



Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

Newsletter
No. 51, Spring 2016

The Keeper's House Going Forward

We are excited!

The renovation of the Keepers' House (KH), the new Visitors and Education Center on Walnut Street in Dobbs Ferry, has been completed. The only tasks remaining are what the architects called "alternatives," work that isn't critical to the repair of the basic structure and therefore wasn't included in the original plans because of financial concerns.

These alternatives include shutters, fireplace mantels, plaster moldings in several rooms and the selection and installation of lighting fixtures that will hang from center medallions in the hallway and front room. Landscaping will be started later this year.

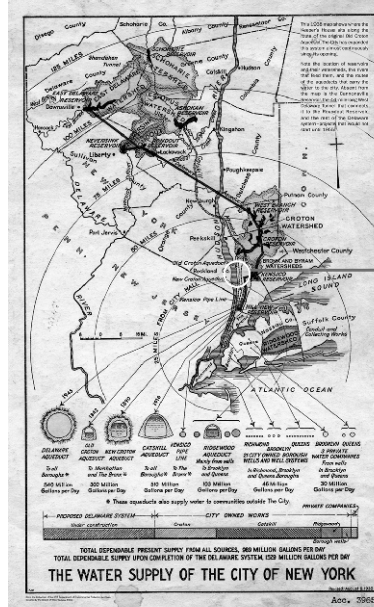
We have received our Certificate of Occupancy from the Dobbs Ferry Building Inspector.

Now we are rushing to complete some of the exhibits so they will be ready for the Open House on Sunday, June 26th. In the meantime, KH will be open to the public each weekend, starting Saturday, June 4th.

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct (FOCA) newsletter editor Ruth Gastel spoke with members of the design team, Laura Compagni-Sabella and Laurel Marx, to find out what they are planning for the interior space and what you can expect when you walk in the door.

RG: What are you aiming for in creating a Visitor and Education Center?

LC: We are creating a space where people can learn about the history and engineering of the original Croton water supply system. The exhibition uses historical documents, objects, hands-on activities and some excel-



Before the Old Croton Aqueduct opened in 1842, a glass of water from a public well in New York City could quench your thirst on a hot day—or it could kill you. This began to change when the city opened the first section of the Croton water supply system. It consisted of a masonry dam and reservoir on the Croton River, a 4.5-mile-long, gravity-fed aqueduct, and two reservoirs in Manhattan.

The original masonry structures of the Old Croton Aqueduct represent the first piece of what is now an enormous urban water supply system. It delivers over 200 million gallons of water to New York State and transports water to over nine million city and suburban residents each day.

This system reminds the story of municipalities around the globe. However, this engineering marvel did not grow to its current capacity quickly or easily. It has involved more than two centuries of planning, innovation, building, and debate about engineering, land use, property rights, and environmental regulation.

you are here



Map of entire Croton system

lent films to do this. We are also designing a temporary exhibit space where guest curators can contribute ideas and images to our interpretation of the Croton system and why it is important.

RG: What is unique or different about the way you are telling this well-known story?

LC: Many people think of the Croton system as the original reservoir and underground conduit that opened in 1842. We tell the story in a new way by expanding the scope of our narrative to include the 75 years it took to build the entire Croton system, including 12 reservoirs and two aqueducts.

The trail begins at the New Croton Dam which was not completed until 1906. The expanded scope of our story allows us to use documents and objects that were created in the late 19th century when photography and mass printing became widely available. By the time construction for the expanded Croton Reservoir began in the 1890s, more than 100 newspapers were being published in New York City alone.

The availability of this material will help us to tell a more nuanced story about who was involved in planning and construction as well as the consequences of large-scale infrastructure projects.

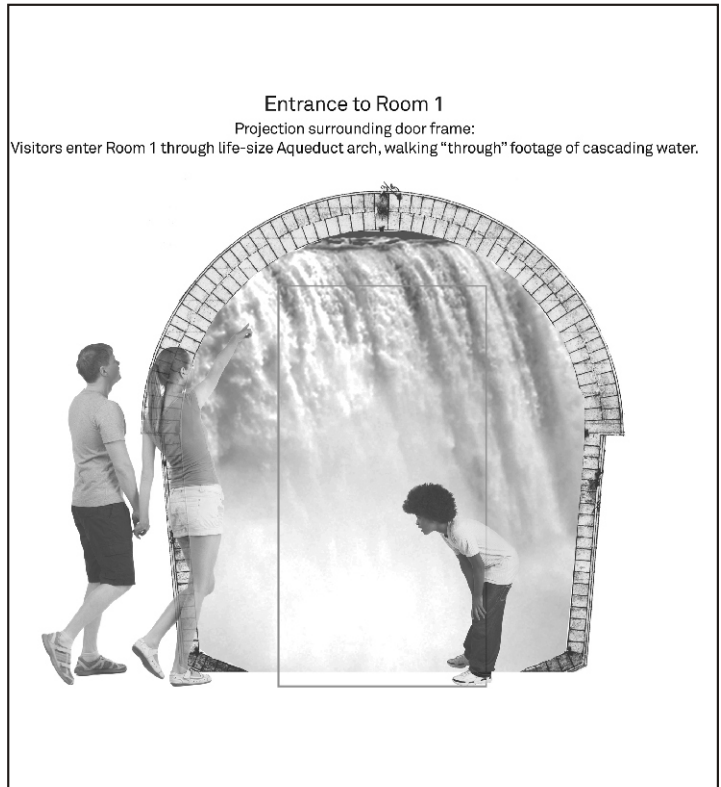
Photographers and journalists produced a vast record of the experiences of communities where people were forced to move their homes or to abandon them altogether to make way for a larger reservoir. We also have detailed accounts of the labor strikes that took place throughout the period when the Croton system was being constructed.

In addition, from this later period, we have images of the tasks performed by laborers from all over the world as they pieced together massive masonry structures using hand tools and steam-powered machinery.

RG: How far along will you be with your plans when KH first opens to the public on Saturday and Sunday, June 4th and 5th?

LC: We are collaborating with our partners at the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation in Albany. Their talented team of exhibition fabricators oversees the interpretation of 35 state historic sites. We hope to begin the installation of the exhibit in mid-June with a slow roll-out as additional items are completed.

In the meantime, we will use the space for some exciting temporary exhibitions that show the public what the house looked like as a ruin and what needed to happen to transform it into the beautiful and inspiring space that it is now.



Entrance to Room 1

Projection surrounding door frame: Visitors enter Room 1 through life-size Aqueduct arch, walking "through" footage of cascading water.

We want to take some time to highlight the accomplishments of the FOCA Board including the tireless efforts of President Mavis Cain, FOCA members, and the community of supporters and funders who have made this all possible.

We also want to celebrate the work of the architectural planning group, led by Board members Douglas Emilio and Bob Kornfeld, and a team of historic preservation specialists from Stephen Tilly's group. The light-filled, restored house is stunning and will be available for the public to enjoy this summer.

RG: How is the story being told and what makes it different from reading a book about the topic?

LC: We are telling the story, in part, through historic documents and objects. Some of these documents, from private collections and public archives, have never before been published or put on public display. Each object invites us to think about the person who created or used it and what work meant to them.

For example, we have a surveyor's chain and scope that will help us to talk to visitors about how a team of land surveyors plotted out the line of the aqueduct. Its path passed through villages, large estates, and farms. The surveyors had to confront local property owners who



Masons used horse-drawn carts to travel along the Aqueduct with tools and supplies. (Part of a "Day in the Life of a Keeper" exhibit.)

would not have welcomed people who were making plans to acquire the strip of land needed for the tunnel by using the laws of eminent domain.

RG: What aspects of the Center are you most excited about?

LC: We are excited about the playful elements of the Visitor Center that will make it less like a traditional historic house museum and more like a friendly resting place for curious trail-users.

For example, when visitors enter the Keeper's House, they will encounter a projected image of an architectural drawing of the tunnel. Animated water will be seen flowing through this tunnel and people will walk through the projected light.

Creative Director Laurel Marx comes to the project from the world of art and design rather than from the field of historic house museums so her interpretive approach is fresh and unexpected.

We're also very excited about the gallery space that we have set aside for temporary exhibitions. We will use this space to explore subjects related to parks, living things found along the trail, the Hudson River Valley, historic structures, and contemporary topics related to water. Here, we hope to make program and exhibit planning open to a broad range of voices and perspectives.

In addition, we are happy to be returning this structure in some sense to its original purpose as a center for the oversight of the aqueduct.

The Visitor Center will include the office of the park manager, Steven Oakes, who is incredibly knowledgeable about the trail, the aqueduct itself, and the history of the entire region. He is and will continue to

be an essential resource for the Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct and for trail users.

RG: Who is involved in creating the exhibit?

LC: This exhibit has been curated by a core team of planners but has also involved specialists who have provided expertise in exhibit and projection design, animation, illustration, object mounting, exhibit carpentry, printing, and historic research and writing.

RG: Are there exhibits that you had in mind that turned out to be too expensive or too impractical, given the limits of the space?

LC: We always believed that the exhibit should look and feel like it belongs in an old house. This inspired simple, hands-on concepts. Flashy video game technology can be effective and fun in museum exhibits but so can wooden puzzles, balls rolling through tubes, and mysterious collections objects.

Where we do use newer technology, the hardware is hidden to preserve the aesthetic of an old house. For example, we have created an animated story about a day in the life of the "Keeper" but we hid the hardware inside a wooden box that resembles a 19th-century stereoscope

RG: Will there be special exhibits at the KH, including exhibits and activities for children?

LC: Exhibit developers think about how people learn rather than their age. They create exhibitions with learning styles in mind. For example, analytic learners are primarily interested in acquiring facts in order to deepen their understanding of concepts and processes. Architectural drawings or charts are often meaningful to these visitors.

A common sense learner is interested in how things work; they want to get in there and try it. Hands-on activities and kinesthetic experiences are often more engaging for them. Other people gravitate towards self-directed experiences. These visitors might be happy to grab FOCA's trail map and go for a long walk or ride.

There are also people who need a personal reason for learning something so they might want to attend a program about where their water comes from and how it is treated or managed.

RG: Where has financial support for the exhibit come from?

LC: Nothing gets done without an active community of supporters, including people from New York City.

The restoration and interpretation of the house has been made possible because hundreds of people want to ensure that nothing ever happens to the Old Croton Aqueduct.



INTERACTIVE

Visitors will peek inside Discovery Drawers to find objects like trimming hammers, plug and feather cutting tools, bricks, and miners' lights. Small flip labels will identify the objects and feature a fun fact (e.g. the amount of bricks used in the New Croton Aqueduct in every mile!)

People who have contributed to this effort, including those who have made small donations and volunteered time, and those who have been instrumental in significant contributions from public and private grant programs should feel really good about making a positive impact on all of the trail communities from Yonkers to Croton-on-Hudson.

RG: *How often will the KH be open to the public? Will the toilet facilities and water fountain be open when the exhibit space is closed?*

LC: KH will be open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays, from 10am to 4pm. The facility will also be open whenever the Park Manager is in his office. A sign in front of the building will indicate whether the building is open or closed.

RG: *What kinds of programs will people find at the KH?*

LC: We want everyone to feel that there is something for them at the Keeper's House so we will rely on the community for ideas and contributions. We envision programming that will include our renowned tours of the waste weir in Ossining, the New Croton Dam, the newly restored High Bridge, and many historic sections of the trail.

We also hope to expand our programs to feature new activities like yoga, collectors' workshops, geocaching, mechanical drawing, plein-air painting, bird-watching,

maple syrup harvesting, and fort-building using invasive species.

Lastly, we hope to inspire a whole new generation of Old Croton Aqueduct advocates; so we'll sponsor special events for families featuring storytellers, puppets, and music. There are many stories about the Croton system and many ways to tell them!

New Greenway in Ossining

A marvelous new attraction opened on April 13 in Ossining: a concrete walkway that lets visitors stroll in the Sing Sing Kill's rocky gorge, with the stream rushing beneath it and trees clinging to the gorge's steep sides. The new walkway is ADA-compliant and has steel railings along its full length (about a third of a mile). You retrace your steps to return.



Sing Sing Kill Walkway. Photo by C. Fahn

From the walkway you can easily see, emerging from a hillside, the fat pipe through which diverted Croton water flowed when the gate was lowered in the weir. The weir is high above the walkway, at one end of the Double Arch Bridge. You can see where the diverted water poured into the Kill.

An easy entry to the Sing Sing Kill Greenway is from the lower parking lot of the Joseph Caputo Community Center, 95 Broadway. The other end is at Ossining's local Central Ave., from where the stream heads toward Water St. and the Hudson. The new path is a great adjunct to a weir visit. —Charlotte Fahn

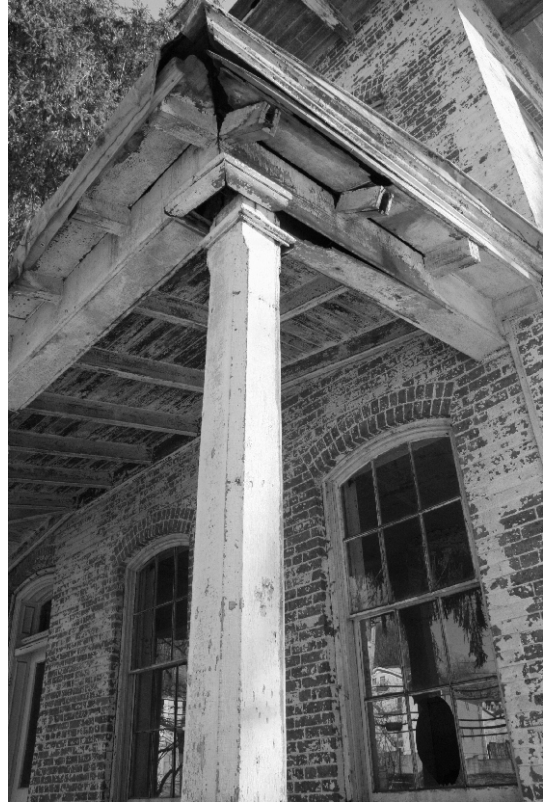
Transforming the Abandoned Building: KH Before and After



A 2007 view in the entrance hallway without staircase bannister, showing interior crumbling plaster, much of which had to be removed to bare brick and then rebuilt due to 40 years of roof leaks.



A 2007 view of foot-deep pile of fallen plaster and brick rubble on the second floor under a section of deteriorated exterior brick wall through which the sun shone and the rain and snow fell. The rubble remained in place long enough to rot the floor section beneath it.



Top and bottom: A 2007 view of KH showing the dangerously sagging front porch structure, broken windows and peeling paint. The Friends were allowed to rebuild the porch structure as a separate project before the KH renovation. All photos on this page by E. Zazzera.

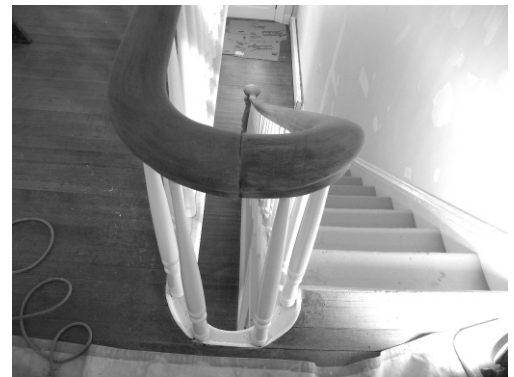




Rebuilt staircase and wall of entrance hallway. The formerly missing newel post was fabricated from reference photos taken at the Ossining KH, recently rediscovered as a mirror image of the house design in Dobbs Ferry. Numerous balusters were made to match the surviving ones on the bannister.



In 2014 a worker shovels plaster rubble from Room 2 downstairs. All the ceiling and wall plaster was removed from this room, then replaced with new sheetrock and plaster. A weak ceiling joist was reinforced and new electric lines and heating conduits were added while the ceiling was open.



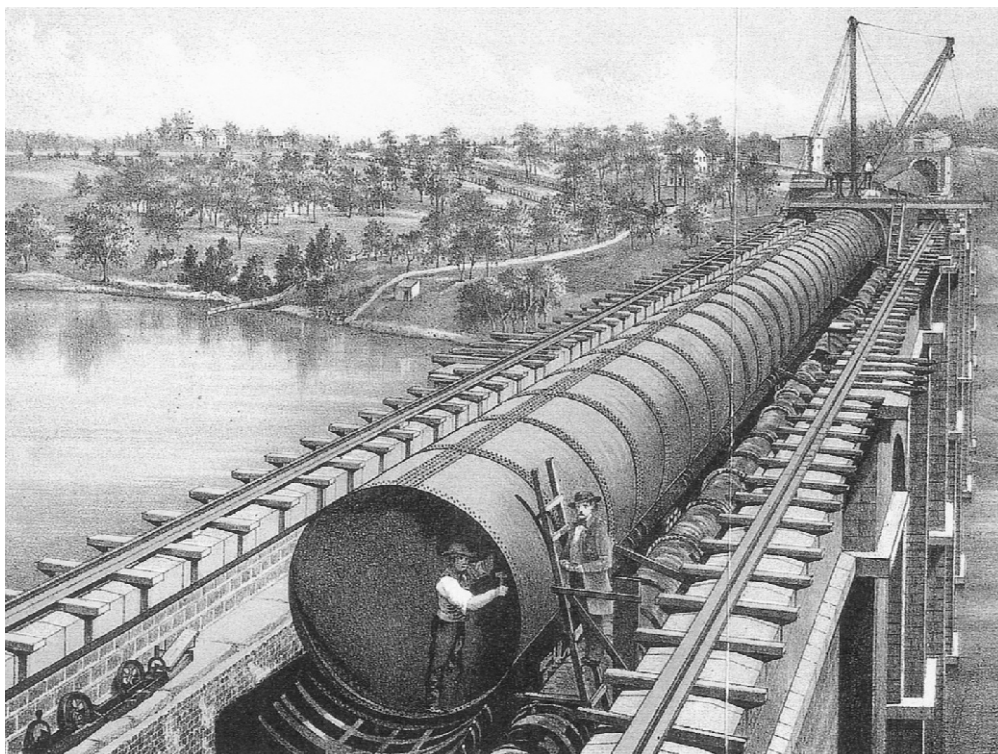
A view of the graceful curve of the restored hall bannister and balusters from upstairs, looking towards the front door.



After restoration, a view from Room 1 decorated with a string of Croton manhole cover coaster designs, showing a view of the hallway and Room 2. Room 1 will be the main exhibit space in the KH.



A detailed view of one of the restored KH porch posts on a corner of the porch. All photos on this page by T. Tarnowsky



*"High Bridge
During Construction
of the Large Main.
Viewed From the West
Gate House looking East."*

*From D. T. Valentine's Manual
1862.*

"Remarkable Project": Three Awards for High Bridge Restoration

As the first anniversary of its reopening approaches, the restoration of the High Bridge continues to receive recognition from the historic preservation community. So far this year, it has received three awards. The public was welcomed onto the original Croton Aqueduct span across the Harlem River on June 9, 2015, to great celebration after having been closed for 45 years.

Most recently, High Bridge was one of a group of projects winning a prestigious Lucy G. Moses Preservation Award. Winners are chosen by the New York Landmarks Conservancy, which held an impressive ceremony on April 28 at Riverside Church to announce the awards. New York City Dept. of Design & Construction Commissioner Feninsky Pena-Mora and Ellen Macnow of the city's Parks & Recreation Department accepted on behalf of their agencies and the many firms that had contributed to "this remarkable project."

On March 3 the High Bridge was awarded a 2016 Masterworks Award by the Municipal Art Society as Best Neighborhood Catalyst. The citation called the project "a model case for the restoration of historic city assets to their original use and community purpose."

Trade recognition came in January when *Roads & Bridges*, a national magazine bringing industry news to engineers and contractors, selected the High Bridge as one of its 2015 Top 10 bridges. Nominations are based on

project challenges, impact to the region and scope of work. These awards "recognize the top projects in North America."

Congratulations to all who helped to bring this monumental water supply structure back to life. The Parks Department is readying its seasonal program of arts, cultural, athletic, and fun activities and events. Hours of opening now that days are longer are once again 7am to 8pm. See www.aqueduct.org for directions. —Charlotte Fahn

MEMBERSHIP COUPON

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

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

Name _____

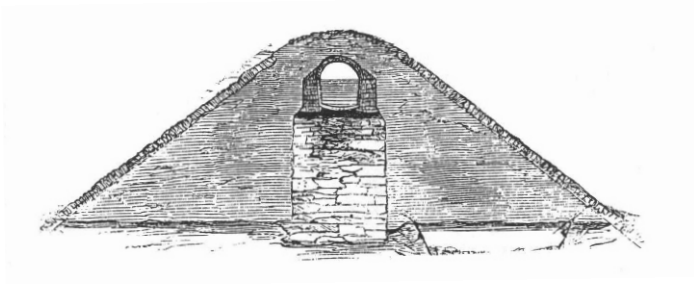
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For inquiries about Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park or to report trail conditions, call Historic Site Manager Steven Oakes at 914-693-5259; mailing address: 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522.

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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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Tracy Burke-Pearson and Heidi Fontana (nee Burke) grew up on Walnut Street. As kids, they used to creep into KH through an opening at the back, scared as to what they might find but excited at the same time. "Hippies" and others camped there periodically, sleeping on mattresses on the floor. The two sisters thought the house was beautiful and hoped someone would live there someday. Photo by A. Schneider

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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