

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Newsletter

No. 43, Winter 2013

City Breaks Ground for High Bridge Restoration

Charlotte Fahn

A long-awaited turning point in the history of the High Bridge was marked on January 11 by a joyful groundbreaking ceremony at the Bronx end of the bridge. The 1848 structure, celebrating its 165th anniversary this year, is the oldest remaining bridge in New York City, with a story like none other. The restoration prepares the way for a bright new chapter in that story, the reopening of the landmark bridge as an up-to-date public space and pedestrian crossing after being closed to the public for 40 years.

Presiding over the event was Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose administration selected the High Bridge as one of eight city parks to be restored as part of its PlaNYC 2030. A crowd of local residents, city officials, and High Bridge advocates - including the Friends - who have campaigned for the restoration for years, together with more than 100 excited schoolchildren, was addressed by the mayor and other officials and a surprise final speaker. The project was praised for reconnecting families and friends in the Bronx neighborhood of Highbridge with those in Washington Heights in Manhattan and providing easy access to each other's recreational facilities. On a broader

scale, it will again become a unique destination with marvelous views and a water supply story to tell. For hikers and bikers it will restore a major gap in the Old Croton Aqueduct route and city greenway system.

The High Bridge is the once world-famous central element of the original ("Old") Croton Aqueduct. It carried Croton water across the Harlem River from the mainland to



Highbridge sixth-grader Joscelyn Fuentes with Mayor Bloomberg and elected officials at the gated Bronx end of the High Bridge.



Students from Bronx PS 126 and PS 11 on the bridge, chanting "High Bridge is our park!" (Photo by C. Fahn)

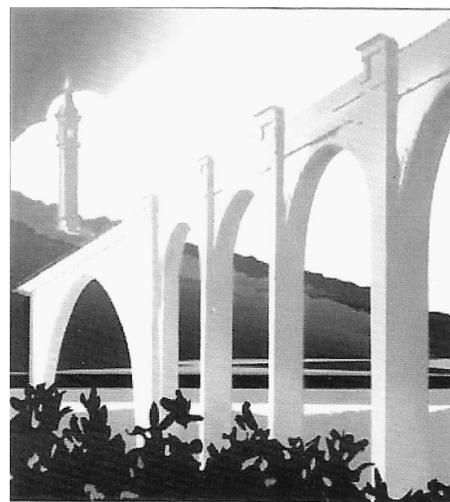
Manhattan Island, in pipes still beneath its deck, on 15 muscular yet graceful Roman-style granite arches. (Five arches in the water were replaced in 1927 with a single steel arch to facilitate navigation.) Though not designed at first to be a public space, the bridge quickly became popular with walkers and throngs of tourists and was the subject of countless paintings, postcards, and photographs. It also became part of the daily life of the two neighborhoods it joined.

While the bridge is structurally sound, the refurbishment will address virtually every part of it, from cleaning and repointing all the masonry to restoring the pipe chamber where, for decades, water has seeped through from the deck, to repainting the steel arch and replacing – as needed – thousands of rivets. The pipes will remain, viewable by the public if a practical means can be found. Ramps will be constructed at each end to provide access for wheelchairs, bikes, and baby strollers. The historic railing and brick paving will be refurbished and reinstalled. Several seating areas, more lighting, and a new, much higher fence will be added. The city estimates completion in 2014, at a cost of some \$61 million, about two-thirds from the

city and a third in federal funds. The city's Department of Parks & Recreation, in partnership with the Department of Design and Construction, is leading the project.

And that surprise speaker? It was Highbridge sixth-grader Joscelyn Fuentes, a member of the young Highbridge Historians, a program led by youth worker and advocate Chauncy Young in which the Friends have participated. Joscelyn told how she was anticipating visiting her grandparents in Washington Heights more easily once the bridge reopens, and cogently summed up the history: "This bridge wasn't built for traffic or even for people to cross. It was built for clean water!"

See you on the High Bridge!



Save the Date!

**Sunday, April 7,
2:00 p.m.**

**Friends of the
Old Croton
Aqueduct
Annual Meeting**

High Bridge - It's Happening!

Please join us to hear a first-hand account of the top-to-bottom restoration of the High Bridge now underway from civil engineer Bryan Diffley, construction manager of the project, and learn of his experiences as a contractor working within the Croton Waterworks. A short business meeting precedes the talk. The meeting, at the Irvington Public Library, opposite Irvington Station on Metro-North's Hudson Line, is open to the public. Information: 914-478-3961.

The Old Croton Aqueduct in History and Culture

Ed Brody

IX. The Renaissance of the Old Croton Aqueduct (1990-2012)

This continues the story from the Fall 2012 Newsletter (#42) that covered the period 1965-89. New York State acquired the Westchester segment of the Aqueduct from New York City in 1968. The trail had been neglected since 1958 when the tunnel was taken largely out of service. Although the trail and some of its structures did get recognition as historic properties, budget restrictions limited State Parks' ability to maintain the trail. Volunteer groups arose to try to remedy the situation.

1990s – The Aqueduct Begins to Thrive

The decade started with New York City selling the 113th St Gatehouse to a nursing home for adaptive reuse. Momentum began to build to preserve the Old Croton Aqueduct structures as both the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct¹ and State Parks played stronger roles.

In the spring of 1991 a visitor center was created at the Ossining Heritage Area Park with an extensive permanent exhibit on the Aqueduct (called “Down the River” to complement the Sing Sing exhibit called “Up the River”). In July of that year the ongoing problem of motor vehicle use of the trail came to a head with a suicide in a car on the trail. This finally prompted the erection of vehicle barriers on the northern part of the trail.²

The 150th anniversary (1992) of the opening of the Aqueduct saw several major accomplishments. State Parks hired a Historic Site Manager dedicated to the Aqueduct with two full time staff. Over the next 10 years site manager Brian Goodman became known as “Mr. Aqueduct” for his vigorous advocacy within State Parks, protection of the trail and outreach to the community.³

To celebrate this anniversary, the Hudson River Museum mounted a major exhibition and published a book – *The Old Croton Aqueduct: Rural Resources Meet Urban Needs* – which spread knowledge of the Aqueduct. The exhibition also celebrated the designation of the entire Aqueduct, including the tunnel and engineering features, from the Croton Reservoir to the Manhattan side of the High Bridge as a National Historic Landmark (previously only segments had been recognized).

Threats averted

While all this was going on, Indeck Energy Services quietly proposed a high-pressure gas pipeline along the Aqueduct tunnel from Mercy College to a co-generation plant to be built in Yonkers, offering \$500,000 plus rent for its use. When this proposal became known, communities along the route formed the



Landmarked gatehouse at 119th St and Amsterdam Ave. (Wikimedia Commons, Jim Henderson, photographer)

“Save the Aqueduct Committee.” Concerned that this pipeline was close to homes, that the trail would be damaged and its character altered, they wrote letters to officials and the press and held public meetings. As a result of broad opposition Indeck withdrew its proposal in February 1994, proposing Broadway as an alternate route. That proposal was also withdrawn when a similar pipeline exploded in Edison, New Jersey in March.⁴ October 2, 1994 saw the first of an annual series of Aqueduct Awareness Days with tours and entertainment sponsored by the Friends to publicize the trail.

The Friends continue to protest developments that could affect the trail and its views. By 1995 State Parks reported progress in removing trail encroachments by homeowners. That year the Jerome Park Conservancy, a Bronx group, fought to stop the city from using the Jerome Park Reservoir site for a water treatment plant; in 1998 the City decided to build the plant at an underground site at Van Cortlandt Park.⁵

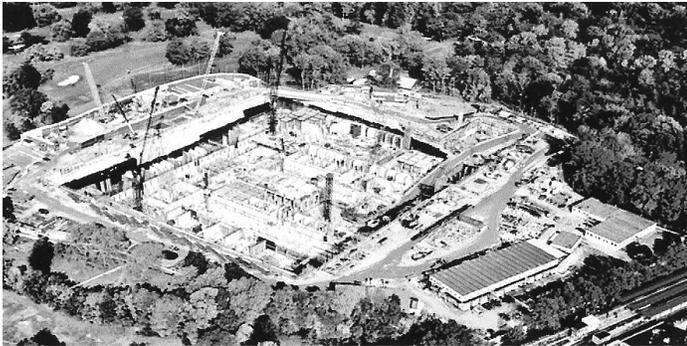
That fall, helped by a small state grant, Friends volunteers began restoring the Dobbs Ferry Keepers House with fresh paint, new windows and a picket fence. Dobbs Ferry High School agreed not to build a practice field west of the trail that would have involved people tramping across the trail. A new bridge for the trail was built at Archville, the old stone arch having been removed in 1926. The Friends began its periodic newsletter with current and historical material. In response to increased trail use they created an award-winning full-color walker’s map and guide to the Aqueduct in Westchester.

The decade ended on a high note as the Aqueduct became “Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park,” one of only four (now five) state historic parks.

2000s – The Aqueduct flourishes

The new century started with the gatehouse at 119th St and Amsterdam Ave becoming a New York City Landmark. Then Westchester County acquired the Unification Church property connecting the Aqueduct trail, Sunnyside and Lyndhurst. In the following years there were further easements and modification of properties to enhance the trail experience. In 2001 the Jerome Park Reservoir District, including the surrounding parks that were originally landscaped grounds of the reservoir, was added to the National Register of Historic Places.⁶

That year also saw the start of a campaign by the newly formed High Bridge Coalition to restore the High Bridge itself,



Croton water treatment plant under construction in Van Cortlandt Park. (Local 3 - I.B.E.W. website, June 2012)

with the Friends playing an active role. By 2002 Highbridge Park, a small park with wonderful views at the Bronx end of the High Bridge, was restored. And by 2007 New York City had committed to restoring the entire High Bridge for pedestrian use.⁷

The year ended on a high note when a federal grant was approved to rehabilitate the Dobbs Ferry Keeper’s House as a visitor and education center. This \$694,000 grant required a \$174,000 local match. Response was strong and the matching funds were raised by 2005. However, restoring a historic building involves complex regulations, detailed scrutiny of plans and coordination between State agencies; this slow process is still going on but hopefully near an end.

In 2003 work began to convert the large, elegant superstructure of the 135th St gatehouse to a performance space associated with City College; it is a rare double-gatehouse where the New Croton Aqueduct met the Old Croton Aqueduct. Work was completed in 2006.⁸ In 2004 the Friends created a second full-color map to cover the New York City part of the Aqueduct as a guide for walkers following the route of the tunnel, including above ground features.

In 2009, the Old Croton Aqueduct became a stand-alone park with own fully dedicated staff. (Since 2003 it had been a satellite of Rockefeller State Park, and before that FDR State Park, sharing staff.)

Recent Developments

The trail entrance at Cedar St in Dobbs Ferry was redesigned by State Parks in conjunction with the Friends and made handicapped-accessible. The 20 percent match to a \$157,000 federal grant was readily met by local response to the Friends outreach. Approved in September 2009, the process flowed smoothly with State Parks overseeing the work. The entrance was dedicated in October 2011.⁹ And that year the New York City Landmarks Commission approved plans for the complete High Bridge restoration. The groundbreaking ceremony took place in January 2013.

We start 2013 with:

- Good support by State Parks
- A strong, active Friends group
- The High Bridge restoration begun
- The Keepers House rehabilitation moving towards the bidding stage
- Broad recognition of the Old Croton Aqueduct as an important asset and attraction

The future is very bright for this magnificent, multi-level resource.

Footnotes

1. Due to concerns about lobbying, the Old Croton Aqueduct Committee (OCAC) and Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct (Friends) which had the same officers, did not merge until 1994.
2. David Talbot, “Dog-walkers find body at Aqueduct,” (July 24, 1991); David Talbot, “Aqueduct gets barriers,” (October 4, 1991) *Gannett Suburban Newspapers*.
3. Newsletter #12 (July 2002) reviews Goodman’s Aqueduct career.
4. Sean Webby, “No gas pipeline will go through aqueduct,” *Yonkers Herald Statesman*, (Feb 4, 1994); Wikipedia, “List of Pipeline Accidents in the US 1975-1999”
5. Douglas Martin, “Filtration Plant is Placed within Van Cortlandt Park,” (Dec. 2, 1988), *New York Times*.
6. The National Register nomination report was researched and prepared for the Jerome Park Conservancy by Friends vice-president Robert Kornfeld, Jr.
7. Newsletters #11 (March 2002), #14 (Spring 2003), #27 (Summer 2007) and #42 (Fall 2012) track this process.
8. Newsletters #16 (Winter 2003/4) and #25 (Winter 2006/7) describe the project.
9. Newsletter #36 (Summer 2010) describes the project.

The Friends' newsletters cover recent events involving the Aqueduct. Selected articles are available at aqueduct.org or by request.

Head North Hikers! A Favorite Aqueduct Hike

George O'Lear

To the dismay of anyone who likes long uninterrupted walk-time, many parts of the Old Croton Aqueduct (OCA) trail are really not ideal. Diehard walkers like me object to trail sharing with bikers, phone addicts and occasionally off-leash dogs. We're not an unfriendly bunch; but they all tend to disrupt one's pace. Even obvious detours can be unsettling; over time, manmade intrusions have altered the original right of way and forced the creation of patchy alternate routes.

Happily, a tranquil and contiguous section of the Aqueduct trail can be found at the northern reaches of the park. F.B. Tower, a Croton engineer in the 1840s called it "the wild region of the Croton". It remains the most rustic section of the entire Aqueduct trail, with much of it looking like it did in 1842. In many spots the trail is carved into steep hillsides.



Built to resemble a rustic Japanese teahouse, the Nikko Inn is now privately owned. (Photo courtesy of the Croton Historical Society)

This particular one-way stretch of almost three miles includes the Croton Gorge Unique Area, good bird watching, views of both the Croton and Hudson Rivers and a glorious view atop the New Croton Dam. The hamlet of Crotonville, town of Ossining, is the starting point for this essentially flat, historic hike. It features easy parking and three-hours-plus of steady, moderately fast pace walking roundtrip.

Hikers can picnic and sunbathe at the turning point of this back-and-forth walk either above or below the dam. At the far end of the spillway bridge large concrete barriers make handy rest spots. Or walk down to the grassy Croton Dam Plaza at the

The author, a veteran hike leader for the Appalachian Mountain Club and Westchester Trails Association, lives in Tarrytown NY. With help from Lesley Walter and Tom Tarnowsky, both FOCA Board members, and the Croton Historical Society.

bottom of the spillway, where there are portable toilets (not always open) and tables are set out.

One of the whimsical pleasures to this "rustic" walk is the sudden appearance of the dam itself, a gorgeous manmade light and sound spectacle. After reaching the terminus point of the OCA Trail, turn right onto a wide dirt road. One literally walks out the woods and onto the bridge over the New Croton Dam spillway, once known as "the second-largest hand-hewn stone structure after the Pyramids".

Finished in 1906, it is still breathtaking to see. At the time of its completion, this was the tallest dam in the world. Don't miss the unusually organic-looking rock waterfall that blossoms from the north side of the spillway. Irish workers built the first Croton Dam. But it was largely southern Italian stonemasons who, fresh off the boat, arrived in Croton as contract labor for the new dam.

In fact only the top half of the dam is visible. The rest is buried in the massive excavation, down to the bedrock, over 200 feet below the top of the dam, then filled in after construction to create the level plaza at the foot of the dam.

Long before the dam looms there are several spots worth mentioning. First, walkers will notice the quiet — even the Croton River rapids are often audible (off to the left/west and down the ravine).

This walk heads north from Gerlach Park, But in the winter mason work lovers may take a quick look at the Indian Brook culvert, which is just two minutes in the other, southerly, direction. Massive stone embankments made possible the gentle, 13-inch-per-mile grade of the Aqueduct all the way into New York City. If you head right off the trail at Reservoir Road (just before the GE campus gate), in back of the houses you can clearly see the buttressing stonework that still guides the running brook. Another pretty working culvert is off Quaker Bridge Road (the last road to cross the trail before the dam). Walk down the road about 200 yards and step over the stone fence on the left for a good look.

Along the banks of the Croton River is a locally well-known tribute spot to silent movie making. Before the "Croton Gorge Unique Area" OCA Trail sign, but on the other side of the river, is the cliff where a scene for an early Tarzan movie was filmed. The shoot occurred on the grounds of the popular Nikko Inn, built in 1907 by Clifford Harmon to attract theater and film stars from New York City.

Tarzan's cliff, known as Mayo Landing, is on the opposite bank of a little-known local picnic spot that is accessible from the Aqueduct Trail. A Croton centenarian, the



The entire structure of the New Croton Dam is of natural masonry. Almost all dams built afterward had large amounts of cast concrete block in addition to stonework. (Photo courtesy of the Croton Historical Society)

late Edward Rondthaler, liked to relate that Tarzan the actor famously balked at jumping off the cliff. For 50 cents, a local boy coolly took his place and dove off.

About four-fifths of the way to the dam, the trail crosses a band of high-tension wires. Birders appreciate the large span of underbrush that grows here. Even in winter the general area

is thick with migratory birds. Since the widest spot in the Hudson is nearby and unfrozen, many Canadian geese stay for the winter. Big birds also roost in the pinewoods just south of the dam. On most winter days eagles skim and hunt for fish on the partially frozen reservoir. (One of us counted seven eagles out on the water on a recent January day.)

One scenic vista along the walk is a long view of the Hudson River. The view is easier to find on the return trip, off to the right between the second and third ventilators (counting from the dam) and is only visible in fall or winter.

The dam spillway is actually part of the 12-mile Briarcliff Peekskill Trailway. However the Briarcliff Peekskill trail is not as well kept or as clearly laid out as the OCA and the views, at least walking north from the dam, are disappointing. Heading south on the Briarcliff Peekskill trail, hikers can reach Teatown Lake Reservation in 1.75 miles.

Another diversion is the Croton Gorge Trail, a pleasant wooded walk into the streets of Croton via the one-lane Quaker Bridge. Today this section of the Croton River is picturesque but its history is fraught. When part of the original Croton Dam collapsed in 1841, a 50-foot wall of water rolled through the narrow and populated gorge. The present bridge is the fourth to be built there, in 1894.

Note: All the places mentioned can be found on the Friends' Old Croton Aqueduct Map & Guide. The starting point, Gerlach Park, is unnamed but the parking lot steps up to the OCA Trail are clearly visible on the map, just next to the words "Indian Bk" on Quaker Bridge Road in the town of Newcastle.

Maps for both the Westchester and New York City Aqueduct route are for sale at www.aqueduct.org.

Quick Summary

OCA Trail: This section of the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail passes three ventilators and ends at the New Croton Dam. It's a brisk three-hour-plus A-to-A (roundtrip) walk starting from Gerlach Park and walking north. The turnaround is at the dam.

South of Gerlach, there is a trail map if you stay on the OCA Trail. It's near the Fowler Avenue gate of the GE campus. But the trail is not contiguous near GE and the detour crosses busy Rte. 9.

Additional Routes: From the dam you can continue walking north or south on the Briarcliff-Peekskill Trailway. Or walk across the Croton River to the ½-mile wooded Croton Gorge Trail. It leads into the village of Croton-on-Hudson. To get there, turn off the OCA Trail where it crosses Quaker Bridge Road (trail crosses the road twice; take either route and head down, towards the river). The spur up to the trail is just after the old bridge, on the left. See Old Croton Aqueduct Map.

Where to park: at Gerlach Park, Town of Ossining, free parking to all. Find the wide railroad tie steps leading up a steep slope from the back of the parking lot. The Old Croton Aqueduct Trail is at the top of the slope; turn left to head north to the dam.

How To Get There: You can reach Gerlach Park via Route 9. Exit onto Old Albany Post Road/Quaker Bridge Road, which is just south of the intersection of Routes 9 and 9A. The road winds. The park is on the right. Another starting point is at the top of Fowler Avenue, on the grassy verge by the side of the GE campus gates. See Old Croton Aqueduct Map.

If you start at the north end, the dam is inside Croton Gorge Park. The park is off Route 129 (Lower Yorktown Road) in Croton-on-Hudson.

Awards and Other Aqueduct Happenings

Friends Receive Parks and Trails NY Award

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct have received an award of \$1,250 from Parks and Trails New York, a statewide advocacy group. The grant is part of PTNY's "Growing the Grassroots" awards program to foster the stewardship and promotion of New York's parks and trails. The Friends were one of 10 not-for-profit park and trail organizations to receive a Growing the Grassroots grant this year. The funds will be used to help defray the cost of producing of a short film about the history of the Old Croton Aqueduct, the Dobbs Ferry Keepers House and the trail itself.

Friends Receive Award from the Volunteer Center of the United Way

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct are one of eight non-profit organizations being honored by the Volunteer Center of the United Way for their outstanding work in strengthening the quality of life in their community. Each organization is being recognized for their service in a specific category. The Friends' award, which will be presented by Con Edison, is a "Going Green" Award. The 2013 Volunteer Spirit Awards celebration will take place on April 26 at the Hilton Westchester.

State to Rehabilitate and Repair Old Croton Aqueduct Structures

As part of Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2012 New York Works Initiative, three projects to repair structures along the Aqueduct will receive funding this year. Work on the Sing Sing Kill Double Arch Bridge and Waste Weir in Ossining has already begun. The \$1.1 million contract will pay for

repointing masonry on the entire bridge and weir wherever there is a need, replacing the bridge deck concrete slabs with pavers, rehabilitating the metal railing along the bridge and improving drainage. In addition, vines and hazardous trees along the bridge will be removed.

The other two projects are smaller. One contract is for the rehabilitation of the weir building itself and vent structure, including the repair and repointing of the masonry and repair of the roof. The other is to rebuild the collapsed retaining wall at a small culvert adjacent to Tibbets Brook Park in Yonkers. The two projects combined will cost about \$708,000.

Gary Ricci, Park Manager

MEMBERSHIP COUPON

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

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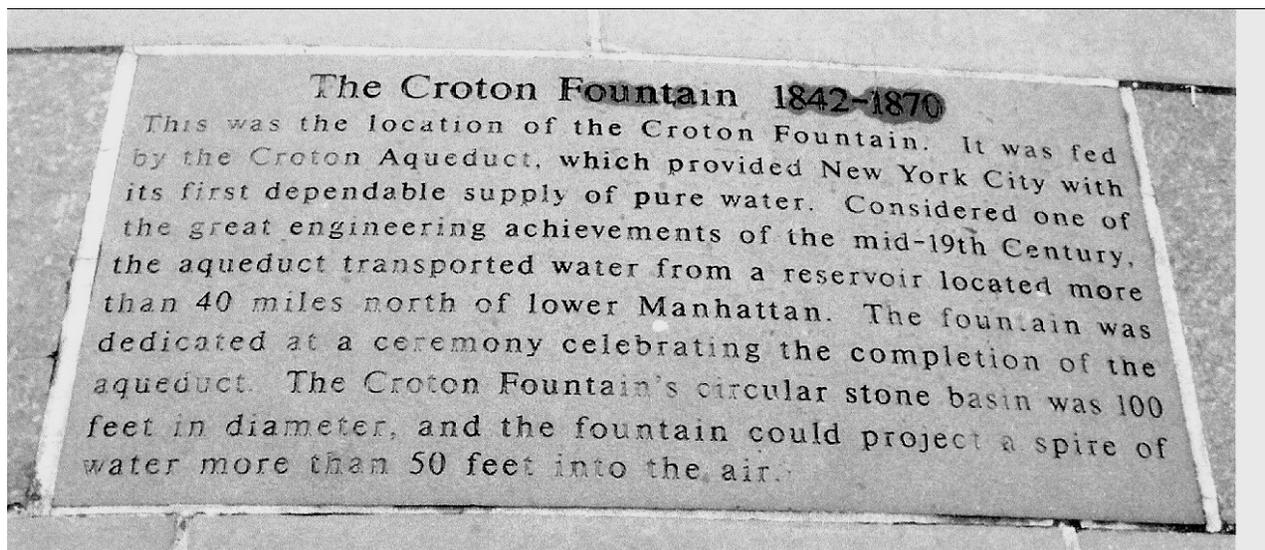
Please make check payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send it with this coupon to the Friends at Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

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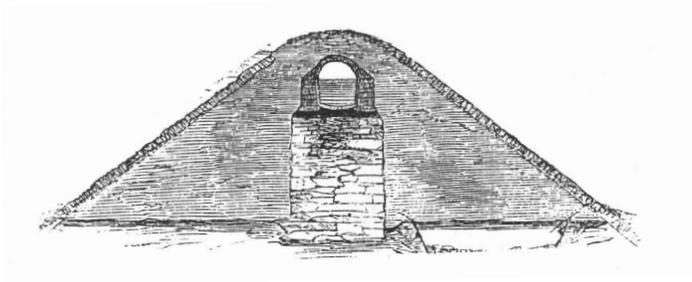
For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call Park Manager Gary Ricci at 914-693-5259; mailing address: 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.



The Croton Fountain, 1842-1870. A tablet set into the paving of City Hall Park. The fountain, which could project a jet of water more than 50 feet high, celebrated the Croton Aqueduct. (Photo courtesy T. Tarnowsky)

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct
Keeper's House
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Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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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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*Indian Brook culvert just north of the GE campus,
see page 5. (Photo by L. Walter)*

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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