderson tells *The Chronicle*. "We knew pretty early on that it was a cemetery related to the American Revolution."

"Everybody felt that it was

# Who were these 44 patriots ?

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important to be there and to do that work to recover as many of those individuals as we could.

**"It was very meaningful to everybody who was involved,"** Ms. Anderson said.

"We had 140 volunteers. We had college students come down, professors brought their students, and then we had a really devoted team of local interested people who came out in all kinds of weather, snow, rain."

The work "paused briefly in the early months of the Covid pandemic — a whole different epidemic — then resumed the excavation from July to September 2020, with protocols," Ms. Anderson said.

Then, in Albany at the New York State Museum labs, she and her team painstakingly pieced together those fragments to identify 44 individuals. Looking at teeth, bone, DNA, and the historical record they learned some specifics.

**All but one of them are male,** Ms.

Anderson tells us. "There is **one child**, six to 10 years old. Most of the **males are young, in their teens and 20s.**"

Ms. Anderson said she was initially surprised not to see evidence of the soldiers' known long marches, malnutrition, heavy work — but noted **"they hadn't been soldiers very long** when they died."

She says, "Then, some are a bit older. Those often were officers. They may have well also been in the French and Indian War. The American Revolution was just 20 years later, so they may have been seasoned soldiers who had already served..."

"We believe this was a hospital cemetery, and it wasn't a hospital for battle wounded, it was for disease."

She said, "There were buttons found from a soldier's uniform from the First Pennsylvania Battalion, which is only in existence for one year during the American Revolution." That set the date at 1776.

**"Then we could tie it to the campaign to try and take Quebec from the British,** which was also very short-lived.

"We know that during part of that campaign soldiers were exposed to smallpox. It became rather rampant through the troops. As that campaign failed, they started to retreat back to New York, and in that process the disease spread....So they established a hospital at Fort George" on July 7, 1776, she says.

"It was mostly to house the sick, because they didn't have treatments."

Ms. Anderson noted, "From what we could see of the (graves) that were still partly intact...**some but not all**" of the



**Bio-archaeologist**

**Lisa Anderson**

*Photo/New York State  
Museum Website*



**Reconstructed soldier's face** — New York State forensic artist Jenny Kenyon and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute used modern technology and a 3D printer to recreate the face of one of the 44 Revolutionary-era patriots to be reinterred at the Repose of the Fallen monument this week. *Images provided*

#### **dead were buried in coffins.**

"We know from accounts during that period...they had sawmills in that area. They were building boats, they had lumber, but I think the scale of the loss of life was so great that they probably weren't able to provide coffins for everybody.

"They also had very few supplies. The surgeon in charge of the hospital had put out a call for people to donate old linens because he didn't have enough materials for bandages.

"In the 18th century, one common way

of burying people was in what they call a winding shroud, basically like a big sheet you wrap around the person. They wouldn't have had even had materials to do that."

**"A lot of it was probably done pretty hurriedly," she says. "But you could tell they were buried with care.** They weren't just thrown in. There was some effort made to bury them in a respectful way. "

As for learning about the people whose  
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## **David 'Starbuck called it': Graves' date 1776**

Dan Barusch, the Lake George Village and Town Director of Planning and Zoning, is spokesperson overseeing the Repose of the Fallen project.

At the site of the memorial on Monday, as work continued to complete the monuments, Mr. Barusch told *the Chronicle*, "Starbuck called it."

Area archaeologist David Starbuck along with the Warren County Sheriff was the first one called when bones were discovered at the Courtland Street construction site in 2019.

"He said right away, I bet they died at the Smallpox Hospital at Fort George," Mr. Barusch says. Seven years of forensic archaeology and research later, his prediction "was absolutely right," Mr. Barusch said on Monday.

Dr. Starbuck died in December 2020.

— **Cathy DeDe**

remains these are, Ms. Anderson says, "The folks I work with deserve all the credit. The work we do is to look at things like the teeth or bones and see if there's evidence of things that happen to a person during their life, different kinds of health stress, mechanical stress.

"They were able to piece together enough parts to be able to look at those individuals. We're hoping to be able to say something about the lives of these soldiers, not necessarily while they were in service, because some weren't in service for very long, but about their lives in the 18th century."

They've retained data in the lab, even as the remains departed for Lake George.

"There's such a huge volume of information we've collected, that as we go back and reassess it, we may come up with some new interpretations. We'll have time to go back and paint a bigger picture," Ms. Anderson said.

**"It was just an honor** to be involved with this from the beginning, and to have been able to help figure out who they were and get it to this point."

## LG Burial grounds are common; 'If you see bone, say so'

**Chronicle Managing Editor Cathy /**

**DeDe writes:** New York State bio-archaeologist Lisa Anderson said, "It's been a common thing that burials get found in Lake George. During the French and Indian War, there were actual battles in Lake George, so there were people who died in those battles."

Numerous graves have been found on the grounds of Fort William Henry, "and all throughout town."

"We have records, newspaper records going back to the 1800s, talking about finding graves.

"Often they're assumed to be from the French and Indian War, but now we know there was this bigger presence during the American Revolution.

"On Courtland Street alone, we know of several other times when remains were found. We actually were able to track some of those down and include them as part of this (reinterment)....

"To the credit of the town, they're now very aware of this, so they have their own protocols for construction and National Grid projects. They stop immediately if something gets found."

She said, "One of the outcomes of this project, and others, is that **the state finally passed a law to protect unmarked burial grounds.**"

The "Unmarked Burial Site Protection Act" of 2023 requires "cessation" of all ground-disturbing activities upon the discovery of a burial ground,

It's administered by the State Museum. "In the last year, we've reported to five different cases," Ms. Anderson says. Her message: "If you see bone, please report it."