

Hello. My name is Marisa Scheinfeld and I am a photographer, author, and founder of the Borscht Belt Historical Marker Project. In August 2022 this project took flight as an attempt to highlight and celebrate the Jewish imprint on this area. In an academic and documentative sense, the Borscht Belt is a topic I've worked to shine a light on for almost 14 years. It is also personal - Sullivan County is the place I was raised and the place, I call home. With each passing year, the physical traces of the Borscht Belt continue to vanish. This marker is part of a planned trail of 20 that will eventually be linked by a self-guided audio driving tour. Each is a symbolic representation intended to live on in a permanent way to celebrate what was both an era and an experience. Like totem poles, they commemorate our shared histories and are a visible construct that the communities in which they are placed can be proud of and hopefully learn from.

The Borscht Belt was birthed in the early 19th century during a time when Jews were omitted from many spaces in America. Common signage of the time read "Gentiles only," or "Christians only, Jews not allowed." Other signage spewed "No Blacks, No Jews, No dogs." A 1919 publication known as the Jewish Farmer's Almanac advertised a section called the *Jewish Vacation Guide - Hotels, Boarding and Rooming Houses where Jews are Welcome*. The guide became a model for the African American community when producing their own guide - the Green Book in 1936.

When considering these guides, it's important to recognize the virulent hate that has been perpetuated over time and as a result, conceived of destinations of refuge - for the Jewish community but also for the Black, Hispanic, Gay, and Disabled and other minority communities - all who have faced degrading marginalization.

The Jews who immigrated to America after fleeing Anti-Semitism, pogroms and genocide in Europe continued to face antisemitism upon their arrival to the United States. They found themselves prevented from housing, employment, educational opportunities, financial opportunities and more. Anti-Semitism reached its peak during the mid-1920s, just around the dawn of the Borscht Belt. At the time Ku Klux Klan membership had reached four million and discriminatory immigration policies were enacted favoring immigrants from northern and western Europe over other parts of the world. 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.

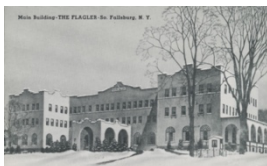
When speaking of the Borscht Belt -- Jews, non-Jews, all of us together are part of this story – all of us made it what it was – Beyond the guests, the resorts, the celebrities, the dignitaries, the glitz and the glamour - and there is a rich history of workers and locals all who shaped the borscht belt into the dynamo that she was.

We are here today to honor a most glorious history. Our 4th marker pays tribute to the town of Fallsburg which according to the Catskills Institute about 79 hotels and 107 bungalow colonies.

ISAAC UNVEIL MARKER:

Borscht Belt – Fallsburg

The story of the tourism industry in Sullivan County, particularly in the Town of Fallsburg, is vast and vibrant. Fallsburg was a major hub of the Borscht Belt. This segment of Route 42, known as “Hotel Row,” led to about 79 hotels and 107 bungalow colonies. One of the first Fallsburg hotels was The Flagler. The Flagler family opened it as a Christian resort in the 1870s. In 1908, it was sold to Jewish developers who retained the original name for guests to believe it was connected to the luxury hotels built in Florida by oil tycoon Henry Flagler. Flagler’s hotels inspired a style of Borscht Belt architecture. Characterized by stucco, pastel colors, arched windows and parapets, and later known as Sullivan County Mission style, it was favored at many resorts. Other notable area destinations were the Ambassador, Eldorado, Olympic, Furst, and Lebowitz Pine View hotels, and the Phyl-Bob Colony Day Camp.



Main Building of The Flagler Hotel, circa 1940s. Courtesy of Steingart Associates
The Eldorado Hotel, 1962. Courtesy of Steingart Associates (members of Steingart family joining us today – whom you’ll hear from soon)

Borscht Belt:

From the 1920s through the early 1970s, the Borscht Belt was the preeminent summer resort destination for hundreds of thousands of predominantly east coast American Jews. The exclusion of the Jewish community from existing establishments in the 1920s drove Jewish entrepreneurs to create over 500 resorts, 50,000 bungalows and 1,000 rooming houses in Sullivan County and parts of Ulster County. The Borscht Belt provided a sense of community for working and vacationing Jews. The era exerted a strong influence on American culture, particularly in the realm of entertainment, music, and sports. Some of the most well-known and influential people of the 20th century worked and vacationed in the area. Beginning around 1960, the Borscht Belt began a gradual demise due to many factors including the growth of suburbia, inexpensive airfare, and generational changes.



This window into Jewish history (and American history) should remind us of all that hate is a dark force. At this moment there is a deep pain felt in the Jewish community around the world regarding the horrific events that have taken place, and which continue to unfold as we stand here. My message today is one of love, compassion, tolerance, and empathy. But it is also one that desires to elevate Jewish identity and history and to combat the virulent hate and the denial of historic Jewish presence and legitimacy our community continues to face. My friend Ilana, who is an Iraqi Jew said this morning, the hating and dehumanizing doesn't do any good, and while there is room for systemic analysis of the situation, each one of us has a choice in how we behave. And is a lot harder to choose to act good.

We had thought to cancel this dedication. However, during a time when we are seeing antisemitism surging around the globe, with many of us feeling as if it's surpassing its prior peaks, we felt it important to come together to celebrate Jewish history and Jewish life. The prejudice against the Jewish

community we are witnessing in the world, online, in academia, and other institutions seems alarmingly normalized.

Throughout time the Jewish people have experienced displacement, intimidation, violence, and genocide. But out of the dark the Jewish people have emerged - and persevered. I have always been proud of my Jewish heritage - and astonished at the undoubtable spirit of the Jewish people. I stand here in support of democracy, civility, and humanity and with empathy for single person suffering unspeakable losses, physically mentally and spiritually. This includes the innocent people living and trying to flee the Gaza strip.

This project could not be done without Jerry Klinger and the JASHP. With Jerry this project is made possible - along with a team that I am especially grateful for -- Isaac Jeffreys, Louis Inghilterra, Kelli Huggins, and Sullivan County historian John Conway our official cosigner on the markers. Additional thanks to our partners in this effort SCVA, Sullivan County Historical Society and the town of Fallsburg.

Before I invite up our speakers, I'm going to close with a poem written by a poet named Esther Raab in 1967 during the 6-day war. Ester Raab was born in 1894 in the land we call Israel-Palestine and occupied by the Ottoman-Syrian empire until 1917 when it came under British rule. Ester's family founded Petah Tikvah, an agricultural community whose name means the "opening of hope." Her words are reminder that during dark times, hope and peace have always been part of our legacy.

Mishalot "Wishes"

I want beautiful trees—
and not wars!
and a coat of many colors
and not uniforms
for all my dear ones;
I want rain
and green furrows
and houses
full of babies;

a calendar of *britot*
and a “brotherhood plaza”
and lightning and thunder—
in the sky;
and bountiful rains
on the earth
and a pink crocus
in the ravines;
and pinecones
on a scented bed
of pine needles—
and bulbul birds rejoicing
among leafy orchards
and sails of peace
on the Mediterranean;
and the fall maneuvers
of white chrysanthemums—
in the parks;
and red balls rolling
along the paths
and the sleeves
of babies’ garments signaling tranquility—
on the clothesline...

SPEAKERS:

ROBERTA BYRON LOCKWOOD, CEO PRESIDENT SULLIVAN COUNTY VISITORS ASSOCIATION

John Conway, Sullivan county historian

Nathan Steingart, Steingart Associates, a fourth-generation family-owned commercial printing company based in Fallsburg that was in operation for 80 years.

Marilyn Silfen, daughter of the former owners of the Eldorado hotel – phil and jean sevush. Marilyn’s brother David is also in attendance.