

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

N e w s l e t t e r

No. 52, Winter 2016/2017

KEEPER'S HOUSE WINS ANOTHER AWARD

The Friends are thrilled to receive a 2016 NY State Historic Preservation Award for the rehabilitation of the Keeper's House. Each year the State recognizes projects that rejuvenate and preserve New York's historic and cultural treasures, and we had hoped to be chosen. The success of the research, the work and the fundraising that this project required has been a reward in itself. But it is wonderful to have our work recognized by others. So many people were involved in the project and each contributor deserves to share in the honor. — *Mavis Cain*

Recipients of the award pictured below, left to right: Stephen Tilly, architect of the Keeper's House restoration; Elizabeth Martin, Douglas Emilio, Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct; Steven Oakes, Historic Site Manager; Mavis Cain, President of the Friends; Andy Beers, Executive Deputy Commissioner of State Parks; Robert Kornfeld, Jr., Vice-President of the Friends; Ruth Pierpont, Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation at NY State Parks. Photo composed by NY State Parks.

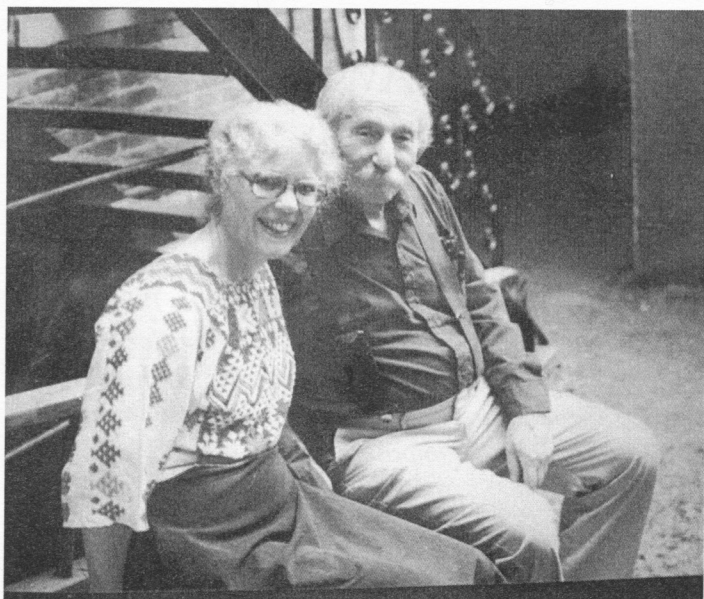


THE ROMANCE OF THE CROTON WATER

Cornelia Cotton

When I opened my gallery in 1979, my idea was to exhibit work by the wonderful artists I knew – who nobody else knew about – and to put together material about local history. I had transferred my deep love for my former hometown, Jena, in Thuringia, Germany, to my new hometown, Croton, in America.

As I haunted the old print shops of New York in search of old Croton items, I discovered that almost everything with the name “Croton” on it had to do with the Old Croton Aqueduct, an ancient structure I knew nothing about.



Cornelia and Bill Cotton

I was not alone in my ignorance. Few people then were aware of the Aqueduct, even in Croton, because it does not run through our village, whereas the New Croton Dam, so resplendent, so huge, had brought with it hundreds of Italian masons, many of whom settled in Croton. Their family lore is tied to that enormous project, overshadowing the earlier dam and aqueduct.

Not only was the Aqueduct barely known in Croton, but people in New York – after all, the recipients of the Croton water – were not aware of it either. Once, when I placed my purchases on the counter, the owner erased the prices in front of me. When I protested, she said, “I haven’t priced this material in years.” On a return visit, I added up my things, wrote out a check, put it on the counter, said, “This is what I’m buying,” and left.

My search not only yielded prints and maps of the Old Croton Aqueduct but got me acquainted with a colorful gallery of people in the antiquarian world. There were the Newmans of The Old Print Shop, Phyllis Lucas, friend of Dali, of The Old Print Center, and the Cohen family of Argosy. Through Barbara Cohen of the wonderful New York Bound Bookshop I met Bill Frost, then the only serious collector of Aqueduct material, who became a life-long friend. He left the bulk of his collection to the Croton Historical Society.

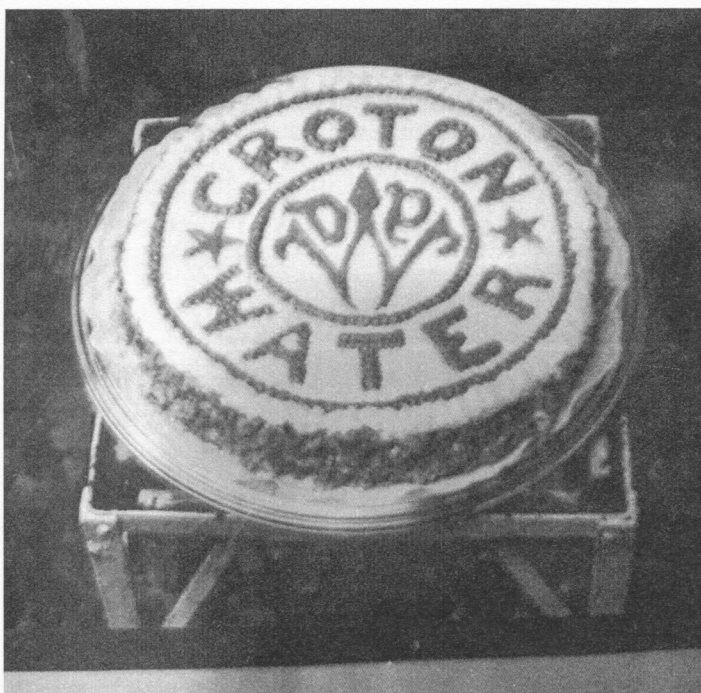
Meanwhile, it had become clear to me that my exhibit would feature the Old Croton Aqueduct. As my search widened, I ventured into the warrens of the secondhand book dealers of Fourth Avenue, leading to more adventures. When I asked Sid Solomon of Pageant Books about a certain volume, he literally dived into the huge mound of books piled in the middle of his shop, rooting around in it for a while. At last he emerged with the title.

After assembling a good store of prints, maps, postcards, and other ephemera, I put up a show called “Croton Water.” As soon as it was publicized, I had visits from several people who knew a great deal about the Aqueduct, who told me about its history and its current state. They were worried about the lack of interest by the public and government, fearing that we may lose this priceless historic treasure. At that time the state of New York was planning to pave the Aqueduct as a raceway for motorcycles.

My visitors were my teachers. These early enthusiasts were the vanguard of the movement to save the



"Croton Aqueduct at Sing Sing." (Plate XII in "Illustrations of the Croton Aqueduct," Fayette B. Tower, 1843)



Sesquicentennial cake, 1992

Aqueduct which brought together historians, industrial archeologists, engineers, and local citizens in the Croton Aqueduct Committee. Our first project was a petition to the federal government to designate the Aqueduct as a National Historic Landmark – a petition that was eventually successful. I am planning to place all papers of that correspondence in the archives of the Keeper's House as their permanent resting place.

In the early years I had a large gallery space. Openings were festive. My late husband's string quartet played; there was plenty to eat and drink, and we always had a big crowd.

During the reception for "Croton Water" I was approached by a rather short man who told me that he had walked on the Aqueduct all the way from Ossining to this event. It took me a while to realize that I was talking with the famous writer John Cheever. We did not talk about books – his or anyone else's – but about the romance of the Croton Water, a great interest we both shared and enjoyed. After a while, he left to return the way he had come. May he rest in peace.

Two more exhibits about the Croton Water followed over the years. At the show in 1992, in honor of the sesquicentennial, I had gathered enough material to trace the Aqueduct in old prints from Yorktown to City Hall and we had a large cake in the shape of the Croton manhole cover. The romance continues.

BECOME A DOCENT AT THE KEEPER'S HOUSE

My friend Millicent, a member of the Friends, had never considered becoming a docent. When I suggested that she might like to volunteer once in a while, she looked at me as if to say, "What? Me? A docent!"

Actually, many members of the Friends would and do make excellent docents. They find it a rewarding way to meet interesting people, to give back to the community and to convey to others their love of the trail and wonderment at the engineering marvel, the water tunnel, beneath it.

When you think of docents, you think of people leading tours at such venerable institutions as the Smithsonian. They appear learned, never at a loss for an answer. But if you think back to the docents that really impressed you, you will realize that it's their enthusiasm for their subject that you first remember.

The Smithsonian we are not! But like most small museums and education centers, we want visitors to have a positive experience and leave feeling excited about the new insights they have gained. And the key to achieving that goal are docents who can communicate their enthusiasm for all that the Keeper's House embodies.

People volunteer to become a docent for any number of reasons: they like meeting new people and welcoming visitors; they love the trail and want others to be able to appreciate it too; they are local history buffs and enjoy sharing their knowledge; or they are fascinated by all the challenges the construction of the Aqueduct and its operation presented.

You don't have to be an expert. New docents are generally paired with more experienced ones so you can refer questions you can't answer to your co-volunteer. If neither of you knows, you can research the answer and relay that information to the visitor.

You'll gradually learn what you need to know. The Keeper's House is stocked with maps and information sheets about the trail, and the interpretive panels now being installed in the front room of the house tell the story of how the Aqueduct was built and how it grew over the years.

One panel, for instance, explains how the chief engineer, John Jervis, overcame the difficulties of a hilly terrain to keep the water flowing downhill. Another shows how the arrival of fresh water from the Aqueduct im-

proved public health and hygiene in New York City's tenements. And there is a large map outlining the various up-state watersheds and aqueducts that we rely on today for our water supply so visitors can see how vast the infrastructure is.

Some docents collect snippets of information that they find particularly interesting. "Did you know that the water in the tunnel descended at an average of 13 inches per mile?" might encourage someone to look at the topographical panel to see how this was accomplished.

Others use the film and videos that can be seen in the second room, adjoining the main exhibit space, to comment on specific aspects of the Aqueduct, including the inside of the tunnel itself. No special technological expertise is needed to show the films. Just the ability to push the start button!

Where do our visitors come from? From near and far; around the globe, in fact. Talking to them is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a docent.

Initially, local visitors came to see how the structure they had watched deteriorate and then be completely renovated now looked on the inside. As these people stepped into the building, you saw their faces light up with awe and amazement at the transformation.



Kids enjoy the arch-building exercise and stereoscope interactive at The Keeper's House.

Now that it's no longer a subject of local curiosity, neighborhood residents frequently come to show off the house to their friends and relatives and learn a little more about their heritage.

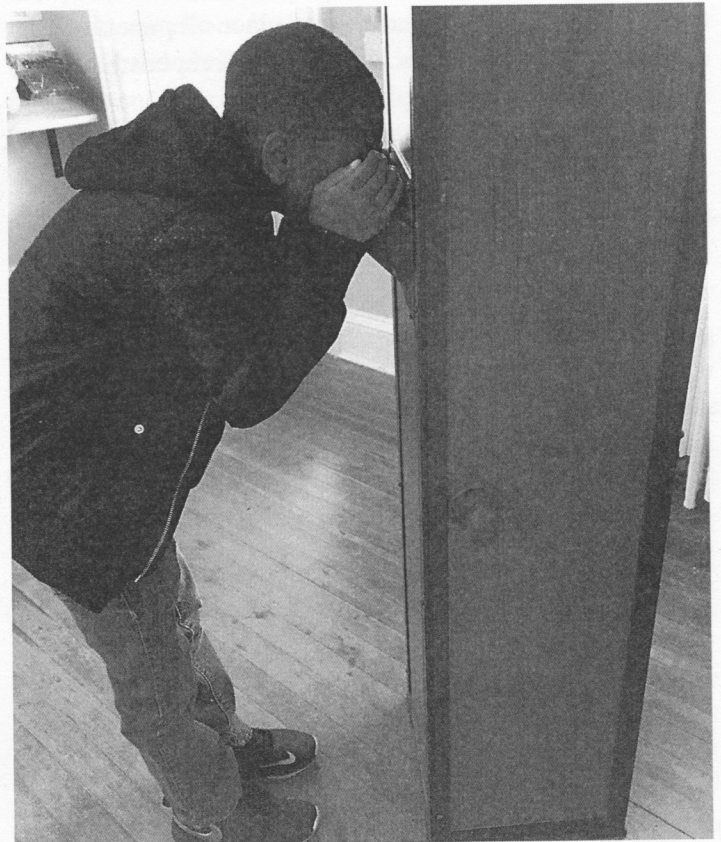
Visitors from New York City and further afield often say they found us on the Internet. One was celebrating her 50th birthday by visiting all New York State parks and the Aqueduct was 25th on her list.

The Keeper's House Visitor Center is located in Dobbs Ferry at 15 Walnut Street which abuts the Aqueduct trail. The house is open to the public on weekends, from 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. Docent shifts are three hours, morning or afternoon, but the hours the house is open may be reduced during the winter months.

Now that you know what's involved in being a docent and how much you would enjoy it, please get in touch with us. Contact Lesley Walter at lwalter@aqueduct.org or if you have a question, email Tom Tarnowsky at tom.tarnowsky@gmail.com. We're looking forward to hearing from you.

My friend Millicent is volunteering too.

— Ruth Gastel



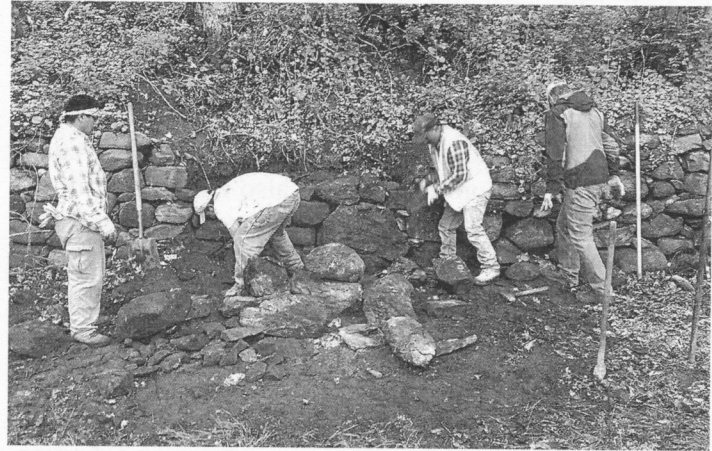
UPDATE ON INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL

As readers may recall, the Friends have embarked on an ambitious plan to rid the trail of the invasive trees, bushes and vines that are not only overwhelming native plants but also block views and threaten historic structures. This report covers the progress made in the past year with the help of many dedicated trail lovers.

Fifth Annual “I Love My Park” Day

In May close to 60 volunteers worked to cut, pull and dig out invasive plants on several acres of a one and a half mile section of the trail in Cortlandt. Part of that section includes a large historic stone retaining wall to which we have devoted many hours over several years by removing the vines and bushes that were obscuring and damaging it.

This year we undertook to restore the now exposed collapsed section in the middle of the wall. Our newest sponsor, Jorge Cabrera, local stone mason and proprietor of J & C Masonry, Inc., agreed to lead this project. Jorge and his helper, along with several volunteers, removed large stones and dug out the soil underneath with pickaxes and shovels to establish a firm base on which to rebuild. A short distance away another crew worked to break up replacement stones and prepare them for transport. Completely unplanned but at the perfect moment Tony Failla, from the Aqueduct State Park’s crew, arrived. Driving his bright blue tractor with a giant shovel in front, he proceeded to complete the excavation work in coordination with Jorge and the volunteers. By the end of the day, the wall had been completely restored and looks beautiful! We encourage trail walkers to make a trip to the restored wall.



This page: Rebuilding of the old wall, from beginning to end.



Member Adopts a Section of the Trail

Last year Daria Gregg adopted an 800 ft. section of the trail near her home in Ossining, inspired by participating in "I Love My Park" days.

To begin the arduous task of ridding the area of invasives, she embarked on a course of study that included invasive plant identification and mapping classes offered by the NY-NJ Trail Conference. She also learned about removal techniques from volunteer work at the New York Botanical Garden and then, with the approval and support of State Parks, put her knowledge to work. She was joined by Friends' member Glenn Sungela and she also hired local laborers.

First she focused on removing vines that were smothering trees: cutting and pulling them down and digging out the large underground roots. Then she expanded her efforts to include bushes and plants, experimenting with various suppression techniques including black plastic, cardboard and mountains of wood chips.

Now she has started a plant nursery with the goal of replacing invasive plants with valuable natives suited to the area. A challenge has been to address the invasive plants that have spread to neighboring properties as well as those migrating from local properties onto the trail.

Mapping Has Continued

Three volunteers (two Friends members and one State Parks intern) continued the mapping of invasive plants on the Aqueduct that was begun in 2014. They walked the trail using handheld GPS devices, documenting the location and frequency of a list of 24 invasive species and added kudzu and bamboo to the list. When the last section is completed next season, the entire 26 miles of the Aqueduct will have been mapped.

Invasive Strike Force Conservation Crew

The Friends engaged the NY – NJ Trail Conference's Invasive Strike Force Conservation Crew to work on the trail for four days this summer. They removed invasive plants and bushes on 3.022 acres of the trail about a mile south of the Croton Dam. They removed 6,966 invasive plants and bushes (they kept count!) with the help of 11 volunteers. Many of the plants removed were those that had been located and targeted by the mapping project. That section of the trail is now visibly different. Since they used best management practices in their removal techniques and were able to apply herbicides to the cut stumps, we do not expect those plants to return! The native plants, bushes and trees in that area now have a vastly improved chance of thriving. We will monitor and continue to remediate this area going forward.



Kudzu on the trail



After kudzu removal

Kudzu Found on the Trail in Yonkers and Hastings

The mapping project this year revealed significant infestations of kudzu, a highly invasive vine that has only recently arrived in Westchester and threatens to overwhelm entire sections of the trail if not controlled. As a result, an emergency request went out to the State Parks Invasive Strike Force team, which was already scheduled to be in the Taconic Region of State Parks this fall.

The four person team was immediately deployed in Yonkers, where they labored for five days in 10 hour shifts removing as much of the infestations as they could. State Parks then provided the funding for a day of herbicide treatment for several areas of the trail including three locations in Yonkers: just north of the New York City border, Lamartine Avenue and Rudolph Terrace.

Friends' members Shaun Gorman and his wife Ilona Fabian, who were part of the mapping team, provided invaluable assistance.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) was also contacted and given the information gleaned by the mapping. The DEC provided guidance on mitigation techniques and may be able to assist with additional removal efforts next season. They were already aware of a kudzu infestation in Hastings and had treated several areas, including a portion of the trail near Warburton Avenue.

Those who owned property next to the affected areas were informed of the herbicide treatments. We hope they participate in mitigation efforts going forward, since the kudzu does not respect property boundaries.

Plans for This Coming Year

In 2017 we look forward to expanding our efforts, engaging both corporate sponsors and additional volunteers. Members are encouraged to participate by donating funds, volunteering and becoming inspired to learn more about invasive plant mitigation and trail restoration.

– Diane Alden

A VISIT TO THE OLDEST STANDING BUILDING IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY

The Friends invited our wonderful, hard-working Keeper's House docents to a private tour of Philipse Manor Hall during the holidays. And, since we wanted to explore Yonkers, we added on lunch at the locally famous Cuban restaurant La Bella Havana. Sixteen docents and board members socialized and took the fascinating tour.

Our New York State Parks guide Robert A Lee, a descendant of General Robert E Lee, then took us outside for an impromptu walk through Van Der Donck Park, where the Saw Mill River has been daylighted. Rushing water and rocky banks are clearly visible, underneath buildings, from a boardwalk through downtown Yonkers. What a gem the city has created.

We all had a lovely afternoon.

(See photo, page 8.)

– Lesley Walter

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Additional Donation to Keeper's House _____

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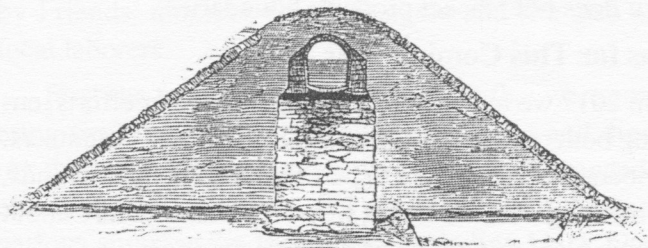
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For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call Historic Site Manager Steven Oakes at 914-693-5259; mailing address: 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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Newsletter: Ruth Gastel, *Editor*. News items, reminiscences, and comments welcome: 914-479-1414 or ruth.gastel@gmail.com or by mail c/o the Friends.

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*Docents and board members touring Yonkers
(see article, page 7)*

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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