



Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Newsletter
No. 14, Spring 2003

Manhattan Access to High Bridge to be Restored Funds Awarded for Two Aqueduct Projects in New York City

New York City Parks & Recreation has won funding for two projects that give life to plans for creating a "trail through history" along the route of the Old Croton Aqueduct in the Bronx and Manhattan. Together they bring closer to reality the vision of an Old Croton Aqueduct walking route stretching 41 miles from the New Croton Dam to the heart of midtown Manhattan.

One of the awards is to restore pedestrian and bicycle access to the Manhattan end of the High Bridge. Enabling the public physically to get to the Manhattan end of the famous bridge that carried the Aqueduct's pipes across the Harlem River is critical to the dream of some day reopening the bridge, which has been closed to the public for decades. While the Bronx end is at street level, the Manhattan end is 100 feet below street level, part way down a steep slope in Highbridge Park.

The funding, \$2 million with a local match of \$1,120,000 to be raised, provides for replication of the stairway that once let visitors conveniently reach the bridge from the broad terrace where High Bridge Tower is situated, near 174th St. and Amsterdam Ave. At present there is only the rusted frame of the old stairway. In addition, a new ramp will be built to allow access by

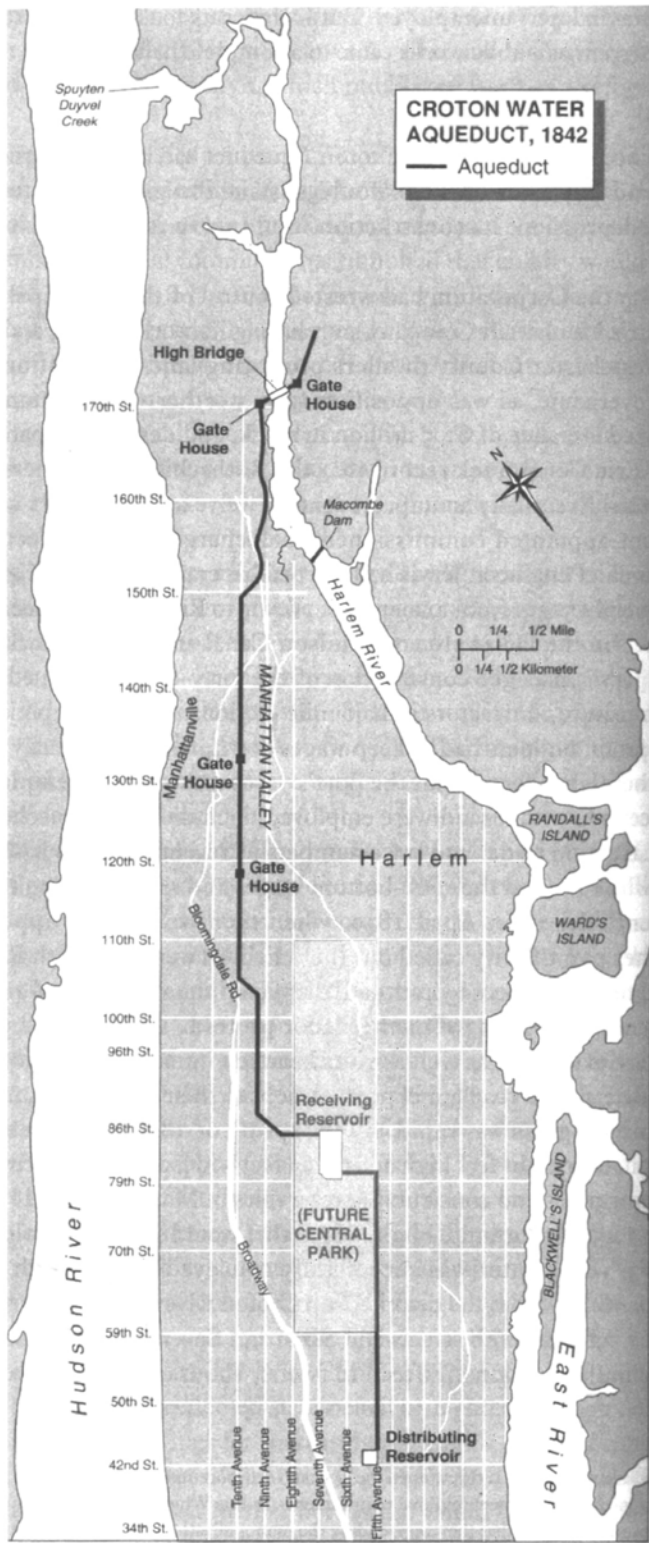
cyclists, people with baby strollers, and those with disabilities.

The bridge is the oldest in New York City. Designed by John Bloomfield Jervis, Chief Engineer of the Aqueduct, it was completed in 1848, six years after the Aqueduct went into service. (During those years, Croton water flowed through low-level pipes to cross the river.) The graceful crossing, with its 15 arches so evocative of the great Roman aqueduct bridges and its views high above the wooded Harlem River valley, achieved instant



C. Fahn

On the High Bridge, looking towards Manhattan



The route of the Aqueduct in Manhattan. Its longest straight run is along Amsterdam Avenue. (Tenth Avenue). (From "A History of New York City to 1898," by Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.)

renown. It quickly became a popular destination for country excursions and spawned an entire tourism industry in the area.

While it long functioned as a convenient as well as spectacular crossing for the Bronx and Manhattan neighborhoods it connects, the bridge has deteriorated since its closure. The New York City Department of Transportation is conducting an engineering study of its needs in cooperation with the Parks Department and with support from the city's Department of Environmental Protection, which is in charge of the city's water supply system, modern and historic.

Being on the bridge is a unique experience, since its entire surface is and always has been only for pedestrians. One can stroll on the entire brick-paved surface, enjoying not only the views but also the beautiful railing and other design details. The High Bridge Coalition, an umbrella group of public agencies and nonprofits, including Friends of the Aqueduct, is mounting a public campaign to reopen the bridge as a key interborough link in a regional greenway network.

The second funded project, equally important to the greenway plan, is to design and install trail and trailhead markers and interpretive signs along the nearly 15 miles of Old Croton Aqueduct route between the Westchester border and Fifth Ave. and 42nd St., where the Aqueduct's massive distributing reservoir once stood. The signage program will highlight major features of the Aqueduct in the city, enable walkers and cyclists to follow its course, and educate the public about its formative role in the city's history.

The Parks Department will work with the city's departments of Environmental Protection and Transportation to implement the signage plan. Funding of \$262,244 was awarded, with local matching funds of \$65,556 to be raised. The map and guide of the same part of the Aqueduct route now being created, with private funding, by Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct will complement the plan.

The applications were prepared by Ellen Macnow and Colleen Alderson of the Parks Department's Planning Office, headed by Joshua Laird. The two projects are being federally funded under the Transportation Efficiency Act (TEA-21), administered by the state Department of Transportation. This is the same federal program that will fund the major portion of the renovation of the Aqueduct keeper's house in Dobbs Ferry as an educational and visitor center. While all these projects will take years to carry out, thanks to TEA-21 the future for Aqueduct devotees is a bright one.

Does This House Look Familiar?

If so, it's because it so closely resembles the Overseer's House in Dobbs Ferry. The photo is of Frank A. Palmer in front of the Aqueduct keeper's house for the Sleepy Hollow section of the water tunnel. The house was situated a few hundred feet north of the stone weir building on the trail just north of the Pocantico River bridge.



Last year Patrick Deely of Maryland contacted former Aqueduct manager Brian Goodman. He provided the photo and wrote: "My great uncle, Frank A. Palmer, was a superintendent of the Croton Aqueduct and lived in the Dobbs Ferry house. His mother, my great grandmother, Mary Ann Palmer, was living with Uncle Frank at the Aqueduct House when she died in 1919. Prior to living in Dobbs Ferry, they lived in the Sleepy Hollow Aqueduct house which evidently burned down. They then moved to the Dobbs Ferry house. My great grandfather, Henry S. Palmer, was living in the Sleepy Hollow house when he died in 1911."

Quoting from information provided by Croton Aqueduct historian Robert Kornfeld, Jr., an 1843 report by the state-appointed Water Commissioners,

the body charged with constructing the Aqueduct, stated "... there has been erected along the line of the Aqueduct, Station Houses, and persons employed, whose duty it is, not only to attend the Waste-Wiers [sic] and flood gates, but to visit that portion of the Aqueduct confided to their care, repeatedly, and to amend any damage to the embankments, and in the event of serious injury, to give immediate notice to the Commissioners..." The Aqueduct was divided into eight divisions, with houses built for the six sections north of the High Bridge, as follows: "1st Section, At Croton Dam; 2nd, at Sing Sing Waste Wier; 3rd; at Mill [now Pocantico] River; 4th, at Dobbs Ferry; 5th, at Yonkers; 6th, at Tibbits Brook."

Mr. Deely wrote that as part of a family geneology project, he is searching for records of his family's time on Aqueduct property. "I am trying to find out if records exist and if so where they can be located. Any point in the right direction would be appreciated." If readers can help, or have photos or recollections of any of the other keepers' houses, please contact the newsletter editor.

An intriguing footnote: Family tradition has it that Mr. Deely's great grandmother lost her wedding ring in the fire at the Sleepy Hollow Aqueduct house. So if anyone found an old wedding ring while exploring the ruin long ago, it belonged to Mary Ann Palmer.



Bronx Walk. Some 100 New Yorkers turned out for a Croton Aqueduct walk in the Bronx last August. Sponsored by Take a Walk, New York! and the Jerome Park Conservancy, the tour was co-led by Robert Kornfeld, Jr. Bob is pictured here in front of the cut in the Aqueduct, so mysterious in appearance to casual passers-by, at West Burnside Ave. The Aqueduct crossing was removed in the early 20th century to allow easier traffic passage and replaced by an inverted siphon under the street, as in Archville.

Medallion Presented to Longtime Trail Protector

On December 18, 2002, the Board of the Friends presented a replica of the historic Aqueduct medallion to Constance Porter in recognition of her decades of activism to protect the Aqueduct trail. Connie, who lives in Irvington, led the Croton Aqueduct Committee, which was organized in 1974 to defeat an initiative to transform the Aqueduct into a paved, 8-foot-wide bikeway. Opponents were concerned that the trail would lose its bucolic character and become a speedway for conventional and motorized bike riders.

In accepting, Connie recalled how she and Bill Hoppen, years later one of the organizers of the Friends, went door-to-door to alert neighbors to what might happen to the trail. The support of some 35 organizations was enlisted in a CAC-led, grass-roots surge of opposition that took county and state park officials by surprise and succeeded in killing the proposal. Bob Kornfeld, Jr., a current Board member, mentioned that the CAC was ahead of its time, since works of public infrastructure were not then generally recognized as valued legacies to be preserved.

In presenting the medallion, Mavis Cain, president of the Friends, also recounted Connie's forcefulness when meeting with public officials in the more recent campaign, led by Fred Charles in 1993-94, against a proposal to install a high-pressure gas pipeline in the Aqueduct right-of-way in Dobbs Ferry, Hastings, and Yonkers. Connie recently stepped down after serving the Friends superlatively for eight years as treasurer, with the invaluable assistance of her husband, Dan, who passed away last year. Happily, she will continue to serve on the Board.

High Bridge Memories

The High Bridge reminiscence in our previous issue elicited vivid memories from Thomas Courtien of Putnam County:

"The High Bridge and Tower are something I remember from my childhood. In the 1950s my grandfather lived on 176th St., about three doors in from Amsterdam Avenue. When we would visit him on Sundays we would go down to the park [High Bridge Park]. It was a beautiful park. In those days, the bridge was still open to pedestrians. It was quite a thrill to walk out on the bridge. Also, I remember my uncle telling what the bridge and tower were all about. Even as a child, I was interested in feats of engineering.

"On sunny Sunday afternoons, there were many people walking on the High Bridge. It was also a place of education. One particular Sunday must have been a Jewish holiday. There were many people walking on the bridge who were dressed differently than everyone else. My uncle told me all about the Jewish Holy Days and their meaning.

"When we were children to us the tower was a castle to be defended against the dark knight. The bridge was the focal point of his attack.

"I remember the building of the Cross Bronx and the Alexander Hamilton Bridge. I also remember the start of a new water tunnel under the Harlem River near the High Bridge.



C. Fahn

A detail of High Bridge railing.

"In 1965, my grandfather died; my uncle moved to Brooklyn. By then I was 16 years old; I never thought much about the High Bridge until I started riding my bicycle on the Croton Aqueduct a few years ago. Your newsletter is very informative and brings back a lot of memories."

Intimations of Spring on the Trail

Diane Alden

March 10, 2003 - A request for journal excerpts for the Aqueduct newsletter spurs me to read my notes from last year. What a contrast! Spring is very late this year compared to last year; snow still covers the ground and I have not had the courage to brave the trail for a while. Others have been out, walking their dogs and cross-country skiing; I see them from my window. I read my journal and hunger for spring; I decide I'll begin my walks again tomorrow. Perhaps you will be encouraged as well by my recollections from last year.

February 20, 2002 - Today saw two robins. Were they here all along, or did they just arrive? The snowdrops have been up and blossoming for some time; chives are poking through and the onion grass has also been up for a while.

February 25, 2002 - The garlic mustard is sending small green leaves poking up out of the leaf litter. Today a large woodpecker – either a downy or hairy woodpecker – was drumming on a large hollow tree with many holes in it. A nuthatch calling “nert, nert! Ray (my husband) dubs each of these small creatures “Bert the Nert”. A cardinal calls, “Whew, whew”. In this uncommonly warm weather, it sounds like spring.

When the late afternoon sun hits the western side of the stone wall along the trail, I see large bands of rose quartz in many of the rocks, some vertical, some horizontal, depending on how the mason positioned the stone. Shimmering mica also catches my attention. Large circles of pale lichen decorate the stones; pale blue green lichen and bright green moss share the rough surface of the boulders.

February 27, 2002 - The ground is soft under my feet; it accepts my footsteps welcomingly. I add my prints to those of the horses, deer, dogs, bicycles, and others traversing the trail. I look at a couple in the distance; the man has hoisted a young woman up on his back and then strides forward confidently despite the extra weight. My gaze wanders elsewhere and when I look ahead again I see that the young woman is now carrying the man!

March 9, 2002 - It is unseasonably warm. Today I decided to taste the spring. I nibbled wild garlic chives, garlic mustard and a dandelion leaf. I enjoyed the variety of flavors, one at a time. In my garden the perennial arugula is sprouting along with the French sorrel; I tasted them as well. All strong flavored and yet delicate at the same time. If I had the patience, I would gather a basket full of greens and sauté them for a spring pilaf. Perhaps one day next week...

March 10, 2002 - Overnight there was some rain and today I noticed a green haze on the barberry bushes; the leaves have begun to sprout. And there are swellings at the nodes of the furry wine berry canes. I

read in the Audubon magazine that the deer have grazed all of the understory except for the barberry (prickly with sour leaves – I have tasted them), the wine berry (also prickly and hairy) and the euonymus – all alien species and all ubiquitous along the trail.

March 16, 2002 - The wild rose bushes are budding out now and the canes themselves appear to be a brighter green than they were before. Is this possible? As I walk south I begin to hear a high-pitched peep, peep. Then it becomes louder and more persistent – and I realize that the

spring peepers have emerged, a sign that a vernal pond is nearby. Then three times I heard the eerie gobble, gobble of wild turkeys, but despite scanning the treetops I cannot spot them. I imagine that they are roosting in for the night.

On the way home a runner passed me by and then at the very end three dark forms appeared, three women walking together in the darkening evening. It is amazing how much one can still see in the dark. To the west is a misty haze over the Croton River, so that the lights of the town across the river are dimmer than usual and seem farther away. I arrive home content, all of the small aggravations of the day gone in the glow of the peace of the trail.



Exhibit of Aqueduct Drawings Extended

The Museum of the City of New York has extended its exhibit of drawings and Aqueduct memorabilia from the Fayette B. Tower Archive until April 27th. The material displayed was donated to the museum in 2001 by Helen Tower Wilson, a descendant of Fayette Tower.

Tower (1817-57) was an assistant engineer on the Aqueduct for most of the five years of its construction, and authored "Illustrations of the Croton Aqueduct" (1843), the source of the classic views—still widely reproduced—of Aqueduct structures. For example, the engraving of the Pocantico River crossing on the text side of the Friends' color map of the Aqueduct is from the book.

A rare opportunity is provided by the display of some of the plates from the book side by side with Tower's drawings, done in ink on paper or pencil and wash on paper. The book's plates are actually engravings by prominent New York artists based on Tower's drawings. The visitor thus can judge how well the artists' "views" conveyed Tower's vision. Tower's drawing of the Jewells Brook (now Barney Brook) Station Road crossing in Irvington is just one of those displayed this way.

The exhibit brings home the fact that the idyllic view of the High Bridge, ubiquitously reproduced, was drawn by Tower years before the bridge was completed. Another plate, no. XX, not often seen, shows a great jet of water spouting from the Harlem River. The exhibit

explains: "The release of some of the pressurized water from the inverted siphon that supplied the City until High Bridge could be completed in 1848 created the 'jet' known as 'Maid of the Mist.'" Tower described it as "a whitened column rising from the river - waving like a forest tree as the winds swayed it, with the rainbow tints resting upon its spray . . ."

Besides the drawings, items of memorabilia are bound to fascinate Aqueduct fans: the front page of The New York Herald on the day of the great Aqueduct celebration, devoted entirely to aqueducts - Roman and our own; Tower's letters to family; a plumber's bill for connecting a house "corner Leonard & Church Streets" to Croton water (it cost \$21.70). This modest-size exhibit is well worth a

visit. The museum is at 1220 Fifth Ave. (103rd St.); tel. 212-534-1672. It has put a sampling on its web site as a "virtual" exhibit: go to www.mcny.org and click on Current Exhibits.



Title page from Tower's book.



High Bridge, from F. B. Tower (1843). (Illustrations courtesy of Museum of the City of New York)



J. Lloyd

TURKEY WALK 2002



M. MacDougall

The fifth annual day-after-Thanksgiving Turkey Walk from Croton Dam to Hastings on Nov. 29th, 2002, brought a record turnout despite frigid weather. All ages were present - the youngest was a hardy 7-year-old. A highlight this year was a weir tour led by Brian Goodman. Left: The brave band of 8 a.m. starters. Right: The younger set at the Pocantico weir.



Map Orders

To order the Friends' full-color, award-winning map/guide by mail, send a check for \$5.25 (includes shipping and handling) to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, Overseer's House, 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522. For the name of the retailer nearest you, call 914-693-4117.

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Please make check payable to Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct. Send it with this coupon and your name, address, and day and evening telephone numbers to the Friends at Overseer's House, 15 Walnut St., Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

Name _____

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Please let us know if you would like to volunteer.

National Trails Day

National Trails Day takes place this year on June 7th. In Manhattan the event will focus on Highbridge Park, a treasure trove of sites related to both the Old and New Croton aqueducts. One feature of the day's varied program, now in the planning stage, will be work on improving the Aqueduct trail in the park, the last mile of green, unpaved Old Croton Aqueduct footpath. Details to come.

Mud Season is Here: Be Kind to the Trail

We may all have had our doubts this year, but spring is coming and bringing with it muddy conditions. To avoid creating ruts, bikers and others using wheels on the trail should allow the trail to dry out before using it. Thanks!

For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call 914-693-5259. Until a new Aqueduct manager is appointed, calls will be automatically forwarded to Elizabeth Woodard, Manager of Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park.



"Road Bridge Below Sing Sing"
(From Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 1860)

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
Overseer's House
15 Walnut Street
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

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:* Overseer's House, 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109; *telephone* 914-693-4117.

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