



# Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct

*Newsletter*

No. 47, Fall 2014

## Go the Extra Mile! Join the Aqueduct Milers Program!

Hundreds, maybe thousands of people have walked the entire length of the Old Croton Aqueduct trail (approximately 41 miles) from its beginning at the New Croton Dam to where it ends on 42nd Street, the site of the distributing reservoir that sent water to New York City neighborhoods and now the location of the New York Public Library. Even more have walked from Croton to the Westchester County border just south of Tibbetts Brook Park in Yonkers (26 miles). Now, those who complete either the Westchester portion or the entire trail can apply for a patch and certificate of recognition.

The idea for an award came from our members, walkers and runners who use and love the trail. Member Guy Silker suggested more than a year ago that we use the Appalachian Trail Miler program as a model. Other requests soon followed. Then in the spring of 2014, Jane Daniels, author of *Walkable Westchester* and an enthusiastic supporter of the trail, said she thought it would be a great way to encourage walkers and runners to get to know the trail in its entirety. Jane Daniels' endorsement convinced any doubters that the project was worthwhile. After much discussion, we settled on the design of the badges, the application form and the certificates. By early summer, due to the hard work of Sara Kelsey, we were ready to launch the program.

You don't have to be a marathon runner to participate. Most trail walkers could earn a patch. Walks and runs can be completed in segments or all at once, in any sequence, direction or length of time and at any speed. (The Appalachian Trail Conservancy calls hikers who complete the trail in a single trek of many months "thru-walkers" and those who complete it in a more leisurely way, in segments "section hikers.")

The Friends program is free to members: non-members pay \$10 to help defray administrative expenses. See our website, [aqueduct.org](http://aqueduct.org), for details.

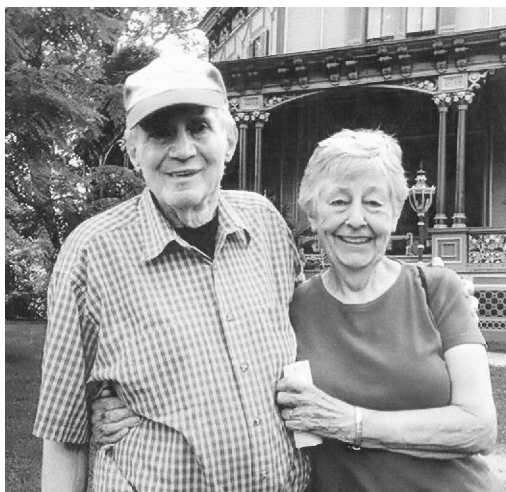


*Patches for the Friends of Old Croton Aqueduct  
Miler Recognition Program.*

Diona and Ronald Koerner were the first to apply for patches and a certificate. The Koerners have been walking the trail for more than 10 years. They set themselves a goal of walking two miles one way and two miles back, first in Westchester and then in the Bronx. Each time they set out, they would drive to where their previous walk had ended and hike another two miles there and back until they had completed the entire 41 miles, not once but twice since they always walked in both directions.

"Everyone should walk the Aqueduct trail from start to finish," Diona says. "It's a relatively easy walk for most people and it's interesting to experience the different environments as you travel from one community to another. There were some difficult spots.

Some sections are hard to find even with a map and we had to clamber up steep inclines near Piping Rock Drive just north of Ossining, but the Friends' Westchester map does warn of steep grade changes. It's a wonderful park. We have to preserve it so everyone can do what we did."



*Ronald and Diona Koerner at the Octagon House, Irvington. They were the first to apply for patches.*

Rachel Conrad from Brooklyn, our third Aqueduct Miler, and her friend Carmen Penttila, walked the trail in two days—thru-hikers according to the Appalachian Trail definition—taking the train from Grand Central Station, first to Croton and then on the second day to Irvington. They are both experienced hikers. Both wrote notes on their hike.

"Even though the walk to the dam from the Metro North train station, a distance of more than three miles, required us to walk further," Rachel wrote, "the fantastic scenery makes it well worth the effort and it is quite possibly the highlight of the entire trail."

After sightseeing and picture taking at the dam, they picked up the official trail. "Along the way, we encountered wildlife (songbirds, deer and snakes) and friendly walkers, hikers and cyclists, many of whom were interested to hear about our plans to walk the entire trail. We were fortunate to happen upon a Weir Tour at Ossining and this enhanced our understanding of the aqueduct system as a whole."

Carmen wrote that she was impressed by the history that has been preserved and intrigued to learn and see more. "The informational representation at the Morton Playground in the Bronx was an unexpected treat," she says, "as was coming upon the Croton Water marker in the sidewalk. I was surprised by how connected and attached to the Aqueduct I came to feel."

— R. Gastel

## Aqueduct Trail Project Completed in Van Cortlandt Park

The New York City Department of Parks & Recreation has completed a capital project designed to improve the Aqueduct trail in Van Cortlandt Park and address issues that affect conditions on the trail, especially concerning drainage and the state of the surrounding Croton Woods. Numerous problems stem from the 1950s construction of the Major Deegan Expressway, when the highway's drainage was directed into this woodland. The highway bisected the park and the trail – a circumstance park and Aqueduct advocates are campaigning to have corrected with a pedestrian bridge across the Deegan.



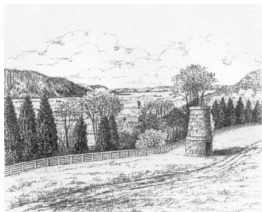
*This exposed brick segment of the Aqueduct in Van Cortlandt Park has now been covered with earth, as intended by the 19th century engineers, see page 7. (Photo by T. Tarnowsky)*

The Aqueduct in Van Cortlandt Park, exclusive of detours, is about a mile and a half long. Aqueduct walkers will be happy to learn of one immediate and obvious benefit of the recently completed work. They can now follow the trail in the park without losing their way while getting around the Deegan, since the trail and detour paths were blazed and directional signs installed in the course of the project.

A variety of efforts to remediate drainage problems and resulting widespread erosion were a major part of the project, carried out in consultation with environmental engineers and other specialists. The landscape around the Aqueduct weir chamber, disturbed over the years by erosion from storm water surges, was reconstructed, as was an existing terrace wall and headwall, and a second terrace wall was added. (Work on the weir chamber itself was not part of the project.)

*continued on page 7*





## Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, Inc.

Keeper's House, 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109

### OLD CROTON AQUEDUCT TRAIL 26- AND 41- MILE WALKER/RUNNER RECOGNITION

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct ("Friends") will recognize anyone who reports completion of the Westchester portion or the entire Old Croton Aqueduct Trail ("Trail") with a patch and certificate. The Friends will trust that those who apply for recognition have walked and/or run all of the 26 or 41 miles. We recognize the achievement no matter the sequence, direction, speed, or the length of time that it takes to do it. It may be done all at once or in many segments. The Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park Map & Guide and the Old Croton Aqueduct in New York City map produced by the Friends and sold on their website ([www.aqueduct.org](http://www.aqueduct.org)) or at retail outlets will be the reference point for what is considered to be the Trail (or a work-around, where necessary). If you meet these standards, please complete and sign this form.

I verify that I have walked/run the following portion of the Trail (check one) of the Trail:

☐ 26 miles (Westchester County-only portion between the New Croton Dam and the border with Bronx County)

☐ 41 miles (the entire Trail between the New Croton Dam and the New York Public Library)

Starting Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(MM/DD/YY)

(MM/DD/YY)

Print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print name legibly so we can spell your name correctly on your certificate)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Male: ☐ Female: ☐ Are you a member of Friends? Y: ☐ N: ☐

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Check if you are NOT interested in receiving mail and/or email notices concerning the Friends and/or the Aqueduct: ☐. Walk/run completions reported to us may be listed in a future edition of the Friends' newsletter and/or website. If you do NOT want to be included in this listing, check here: ☐.

We'd love to hear how and when you did it! All stories, comments, suggestions and photos welcome. Enclose your comments and photos with (or on the back of) this form. Please let us know if we can share them via our newsletter or website. The Friends will send your certificate of recognition and patch to your mailing address. If you are NOT a member of the Friends, please enclose a check for \$10 made out to "FOCA" to help defray our administrative expenses.

PLEASE RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM BY MAIL TO: Sara Kelsey, c/o Keeper's House, 15 Walnut Street, Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522-2109.

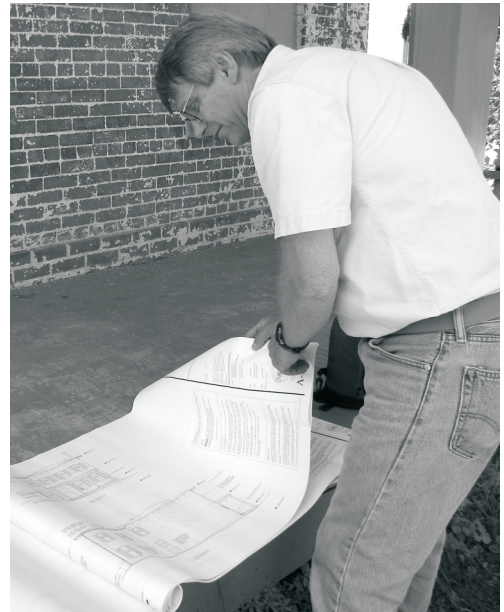
*The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.  
Contributions to FOCA are deductible to the full extent allowed by law.*

## The Keeper's House Restoration

*Text and photos by Tom Tarnowsky*



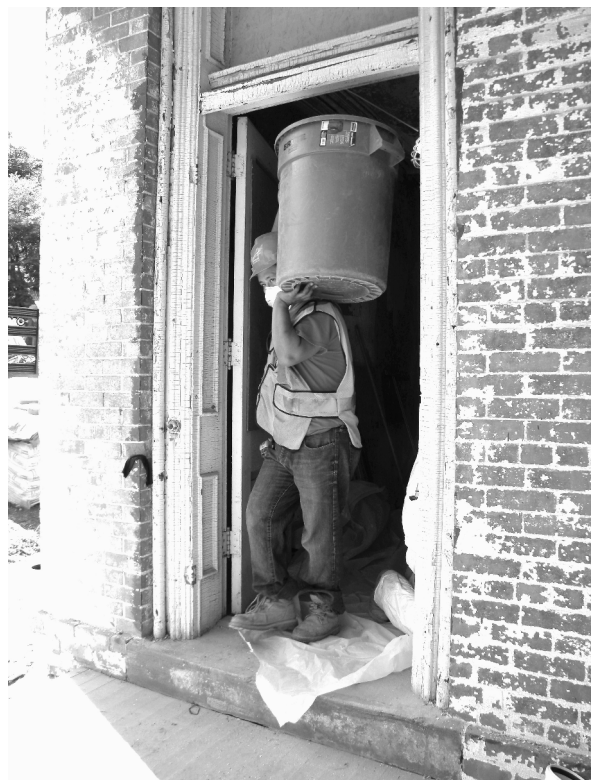
*A sign posted in front of the Keeper's House announces its long-awaited restoration.*



*NY State Parks Engineer Rich Gromek on a recent site visit, checking Keeper's House renovation plan drawings.*



*A worker removes old ceiling lathe in Room 2 in preparation for repair of a rotted beam.*



*A bin of rubble is removed through the front door by a demolition worker.*





*A backhoe rests after moving the trunks of trees cut down on the property. The trees had been threatening the roof and foundation of the building.*



*Concrete is delivered to a worker for pouring into the curb forms of the new parking lot for visitors with disabilities across the street from the Keeper's House.*



*Exhibit designer Laurel Marx (left) and Andrey Nieson, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, discuss exhibit ideas at the Keeper's House in early Spring 2014*

## Lesser-known Tales of the Old Croton Aqueduct: The Angel of the Waters

Katharine Gates

While every New Yorker is familiar with the magnificent fountain at the center of Bethesda Terrace in Manhattan's Central Park, few are aware of the fascinating story behind its creation.

Over the past century and a half, Central Park has accumulated 29 sculptures commemorating various historical and fictional characters, from Balto the Sled Dog to Alice in Wonderland and Poland's 15<sup>th</sup> century King Jagiello. But when Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux originally submitted their 1858 master plan, they only called for one monument. The subject of this important sculpture was not, as one might expect it to be, a Founding Father or a New York political figure. Rather, they chose what they considered the most significant moment in New York History: the 1842 opening of the Old Croton Aqueduct.

Today we may take our water for granted, but late 19<sup>th</sup> century Manhattanites understood that without the Old Croton Aqueduct, New York could never become the great city it hoped to be. The Water Terrace Fountain, as the Bethesda monument was originally known, would celebrate the birth of a great Metropolis. To Olmsted and Vaux, memorializing the Old Croton Aqueduct, which brought fresh, clean water to the city, was of a piece with their vision for Central Park as a place where ordinary people could free themselves from the miasma of crowded slum conditions and breathe good, clean air.

The Central Park Commission chose an unlikely sculptor to complete the fountain project: Emma Stebbins, born in 1815 to a wealthy New York City family, was a relatively unknown artist and the first woman to receive a commission for a major work of art in New York City. (That Emma's brother Henry Stebbins was president of the Central Park Board of Commissioners may have helped her secure the coveted job.)

Emma Stebbins was an open lesbian whose intimate circle included many of the colorful bohemian celebrities of the day including actress Matilda Hays and African American/Native American sculptor Edmonia Lewis.

Rather than memorialize the engineers or workers

who constructed the Croton Aqueduct, Stebbins chose to go with an allegorical image: Her 1872 design for the fountain called for an eight-foot-tall bronze neoclassical angel. This physically imposing figure holds a lily, representing purity. The four cherubim below the angel represent health, purity, temperance and peace. At the time of the sculpture's dedication in 1873, this particular imagery would have been understood to reference the temperance movement. The installation of public water

fountains, in fact, was a major goal of the National Woman's Temperance Union's organizing convention of 1874. So while today we might see the Bethesda Fountain as an example of staid civic piety, viewers of Stebbins' era would likely have identified this monument specifically with a political movement led by powerful women. (Leaders of the temperance movement would later form the militant core of women's suffrage organizations.)

Yet behind the larger themes, there is a much more personal and emotional story.

At the dedication of the Angel of the Waters in 1873, Emma Stebbins quoted a passage from

the Bible:

*"Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called... Bethesda... whoever then first after the troubling of the waters stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." John 5:2-4*

Her audience might have seen this as a reference to the ravages of cholera before clean Croton Water arrived in the city. But the sculptor herself might have wanted to convey other, more personal, concerns. The angel's face bears a strong resemblance to Stebbins' lover, the famous stage actress Charlotte Sanders Cushman. At the time, Cushman was dying of breast cancer. Perhaps Stebbins put her own passionate hope for healing and rebirth into her best-known work. Cushman died in 1876, three years after the statue's dedication.

So the next time you visit Central Park, take another look at this fascinating monument, one of the lesser-known tales of the Old Croton Aqueduct.



Photo: Library of Congress



## Aqueduct Trail Project *(cont'd. from page 2)*

The land around the stream uphill from the weir was cleared and lined with river stones and a retention basin created, in order to improve drainage through the culvert under the Aqueduct when stormwater pours off the highway. Drainage issues continue to receive attention.

Walkers may be startled to see parts of the trail covered in square-cut bluestone, at present looking more suitable for a patio than a woodland path. The bluestone sections ("treadways"), underlain with six inches of gravel and screenings, were placed where muddy or constantly wet conditions prevailed, in the expectation that the stones will keep these sections of the trail dry while becoming inconspicuous as soil and leaves gradually cover them.

Another element of the project led many of us to breathe a sigh of relief. A 10- to 12-foot section of the curved brick roof of the Aqueduct had lain exposed for decades, vulnerable to vandalism and the elements. Almost miraculously the structure remained undamaged all that time. An earthen cover has now been restored so that the section is once again safely unseen. Several measures were taken to stabilize the adjacent slopes.

Restoration of the Croton Woods, described by the Parks Department as a valuable, yet fragile, old growth forest with trees up to 60 inches in diameter, was another major goal of the project, since parts of the woodland have been destroyed by the area's drainage problems and the encroachment of invasives. In conjunction with naturalists, foresters, and botanists, a custom plant list based on a comprehensive inventory was drawn up and a plan developed and implemented for protecting the native trees, removing invasive non-native trees, and for overall forest restoration. Invasives and vines were removed along the Aqueduct trail north of the Major Deegan, the cleared gaps were seeded, and shrubs and trees planted. Less of this work was needed south of the highway, thanks to the work of Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

The project, which also included creation of a seating area at the corner of Dickinson Road and Van Cortlandt Park South near the trail's exit/entrance, was paid for by the Department of Environmental Protection's Croton Water Treatment Plant Mitigation Fund, created to improve hundreds of Bronx parks. Trail users are the fortunate beneficiaries.

We thank Katherine Bridges, Landscape Architect, Parks Capital Division; Margot Perron, Park Administrator; and Christina Taylor, Executive Director of Friends of Van Cortlandt Park for their assistance.

— *C. Fahn and T. Tarnowsky*

## Farewell and Welcome Back: Park Managers Change

We are sad to be losing Gary Ricci as Park Manager and happy to learn that Steven Oakes is returning to his former position with us.

Gary helped us through a difficult period when it was unclear when the Keeper's House renovation project would get started. He also had to deal with all the downed trees and other problems caused by Super Storm Sandy and a particularly arduous winter. Yet through it all, Gary could always be relied on to be upbeat and confident. We wish him well in his next assignment.

Steven Oakes is returning to the Aqueduct after managing the Walkway Across the Hudson for three years. Steve grew up in Dobbs Ferry and worked at the John Jay Homestead before he first came to the Aqueduct, so is familiar both with the area and historic structures. We are all looking forward to working with Steve again.

—*M. Cain*

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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        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Additional donation to Keeper's House Fund \$_____ |   |

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:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleanups                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Vine-cutting          |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Events planning                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach at events    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog/website                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity (all media) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic design/signage                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter articles   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead (or assist with) walking tours    |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach on the trail (meet and greet) |  |

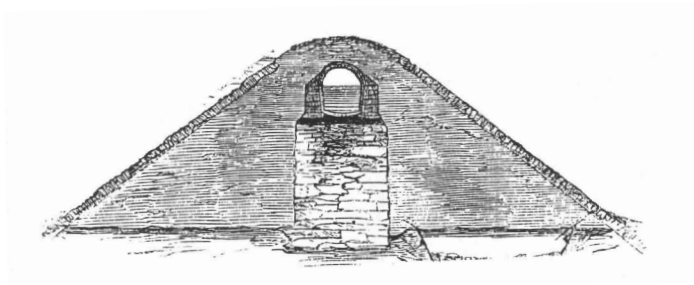
**We need your help.**

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

Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct  
Keeper's House  
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 [ruthg@iii.org](mailto:ruthg@iii.org) or by mail c/o the Friends.

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## Newsletter No. 47 Fall 2014



*Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

*Emma Stebbins (1815-1882), sculptor  
of the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park*

**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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