

UNITING THE BOROUGHS THE TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE EXHIBIT

A Teacher's Guide on the History and
Building of the Triborough Bridge

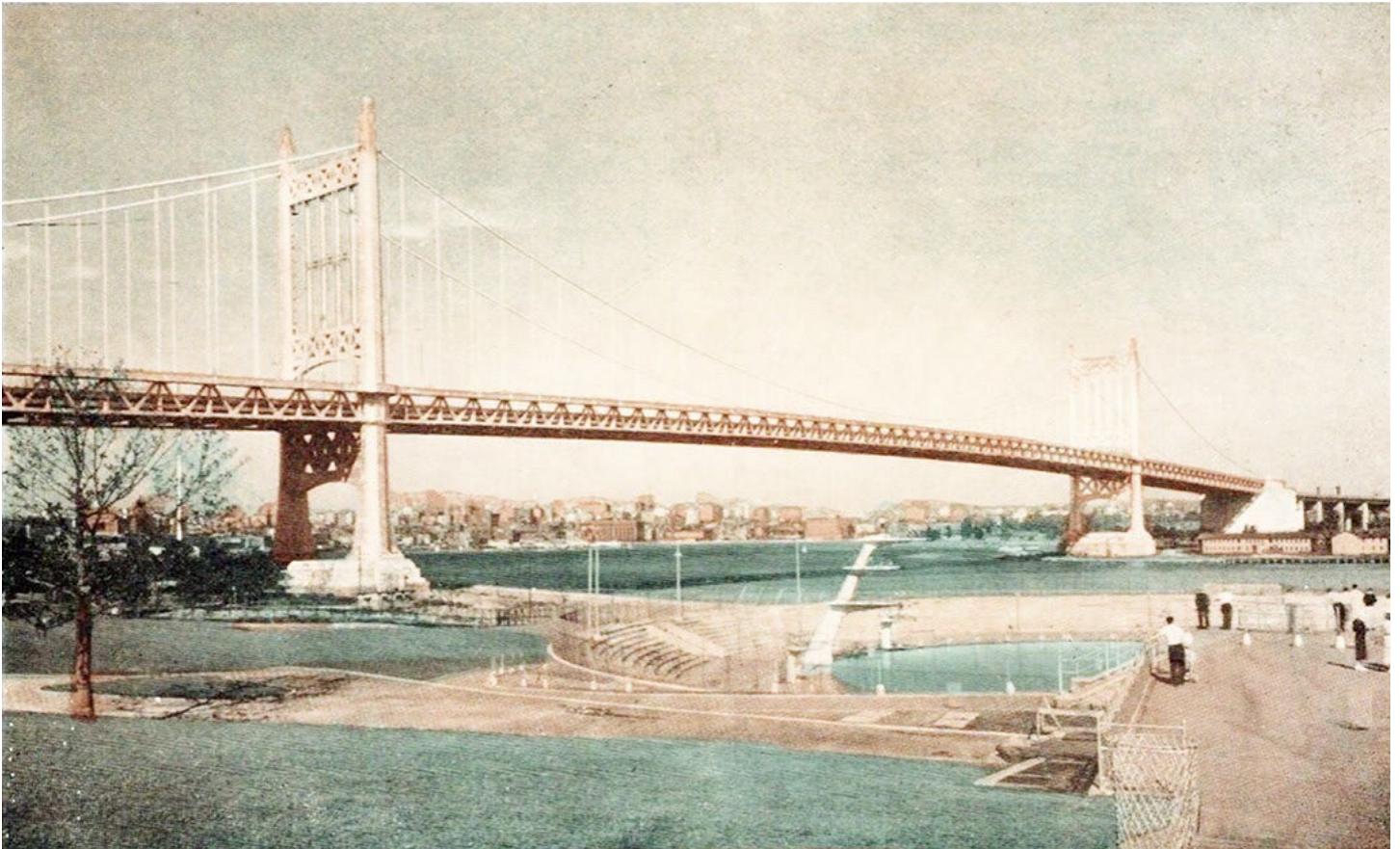


Exhibit Location

31 Chambers Street, Suite 110, New York, NY 10007

October 26, 2023 - June 2024

*This exhibit is open to the public for free
from 9 AM - 4:30 PM, Monday - Friday.*

Uniting the Boroughs: The Triborough Bridge

31 Chambers Street, New York, NY 10007 www.nyc.gov/records

NYC Department of Records
& Information Services

Join the NYC Department of Records & Information Services and MTA Bridges and Tunnels for a celebration of the Triborough Bridge in our latest exhibit, *Uniting the Boroughs*, which explores the history of the bridge and its role in uniting Manhattan, the Bronx, and Queens in a rapidly modernizing city.

Uniting the Boroughs focuses on the story of the evolving design and construction of the bridge, and the work of civil engineer Othmar Ammann to redesign the structure, overcoming multiple engineering difficulties to open in July, 1936, twenty years after its original conception.

The exhibit uses original documents, photos and footage from the Municipal Archives and the Bridges and Tunnels' Special Archive and includes a large model of the Triborough Bridge and surrounding areas commissioned in 1935. *Uniting the Boroughs* documents how the bridge contributed to the development of the city, including the history of Randall's and Wards Islands as parks.

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Triborough Bridge Location

The Bronx, Queens, and Manhattan

Fun Fact!

In 2008, the Triborough Bridge was renamed the Robert F Kennedy Bridge - after the late United States senator for New York State. Some people call it the RFK Triborough Bridge, but many people still call it the Triborough Bridge!

Type of Bridge

The Triborough Bridge is a Y-shaped bridge that crosses three different bodies of water. It links three boroughs and is one of the largest bridges in the United States.

History of the Triborough Bridge

City officials announced plans to build the bridge in 1916. When the bridge was originally suggested, many questioned whether there was the budget necessary to build it and argued that it was not needed. Construction eventually began in 1929 but halted shortly after the Great Depression began. When federal funding from the New Deal became available in 1933, the project resumed under the supervision of Robert Moses who oversaw important public projects. There were disputes among Moses, the Mayor of New York City, the Governor of New York State, and even the President of the United States over how much money was needed to build the bridge. One of the many disagreements came when Moses wanted the workers' work schedule increased from 30 hours to 40 hours per week to speed up construction. Eventually, Moses was able to get this done.

Although not finished until 1937, Moses staged a grand opening in 1936. Thousands of people attended the opening. President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke and was a passenger in one of the first vehicles to cross the bridge.

Fun Fact!

*When the bridge opened, the toll was 25 cents.
Now drivers can pay a toll of as much as \$9.11!*

Othmar Ammann, a Swiss-born civil engineer, designed the structure. In addition to the Triborough Bridge, Ammann designed the George Washington Bridge and the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge.

The Segments of the Bridge

The Triborough Bridge is made of four segments—one spanning the East River to Queens, another crossing the Harlem River to Manhattan, and the third from the Bronx Kill to the Bronx. The fourth is a T-shaped viaduct that leads to a plaza on Randall’s Island.

The Three Bridges that make up the Triborough Bridge

East River Suspension Bridge: This is the largest and most impressive part of the bridge. It connects Queens and Wards Island. The suspension bridge is 2,780-feet long and 98-feet wide and includes top towers with a very elaborate design. It has graceful cable lines, an attractive truss design, and decorative concrete pillars of the Art Deco era. It is the most elaborate of engineer Othmar Ammann’s designs, whose other suspension bridges are plain in comparison.

Harlem River Lift Bridge: This is the largest vertical lift bridge in the world. Its total length is 770-feet. The wide towers are 210-feet tall. Its design makes it a very impressive bridge. In addition to carrying Metro North Railroad trains from Manhattan to the Bronx, it has six lanes for vehicles and two walking lanes that extend between Manhattan and Randall's Island. This allows people to travel between Queens and the Bronx.

Bronx Kills Through Truss Bridge: This is the most unusual and the least attractive of the three bridges. It's a steel motorway bridge that connects Randall's Island in Manhattan with Port Morris in the Bronx. It was created so it could be converted into a vertical lift bridge. Since the Bronx Kills was filled with dirt to extend the park land, the vertical lift bridge was never built.

Fun Fact!

It's been described as "not a bridge so much as a traffic machine, the largest ever built."

How the Three Bridges Are Connected

These three bridges are connected by an elevated highway viaduct, a long, elevated roadway consisting of a series of short spans supported by arches, piers, or columns. The highway goes across Randall's and Wards Islands and 14 miles of support roads.

Fun Fact!

The Triborough Bridge previously had toll booths, but in 2017 the booths were removed and now tolls are collected electronically.

Randall's Island and Wards Island

Wards Island is a 225-acre landmass on the East River between Manhattan and Queens.

Randall's island is a 273-acre landmass on the East River between East Harlem, the Bronx and Astoria, Queens. Both Randall's and Wards Islands are transportation hubs, hosting the Triborough Bridge.

In 1936, the Triborough Bridge opened the first roadway connecting upper Manhattan with the Bronx and Queens with massive concrete piles and steel towers rising from Wards Island soil. In the 1930s the Metropolitan Conference on Parks recommended that the land on both islands be cleared of asylums and institutions and be used only for recreation. In 1933, the state acted on the recommendation and transferred the ownership to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Little Hell Gate, a narrow channel separated the two islands until the 1960s, when Robert Moses had them connected.

To learn more about the Triborough Bridge:

<https://www.nyc.gov/events/uniting-the-boroughs-the-triborough-bridge-exhibit-opening/463331/1>

<https://www.archives.nyc/blog/2023/11/3/united-the-boroughs-the-triborough-bridge>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/nyregion/28bridge.html>