



PRESS RELEASE:

Established in August 2022, the Borscht Belt Historical Marker Project is a group of locals, artists & historians dedicated to commemorating the history of the Borscht Belt, a celebrated era in American Jewish life, American culture and Catskill history. Our mission is the creation of a large-scale historic marker trail that permanently cements the famed era in its physical place while paying tribute to its legacy. Enhanced by photographs and QR codes, when complete the 20-marker trail will be united by a self-guided audio driving tour.

From the 1920s through the 1970s, the Catskill Mountains were a popular vacation destination for millions of Americans, many of them Jews. Known as the Borscht Belt, the resorts and bungalow colonies of Sullivan and Ulster County were a refuge for American Jews, who found themselves excluded from business ventures, employment opportunities, social circles, and vacation access in the anti-Semitic climate of America during the first half of the 20th century. Out of this exclusion sprouted a place that was both a refuge and Renaissance – a promised land that offered acceptance, community, tradition, leisure, and culture.

The Borscht Belt combined recreational activities with a sense of community, culture and entertainment, particularly stand-up comedy, which was born in the region's theaters and showrooms. At its peak during the post-WWII era, the Borscht Belt sustained more than 535 resorts and hotels and over 50,000 bungalows. From the 20th century and into the 21st century, the Borscht Belt influenced the positive, transformative growth of America societally, culturally, and artistically. Since the era's decline, much of its structural environment has been disappearing year after year, decomposing over time or, in other instances, new structures have taken the former's place.

Prior to our initiative, there were no historical markers commemorating the Borscht Belt era. As of now, we have established nine, with plans to expand to 15 by the end of 2025. Our first nine historic marker dedications and accompanying public programs have attracted over 1,300 attendees, ranging in age from 5 to 90. These events have drawn a diverse audience, including residents, visitors, those interested in Jewish-American history, Catskill history, and New York State history. We have also engaged individuals with connections to the Borscht Belt, as well as those passionate about the arts, music, literature, and entertainment. Additionally, many newcomers to the Catskills have discovered the region through our events.

Whether on or near sites of significant events or historic properties, the Marker Project selects locations significant to the era and illuminates them in the present day. Our historic markers are intentionally placed on public domain lands and in existing public spaces, parks, and locations where people can easily maneuver.



Our aesthetic diverges from the typical New York State historic marker, drawing inspiration from the mid-century Borscht Belt era. The design features a vibrant blue railing surrounding a tan background with blue lettering, dual-sided text, photographs, and QR codes—elements that enhance the viewer's experience. Scanning the QR code directs visitors to our website, offering extended stories about the towns, hotels, and bungalow colonies, along with additional images, videos, and media.

The Marker Project is designed to engage both those who lived through the Borscht Belt era and those newly intrigued by its history. By blending traditional historic markers with modern elements like QR codes and multimedia, we create an immersive experience that appeals to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Beyond guiding visitors through a literal roadmap of history, the Marker Project, along with its accompanying public programs rolled out at each historic marker dedication, fosters community engagement, a sense of social connection, and deepens the relationship citizens and visitors have with the region's vibrant past.

When completed (estimated in 2026), the permanent marker trail, along with its audio tour, will encourage visitors to explore the landscape and discover the various towns that were central to the Borscht Belt era. The project aims to be a fun, educational endeavor that invites people to experience the physical places tied to this history, while also promoting economic development and tourism throughout the region. As of late 2024, we have installed nine historical markers, with six more planned for 2025. Marker dedications will continue into 2026 until the trail is completed.

The Borscht Belt Historical Marker Project goes beyond just markers. It includes a variety of initiatives such as film screenings, exhibitions, bus tours, and events celebrating authors, literature, comedy, music, and more. Additionally, we are creating a self-guided audio driving tour. All public programs associated with the historic marker dedications are free. Our goal is to combine history and adventure, offering an immersive, educational community experience while fostering economic growth and tourism in the region.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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