

Blazing a path through history

Governor hosts a conference designed to exploit state's cultural tourism resources

By Casey Seiler

Published 11:13 p.m., Tuesday, August 28, 2012

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1 of 8

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An informational table on the Women's Rights National Historical Park is seen here in the concourse level of the Empire State Plaza during the Path Through History Conference on Tuesday, Aug. 28, 2012 in Albany, NY. (Paul Buckowski / Times Union)



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ALBANY — Forget about natural gas trapped in the Marcellus shale or the glories of the Adirondacks, at least for a moment, and consider a man-made natural resource that New York could do more to exploit: its history.

More than 200 historians, museum directors, tourism officials and other interested parties spent Tuesday at the state Capitol for the first "Path Through History" conference, convened by Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#).

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smartphone app that allows tourists to custom-tailor a trip based on specific topic areas, plus new standardized road signs that will be installed throughout the state at historic sites.

Glaser said "heritage and cultural tourism" — which attracts visitors to sites from Seneca Falls and Fort Ticonderoga to the five boroughs — accounts for \$5 billion in annual business around the state.

The conference kicked off with a backstage tour of the Capitol for the guests, including stops in the governor's inner office and the still-under-construction skylight atop the Senate staircase. The keynote address by [Kenneth T. Jackson](#) of [Columbia University](#) reminded the audience that the decline of history was partially the fault of its keepers — due to a failure to connect narrow themes to grander narratives, divides between regions and public entities, and the inability to "realize that you're salesmen. ... We have to tell stories."

Midday was given over to breakout sessions among 10 regional panels that followed the borders of Cuomo's business-minded Regional Economic Development panels. In the Hart Lounge, representatives inventoried the historic resources of their region — sometimes in detail so numbing that it seemed to prove the points made by Cuomo and Jackson.

On his way to the opening session, Albany Assemblyman [Jack McEneny](#) — a formidable local historian in his own right — said that the event reflected Cuomo's personal interest in history, and marked a definite change from the recent past.

"I've seen several generations of state leaders pay lip service to history with very little follow-through," McEneny said. This was different.

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Appearing before the attendees in the afternoon, Cuomo said the state seemed at times to have lost its grand narrative as America's longtime progressive capital — in the realms of social change, engineering, the arts and more.

"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," he said in the Hart Lounge of The Egg, with two of his own daughters on hand.

State Director of Operations [Howard Glaser](#) unveiled the full Path Through History initiative, including a soon-to-be-completed interactive website and

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