

Thank you for joining us to today as we dedicate our 14th historic marker honoring Parksville. Long before roads were paved or railways built, the land we call Parksville was home to the Lenape people, the original stewards of this region. They lived in tune with the changing seasons and honored the natural cycles of the land. If you know where to look, their story can be found in creeks, place names, and the hills that surround us.

Centuries later, as settlers moved into the region, the landscape and its story began to change. In the early 1800s, William Parks built sawmills and gristmills along the Little Beaverkill Creek, founding the hamlet that would take his name. A community formed around the mills and Parksville began to grow. By the 1880s with the arrival of the railroad, Parksville transformed into a vibrant stop in the midst of what would soon become the Borscht Belt: a cultural haven for the Jewish community who built an empire here.

The story of the Borscht Belt begins with the dirt and sweat of Jewish immigrants fleeing exile, persecution, and poverty, who found themselves in an America that excluded them. Barred from housing, employment, education, legal opportunities, and mainstream vacation access, Jews coming to this region didn't arrive to golden doors and open arms, but to muddy land, fruitless farms, and the determination to build something from nothing.

The farmhouses, boarding houses, kuchaleins, hotels and resorts and bungalow colonies they built were more than just places to vacation. They were cultural and creative havens where Jewish culture, art, music, comedy, and tradition thrived. The era was a true historical phenomenon; its influence rippling through comedy, film, art, music, sports, design, and even how Americans think about leisure itself. Few chapters in American history have matched its vibrancy or originality. From its deep imprint on Jewish culture to the spark it brought to American pop culture, the artists and entertainers who passed through here helped shape not only Jewish identity but American life as a whole.

Fun fact: Bobby Darin got his start here in Parksville at the Sunnylands Hotel, where he also worked as a busboy. He went on to become one of the 20th century's great entertainers; a pop idol with a range from rock to standards and folk to protest songs. During its Borscht Belt heyday, notable Parksville destinations included Breezy Hill, Lake Plaza, New Brighton, Young's Gap, Klein's Hillside, Paramount, and the Tanzville. Today, we're proud to have Ro Skopp and family with us, descendants of the Bauman House, where the post office now stands, along with Larry Simmons, whose family owned the Palace House in Parksville as well as the Garden Resort in Ferndale.

But change arrives, ready or not. The O&W stopped running in 1957. The Youngs Gap closed in 1967, signaling what many say was the start of the Borscht Belt's decline. One thing about the Young's Gap was that it operated as a year-round, all-inclusive resort. It

featured an indoor pool, ice skating rink, golf course, and nightclub that rivaled that of the Concord, Nevele or the Pines, though its legacy has been ultimately eclipsed by its early closure. In 2011, Route 17 was rerouted, diverting travelers away from Parksville, a fate shared by many American towns, causing economic hardship and loss.

But Parksville never truly stopped. It rested. And now it rises. In recent years, there's been a new renaissance here made up of artists, musicians and entrepreneurs. The Parksville Arts Center has found a home at the 118-year-old Tefereth Israel Anshei Synagogue along with New Memories/Conflux Gallery which has reopened as a community arts venue, and Double Up, a unique dining destination housed in a refurbished double-decker bus. The railroad is now traversed on foot as the rail trail. Old stories are being unearthed, and new ones are taking root.

Parksville is not frozen in time; nor is it a ghost town as many on the internet like to claim - it is living history. A place shaped by the Lenape, built by settlers, lifted by Jewish culture, challenged by change and now renewed.

So today, as we dedicate this Parksville marker, we honor not only what was but what is and what will be. We are not lamenting the passing of the Borscht Belt - we are celebrating its life. What I love about the marker project is that it gives its history a place. Like totems or tombstones, each marker says: this happened here.

Thank you to our partners who've been with us every step of the way: JASHP, and Jerry Klinger who fund each of these markers, The Steingart Family, Phil Brown at the Catskills Institute, John Conway, Sullivan County Historical Society, Sullivan Catskills and Delaware Valley Artists Alliance. Additional thanks to the Jewish Community Youth Foundation of Greater Mercer County and Purchase College.

Thank you to the Town of Liberty and hamlet of Parksville for giving this marker a home. We're grateful to the Parksville Arts Center, New Memories, Double Up and the whole community. A special shout out to Adrian Perlmutter, Nick Rusin and Frank DeMayo for helping to get this marker in the ground. And thank you all for being here and for helping us tell the story of the Borscht Belt.

- Marisa Scheinfeld, October 5, 2025, Parksville, NY