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LAKE GEORGE, NEW YORK, July 3, 2026

Lake George Battlefield Alliance Marks 250th Anniversary of Fort George Smallpox Hospital

By Mirror Staff

The Lake George Battlefield Park Alliance will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Continental Army's Fort George smallpox hospital with a public program examining one of the Revolutionary War's deadliest but least remembered chapters.

The free event will begin at 6:30 pm Thursday, July 9, at the Fort William Henry Conference Center. It will feature three presentations and a panel discussion exploring the devastating smallpox epidemic that crippled the Continental Army following its failed invasion of Quebec in 1775-76.

The program coincides with the anniversary of the establishment of the Fort George hospital in July 1776, when Lake George became a central treatment site for soldiers infected with smallpox. Historians estimate that more than 3,000 Continental soldiers were hospitalized there during the summer and early fall of 1776, with between one-quarter and one-third dying from the disease.

Featured speakers include Michael P. Gabriel, a Kutztown University history professor and author of a biography of Maj. Gen. Richard Montgomery, who will discuss the Canadian campaign and the epidemic's impact on the Continental Army. Sam Huntington, manager of Crown Point State Historic Site, will examine how military leaders responded after sick soldiers retreated south to Crown Point following the failed invasion of Canada.

Retired infectious disease specialist Dr. Richard Leach will explain the nature of smallpox, the challenges physicians faced at Fort George and how the outbreak influenced Gen. George Washington's decision to order the inoculation of Continental troops during the winter of 1777, a move widely regarded as a turning point in preserving the army's fighting strength.

According to John DiNuzzo, the Battlefield Park Alliance's president, the 2019 discovery of the hospital's burial grounds nearly a mile from Fort George underscores the hospital's scale. That suggests the medical complex extended well beyond the present-day Battlefield Park.

Admission is free, although organizers request advance registration by emailing info@lakegeorgebattlefield.org with the number of people attending to help ensure adequate seating. Michael Gabriel will also sign copies of his biography of Montgomery following the program.