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David R. Starbuck

Fort William Henry was a British frontier fort constructed on the orders of Sir William Johnson in September of 1755 at the southern end of Lake George in upstate New York. After its destruction by a French army under the leadership of the Marquis de Montcalm in August of 1757, at which time many of its defenders were "massacred," the outline of the fort lay exposed until 1952 when archaeological excavations began to expose the charred ruins of the fort. Regrettably, while this was one of the largest excavations ever conducted on a site of the French and Indian War, the project was published on only in the popular media. In 1992, however, a new movie version of The Last of the Mohicans *was released by Twentieth Century Fox, describing some of the events that took place at this fort, and in 1993 there was a reanalysis and reburial of soldiers' skeletons that were first excavated at the fort in the 1950s. Given the fresh attention directed to this site and to the events that occurred there in the 1750s, it is now quite timely—forty years after the excavation—to present some of the results of a very old project.*

Le fort William-Henry est un ouvrage fortifié britannique construit sous les ordres de Sir William Johnson en septembre 1755 à l'extrémité sud du lac George dans le nord de l'état de New York. Suite à sa destruction par l'armée française du Marquis de Montcalm en août 1757, un affrontement au cours duquel plusieurs de ses défenseurs furent "massacrés," seuls les contours du fort sont demeurés visibles, jusqu'à ce que les premières fouilles, réalisées en 1952, amorcent la mise au jour de ses vestiges calcinés. Malheureusement, même s'il s'agissait d'une des plus importantes fouilles menées sur un site de la guerre de Sept Ans, peu de ses résultats ont été publiés. En 1992, cependant, la nouvelle version du film "Le dernier des Mohicans" de Twentieth Century Fox, qui présente certains événements qui ont eu lieu au fort, a occasionné un regain d'intérêt pour son histoire. C'est ainsi qu'on a procédé en 1993 à une nouvelle analyse et à la réinhumation des squelettes des soldats dont les restes avaient été excavés dans les années cinquante. Étant donné l'intérêt renouvelé pour ce site et pour les événements des années 1750, il convient—quarante ans après la fouille—de présenter les résultats de ce très ancien projet.

Historical Background

On August 10, 1757, a frontier fort at the southern tip of Lake George was the scene of one of the most famous and brutal massacres in early American history (see FIG. 1). The British and Provincial garrison of Fort William Henry, under the leadership of Lt. Colonel George Monro, had just surrendered to a force of at least 10,000 French Regulars, Canadians, and Indians under the Marquis de Montcalm. Escorted by no more than a few hundred French Regulars, the British and Provincial prisoners started the 16-mile march toward safety, the nearby site of Fort Edward. While on the military road, south of Lake George, they were suddenly attacked, and many were scalped and killed by Indians who literally tore the uniforms off the backs of the terrified soldiers. Few dared to defend themselves from the assault as Indians hacked them with tomahawks, took scalps, and dragged prisoners away.

These horrific events inspired one of the first great American novels, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, originally published in 1826. This epic has been acted out many times in films, and the story has had such a lasting impact because the slaughter at Fort William Henry was unquestionably one of the most controversial events of the French and Indian War and one of the most ruthless mas-
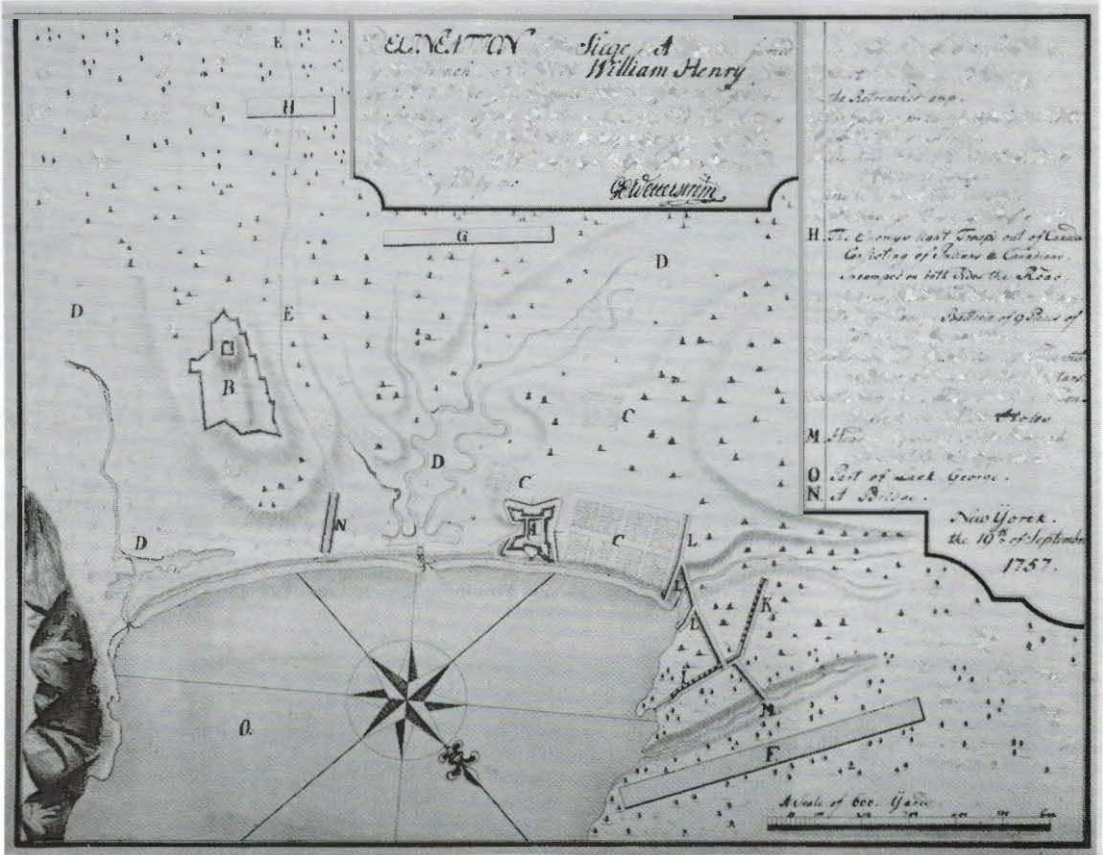
1. "DELINEATION of the Siege & Attack, formed by the French on the Fort William Henry, from the 3the till the
August 1757. after a Vigorous Resistance of the Fort as Retrenched   thy was obliged to Yield to the
Superior force of the Enemy. Laid down by Mr George Demelaer, and   by me GC Wetterstrom." The legend
lists: "A. Fort William Henry. B. the Retrenched Camp. C. The Gardens for the Garrison and the Fort. D.
Inondation or Swamp. E. The Road between Fort Edward & William Henry. F. The French In Campement. G. The
Enemys Corps of Observation. H. The   out of Canada Consisting of Indians & Canadians,
Incamped on both Sides the Road, between   William Henry. I. The First Enemys Batterie of 9 Pieces
of Canons & Two Mortars. K. The Second Batterie   with 10. Pieces of Cannon & two Mortars. L.
Batteries ready till the Embrasurs or Shot Holes. M.   or Opening of the French Trenchee & Approaches. O.
Part of Lack. George. N. A Bridge. New Yorek. the 19th of Septembr. 1757." (Courtesy of J. Robert Maguire.)
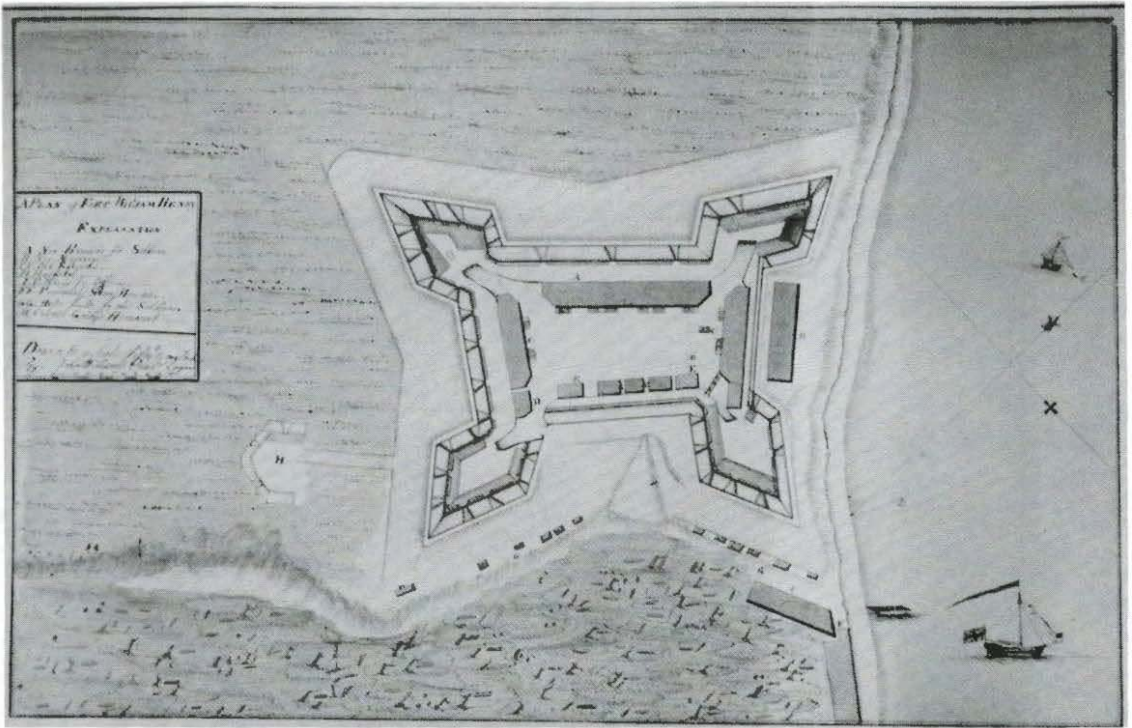
Figure 2. "A Plan of Fort William Henry. EXPLANATION A. New Barracks for Soldiers. B. New Magazine. CC. Old Barracks. D. Hospital. EE. Sheds for Officers. FF. Provincial Store Houses. GG. Huts built by the Soldiers." H. the ravelin. (Courtesy of J. Robert Maguire.)
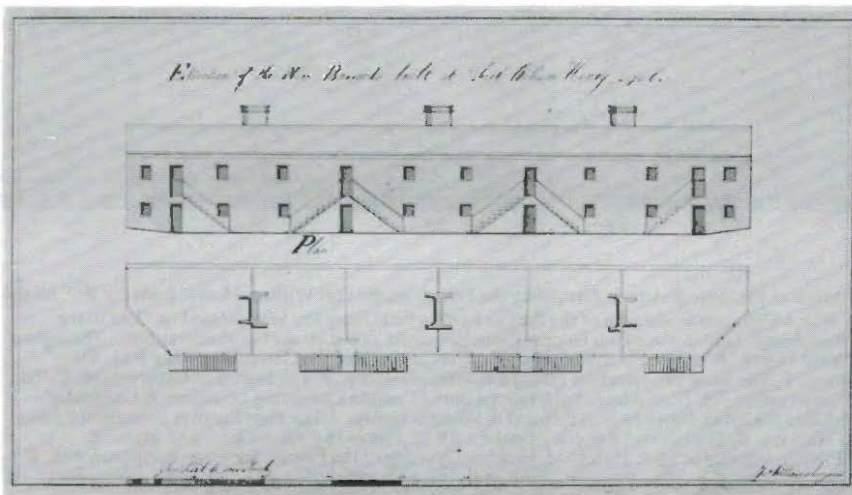

Figure 3. "Elivation of the New Barracks built at Fort William Henry. 1756." (Courtesy of J. Robert Maguire.)

sacres in 18th-century America.

These events, and those that led up to this slaughter, are superbly described in the book *Betrayals* by Ian Steele (1990), who has demonstrated how the massacre was the unfortunate outcome of a series of betrayals: Colonel Monro felt betrayed by his commanding general, Daniel Webb, who held 5,000 soldiers in reserve in Fort Edward and did not send them to relieve Fort William Henry; the British felt betrayed by Montcalm and the French because their surrender and "safe conduct" to Fort Edward had been violated; the French felt betrayed by the Indians who had slaughtered the defenseless British and provincial prisoners; and the Indians felt betrayed by the French because they did not receive their proper share of the booty after the surrender of the fort. (Many of these events have also been described in Cuneo 1988, Todish 1988, Gifford 1955, and Kochan 1993.)

While "Hawkeye" and many of the other characters in Cooper's novel were entirely fictional, the setting of the action in *The Last of the Mohicans* was the northernmost British outpost in the interior of colonial America. Fort William Henry, named in honor of the son of King George III, had been constructed by the engineer William Eyre on the orders of Sir William Johnson, the prominent major-general and King's agent from the Mohawk Valley. Built immediately after the "Battle of Lake George" in September of 1755, the fort was positioned so as to block the advance of French forces from Canada. Even more important, it needed to withstand any attack from the French garrison at Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga), just 35 miles to the north.

For the French, though, Fort William Henry was a British intrusion into the lake and drainage basin that Samuel de Champlain had first claimed for the king of France, named by the Jesuit Isaac Jogues "Lac St. Sacrement" in 1642. Lake George thus became a disputed waterway between two great empires, and this small picketed fort with 30-foot-thick walls of pine logs and earth—with beach sand packed in between the cribbing—was virtually the front line of British defenses (FIG. 2).

Sporadic raids between the two colonial powers exploded into war in August of 1757 when the Marquis de Montcalm and an army of French and Indians variously estimated be-

tween 10,000 and 14,000 laid siege to the British fort and its garrison of about 2,300 men. The end came swiftly, but the terms of capitulation were generous: the British and the Americans were allowed to leave under French escort, having promised not to fight against the French for the next 18 months.

Their heroic defense of the fort had lasted just six days, and constant bombardment by French artillery had pounded the log fort into submission. But after the surrender, some of the 1,600 Indians attached to Montcalm's army—from 33 different tribes (see Steele 1990: 111)—entered the fort on August 9, and as they searched for booty they killed, scalped, and—in at least one case—beheaded some of the sick and wounded soldiers who had remained inside the casemate rooms. This was described in detail by a young French Jesuit eyewitness, Père Pierre Roubaud (as cited in Gifford 1955: 48; see also Thwaites 1896–1901, Vol. 70: 179):

> I saw one of these barbarians come forth out of the casements, which nothing but the most insatiate avidity for blood would induce him to enter, for the infected atmosphere which exhaled from it was insupportable, carrying in his hand a human head, from which streams of blood were flowing, and which he paraded as the most valuable prize he had been able to sieze.

Events further deteriorated when Indians dug up some of the bodies in the British military cemetery and began scalping the corpses, many of whom had died from smallpox. One of the smallpox victims who was scalped was Richard Rogers, brother of the famed ranger Robert Rogers. Some of the Indians contracted smallpox, which they carried to their villages in Canada. Thousands of Native people subsequently died from an epidemic of smallpox (see Steele 1990).

On August 10, Indian allies of the French, feeling disappointed with the few scalps they had collected, attacked the retreating British and provincial column, killing and scalping men, women, and children while the French seemingly did little to protect the prisoners. This is portrayed with horrible effectiveness in *The Last of the Mohicans*, even though—unlike the movie—there was no "Magua" (the Huron warrior who led the attack), nor did Colonel Monro die in the massacre. Rather, Monro and his fellow British officers were prisoners in the French camp at the time of the massacre, and

Monro died about a year later in Albany, New York. The soldiers' families, camp followers, blacks, mulattoes, and even Indians who had fought on the British side were attacked and killed or dragged away to the enemy camp. Steele has estimated (1990: 143–144) that no more than 185 soldiers and civilians were actually killed in the massacre, but the terrified survivors clearly believed that the number of those slaughtered had been far greater; even 94 years later, Benson Lossing was to claim that "Fifteen hundred of them were butchered or carried into hopeless captivity" (1851, Vol. I: 111). Many prisoners were carried into captivity in Canada, where some were adopted into Indian tribes, some were sold into slavery, and others were eventually ransomed and returned home.

The atrocities had been unusually brutal, even for a period when *all* sides—British, French, and Native Americans—practiced scalping and slaughtered innocent civilians. It was a blemish upon Montcalm's reputation that captives under his protection had been murdered. So, after removing the cannons and stores from Fort William Henry, he burned it to the ground on August 11th and 12th and had his men level the charred timbers with picks and shovels. Some historical sources claim that the bodies of the massacre victims were immolated on a great funeral pyre atop the remains of the razed fort, but this has never been proven. And so Montcalm's army returned to Fort Carillon, and Fort William Henry vanished just two years after it had been constructed, a victim of the French and Indian army who had claimed the region for New France. Later armies camped on this spot (Abercrombie in 1758 and Amherst in 1759); workmen constructed boats here in 1776 and 1777; and even General George Washington tethered his horse on the site of the ruin in August of 1783, noting that "There is a lot of history under this ground" (cited in Magee 1965: 6).

After the French and Indian War (1754–1763) ended, the battle at Fort William Henry would probably have been forgotten had it not been immortalized in Cooper's adventure classic. The novel and movie adaptations have shaped our thinking about the incident, which has become one of the most powerful images of early American warfare. Enough time has passed, however, that few people living today realize how significant the massacre at Fort

William Henry was in shaping British and American attitudes toward Native Americans. Contemporary accounts of the brutality were especially horrific, as evidenced in the following eyewitness description by Major Israel Putnam (cited in Lossing 1851, Vol. I: 111–112).

> The fort was entirely demolished; the barracks, out-houses, and buildings were a heap of ruins; the cannon, stores, boats, and vessels were all carried away. The fires were still burning, the smoke and stench offensive and suffocating. Innumerable fragments, human skulls and bones, and carcasses half consumed, were still frying and broiling in the decaying fires. Dead bodies, mangled with scalping-knives and tomahawks in all the wantonness of Indian fierceness and barbarity, were everywhere to be seen. More than one hundred women, butchered and shockingly mangled, lay upon the ground, still weltering in their gore. Devastation, barbarity, and horror every where appeared, and the spectacle presented was too diabolical and awful either to be endured or described.

The 1950s Excavations

In the mid-1950s a hotel entitled, appropriately, the "Fort William Henry Hotel" was built atop the former gardens of Fort William Henry (north of the fort; see FIG. 1); and in 1872 the ownership of the fort site was conveyed to the Lake Champlain Transportation Co., which, in turn, became affiliated with the Delaware and Hudson Railroad Company. The D & H built a new hotel on the site of the former hotel in 1911, but the fort itself remained largely undisturbed—except for occasional treasure hunters—until 1952 when a group of local businessmen decided to have it excavated and preserved (Magee 1965). Even Calver and Bolton, who collected artifacts from nearly all of the prominent military sites in New York State, appear not to have dug at Fort William Henry, although they dug at the nearby site of Fort George (Calver and Bolton 1950: 228–230). In fact, by 1952 there had been no competent excavations conducted at any fortress site on Lake George or Lake Champlain. Duncan Campbell's investigations within the French village at Fort Ticonderoga did not occur until 1957 (Campbell 1958), and the first professional work in the Lake George area—a salvage excavation by Lois Feister and Paul Huey at the 1758 site of Fort Gage—did not occur until 1975 (Feister and Huey 1985).

While the fort's ruins had often been vis-

Figure 4. The 1950s excavation, as charred timbers were being exposed. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

ited by guests from the hotels nearby, the outline of the fort was still quite visible in 1952, and the ruins of the fort lay within a grove of tall pines. It was Harold Veeder, an Albany real estate broker, who formed a stock company of investors—the Fort William Henry Corporation—and purchased the ruins. The property had never been built upon, and vague outlines of the dry moat and of diamond-shaped bastions were visible on the surface, along with a few depressions. Historical records had already verified that it was a bastioned fort, the type made popular by Sebastien Le Prestre Vauban, the French designer of forts. It contained barracks for the soldiers and living quarters for civilians (see FIGS. 2, 3). A deep dry moat surrounded the fort on three sides and

a bridge spanned the moat.

After the French had burned the fort in 1757, the log walls caved in, and sand from the earthworks spread over the ruins and buried much of it to a depth of several feet. A few pits were excavated in this sandy promontory in late 1952, and intensive trenching to find the original construction levels was begun in the spring of 1953 and lasted through 1954 (FIG. 4). Stanley Gifford (FIG. 5)—assisted by his wife Ruth—was the senior archaeologist hired by the Fort William Henry Corporation; his experience in working on both prehistoric and historical sites in central and eastern New York went back to the early 1930s. Over the course of his life he held positions at Syracuse University, Fort Ticonderoga, the Onondaga

Figure 5. Stanley Gifford using a modified mine detector to locate metal artifacts. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

Historical Association, the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, and the Museum of the American Indian, before passing away in 1961.

Gifford's research objectives were quite straightforward—to dig as much of the fort as possible before mid-1954, by which time the developers wanted the fort totally rebuilt. In attempting to locate original floor levels, the bases of stone walls, and the boundaries of the fort, he employed dozens of workmen who dumped the dirt from their wheelbarrows into a giant sifting machine. Unfortunately, Gifford's final excavation report cannot now be located, but he wrote a popular-style history of Fort William Henry (Gifford 1955), and a few small field notebooks have survived in storage at the fort. As a result, the excavation can now

be described only through newspaper accounts, photographs, surviving artifacts, and some oral history. In fact, only one archaeologist—Paul Huey—has ever mentioned this project in print (Huey 1986: 4).

Consequently, 40 years later it is impossible to write a thorough site report or to provide quantitative information about the excavated artifacts, many of which have vanished from the fort's collections since the 1950s. However, Fort William Henry is but one of many museum villages and historic site reconstructions where it is now extremely difficult to reconstruct excavation details long after the principal archaeologists have departed or died. Similar efforts to reanalyze old collections have already been made at Plimoth Plantation (Beaudry and

Figure 6. The southwest bastion of the reconstructed fort in the fall of 1993, lying atop the remains of the original 1755–1757 fort. Lake George is in the background on the left.

Figure 7. Excavations at the site of the East Barracks in 1954 revealed, at a depth of about eight feet, what was believed to be remains of the fort's blacksmith shop. The two excavators are viewing some of the artifacts that were exposed here, which included "nine hewing axes, a Rogers Rangers tomahawk, a 24-pound cannon ball, a shovel, heavy iron bar of the type used as cannon axles, a copper lead ladle for bullet making, and several finished pieces of iron work used on the cannon and cannon cartridges" (*Albany Times-Union*, Aug. 29, 1954). Charred logs from the East Barracks are visible in the background. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

George 1987), Colonial Williamsburg (Derry and Brown 1987), and elsewhere, but it often is extremely difficult and frustrating to try to put order into old notes and collections.

In 1953 Gifford's crew proceeded with their work just barely ahead of the loggers and construction workers who were rebuilding the walls, corner bastions, and barracks (FIG. 6). The public was present to view every aspect of the dig, and 60,000 visitors took guided tours of the excavation during the first year. Gifford successfully unearthed the stone- and brick-lined casemate rooms that had been built underneath the East and West Barracks. It was here, below the level of the fort, where women, children, and the sick were sheltered in times of battle. And it was here where the Indians under Montcalm's command had commenced their slaughter of the sick and injured soldiers.

One of Gifford's more interesting discoveries was a layer of black sand which showed where the British Lord Jeffrey Amherst had burned over the surface of the ground and covered it with beach sand in 1759. Fastidious about sanitation, Amherst sterilized the site before he was willing to let his army camp on top of the ruins. Elsewhere, in the northeast corner of the parade ground, Gifford's crew also discovered the original 60-foot-deep well from which the fort drew its water.

The reconstruction of Fort William Henry was completed in 1956, although small archaeological excavations (such as the well) continued until 1960. It was possible to be reasonably accurate in the rebuilding because detailed written descriptions and measurements of the fort were available, as were copies of the 1755 construction plans for the fort, housed in the British archives, the Canadian archives, the Library of Congress, and the New York State Education Department. Still, the original architectural plans would have been of little value to the reconstruction without the use of archaeology to precisely locate each structure and interpret the activities that went on inside. Also, there is no reason to believe that William Eyre's engineering plans had been followed exactly in 1755, and one divergence was discovered during excavation and reconstruction when the workmen found that the measurements of one bastion were off from the original plans by 14 feet.

The architectural drawings revealed that

the fort was laid out with four bastions, four curtain walls, and four barracks (FIG. 2). The North and South Barracks were built of logs and planks two stories high (FIG. 3), whereas the East and West Barracks consisted of one story of logs underground and two stories above ground. At the center of the fort was the parade ground, and a powder magazine lay underneath the northeast bastion. The ruins of most of the buildings and earthworks were excavated and reconstructed, and excavations within the relatively intact East Barracks exposed many logs that were charred only on the outside, with the inside of the wood still solid (FIG. 7). Underneath the brick floor of the East Barracks, inside the remains of a casemate— which had been used as a hospital—Gifford found four human skeletons in 1957 (FIGS. 8, 9), one of which had eight musket balls intermingled with the bones. These may well have been the remains of some of the aforementioned sick and wounded soldiers who were killed by the Indians on August 9, when the Jesuit Père Pierre Roubaud described an Indian leaving the fort carrying a human head (Thwaites 1896–1901, Vol. 70: 179).

The Military Cemetery

In addition to uncovering the ruins of the fort, one of the main goals of the 1953 excavation was to find the fort's cemetery, unmarked on any plan, but assumed to have been located just outside the walls of the fort. Those buried here would most likely have died from smallpox, dysentery, and other diseases, gunshot and knife wounds, occasional skirmishes with the French and Indians (including an unsuccessful attack upon the fort by an army of French and Indians in March of 1757), and perhaps a few were buried here during the early stages of the siege in August of 1757. Because the cemetery was well outside the walls of the fort, it is extremely doubtful that any of those who died later in the siege—or during the subsequent massacre—could have been buried here.

Because Lake George is on the north side of the fort, grading operations were conducted on the southern side of the fort, revealing a number of oblong stains with the dimensions of about 2.5 × 6 feet each. These features were individually pedestaled, and then excavations

Figure 8. Four victims of the massacre were found in a casemate room underneath the brick floor of the East Barracks in 1957. Some of the skulls were broken, possibly from tomahawk blows, and eight musket balls were found intermingled with the bones of one individual. The process of conserving the bones was recorded in a local newspaper account: "First, the bones are exposed to air on a hot dry day for two to three hours. When they reach the peak of hardness, a light cellulose solution is painted on, and then depending on the air, two more coats are painted on, each coat heavier than the other . . ." (*The Glens Falls Times,* Aug. 6, 1957). (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

Figure 9. One of the skulls found in 1957 in the casemate room under the East Barracks; this was photographed in 1966 as the skeletons were removed from the casemate for treatment with alvar. The skull shows evidence of a possible tomahawk blow. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)
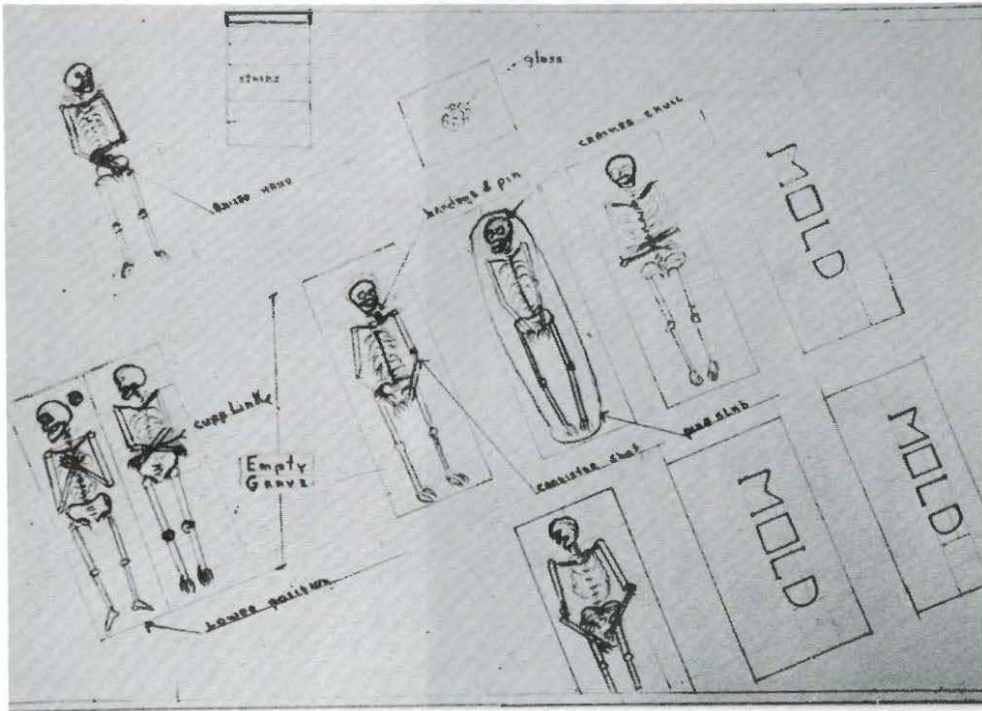
Figure 10. A field sketch of the skeletons in the military cemetery, drawn on July 29, 1954. Seven of the skeletons had been exposed by this date, and three more (identified as "MOLD") had been pedestaled and were awaiting excavation. A cuff link attached to a bit of cloth was found at the wrist of one skeleton (left); another skeleton (left center) was accompanied by a bandage and pin, and a musket ball was embedded near the left elbow (see FIG. 11); and another skeleton (center) was laid on a "Pine Slab." (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

Figure 11. Soldiers' skeletons exposed inside the British Military Cemetery in 1954. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

Figure 12. Remapping the skeletons in the
were still on display within the temporary log
1953–1954.

Cemetery in April of 1993, prior to removal. The skeletons
/exhibit building that had been erected in the winter of

uncovered skeletons at depths of about 4 to 5 feet (FIGS. 10, 11). A corner of the burial ground had been located, and just ten graves were excavated, but additional test holes placed within the parking lot west of the reconstructed fort brought up bones that suggest that at least another 200–300 skeletons lie underneath. (Local historians have guessed that the death count between 1755 and 1757 was as high as 800–1000.) The excavation of the cemetery was simplified somewhat for the archaeologists when an unheated log building, measuring about 30 feet on a side, was constructed around the remains in late 1953 to house the open graves and to permit the archaeologists to work into the winter (FIG. 12).

It appeared that the soldiers had been buried hastily without coffins, although one was found lying on what appeared to be a slab of pine bark (FIG. 12). Most of the bodies had probably been wrapped in a blanket or nothing at all because their uniforms had to be reused by other soldiers; a few had cuff links near the wrists, but none had buttons that would suggest a uniform coat. All of the burials lay in an extended position, and most were Caucasian males in their late teens and early twenties. Some of the bodies had limbs missing, which was to be expected at a time when amputation was the only method available for dealing with shattered limbs. One of the soldiers had been buried with his feet tied together (there were traces of rope in the sand), and, curiously, one of the skeletons was even missing its head. One skeleton still had a musket ball imbedded in the vicinity of its left elbow (FIG. 13), another had a musket ball lodged in its neck, while others had skull fractures which were

Figure 13. This skeleton in the Military Cemetery has a musket ball embedded at the distal end of the left humerus. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

believed to have come from tomahawk blows. One grave contained a chert projectile point, while another skeleton still had the traces of a bandage around its neck, held in place by a hospital pin.

When combined with the human bones found scattered inside the ruins of the fort, Gifford and his colleagues found a total of over 30 soldiers who had died at Fort William Henry. It was impossible to provide names or ranks for any of the dead, and even now it is impossible to say which skeletons were British and which were American Provincials. Information on the stature of some of these individuals, however, was included in a recent article by Steegman and Haseley (1988).

Given the harshness of northern winters, each one of the recently-unearthed skeletons in the military cemetery was given a custom-built "electric blanket" by General Electric during the winter of 1953–1954. In a rather innovative fashion, GE engineers surrounded each skeleton with heating cables and covered the remains with special composition paper blankets stretched on a framework of hardware cloth. Thermostats kept the air surrounding the bones at a constant 40 degrees Fahrenheit so they would not suffer damage from freezing during the cold winter months.

The documentation of the skeletons was admittedly incomplete by modern standards, yet little of professional quality has been published on 18th- or early 19th-century military cemeteries until very recently (see Pfeiffer and Williamson 1991; Litt, Williamson, and Whitehorne 1993; and Sciulli and Gramly
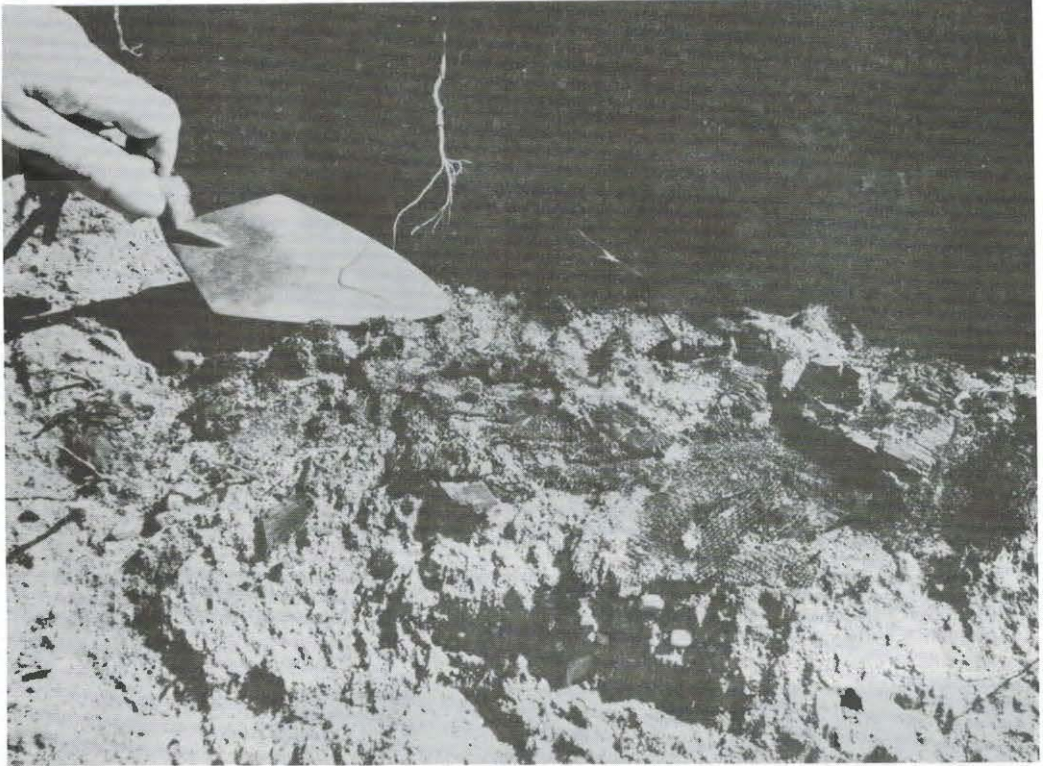
Figure 14. The charred remains of a blanket were found in a magazine under the northeast bastion of the fort. To explain its survival (it was surrounded by charred wood), Gifford hypothesized that "it probably hung over the entrance to the place where the powder was stored and soaked with water to prevent any stray sparks from igniting the combustibles" (1955: 59). (Courtesy of the Fort Henry Corporation.)

1989). Once Gifford finished his work, the bones of the dead soldiers remained on view within the "temporary" shelter that had been erected so the archaeologists could work on them. In fact, the bones continued to be on display as a major tourist attraction for the next 40 years, with hundreds of thousands of visitors to the resort community of Lake George viewing the skeletons in the cemetery.

The Artifacts

No quantitiative analysis was ever conducted on the tens of thousands of artifacts recovered from the ashes of Fort William Henry; few of them have meaningful provenience, and few have ever received any conservation treatment. However, when the 1950s accounts of the excavation are compared to the surviving artifact collection, it is clear that Gifford's team uncovered armaments which include mortars split from use, dozens of cannon balls and 8-inch mortar shells, hundreds of pieces of grape shot, gunflints, musket parts, sword blades, bayonets, and "bushels" of musket balls; kitchen-related artifacts including knives, spoons, pottery sherds, tin canteens, and great numbers of wine bottles; clothing and personal artifacts such as shoe buckles, cuff links, buttons, a half-moon-shaped metal gorget, and a pewter signet ring; architectural remains which include charred wooden beams and thousands of hand wrought nails, spikes, and bricks; part of a charred blanket was found in a powder magazine under the northeast bastion of the fort (FIG. 14); thousands of prehistoric projectile points, pottery sherds, and ground

Figure 15. An unexploded mortar shell, with an ax stuck to it, was discovered in a pit in the East Barracks in 1955. Be ause the shell was still filled with black powder, a demolition squad (542d Ordnance Detachment, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Control) from Fort Jay in New York Harbor deactivated the shell by emptying the powder. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

Figure 16. A mor ar shell was discovered inside the ruins of a bar acks building in October of 1954. The shell had not exploded, and it appears that when it was fired into the fort, it landed upside down in sand, extinguishing its fuse. A human scalp with black hair was found embedded on the surface of the shell, suggesting that on impact it had literally peeled the scalp from the head of one of the defenders of the fo t. (Courtesy of the Fort William Henry Corporation.)

stone tools; and great quantities of butchered bone fragments, tobacco pipes, Spanish, British, and French coins, axes, hoes, spades, candle snuffers, padlocks, and chisels. A few hundred of these artifacts are currently on display at the fort, but the rest reside in a rear storage room that desperately needs a security system and climate controls.

These are certainly the artifact categories that one usually associates with a frontier fort, albeit in exceptionally large quantities because of the large-scale excavation. Thousands of tobacco pipe fragments lay in the dry moat that surrounded the fort, and wine bottles were so numerous that Gifford once wrote, with tongue in cheek, "that the archaeologists came to the conclusion that the war was fought by each side throwing rum bottles rather than firing their muskets" (1955: 59).

Much more unusual, though, was the 1955 discovery of a live eight-inch mortar shell inside the ruins of the East Barracks building. It was still loaded with black powder, and a demolition squad from Fort Jay was summoned to deactivate it (FIG. 15). Another unexploded mortar shell had already been discovered inside a barracks building late in 1954; that one was found to have the remains of a human scalp with black hair affixed to the surface of the shell (FIG. 16). The only possible interpretation was that the mortar shell had been lobbed into the fort and bounced off the head of one of the fort's defenders, tearing off part of his scalp in the process! Probably the shell had not exploded because it landed upside down in sand, thus extinguishing its fuse.

Changes in the 1990s

For many visitors, the soldiers' skeletons at Fort William Henry were the last opportunity to see human bones on display anywhere in the eastern United States, and viewing the bones within the cemetery and inside what was sensationally termed the "crypt" inside the fort (the casemate room under the East Barracks) was one of the strongest memories that tourists carried away with them. For some there was the growing concern that it was not properly respectful to display these remains, however, and so in the spring of 1993 the Fort William Henry Corporation decided it was finally time to rebury and honor their dead. In April and

May of 1993 they allowed Maria Liston of Adirondack Community College and Brenda Baker of Moorehead State University to examine the skeletons prior to removing them from display, reasoning that forensic techniques had evolved sufficiently since the 1950s that a complete reanalysis of the bones was warranted (FIG. 12).

Liston and Baker's first task was to remove the coating of liquid plastic preservative (alvar) that had been applied to the bones to stabilize them, both while they were being excavated and as recently as 1966. The plastic had become as hard as a rock, and it was necessary to use acetone to remove it. They then reassembled many of the more fragmentary remains so that measurements could be taken on complete bones; they studied the individuals to learn how they had died; and they x–rayed the bones and examined them for signs of chronic stress, pathologies, infections, traumas, and amputations. Preliminary comments and interpretations have subsequently appeared in one article (Starbuck 1993); on television ("The Last of the Mohicans," Sept. 30, 1993, in the series Archaeology on The Learning Channel); and in one detailed newspaper account (Dietrich 1993).

As the above sources indicate, Liston and Baker have found evidence of herniated discs, demonstrating that sometimes the men were carrying loads so heavy that the cartilage discs between the vertebrae were creating depressions in the bone. One skull showed cut marks along the hair line, suggesting that scalping had occurred; another individual was apparently anemic—there was much "pitting" in his skull bones; there was evidence of tuberculosis and arthritis; and one soldier died of long-term infection that was throughout his body. The left leg of one soldier had been amputated below the knee, and another had probably died before his amputation was finished. There were signs of trauma everywhere, including one individual that Liston believes had been hit with canister shot, breaking his ribs inward and perhaps puncturing his lungs. Liston and Baker's work is clearly revealing evidence both for disease and violent death, and as their reports on the Fort William Henry skeletons begin to appear, they should be able to provide some of the first good evidence for the problems that afflicted soldiers during the French and Indian War.
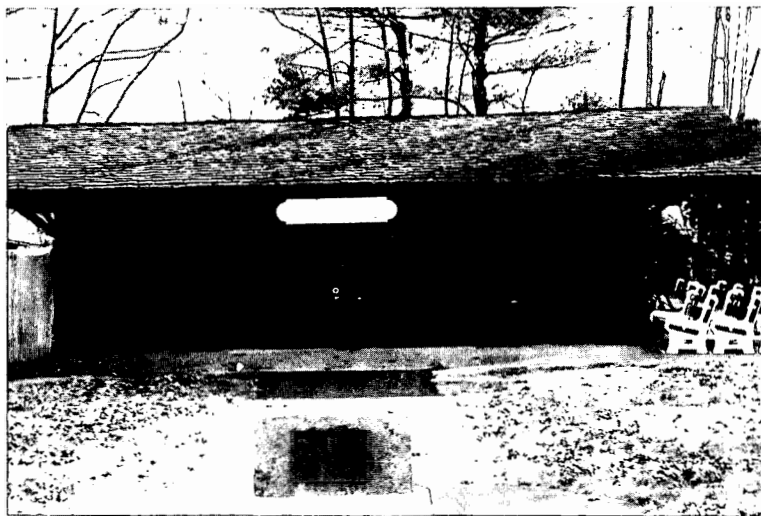
Figure 17. The log exhibit building that was created to house the ten skeletons excavated in the Military Cemetery. This reflects the modern appearance of the display structure, as modified in mid-1993 once the skeletons were removed from view. This is located just south of the reconstructed fort, and it covers only a small corner of the extensive cemetery that now lies under the modern parking lot.

Following removal of all skeletons from exhibit areas in May of 1993, the cemetery exhibit building was modified by the fort's curator, Mike Palumbo, so that it would now display photographs of the skeletons—but not the bones themselves (FIG. 17)—and then a memorial service was held at Fort William Henry's Military Cemetery on May 30, 1993. Just before the service, part of the skeletons were reburied in the cemetery, with the remainder ultimately to go to the Smithsonian Institution for study. Fittingly, one of the chiefs of the Onondaga Nation, Chief Paul Waterman, joined representatives of New York State's government, the British Consulate, the British military, and the Fort William Henry Corporation in eulogizing the dead and placing a wreath over their remains.

Conclusions

While it is true that Hawkeye, Uncas, Chingachgook, and even the fearsome Magua never fought at Fort William Henry, nevertheless these colorful figures have made *The Last of the Mohicans* come alive as great literature and have made the French and Indian War much more exciting for modern audiences. There is no denying that the massacre at Fort William Henry, and the resulting novel, may be the *only* story of the French and Indian War with which most people are familiar. And so it was certainly fitting that an archaeological project would take place at Fort William Henry; after all, field discoveries often help to distinguish between great fiction and the lives of very real people.

Still, the 1950s excavation at the fort was so extensive, and so poorly documented, that it would have been better to test just a few locations—to determine site integrity and to locate key structures—and to then leave the rest of the site alone. Instead, given the local desire to create a historic museum attraction, the sponsors of the work exposed almost everything and built on top of the ruins, making further excavation or reinterpretation extremely difficult. This was not an unusual occurrence for that period, but it certainly provides a harsh lesson about the danger of overdigging an archaeological site. After all, this site witnessed the most extensive excavation ever to occur on a French and Indian War-period site in the Northeast— the setting for the most famous massacre in 18th-century America—yet it is underrepresented in the archaeological literature and un-

til now has provided nothing of value to scholars. It is hoped that the new research begun at Fort William Henry in 1993 will help spark a greater interest in restudying and publishing older archaeological sites and collections— even those that have been waiting for forty years!

Acknowledgments

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