

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct



Newsletter

No. 26, Spring 2007

Design Phase Begins at Keeper's House

With the recent start of design work, an important corner has been turned in the project to give new life, as a visitor and education center, to the Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry. The 1850s structure, which sits next to the Old Croton Aqueduct footpath at Walnut Street, was the home and operations center for the superintendent of the Fourth Division of the Aqueduct. It is the only remaining keeper's house from the 100-plus years that the Aqueduct was in service. The house embodies Aqueduct history, inspiring the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct to undertake the project in partnership with the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The two-story building, which shares the Aqueduct's landmark designation, has many appealing features: plaster ceiling medallions, period moldings, two fireplaces, large windows that let daylight pour in, an inviting porch, and a graceful exterior design. It also presents challenges to the architects now drawing up preliminary designs enabling a modest, 19th century Italianate house to serve a 21st- century public purpose. Building code requirements must be met and access for people with disabilities provided. The interior, which is divided into numerous rooms, some quite small, with one narrow, steep staircase, must be designed for



The Keeper's House in 1995, with the trail on the right. (Photo by C. Fahn)

varied uses – to provide, for example, simple amenities for trail users and space where docents can answer their questions; exhibit, office, and archive space; and a room where a visiting class can learn the compelling history of the Aqueduct.

By far the bulk of total spending will be to bring the house, last inhabited in the 1950s, to usable condition. Boarded up for decades, vulnerable to the elements, it became a target for vandals until volunteers from the Friends, in the late 1990s, put in windows, erected a



The current condition of the stairway. (Photo by D. Emilio)

fence, and replaced rotten porch boards, while State Parks removed asbestos from the basement and addressed additional pressing conditions. Now, the heating, electrical, plumbing systems and roof must be replaced, dilapidated stairs and fireplaces rebuilt, the plaster inside and brickwork outside completely restored—the needs are manifold.

The project received critical endorsement as well as resources when it was awarded \$694,400 in

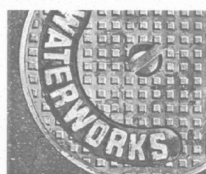
federal funds, which stipulated a match from the Friends of \$173,600. The Friends are now working to raise \$300,000, which will include the required match. This goal is necessary to meet the original construction budget plus the expenses of outfitting the house, creating exhibits, cost inflation, and the “surprises” that renovation of an old house inevitably presents.

Happily, the Friends are close to their goal, with another \$25,000 still to be raised. Corporations and foundations, many locally based, as well as private donors have made generous contributions. In December an unusual direct mail packet, with a drawing of the house labeled “For Sale” on the envelope, was sent to Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, and Irvington residents and all members of the Friends. Most hearteningly, some \$22,000 has been received so far in response, proving, says Friends president Mavis Cain, that people care about the history of the Aqueduct as well as the pleasures of the trail. The mailing prompted an article about the Keeper’s House project in the *Journal-News*, and also reached far enough afield to bring the following note from Andrew Serrell of Maryland:

“... I HAVEN’T BEEN BACK TO DOBBS FERRY FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME SINCE I JOINED THE NAVY IN JULY 1942. MY MEMORIES OF THE OLD CROTON AQUEDUCT GO BACK MUCH FARTHER, HAVING BEEN BORN [IN DOBBS] IN 1923 AND HAD THE WONDERFUL PLEASURE OF WALKING BETWEEN DOBBS AND YONKERS TO THE SOUTH, AND TO TARRYTOWN TO THE NORTH, EVER SINCE I WAS 5 YEARS OLD. MY FATHER WAS AN OUTDOORS MAN AND HE REGULARLY MARCHED ME, MY BROTHER PHILIP AND

SCOTTIE DOG, JOCK, ‘UP THE LINE.’ LATER, I PLAYED SANDLOT FOOTBALL THERE AND LIVED HALCYON DAYS. MY FONDEST WISH IS TO LIVE THEM ALL OVER AGAIN.”

The Friends’ participation in the project is directed by Douglas Emilio, working with Carl Grimm and Robert Kornfeld, Jr., all board members and architects with expertise in preservation work, and Friends member and general contractor Eli Nivin. The firm designing the renovation is Stephen Tilly Architect, a neighbor of the Keeper’s House and long familiar with it. For the present, fundraising as well as design work will continue, with an opportunity for public feedback on the plans. Groundbreaking is anticipated in 2008. We thank warmly all who have supported and encouraged us!



Save the Date!
Sunday, April 22nd
2:00 p.m.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct Annual Meeting

A slide talk and book-signing by architect Kevin Bone, editor of *Water-Works: The Architecture and Engineering of the New York City Water Supply*, will be featured, following a short business meeting. A *New York Times* review called the book “a visually stunning archive.” The meeting, at the Irvington Public Library, opposite Irvington Station on Metro-North’s Hudson Line, is open to the public. Advance registration is not required.

Harlem River Map and Guide

Shorewalkers, the environmental and walking group, has published the “Harlem River Valley Map & Guide,” a welcome contribution to the ongoing revival of the Harlem River as a major recreational and cultural resource. The color publication shows walking trails around north Manhattan, along the Bronx side of the river, and along the Old Croton Aqueduct route between Fordham Road in the Bronx and West 145th St. in Manhattan. The Aqueduct’s High Bridge, Highbridge Water Tower, and the Highbridge parks are among the featured attractions. To order, send a check payable to Shorewalkers for \$4.00 plus \$1.50 shipping and handling per map to Shorewalkers, Box 20748, New York, NY 10025; tel. 212-663-2167; or go to mail@shorewalkers.org to order a map or see a sample.

Get an Aqueduct T-shirt and wear a map of the trail on your back! Call Mavis Cain at 914-693-0529.

The Long Shadow of the Croton –Part 2

Christopher R. Tompkins

This completes a two-part memoir of the author's grandfather, John Matthew Tompkins ("Poppy"), longtime superintendent of the Croton Aqueduct gatehouse in Yorktown. Part one was in the Winter 2006/07 newsletter, no. 25.

In the 1950s two major events occurred in Poppy's life and in the history of the Croton: a chlorine tank accident and the near-failure of the Croton Dam. In the first, one of the chlorine tanks used at the gatehouse exploded – a blast that was heard clear across the lake at the Palmer House. As Poppy drove the short distance to the gatehouse, he could see the yellow cloud of chlorine gas rising from the building. Using a gas mask, he entered and pulled workers to safety, but suffered burns in his esophagus that affected his breathing and health for the remainder of his life. (Chlorine incidents occurred more than once. Chlorine canisters would arrive by the New York Central Putnam Division – a single-track line with few obstructions, thus a favorite for moving oversized loads. One incident caused quite a stir when some local kids released the brakes on a train car at

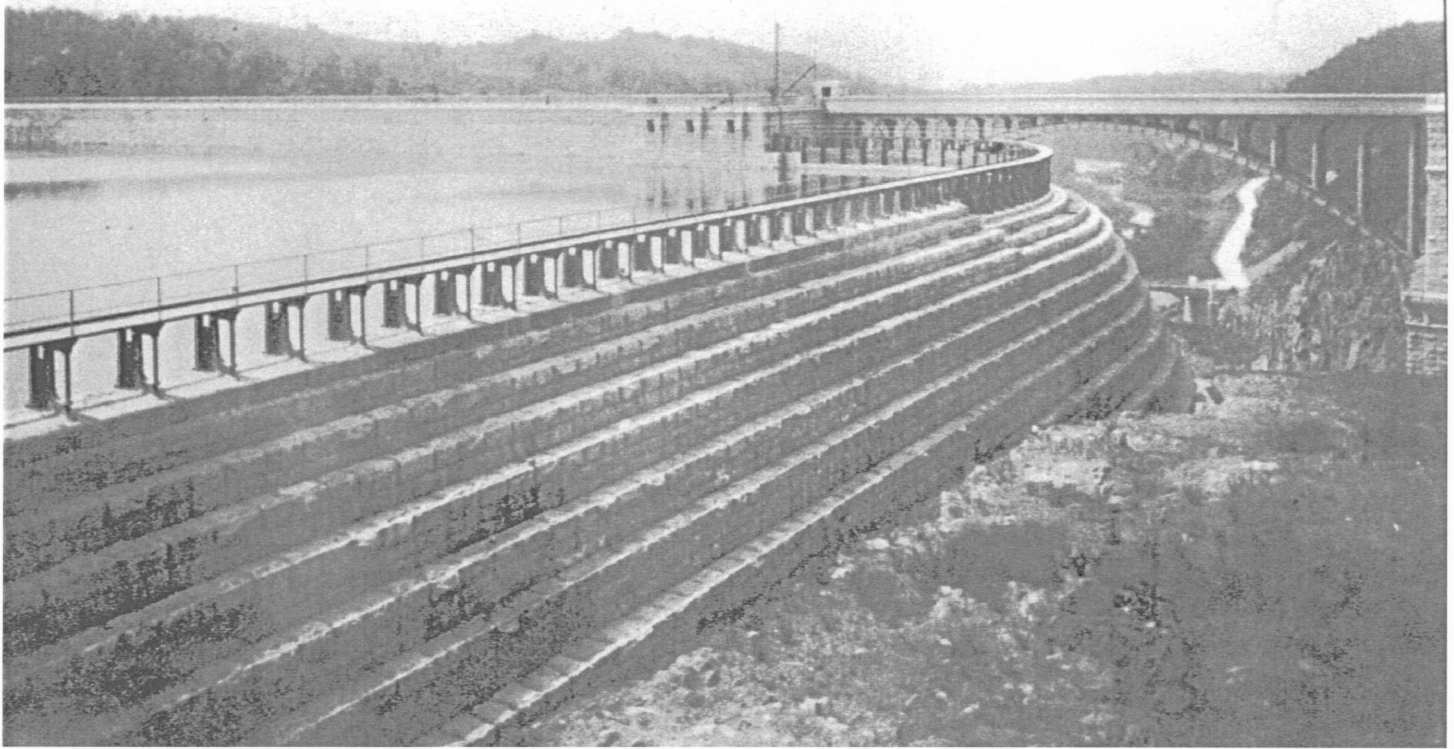
the Croton Lake station siding. The car rolled all the way down the track to the Kitchawan Station, where a New York Central engine had to come just to push it back up the grade to Croton Lake.)

A few years later, on October 14 and 15, 1955, a major hurricane moved through the region, depositing enormous amounts of rain on a saturated valley. The Croton Reservoir was already at capacity, which in those years included the potential for additional impoundment from a system of wood planks that could be dropped into slots via a hand-powered rail system that extended across the spillway. The surge in runoff was so extreme after the storm that water supply workers were amazed to see the reservoir's normally still water flow past the gatehouse as if it were a slow-moving river, and the spillway's customary lacy overflow transformed into a wall of water. According to my grandfather and father, the reservoir reached a level never before and never again achieved.

John M. Tompkins took his son, John Roger, and went to the dam to check on its status. As they entered the bowels of the masonry structure, they had trouble steadying themselves against the amazing vibration of the dam. Poppy tried to read the gauge that measured the flow of water, but it was not working. He leaned out an opening in the dam to attempt a measurement using a tape measure, but came back in, white with fear from the vibration in the masonry. Against the overwhelming roar of the spillway, Poppy yelled to his son that they needed to get out because he was unsure if the structure would hold – this from a man who knew the dam and its capacity like the back of his hand. Sure enough, the dam did crack in numerous places and required draining the reservoir to complete extensive repairs, which included removing the structure along the length of the spillway that had permitted additional im-



The explosion in the 1950s of a chlorine tank (above) at the Croton gatehouse was heard a mile away. From left: An unidentified worker, chief engineer John H. Kelley, and superintendent John M. Tompkins. (Photos from "The Croton Dams and Aqueduct" by Christopher R. Tompkins, 2000, Images of America series, Arcadia Publ., Charleston, SC.)



Croton Dam spillway, 1907. The structure along the top permitted several additional feet of water to be impounded in the reservoir during peak use. It was removed after the storm and floods of 1955 caused cracks in the dam's stonework.

poundment. Current plans for the dam's modernization include studying the possibility of raising the normal water level up to four feet.

Poppy's life was the Croton Reservoir and the Croton Valley. He was the one who found a trove of nineteenth century photos of the construction of the dam that were in a dumpster and saved them for posterity. He was heartsick to see the deterioration of the Dam Plaza in the 1970s, and saddened by the choice of the simple arch bridge that replaced the ornate original bridge from the 1906 completion. After retirement, he had to watch his "home" of 40 years deteriorate from neglect, prior to its use as a Department of Water Supply (now New York City Department of Environmental Protection) police station.

My own childhood tour of the gatehouse in 1971 was, in many ways, Poppy's final attempt to continue the deep cultural connections between his family and the Croton Valley. When I was too fearful to enter the interior of the structure, he took me outside to view the enormous pipes heading up the rock face and off to New York City. We walked up Arcady Road to look down on the dedication plaque for the 1842 Croton Dam and Aqueduct entrance.

Poppy then had me dip a fishing line into the water by the intake at the gatehouse. Legally, this was not allowed, but it was a special treat as he approached retirement and, after all, everyone knows that the bass love those granite-faced walls by the gatehouse!

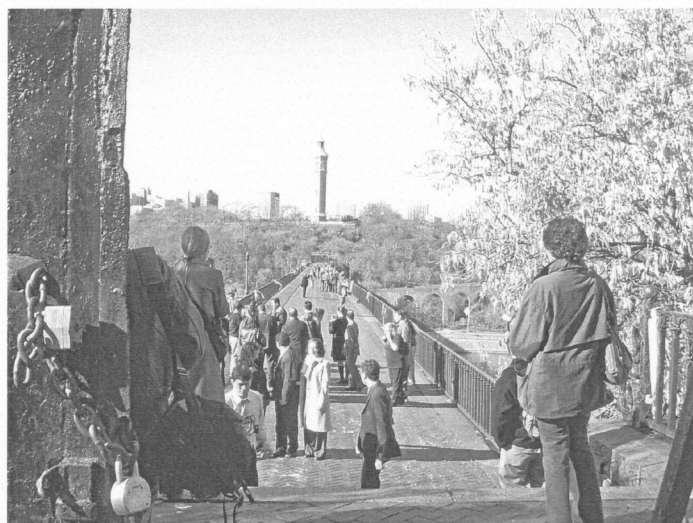
After his death in 1972 as a result of complications linked indirectly to the chlorine tank incident, I often thought of my day with Poppy. I grew up in Croton Heights, so named because in the eighteenth century one could view the Pine's Bridge crossing from historic Davenport House. Before we used air conditioning, we would spend summer evenings sitting on the porch. The cool night air carried many sounds – the fire whistle from Katonah, the train whistle from the Harlem Line rail crossings, and the Thunder Bridge at the gatehouse. Until the wood on the bridge was replaced with metal grates in the 1980s, that sound was a constant reminder of my grandfather, his connection to the Croton Watershed, and my cultural heritage as a son of the Croton Valley.

High Bridge: Reusing Historic Infrastructure

The High Bridge was one of four featured sites at an October 17, 2006, program at the Urban Center on "Reusing Ruins: Preserving New York's Industrial Heritage." Panel members were Robert Kornfeld, Jr., Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, speaking about the High Bridge; Patricia Cruz, Harlem Stage, for the 135th St. Croton system gatehouse, the city's newest theater; historian Roger Panetta, Marymount College, for the Yonkers (Glenwood) power station; and, for the High Line, Joshua David of Friends of the High Line.

Frank Sanchis, senior vice-president of the Municipal Art Society—the program's sponsor—and author of *American Architecture, Westchester County, New York: Colonial to Contemporary* (1977), which includes a major chapter on the Old Croton Aqueduct, was moderator. He noted we still don't know how to find value and opportunity in structures that once served an important purpose, later become derelict, and then achieve beauty in the eyes of those who save them.

Bob Kornfeld stressed the singularity of the High Bridge in that its advocates, represented by the High Bridge Coalition, are seeking to restore one of the bridge's early functions, rather than identify a new use. From the beginning the bridge served a dual purpose, to carry Croton water to Manhattan across the Harlem River, in pipes still beneath the walkway, and as a public destination. To serve the crowds of tourists, beer gardens and inns opened, a ferry landing was built, and a handsome stairway was constructed on the Bronx side connecting the waterfront and bridge entrance. The



The High Bridge, opened briefly on Nov. 17, 2006. High Bridge Water Tower, Manhattan, is at far end. (Photo by C. Fahn)

bridge was considered a work of art, esthetics being a principal reason a high-level crossing was chosen.

Cautioning against allowing "a veil of romance" to obscure complex relationships between these structures (when they were operational) and their workforce and neighbors, and between Westchester County and New York City, Roger Panetta spoke of the sense of municipal aspiration, power, and longevity they impart. The speakers agreed that having the surrounding community both support and "take ownership" of adaptive reuse projects is essential to success.

Memo to Trail Neighbors: A Good Year for Conservation Easements

If you own undeveloped green space along or within the viewshed of the Old Croton Aqueduct and would like to keep it permanently green, 2007 would be a good year to place a conservation easement on that part of your property. While there have always been potential tax benefits for doing this, a February 7th *Wall Street Journal* article ("Tax Break With a View") explains that expanded federal tax benefits passed last year expire at the end of 2007 unless Congress renews them. The law applies to "scenic, environmentally sensitive or historic properties..." that meet certain criteria. State tax benefits may also apply.

At least two conservation easements have been placed on land along the Aqueduct, both through the Westchester Land Trust. The property owners benefited not only themselves, but all who use the Aqueduct trail. Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, a narrow, 26 mile linear park, is especially vulnerable to the impact of new building nearby. A conservation easement is an important tool for protecting neighboring green space on private land.

An easement can be implemented even when tax benefits don't apply, and can often be tailored to individual needs. The level of tax benefits, for properties that qualify for them, depends on the owner's income and the value of the land being protected. To learn more, visit Westchester Land Trust's web site, www.westchesterlandtrust.org, which also has the text of the *Wall Street Journal* article, or call Eileen Goren or Susan Carpenter at 914-241-6346.

Management of Hazardous Trees on the Aqueduct

Peter Iskenderian

As park manager of the Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park, I am responsible for the maintenance of the trees in the park. I also represent the Taconic Region of the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on the statewide hazardous tree taskforce. I've been trained by state experts on how to detect and assess hazardous trees in a park setting. Trees certainly add to the enjoyment of the park experience, but too often people are unaware of the risks associated with defective trees. Being able to recognize hazardous trees and taking proper action can protect property and lives.

A hazardous tree refers to any potential tree failure due to a structural defect that may result in property damage or personal injury. There are no absolute rules for recognizing and correcting hazardous defects. According to the manual "How to Recognize Hazardous Defects in Trees" (U.S. Dept. Agric. NA-FR-01-96), "It is difficult to predict tree failure with certainty because of the complex interaction between the tree and the environment. Every tree will eventually fail; therefore, knowledge of each tree species, proximity to other trees, site characteristics, and local weather conditions is important when evaluating tree hazards." The severity of the defect in a tree, the tree's height, and the target zone if the tree should fall must also be considered.

New York State has very stringent guidelines for dealing with hazardous trees. I am required by the state to prepare and submit a detailed hazardous tree inspection report twice a year. If this form is not submitted on the required date the park is closed until the form is received. I inspect Aqueduct trees every spring and fall, after the leaves have dropped, to identify which trees may become a problem in the future and should be watched, and also after severe storms. When I'm approached by a trail neighbor concerned about a

tree adjacent to their property, I investigate completely and take appropriate action.

Trees must be evaluated individually and all trees within falling distance of targets should be given extra care during an inspection. The federal manual states "Responsibility to ensure public safety is proportionate to the degree of development in a given area. Higher developed areas incur a greater level of responsibility than undeveloped areas." For a park manager to protect him- or herself from liability, it is necessary to use reasonable care to protect park visitors and neighbors. The best protection against liability is a documented program of annual inspections.

There are other special factors that must be taken into consideration because of

the nature of the Old Croton Aqueduct. The Aqueduct is a national, state, and county landmark. The actual brick tube where the water flowed, and its stone retaining walls, are greatly affected by tree growth. All along the Aqueduct, trees are creating severe damage by growing into and around these structures, in many cases pulling apart the walls with their roots. Because of this, and the Aqueduct's landmark status, extra care must be taken when evaluating trees. As you can see, I cannot take the concerns of hazardous trees lightly, and extra thought is needed when classifying hazardous trees. This is one of the most important issues facing the Aqueduct today.



Tree hazard on the trail. State Park vehicle in background. (Photo by P. Iskenderian)

Be Kind to the Trail!

With the arrival of spring mud, bikers and others using wheels should allow the trail to dry out first to avoid creating ruts.

Ossining Weir Tours

Ossining Weir Chamber Visits Led by the Friends. Saturdays, April 14, May 12, July 14.

See a video and exhibit about the history of the Aqueduct, and cross the Aqueduct bridge over Sing Sing Kill to see the inside of the weir chamber and descend into the water tunnel. Meet at 1 pm in the Joseph G. Caputo Community Center-Heritage Area Visitor Center, Ossining. Directions: turn west onto Broadway from Highland Ave. (Rte. 9) opp. intersection of Croton Ave. (Rte. 133). Parking available. Free; advance registration not required. Takes about 1½ hrs. Rain or shine unless weather is extreme. Accessible from MetroNorth's Hudson Line Ossining station. Questions? Call 914-478-3961.

For Saturday, June 9th, Ossining Village Fair Day: Tours into the Aqueduct tunnel between about 10:30 am and 3 pm. Meet at weir chamber at far end of Aqueduct bridge, near the Community Center (see above.)

WALKS. See www.aqueduct.org for Friends-sponsored walks. In walks listed below, AMC means sponsor is Appalachian Mtn. Club.

Sat., March 31, 10am-3pm. Walk south to Hudson River Museum, and possibly further. 7 miles. Westchester Trails Assoc. Meet at Keeper's House, Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry. Leader: Ken Abels, 914-437-5246.

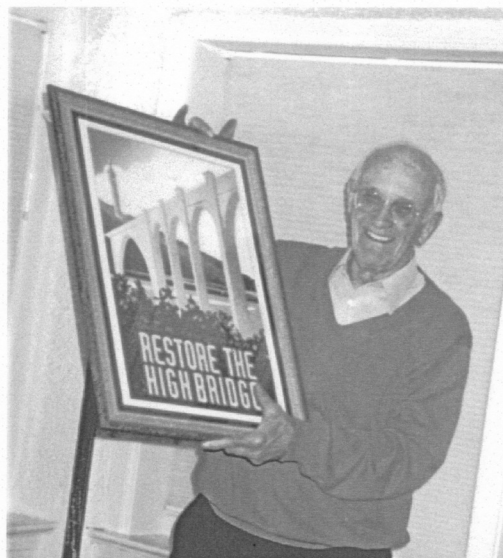
Sun., June 3, 10am. Walk uphill to Untermyer Park's Greek Gardens, then quick-pace south on Aqueduct to and through the Bronx to the High Bridge and optionally to Manhattan on Washington Bridge. Bailouts possible en route. Est. 7-15 miles, 5-9 hrs. Appalachian Mtn. Club. Meet at Metro-North's Hudson Line Greystone station, Yonkers. Leader: Mike Graff, mgraff@nyc.rr.com or call 917-902-7979 before 10:30pm.

Mon. June 18, 6 pm, Hastings-After-Work Hike. Hike on Old Croton Aqueduct and other trails connecting to local parks. After-hike snacks available in village. AMC. By train: take Hudson Line 5:19 to Hastings from Grand Central; hike ends in time to take 8:20 PM train back. Drivers park at station. Meet near taxi stand at Hastings station. Leader: Hal Kaplan, 914-376-3156; hike message begins June 18, 9am.

Fri., July 6, 6pm, Poet's Walk. Stroll along route Poe may have taken and listen to readings from his poetry. Includes route of Old Croton Aqueduct from Kingsbridge Armory to the High Bridge. NY Restoration Project. Meet at Poe Cottage in Poe Park. Leader: Jim Lane, jlane@nyrp.org or 212-333-2552.

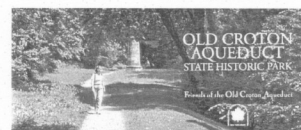
Sun., July 8, 2pm. Greystone (Yonkers) to Hastings on Old Croton Aqueduct and several side trails in nearby parks. Several short uphill. AMC. By train: take Hudson Line 1:20 to

Greystone from Grand Central. Drivers park near Greystone station (Warburton & Harriman ave.). Meet at Greystone sta. Leader: Hal Kaplan, 914-376-3156; hike message begins July 2 (to confirm hike is going).



Former park manager Brian Goodman, in New York for a visit last fall, accepting a framed High Bridge poster from the Friends, who thank Eli Nivin for arranging the gift. (Photo by W. Cassella)

Map Orders. The Friends' full-color map/guides, *Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park* (Westchester County) and *The Old Croton Aqueduct in New York City*, are \$5. each (members, \$4.). Add 75 cents shipping and handling for the first map, 50 cents for each additional map. Send a check for the total to the Friends at 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. For the name of a retailer, call 914-478-3961, or go to www.aqueduct.org.



MEMBERSHIP COUPON

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

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal | <input type="checkbox"/> New Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Students & retirees \$10 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good Friend \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Best Friend \$100 |

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.

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



*The Friends' vision of the Keeper's House as a visitor center.
Concept drawing by Ildiko Viczian.*

Newsletter: Charlotte Fahn, *Editor*. News items, reminiscences, and comments welcome: 914-478-3961 or czfahn@yahoo.com 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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