Thank you all for being here today to dedicate our 20th historic marker.

It's amazing to think about how far this project has come. When we started in the fall of 2022, we had a vision and the passion to make it happen, even if we were still figuring out how. At the time, there wasn't a single historic marker in the region commemorating the Borscht Belt or Jewish life in the Catskills. We dedicated our first marker in Monticello in May 2023, and by the end of that year, we had four. Since then, we've worked town by town, place by place, to get the history right and try to do justice to this extraordinary chapter of American history.

The Borscht Belt grew in part because of antisemitism and the exclusion of Jews from hotels and resorts elsewhere. For generations of Jewish immigrants and their families, the Catskills became a kind of second homeland, built through hope, hard work, and hustle. What began with farms and homegrown tourism grew into a cultural world of its own, shaping American comedy, music, entertainment, food, architecture, hospitality, and popular culture.

For all that history, the landscape where it unfolded had gone largely unmarked. We wanted to change that. These markers say, quite simply, *this happened here*. And now there are 20.

Together, they tell a much bigger, layered story. They bring back into view a world that has largely vanished, but its imprint remains. The markers now span more than two dozen communities across Sullivan and Ulster Counties, giving this history a visible presence across the region.

I want to thank the people who have helped build this project.

First, Jerry Klinger and the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, which has funded our markers. Without Jerry's support, there would be no markers. That's the simple truth, and we're deeply grateful.

Thank you to the Sullivan County Historical Society for serving as our fiscal sponsor and helping us grow the project beyond the markers themselves, through public programs, research, community partnerships and outreach.

Isaac Jeffreys, I can't really express how much it means to build this together. You're a friend, a collaborator, and an incredibly talented person. Your creativity and vision have shaped this project from the beginning. We've both been pretty stubborn and fiercely committed to getting things right, and I think the project is better for that. I'm grateful to be doing this alongside you, and I'm always rooting for you.

Louis, even from a distance, your meticulous work on the marker text and website, and your attention to every detail, have helped bring this project to life. Kelli Huggins, historian, and our behind the scenes copyrighter, thank you.

John Conway, our Sullivan County Historian, thank you for being such a steady and generous guide. Your knowledge and commitment to getting the history right have been invaluable.

The Steingart Family has entrusted us with access to an extraordinary collection of photographs, giving us the opportunity to bring rarely seen images into the story of the Borscht Belt.

The Catskills Institute and Phil Brown have been preserving and sharing this history for decades, long before our project began. We're grateful to build on their work
A big thank you to DVAA, Sullivan Catskills, and the Jewish Community Youth Foundation of Greater Mercer County for supporting our public programs and helping us bring this history to more people.

David Hilfstein, thank you for always showing up, whether it's helping us set up, emceeing, or pitching in wherever needed. I really appreciate you, and we're lucky to have you in our corner.

I also want to thank Stacey Nemerson for her enthusiasm, support and friendship. Her excitement for history, this area and her own story is contagious, and we are grateful for her support.

Lynn Skolnick, thank you for believing in us from the beginning, helping us install our very first marker in Monticello, and showing up for every dedication since.

Thank you to David Lewis, the Mamakating Historical Society, and the Town of Mamakating and the board for their support and for giving this marker a home. And thank you to Tom Morrow and his team for installing it.

To all the town supervisors, mayors, property owners, fire departments, schools, highway departments, local historians, librarians, historical societies, and everyone who has shared photographs and stories, made connections, volunteered their time, or helped spread the word, thank you. This project has been possible because so many people care about this history and want to see it recognized.

The Borscht Belt as we knew it is largely gone, but the landscape is still here, along with what remains of the world that once filled it. These markers reconnect that past to the places where it happened, creating a thread between past and present and helping us understand just how much this world contributed to the Catskills and to American culture.

Twenty markers is something to celebrate, but we're nowhere near done. There's still so much more we can do: add more markers, bring this history into classrooms, and create

new public programs that get people out into the landscape and engaging with these places.

For me, this work is deeply personal. I grew up here, and I know I'm not alone in feeling that there's something special about this place. Over the years, I've come to understand just how many people share that feeling.

In some ways I think I do this for my grandparents, and all the grandparents and generations who came here. But I'd be lying if I didn't say I did it because it fulfills something deep within myself.

Every marker is a joy, because each one puts a little more of this past back where it belongs. Thank you all for being part of this work and helping bring this project to life.

Marisa Scheinfeld, October 18, 2026