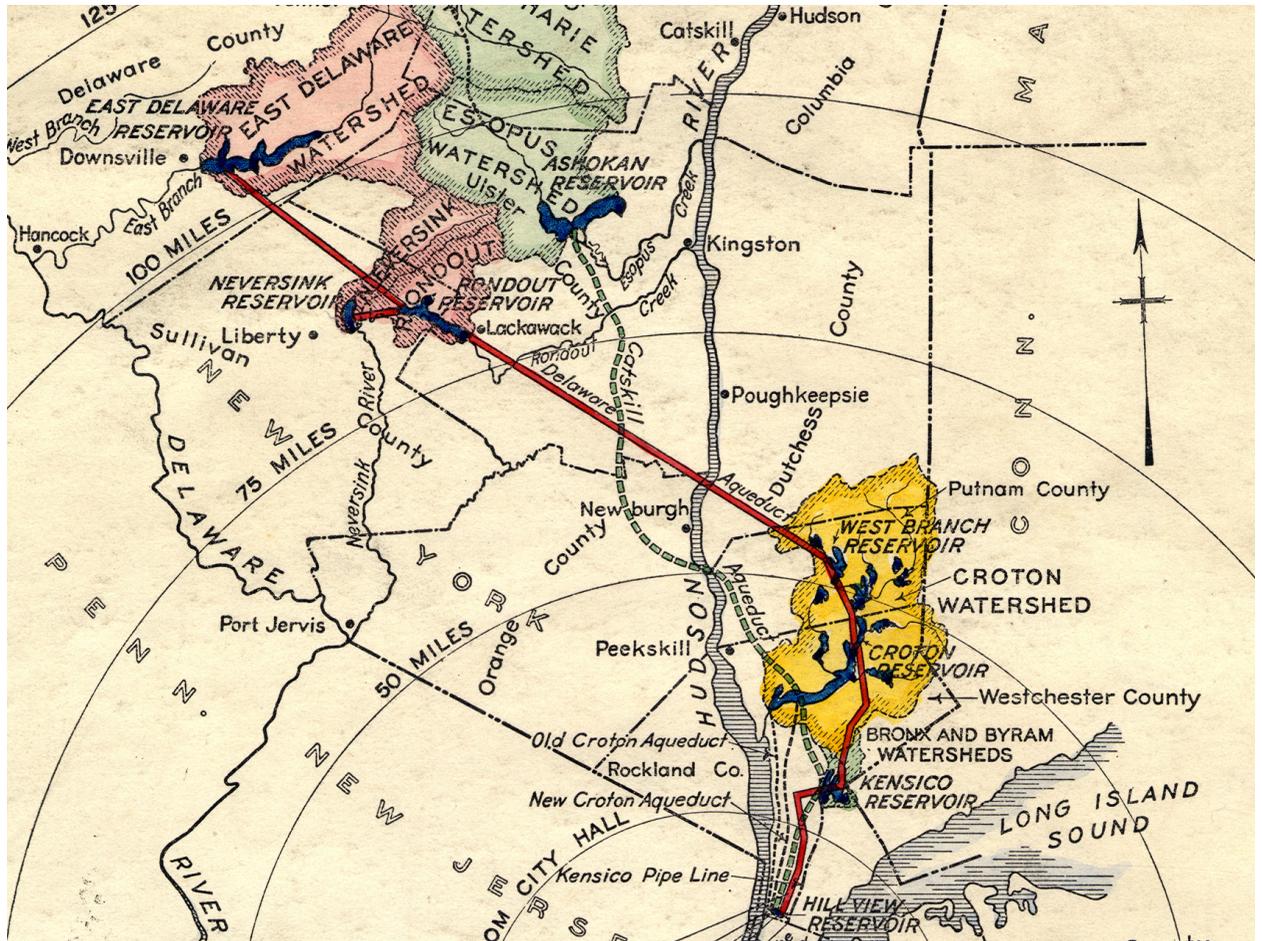


From Watersheds to Faucets

The Marvel of New York City's Water Supply System

On Long-Term View



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Cover: Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity, *The Water Supply of the City of New York*, August 9, 1938

For the 1939/1940 World's Fair, city agencies were invited to produce exhibits for the New York City Pavilion, now home to the Queens Museum. Each exhibit shared "what the various branches of municipal government are doing to serve the citizens of today."*

To educate New Yorkers about their water supply system, the Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity commissioned the Water System Model. Intended as the centerpiece for the Department's joint exhibit with the Board of Water Supply, it was the largest and most expensive component of an ambitious exhibit that featured illuminated maps, dynamic water displays, and a full size replica of a water tunnel.

The model was built by the Works Progress Administration with an immense depression-era budget of \$100,000—roughly \$1.5 million in today's dollars. However, at 540 square feet, the model was too big for the allotted space and was excluded from the fair. Ten years later, its one public appearance was in the City's Golden Anniversary Exposition at Manhattan's Grand Central Palace. For most of the next 60 years, the model was stored at a water pumping station in the Bronx, out of view except for occasional visits by public school groups and intrepid city officials.

Re-discovered after decades in storage, the 27-piece model was in desperate need of conservation. Working in collaboration, the Queens Museum and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection, arranged for it to be restored and returned to its intended home.

The Water System Model is one example of the use of models to inspire people about the grandness and complexity of New York City. Another is the Panorama of the City of New York, then and still the world's largest architectural model, commissioned by Robert Moses for the 1964/1965 World's Fair. Displayed together under one roof, these models invite New Yorkers to consider the vital and inseparable role that water plays in our individual and collective urban lives. These models represent the Museum's close ties to the history of this building and this park, as well as to New York City.

*Official Guide to City of New York Exhibition Building, New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940

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