

The Lake George Examiner

Repose of the Fallen Memorial dedicated at reinterment ceremony

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by Gillian Burdett



“In early February 2019, the remains of 44 patriots were discovered quietly resting beneath the ground in a nation that has 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.”

These opening remarks were made by Lake George Town Supervisor Vincent Crocitto Jr. at the Repose of the Fallen Dedication and Reinterment Ceremony held Friday, May 22, in Lake George. Several hundred gathered at the memorial to honor and witness the respectful reinterment of the Revolutionary War patriots whose final breaths were taken at what is now Lake George Battlefield Park.

“We know very little about these patriots,” Crocitto continued. “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. So, we gather here today to finish that task, not out of obligation and not for recognition, but because there are certain things a people owe to those who came before them.”



Lake George Town Supervisor Vincent Crocitto, Jr. speaks at the Repose of the Fallen Dedication ceremony.

The remains were discovered in 2019 at a construction site on Courtland Street in Lake George Village when excavators uncovered an unmarked cemetery. For more than a year, volunteers sifted through the soil to recover the fragments of human remains, which were severely damaged during the excavation work.

They were sent to the New York State Museum in Albany to be analyzed. Archaeologists determined the remains were those of Continental Army soldiers and their followers who were patients at the 1776 smallpox hospital at Fort George at the head of Lake George.

New York State Museum Archaeologist Lisa Anderson says the remains belonged to at least 44 individuals.

They survived battle, exposure, and starvation, only to fall victim to the most feared enemy, disease. This place where we stand was hallowed ground then as it is now. A place where thousands of soldiers, stricken with smallpox and other diseases, were sent in the summer of 1776. They were housed right here, in every available space from barracks and storehouses to sheds and other hastily built structures. The situation was dire, as a small staff struggled to provide care with no medicine, no bandages, and no cure. Many did not survive.

Those who died were carried to a nearby hillside to be buried in a beautiful sandy spot looking out over the lake ... They were buried with as much care as time allowed, for there were many. Some were given coffins, most were not, but that did not diminish the honor that each was due.

Over time, their burial place was forgotten until construction seven years ago exposed part of a larger burial ground extending over much of that hillside. We now know, as you've heard, that 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.

Among them was a woman and a child, possibly from families traveling with the soldiers. A woman's role during the war was crucial, providing support and care, even serving as nurses here at Fort George in that summer. We are grateful to be giving them the honors they deserve. — Lisa Anderson

On Wednesday, May 20, the remains, which had been placed in 40 small pine caskets, were transported from Albany back to Lake George for reinterment in a [procession](#) led by New York State Police and escorted by the New York Patriot Guard Riders. Thirty-six caskets were interred at the Repose of the Fallen Memorial at that time. The remaining four were taken to a local church, where they remained under guard until Friday morning.

Friday morning, a horse-drawn caisson transported the four caskets from the church through the Village of Lake George, ending at the southwest corner of Battlefield Park. Three of the caskets were draped with the Grand Union flag, the flag representing the United Colonies at the time. The fourth casket was covered with the flag of the 1st Pennsylvania Battalion. A 1st Pennsylvania uniform button was found with this set of remains.

In a solemn procession, reenactors served as pallbearers, carrying the caskets through Battlefield Park to the Repose of the Fallen Memorial on Fort George Road.



Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President and member of the Courtland Street Reinterment Committee, John DiNuzzo, said they knew soon after the remains were discovered that they needed a suitable place to reinter the remains. He credits New York Senator Charles Schumer with pointing the way forward. With the Senator's support and suggestions, the Reinterment Committee was able to secure the funding and permissions needed to construct the Repose of the Fallen Memorial.

Speaking of the fallen soldiers honored at the day's ceremony, DiNuzzo said, "They join — as many of you know — there's a memorial over to my right here to four unknown soldiers who died in the Battle of Lake George in 1755. And there are hundreds of other remains likely in this park, men mostly, who died in battle during the Battle of Lake George in 1755, during the siege of Fort William Henry in the aftermath that was documented by James Fenimore Cooper in 'The Last of the Mohicans'."

Historians estimate that a thousand patients in the smallpox hospital died on these grounds in 1776, DiNuzzo said, and at least 30 American soldiers were killed in the last Lake George battle in 1780. “So, they’re joining a hallowed ground with a whole array of other people who have been part of the story of Lake George.”



John DiNuzzo, Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance President

“The repose of the fallen memorial ensures that the 44 patriots who lost their lives in 1776 at the Continental Army’s Smallpox Hospital will not be forgotten,” said New York DEC Commissioner Amada Lefton. “Their memory will live on. Their story will be told.” Lefton says that to protect our freedom, it is important to understand and accept our history.

Lefton also spoke about the contributions of DEC Historic Preservation Officer Charles Vandrei, who passed away before the project was completed. “As part of the Cortland Street Reinterment Committee and working with members of the Town and Village of Lake George and the Lake George Battlefield Alliance, he helped lead the effort to identify a reinterment site within the Battlefield Park and prepare a unit management plan amendment to make this memorial reality. If Chuck had not supported and championed the effort to establish the Cortland Street Reinterment site in the Battlefield Park, it simply would not have happened.”



Amanda Lefton, New York Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner

New York Deputy Secretary of State Kisha Santiago also spoke at the ceremony. A large portion of the funding for the Repose of the Fallen came from a state [Downtown Revitalization Initiative](#) grant. “Too often, the economic generation of a project can overshadow community development and community connection, and the critical role of a community’s heart is how it plays in its survival,” Santiago said. “Because the DRI is not solely about job creation or units of housing created, we fund a selection of projects that support one another and the community at large in their revitalization ...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 behind this project.”

Following prayers offered by Father Bush from Sacred Heart Church, Reverend Allie Trowbridge from the Caldwell Presbyterian Church, Reverend Laura Miller from St. James Episcopal Church, and New York Army National Guard Chaplain Major Robert Volk, the caskets were placed in their final resting spaces while Taps played. Members of the Empire State Society Sons of the American Revolution placed wreaths before the granite columbaria where the patriots were interred.

“As the speakers before me have reminded you of the great saying, those who don’t remember history are doomed to repeat it,” said Village of Lake George Mayor Ray Perry, “But what is equally important is respecting and acknowledging our history. We as a community know the importance of respecting our history, as today’s events show.”





Ray Perry, Village of Lake George Mayor



Kisha Santiago, New York Deputy Secretary of State

