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# On the Doing of Local History in New York

CAROL KAMMEN

**Abstract:** New York has a long tradition of attention to, caring for, and publishing local history. Approaches and intensity of interest have varied over the years, with strong local history publication in the late nineteenth century, an ebb in the early twentieth century but also a state requirement in 1919 for local governments to designate official historians, a sharp rise in the period of the bicentennial of the American Revolution, and, since that time, an increase in the publication of local history and other examples of progress such as the annual conference on New York State history. At the same time, though, there are substantial needs for better training, advocacy, and resources. New York's history programs are "like a cluster of wind turbines," many exuding energy, others quiet and still. A stronger role for the State Historian is essential to strengthening the preservation, management, and use of state and local history.

**Key words:** Local government (municipal) historians, local history, local history publications, New York state and local history, state historian

OVER THE YEARS, NEW YORK has created three distinct components to tend the state's history. They appeared within a context of two conventional ideas about what the history of the state was and should be. There has been, in addition, one underlying problem that continues to this day.

The three components include two statewide historical societies. One (the New-York Historical Society) began with the idea of broadly collecting Americana but became over time a fine repository and museum of the immediate

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area. The other (the New York State Historical Association), which began with the mission of representing a region, became a fine statewide historical society. The second distinctive component was set in place in the 1890s when the state created the autonomous position of State Historian to oversee and encourage the doing of history and to produce historical works. The third component was the result of state legislation in 1919 mandating the appointment of municipal historians, one for every town and village with a population greater than four hundred, and later legislation that included counties and the boroughs of New York City. The historians in this network now number more than 1,350 people, a phalanx who aim to do as well as they can on behalf of their community's history. This triad, made up of two statewide historical organizations, a State Historian, and local historians, provides a potentially vivid presence for doing the state's history.

What is most interesting is that the organizations, and those that appeared afterward around the state, were created by private individuals, whereas the state and local historians were legislated by the state government to preserve and disseminate information about its people's history. On paper, this is an impressive array of organizations and people concerned about and involved in doing state and local history, and the state's role was stunningly original and important.

There are two historical conventions about how to view New York's history. For some people, New York's history is inseparable from the history of the nation, that is, a history somewhat larger than the state itself. For others, the history of New York City casts a large shadow that often oversteps the city limits, as if its history and that of the state were one and the same. These two historical viewpoints have dominated the state story. Histories of the smaller places within the state have been created to celebrate the local and to differentiate one locality from another. Local history has been used to create and define place, a role for which it has been very useful.

The one underlying problem, at least for the last century and a half, has been the lack of firm financial footing for the organizations that have been put in place to attend to New York's history.

In the historical novel *World's End*, T. C. Boyle propels his motorcycle-riding antihero along a road that the young man misjudges, only to end up careening into a blue and yellow New York State historic marker. This brutal encounter with history resulted in the loss of a foot. Later in the novel, our hapless hero bashes his other foot. The story provides us with an allegorical roadmap for understanding local history in the state, even though not all historical encounters in New York have been quite so injurious.<sup>1</sup> There have been some close calls, and even a few blind alleys along the way, but mostly the failures and successes that have occurred involve leadership, will, and money—and not historical markers.

1. T. C. Boyle, *World's End* (New York: Viking Publishing, 1987).

## ***Revvng up the Motorbike***

Organized local history began with John Pintard, a New York City merchant, who with a dozen friends created the New-York Historical Society in 1804. The N-YHS was an elite group of men who intended to create a fine library, meet to hear learned papers, and “rescue from dust and obscurity of private repositories . . . important documents liable to be lost or destroyed by indifference or neglect.” In 1809 it issued a general appeal for “manuscripts, records, pamphlets and books relative to the history of this country” and also posed a series of questions seeking “particular information,” such as the number of religious establishments, the “state of *morals*,” and the “progress of luxury,” meaning carriages and other signs of affluence, in order to add to its historical collection information about contemporary life. This questionnaire did not set off a storm of activity, but the N-YHS gradually amassed a fabulous collection of materials, some germane to local and state history, but also including the eclectic contents of homes and attics of members and collectors.<sup>2</sup>

Writing the state’s history dates to Washington Irving’s *History of New York* published in 1809 and William Smith’s *History of the Province of New York* in 1829. At that point the state became involved and in 1839 passed legislation to fund the collection of documents in European archives relating to its history. This resulted in the publication of E. B. O’Callaghan’s massive *Documentary History of New York*, issued between 1849 and 1851. Community histories began with The Rev. Lyman Beecher’s *Sermon Containing a General History of the Town of East Hampton*, published in 1806. By 1850 Albany, Buffalo, Cooperstown, Rochester, and Binghamton also had histories promoting their unique attractions, discussing founding families and institutions and stressing the reasons why local sons (and it was sons that these communities worried about) should remain at home and why newcomers should settle there. Local history was often written in competition with other nearby places. Local history became the repository of facts, recorded and published before the last of the settling generation died off and took all that they knew with them. The process thereby created a crafted and agreed-upon community memory.

## ***Going Round the Bend***

The bend in the road, for state and local history—in New York and elsewhere—was the celebration of the Centennial of American Independence. In 1876 President U. S. Grant urged Americans to write histories of their

2. See “To the Public,” *New-York Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 1 (1811): 6–13; and Carol Kammen, “Not Like a Bed of Oysters,” *New York History* (October 1987): 420–25, reprinted in Kammen, *Plain as a Pipestem: Essays about Local History* (Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1989).

hometowns, an invitation taken up, with the result that many community histories appeared. In Suffolk County, six local histories were published in 1876; in Seneca County, ten appeared in the two decades after the Centennial; five issued from Clinton County between 1876 and 1900. These books contain valuable information, though they generally lack documentation.<sup>3</sup> The Centennial also encouraged large publishers in and out of state (in Syracuse and Philadelphia, for example) to regard this popular interest in local history as a business opportunity. These commercial outfits produced histories that became bedrock for the next century containing information about the origins of towns and counties. They also listed municipal officers and information about the organization of local institutions. Published in the years after the Civil War, most list by name soldiers, their regiments, battles, injuries and deaths, and condition upon discharge. These books were financed by pre-publication sales and by inducing men to pay for portraits of themselves, sometimes of their wives, homes, barns, and even cattle. I have found very few factual mistakes in the 1879 history of my county (Tompkins), but I continually attempt to amend its lapses and its steadfastly WASP and male point of view by keeping a list of topics I search for but cannot find—a useful way to judge changes in historical thinking over time.<sup>4</sup>

The organization of historical societies also followed the Centennial. Prior to 1876, there had been fewer than ten local historical societies in the state, each intent upon celebrating the history of a place, each one eager to collect local artifacts, publish documents, and present lectures to membership and sometimes to the public at large. They were driven, for the most part, by donations and the wishes of donors. The Long Island Historical Society, for instance, founded in 1863, received a gift of \$2,000 in 1865 to create collections about Egypt, the Holy Land, and ancient Greece—not exactly Long Island local history. A later bequest in the 1890s led to a new focus on books in Latin. That society housed important collections, but its holdings were eclectic. Few were directly related to the history of the area, and within its impressive but confusing collection the mission of the LIHS became “lost in a forest of its own possessions.” This eclecticism of collections was mirrored in historical societies across the state, where to a great extent donors dictated an organization’s holdings. In the 1920s the LIHS sold some of its collections and gave other items to nearby repositories—a situation other history organizations in the state, including the N-YHS, only dealt seriously with at the end of the twentieth century, and some not even yet.<sup>5</sup>

3. See Harold Nestler, *A Bibliography of New York State Communities* (Port Washington: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1968), arranged by county and town. There is an “Addition and Correction” sheet issued in 1975 that notes books to that date. Beecher’s *Sermon Containing a General History of the Town of East Hampton* is available at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)

4. Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* (1985; rev. ed., Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 102–05.

5. See David J. Russo, *Keepers of Our Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820–1930s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, pp. 11–

The Cayuga County Historical Association was the first county organization in the state, created in 1876, followed by more than a dozen others by 1900. These were chartered by the state, as were the town societies that were founded mostly after the turn of the twentieth century.

The New-York Historical Society showed little interest in people or events beyond the metropolitan area, thereby becoming local in focus. The New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) began in 1899, intending to celebrate the North Country and the French and Indian War, but gradually it adopted a statewide scope and importance. Its goal was “to make history a popular interest.” Over the years NYSHA’s successful lectures, seminars, and publications served the interests of a broad range of New Yorkers. Its summer seminars attracted amateurs and academics to Cooperstown, on the shores of Lake Otsego, for sessions on the state’s history and craft workshops. NYSHA also fostered local history among school children through a well-developed network of Yorker Clubs.

It was probably also the Centennial and the growing popularity of local history that prompted the state to act on behalf of history by creating an office of State Historian.<sup>6</sup> Hugh Hastings held the post from 1895 to 1907. In 1909, Victor Hugh Paltsits, the second State Historian, issued an important paper entitled *The Function of the State Historian of New York* in which he outlined the duties he thought important to tackle, such as collecting and editing official records, especially those pertaining to New Yorkers’ participation in military events. He also stressed that his position needed to function independently from state bureaucracy.

Paltsits, for all his historical rigor and industry, ran into his own roadside sign in the person of Andrew S. Draper, New York’s first Commissioner of Education, who headed the State Education Department (SED), created by legislation in 1904 by consolidating governmental components concerned with education (the public schools, state normal schools, for example) into one entity. While enlarging his sphere, Draper managed to get the Office of State Historian under his authority, and shortly thereafter, Paltsits resigned in protest. Since that time, the Commissioner of Education has appointed the New York State Historian, and has controlled the budget for the office, managing the post within SED. The third State Historian coped with the devastation caused by a 1911 fire in state archival material; the fifth, James Sullivan (1916–1923) focused on documentary editing.<sup>7</sup>

Sullivan also promoted enactment of the rather extraordinary and unique 1919 Local Government Historians Law, putting in place the third component of the triangle of interests promoting state and local history. The legis-

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41; and Walter M. Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies* (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1962), 38–42, 339–79. The quote is on p. 379.

6. New York State Laws of 1895, Vol. T, section 393, page 23G.

7. See Joseph F. Meany, Jr., “New York: The State of History” (1994 typescript; revised 2001). Available online at [www.nysm.nysed.gov/services/meanydoc.html](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/services/meanydoc.html).

lation required that appointed historians locate documents, see to their preservation, and research local history. The legislation was intended to record the service records of veterans of The Great War, then returning home, just as communities were experiencing the passing from the scene of veterans of the Civil War in which there was great interest. There was also the hope that the public might direct questions to the appointed municipal historians and lessen the growing demand on the State Historian. Municipal historians were encouraged to inform and interest the public about its history. These municipal historians were designated as officers of their municipalities, yet the law provided no provision for salaries, offices, or support, save for a fireproof safe. In fact, municipalities had no responsibility at all for these positions except for making the appointment. These many official historians set out after their own historical interests, some investing their time in genealogical research, some tending local cemeteries, others working on their own to learn history from local sources.<sup>8</sup>

If we follow the trajectory of T.C. Boyle's novel, there are times when his bumbling hero follows a straight path, but often he is out of sight: he spends a long stretch of time in Alaska. The same might also be said of local history during the early years of the twentieth century: it was, in effect, put on ice. Academic history had begun to professionalize (1884) without showing much interest in local history, then considered fustian, not seen as particularly attractive or useful to the public. The previous interest in local history displayed by commercial publishers waned, although some local history continued to appear under the auspices of historical societies, and books were brought out by authors themselves or by local printers. Alexander C. Flick, the sixth State Historian (1923–1939), pursued military history and edited a ten-volume history of the state.<sup>9</sup>

It is rather surprising to discover the number of local town and village histories published in the 1940s and 1950s, indicating a strong interest in the local past. Perhaps this was partially due to the relaxation of wartime restrictions on paper and ink, but it is surely also the result of an appreciation of home following the dislocation of people and lives during World War II. In Erie County, for example, three histories of towns within the county were published before 1900, five in the 1930s, and fourteen between 1950 and 1969. This same pattern appears across the state. Of the fifty histories written about

8. New York Arts and Cultural Affairs Law, Section 57:09. Today, although some appointed historians receive stipends and a few are salaried employees of a municipality, many as the appointed records manager, most work as volunteers. Their annual reports, sent to the State Historian, have not been considered particularly important. In the 1980s, when I wanted to write about these reports, someone in SED handed me all that had come in from the previous year and instructed that I not return them. They are now in the Department of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Today annual reports are acknowledged. In 1981 the State of Indiana established the Indiana County Historian Program with an Indiana Historical Bureau that set requirements for the state's ninety-two volunteer county historians who are directed to promote local history and serve as a community resource.

9. See Meany, Jr., "The State of History."

towns in Nassau County, four date before 1900, seventeen from 1900 to 1940, and twenty-five between 1948 and 1966.<sup>10</sup>

This mid-century interest in local history was probably also the result of the growth of local historical organizations and dissatisfaction with the limitations of older nineteenth-century histories. It might also have been inspired by educational seminars sponsored by NYSHA or by newly enacted state educational requirements. In 1939, after tinkering for years with the public school curriculum, the State Education Department (SED) began to emphasize the “study of the community” as the place where “fundamental principles of democratic government are hammered out on the anvil of mutual relationships.” It was believed that local history would deepen “our spiritual roots, to give us the sense of ‘belonging to a place,’ which is so genuine a satisfaction.” For some, this concern for “community living” translated into civics instruction in grades 7, 8, or 9. Local history was mentioned, observes James Folts of the New York State Archives, who researched this question, “but only as an aspect of local community institutions and relationships.” In other words, what SED was most interested in, in line with the times, were classes devoted to government, citizenship, and patriotism.<sup>11</sup>

In 1942, however, SED defined its aim more precisely and stated that “social studies” in grade 7 should have as a goal “learning about the local community and New York State,” whereas in grade 8 students should be taught American history, from the colonial period to the present. Most public school teachers were unprepared to teach local history, lacking both a curriculum and teaching aids. They were also, for the most part, without any training in the complexities of doing local history: the paucity of materials on some subjects, the fragility of documents, or the need to define research projects carefully so that they could be accomplished by children. Nonetheless, some teachers achieved little miracles, and local history was a course that many people remembered years later, a testament to the teachers’ ingenuity and dedication. Perhaps teachers’ needs for information became a contributing factor for the interesting spurt of local history publications that followed World War II.

### ***The Second Historical Collision***

While losing a foot in a run-in with a historic marker seemed an interesting if surprising device at the beginning of Boyle’s novel *World’s End*, having the hero bash his other foot near the end of the book was an accident the reader kept wishing would not occur. With local history there was, interestingly enough, a second bend in the road to negotiate—this time with dramatically different results. National and local celebrations of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution greatly influenced the practice of local history. The Bi-

10. See Nestler, *Bibliography of New York State Communities*.

11. James Folts, New York State Archives, e-mail message to author, November 10, 2009.

centennial helped democratize local history. During this time, several trends emerged, including urban history and the new social history, attention to the local and civil rights, democratization of opportunity, and creation of the profession of public historian, all things that were reflected in how local history has been framed since the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> The era had unexpected influence on the unique issues facing the triad concerned with local history in New York—history organizations, the office of State Historian, and the appointed municipal historians.

New history organizations blossomed, some counties creating a county history society and many towns forming their own smaller associations. In my county (Tompkins), where there had been two historical societies in 1976, there are now seven—some strong, several weak and already considering disbanding. The results of this over-organization have been mixed. In some cases the newer organizations created clear goals, attracted membership, and found sufficient endowment. More often, the older folks who created a society in the 1980s found themselves, over time, less interested or able to carry on; the financial burdens of opening buildings to the public and providing access and insurance grew burdensome; and few of these organizations had clearly articulated objectives. The newer societies also drew financial support and volunteer aid from the larger already-established associations.

County history organizations, even those newly created, suffered. Six new county societies were formed after 1945: in Clinton, Delaware, Wayne, Albany, Schuyler, and Orleans counties. However, the Allegany County Historical Society, founded in 1977, “died” in 2008, according to the Allegany County Historian, who said that its demise was “due to lack of participation—no one wanted to be an officer, arrange programs, etc. . . .”<sup>13</sup> Others today are feeling acute financial constraints and are cutting staff, reducing hours, and most especially limiting the installation of exhibitions, which are costly and time-consuming to mount.

The two statewide organizations also encountered problems. NYSHA dropped its popular array of summer seminars, eliminating a successful means of history education, and has also discontinued its Yorker program for school students. The N-YHS went into what can probably best be described as receivership. Then it cleaned house, instituted clearly defined goals, pruned its eclectic collections, dropped its journal, and set in place inspired leadership that located sufficient money to support a truly stunning series of exhibits that have been widely praised for their importance.

After all the leadership it had shown in regard to history, the State of New York terminated the Office of State History in 1976. That office, established

12. See in particular Blake McKelvey’s many histories of Rochester: *Rochester: The Water-Power City, 1812–1854* (1945); *Rochester: The Flower City, 1855–1890* (1949); *Rochester: Quest for Equality, 1890–1925* (1956), and *Rochester: The Emerging Metropolis, 1925–61* (1961), in particular. McKelvey also wrote about the city’s parks, education, libraries and Rochester during the Civil War.

13. Craig Braack, Allegany County Historian, e-mail message to author, November 5, 2009.

a decade earlier and directed by the State Historian, who also held the title of Assistant Commissioner for State History, had administered the state's history program. The incumbent lost his position and several other positions were also eliminated. In that Bicentennial year of heightened historical consciousness, the state turned its back on an institution of which it should have been proud. It cannot be said that New York had not been interested in its history. It had supported the collection of archival material in 1839; created the position of State Historian in the 1890s; mandated municipal historians in 1919; required local history education in 1942; and in 1975 created both the New York State Council for the Humanities and the Council for the Arts, which improved standards and provided funding for many state and local history projects. The state had passed through a time, from the 1930s to the 1960s, when the state historical organizations and the office of State Historian had cooperated and when there was interest in the state's history by novelists, folklorists, and preservationists. It was also during this era that the New York State Archives, under the leadership of Larry Hackman and then his successors, began to support archival preservation and research. The Archives sponsored educational programs in Albany and around the state, and provided research scholarships. Its leadership has been exemplary, and it created *New York Archives*, a lively and popular journal that contains history articles and features examples of archival use. Its authors are drawn from the academic and public history sphere, and also include appointed historians of municipalities and independent scholars.

The state had, in effect, run into a stop sign. Shortly after eliminating the Office of State History, the Education Department designated an employee already on the staff of SED to become Acting State Historian and transferred the position to the State Museum. Thereafter, the position was filled, sometimes on a continuing basis and sometimes on an "acting" basis, by individuals who usually had other responsibilities. Resources were very limited, diminishing the scope and activity of the office. State and local history were relegated to low priority. After an incumbent who had been serving in an "acting" capacity from 1994 retired in 2001, the State Historian's position was left vacant for seven years.

This situation became a lightning rod for the municipal historians who blared somewhat like traffic cops and organized to create a sense of community and provide educational initiatives that once came (even though without consistency) from NYSHA and the State Historian.<sup>14</sup> Their organization, the Association of Public Historians of New York State, lobbied for the renewal of the position of State Historian, as did the Commission on State and Local

14. In 1971 municipal historians organized the Municipal Historians Association of New York; in 1986 the county historians formed their own organization. In 1999 both groups combined into the Association of Public Historians of New York State (APHNYS). Its primary activity has been building its own organization and promoting a system to register appointed historians with the goal of seeing them receive payment for service and professional status. APHNYS holds regional educational meetings and an annual conference.

History appointed by Commissioner of Education (2000–2006). The Commission hoped to see a full-time line for the State Historian, who would advocate for the state's history, use modern technology to provide educational training for the municipal historians, post documentary source material on the Internet, and lobby on behalf of state history.

In response, while searching for a new Chief Curator of the State Museum, the Commissioner of Education added the responsibility of State Historian to the job description, repeating the pattern established when the Office of State History was abolished. The story of the position of State Historian then, is one of diminishment, which is not the result anyone wanted, but by this action the Commissioner quashed the calls for action that came from around the state. The current occupant of the position of Chief Curator of the State Museum and State Historian, appointed in 2008, has complex duties, and his capacity to act as historian is limited by lack of funding, staff, and time. Tasked with the full-time duties of Curator, he has also been charged with the full-time duties of State Historian without being afforded the time or resources to sustain its ideal leadership mission in terms of the state's history. Nor has the state supported his mission as Historian by appointing, for example, a group or commission to plan for the observation of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War. Had the state designed the post as full-time State Historian, it might well have enabled the state's important and interesting role during that era to be extensively developed and better known.<sup>15</sup>

Where some states have supported the collection of documents and the research and presentation of state and local history with state funds and an organization supported with state monies, New York has allowed a network of differing components to swing free of each other, each to do its best without leadership or an expectation of cooperation. This might be viewed as independence of the parts to do as they wish, and some strong leaders have been impressive. Alternatively, it could be seen as a wasted opportunity to promote the state's history within a cooperative and educational context.

If you want to examine an interesting and dynamic situation concerning history, you might look at what happened in New York with the creation of numerous history organizations, appointed historians directed to be involved with community history, and an office of State Historian that published and promoted history. However, I could easily reverse the picture: if you want to see a really interesting setup for state and local history floundering without direction or interconnection, and without adequate financing, you should look to New York. Both statements are true. There is the potential for New York to be a model for other states, if only the connections between the pieces were present—or the will that they be set into place—and if only adequate funding had accompanied the original legislative acts. Instead, there has been little more than stasis. What has been accomplished has been by individuals or

15. See Sam Roberts, "New York Doesn't Care to Remember the Civil War," *New York Times*, December 26, 2010.

organizations functioning under their own steam and for their own benefit, and some of these players have accomplished wonderful things. But the allure of the network has not come about; the hope for interconnectedness and cooperation and education has not been realized. Instead, historymaking in the state has been woefully underfunded and greatly underappreciated, and, as Paltsits feared, the office of State Historian has been emasculated.

I asked several people what initiatives they would hope to see the state undertake, imagining the simple step of restoring a fulltime, reasonably funded and staff-supported State Historian position. They proposed a number of initiatives taking advantage of the Historian's organizational skills. These advisors suggested that a State Historian develop an Internet network to deliver information about grants, promote history themes, advertise significant achievements, and maintain a list of research topics; advocate for commemorations of historical events and connect those involved in researching them; recognize work well done; develop a thoughtful and thorough educational program, available online to those interested, of themes and resources for doing New York history; provide training in the form of statewide and regional meetings for County Historians who are the interface between Albany and municipal historians and others interested in local history; promote topics in New York history; maintain a register of speakers and of research interests; create an annual report form and use the information to show the economic and social value of local and state history to the state; advocate within the state government for the means of carrying out worthwhile projects; develop a grant program for those engaged in local history, understanding that small sums can help; and create an advisory council to advocate for programs and activities devised by the State Historian.

### ***What Our Careless Rider Might See from the Road Today***

If our biker were to ride his motorbike today to Wales, in western New York, he would see wind turbines on the hillsides. Some are at a distance, but the road pulls close to a few clusters that rise like cathedrals or granaries high into the sky. Our hero might stop to watch. Some of the turbines spin merrily in the wind, others move more slowly, and some seem to move not at all—their connections unseen but crucial for the production of energy. The wind machines recall the situation of state and local history today. Many people approach local history with genuine interest and enthusiasm, local and place-specific history has been and continues to be compelling, proving that the history of place is of interest and importance in defining our communities today.<sup>16</sup>

16. Note the sales of books of local history published by Arcadia Press and The History Press, commercial publishers that for the past twenty years have sought out authors for histories of municipalities, institutions, and of segments of society. Both presses, and others I probably don't know about, set a word limit, require illustrations, and provide editorial aid.

Today, local history is undertaken by scholars and amateurs, by organizations strong and wanting; it is taught in the schools, though not so much in the state's colleges. Local history is used as a promotional device to encourage tourism and to enhance the cultural lives within our communities. Yet, like a hillside of elegant wind turbines, the diverse aspects of state and local history protrude from the landscape mostly as solitary entities in isolation from the others. They are only loosely connected, harvesting energy from their own encounter with the wind but largely unconnected to a grid from which they might reap the benefits of cooperation, education, and communication across borders. Some of them spin with delight; others move slowly or not at all, going nowhere in particular. These slow-moving historical power generators might keep the local operation going, even if only haltingly. Yet they fail to bring sufficient currents into play.

Our hero didn't learn from his encounter with a historical marker and repeated his carelessness; the state of New York began strongly but has not always stayed the course. But its original instincts were in favor of preserving and recording and promoting the state's local history, and it put into place a formidable network to tackle these tasks. For our young rider, history was the *World's End*; for the state of New York it is an opportunity to ride forward. Not to seize this opportunity is an unfortunate loss.

CAROL KAMMEN, Tompkins County (New York) Historian, is the author of *On Doing Local History* (1985; rev., 2003); *Ithaca: A Brief History* (2008); *Cornell: Glorious to View* (2005); *First Person Cornell: Students' Diaries, Letters, Email, and Blogs* (2006), and *Part and Apart: The Black Experience at Cornell, 1865–1945* (2009). She was named New York State Public Historian for the year in 2005 and since 1995 has written the column "On Doing Local History," for *History News*, the quarterly journal of the American Association for State and Local History, an organization that presented her with an Award of Distinction in 2007. Since 1977 she has written a history column, "Pieces of the Past," that appears in *The Ithaca Journal*.