

LAKE GEORGE MIRROR.

"THE QUEEN OF AMERICAN LAKES"

LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK, May 22, 2026

Who Will be Reinterred in the Repose of the Fallen?

Without the New York State Museum's bioarchaeologists, we might never know



A: Earlier this month, the NYS Museum unveiled a facial reconstruction of a Revolutionary War soldier whose remains were recovered from the Courtland Street Burying Ground in Lake George, N.Y. Created by forensic artist Jenny Kenyon, the reconstruction depicts a young soldier believed to have been in his teens, offering a powerful new glimpse into the lives of the individuals who died while serving during America's fight for independence. B: New York State Museum Bioarchaeologists, Alexandra DeCarlo and Julie Weatherwax preparing for the May 22 reinterment of the remains in the Repose of the Fallen in Battlefield Park. C: New York State Museum Bioarchaeologist, Julie Weatherwax sorting hundreds of teeth to reconstruct the dentition of over 40 individuals. Photos courtesy NYS Museum.



By Mirror Staff

What began in 2019 as a routine construction project in Lake George evolved into one of the most significant bioarchaeological investigations of the Revolutionary War era in New York State. During excavation work on Courtland Street, workers uncovered human remains from an unmarked cemetery. Archaeologists at first believed the graves dated to the mid-18th century French and Indian War, long associated with the military history of the Lake George region. But a single artifact — a regimental button from the First Pennsylvania Battalion — dramatically changed the story. The cemetery instead appeared linked to the disastrous 1775–1776 American invasion of Canada during the Revolutionary War and to the military hospital established at Fort George in the summer of 1776.

The discovery launched a years-long effort by the New York State Museum and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to reconstruct the lives, identities, and deaths of the people buried there nearly 250 years ago. Led by museum curator of bioarchaeology Lisa Anderson, the late DEC archaeologist Charles Vandreli and bioarchaeologists Julie Weatherwax and Alexandra DeCarlo, the project became both a scientific investigation and an act of historical recovery.

The work began under difficult circumstances. Construction activity had already destroyed many of the graves before archaeologists arrived. Only eleven burials could be examined intact during the emergency excavation, conducted in frozen winter ground. Anderson later described how investigators “literally had to tunnel into these grave shafts” because the soil surface was frozen solid. Nearby sat a massive spoil pile of displaced earth — essentially a house-sized mound of soil containing shattered human

remains, coffin fragments, buttons, nails, and other artifacts from disturbed graves.

Over the next fifteen months, museum staff and volunteers painstakingly screened the spoil heap by hand. The process resembled assembling an enormous human puzzle. Individual teeth, hand bones, leg bones, and coffin fragments had to be sorted and matched in an attempt to reconstruct as many people as possible. None of the bodies remained intact. Yet through bioarchaeological analysis — the scientific study of human remains in archaeological context — researchers gradually identified evidence for at least 44 individuals whose graves had been destroyed.

The remains revealed the grim realities of the Continental Army’s northern campaign. Many of the dead were teenagers or very young men, some likely as young as sixteen, reflecting the youth of many soldiers who enlisted during the Revolution. Researchers also identified the remains of two children, believed to have been connected to camp families traveling with the army. The fragmented bones further suggested the possible presence of women, Indigenous individuals, and enslaved people, though the condition of the remains often prevented definitive identification.

Bioarchaeology has been central to understanding not only who these individuals were, but how they died. Examination of skeletal development and dental

eruption allowed researchers to estimate ages; one jawbone belonged to a teenager whose molars had not yet fully emerged. Military artifacts connected the cemetery to soldiers retreating south from the failed Quebec campaign. Historical records from Pennsylvania, including muster rolls, journals, and orderly books, helped correlate the burials with documented troop movements through Fort George.

The evidence also pointed

strongly toward disease rather than combat as the cause of death. Researchers concluded that many of the soldiers likely died in the summer of 1776 at the Fort George General Hospital after contracting smallpox or related illnesses during the Canadian campaign. Thousands of sick and wounded soldiers had been transported south from Crown Point and Fort Ticonderoga to Lake George, where medical treatment was primitive and epidemics spread rapidly through crowded camps and hospitals. Bioarchaeological evidence, combined with historical documentation of the smallpox outbreak that devastated the Continental Army during the Quebec expedition, has allowed researchers to reconstruct the broader medical catastrophe behind the cemetery.

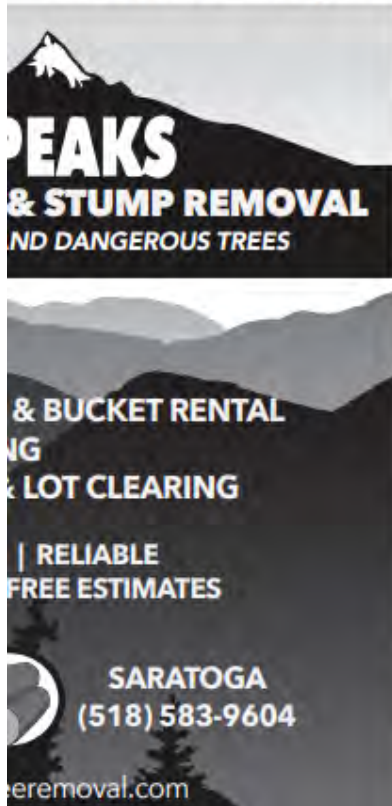
As the scientific investigation progressed, the project increasingly emphasized restoring the humanity of the dead. Anderson repeatedly stressed that the goal was not simply to catalog bones, but to “learn something about them from their remains.” That effort reached a powerful milestone in 2026 when the museum unveiled a facial reconstruction of one of the soldiers, created by forensic artist Jenny Kenyon using 3D-printed scans of a skull

from page 4

produced in collaboration with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The reconstruction depicted a teenage soldier whose face had

been lost to history for nearly two and a half centuries, transforming fragmented remains into the image of a recognizable young person.

The Courtland Street project



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has also reshaped public understanding of Lake George's role in the Revolutionary War. While the region is often remembered for the French and Indian War, the cemetery revealed another chapter: a humanitarian crisis created by disease, retreat, and military collapse

during the Revolution. The investigation further highlighted the vulnerability of unmarked historic burial grounds and contributed to calls for stronger preservation laws in New York State.

The final phase of the effort has focused on dignity and

remembrance. Following years of consultation among local, state, and federal officials — supported in part by the office of Charles Schumer — plans were developed to reinter the remains at Lake George Battlefield Park. A consecration ceremony for the burial ground was held in June 2024, and a formal public reinterment ceremony is scheduled for May 22, 2026.

For Anderson and her colleagues, the work remains unfinished. Each recovered fragment contributes another piece to the story of soldiers and camp followers whose suffering had largely vanished from the historical record. Through bioarchaeology, forensic reconstruction, and archival research, the dead of Fort George are no longer anonymous casualties buried beneath modern development. Instead, they are emerging once again as individuals — young soldiers, children, and camp followers caught in the hardships of war, disease, and revolution nearly 250 years ago.