

SUMMER TRAVEL



The Fort Stanwix National Monument is a reconstruction of the original American Revolutionary War fort that was known for never surrendering.

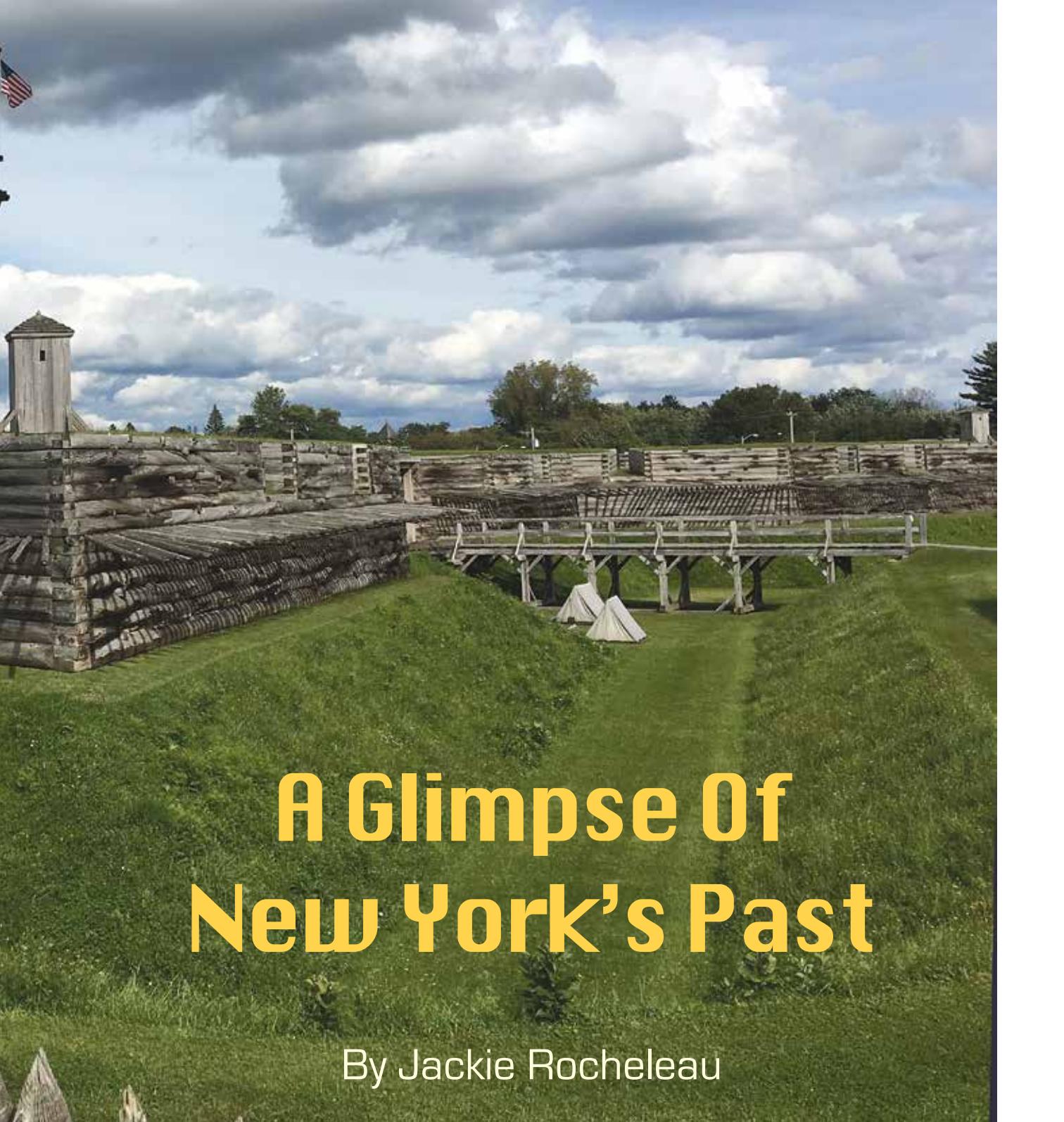
KELLEY BERLINER

Most visitors to New York State begin and end their trips in New York City. But those traveling outside the urban center can experience the rich history of the region across the millennia.

The best place to start would be the state capital, Albany, at the **New York State Museum**, home to exhibits of the state's history from the Pleistocene to the present. One of the museum's larger exhibits, "First Peoples," chronicles human existence in the area beginning with the last ice age. Among the artifacts on display are stone tools from 7000-5000 B.C., excavated from a rare, largely undisturbed

site in the Susquehanna Valley. Through this collection of net sinkers, milling stones, scrapers, knives, and drills used for hunting and gathering, coupled with detailed dioramas, you can readily imagine a day in the life of Archaic period people. The Iroquois portion of the exhibit recounts their history and features a collection of smoking pipes shaped into human and animal figures, intricately decorated bone combs, and clay pots from an Iroquois longhouse dated to A.D. 1450-1600.

More recent finds shed light on life since the European arrival in what is now Albany. When the Dutch first arrived



A Glimpse Of New York's Past

By Jackie Rocheleau

in 1624, they christened the area Fort Orange. The museum houses 36,000 artifacts from that period, including tobacco pipes stamped with a maker's mark of a tulip, sherds of Dutch majolica dishes, and an ornate bronze cannon. The museum also features stories and artifacts from New York City, both before and after it became the metropolis it is today.

Driving west from Albany toward the Mohawk Valley, the landscape quickly turns rural. The hamlet of Howes Cave is a popular destination known for its remarkable caverns. Just four minutes away from the caverns around a bend on Caverns Road is the **Iroquois Museum**. The contemporary

building is inspired by an Iroquois longhouse, with grey cedar shakes instead of bark for siding and skylights in place of smoke holes.

The Iroquois, who call themselves the Haudenosaunee, descended from the first people who inhabited this area. The museum's archaeology exhibit chronicles the story of human occupation here, in what's now Schoharie County, starting with the Paleo period 12,000 years ago. You can see the evolution of projectile points, scrapers, and other stone tools from the predecessors of the Iroquois through the millennia, along with works from modern Iroquois artists.



This life group scene at the New York State Museum is based on excavations of a site in the Hudson Valley of eastern New York. The excavation revealed that the site dates to shortly after 13,000 years ago.

In fact, the museum mostly showcases work from Iroquois artists from 1980 to the present. For a special exhibit titled “Material Shift,” Iroquois artists re-interpreted traditional cultural objects and concepts with untraditional materials. The exhibit includes plastic bags braided into baby moccasins and a dreamcatcher made of litter found on a reservation road. Though a small museum, you could easily spend several hours here exploring exhibits, walking nearby nature trails, and getting to know the organization’s Chief Feline Officer, Little Boy, an orange tabby who keeps operations running smoothly.

On your way to points west, you can split up a long drive and stop at the **National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum**, in Cooperstown. It features historical artifacts like a nineteenth-century baseball, uniforms of Hall-of-Famers, and World Series rings.

Next, in Chittenango, you’ll find the **Chittenango**

Landing Canal Boat Museum, which resulted from a project by a few enthusiasts eager to recall the village’s historical moment. Nearly forty years ago, armed with an 1895 map, a photograph, and archaeology surveys, the museum’s founders pieced together the story of the boatyard at Chittenango Landing, a nineteenth-century dry dock complex on the Old Erie Canal. The museum is their re-imagining of the dry dock complex. Back then, the complex serviced boats to keep cargo moving through the canal, which runs east to west from Albany to Buffalo. This rare site still has its original three-bay dry dock where workers repaired cargo boats. In addition to the dock, built in 1856, visitors can see an excavated sunken canal boat, a walk-on Laker boat exhibit, and a reconstructed canal store, mule stable, and a blacksmith shop where reenactors labor.

About a thirty-minute drive back east in the city of Rome is the **Fort Stanwix National Monument**. The fort is



COURTESY NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM, ALBANY, NY

a reconstruction of the 1758 original, and within it actors portraying Continental soldiers and their families revive the colonial atmosphere. Fort Stanwix is probably most well-known for its role in the American Revolution as “the fort that never surrendered.” Here in 1777, Stanwix’s soldiers fought off British forces in a twenty-one-day siege. It was the only American fort that never surrendered when under attack during the war.

The Oneida, one of the founding members of the Iroquois Confederacy, once controlled this territory. Archaeologists have found artifacts from the Lamoka people who lived there thousands of years before, during the Archaic Period. The bulk of the archaeological finds tell the stories of life during the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, including over 180 mortar bomb fragments, decorative fire-arm plates, and everyday utensils and hardware. Fort Stanwix’s collections number about half a million objects, a portion of which are permanently on exhibit at the Marinus Willett Collections Management and Education Center.

american archaeology

Next, heading further east to Johnstown, you’ll find a 1763 English manor dropped into the Mohawk Valley. The **Johnson Hall State Historic Site** preserves the unique estate of Sir William Johnson, a wealthy landowner appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs by the British Crown. Johnson was known for his diplomacy with the Iroquois, especially the Mohawk. He led a mix of colonial and Native American soldiers during the French and Indian War and cemented an alliance between England and the Iroquois.

The Georgian-style home looks like something out of a painting—the white manor is almost perfectly symmetrical, accented by maroon shutters and flanked on either side by blockhouses. Johnson initially had the two stone blockhouses built to protect the property, but they later housed servants and slaves and served as storerooms and offices. At its prime, the estate resembled a town more than a home. The 700-acre property was comprised of barns, a summer house, a coach house, an overseer’s house, mills, shops, housing for tenants, a bakery, a smokehouse, a stone office, and more. Though

most of these buildings are no longer here, visitors can tour the grounds and the interior of the main house, which is styled to resemble the home in which Johnson lived.

Just ten minutes away in Fonda is another time capsule of the Mohawk Valley, the **Saint Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine & Historic Site**. Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 to a Mohawk chief and a Christian Algonquin woman. After her death in 1680 people began making pilgrimages to her tomb and healing miracles were attributed to her. She was beatified in 1980 and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

A 1782 barn-turned-chapel greets visitors at the main grounds. The upper floor houses Saint Peter's Chapel, which is named in honor of the chapel where Saint Kateri was baptized in 1676. The main floor contains artifacts from local excavations of a Mohawk village, but finding the actual village site requires a bit more work. A short hike through the woods

following blue trail markers leads to the Caughnawaga site, the only fully excavated Iroquois village. The Turtle Clan of the Mohawk built the fortified village in either 1666 or 1679—there is still some debate. You can walk through the village, entering between the gray markers set into the original post molds that demarcate the wooden stockade that protected the community. Inside, red posts outline the twelve longhouses and yellow posts mark the supports for benches and beds. From the village a steep, rocky trail through the woods takes you to a spring, where a small statue of Tekakwitha stands. Water from this spring was used to baptize her.

A trip farther north toward the Adirondacks and Lake George reveals yet more pivotal sites in Colonial America. **Fort William Henry Museum** stands atop a formidable hill overlooking the lake and mountains as American, French, and British flags flap in the wind. If arriving via Beach Road, there is an equally formidable set of stairs leading up to



JAN UNDERWOOD

1. New York State Museum
222 Madison Ave., Albany, 12230
518-474-5877
www.nysm.nysed.gov

2. Iroquois Museum
324 Caverns Rd., Howes Cave, 12092
518-296-8949
www.iroquoismuseum.org

3. National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum
888-425-5633
<https://baseballhall.org>

4. Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museum
717 Lakeport Rd., Chittenango, 13037
315-687-3801
<https://clcbm.org>

5. Fort Stanwix National Monument
200 N James St, Rome, 13440
315-338-7730
www.nps.gov/fost

6. Johnson Hall State Historic Site
139 Hall Ave., Johnstown, 12095
518-762-8712
<https://parks.ny.gov>

7. Saint Kateri National Shrine & Historic Site
3636 NY-5, Fonda, 12068
518-853-3646
www.katerishrine.org

8. Fort William Henry Museum
48 Canada St, Lake George, 12845
518-668-5471
www.fwhmuseum.com

9. Lake George Battlefield State Park
Fort George Rd. and Beach Rd.,
Lake George, 12845
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/113216.html

10. Rogers Island Visitors Center
11 Dr. David Starbuck Lane, Fort Edward, 12828
518-747-3693
www.rogersisland.org

11. Saratoga National Historical Park
648 Route 32, Stillwater, 12170
518-670-2985
www.nps.gov/sara

12. Shaker Heritage Society
25 Meeting House Rd., Albany, 12211
518-456-7890
<https://home.shakerheritage.org>

the fort—or, you could bypass those stairs in favor of the Canada Street entrance. The immersive experience begins right away as you approach the reconstructed fort's heavy wooden doors that demand you pull with all your weight to gain entry. Once inside, you can join a British or provincial soldier for a guided tour, or explore on your own.

The fort's artifacts help visitors piece together the story of the soldiers who lived here. There are everyday items like rusted shoe buckles and keys, as well as mortar fragments, musket balls, and weaponry. While most of the fort has been reconstructed, an original fireplace over 250 years old remains in the basement. There is also an exhibit of underwater findings from Lake George. The original fort was destroyed in 1757, so in 1758, to protect their fleet from French forces, the British weighed down and sunk over 260 vessels. They successfully reclaimed over 200 when summer arrived. In excavations that began in the 1960s, archaeologists have recovered anchors, grappling hooks, supplies, wooden buoys, and pieces of the ships.

A short walk from the fort is the **Lake George Battlefield Park**, which commemorates a site of many clashes over time, including those during the French and Indian War

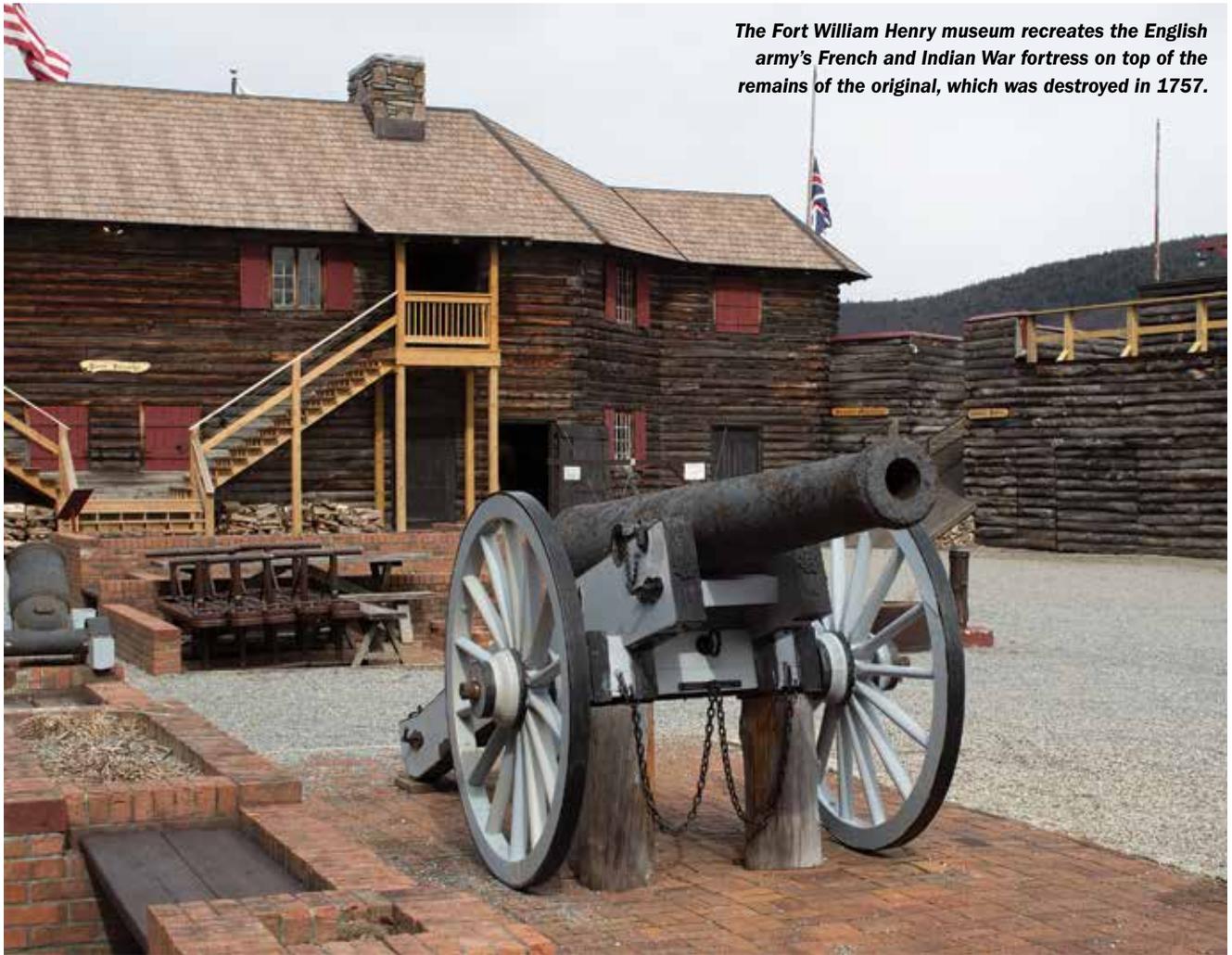
and the Revolutionary War, and battles between the Iroquois and Algonquin. The site of a former French and Indian War military hospital, now a pleasant grassy clearing, sits at the top of the park overlooking the lake. A self-guided walking tour takes you through bright green slopes with signs and monuments documenting sites in the various wars. Though the park emphasizes its history as a battlefield, one statue, the Mohawk Warrior, commemorates the area's early inhabitants. During the warmer months, visitors might also stumble upon archaeologists in action, unearthing more evidence of the area's history.

Next on the tour is another outpost of the French and Indian War. As the Hudson River rounds a bend in the village of Fort Edward, a small island cuts through its path, **Rogers Island Visitors Center**. Archaeological excavations began in Fort Edward in the 1980s during construction of a sewage plant. Eight feet below the surface, archaeologists unearthed an ancient village dated to around 1000 B.C. with a trove of 80,000 artifacts. Above that village were storage pits and hearths from A.D. 1000-1300 and other evidence of daily life. The island's visitors center displays artifacts from prehistoric to colonial times. The island itself is named for Major



SHAKER HERITAGE SOCIETY

The Shaker Heritage Society has an herb garden where feverfew still grows. Feverfew was used historically to treat colds, worms, and hysterics.



The Fort William Henry museum recreates the English army's French and Indian War fortress on top of the remains of the original, which was destroyed in 1757.

JACKIE ROCHELEAU

Robert Rogers, founder and commander of Roger's Rangers in the French and Indian War. In 1757 Rogers also wrote the "Rules of Ranging" on the island, the foundation of today's U.S. Army Rangers.

Just a bit further south in Stillwater is the site of the Revolutionary War battles of Saratoga. The **Saratoga National Historic Park** includes the 3,000-acre battlefield where the fledgling United States fought the British, eventually forcing their surrender. But until recently, no one knew exactly where the Second Battle of Saratoga began. In 2019, archaeologists conducted geophysical assessments of the land and found enough ballistics—case shots (iron canon projectiles) and musket balls—to confirm that Barber Wheatfield, a stop along the ten-mile driving tour of the park, is the site where that October 7, 1777 battle started.

The park also includes Schuyler House, located eight miles north of the battlefield in Schuylerville. The Schuyler estate was both the home and field office of the Continental Army General Philip Schuyler. The National Park Service has restored the house for visitors, who can see the rooms as they likely looked during Schuyler's residence.

Finally, heading back toward Albany, you will find the remnants of a utopia in the form of unrestored buildings across from the Albany airport. This is the location of the **Shaker Heritage Society**, which preserves the site of the

first Shaker settlement in America, founded by Ann Lee, also known as Mother Ann, in 1776. The Shakers, a celibate and pacifist Christian sect and an offshoot of the Quakers, fled religious persecution in England. They isolated themselves from the outside world and chose upstate New York as the place for their paradise on Earth, settling on land the Native Americans called Niskayuna, which became the town of Watervliet in 1778.

Nine buildings remain on the edges of a settlement that once spanned thousands of acres. There's a museum in the meeting house, built in 1848, with a small but intriguing collection. The museum also features artifacts from a Shaker industry the public will be less familiar with, herbal medicine. The small exhibit on nineteenth-century medicine includes glass vials of a powdered tobacco remedy to heal maladies of the head and eyes, and bricks of medicinal herbs to treat hysterics, indigestion, colds, and other ailments. Visitors can explore the grounds with a helpful audio tour, and later go birdwatching at the neighboring Ann Lee Pond.

Though it likely was not the utopia Lee envisioned, upstate New York is rich with places and people eager to share its stories.

JACKIE ROCHELEAU is an independent journalist whose work has appeared in Vox, Forbes, Scientific American, and other publications.