



New signs to tout NY state's rich history, culture

By **Chris Carola**, ASSOCIATED PRESS, August 29, 2012

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) - The Cuomo administration is hoping a new statewide series of roadside signs designed to promote New York's rich history will help boost the state's economy by steering visitors to historic sites and cultural attractions.

More than 200 signs were unveiled this week in Albany as part of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's "Path Through History" program, a \$1 million initiative that will split the funding between 10 regional heritage tourism marketing plans across the state.

The new signs planned for installation near Thruway exits and other New York highways highlight some of the state's most significant sites and historic milestones. State officials hope the briefly worded signs, along with related high-tech tools such as websites and applications for handheld devices, will entice travelers to seek out places where history was made in New York.

"It was clear to me growing up that New York was a special place; we don't tell that story as much as or often," Cuomo said at a news conference Tuesday.

For years, stakeholders among the state's multibillion-dollar heritage tourism industry have complained that New York doesn't do enough to promote its own history when compared with other states. Among the most vocal critics has been Kenneth Jackson, a history professor at Columbia University.

"New York history tends to get a little bit overshadowed by Massachusetts and Virginia, so we need to tell our story," he told The Associated Press in a 2008 interview.

Jackson is among the team of prominent historians Cuomo enlisted to advise state officials on creation of the Path Through History program. Another is Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer, senior vice president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He called the initiative and other recent steps taken by Cuomo to promote New York's historical resources "a huge change" from previous administrations.

"He's a history devotee," Holzer said, "and he understands the economic potential here. Tourism is one of the biggest industries in New York state, and it can be bigger. It can be better if there's more coordination and leadership."

The new signs will have a distinctive design that differs from the thousands of other state historical markers dotting New York, Holzer said. Examples have been posted on the program's website. At least one of them could steer visitors wrong: It gives the start of Saratoga Race Course as 1847, when in fact the famous thoroughbred racetrack opened 17 years later.

"The sign is totally incorrect," said Allan Carter, historian at the National Museum of Racing in Saratoga Springs. He pointed out that the first organized racing meet was held in Saratoga in 1863 at a location known as Horse Haven, before a new track was built across the road the next year and opened as Saratoga Race Course.

Holzer pointed out that the examples prepared for Tuesday's presentation won't be the final product travelers see along the road. They'll be checked out by local historians for veracity and accuracy, he said.

"Everything will be reviewed six ways from Sunday," Holzer said.