



Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Newsletter
No. 36, Summer 2010

Coming to Dobbs Ferry in 2011

Goodbye to the steep slope and difficult steps at the Dobbs Ferry trail entrance at Cedar and Main.

Bikers, parents with strollers and seniors have been complaining about it for years, not to mention people out for a simple, leisurely walk. We heard you and now we are doing something about it.

In 2009, the Friends applied for a Federal Recreational Grant to improve this heavily used section of the Aqueduct Trail. We were told that our chances were slim because the grant is very competitive but "to give it a try" anyhow ...which we did. Into the application went three copies of about 30 documents and letters of support from all over the county. And a few months later, what a surprise! We had won.

The grant is for \$157,000 but of course we have to match a portion of it with our own money. We have already made the first payment of \$17,500 and the other \$17,500 is due soon.

Here's the plan, one which will make this section of the trail even handicapped-accessible. As you can see from the picture on this page, there will be a ramp curving down from behind the plaza at the junction of Cedar and Main. This will mean that people

with wheelchairs, strollers and bikes will not have to contend with steps. Even better, those huge slabs of concrete that imperil even able-bodied walkers will disappear. To make a smooth link from Cedar Street to the Aqueduct, there will be a wooden staircase opposite the sign that now reads OCA (Old Croton Aqueduct, for those who have been puzzled at the meaning of those three letters) just across Cedar Street at the end of the parking lot. (cont'd on page 2)

PROPOSED GRANITE
TRAIL MARKERS
ALONG SIDEWALK



PROPOSED WOOD
DECK STAIRWAY FROM
CEDAR AVENUE TO
OCA TRAIL

PROPOSED ACCESSIBLE
RAMP FROM POCKET PARK
ON CEDAR AVENUE TO
OCA TRAIL.

PROPOSED INFORMATION
KIOSK WITH AQUEDUCT
HISTORY AND TRAIL
MAP.

Artist's vision of Cedar Street entrance to the Aqueduct trail in Dobbs Ferry.



Getting a stroller down the current path.

The slope will be landscaped and landfill will smooth the way down to the section near the schools. We want to encourage kids to bike or walk to the Dobbs Ferry Middle School and High School and to Mercy College, and even to the Greenburgh Hebrew Center. People from the Center have been helping us keep the trail free of litter. We really appreciate their hard work.

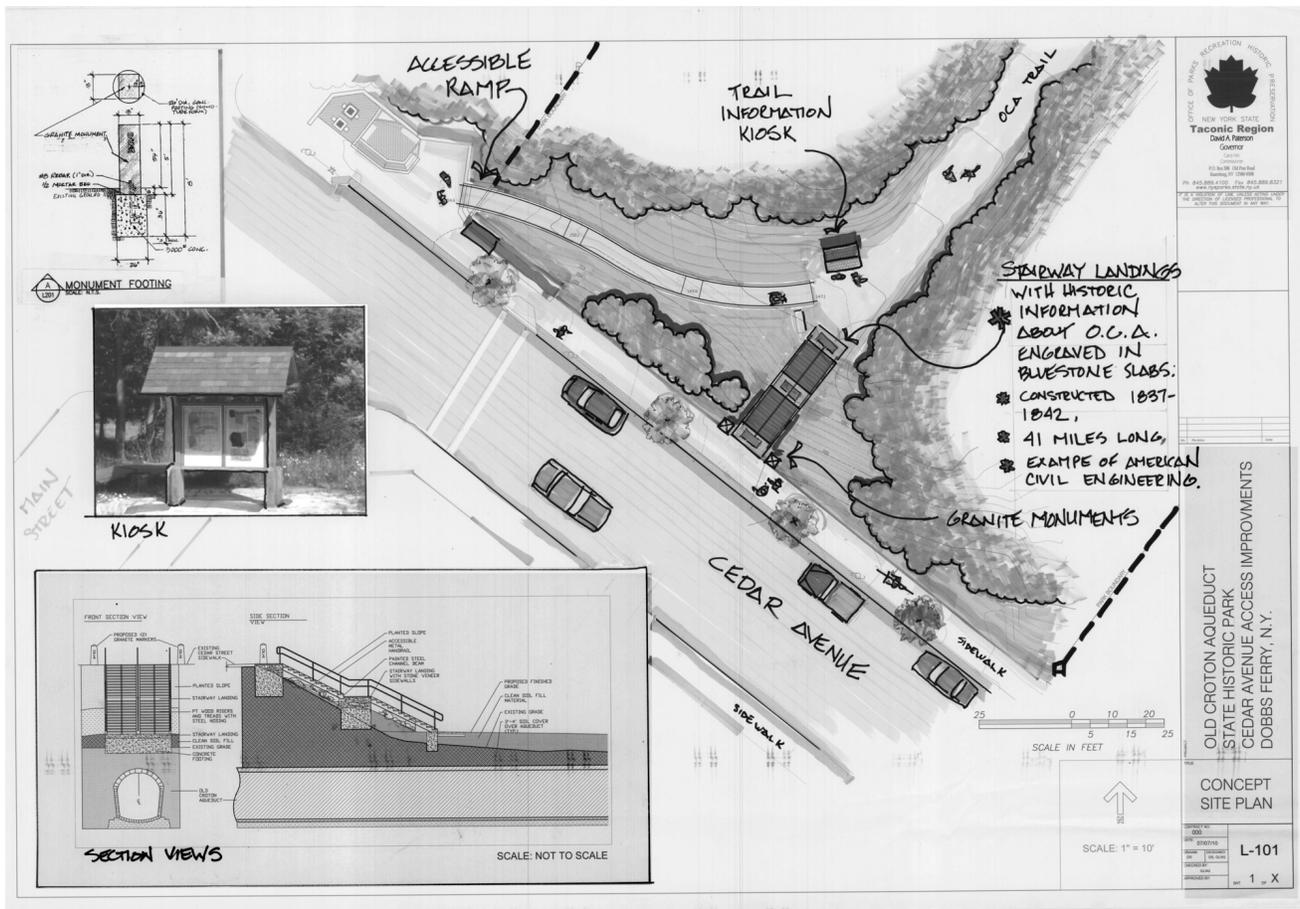
While the project will benefit all users up and down the trail, it will be of special benefit to the village of Dobbs Ferry. This is one of the most heavily-trafficked

parts of the trail. People can use it to link with buses to other parts of the county. There is a bus-stop at the trail entrance.

As newsletter readers know, the Friends and the State have worked hard to upgrade the trail in the Yonkers area. Thanks to the help of former Senator Nick Spano and Assemblyman Mike Spano, steeply sloped segments of the trail in that community have become much more accessible. The Dobbs Ferry project is the first big improvement the Friends have undertaken in the middle section of the trail. The rebuilding of the entrance is badly needed so we're thrilled at being awarded the grant even though it entails fundraising to meet the grant requirement for matching funds. We hope construction will begin early in the spring of 2011.

No more carrying bikes down the slope and no more looking for help to get a stroller over the slabs. And people in wheelchairs will be able to negotiate this section safely. We may even see some cross-country skiing on the trail. In the meantime, the Friends are looking forward to working on this project with the schools, the Village and all those who enjoy the trail. We'll keep you informed as the project progresses.

—Mavis Cain



Plan view of the Old Croton Aqueduct trail entrance

The Old Croton Aqueduct in History and Culture

Ed Brody

II. From the Revolution (1776) to the Manhattan Company (1802)

This continues the story from the Winter 2009 newsletter (Issue 34), which covered the period up to 1776.

From its beginnings as a small trading town at the southern tip of Manhattan Island to its expansion throughout the mid-18th century New Amsterdam/New York had few public works of any sort. The Hudson and East Rivers are salty and the groundwater at the south end of the island was briny. There were wells, and freshwater was delivered from the Collect Pond north of the city. New York was known for its bad water. Most people drank beer, punch or hot beverages. Epidemics and fires were frequent; bathing was infrequent. In 1774, the Colles' water system of a well, steam pump, reservoir and wood pipes was begun but the war intervened.

Effect of the Revolution

New York did not fare well during the Revolution. During the summer of 1776, American forces were driven out and the patriots fled, reducing the population of the city by almost half. New York became the principal British military base and was the last post to be given up.¹

In September 1776, fire destroyed one-fourth of the city and two years later there was another major fire. Christopher Colles' water project was destroyed. Loyalists from other colonies now fled to New York. Deforestation of the island for firewood, along with drought, damaged the groundwater supply and worsened sanitation. The British were not interested in civic improvement. Abandoned buildings were used as stables or hospitals. As the war came to a close, this time the loyalists fled. After seven years of British occupation the city was a shambles and had to largely be rebuilt.

Recovery

A period of rapid expansion and rebuilding began for New York. Shipping led the way. New York became the state capitol, and even capitol of the US for a while. As patriots returned, the population bounced back. The large loyalist farm holdings just north of the city were confiscated, divided and sold to returning soldiers.

The great Philipse estate, covering the western part of southern Westchester, was confiscated since Frederick Philipse III was a prominent loyalist. His former tenant farmers became individual owners, making the eventual route of the Aqueduct through a series of small farms.



Buying water at the Tea Water Pump.

There was interest in building and making money – the precursor of the NY Stock Exchange was formed in 1792 – but little else flourished. The arts and sciences were left to Philadelphia, New Haven and Boston. Calls for civic improvement were ignored. The City Council did advertise for private water supply proposals, of which there were several, including a petition for a public waterworks, but they all went nowhere.

Although the state capitol moved to Albany in 1796, New York City continued to expand. By the 1800 census, the population had increased to 60,515 from 23,614 in 1787. The boundary was now Houston Street. North of it remained woods, pastures, farms and country houses; Greenwich Village was still a suburb.

The need for municipal services of all sorts was glaringly apparent. Yellow fever epidemics were almost an annual occurrence, supplemented by typhoid and cholera. (The causes and remedies for these diseases were not established until the early 20th century.) In 1795 the city acquired the Bellevue estate for a pest house (a hostel to isolate those with communicable diseases); wealthier New Yorkers fled to Greenwich Village during these epidemics.

Fires were still frequent. In 1798 a volunteer fire department led by a professional civil engineer was formed. But water still had to be hauled from various pumps and wells to the fire site. New York was a city of wharves; owners in the dock area were required to pave nearby streets, but elsewhere the streets were muddy alleys with no sewers or drainage; pigs still foraged. The Collect Pond and the Tea Water Pump (*see illustration*),

formerly the main source of decent water, were no longer in the suburbs, but surrounded by streets and increasingly polluted by industry and clothes washing. And New York was still known for its bad water.

The Manhattan Company

In July 1798, Dr Joseph Browne, a wealthy Westchester resident, proposed the Bronx River as a water source. The engineering seemed feasible; the works would be publicly owned and the financials seemed viable. A yellow fever epidemic that summer killed thousands and forced the City Council to act, but they wanted legislation from the state for broad authority. So early in 1799 a delegation headed by Aaron Burr² went to Albany with a draft bill.

Amazingly, Burr turned this bill into a charter for a private water company, owned by his cronies and other prominent men. In April 1799, The Manhattan Company was capitalized at 10 times the original estimated cost, with the city having only a 5 percent share and only one of 12 directors. The company got the exclusive right to provide water to the city, eminent domain, exemption from repairing streets torn up, freedom to set prices and did not have to provide free water for fire fighting. Best of all, the company got the right to use its surplus capital however it wished for the sole benefit of the company. Burr thereby created the Manhattan Bank (now Chase Manhattan). He had turned water for the many into wine for the few!

The Manhattan Company did reopen Colles' well near the Collect, which had magically become less impure since it was less costly to draw water from the Pond than the Bronx River, and later built an additional well and small reservoir at Chambers Street. They laid 20 miles of wood pipe (*see illustration*), never even stopping to repair the torn up streets, but by 1802 had only 1,683 customers. Meanwhile, the Manhattan Bank became a powerful and profitable institution, alienating many, while the Manhattan Company managed to fight off other water suppliers and continued its



Wooden water pipes uncovered in lower Manhattan, 2004. Photo by J. Geismar, with permission.

mismanagement of the water system for the next 30 years.

For most people it was back to street wells and carted water. Things were worse than when the Dutch had left in 1664.

Footnotes

¹ Although the war nominally ended with the surrender of Cornwallis in October 1781, negotiations involving France and Spain and slow communications delayed the peace treaty. The official Evacuation Day was not proclaimed until November 25, 1783 when George Washington entered the city and gave his Farewell Address.

² The extraordinary Aaron Burr was born in New Jersey in 1756. He served in the Revolution, married Dr. Browne's wife's half-sister, established a successful law practice, became State Attorney General, US Senator and NYS Assemblyman before the Manhattan Company venture. He later became US Vice President, stiffed the Manhattan Company for \$120,000, killed Alexander Hamilton and engaged in conspiracies against the US. He died in Staten Island in 1836 as the Croton Aqueduct work was beginning.

Author's Note: We relied heavily on G. Koepfel, *Water for Gotham* (2000, Princeton University Press).

A Ventilator in the Bronx

For many, the Aqueduct ventilators are the most prominent identifier of the trail in Westchester County, distinguishing it from all other trails in the region. Their name reflects their function. Fayette B. Tower, a young engineer who worked on the Aqueduct during most of its construction, wrote in 1843 that “For the purpose of ventilation hollow cylinders of stone are erected over the top of the Aqueduct and rising about 14 feet above the surface of the ground, or earth covering. These occur every mile, and every third one is constructed with a door to afford an entrance to the Aqueduct. . . . An iron grating covers the top to prevent any thing being thrown in.”

Writing in 1846, Theophilus Schramke, another member of the technical crew, says the ventilators “. . . keep the air which is confined in the closed Aqueduct in communication with the atmosphere . . . [those with a door] facilitate examination and repair of the inner parts of the Aqueduct in cases required.” He counts 22 constructed of gneiss and 11 of white marble.

Familiar as these sturdy sentinels are in Westchester, there are none remaining in New York City with the exception of the two, atypical in appearance, at either end of the High Bridge. Now, thanks to the New York City Parks Department Archive, we have a wonderfully clear photo, taken in 1939, of a ventilator that once stood on the Aqueduct in the Bronx. (When the Aqueduct was built, all of the Bronx was still part of Westchester.) The route is preserved today as a linear city park named Aqueduct Lands or Aqueduct Walk. Walkers who took part in the Friends’ May 30th hike along the Bronx route helped compare the photo with today’s scene. We concluded that the probable location of the ventilator shown is close to Evelyn Place, looking south toward W. 183rd St.

This photo is as clear as another striking picture that surfaced in 2003, the first the Friends had seen of a ventilator in Manhattan (*photo on right*). A negative of the 1910 photo was found by Bill Logan in a box of family pictures. Remarkably, since Bill is a former Friends



A ventilator on the Aqueduct in the Bronx, probably near Evelyn Place, view south toward W. 183rd St. Jan. 12, 1939. Courtesy of NYC Parks Dept. Archive.

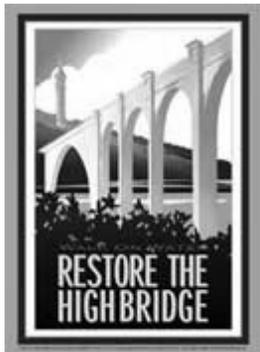
board member and active current member whose yard in Hastings backs up to the Aqueduct, the Manhattan ventilator stood in front of his great-grandparents’ house on St. Nicholas Ave., between 154th and 155th St. The house and ventilator no longer exist.

As trail walkers in Westchester pass the ventilators, they can look for those with a door (blocked up now) – these are larger and a bit to one side of the Aqueduct. The doorless ventilators are directly on top of the water tunnel. And while the ventilator pictured is gone, Aqueduct Walk itself is scheduled for renewal and refurbishment. – *Charlotte Fahn, with thanks to Ellen Macnow and Christina Benson of the NYC Parks Dept.*



Manhattan ventilator, St. Nicholas Ave., 1910. Courtesy of William Fox Logan.

High Bridge Design Process: Comments from the NY Times and the Friends



With the High Bridge design process now underway, the city has invited input from the public. Weighing in on May 13, a *NY Times* editorial challenged Mayor Bloomberg to make the bridge's rejuvenation as successful as that of the High Line in downtown Manhattan. The *Times* writes that in years past the bridge "... was a place for New Yorkers to get relief on the steamiest days. . .

. From 116 feet above the water, the views are stunning and the highway's roar is muted." The editorial poses the question: "... foot traffic, yes, but bicycles?"

The Friends' answer to that question, in comments to the Parks Department, is yes, bicycles, *but* the city should require that they be walked across. This would preserve the freedom of movement for all visitors that is one of the joys of being on the bridge. It is a short walk from one end to the other. And since the span is only 15-17 feet wide, devoting two lanes (one in each direction) to biker traffic would entirely negate its character as a public space where people can relax and stroll on the deck casually and safely, without having to wait for or dodge moving bikes. Bike commuters in a hurry can easily use the adjacent Washington Bridge.

The Friends' comments also note that the High Bridge shares in the Old Croton Aqueduct's designation as a National Historic Landmark, as do all the Aqueduct's structures. We advocate that the bridge be designed as an uncluttered public space that retains its historic character to the maximum extent possible. This would include retaining the moderate crown, or upcurve, of the deck that reflects the water pipes beneath it, and reusing the old bricks and railing. We support casting a wide net for ideas for supplemental railings that provide safety without a "caged" feeling, and suggest creating full-scale mockups of the most promising possibilities. We hope that a practical way can be found for visitors to see the pipes that are still in the pipe chamber right under the walkway.

To read the full text of the Friends' comments, go to www.aqueduct.org and click on History, then High Bridge. For a hard copy, call 914-478-3961. To submit your own comments, go to www.nycgovparks.org and click on Contact Us, or write to Parks Commissioner, NYC Parks Dept., The Arsenal, Central Park, 830 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10065. —*Charlotte Fahn*



Trailside, Summer 2010

Two Paths, One Destination *Ed Perratore*

The Old Croton Aqueduct Trail has several detours that, for as many reasons, take the hiker from the direct route of the Aqueduct itself. Hit a detour when you're driving, and you're not likely to appreciate it. But along the trail, as in life, a detour can be more rewarding. I recalled this while coming to the end of a pleasant woody stretch of the trail, about a mile from Ossining.

The trail crosses Scarborough Road and straddles this country road alongside what would otherwise be a shoulder. A first-time hiker of the trail would walk about a block toward a juncture with Albany Post Road (Route 9) near the hamlet's most prominent landmark, Scarborough Presbyterian Church. And the hiker would suddenly realize that the trail, from all appearances, has vanished.

It hasn't, of course. The Aqueduct itself cuts through some private property and a snippet of the Sleepy Hollow Country Club before crossing Route 9. A look at the map, however, shows the trail taking a detour, one of a handful it makes along its sojourn through the county. It directs you to cross Route 9, walk west on Scarborough Station Road, turn south onto River Road, and turn roughly east onto Creighton Road. This street rejoins River Road, along which you rejoin the Aqueduct's path within a few steps of Route 9. Total distance: a full mile.

But what a mile it is. The way to River Road and back is a mix of pristine estates—some homes here would qualify as mansions—and other properties that, though modest, are nevertheless exquisitely manicured. No sidewalks run through these tree-lined roads, but even if you're taking in the majestic river views, cars move

Friends Annual Meeting, 2010

The Annual Meeting was held in the Irvington Public Library on April 25 at 2pm. A new board member, Laura Compagni (*right*), was elected and those who were up for reelection were approved for an



additional term. A large and appreciative crowd heard Hudson Valley historian Scott Craven talk about the history of the mouth of the Croton River and its relationship to the Aqueduct and enjoyed selections from Bach, Chopin and other classical composers played by pianist Myla Kato-Duvally.

Two Paths, One Destination (continued)

slowly enough here that you're unlikely to be hit.

You would miss all of this along the straighter route. You'd rejoin the Aqueduct far sooner; it crosses the Post Road a mere third of a mile down. But along the way, you'd learn why the trail's blazers mapped out the detour. The road's edge is a strip of weeds, utility poles, road signs and jutting tree branches, and at its narrowest this strip leaves the hiker or jogger about two feet of clearance. Eighteen-wheelers and other big vehicles take this part of the road at highway speeds, and the side mirrors of some jut out over the curb. Hiking there? You'd better hope only the wind hits you.

When I've set out to incrementally walk the entire Westchester portion of the trail, I've stuck rigidly with the prescribed trail. During a one-shot hike on a hot day, though, I admit to taking the unmapped way, too. On one recent hike, I considered why I find the divergent routes so intriguing.

Just as this section of the Aqueduct permits the seduction of an alternative route to the same point in the trail, we often face different paths to reach our goals in life. Take, for instance, the aim of "making it big," or becoming a success in your line of work. You might weigh approaches as diverse as these very paths. One is the "slow and steady" approach in which you take the time to learn what you need to know along your path. It's doing things the established way, in this case perhaps making what money you can, investing it prudently and making contacts who can help your ascent.

You might instead consider a very different approach, one that justifies impatience. The race goes to the swift, in this view. With this path, you might reasonably expect to reach your goal sooner. The way might even seem more exciting. Just feel the wind in your face! But it's a way fraught with danger—whether by investments or alliances. And those who do reach the end might wonder, perhaps not right away, whether they might better appreciate the ultimate goal more if they'd taken the slow way, paid their dues and appreciated the journey.

However closely you hew to the established path, the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail has lessons for the new and experienced hiker alike. After more than 150 years, it's how it stays new.

For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call Park Manager Steven Oakes at 914-693-5259; mailing address: 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.

Walks, Talks and Tours

Sat. Sept. 11 (rain date, Sept.12), as part of the **Hudson Valley Ramble**, Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct will lead a walk through a historic stretch of the trail. Meet at 10 am in the northeastern-most parking lot of Mercy College (555 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry). Hike to Lyndhurst and back (2.4 miles in each direction; 2-3 hours). Learn about historically significant sites along the way. Bring lunch or buy a sandwich in Irvington. On the return trip, hikers may wish to leave the hike and take the tours offered at Lyndhurst and Sunnyside. Call Sara Kelsey, 646-303-1448, for more information.

Sat. and Sun., Oct. 9 and 10. Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct will again lead walks along the route of the Aqueduct in the Bronx (Sat.) and Manhattan (Sun.) during the 2010 Open House New York. Guides will talk about the Aqueduct and point out historical sites of interest along the way. Free; registration is required. Registration and walk details in Sept. at www.ohny.org. Inquiries by email: old.croton.aqueduct@gmail.com

Sat. and Sun., Oct. 9 and 10. As part of Aquefest, friends will lead a walk in the northernmost trail section. Information: tom.tarnowsky@gmail.com.

Sat. Oct 23, 11am. An Aqueduct Walk in Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow. Meet at Neperan Rd. and Grove St. two blocks east—uphill—from Route 9, Tarrytown. (Neperan intersects Route 9 in Tarrytown.) Guided walk north to the Pocantico weir and back includes a detour to several interesting sites in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. About 5.5-6 miles. Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Bring lunch and water. No registration required. Information: czfahn@yahoo.com 914-478-3961.

Map Orders

The Friends' color map-and-guides of the Aqueduct in Westchester (Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park), and of its route in New York City, are available by mail. The maps are \$5 each (members, \$4). Add 75 cents shipping and handling for the first map, 50 cents for each additional map. Please specify which map(s) you want. Send a check for the total to the Friends at 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. Or order from our website: www.aqueduct.org. Questions? Call 914- 693-0529.

MEMBERSHIP COUPON

Your tax-deductible contribution helps to protect and preserve the trail.

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Please make check payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send it with this coupon to the Friends at Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Please let us know if you would like to volunteer.

SAVE THE DATE!

6th Annual AQUEFEST Weekend! Saturday, Oct. 9 & Sunday Oct. 10

Music and merriment all along the trail in
Yonkers, Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington,
Tarrytown, Ossining and Croton

Sunday @ noon: **Special guest**
Tom Chapin performs at
the Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry.

See our website for complete **AQUEFEST**
listings after September 10.

Newsletter: Ruth Gastel, *Editor*. News items,
reminiscences, and comments welcome: 914-479-1414 or
ruthg@iii.org or by mail c/o the Friends.

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Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct is a private, non-profit, volunteer organization formed to protect and preserve the Old Croton Aqueduct. The Friends work to raise public awareness of the Aqueduct and trail, and to secure the resources that will enable this historic greenway to remain unspoiled in perpetuity. *Address:* Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St. Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109; *telephone* 914-693-4117, www.aqueduct.org

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