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## Opening Day for Boston's Waterworks Museum is Sunday

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By [Daniel Couture](#)

New England Active Seniors Travel Examiner



Waterworks Museum in Boston which opens on Sunday, March 27

Credits: Dan Couture

Students at Boston College and residents of the Cleveland Circle vicinity know the building well. Many in these neighborhoods walk or jog along the dike separating the Chestnut Hill Reservoir from Beacon Street and when they look across the street they see a Richardsonian Romanesque building inscribed with the words “Metropolitan Waterworks” above the arch of the main entrance. This building, or more accurately the machinery within it, had for eighty years an important role in the critical function of supplying clean water to Boston. Thus it is fitting that it now is being preserved as a museum that focuses on the technology, architecture and social history of its operating era. Opening day is this coming Sunday, March 27th.

Understand that Boston had to face water supply problems during much of its development years even though it wasn't much of a concern originally. In fact, part of the reason it was settled in 1630 was because of a good fresh water supply. However, the city outgrew the local resources before the Revolutionary War. That led to Jamaica Pond being tapped before 1800 but, when you consider that from 1840 until 1900 the population grew six-fold from 93,000 to 560,000, the city obviously needed more volume.

That's when Boston started to look to outlying communities for significant new supplies. Lake Cochituate was the first major addition to the waterworks in 1849 and lakes formed from the Sudbury and Mystic Rivers were utilized later in the century, too. Lake Cochituate fed Chestnut Hill Reservoir which was built in 1870 but the need to move water from there to service the entire city is what led to the construction of the Metropolitan Waterworks pumping station. Unfortunately, when the facility opened as a small operation in 1887 it was virtually obsolete

already. That led to an expansion that brought about the impressive Chestnut Hill High Service Pumping Station building that exists now as the museum complete with a coal fired boiler room, an observation tower and three very powerful steam engines that worked the pumps.

Those engines were fully put to use when the Wachusett Reservoir was opened in Clinton in 1908. That event provided a water capacity that was sufficient for many of the years leading up to when the Quabbin Reservoir came on board. When you visit the museum you will be able to get up close to each of these engineering marvels of the mechanical age which were known for their quiet efficiency. Many of the tools used to maintain them will be on display as well.

The pumping station was used daily into the 1970's but now the reservoir is available only as a backup supply for emergency situations. One such emergency happened in May of last year when a major water main broke and the backup system came through according to plan. Meanwhile, the expansive waterworks property on the opposite side of the road today has been redeveloped into 112 condominiums spread out among several buildings, including four units located within the main structure.

The museum has an address of 2450 Beacon Street in Chestnut Hill, the neighborhood that people as far away as Roslindale and West Roxbury like to claim as their place of residence. In fact, the coveted Chestnut Hill encompasses a part of three cities. Two of them are literally a stone's throw from the museum, at least if you have an arm as good as most Red Sox players. A toss from the back side of the building over the Green Line tracks will reach Brookline while a stronger throw west might reach Newton if the trees don't block the flight path. Regardless, the museum itself is in a very beautiful corner of Brighton within the city limits of Boston.

If you can't make it to the Waterworks Museum grand opening this weekend, I suggest you wait for a nice spring day when the trees have fresh leaves and include in your visit a walk of at least part of the reservoir perimeter. The museum combined with the reservoir is shaping up to be yet another New England destination that shouldn't be missed.

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