



# Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

*Newsletter*  
No. 39, Fall 2011

## Untermeyer Gardens To Be Restored

*John Scheuneman and Stephen F. Byrns*

Samuel Untermeyer was born in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1858 and grew up in New York City. He was educated at City College and got his law degree from Columbia in 1878. He became a successful, influential, and very wealthy lawyer as partner in the New York firm Guggenheimer, Untermeyer & Marshall. More may be learned about this forgotten man's amazing professional and civic accomplishments at the Untermeyer Garden Conservancy's website [www.untermeyergardens.org](http://www.untermeyergardens.org).

Mr. Untermeyer purchased Greystone from the estate of Samuel J. Tilden in 1899. Through later acquisitions including the mansion of Eva Smith Cochran, this Yonkers estate grew to about 150 acres running along both sides of North Broadway and sloping down to the Hudson River across from the Palisades.

In 1912, the architect Welles Bosworth, fresh from his design work on the gardens of John D. Rockefeller at Kykuit, was commissioned by Samuel Untermeyer for his gardens. Mr. Bosworth is remembered now for his garden work at Kykuit, but the gardens at Greystone were far more impressive. The Bosworth design incorporates themes from the most lovely gardens known in human history, from the Persian to the Greek to the Renaissance, from Pasargadae to the Alhambra to the Taj Mahal to Villa d'Este. At the bottom of the Vista are two ancient Roman monolithic cippolino columns about 2000 years old, probably the greatest in America.

After the gardens at Greystone were established, as many as sixty gardeners were employed for their upkeep. These gardeners gained the expertise that was later



*Partial view of Untermeyer's gardens, c.1940*

called on in the development of the New York Botanical Garden, and even later influencing Wave Hill in Riverdale. Greystone became a well-known sightseeing destination: on one Sunday in 1939, thirty thousand people visited for a free flower show.

## Untermeyer Gardens (cont'd.)

After Samuel Untermeyer died in 1940, a small portion of his estate was given to the City of Yonkers, which struggled to maintain it with difficulty. The gardens began a decline that has only lately begun to be reversed. Some of the northern part of the estate was used to construct a hospital and nursing home. On the southern part is a home for developmentally disabled children. Garden apartments lie on the east side of North Broadway. The Untermeyer mansion is gone now, but its central fountain is now the highlight of the Conservatory Gardens in Central Park, called the Untermeyer Fountain. The remaining acreage at Greystone was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, now known as the Samuel Untermeyer Park and Gardens. Many architectural features remain and the Yonkers Parks Department performs maintenance, but the garden is mostly covered by seventy years of overgrowth. It totals about forty-five acres.

The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy was established in 2010 by Stephen F. Byrns for the purpose of restoring Untermeyer Gardens to their former glory. This will be a long process, but important first steps have been taken. The Conservancy became a NY State Non-Profit Corporation in 2010, and obtained 501 C-3 status in 2011. It will be a public/private enterprise modeled on the Central Park Conservancy and operating under a memorandum of understanding between the Conservancy and the City of Yonkers.

The Conservancy has raised the resources to hire Timothy Tilghman as a full-time gardener in the Parks Department, dedicated solely to the Untermeyer Gardens. He is augmenting the work done by the over-taxed Parks Department staff working throughout the City of Yonkers. Mr. Tilghman's impressive experience includes five years at Wave Hill, responsibilities as a gardening editor at Martha Stewart Magazine, and most recently as head gardener at Rocky Hills, a distinguished private garden in Mount Kisco, New York.



Marco Polo Stufano, the dean of American horticulture and founding Director of Horticulture at Wave Hill, will act as the Horticultural Advisor to The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy.

The first stages of restoration are directed at the walled garden. (Historical and present-day photographs of the walled garden features may be seen at [www.undermyergardens.org](http://www.undermyergardens.org).) This part of Untermeyer Gardens was called the "Greek Garden," although its basic design is Persian, with its criss-crossing water channels within a walled garden. As such, it is probably the most significant Persian garden in the Western Hemisphere. The outer walls and towers are influenced by Persian design. The entrance gate echoes Mycenae and the interior architectural features incorporate classical Greek design. The outdoor mosaics, some of which are in ruin, are magnificent, as are the griffin sculptures by Paulanship.

Horticultural improvements within the walls will see the reintroduction of the rhythmic planting along the water channels, alternating with bold flower arrays. The western border, over 300 feet long, will become a stupendous mixed border, featuring perennials, vines and small woody plants. The eastern border will be planted with an enriched mixture of primarily woody plants. The amphitheater and porticos will be adorned with brilliantly planted pots. Finally, the overall area will be planted with a mix of larger trees to impart the feeling of lushness that once prevailed at the gardens.

Samuel Untermeyer was an intensely driven and ambitious man. He asked Welles Bosworth to create "the finest garden in the world." It is the goal of the Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy to put these gardens back on the world's horticultural map, and to restore them as one of the finest gardens in America once again.

Fund-raising is critical to the success of this major project. Tax-deductible contributions may be made to the Untermeyer Garden Conservancy, 33 S. Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701. Online contributions may be made on the Conservancy's website, [www.undermyergardens.org](http://www.undermyergardens.org).

*Note:* c.1940 photos from the Untermeyer Garden Conservancy website used with permission.



## Another Trail Milestone to Celebrate: Reclaiming Lamartine Ave. in Yonkers

For years, many southbound Aqueduct walkers have thought the Aqueduct trail dead-ends at Lamartine Ave. in Yonkers. For as many years, the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct have been urging State Parks to reclaim the trail from long-time encroachments on the next segment and the agency itself has sought to make it happen. Now at last it has, thanks to the work by Aqueduct Manager Gary Ricci, his crew and members of the Friends who pitched in to help.

The section in question is short but important to purists who like to hew to the exact route followed by the brick water tunnel to the maximum degree possible. The section lies between Lamartine Ave. at one end and Bishop William J. Walls Place at the other – a distance that literally takes about three minutes to walk. The stretch is adjacent to the Cottage Gardens housing development. It marks the place where the Aqueduct just starts its turn to the east, continues east for some distance, and then turns southward again on its way to Manhattan Island.

Following initial approaches to the neighbors by former Aqueduct manager Steve Oakes, Gary Ricci held further conversations with them to assure a smooth transition to an open public way. The park crew then took down several fences, put up “No Motorized Vehicles” signs, and cleared the way to re-establish public use of the section, which had never ceased to be state park land. This is the first step in making this section more park-like, with a better defined path – perhaps marked with green feet stenciled on the paved areas – and

Aqueduct signs at the Bishop Walls end of the section.

There has also been talk for some time of creating a park to encompass the next section of the Aqueduct route, at the northeast corner of Ashburton Ave. and North Broadway. Now a grassy field surrounded by a chain link fence, the water tunnel cuts across this corner to fully make its eastward turn. A park or other development permitting easy public access would enable Aqueduct walkers to follow the route even more closely.

We hope the reclaimed section will see frequent use by through-walkers and area residents alike, to firmly establish it as part of Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park.

*Walking directions:* Walkers heading south who reach Lamartine Ave., marked by an interpretive sign and a slender, green “OCA” signpost (and the Hudson River) on their right, should cross the street, walk through the asphalt parking lot behind the Yonkers Christian Assembly, and continue through a grassy field. Then continue on an unpaved surface behind several neighboring buildings and houses, emerging at the corner of Bishop William J. Walls Place and North Broadway. Walk to Ashburton Ave., the next corner south, and find your way along the south side of Ashburton to Palisade Ave., picking up the familiar Aqueduct trail a little off the corner. Northbound walkers coming from the trail at Palisade Ave., close to the corner of Ashburton, should reverse these directions.

– C. Fahn



*The north end of the reclaimed section at Lamartine Ave. (left), and the south end at Bishop William J. Walls Place (right) in Yonkers. (Photos by C. Fahn and E. Zazzera)*

# The Old Croton Aqueduct in History and Culture

*Ed Brody*

## V. From opening to expansion (1842-62)

This continues our story from the Spring 2011 newsletter (# 38), which covered the period from 1835 to 1842. Work on the Aqueduct began in 1835. Despite land disputes, labor disputes, the Panic of 1837 and the collapse of the first dam, the Aqueduct was completed and officially opened on Oct 14, 1842.

### Great changes

The arrival of fresh water was a moment for great celebration for New Yorkers. But in Westchester it wasn't the opening of the Aqueduct but the building process that had the most immediate effect. When the original dam collapsed in 1841 so much silt and debris was deposited in the lower Croton River that it was no longer navigable and the new dam reduced the water flow needed for mills. Businesses using the river closed. But the dam and 400-acre Croton Lake did become a recreational site for city people and tourists.

The Aqueduct opened at the beginning of a period of tremendous geographic and economic expansion. Texas and California joined the Union, the Oregon Territory was opened and the Southwest acquired from Mexico. Technological inventions such as the telegraph, reaper and sewing machine helped drive economic growth, making possible a higher standard of living.

### New York City

In New York, demand for Aqueduct water developed slowly. The wealthy hooked up to have indoor baths and running water, but two years after its opening only 6,175 houses were paying the \$10/yr fee. Nevertheless, New York was becoming the fastest growing American city. Already the leading port, railroad financing now made it the leading capital market as well. The population more than doubled in just 20 years to 813,000.

Aspects of a great city began to take shape. Many streets were paved with granite. There were gas street lamps. One could travel by rail, on horse-drawn buses and streetcars. There was music, theater, art galleries, new magazines, public lectures and book publishers. In 1842 a Board of Education was founded. In 1845 a Police Department was formed. In 1853-4 America's first World's Fair took place at the Crystal Palace next to the 42nd St reservoir with a 350-foot tower across the street.

But there was also another city of tenements, saloons and brothels. Ten thousand children were homeless. In the poor areas, streets were still mud and pigs wandered about. Cleanliness was not considered important and medical knowledge lagged. Surgeons did

not wash their hands before operating. People still thought that disease was transmitted by bad smells. There was no Board of Health until 1865, no Street Cleaning Dept until 1881. Until 1864 fire fighters were volunteers; teams competed to reach the fire and hydrants. There were frequent gang wars and Tammany Hall politicians were corrupt.

### Cultural impact of Aqueduct

At first, the Aqueduct's strongest impact on the city was cultural. The 42nd St. distributing reservoir with its massive, Egyptian style walls was a great wonder. Visitors could mount steps to walk around the top with views of the city, Long Island Sound and the Jersey hills.<sup>1</sup> Public fountains shooting water high into the air were a great source of pride even if they wasted water. The temporary bridge at 174th St. was a popular day trip and promenade, even more so when it became the High Bridge in 1848.

Romanticized Croton Aqueduct pictures fit in with the rise of landscape painting and the desire to balance technical progress with nature. Moreover, the Aqueduct gave America something comparable to the noble achievements of past epochs in foreign lands but achieved by democratic vote, not imperial decree, and built by contractors employing paid labor. "Henceforth there would seem no project too bold nor enterprise too great for NYC to undertake."<sup>2</sup>

### Social impact of the Aqueduct

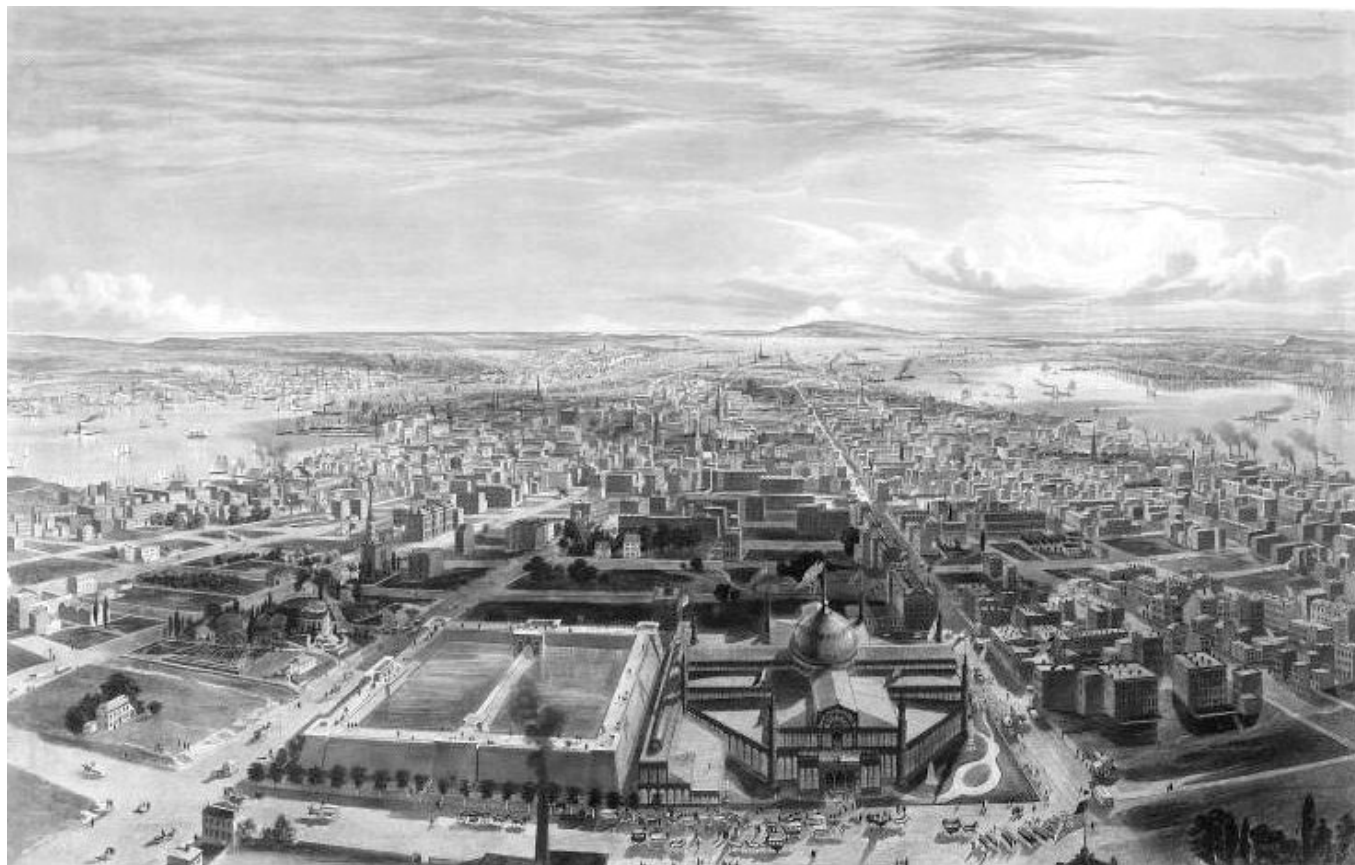
Access to fresh water did improve the hygiene of the masses, as there were 600 free public taps. But as people relied less on wells the water table rose, flooding cellars. The city thus started a sewer system in 1849 and the cockroach got a new name: "Croton bug."

But by 1846 there were still only 12,000 paying users. Once again it took a cholera epidemic – this one in 1849 – to push people into action. While "only" 1% of the population died, compared with the 1832 epidemic when nearly 2% died, now tens of thousands signed up for Aqueduct water. During the next epidemic in 1854, the death rate was halved and by the following epidemic in 1866 it was under 0.1%.

Public baths starting at 3¢ became popular, as did the bathroom. The first toothbrush, shower/bath and toilet tissue arrived in 1857. Although hopes that wholesome water would reduce alcohol use proved futile, it did save the city's breweries!

In time, the 13th St waterworks were torn down and the Manhattan Co. waterworks were emptied, but a





*New York, 1855, from the Latting Observatory.  
From I.N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs,  
The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.*

Manhattan bank employee ceremoniously pumped some water each day lest they lose their state charter.

### **Aqueduct no longer adequate**

The Aqueduct needed constant maintenance as there was considerable leakage due to erosion, ground settling, etc.<sup>3</sup> Divided into eight sections, each was assigned a resident Keeper or Superintendent. (At first their houses were wooden but by 1857 they were rebuilt with brick. The Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry is the only remaining one.) The tunnel was drained once a year for a 4-5 day inspection during which time the city had to rely on the Yorkville Reservoir. In 1860 pipes connecting the Yorkville and Murray Hill reservoirs collapsed, draining the reservoirs and flooding the area. Repairs took two panicky days.

The 31-acre Yorkville Reservoir with its 180 million gallon capacity was no longer enough. A second reservoir was begun in 1859. It would cover 107 acres and hold one billion gallons, which was considered a 30-day supply of water for the city. First called Lake Manahatta, it became the Central Park Reservoir and now the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir. Anticipating further demand the city commissioned a topographic

map of the entire Croton watershed for possible additional dams.

1. The Spring 2010 Newsletter (#35) has an excerpt of Walt Whitman's exuberant remarks on the reservoir.
2. Mrs. Martha Lamb & Mrs. Burton Harrison, *History of the City of New York* (1877), p.732.
3. The Winter 2001 Newsletter (#10) has an article by Bob Kornfeld, "Operating the Aqueduct." Newsletter #30 (Summer 2008) excerpts a chapter by Kevin Bone on the early days of the Aqueduct.

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### **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        |

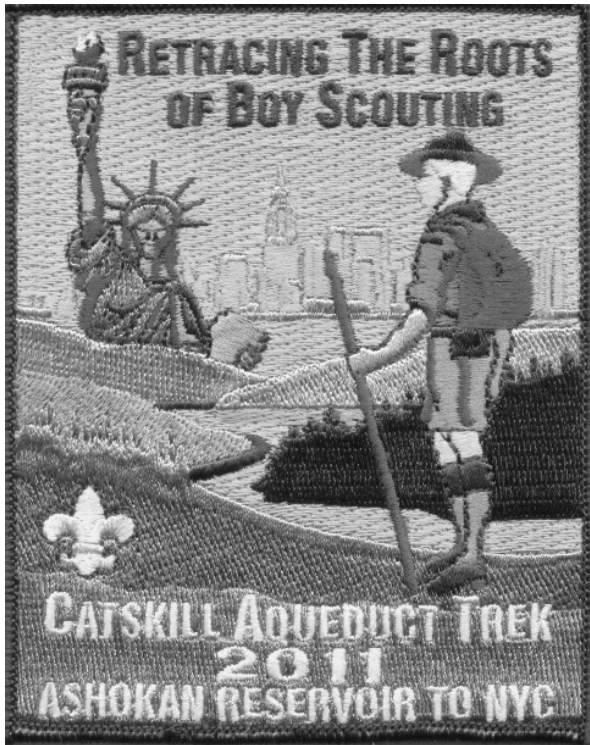
Please make check payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send it with this coupon to the Friends at Keeper's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

*Please let us know if you would like to volunteer.*



## Boy Scout Trek from Catskills

A band of slightly trail-weary Boy Scouts, their scoutmasters, and several accompanying parents were greeted on their arrival at the Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry on Aug. 26 by Gary Ricci, State Parks manager of the Aqueduct, and Mavis Cain and Charlotte Fahn, representing Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. The 15 boys, ages 10 to 14, were from West Shokan Troop 163 in the Catskills. They had started their trek on Aug. 19 from the Ashokan Reservoir in Ulster County; walked about 120 miles along the Catskill Aqueduct and sections of the Old Croton Aqueduct during days filled with talks, tours, and tramping; and would end the adventure at a celebration and reunion with their families at the reservoir in Central Park the next day.

The trek had roots in both the historic and recent past. It commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the troop, which the engineers who built the Ashokan Reservoir formed to benefit the local Catskill boys. It also recognized the students and teachers from two high schools, one in the Catskills and one in Brooklyn, who together made the original Mountaintop to Tap Watershed Trek in 2007.

Among many others, Kim Estes-Fradis of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, with the assistance of Robin Sanchez, played a major role in the months of planning that preceded the adventure. Stephen Schiame of State Parks, as well as the Friends, helped with the planning of the east-of-Hudson segment.

– C. Fahn

## Walks, Talks and Tours

**October 15, Saturday - Ossining Weir Tour** As part of Aquefest weekend, descend into the original 1842 brick water tunnel and learn its history. Meet at 10 AM at the Weir building on the Double Arch Bridge adjacent to the Joseph Caputo Community Center, 95 Broadway, just west of Rte 9/Highland Ave. at the junction of Croton Ave. (Rte 133). Free parking available at the Center. Information: Sara Kelsey, 646-303-1448 or sak1221@aol.com

**October 15 and 16, Saturday and Sunday - Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct** will again lead walks along the route of the Aqueduct in Manhattan (Sat.) and the Bronx (Sun.) during the 2011 Open House New York. Guides will talk about the Aqueduct and point out historical sites of interest along the way. Free: Registration is required. Details about registration and the walks available in Sept. at [www.ohny.org](http://www.ohny.org). Inquiries by email: [old.croton.aqueduct@gmail.com](mailto:old.croton.aqueduct@gmail.com)

**Aqueduct Hike Series Planned by Westchester Trails Association.** Westchester Trails Association, a long-established hiking club has organized a series of monthly hikes on the Old Croton Aqueduct called "OCA and More," starting in November. The hikes will each be 7-8 miles long, and will incorporate the four sections listed in the book *Walkable Westchester*, beginning at Lamartine Ave. in Yonkers and continuing to the Croton Dam. Each hike will add other areas of interest as well. The first hike, on November 6, from Dobbs Ferry to Sleepy Hollow, is listed below. Look for details of the December, January and February hikes in the WTA's winter schedule, which can be found at [www.westhike.org](http://www.westhike.org).

**November 6, Sunday Post Halloween Hike: Dobbs Ferry to Sleepy Hollow, Following the Legend** Eight miles, easy hiking into the unknown. This hike, mostly on the Old Croton Aqueduct, will start out happily enough, as we walk from the site of the historic Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry to Lyndhurst. There, the reading of excerpts from Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" will begin. As the story unfolds, the hike will follow the route, as much as possible, taken by Ichabod Crane through Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow on the fateful night when he met the Headless Horseman. As sundown approaches, hikers will walk through the burial grounds of the Old Dutch church and visit the graves of the author and some of the characters in the story. The plan is to (hopefully) return safely to our cars via the Aqueduct. Bring a flashlight "just in case."

Leader: Eileen West, [eileenw1000@yahoo.com](mailto:eileenw1000@yahoo.com). Meet the leader at Sleepy Hollow H.S. parking lot (access from Rte 448, just east of Rte 9) at 10.30 am. Hikers will do a car shuttle from there to the start of the hike. Transportation contribution for shuttle is \$1.

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.





Trailside / Fall 2011

## The Leather Man...and Us

*Ed Perratore*

The exhumation of a homeless man who died more than a century ago might not rate much attention during a tumultuous year that has so far included Mideast uprisings, the death of Osama bin Laden and our recent Hurricane Irene. But even if you're not a hiker, you can appreciate the Leather Man. His story is not just about him.

You might already know that the Leather Man was a mysterious figure who became known by the 365-mile circuit he walked between the Hudson and Connecticut Rivers. Like clockwork, he followed this routine every 34 days between the late 1850s and 1889, when he was found dead in a Mount Pleasant cave. The man must have looked alarming with his unwashed, grizzled appearance, clad in a handmade leather suit. But to the locals he could count on to feed him, the vagabond posed no danger. From the bounteous meals some prepared, they might even have looked forward to his appearances.

After he died, he was interred at Ossining's Sparta Cemetery, in a pauper's grave incorrectly marked with the name Jules Bourglay, the only name ever attributed to him. Over the years since his burial, Route 9 has grown up around the site, so you could find yourself standing upon the Leather Man's grave merely by stepping into the cemetery from busy South Highland Avenue. Besides wanting to give the man's remains a more appropriate resting place, the Ossining Historical Society deemed the gravesite a safety hazard.

What most strikes me about the Leather Man's story is that for most of us, the stretches of any trail we frequent—including the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail—owe much to our own personal routines. We are not expecting to fulfill the needs of others.

The Leather Man's route developed over time, as he learned which households would provide a meal and perhaps some tobacco for his pipe. Had nobody along his path rewarded his scheduled arrival with such kindness, he would likely have ended his days in the obscurity of any other homeless man. We remember him today not merely from how he spent his days but from the enduring compassion he stirred in those he met. For neighbors, taking part in his routine was an honor. It brought out the best in them.



*The Leatherman*

A new pine casket now lies beneath a boulder with a plaque marking the Leather Man's final resting place at a gravesite farther from the road. The old box was empty; diggers found not even teeth. Connecticut's state archeologist, Nicholas Bellantoni, reportedly said that grading of Route 9 in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century might have altered the burial site and marred the remains. But another explanation works better for me.

How much of the Leather Man's legend is the man himself—and how much the kindness of strangers? If it's the former, something of him should have remained. But if the latter, it's no surprise his grave was empty. While hiking in Ossining you might see the shadowy figure, weighed down by a grungy patched coat, as he trudges along the trail feeling grateful for the help of others.

## Gary Ricci talks about his new assignment

Gary Ricci joined us as State Parks Manager in February, 2011. He says, "The first thing you realize as manager is that the Aqueduct Trail, which is typically 66 ft wide and 26 miles long, is a very different kind of park. Most parks are destinations. People plan a visit, enjoy it and then leave. Most users of the Aqueduct are people who live near and have a sense of belonging, Most don't think of the trail as a State Park, but rather a piece of shared property to be protected and cared for."



*Gary Ricci*

Gary is getting used to the many calls from neighbors who have noticed something on the trail that they wish to report. Gary says, "I appreciate their calls even if the problem is minor."

Gary commented on the fact that the Aqueduct is unique in that it runs through urban as well as rural areas. "Yonkers is a challenge because it is a city not a village and the trail is often unrecognized as a State Park. I'm trying to change that. We've made a start by reclaiming the Lamartine avenue section." (See article on page 3.)

"My interest in history has been rekindled — especially since the Aqueduct history is so fascinating" Gary told our editor. "I've looked at old photographs that show very few trees. Most land was agricultural. Now there are many trees which runners appreciate for their shade. But trees can imperil the tunnel's brickwork. So that is a challenge."

**7th Annual AQUEFEST Weekend!**  
**Saturday, Oct. 15 and Sunday, Oct. 16**

Music and merriment all along the trail!  
 SAT: Yonkers, Sleepy Hollow, Ossining  
 SUN: Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington

Special Guest: **Tom Chapin** starts off the  
 festivities on Sunday at the  
 Keeper's House in Dobbs Ferry.

For Complete AQUEFEST program,  
 see **[www.aqueduct.org](http://www.aqueduct.org)**

**Newsletter:** Ruth Gastel, *Editor*. News items,  
 reminiscences, and comments welcome: 914-479-1414 or  
[ruthg@iii.org](mailto: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](http://www.aqueduct.org)

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