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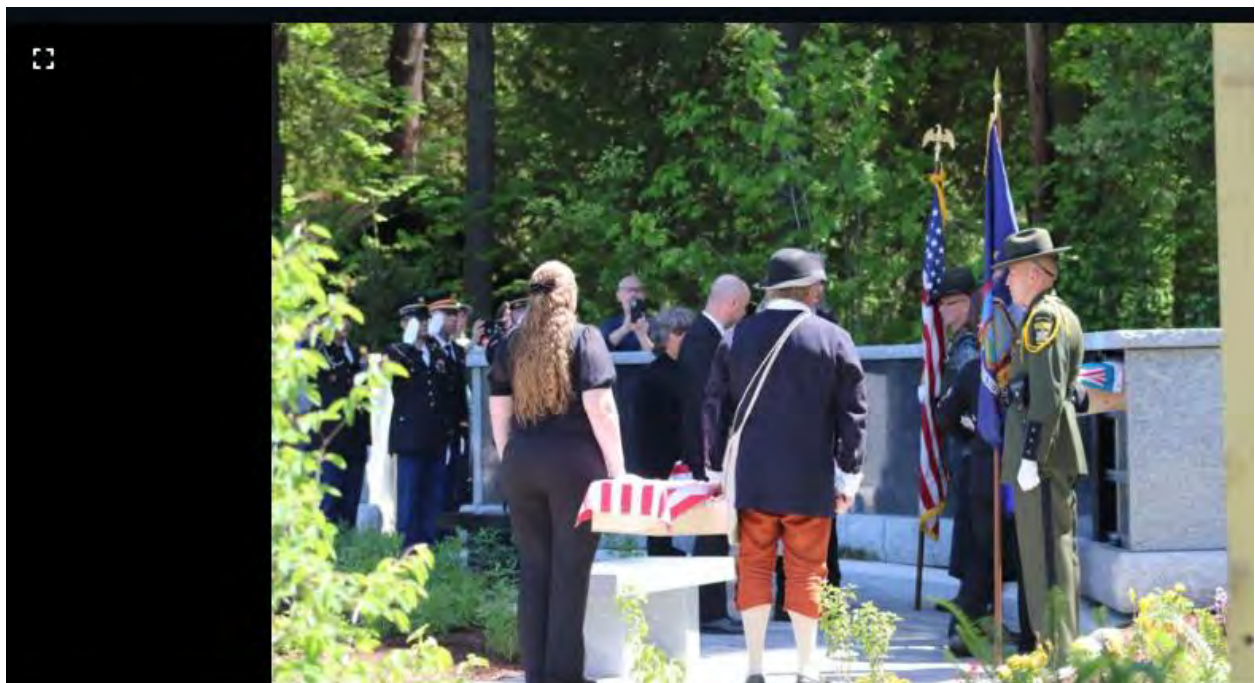
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Hundreds honor Revolutionary patriots at Repose of the Fallen ceremony



The remains of 44 Revolutionary War patriots were laid to rest in Lake George on May 22.
Alex Portal

By Luke Mosseau

LAKE GEORGE — In celebration of Memorial Day, hundreds of dignitaries, local and state government officials, and community members honored the remains of 44 fallen Revolutionary War-era patriots who were reinterred in the new Repose of the Fallen memorial on Friday.

The dedication was hosted by the town of Lake George, the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

“In early February 2019, the remains of 44 patriots were discovered quietly resting beneath the ground in a nation that had long since moved on without them. As we prepare to celebrate 250 years of this American adventure, we gather here today to lay them to rest with the dignity they were never given,” Lake George Town Supervisor Vincent Crocitto said.



Lake George Town Supervisor Vinnie Crocitto.

The February 2019 discovery of human remains was made during the excavation of a construction site on Courtland Street in Lake George. For two years that followed, over a hundred volunteers spent hours unearthing and recovering the remains for examination. Staff at the New York State Museum then analyzed and catalogued the remains, where the work's findings established that the deceased were from a cemetery for those who contracted smallpox.

During the summer of 1776, Fort George at the southern end of Lake George was converted into a smallpox hospital to separate the afflicted from the rest of the Continental Army stationed at Fort Ticonderoga at the lake's northern tip. Thousands of people died at the site and were buried in makeshift cemeteries, in some cases stacked on top of one another.

“We know very little about these patriots. We do not know where they came from. We do not know the families they left behind, but we know they were here at the beginning, and we know they were part of a struggle that would lead to our nation, and we know they were never properly laid to rest,” Supervisor Crocitto said. “We gather here today to finish that task, not out of obligation and not for recognition, but because there are certain things that people owe to those who came before them, and that the values that these patriots stood for are not just part of history, but are alive today in the actions we take.”

Most of the discovered remains are of young men in their teens and early 20s; however, one set of remains seems to be that of a female, who was likely a nurse at the hospital.

"They were the graves of at least 44 individuals. Many were young men who were probably setting out for the first time. They did not bear the signs of the hardship we know they endured, possibly

because their time in service was too brief to leave a trace," said Lisa Anderson, New York State Museum archeologist.

Before the dedication ceremony, there were several opportunities to commemorate the fallen patriots throughout the village. Beginning at 9 a.m., a horse-drawn caisson transported the four caskets holding the remains from Sacred Heart Church on Mohican Street to the corner of Betty Little Boulevard and Beach Road. Then at 10 a.m., Revolutionary War living historians and re-enactors carried the caskets from the caisson to the Father Issac Jogues statue in Lake George Battlefield Park before the remains reached their final resting place at the memorial site.



A pallbearer says a touching farewell to a 250-year-old soldier who likely died only a few yards from where he and the remains of 43 other Revolutionary War patriots will finally be laid to rest.

Tucked up on the hill along Fort George Road, the Repose of the Fallen memorial consists of a walking path that guides visitors through a series of historical informative signage with an interactive kiosk, a seating area surrounding a flag pole, a center-placed memorial obelisk, and the columbaria where the remains are now laid to rest. During the ceremonial reinterment, Amy Baker performed "Taps" while the remains were stacked in their final resting place within the columbaria. New York Army National Guard Chaplain Maj. Robert Volk and local clergy also recited prayers and remembrance.

"This site is the first of its kind in New York State, and one that will both continue the legacy of historic preservation in Lake George and leave a lasting impression on those who will walk this land many years after us," said Dan Barusch, Lake George planning and zoning director. Through the

many years of planning and development stages, Barusch has been one of the most important figures in bringing Repose of the Fallen to fruition.

"This plaza will stand the test of time, allowing the souls of these faithful departed to rest in peace," Barusch said.

John DiNuzzo, president of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance, thanked U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer, saying that Schumer helped to "define the way forward in terms of bringing this beautiful plaza to reality from the idea. We knew what we wanted to do very early on in terms of bringing a suitable place to honor these early American heroes — we didn't know exactly how we were going to do it. Senator Schumer recommended a number of steps, including this in the Downtown Revitalization Initiative."

Nearly \$520,000 was obtained through the NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative, with thousands more from local fundraising efforts for the plaza.

"The DRI emphasizes projects that have generated community buy-in with extensive outreach and engagement. You need only look out at the incredible crowd here today, and the dignitaries that are here to affirm the overwhelming support, enthusiasm, and pride for this project," New York Deputy Secretary of State Kisha Santiago said. "DRI funds projects that reflect the values, vision, and heritage of the community. The Lake George community chose this project precisely because it reflects such deep and personal sentiments and community-rooted historical patriotism."

"To realize this vision is a true testament to the devotion, perseverance, and passion behind this project, and the results are immeasurable, because these patriots can finally rest in peace back home where they belong," Deputy Secretary of State Kisha Santiago continued.

DiNuzzo added that these 44 patriots will be "joining a hallowed ground with a whole array of other people who have been part of the story of Lake George, and while we recognize these individuals today who were victims of smallpox in 1776, in the future we'll be honoring them, along with the others, many unknown, many unmarked on these same grounds."

"DEC is especially proud to partner with communities across the state on America 250 as part of our longstanding respect for our shared history and historic preservation on state lands," said NYS DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton. "It's an honor to be here today to recognize and commemorate those who paid the ultimate sacrifice 250 years ago, as our nation was taking its first steps toward independence."



New York Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner, Amanda Lefton.

"Today's reinterment remind us of the critical role the Queen of American Lakes and many other Adirondack sites played in the formation of founding our nation," Lefton continued. "The Repose of the Fallen ensures that the 44 patriots who lost their lives in 1776 will not be forgotten, their memory will live on, their story will be told."

The small smallpox epidemic of 1776 claimed over 300 lives in Lake George in a single five-week span, according to historical estimates.

"By the summer of 1776, an estimated 3,000 soldiers were being quarantined right here, and it's a sad truth, but historians will tell you that it was more dangerous to be in a place like this one than on the front lines," Lefton said. "For those of us living with today's modern conveniences and medical advancements, it's difficult to imagine the conditions of an 18th century military camp, let alone a field hospital treating thousands of smallpox patients, and yet understanding our own history, accepting it, and the importance of confronting freedom and oppression is now more important than ever."

Many speaking officials thanked the late-Charles "Chuck" Vandrei, who passed away in 2023 and whose work as a historic preservation officer and archeologist at DEC played an instrumental role in the Courtland Street recovery efforts.

"(Chuck's) deep interest in American military history supported his work right here at Lake George. Outside of his role at DEC, Chuck participated in historical reenactment of both the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars for decades," Lefton said. "When the Courtland Street recovery and discovery occurred, Chuck was interested both personally and professionally, and he jumped into action, and he co-led much of the effort that we're celebrating here today with the New York State Museum archeologist Lisa Anderson to appropriately recover remains and develop a respectful plan for the reinterment, navigating countless obstacles with determination and professionalism."

"I'd also like to thank my colleagues of New York State Museum, who have helped in more ways than can be counted, especially Julie Weatherwax and Alexandra DeCarlo, who have done the monumental job of meticulously identifying thousands of fragments of bone and carefully preparing them for today's reinterment. They did the impossible job of reconstructing three individuals out of a mountain of commingled remains," Anderson explained.

Lake George Village Mayor Ray Perry concluded, "It is an honor and a privilege to serve as mayor to a village and to a community that has so much history. Every day I walk the same streets that many great men and women walked, and that, God willing, many more great men and women will walk in the essence of the American experiment. What is equally important is respecting and acknowledging our history. We as a community know the importance of respecting our history as today's event shows."

"We gather here today, not only to celebrate the culmination of a seven-years-long effort, but to honor these patriots for their sacrifices, to finally lay them to rest in the proper way, and to bless the ground on which they will permanently repose," Barusch said.



John DiNuzzo addresses the reinterment ceremony crowd of hundreds.



f Lake George Director of Planning and Zoning, Dan Barusch.



3attlefield Park Alliance President. John DiNuzzo.



ge Mayor, Ray Perry.



Deputy Secretary of State Kisha Santiago.



m Archaeologist, Lisa Anderson.



Historic military vehicles parked outside of the New York State Museum as 44 boxes containing the remains of Revolutionary War-era patriots are loaded for the start of the journey to their final resting place in Lake George on May 20.