

Criteria Overview for New York State Historic Markers



NYS marker dedication ceremony for Canaan Church, Canaan, NY.

Getting Started

Welcome to the William G. Pomeroy Foundation's criteria guide for New York State historic markers. In this PDF, we outline the key information you need to know when applying for a marker grant through our New York State program.

We cover this material in three parts:

- ✓ First, we introduce you to our NYS Historic Marker Grant Program
- ✓ Next, we explain the important purpose and benefits of historic markers
- ✓ Lastly, we outline the program's marker criteria and give examples

We encourage you to return to this guide as a point of reference as often as needed when you are preparing for your marker grant application.

About the NYS Marker Program

At the Pomeroy Foundation, one of our main initiatives is to help people celebrate their community's history by providing grants for roadside markers and plaques.

Our New York State Historic Marker Grant Program is the Foundation's first marker program established in 2006 by our Founder and Trustee Bill Pomeroy. The program fills a gap, as New York State stopped funding their markers in 1939.

Markers in our program commemorate historic people, places, things or events in New York State. Our markers retain that familiar blue and yellow design from the original state program. So when you see one, you know history happened here!



Las Villas NYS marker in Wallkill, NY.

Marker Benefits

The Pomeroy Foundation feels strongly that markers help educate the public, encourage pride of place, promote historic tourism and preserve history. Markers are made to span generations. By obtaining one, you're doing a service to your community and the public at large.

Whether you're a returning grantee or applying for the first time, we want you to remember that there's a specific goal these historic markers need to accomplish.

Historical Significance

Our NYS markers not only commemorate local history, but also showcase that "history happened there" to visitors or people who are driving by a respective community.

This broader public recognition plays a part in why we have specific requirements regarding marker inscriptions and why our evaluators may ask you to make changes.

Sometimes applicants run into challenges demonstrating that the subject they want to commemorate is historically significant to the community at large. Over the next few pages, we'll show you the marker criteria we established to help ensure the highest quality inscriptions possible.



NYS marker dedication ceremony for the Frederick Douglass house, Rochester, NY.

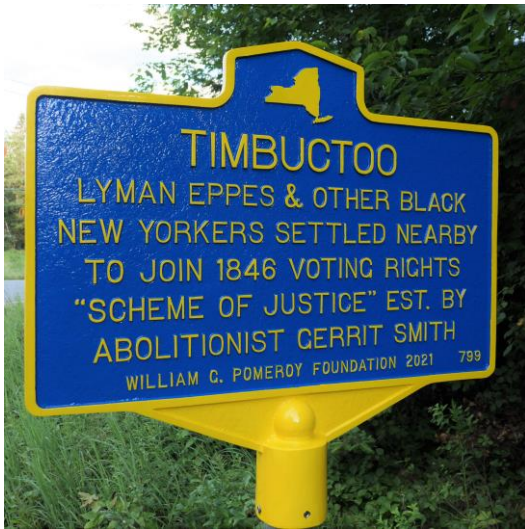
General Marker Criteria

- Your marker inscription must be proven by primary sources. Markers funded by the Pomeroy Foundation are well-researched with primary sources reviewed by professional historians. That is what makes them the gold standard of markers.
- The subject must be historically significant to the larger community or beyond.
- Inscriptions must be clear about why the subject (i.e. person, place, thing, event) is historically significant. When writing your inscription, skip the value-charged language and descriptions (i.e. heroic soldiers, visionary businessman, noted author, bustling business section, etc.)
- Key dates must be included when necessary for framing context; however, the inscription should not simply be written as a list of dates.
- Inscriptions should maximize character limits and use all five lines of text.
- The marker must recognize a historical fact that occurred more than 100 years from the time a final application is submitted.
- Keep in mind that “history happened here” doesn’t mean your subject should be the “first” or “oldest” of something. You don’t need that claim for your subject to be historical. “Firsts” are difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Similarly, claiming the “oldest” is only valid by comparison, so we don’t approve those applications.

Marker Inscription Example

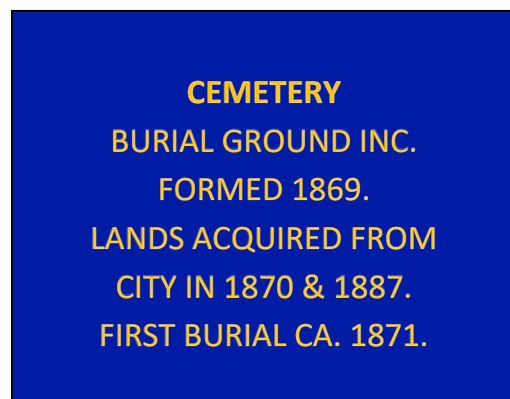
To help illustrate a high quality marker inscription, below is an example. For comparison, we also have a low quality example. On the high quality marker inscription, you see the text maximizing space and clearly demonstrating the historical significance. The example that doesn't pass muster is lacking in several areas, including listing dates, not providing enough context and not demonstrating historical significance.

High Quality Example



Timbuctoo NYS marker in N. Elba, NY.

Low Quality Example



Sample inscription.

Guidelines for Buildings, Cemeteries, Farms, Places of Worship and Schools

Particular attention to historical significance must be provided when submitting an application for subjects in any of the following areas: buildings, cemeteries, family farms, places of worship and schools. Please note, we do not award marker grants for structures that no longer exist. We require at least some portion to be extant and visible to provide relevance to the marker.

If your application falls into one of these areas, consult the following guidelines:

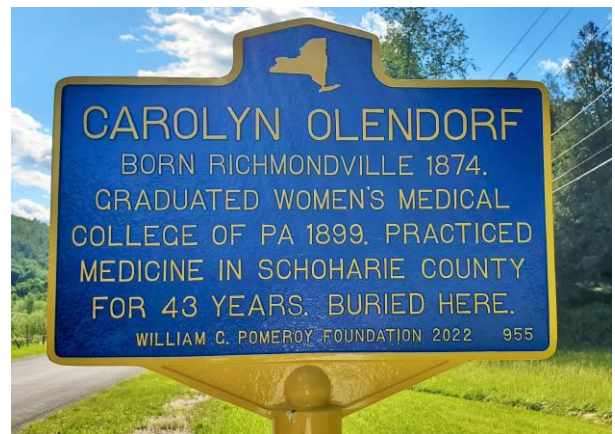
Buildings and Homes

Regardless of the type or age of structure, primary sources must prove the building or home's historical significance to the larger community or beyond. For example, a building or home might have served an important purpose, was designed by a

prominent architect or had a noteworthy resident. If you are commemorating a resident, focus the marker inscription on the person, not the structure. You should address how the person's historical significance had an impact on the community (i.e. town, city, county, etc.). Consider mentioning if the person served in government, civic organizations or was a business leader. Applications regarding buildings and homes that still exist or remain actively used are strongly preferred. If the structure no longer exists, your application will not be successful.

Cemeteries

First, consider if any noteworthy figures are interred at the cemetery. That information should be included in the marker inscription and must be proven with primary sources. Applications for markers recognizing unmarked or abandoned cemeteries without signage are welcomed. For those in NYS who want to commemorate Revolutionary War soldiers' and veterans' burials only, submit your application through our Patriot Burials Historic Marker Program in partnership with the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution.



Dr. Olendorf NYS marker, Richmondville, NY.

Family Farms

You should demonstrate the farm's historical significance to the larger community. The following questions can help you make that determination.

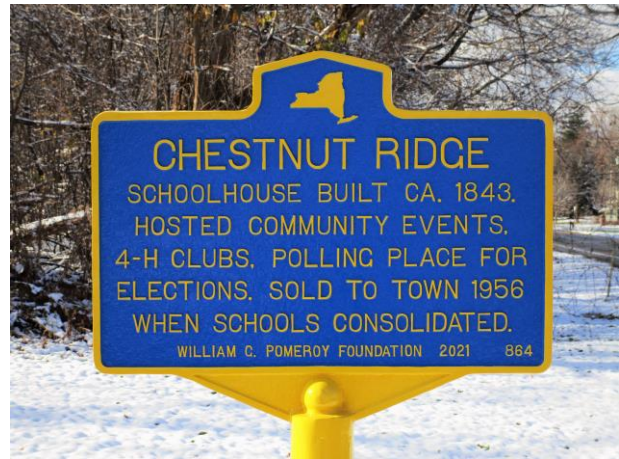
- Did its operation do something pioneering?
- Did the farm have a far-reaching impact?
- Does the farm retain an important feature unique to the area? (e.g. lime kilns)

Places of Worship

Religious sites, such as churches and temples, should include information beyond identifying when it was constructed or rebuilt. As with all inscriptions, the proposed text must include a more historical context than simply listing out key dates. You should try to identify connections to noteworthy events and/or historical figures.

Schools

There must be a historical significance to the larger community that goes beyond serving a specific portion of the school district. Ideally, the marker will commemorate a school building that remains an active educational site. Applications that also prove a noteworthy individual attended are encouraged.



Chestnut Ridge NYS marker in Lockport, NY.

Before You Apply, Keep in Mind ...

The criteria and recommendations in this guide are designed to help you prepare a successful marker grant application with the highest quality inscription possible.

Whether you intend to commemorate one of the aforementioned categories that require special attention or a different area of local history, remember to focus on only one subject. Will your marker recognize a specific person, building, thing or event? The marker's title line must indicate what's being commemorated.

Our online letter of intent (LOI) is a required part of the application process. It includes your proposed marker inscription, as well as a list of primary sources to verify the historical accuracy of your text. Your LOI must be approved by Foundation staff in order to access the grant application. Need help locating and identifying primary sources? Visit our [primary sources webpage](#) for insights and best practices to assist you when preparing your LOI. For complete program guidelines, eligibility, and how to apply, visit the [NYS marker program webpage](#).

If you need further assistance, please contact Christy at info@wgpfoundation.org or 315-913-4060, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (EST).