



**Environmental
Protection**

Department of Environmental Protection Donates 19th Century Wooden Water Mains to New-York Historical Society

Two Early Water Mains are Only Known Complete Sections of Wooden Water Pipes in Any New York City Collection

Preserved Examples of New York City's Earliest Water Distribution Infrastructure will Provide Opportunity to Educate New Yorkers and Visitors about the Evolution of the City's Water Supply

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Carter Strickland today announced that DEP has donated two preserved 19th century wooden water mains to the New-York Historical Society, where they will be preserved and made available to the public in future exhibitions and educational programming. The wooden mains were installed in the early 1800's and were discovered in 2006 during routine utility upgrades that included the replacement of water mains in Lower Manhattan. Adding to the uniqueness of the discovery, when unearthed, the two wooden pipes were still connected, to form a 26-foot section of the city's original 19th century water distribution system. While several New York City institutions, including the New-York Historical Society, have pieces of wooden water mains in their collections, there are no known examples of complete sections still intact. Once on display, the wooden mains will help educate New Yorkers and visitors about how clean drinking water helped New York grow into a modern metropolis.

"These hollowed out trees were the City's first water mains and they tell a story about how clean drinking water helped protect public health and turn New York into a thriving city," said Commissioner Strickland. "Thanks to this partnership with the New-York Historical Society, New Yorkers and the millions of tourists who visit our City each year will have an opportunity to learn about the history of our water supply and to have a greater appreciation for the quality of NYC water each time they turn on a faucet."

"We are very pleased to add these well-documented water pipes to New-York Historical's collection, where they will be used in future exhibitions and educational programming to help visitors understand the city's early infrastructure and the pressing need to secure a safe and pure water supply," said Margaret K. Hofer, Curator of Decorative Arts. "Among the possibilities under consideration would be the display of the pipes in our redesigned Luce Center, along with other powerful relics of New York's past. Like all New-York Historical Society collections, these artifacts would be also documented in eMuseum, New-York Historical's on-line collection catalog."

“The fact that the New-York Historical Society is making a home for these pipes is as wonderful as finding them in the first place,” said Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. “It’s an incredibly important archaeological discovery, and as the official stewards of the City’s historic resources, we are grateful to the Department of Design and Construction for finding them, to DEP for conserving and storing them, and to the New-York Historical for showcasing them to a worldwide audience.”

One of the earliest methods of delivering clean drinking water in cities like New York, Boston and Philadelphia, wooden water mains were constructed using spruce, oak or yellow pine trees. Workers used an auger to bore a hole through the center of the trees creating wooden pipes that would be tapered at each end to connect to the adjacent pipe. The pipes were then strapped together with a wrought iron collar.

The preserved mains being donated to the New-York Historical Society are sections of yellow pine trees that measure approximately 14-feet and 12-feet in length, respectively. The early mains are more than two and a half feet around and have a hollowed-out core eight inches in diameter. The wooden water mains were likely installed in the 1820s, after the section of Beekman Street between Water and Pearl Streets was opened. The preserved pipes were part of a water distribution system composed of interlocking wooden mains that carried water from ground wells in the vicinity of City Hall.

Upon their discovery in 2006, the Department of Design and Construction, consulted with the Landmarks Preservation Commission and an archeological consulting firm was called in to oversee the excavation. Construction workers excavated the area surrounding the entire length of the pipes before attempting to remove them. Once fully exposed, the mains were carefully removed for preservation. A report issued by Landmarks Preservation Commission about the excavation can be found here: http://nytelecom.vo.llnwd.net/o15/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/979.pdf.

After the wooden mains were cleaned and stabilized they were put on display at DEP’s headquarters in the spring of 2012. Since then, DEP has searched for an institution to adopt and preserve the mains as a historic record of New York City’s water infrastructure. The preserved wooden water mains present a unique opportunity to educate New Yorkers about the evolution of New York City’s water supply system and the critical role water played in the growth of the city.

The wooden water mains were originally installed by the Manhattan Company, a private organization that was chartered in 1799 by the New York State Legislature for the purpose of providing pure and wholesome water to New York City. Wooden water mains became obsolete when the Croton Aqueduct was put into service in 1842.

The New-York Historical Society, one of America’s pre-eminent cultural institutions, is dedicated to fostering research and presenting history, art exhibitions, and public programs that reveal the dynamism of history and its influence on the world of today. Founded in 1804, the New-York Historical Society has a mission to explore the richly layered history of NYC and State and the country, and to serve as a national forum for the discussion of issues surrounding the making and meaning of history.

DEP manages New York City’s water supply, providing more than one billion gallons of water each day to more than nine million residents, including eight million in New York City. The water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, comprising 19 reservoirs and three controlled lakes. Approximately 7,000 miles of water mains,

tunnels and aqueducts bring water to homes and businesses throughout the five boroughs, and 7,500 miles of sewer lines and 96 pump stations take wastewater to 14 in-city treatment plants. DEP has nearly 6,000 employees, including almost 1,000 in the upstate watershed. In addition, DEP has a robust capital program, with a planned \$14 billion in investments over the next 10 years that will create up to 3,000 construction-related jobs per year. This capital program is responsible for critical projects like City Water Tunnel No. 3; the Staten Island Bluebelt program, an ecologically sound and cost-effective stormwater management system; the city's Watershed Protection Program, which protects sensitive lands upstate near the city's reservoirs in order to maintain their high water quality; and the installation of more than 820,000 Automated Meter Reading devices, which will allow customers to track their daily water use, more easily manage their accounts and be alerted to potential leaks on their properties. For more information, visit nyc.gov/dep, like us on Facebook at facebook.com/nycwater, or follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/nycwater.