

The 1939 New York World's Fair

By Alan Taylor

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An idea dreamed up at the height of the depression, the theme of the 1939 World's Fair in New York was "The World of Tomorrow." Planners were given permission to develop 1,200 acres in Queens, on the site of a former ash dump . Government agencies, corporations, civic groups, and smaller organizations from around the world arrived in huge numbers, building extraordinary pavilions and setting up exhibitions. The iconic Trylon and Perisphere structures became the symbols of the entire fair; they housed a diorama called "Democracity," a utopian city of the future. Over the course of two seasons, 44 million people attended the fair, catching glimpses of a possible future, and enjoying entertainments from marionette shows and thrill rides to girlie shows and choreographed aquatic extravaganzas.

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Rosalie Fairbanks, a guide to the New York World's Fair, points to the theme of the exposition -- the Tylon and Perisphere -- in New York on February 22, 1939, after the entire sheath of scaffolding was removed for the first time. #

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An aerial view of the 1939 New York World's Fair site during construction in Flushing Meadows, Queens, on May 17, 1938. #

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Shifts covering full 24-hour period were in effect as work was rushed on the filling in of land for the New York World's Fair in Flushing, New York, on December 16, 1936. #

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During construction, a bridge leads from the administration building to the exhibit area of the New York World's Fair, on February 21, 1938. #

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Arlene Warner, "queen of beauty" of Elgin, Illinois, presides at the opening ceremonies of the Elgin Time Observatory at the New York World's Fair on May 10, 1938. She is unveiling a heroic figure of "Time," represented as a slave striking a gong sculptured by Bernard J. Rosenthal of Chicago. #

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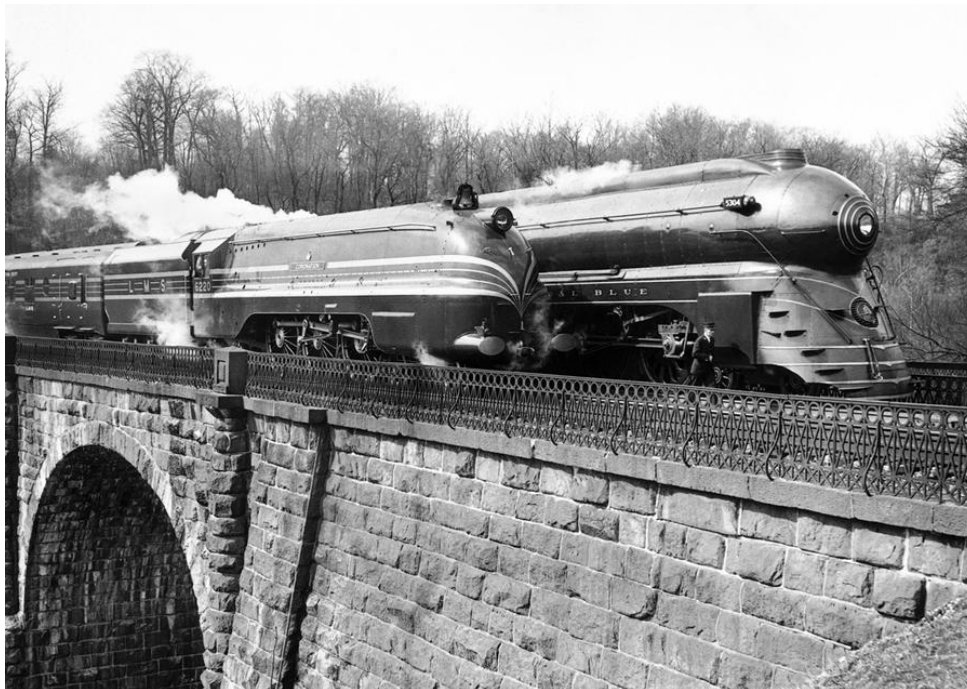


• The Russian pavilion at the New York World's fair, one of the last exhibits to be completed for opening of the exposition on April 30, 1939. A theater and a restaurant are incorporated in the semi-circular structure, and the exhibits and activities are designed to show the Russia's peoples. #

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The Coronation Scot, in America for the New York World's Fair, made several runs between Washington and Baltimore, where she awakened considerable interest. The Coronation Scot stops here on a bridge near Washington, alongside the famous American train Royal Blue, on March 27, 1939. #

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The World's Fair buildings now nearing completion over seven miles away (upper right) can be seen in the distance from the top of the Empire State Building in New York, on February 27, 1939. #

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Flanked by Boy Scouts, President Franklin D. Roosevelt opened New York's \$160,000,000 World's Fair with an address in which he said America has "hitched her wagon to a star of good will", on April 30, 1939. He emphasized the United States' desire for placid living among the countries of the world and expressed hope that the future would see a breakdown of "many barriers of intercourse" among European nations. #

AP Photo/John Lindsay

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Some of the 35,000 guests of honor who listened to the opening speeches in the Court of Peace at the New York World's Fair, on April 30, 1939. #

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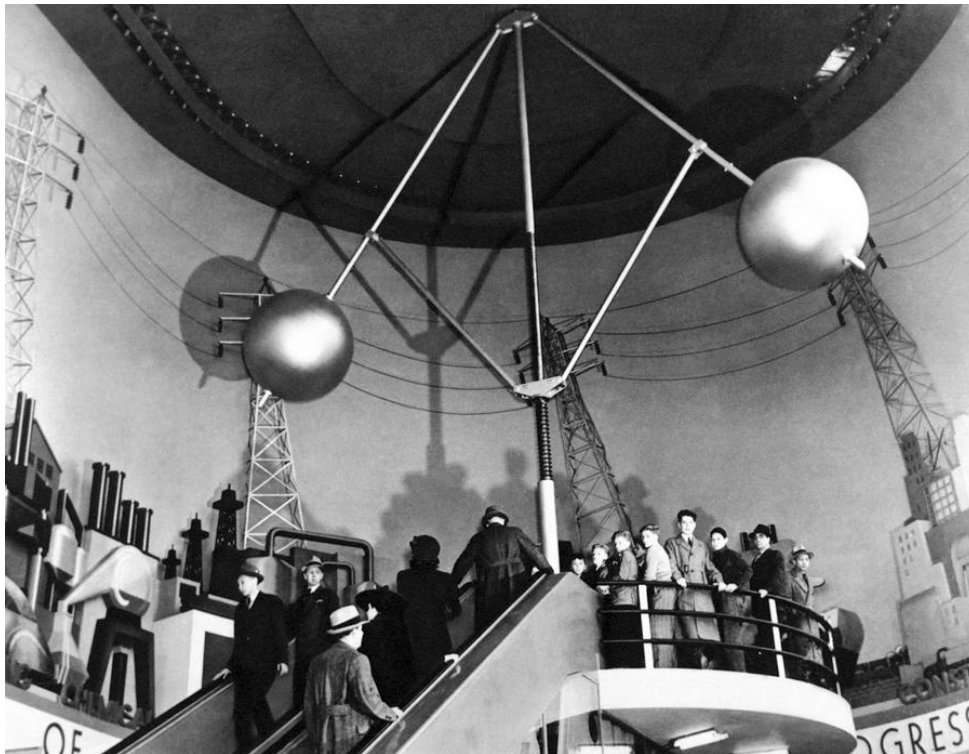
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A view taken from the side of one of the many lagoons at the New York World's Fair on July 7, 1939. Light brings out some of the wondrous beauty as erected at the "World of Tomorrow". The famous statue of George Washington is silhouetted against the lighted Perisphere. #

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Visitors ascend the "electric stairway" in the Hall of Power at the Westinghouse Building at the World's Fair, on May 8, 1939. #

AP Photo/Westinghouse

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Jamming every inch of space in the huge Hall of Electrical Living at the Westinghouse Building at the World's Fair, crowds stand 6 deep on the sidewalk outside the glass-enclosed structure to watch Elektro, the Westinghouse Moto-Man, perform his 26 mechanical tricks, including, walking, talking, smoking a cigarette and counting, on May 8, 1939. #

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Prominent representatives of the state of Washington look at a diorama of Grand Coulee dam, part of their state's exhibit at the New York World's Fair on May 1, 1939, after opening day ceremonies on April 30. From left are Mrs. E.B. McGovern, U.S. Senator Homer Bone, Mrs. Bone, and Comm. E.B. McGovern, representing the governor. #

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A World's Fair night views of Consolidated Edison's fountains, on June 24, 1939. #

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With New York City as a backdrop, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (first car) proceed up the Westside highway along the Hudson en route to the New York World's Fair, on June 10, 1939, soon after they landed at the

Battery. A score of New York motorcycle police surrounded the royal car, and several men stood guard on the running boards. #

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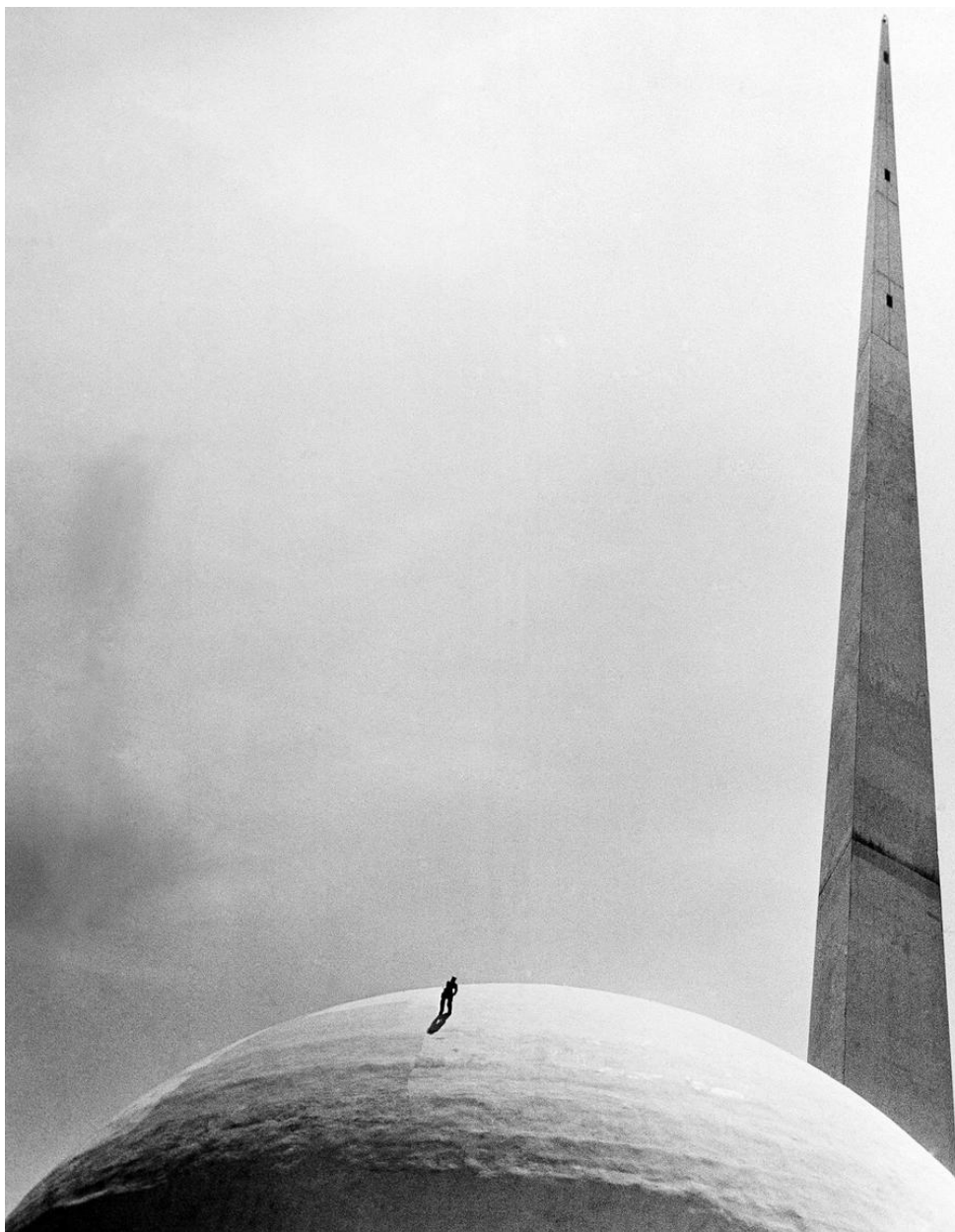
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Presentations are made to Britain's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in the British Pavilion, during their visit to the fair in New York, on June 19, 1939. #

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A workman at New York World's Fair repaints the famed Perisphere, on June 6, 1939. #

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Color view of the 1939 World's Fair. Corona gate with Bulova clock, ca 1939. #

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The entrance to General Motors' Exhibit at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940. The exhibit attracted nearly 25 million visitors. #

AP Photo/General Motors Corp.

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Futurama, the model city of 1960, designed by Norman Bel Geddes for the General Motors Exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1939. This photograph shows an elevated view of the huge model of a futuristic city with widely spaced skyscrapers, double-decked streets with moving cars representing traffic patterns, and parks and landing pads for helicopters and auto-gyros shown on the roofs of low buildings. #

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"The Road of Tomorrow," an elevated highway of cork and rubber composition, at the Ford Exhibit at New York's World Fair in 1939. #

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Lines to enter the fair at Flushing Gate, on October 27, 1940. #

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Workers in an exhibit use modern techniques to package bacon for Swift Premium Meats. #

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Bumps and laughter enliven one of the Fun Zone's many novel rides at New York's World Fair in 1939. #

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Jack Sheridan's "Living Magazine Covers" exhibition, where, for a fee, one could enter and photograph topless models posing in sets designed to look like contemporary magazine covers. #

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Ford Motor Building entrance, May 12, 1939. #

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Poland's pavilion at the New York World's Fair. #

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Members of the New York World's Fair staff, on a tractor train in 1939. #

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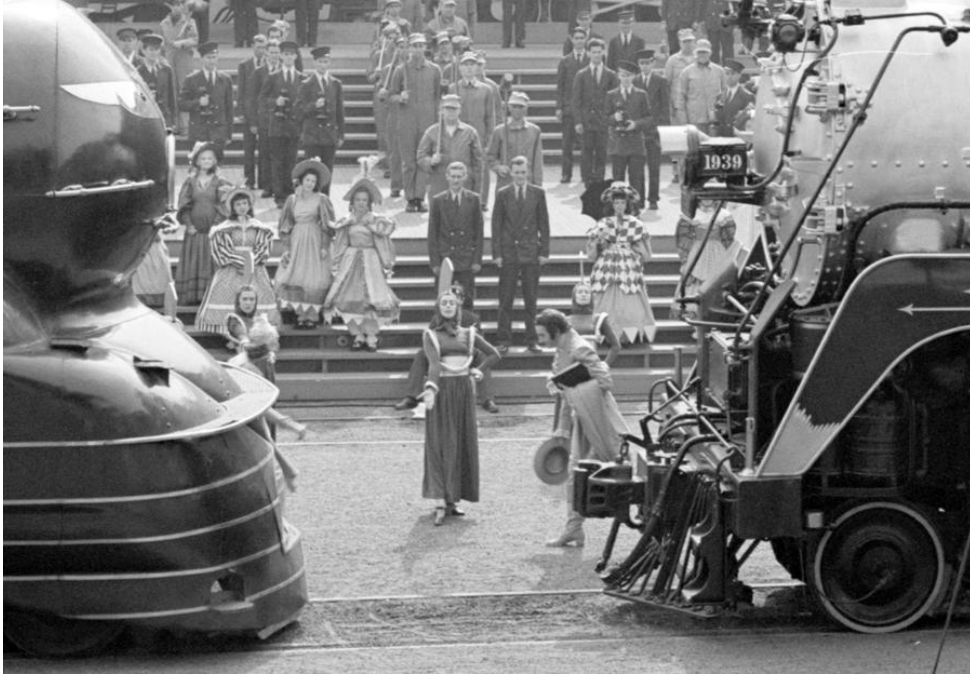
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World's Fair, railroad pageant. Final curtain, May 27, 1939. #

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A closer view of the end of the railroad pageant, as a "woman of the future", center, brings together performers representing past and present, on May 27, 1939. #

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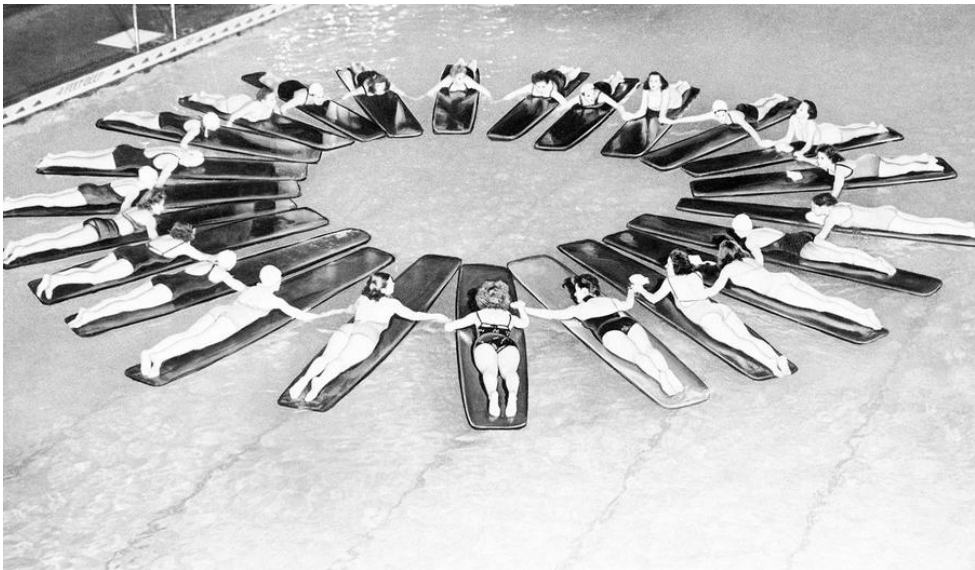
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Swimmers in Billy Roses "Aquacade" at the Marine Amphitheater at the New York World's Fair, on June 10, 1939. #

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Crowds surround a new television in the RCA exhibit at the 1939 World's Fair. #

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General night view of the World's Fair, New York City, September 15, 1939. #

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The second and last season of this edition of the New York World's Fair closed on October 27, 1940. Unfortunately, events in Europe were descending into a second World War, and budget overruns ended up leaving the World's Fair as a financial failure. Shown here is a view of the View of the Trylon and Perisphere being dismantled in New York, on January 23, 1941. #

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Formerly a New York World's fair excursion bus, the "Spectroheliogram," was converted after the fair closed, to be used to shuttle WAACs to and from work at the armored force replacement training center, July 26, 1949 in Fort Knox, Kentucky. #

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