

1880 - 2026

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LAKE GEORGE MIRROR



May 29, 2026

DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE QUEEN OF AMERICAN LAKES

Established 1880

WE HONOR THE SOLDIERS OF 1776



A casket draped with the flags of the Continental Congress and the First Pennsylvania Battalion was among those reinterred in the Repose of the Fallen on May 22. See page 5.

IN A MOVING CEREMONY, REMAINS UNCOVERED AT A CONSTRUCTION SITE ARE FINALLY LAID TO REST IN A NEW MEMORIAL PLAZA



A: Reenactors who participated in the ceremony observe from the plaza's perimeter. B: The convoy that brought the remains from Albany to Lake George rolls through Glens Falls. Photo by Paul Post. C: Volunteers transfer caskets from the convoy to the columbarium in the memorial plaza. D: Honoring those being returned to a final resting place near the Revolutionary War hospital where they died. Fred McKinney contributed photographs.

AT LONG LAST, HONOR FOR THOSE LYING IN THE FORGOTTEN GRAVES OF LG

By Mirror Staff

On May 22, a seven-year effort to recover, identify and reinter the remains of 44 people who died from smallpox and other diseases at the Fort George Military Hospital in 1776 – the largest in the 13 colonies at the time – was brought to a dignified but heartfelt conclusion.

The historic, one-hour ceremony on Friday morning featured speeches, prayers and a procession that carried the remains of those who had yet to be reinterred in Battlefield Park to their final resting place.

Friday's ceremony – which also served as the dedication of the park's new, \$700,000 memorial plaza – was the culmination of months of planning but three days of frenetic activity, beginning on Wednesday, May 20, when the remains of those whose graves were destroyed at a construction site in Lake George Village in 2019 were transported from the

State Museum in Albany.

44 individual wood caskets containing the remains, identified and preserved at the museum by the state's bioarchaeologists, were transported in three U.S. military vehicles 60 miles along Route 9 from Albany to Lake George – part of a convoy that included the New York State Police, New York members of the Patriot Guard Riders and nine vintage military trucks driven by members of the NY-Penn Military Vehicle Collectors Club.

Among the latter was Mark Pollard's five-ton, Desert Storm-era army truck. The vehicles, doubling as hearses with black flags draped their sideboards, stopped briefly in towns and cities such as Glens Falls and Saratoga Springs along the motorcade's route.

Hundreds of people, including dozens of middle school students, turned out to pay their respects to the deceased when the convoy paused by the Chapman Museum

in downtown Glens Falls to give people an opportunity to speak with drivers.

"It brings tears to your eyes," Pollard told a reporter. "These are our first American heroes."

Pollard, an Altamont resident, belongs to the Hudson-Mohawk Chapter, NY-Penn Military Vehicle Collectors, a non-profit organization that buys, restores and preserves military equipment from World War II to the present day. Many are veterans.

Larry Arnold, a trustee of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance who contacted the

Remains uncovered at a construction site are finally laid to rest

from page 5

Collectors club and solicited its assistance, thanked the club, the Patriot Guard and the New York State Police for assisting with the transportation of the remains.

New York State Police Superintendent Steven G. James was among the state officials commemorating the transfer of the remains.

"We pay our deepest honor and respect as 44 patriots embark to their final resting place, standing as a permanent tribute to their bravery and sacrifice. May we honor their memory with our actions and always be mindful of the heroes that walk among us," he said.

Once in Lake George, the motorcade turned north onto Elizabeth O'Connor Little Boulevard, then drove east on Beach Road before turning onto Fort George Road and stopping at the memorial site.

As 40 caskets were placed in the columbarium, the Rev. Joseph Busch of Lake George's Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, offered a brief prayer: "We earnestly ask you to look upon this sacred space now and bless us as we commit to the earth those who fought so hard for our freedom. May we never take for granted the peace their service has bestowed upon us, nor the

freedom it has secured."

Commented Lisa Anderson, New York State Museum Curator of Bioarcheology, "We have spent the past seven years painstakingly working to piece together the story of these individuals. As we close this chapter, it's hard to put into words the gratitude my team and I have for being part of this project. It has been a privilege to help uncover the story of these veterans and we look forward to them finally having the dignified burial they deserve."

The remaining four caskets – one of which held the remains of a soldier from the Continental Army's First Pennsylvania Battalion, who was identified with the help of a button from a uniform in which he was buried – were taken to the Sacred Heart church, where volunteers served as round-the-clock honor sentinels.

The following morning, those caskets were placed upon a horse-drawn wagon and transported to the memorial site, passing, among other places, the Lake George Jr.-Sr High School.

Students lined Canada Street, dressed in red, white, and blue, waving American flags as the funeral procession passed by.

Lake George Band teacher Alex Miller and members of the Lake George band performed the "Star-Spangled Banner" followed by "Taps" as the procession

moved past the school.

"History isn't something distant for our students, it happened right here," said Principal Fran Cocozza, who served on the Reinterment Committee and is Vice President of the Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance. "Watching this procession pass our school reminded us that the freedoms we enjoy today were fought for by young patriots on this very land more than 250 years ago. It was an unforgettable moment of reflection, respect, and connection to our community's history."

State and local officials, along with hundreds of local residents, attended the May 22 ceremony.

"It is incredibly moving that after 250 years, we can recognize the sacrifice of these brave souls who helped forge the republic we cherish today, under the very nation they helped create," said Assemblyman Matt Simpson.

Environmental Conservation Commissioner Amanda Lefton, whose department manages Lake George Battlefield Park, said, "As part of our long standing

respect for historic preservation on state lands, 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 towards independence."

Lefton noted that "the small smallpox epidemic of 1776 claimed over 300 lives right here in Lake George, in a single five-week span."

By August of that year, roughly 3,000 patients were being treated at the new hospital, with twenty to thirty dying every day.

The graves destroyed in Lake George Village in February, 2019 are among the hundreds dug for those who died from smallpox and other diseases at the Fort George Military Hospital, where survivors of the colonies' disastrous invasion of Quebec were sent after being repulsed in an assault that left Richard Montgomery dead and Benedict Arnold badly wounded.

Lefton also paid tribute to the late Chuck Vandrei, DEC's Historic Preservation Officer from 1994 until his death in

2024, who helped lead the archaeological study of the construction site in Lake George Village where the Continental army buried their dead.

Lefton credited Vandrei with the Unmarked Burial Site Protection Act, legislation intended to ensure that unmarked graves such as those where Fort George's smallpox victims were buried would never be disturbed by other developers, in other places in New York, in the future.

The legislation, signed into law in 2023, created statewide protections for unmarked graves and human remains discovered during construction or development on private land.

The legislation requires all ground-disturbing activity to stop immediately if human remains or funerary objects are uncovered. Property owners or contractors must notify local law enforcement or a county coroner, who determines whether the remains are more than 50 years old. If they are, the case is referred to the state archaeologist for review.

Photo by Joe Scorsone, New York



Prior to its passage, New York was among only a handful of states without specific protections for unmarked burial grounds, particularly those on privately owned land

“Chuck's work at and the Cortland Street Discovery site contributed to the passage of the Unmarked Burial Protection Act,” said Lefton. “It has already proven to be beneficial in establishing a process and legal penalties for violations requiring anyone who digs up human remains to immediately stop work. This is an incredibly important achievement, which (the discovery of the graves in Lake George) helped make happen.”

Dan Barusch, Lake George's Director of Planning and Zoning who chaired the Cortland Street Reinterment Committee, brought the ceremony to a close by noting that the construction of the memorial plaza honors not only those whose remains were discovered in 2019, but “in remembrance of all those who perished here at Lake George in those colonial wars.”

“This site is the first of its kind in New York State, and it is one that will continue the legacy of historic preservation in Lake George and leave a lasting impression on those who walk this land many years after us. This plaza will stand the test of time,” Barusch concluded.

Paul Post contributed reporting for this story.



Lake George Jr-Sr High School students honor those who died in Lake George in 1776 as the remains are taken by a horse drawn wagon to the new memorial plaza for reinterment.

