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The Museum Association of New York strengthens the capacity of New York State’s cultural community by supporting professional standards and organizational development. We provide advocacy, training, and networking opportunities so that museums and museum professionals may better serve their missions and communities.

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New York State has more than 7,600 freshwater lakes, ponds, and reservoirs, as well as portions of two of the five Great Lakes, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Long Island Sound. Over 70,000 miles of rivers and streams flow within our state’s geographical boundaries. These waterbodies supply our drinking water; provide flood control to protect life and property; support recreation, tourism, agriculture, fishing, power generation, and manufacturing; provide habitat for aquatic plant and animal life; and inspire the human imagination.

Water also played a practical role in our state’s history. The availability of water affected settlement and migration patterns of all of New York’s peoples as a source of food, livelihood, and transportation.

As we celebrate the Bicentennial of the Erie Canal, the Water/Ways exhibition will tell the story of how six communities and their waterways helped New York become the Empire State, how canals and river communities played strategically important roles in the development of our transportation, trade, commerce, industry, and culture, and how our lake shores connect us to other states and our ocean front communities connect us to our nation and peoples around the globe.
Housed in the only remaining canal weighlock building in the United States, the Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse collects and preserves Canal material and provides educational experiences that champion the Erie Canal’s effects on the past, present, and future. The Museum is located on the route of the original Erie Canal, which transported goods, people, and ideas and shaped the development of Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo in New York as well as cities on the Great Lakes in the Midwest.
Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village (BNHV) is located at the point of convergence of the original Erie Canal and Tonawanda Creek. BNHV highlights Canal history through exhibitions, collections, and walking tours of the historic village. The historic working farmstead and history museum highlight the impact of local water resources on agriculture and rural ways of life in 19th century New York.

Illustration by Carol Coogan ©2019
In Aurora-on-Cayuga, the Aurora Masonic Center, the Village of Aurora Historical Society, and Long Library at Wells College have partnered to host the Water/Ways exhibition and share their unique Cayuga Lake water stories. This lake, heart of the Cayuga Nation of the Haudenosaunee, has provided resources to local peoples for centuries: Aurora was once the Cayuga orchards of “Peachtown.” The Erie Canal brought Aurora’s wool, grain, and fruit to national and international markets. As elsewhere in the Finger Lakes, farming is an economic driver, and water quality is an ongoing concern.
The Hudson River, the Champlain Canal, and the Lake George/Champlain watershed surround the city of Glens Falls, home of the Chapman Museum. These waterways supply drinking water, provide transportation routes and recreational opportunities, and offer water power for industry and electricity generation across a large geographic region of New York. The Chapman Museum celebrates the waterways surrounding Glens Falls and aims to increase public understanding of the issues that affect water quality in the upper Hudson River and Lake George/Champlain region.
Located on historic Rondout Creek, the Hudson River Maritime Museum collects and displays four centuries of technological, industrial, and ecological innovations. They collect, preserve, research, display, and interpret collections of historical artifacts related to the maritime heritage of the Hudson River including ice harvesting, brick making, boat building, bluestone quarrying, cement making and coal transport. In recent years, environmental advocacy has increased in communities along the Hudson River and along with it, education about the importance of watershed protection.
The East Hampton Historical Society documents and celebrates the social and natural history of the east end of Long Island, including the stories of baymen and fishermen who have lived and worked on the waters for generations, and the rich history of Native Americans who used and honored the waterways long before European settlement in 1640. Even today, East Hampton is defined by its proximity to the ocean. It’s location as a tourist destination and a residential area allows the Historical Society to expand education about the importance of waterways, teaching the next generation about environmental conservation.